



Youth Arts Now -
A Research Project on Youth Arts in Ireland Today and
The Potential for a Professional Youth Arts Network

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Youth Arts Now

This research has been commissioned by Youth Arts Now, an initiative by Waterford Youth Arts which aims to support the research and future development of youth arts practice in Ireland.

This phase of research has been resourced by Creative Waterford in association with Kilkenny County Council Arts Office, Wexford County Council Arts Office, Carlow Arts Office and Waterford Council Arts Office.

Aims of Youth Arts Now:

- Youth Arts Now aims to establish an advocacy network for the development and adoption of a youth arts policy in Ireland
- To research and recommend a funding strategy that will enable the development of Youth Arts work across Ireland.
- To marshal the collective experience, passion and skills of youth arts practitioners and young people in Ireland to effectively lobby for the implementation of youth arts policy in Ireland
- Support the ongoing development of skills and constant advocating for the creative rights and needs of all young people.

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List of Abbreviations

CRC – United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child

DCEDIY - Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Formerly DCYA)

NYAAG – National Youth Arts Advisory Group (Scotland)

NYCI – National Youth Council of Ireland

UNCRC – United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

YANC – Youth Arts Network Cymru (Wales)

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This research explores the potential for a national youth arts network in the South East region and nationally, throughout Ireland.

The research aims are as follows:

1. To gain an understanding of the opportunities and challenges associated with creating a youth arts network in Ireland.
2. To engage stakeholders, specifically youth arts workers and youth arts participants, in the research.
3. To survey youth arts workers to gain insight into whether they feel a youth arts network would be beneficial for the sector.
4. To conduct focus groups with young people, in addition to online surveys, to hear what their hopes for a youth arts network would be.
5. To build a picture of resourcing of youth arts across Ireland, pre-Covid, using 2019 as a sample year.
6. To identify three international youth arts organisations for whom the presence of active professional networks, policy and collaboration have been impactful and could provide insights for Youth Arts Now.
7. To conduct in-depth interviews with representatives from each of these international youth arts networks.

Chapter One will set out the background to Youth Arts Now and the terminology used in the study. Chapter Two will detail the research methodology used to explore the research aims outlined above. Chapter Three provides a literature review of existing sources in the field, in

addition to a policy review. Chapter Four presents key findings from the qualitative data generated from online surveys, interviews and focus groups with youth arts practitioners, youth arts participants and Local Authority Arts Officers. Chapter Five presents examples of youth arts networks from three countries: Scotland, Wales and Norway. Chapter Six provides a summary of key findings and sets out recommendations informed by the research.

1.2 Youth Arts Now

This study has been commissioned by Youth Arts Now, an initiative led by Waterford Youth Arts which aims to support the funding and future development of youth arts in Ireland. This initial phase of research has been funded by Creative Waterford, Kilkenny County Council Arts Office, Wexford County Council Arts Office, Carlow County Council Arts Office and Waterford City and County Council Arts Office. This research report is intended to be a preliminary investigation into the potential for a youth arts network in the South East and potentially, nationally. The study will feed into further exploration and development by Youth Arts Now in 2021/22.

1.3 Definitions

This research prioritises a broad understanding of ‘youth arts’ as ‘the practice of all art forms in sectors that are not part of the formal education system, in which young people, in the 12-25 year age range, engage as active participants or as consumers/audience members in their own free time’ (Coughlan, 2002, p.5). Youth arts often includes ‘the engagement of adult artists and arts practitioners as well as youth workers who facilitate arts activities, workshops, and collaborative work, with and for young people’ (Durrer, 2011, p.56). More recently, youth arts has emphasised young people as active ‘contributors’ or creators, rather than simply passive

'recipients' of arts activities (Durrer, 2011, p.56; Arts Council, 2005, p.1). This research will refer to those adult artists, practitioners and youth workers as 'youth arts workers' and young people who engage in youth arts activities as 'youth arts participants.'

Chapter 2: Research Methodology

2.1 Research Methodology

This research was commissioned by Youth Arts Now to investigate the potential for creating a youth arts network in the South East region of Ireland and ultimately, nationwide. The research took place over a twelve week period from November 2020 – February 2021. Delfin (2012) writes that an arts network can be generally understood as ‘decentralized socio-political formations consisting of arts and cultural organisations that work together towards shared objectives’ (p.240). Arts networks can include various other stakeholders including freelance artists, facilitators and arts workers. According to Madden (2005), the main functions of arts networks are to encourage dialogue, consolidate resources, engage a wider range of people, to centralise information flows and to bridge the gap between policymakers and researchers (p.134). Arskey and O’Malley (2005, in Wilson 2014) write that a scoping study aims ‘to map rapidly the key concepts underpinning a research area and the main sources and types of evidence available’ (p.98). In this way, this research acts as a scoping study to identify some of the key concepts underpinning youth arts in Ireland. To survey youth arts workers and participants for their insights on the potential impact of a national youth arts network in Ireland for youth arts practitioners. To identify examples of the impact of youth arts networks on international best youth arts practice models and to identify key areas for further research for Youth Arts Now.

The first research method involved a policy and literature review. A summary of relevant policies and literature is included in Chapter Three of this report. The literature and policy review informed the identification of interviewees and later recommendations. Online surveys were utilised with regard to the third research aim, ‘To survey youth arts practitioners to gain insight into whether they feel a youth arts network would be beneficial for

the sector.’ The surveys were anonymous to encourage youth arts practitioners to answer freely. The questions in the survey were as follows:

- Do you feel that there are opportunities for your youth arts organisation to connect with other youth arts organisations in Ireland?
- Do you feel that there are opportunities for skills sharing/peer learning?
- Do you think that your youth arts organisation would benefit from a youth arts network? What kind of network do you think would be most beneficial?
- What would you like to see achieved in the youth arts sector in the next 5-10 years?

These questions were identified in order to assess the need for a youth arts network from the point of view of the youth arts practitioner, particularly in relation to peer learning and skills sharing. In addition to the online survey, the researcher conducted one semi-structured interview with Rhona Dunnett, Research and Development Officer of Youth Theatre Ireland to offer further insights and context to these survey findings. The semi-structured interview style was privileged because they ‘are interactive allowing for clarification of questions and identification of unexpected themes’ (Flick, 2009, p.222).

A number of research methods were also used to glean the insights of youth arts participants. The researcher was working within the challenges of COVID-19, which significantly impacted the young people’s ability to participate in the research process. Initially, the researcher planned to prioritise online surveys for acquiring youth arts participant data. However, responses were limited and she later chose to include additional methods. The questions for the online surveys were as follows:

- Which youth arts organisation are you part of?
- In which county is this organisation?
- Why did you decide to get involved?
- Do you feel that you have opportunities to connect with young people from other youth arts organisations in Ireland?
- What have been the challenges and/or benefits of being involved in youth arts during the pandemic?
- Do you feel that young people's voices are heard within your youth arts organisation/in the youth arts sector in general?
- What would you like to see in the youth arts sector in the next 5-10 years?

9 completed surveys were received which the researcher felt was not a sufficiently robust sample. To ensure the youth voice was central to this research process, the researcher facilitated focus groups with young people from various youth arts organisations in the southeast region, to offer further insights from young people. The researcher facilitated focus groups with young people from Waterford Youth Arts' LIT Young Writers Festival committee, Cloughjordan Circus Club, Young Irish Film Makers and Wexford Youth Film. Each session was of approximately twenty minutes duration and took place over Zoom. The researcher asked the questions outlined above of the groups, however, the focus groups had the advantage of interaction and spontaneity and the researcher could clarify questions for the respondents and offer further enquiry to their points. One in-depth semi-structured interview with a youth arts participant was conducted to offer further context to the survey and focus group findings. The interviewee, Izzy Tiernan, is a member of Waterford Youth Arts and former chairperson of the LIT Young Writers Festival youth committee.

Online surveys were also used to gather data from local authority Arts Officers throughout Ireland about youth arts activity in their county and funding provision for youth arts. The questions were as follows:

- Which Local Authority are you affiliated with?
- How much did your Local Authority spend on youth arts activities in 2019 for the following age groups: Ages 10-14, Ages 15-17, Ages 18-21, Ages 21-25
- In which of the following artforms were these activities: Visual Arts, Theatre, Music/ Sound Performance, Creative Writing, Film, Dance, Other
- If you ticked the box labelled 'other,' could you please describe these activities?
- What was the overall spend for youth arts activities in 2019?
- Any other comments.

The researcher received 16 survey responses in total, representing 50% of local authority Arts Officers in Ireland. The approach of identifying an additional interviewee from amongst this respondent group for a semi-structured interview was not adopted so as not to privilege one local authorities' views over another.

The research of international youth arts networks focused on best practice examples identified in three countries: Scotland, Wales and Norway. These countries were selected due to the presence of youth arts practitioner networks, whether formal or informal, specific policy development together with active youth arts sectors, their relative proximity and, in some cases, having engaged in previous collaborative research activity with Waterford Youth Arts which facilitated relevant contacts for the researcher in each of these countries. Interviewees were identified within each country who would be able to provide the researcher with analytical information, content, or insights in relation to the proposed study.

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with Sarah McAdam, *Time to Shine* Programme Manager at Creative Scotland (equivalent of

Arts Council of Ireland) Kenny McGlashan, Chief Executive Officer at Youth Theatre Arts Scotland; Francesca Pickard, Steering Group Secretary at Youth Arts Network Cymru; Miranda Ballin, Chair at Youth Arts Network Cymru; and Thorunn Hagberg, Producer at Stella Polaris, Sandefjord, Norway. The researcher identified one relevant youth arts organisation within each country and one best practice example of policy influencing youth arts provision in each country. Interviewees were asked questions in relation to their youth arts organisation, how its role has developed over time, the impact of Covid-19 on their work, the impact of policy provision on their provision for young people and the impact of the presence of a professional network on their organisation and practitioners. These findings are summarised in Chapter 5 of this report.

2.2 Research Limitations

One of the biggest challenges of the research was differing understandings of the term 'youth arts', both within existing literature and within the arts sector itself, presenting difficulties in establishing accurate cross contextual comparisons. In addition to this, the researcher faced challenges related to the current pandemic, particularly with regard to the facilitation of interviewees, focus groups and survey respondents, resulting in lower than anticipated engagement with the surveying process, the focus groups and a number of youth arts organisations who had expressed interest in contributing to the research were unable to engage digitally. The associated challenges and resultant research limitations will be addressed in Chapter Four.

2.3 Conclusion

This Chapter outlined the research methods involved in this study, and briefly summarised the research limitations inherent in a study of this

nature but also the unprecedented challenges presented by the Covid-19 global pandemic. The next chapter will provide a review of relevant policy and literature in the field of youth arts provision in Ireland.

Chapter 3: Policy and Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a policy and literature review of the field of youth arts in Ireland. The study was recursive, with the researcher referring back to and revisiting the literature through all phases of research, as Braun and Clarke (2008) note, 'analysis is not a linear process of moving from one phase to the next' (p.86).

3.2 Policy Review

Several key international and national policy frameworks and strategies influence youth arts policy and practice in Ireland. In an international context, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) was ratified in Ireland in 1992, marking a key moment in Ireland's history where the State committed to promote, fulfil and protect the rights of all children and young people under the age of 18. Article 31 sets out the right of the child to participate freely in cultural and artistic life. The full text for this article reads as follows:

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.
2. States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity (UN Commission on Human Rights, 1989, art. 31)

Integral to youth arts provision, Article 12 of the UNCRC sets out the right of the child to express their own views freely on all matters which concern them. This report utilises the term 'youth participation' for the rights

embodied in Article 12, a common shorthand for the rights in this Article (Lansdown, 2010, p.11). The intersection of children's rights in Article 12 and 31 are of particular relevance to youth arts policy and practice in Ireland. General Comments 12 and 17 of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) have highlighted the importance of children's rights in Articles 12 and 31 respectively and set out the obligations of governments to make progress in their implementation. With regard to child and youth participation in the provision of arts activities specifically, the CRC (2009) writes, "These should be designed taking into account children's preferences and capacities . . . children who are able to express their views should be consulted" (p.25). A similar sentiment was expressed by the CRC again in 2013: "The Committee underlines the importance of providing opportunities for children to contribute to the development of legislation, policies, strategies and design of services to ensure the implementation of the rights under article 31" (p.8).

In a European context, the *European Youth Strategy 2019-2027*, includes three areas of action: engage, connect and empower. The connect focus specifically mentions the strategy's intention to support young people to develop their "critical thinking and creativity" (p.7). Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps have been highlighted as important sources for youth arts funding in Ireland (NYCI, 2021, p.20). In an Irish context, policies in relation to the rights of children and young people have increasingly sought to articulate provision for children's cultural rights. *The National Children's Strategy 2000* states: "Children will have access to play, sport, recreation and cultural activities to enrich their experience of childhood" (Department of Health and Children, 2000, p.57). In 2014, this strategy was succeeded by *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Framework for Children and Young People* which includes a commitment to "Enable greater access to sports, arts and culture for all children and young people" (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2014, p.58).

The National Youth Strategy states the priority action to, 'Identify ways in which arts, culture, sports and youth organisations can cooperate at a local level to enhance quality and developmental opportunities for young people' (DCYA, 2015a, p.24). Fundamentally, each of these strategies and frameworks commit to honouring the voice of the child and young person and in 2015, this commitment was cemented in the all-of-government *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making* (DCYA, 2015b). The first of its kind in Europe (DCYA, 2014, p.V), this strategy is rooted in Article 12 of the UNCRC.

There have been a number of developments in arts policy for children and young people in the two decades since *The National Children's Strategy 2000*. The Arts Council of Ireland, in its remit to stimulate public interest in the arts, promote knowledge, appreciation and practice, and assist in improving standards in the Arts (Arts Act 1951, 1973 and 2003), has sought to expand youth arts provision, as distinct from the needs of artforms. The Young People, Children and Education Department supports and promotes "the child or young person's experience of the arts whether as a young artist, learner, participant, audience member or a combination of these" (The Arts Council of Ireland 2020). *Points of Alignment* was published by The Arts Council in 2008 to better align the Arts Council's strategies with the priorities of the formal education sector. *The Arts and Education Charter* (Department of Education and Skills, 2012) states that investment in arts-in-education practice should not be achieved "at the expense of growing other complementary arts and education practices in formal, non-formal and informal settings" (p.12) such as youth arts practice within community arts settings.

In 2008, The Arts Council introduced the Young Ensembles Scheme which supports groups of young people to create or critically engage with ambitious and original work in any artform, heralding a focus on youth-led programming and activity. In 2010, the Art-Youth-Culture FYI forum took

place, bringing together 60 young people and key policy makers to discuss young people's participation in the arts. One of the key objectives of the Arts Council's 10 year strategy, *Making Great Art Work*, is to plan and provide for young people, with youth participation and the youth voice included as an integral part of its implementation: "we will incorporate our commitment to young people into the mainstream of our decision-making and, where appropriate, into our funding agreements with arts organisations" (The Arts Council of Ireland, 2015, p.25).

Many Arts-Council funded arts centres, museums, galleries and other arts organisations provide programmes for children and young people, whether onsite or in a community outreach capacity. Creative Ireland, an all-of-government culture and wellbeing programme to promote creativity in communities across Ireland was established in 2017 and identified 'Enabling the Creative Potential of Every Child' as one of its key pillars. In 2017, Creative Ireland published their *Creative Youth Plan* with the goal that every child will have access to art, music and coding by 2022, "through strategic alliances and partnerships between the formal and nonformal education sectors".

Local Creative Youth Partnerships (LCYPs) were established in late 2018 as a pilot initiative of Creative Ireland together with three Education and Training Boards (ETBs). LCYPs are located in the following ETB areas: Kerry Education and Training Board / Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board / Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board. LCYPs are networks which enable information sharing, collaboration between local creative youth service providers to bring about better use of existing resources, practices and initiatives in an ETB area. By establishing and building these networks, they support collaborative practice across local communities and between schools and creative out-of-school activities. These networks can facilitate and develop new local creative initiatives,

targeting different groups more effectively to ensure wider provision, cutting down on duplication, enabling the sharing of resources and maximising connectivity between practitioners. The remit of the partnerships goes beyond that of the arts and includes cultural and creative activity in areas such as heritage, STEM and entrepreneurship in addition to the arts. They also aim to have the voice of young people as core to the partnership. This LCYP pilot programme is administered by Creative Ireland and funded from the Department of Education and Skills who allocate approximately €100,000 annually to the three projects for programming. This pilot scheme is due to finish in 2021 and is to be evaluated this year also.

The year 2020 has seen many different developments as a direct result of the Covid-19 crisis. In June 2020, the Arts Council published *Survive, Adapt, Renew*, a report from a special Advisory Group established to identify ways for the arts sector to deal with the Covid-19 crisis. The report made a number of key recommendations including increased bursary and commissioning schemes, working to restore public confidence in attending live events and working with the arts sector to address the challenges of digital dissemination, adapting existing spaces and exploring new spaces (The Arts Council of Ireland, 2020b). The impact of Covid-19 on youth arts practice and the needs of youth arts organisations in light of the significant impact of Covid-19 were indirectly, rather than specifically addressed.

In June 2020, the Arts Council published a study of the economic impacts of COVID-19 on the Irish arts sector and a further update was published in September 2020. The findings were troubling, with the latter revealing that unemployment in the arts sector in Ireland is likely to be far higher than the rest of the economy with the possibility of a quarter of all arts jobs lost by the end of 2021 (The Arts Council of Ireland,, 2020c, p.10). Additionally, two phases of public sentiment research have been commissioned by The

Arts Council since last June. The findings of the first research phase in September 2020 reveal that the high level of concern about attending live arts events reported in June 2020 has declined and that restricted capacities, face masks and/or temperature checks have increased public confidence (p.23). In a recent newsletter from The Arts Council, Director Maureen Kennelly articulated The Arts Council's aims to increase investment to support children and young people, "This important audience has suffered so much interruption and loss because of the pandemic . . .we want to catch those at risk of falling through the net" (The Arts Council, 2020d).

3.3 Benefits of Youth Arts

Previous research conducted in Ireland has provided extensive evidence of the significant individual and societal benefits of youth arts participation. In 2006, *The Public and the Arts* was commissioned by The Arts Council to provide information on the behaviour and attitudes of Irish people. Significantly, 30% of the 1,210 surveyed identified 'arts programmes and facilities dedicated to working for and with children and young people' as their number one priority for spending on the arts, with another 24% identifying this as their second choice (p.13). This demonstrates a widespread understanding of the value of children and young people's participation in the arts.

In 2019, Youth Theatre Ireland published *Centre Stage +20*, a detailed report into youth theatre practice in Ireland. The report revealed many positive outcomes for participation in youth theatre. In terms of artistic and creative outcomes, youth theatre leaders and participants reported improved performance skills, design skills, enhanced levels of creativity and an increased knowledge and experience of theatre and the arts (p.15). In terms of social and personal outcomes, reported outcomes of engaging with youth theatre included increased levels of confidence and

self-esteem, ability to make friends, decreased anxiety and stress levels, improved communication skills and enhanced levels of achievement at school and other areas of life (p.16). *Centre Stage + 20* highlighted the importance of further research into the impact of youth theatre participation, including recommendations for further research to be carried out and for youth theatre members and leaders to be supported to discuss, evaluate and communicate these outcomes (p18).

In November 2020, the Arts Council published *Arts and Cultural Participation Among 17 Year Olds* by Emer Smyth, a researcher at the Economic and Social Research Institute. This report draws on information on 2,216 17 year olds who took part in the *Growing Up in Ireland* longitudinal study, documenting their involvement in a range of cultural activities. The study looked at the relationship between cultural participation at 9 and 13 years of age, and later cognitive development (e.g. vocabulary and Junior Certificate performance) and non-cognitive outcomes (e.g. self-esteem and life satisfaction) (Arts Council, 2020e, p.v). Research found that involvement in music/drama lessons/clubs was associated with higher Junior Certificate grades (p.v). Additionally, those who had read for pleasure more regularly when they were younger showed a greater improvement in their vocabulary and academic performance over time. Additionally, involvement in music/drama lessons/clubs was associated with higher Junior Certificate grades (p.v).

Mapping Youth Arts Provision (NYCI, 2021) highlights many benefits of engagement in youth arts for young people. As part of this research, respondents referenced therapeutic impacts of participation including positive impacts on mental health, wellbeing, self-esteem and self confidence (p.44). Additionally, this research identified the potential of participation in youth arts to create platforms for a sense of belonging, community building and a celebration of local culture (p.45). Young people are going outside their comfort zone, learning new skills including how to

experiment, fail and work out why they failed which, in turn, builds resilience and enhances employability. Additionally, this research identified the potential of participation in youth arts to create platforms for a sense of belonging, community building and a celebration of local culture (p.45). Respondents argued that participation in youth arts can inform a more empathetic and diverse youth culture that creates platforms for subcultural identity and community expression. Youth arts are perceived to facilitate the development of key competencies such as critical and divergent thinking.

Youth arts participation, it was identified in this research, has the potential to widen the lens of the young person about occupational futures and to consider potential career paths in the arts. Youth arts were considered a tool that supports young people to interpret, understand and respond to the challenging world around them. The collaborative approach to youth arts provision with a youth work approach provides opportunities for young people for greater learning, growth and acquisition of new skills in the chosen arts area, while promoting a range of social and personal development outcomes.

The research notes that a more collaborative approach at government level would raise the status of youth arts and youth arts practitioners through more of a more coordinated and sustainable interagency approach which would “assist in giving parity of esteem to both the youth work and arts sectors and would recognise the distinctive capacities and contributions of each in advancing youth arts provision across Ireland”. Such an approach would also serve to tackle perspectives of the arts as being elitist and ‘youth arts’ as being for ‘disadvantaged’ or ‘at risk’ young people alone. It would also help to raise the status of youth arts and youth arts practitioners.

3.4 Previous Research into the Needs of Youth Arts Organisations

Both *Centre Stage+20* (Youth Theatre Ireland, 2019) and *Mapping Youth Arts Provision* (NYCI, 2021) identify specific needs in the youth arts sector, of organisations and individual practitioners. It is important to note that the latter focuses on youth arts within the youth work sector specifically, while the former focuses on youth theatre. Both reports identified the need for a comprehensive youth arts policy in Ireland. As part of *Mapping Youth Arts Provision* (NYCI, 2021) the researchers conducted in-depth interviews with key stakeholders in youth arts provision in youth work contexts. They identified “a need for broader commitment to youth arts provision based on a statutory framework, which would empower organisations to implement more meaningful, sustainable and robust practices’ (p.41). Similarly, *Centre Stage +20* (Youth Theatre Ireland, 2019) identified the need for “a strategy that worked to unlock demand from young people, ensure equal access for all and provide for the professional development of youth arts practitioners to ensure quality provision” (p.65).

Both reports identified the need for better pay and working conditions for youth arts workers. The findings of *Centre Stage + 20* identified that only a third of paid youth theatre leaders felt they were being paid for all the work they did in their youth theatre and 66% of paid leaders were working additional voluntary hours to ensure they carried out their role effectively (Youth Theatre Ireland, 2019, p.15). Similarly, *Mapping Youth Arts in Ireland* found that youth workers and youth arts practitioners’ skills are not reflected in pay and progression opportunities (NYCI, 2021, p.11). Both research reports identified a need for training of youth arts workers. In its key findings, NYCI’s report (2021) identified “significant training needs of youth workers, youth arts practitioners and volunteers on various policy and practice issues” (p.11). *Centre Stage +20* similarly included the recommendation to support training and partnership work in support of

youth arts practitioners' professional development (Youth Theatre Ireland, 2019, p.17). The *Mapping Youth Arts in Ireland* report signals the need for greater networking, knowledge and skills sharing amongst youth arts practitioners:

Interview participants expressed a need for knowledge sharing, inspiration, and networking events. They reported limited knowledge about the extent and scope of youth arts provision nationally. In many cases people responded that they simply do not know what is happening elsewhere in the country and they do not know where they can find out about what is happening. (NYCI, 2021, p.42)

The research identified the need for platforms to support greater networking between youth workers and youth arts practitioners across Ireland, as one of their key recommendations.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter provided a summary of the key policies pertaining to the rights of the child to access to arts and culture and the benefits of youth arts engagement in an international and national context. Additionally, this chapter sought to provide an insight into recent research and resultant significant developments in youth arts provision in Ireland. Given the rights of the child to access and be an active participant in the cultural life of their communities, the capacity of (youth) arts organisations to facilitate and support this was considered in this chapter, with a particular focus on the capacity of youth arts practitioners. Existing research in an Irish context has clearly signposted the need for further training and skills development opportunities for practitioners and greater connectivity amongst organisations and youth arts workers, in support of the enhancement of this sector. The next chapter will summarise and analyse key findings from the research.

Chapter 4: Findings - Ireland

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will illustrate key findings from surveys and focus groups with youth arts workers, youth arts participants and Local Authority Arts Officers in Ireland.

4.2 Youth Arts Workers

Data from youth arts workers was generated through anonymised online surveys. Participants were asked whether they felt there were opportunities for youth arts organisations and practitioners to connect with one another. While many respondents felt that there were opportunities to connect with others working in their own artform, such as Youth Theatre Ireland and the Irish Street Arts, Circus and Spectacle but, many clarified that opportunities to network amongst peers were limited across artforms:

There are opportunities to connect through the Youth Theatre Ireland network but mostly only youth theatre. There are also some new developments in youth film via Young Irish Filmmakers.

Organisations such as Youth Theatre Ireland offer opportunities at events such as the National Festival of Youth Theatres and, more recently, Youth Theatre Tuesday, to allow us to connect with other youth theatres. Having said this, I find it difficult to connect with youth groups that focus on different disciplines.

There are some opportunities for youth circus groups to connect through ISACS but often meetings include a much wider range of circus orgs so the focus isn't primarily "youth circus" provision.

Additionally, a number of respondents felt that many connections take place in an informal or ad hoc way, without an organised approach. As a

result, many respondents indicated that their specific needs as youth arts practitioners were not met in artform-centric forums and networks:

There are definitely opportunities at conferences but other than that, unless you make contact with them independently, there aren't opportunities to connect with other organisations.

There are opportunities but it is not as structured as it could or should be.

I think if I look hard enough, I can find other youth arts organisations to link up with but I feel that this is something I have to search for.

When asked about opportunities for skills sharing specifically, a majority of respondents felt that opportunities were limited, resulting in a sense of professional isolation in a number of cases. Respondents indicated that there was a need for greater connectivity to be facilitated between practitioners and organisations to facilitate skills sharing and professional development:

I am not aware of any opportunities for skills sharing and peer learning.

There aren't really opportunities for skills sharing, unless you contact the other organisations yourself.

Most facilitators learn on the job or go by instinct, or experience informal mentoring.

When youth arts workers were asked about whether a youth arts network would be beneficial, the responses broadly welcomed this as an opportunity for greater connectivity, networking and skills sharing with their peers:

We would love to connect more with youth arts organisations across all artforms in Ireland.

I am not aware of opportunities to meet within youth arts across artforms and would certainly welcome more opportunities to connect with the wider sector.

I think this is a great idea. Being able to link up, make connections, and share ideas would really help in building a sense of community and peer support.

When asked about what kind of network would be most beneficial, respondents identified the need for connectivity to reduce professional isolation and a forum for knowledge sharing that is multidisciplinary and youth-centred in approach:

I think a peer to peer network of knowledge and experience sharing would be the most beneficial network. It would also be a good forum for the development of inter disciplinary youth arts work and I think that would come about organically with the establishment of the network.

It would be great to offer formalised training and peer sharing, supporting peer-to-peer as much as possible, and supporting young people who want to work in youth arts through mentoring, training, paid internships etc.

Partnership building, skills sharing, sharing info on funding opportunities and potential collaborations.

A network to celebrate, highlight and advocate for youth arts. To lobby for better resources locally and nationally and to shout about the wellbeing impact of arts participation for young people.

When asked about their hopes for the youth arts sector over the next 5-10 years, many common themes emerged from respondents, including the need for sustainable funding, a comprehensive youth arts policy and connectivity amongst organisations and practitioners:

Youth arts strategy/plan for each local authority, multi-annual funding structures to meet the need for long-term engagement with young people - not just project by project, a platform to celebrate and highlight youth arts (could be a festival / youth arts week etc.).

I'd like to see the vetting process revised to encourage cross-organisational interaction, to remove barriers to entry for working with young people while still keeping people safe in a meaningful way.

I'd like to see more infrastructural support for working with young people, from platforms where they can communicate online to dedicated physical spaces.

Evaluation - perhaps a framework for evaluating impacts of youth arts projects

Collaborations and Exchanges - opportunities to build partnerships within the sector

Another common theme to emerge from respondents' hopes for the future of youth arts in the mid to long term was for greater strides to be made in the area of facilitating better inclusion, with respondents specifically identifying the need for better supported inclusion in youth arts for hard to reach young people such as those in rural settings and in Direct Provision:

Rural Arts Provision - a piece of work specifically on what strategic supports are needed to allow rural young people to have as rich and as varied quality offer in the arts as urban young people - to use as an advocacy doc to influence government / Arts Council policy.

Active inclusion and platforming of young people experiencing Direct Provision, empowering youth-led practice, facilitating solid pathways to engagement from supporting young people to join and then becoming active agents in their own creative practice.

Common amongst many respondents was a desire for recognition for their profession of youth arts practice and the young people who participate and, with recognition, to have greater access to an improved youth arts infrastructure:

Proper recognition - with funding streams, national youth arts policies, greater employment of youth arts workers, all young people having access to youth arts outside of schools, this should be a right for all young people.

Recognition of the transformative power of youth arts as a tool for personal development and social justice. More youth voice, particularly at meetings.

These responses have informed the key recommendations in the final chapter of this report.

4.3 Youth Arts Participants

The researcher conducted surveys and focus groups with young people who were active participants in youth arts organisations in the South East, to ensure that the youth voice was central to the research process about the potential for a professional youth arts network. Data from youth arts participants was generated through online surveys, focus groups and one semi-structured interview. The researcher facilitated four focus groups in total with young people from the South East including Waterford Youth Arts, The LIT Young Writers Festival, Cloughjordan Circus Club, Young Irish Filmmakers and Wexford Youth Film. Each session was of approximately 20 minutes duration and took place over Zoom.

The first exercise for each focus group involved the researcher asking young people to describe their youth arts organisation in three words. The four most common answers across all artforms and organisations were fun, creative, social and inclusive. The researcher asked the youth arts participants whether they felt there were opportunities to connect with other young people involved in youth arts in Ireland. Many young people, particularly those within film, circus and theatre, felt that there were opportunities to connect with other young people involved in their organisation's artform. First Cut! Youth Film Festival and Fresh Film Festival were mentioned as positive ways of sharing work, seeing the work of other youth film groups and connecting with other young people. Respondents from Cloughjordan Circus Club spoke about connecting with other circus groups by attending each other's shows, inviting tutors from other groups

to give masterclasses and taking part in national circus festivals such as the Irish Youth Circus Gathering and Festival of Fools. While people in the circus and film groups felt that there were opportunities to connect with other youth arts organisations in their own discipline, many young people felt that there were limited opportunities to connect with young people involved in other artforms and that greater multidisciplinary forums were needed to ensure the youth voice was central and facilitated. When asked if this was something they would be interested in, the response was very positive.

When the young people were asked about what they think the benefits of connecting with other groups would be, the most common answers were making new friends, learning from each other and collaborating in the future. In the focus groups, the young people were asked about how they would like to connect with other youth arts organisations. Many young people said they would like a festival which would offer the opportunity to share work and learn new skills. Social media, in particular Instagram, was mentioned as a way of staying connected and sharing work leading up to or following on from a gathering. While digital forums were acknowledged as offering greater connectivity for both young people and youth arts practitioners, the desire to return to in-person activities post-Covid was keenly expressed across all focus groups. A secondary finding of this research process has been the interest and need on the part of young people in a multidisciplinary youth art network, whether digital or via in-person engagement.

When asked about whether they felt their voices were heard within their youth arts groups, the answers were positive. Many respondents felt that their opinions were sought and taken seriously within their own youth arts organisations. In particular, there was strongly positive feedback from the LIT Young Writers Festival committee, who programme their own festival every year. When asked about the most important steps towards creating

a safe space to express their opinions, LIT Festival Youth Committee members stressed the importance of a fun atmosphere. Additionally they said meetings should be social, regular and “it should feel like there is no hierarchy”. In seeking to better understand how the youth voice is facilitated within their organisations, the researcher gleaned insights into approaches and principles for an open, inclusive and multidisciplinary professional youth arts network.

In addition to the focus groups, the research included a semi-structured interview with Izzy Tiernan, participant and chairperson of The LIT Young Writers Festival committee. When asked about the benefits and advantages she had experienced of participating in youth arts, Izzy noted how youth arts participation had supported her personal development:

Youth arts has helped me flourish and grow and I've made my best friends within youth arts. I've discovered my love, my passion which is writing and poetry. It's pushed me to go on and seek a degree in English and Politics. It's given me so much confidence.

Izzy described an event in Garter Lane Arts Centre in Waterford where she hosted a panel discussion with Kevin Barry and Lisa McLnerney with an audience of 50 people. She described the confidence it gave her:

I couldn't believe that I could accomplish something like that at the age of 14. Youth arts has really given me the opportunity to push my boundaries and to find out what I'm made of.

When Izzy was asked about whether she felt the youth voice was considered in the development of youth arts policy and provision in Ireland, she said that although she feels young people's voices were heard within her own youth arts organisation and experience, she feels there aren't enough young people getting involved in decision making opportunities and fora. She gave the example of a conference she went to

about literature for young people, where the LIT Festival Youth Committee was the only group of young people in an audience of 200 adults. She said:

It felt like it was a great opportunity for us to be there, instead of 'we deserve to be in these spaces' . . . I think the young people deserve to be in those positions of power and that they haven't really breached into that yet.

Izzy emphasised the importance of involving young people and the youth voice in youth arts organisations and policy developments:

'You need to have the people that you are working for to work with you . . . It also gives young people such a sense of passion and drive and it gets them involved at a young age and it teaches them the ways of the world as well.'

When asked about her hopes for the youth arts sector in the next 5-10 years, Izzy answered that she would like to see the youth arts sector investing in young creators as the next generation of youth arts practitioners and arts practitioners. Additionally, Izzy spoke about the difficulties of getting a start on this professional ladder, such as applying for arts grants as a young person and that she would like for these to be made more accessible to young people so that they can take their creative work further.

This research also included online surveys with youth arts participants. While the responses were limited, the young people comprehensively outlined the benefits that they saw in the opportunity to network with other young people. The survey responses included:

- Creating inter-county friendships
- Planning events with young people between different counties
- Strengthening the support youth arts organisations receive
- Meeting young people in the same position as you
- Getting ideas about how other youth arts organisations work

- Job opportunities
- Making friends
- Broadening your idea of theatre (and other artforms)

When asked about whether young voices are heard in the youth arts sector, there were mixed opinions with responses including “Not as much as would be preferred” and “I think we are to a certain extent, but so much more can definitely be done on a bigger scale.” Their responses indicated the ongoing need to ensure that the youth voice is included, considered and central to the development of a youth arts policy and to the development of a youth arts professional network.

4.4 Youth Arts in South East Local Authorities

Local Authority Arts Officers were central contributors to this research and key in assessing youth arts provision throughout Ireland, in particular the southeast region. Online surveys were distributed to all local authority Arts Officers in Ireland. There are thirty-four Arts Officer posts in City and County Local Authorities across Ireland, two of which were vacant at the time of this research. Responses were received from 16 out of the 32 Arts Officers (50%). In general, there was a high level of support for youth arts activities, as demonstrated in the responses. The researcher noted a limitation of the data analysis process as measurement and data gathering practices regarding participant age ranges in the various artforms differ between local authorities. Additionally, it should be noted that the population of young people differs widely across local authorities, meaning provision according to population presents difficulties to comparative studies. One Local Authority Arts Officer (Kildare) highlighted that their County had the highest youth population of Ireland (37% under 24 years) and therefore they had prioritised youth arts spending in their County to a greater degree, in respect of their population demographic.

Many respondents noted the challenge of identifying the level of support that Local Authorities award to youth arts activities as they fund such a diverse programme including arts venues, local arts festivals, arts programmes, Artists in Residence scheme, many of which include significant youth-orientated programming. A network of youth arts professionals regionally, and ultimately nationally, could potentially support the introduction of standardised measurement and tracking of youth arts provision at a local and regional level, in order for a more accurate picture of provision to emerge. The establishment of a youth arts network could allow greater connectivity between practitioners in the sector and support Local Authorities in data collection.

Youth arts has been a central focus of a number of long established arts organisations in Waterford City and County such as Spraoi, Garter Lane Arts Centre and Lismore Castle Arts, giving rise to a many notable youth arts organisations and programmes such as Waterford Youth Arts, Little Red Kettle and the Waterford Young Arts Critics. In 2019, 29% of arts grants were allocated to youth arts organisations and activities, giving rise to a number of unique projects and programming for young people in this region which form replicable and scalable models. The LIT Young Writers Festival at Waterford Youth Arts is an example of truly youth-led practice. The LIT Young Writers Festival is a festival for young people by young people which was initiated in 2017 through Waterford Youth Arts' long established creative writing programme. Award winning and internationally renowned writers have contributed to this festival which is programmed and led by a committee of young writers, securing significant engagement via a new partnership with Waterford Libraries Service and broadening its engagement nationwide with an entirely digital delivery in 2020, supported by RTÉ.

Another example of best practice youth-led programming in the Waterford local authority area is Waterford Young Arts Critics which was

established by Garter Lane Arts Centre and has, for the last decade, enabled young people from ages 14-17, with an interest in arts management, journalism and curation, the opportunity to engage directly with professionals, present their own projects and engage with their peers across the country in a self reflexive and peer-led programme. Highlights of this initiative over the past decade have included exhibitions of The Arts Council's Collection and National Self Portraiture Collection, curated by the young people and participation in the National Youth in Galleries Forum 2013, alongside the Limerick Young Curators Programme, the Red Bird Youth Collective in Galway Arts Centre and the Red Square Youth Collective in the Butler Gallery in Kilkenny.

Celebrating its 30th anniversary in 2021, Barnstorm Theatre Company in Kilkenny is one of Ireland's longest established theatre in education companies and has a significant track record and reputation nationally for facilitating best practice youth arts programming in the artform of theatre, for young people in Kilkenny. Barnstorm provides quality arts experiences for children and young people, supporting individual and community development through creative expression and producing, commissioning and touring youth productions. Barnstorm also supports young people to engage with their local community through collaborative and participative outreach programming. In addition to this best practice example of a local youth arts organisation, another, Young Irish Film Makers has been transformative for young people in Kilkenny. Young Irish Film Makers is a national youth organisation which has a nationwide reach and impact through the artform of film.

Also celebrating its 30th anniversary in 2021, Young Irish Film Makers was established in 1991 as a local film club for young people but now has expanded to engage over 1500 9 - 25 year olds nationally, across summer camps, after school programmes, schools workshops, local training initiatives and through The National Youth Film and Animation School. The

focus of their programme is on active learning and skills development, supporting the maintenance of a significant filmmaking, and particularly animation industry in the area, with Oscar-nominated studio Cartoon Saloon based in Kilkenny and boasting many of its alumni, including director Tomm Moore. While YIFM cultivates a significant national reach, its impact in Kilkenny is keenly felt by its young people who benefit from its programming both in person, and online during Covid-19.

'Advancing the Arts, County Wexford Arts Plan 2018-2022' identifies, amongst the first critical needs and issues facing public engagement in the arts in Co. Wexford, the need for "more arts programmes and projects targeting young people". Goal 1 of the current Arts Plan is to "foster a culture of educational attainment and lifelong learning in County Wexford and provide opportunities to develop educational and workforce skills to improve work readiness and access to employment" and the first objective as set out under Goal 1 is the provision of "inclusive arts in education programmes that promote involvement and engage children and young people, placing their needs at the core". In the commencing year of the current arts plan, €19,550 in funding was allocated to youth arts activities excluding significant additional funds for youth arts programming supported by Music Generation, Living Arts Programme, Music for Wexford, Creative Ireland and other arts bursaries and initiatives.

A notable example of best practice youth programming in this County is County Wexford Youth Film Project which trains young people aged 13 – 20 in filmmaking. Established in 2005 as a partnership initiative between the Local Authority, the Arts Council and St. Michael's Theatre, this programme provides young people in Wexford with an opportunity for creative expression through an accessible and exciting medium of film. Their programming is entirely youth-led, being produced and written by the participants, and commendably addressing themes and issues relevant to

their lives. To date, over 400 young people have directly benefited from the opportunity to participate in the County Wexford Film Project.

In 2019, The Arts Council of Ireland for arts development across Ireland total investment into County Carlow was €553,969, 1.4% of which was directed to local youth arts organisations (p.128-131 Carlow County Council Annual Report 2019). 25% of additional Creative Ireland project-based funding in Carlow was directed to youth arts programming and youth arts organisations such as County Carlow Youth Theatre. Commendable youth arts projects and models of collaboration to take place in Carlow in 2019 included Carlow Youth Reach's collaboration with Carlow Youth Services and County Carlow Youth Theatre to produce a drama project to engage young people out of school, giving them the opportunity to foster creativity & self expression.

Another laudable youth arts project in 2019 that was supported by Creative Ireland Carlow was in collaboration with artist Clare Breen, Carlow County Arts Office, VISUAL Carlow and other artists. The programme provided every school in Carlow with an opportunity to engage with artist Marjetica Potro's exhibition in VISUAL through a coordinated programme of arts educational activities. A third best practice model of youth arts collaborative practice in Carlow in 2019 was Music Generation Carlow's collaboration with Carlow Regional Youth Services and the Rock Band RipTide Movement to create a weekend of workshops and mentorship for the rock bands across County Carlow, culminating in a concert for young people.

Music Generation

Another important development within youth arts provision in recent years attached is Music Generation. This programme aims to transform the lives of children and young people through access to high quality performance music education in their locality. Initiated by Music Network,

the programme is funded initially through U2 and The Ireland Funds. It is now funded through a partnership between The Department of Education and Skills and Local Music Education Partnerships. Creative Ireland plan a national roll-out as part of their Creative Youth Plan (Creative Ireland, 2017, p.15). The Local Music Education Partnerships (LMEPs) are groups of local experts, individuals and organisations that champion and guide the development of the Music Generation programme in their area, each one being led by a Local Authority or an Education and Training Board. Funded initially almost in its entirety through private philanthropic funding, Music Generation is now a 26 County programme led by local authorities and state funded, supporting the engagement of a new cohort of youth arts practitioners into the sector, practitioners with evolving professional needs

Local Creative Youth Partnerships (LCYP's)

Three pilot LCYP's have been created since 2018 and they will be evaluated at the end of 2021 when this pilot period ends. Action 14 of Creative Youth (1) states that Local Creative Youth Partnerships (LCYPs) will be established on a pilot basis in ETB areas, building on the model for Local Arts in Education Partnerships contained in the Arts in Education Charter (2). Three Partnerships are being piloted: Kerry Education and Training Board / Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board and Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board. LCYPs are networks which enable information sharing, collaboration between local creative youth service providers to bring about better use of existing resources, practices and initiatives in an ETB area. By establishing and building these networks, they support collaborative plans to be developed across local communities and also between schools and creative out-of-school activities.

These networks can facilitate and develop new local creative initiatives, targeting different groups more effectively to ensure wider coverage,

cutting down on duplication and enabling the sharing of resources. The remit of the partnerships goes beyond that of the arts and includes cultural and creative activity in all spheres, including areas such as heritage, STEM, entrepreneurship. They also aim to have the voice of young people a core to the partnership. This LCYP pilot programme is administered by Creative Ireland and funded from the Dept. Of Education and Skills and they allocate approx. €100,000 each year to the three projects for programming. Having a dedicated arts worker in an ETB area enables greater collaboration and establishment of informal networking practices with local Arts Officers, Creative Ireland Coordinators, Youth Officers, Festival Organisers and Music Generation practitioners, as well as supporting youth workers. In this way, these roles support informal networking and greater connectivity amongst practitioners and organisations in the sector. These roles also support longer term programming with multi annual funding, rather than project-based funding which support once-off engagement for young people. The impact of this model of longer term investment and infrastructure in these ETB areas will provide valuable insights.

4.6 Conclusion

With many significant, innovative and unique best practice models of youth arts practice in the South East region, with demonstrable commitment and support of their respective local authorities as outlined in this chapter, the establishment of a professional youth arts network in this region would support enhanced connectivity, skills sharing and the scaling and replicability of youth arts programming from the region.

Youth arts workers who participated in this research clearly outlined the gap in opportunities for them to network amongst peers. Existing networks are informal, conducted in an ad hoc manner and are typically artform-specific and therefore do not adequately address the specific

needs of youth arts practitioners, resulting in a sense of professional isolation. The establishment of a youth arts worker professional network, that is multidisciplinary and youth-centred in approach, could support what they saw as the need for greater connectivity between individual practitioners and youth arts organisations to facilitate peer-to-peer knowledge sharing. The establishment of a professional network was also seen as a potentially impactful approach to addressing what they saw as key challenges facing the sector, including inclusion and sustainability through improved policy, infrastructure and recognition.

Chapter 5: Findings - Best Practice models - Youth Arts Provision in Scotland, Wales and Norway

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will summarise key findings related to the sampling of best practice models of youth arts provision and policy development sampling policy and practice in Scotland, Wales and Norway. This chapter will address established networks, partnerships and collaboration and identify best practice examples that have impacted on youth arts provision within each country.

In Scotland, the researcher conducted an interview with Sarah McAdam, *Time to Shine* Programme Manager at Creative Scotland (Scottish equivalent of The Arts Council) and Kenny McGlashan, Chief Executive Officer at Youth Theatre Arts Scotland. In Wales, the researcher interviewed Francesca Pickard, Steering Group Secretary at Youth Arts Network Cymru and Miranda Ballin, Chair at Youth Arts Network Cymru. In Norway, the researcher interviewed Thorunn Hagberg, Producer at Stella Polaris, Sandefjord, Norway. Interviewees were asked questions about their youth arts organisation, how role and impact has developed over time, how Covid-19 has changed the nature of their work practices and a brief overview of youth arts policy which has informed their missions. The chapter is divided into three sections, each of which pertains to the insights of one of the three interviewees.

5.2 SCOTLAND: Case Study

In November 2013, Creative Scotland launched *Time to Shine*, the country's first ever youth arts strategy, which stated a vision to support all Scotland's children and young people to flourish through the arts (Creative Scotland, 2013, p.2). Interviewee Sarah McAdam is the Programme

Manager of *Time to Shine* at Creative Scotland. She explained that the impetus for the policy was practitioner-led. Scotland's youth performing arts companies approached the cabinet secretary for culture about the need for a specific and tailored strategic approach to youth arts, which met the distinct needs of this sector. Preliminary discussions which largely centred on the idea of a national youth arts centre were identified as potentially limiting and that the formation of a professional network would better support the advancement of the sector. McAdam commented, 'Things didn't need to be centred in one place but rather, we needed to be thinking about a network.'

The Scottish Government pledged £5 million to a youth arts strategy over three years and Creative Scotland administered that funding and initiated research within the sector, including consultation with children and young people. A National Youth Arts Advisory Group (NYAAG) was established to work with both Creative Scotland and an external facilitator to advise on youth arts. McAdam noted that NYAAG's role into the future would be more impactful were it further embedded in the sector, "empowering young people where they are with the people they have relationships with, in the spaces that they feel confident in and they know what action they can take and what they are capable of." She highlighted the need for youth involvement in policy development and delivery in Scotland.

Youth Theatre Arts Scotland CEO Kenny McGlashan indicates that his organisation was established in 2004 in response to repeated calls from publicly funded youth theatres for more sectoral support, to combat the impact of the rise of private for-profit stage schools. He notes that the resulting research established that there was a need for "a network to help professionalise the sector" and offer professional training supports for practitioners. Kenny explained:

The role that we fulfil is that, across the country, there's hundreds of youth theatres working in a local context. To help them develop, they need either training, guidance, micro-grants, opportunities to tour their work, help them to train and guide them in funding.

In the Scottish context, the development of a professional network was seen as broadly beneficial in offering practitioners and organisations skills sharing and peer support opportunities, which were seen to address broader sectoral needs and support the enhancement and recognition of the sector as having needs distinct from artform practitioners and youth work.

5.3 SECTION TWO: WALES

Wales was the first nation in the world to bring the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development into law with its pioneering Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015. The Act aims to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales (p.3). The Act puts in place seven well-being goals, including 'A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language' (p.4) and a "society that promotes and protects culture, heritage and the Welsh language, and which encourages people to participate in the arts, and sports and recreation" (p.4). In this way, the arts are recognised as a key mechanism in building a sustainable future for Wales, with The Arts Council of Wales are one of the thirteen public bodies supporting implementation (p.6). In 2015, The Arts Council of Wales published a policy statement setting out its vision for developing and sustaining a creative Wales, including a youth arts strategy as set out in a Guide for Young People.

Youth Arts Network Cymru (YANC) is a voluntary collective set up by the youth arts community in Wales to forge links and share best practice across the sector. According to YANC's website, the network exists so that

“(youth arts workers) can learn from one another, raise the profile of our work and fight for a sector that we passionately believe in” (YANC, 2021).

Before the establishment of YANC, Miranda Ballin stated that youth arts practitioners did engage and connect with one another but on an informal basis: “We’re a bit of a village, we talk to one another”. She noted that the difficulty with this kind of informal networking is that it makes it hard for emerging practitioners or someone outside of the informal network to connect. Ballin gave the example of a young theatre director who wanted to connect with youth arts organisations in Wales and found this process difficult and information limited, due to the informality of peer networking taking place in an ad hoc fashion.

Resulting from such insights, Ballin noted that National Theatre Wales initiated consultation with youth arts practitioners about the needs for more formalised platforms for connectivity, for both young people and youth arts organisations. Throughout this consultation, youth arts workers expressed their desire for a network to be able to connect with their peers and skills-share. A series of youth arts practitioner meetings were held and arising from these meetings, a needs assessment identified a clear and demonstrable desire on the part of practitioners to connect, to collaborate and to advocate for the sector together. Miranda noted that in more recent times, YANC has played a key role in advocating for the sector during the Covid-19 pandemic and informing stakeholders of the impact on the ground. During summer 2020, YANC compiled a report for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport regarding the impact of Covid-19 on the Youth Arts sector in Wales. It outlined the resultant loss of income for many freelance practitioners working specifically in the youth arts sector, the impact on the wellbeing of practitioners and critically, young people themselves which persists due to digital poverty and access, despite new blended delivery models. The presence of a professional network for youth arts practitioners has acted as a resource for

stakeholders and decision makers in being able to assess the impact of Covid-19 and implement supports in an efficient manner.

Crucially, the YANC report also demonstrates that its members have found the network to be an invaluable source of professional support and resilience during the pandemic. The report found that the increased openness and desire to share experiences through the network had been an important way to mitigate isolation for members in challenging circumstances. The report highlighted how, through greater connectivity, the network can enable funders and stakeholders to support the mental wellbeing of practitioners and young people. These insights echo the findings of the Irish 'Youth Arts Now' preliminary meetings in 2020 where participants noted that the opportunity for connectedness, peer-to-peer learning promoted resilience, upskilling and reduction of feelings of isolation amongst practitioners who, in turn, felt better able to support young people in times of crisis.

5.4 SECTION THREE: NORWAY

Norwegian Cultural Policy

The Cultural Schoolbag (TCS) is a national culture policy programme that ensures that all school-age children in Norway are given the opportunity to experience professional art and culture in school. It is the only programme of its kind in the world. TCS gives children and young people the opportunity to experience, become familiar with and develop an understanding of professional artistic and cultural expressions in an in-school setting. The activities must be of professional quality and cover the entire cultural and art form spectrum: film, cultural heritage, literature, music, performing arts and visual arts.

The Cultural Schoolbag has been part of Norwegian culture policy for primary and lower secondary school students since 2001, upper secondary school students becoming included later. This means that all young people and children experience professional art and culture through TCS, from first grade to the final grade of secondary school, in an in-school setting.

National and Local Collaboration

The Cultural Schoolbag is a collaboration between the Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Education and Research, all county councils and municipalities throughout Norway. TCS is a collaborative programme between the cultural and education sectors on national, regional and local levels and encompasses all schools. County councils are responsible for regional coordination and programming and municipalities in Norway may also develop their own programmes. *Kulturtanken* has had national responsibility for the programme since 2016.

Kulturtanken is responsible for managing, quality assuring and developing the TCS programme. In addition to national coordination of quality development and collaboration, *Kulturtanken* also helps to ensure that the activities are compatible with school curricula and the development of a joint understanding and involvement of the art, cultural and education sectors. *Kulturtanken* distributes lottery funding (from profits from Norwegian state lottery operator), obtaining reports and preparing the national annual report for TCS. *Kulturtanken* does not have any decision-making authority regarding the local TCS programmes. Producers and programmers in the counties and/or municipalities determine the final programme in partnership with local panels of experts.

National cultural institutions and companies like *The Norwegian Network for Performing Arts* (dance and theatre), the *National Museum* (visual arts) and the *Norwegian Writers' Center* (literature) provide content to TCS. They also work to ensure a high level of quality and offer capacity-building

measures to performers and artists. Professional artists, performers, practitioners and producers of art and culture submit content for consideration in inclusion in The Cultural Schoolbag. Various regional, local and independent practitioners also produce content for TCS (programmes, performances and exhibitions) such as film producers, local and regional theatres, orchestras and museums, as well as independent musicians, dance companies, theatre groups, authors and artists. TCS is Norway's largest 'employer' of artists. Producers and programmers in the counties and/or municipalities determine the final programme in partnership with local panels of experts.

Resourcing

The Cultural Schoolbag receives lottery funding from profits earned by Norsk Tipping. The total amount received in 2019 was NOK 285 million. Funding is allocated by Kulturtanken to the county councils and municipalities based on a formula that takes into account the geography, demographics and local infrastructure. Counties and municipalities are responsible for the local administration of the TCS programme and many provide local, additional funding for projects. As a result, total funding for TCS is much greater than the lottery funding alone.

TCS is Norway's largest 'employer' of artists. Artists and performers involved in The Cultural Schoolbag are paid in accordance with industry standards and established fee rates and copyright owner rights are protected in line with the Copyright Act. A framework agreement was also enacted between the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS) and the Norwegian Musicians' Union (MFO). Paid artists and performers who work for The Cultural Schoolbag are paid in accordance with this agreement. This national policy has impacted very positively on the lives of artists and practitioners in Norway, ensuring that a liveable wage is realisable by artists and practitioners.

In Vestfold, Norway, outdoor spectacle and theatre company Stella Polaris has provided content to TCS. Interviewee Thorunn Hagberg, Producer at Stella Polaris in Sandefjord explained that The Cultural Schoolbag has been highly successful in offering a well-planned programme for all children and young people to experience quality arts and culture. While essentially an in-school programme, TCS has impacted positively on the ecology of out-of-school youth arts provision, contributing to an environment for sustainable livelihoods for artists and practitioners in Norway, leading to richness of practice. According to Thorunn Hagberg, the programme has been successful in providing a liveable wage for artists. A large proportion of young people and children in Norway engage in theatre, dance, ballet, choir etc. and participate in Culture-School, organised by every county; Thorunn Hagberg attributes much of this interest from young people and children to engage in creative activity to the legacy of 25 years of TCS in schools.

Stella Polaris was formed in 1985 by Merete Klingen and Per Spildra Borg. The company draws from ancient celebrations and previous rituals of human life; 'In a world of jesters, storytellers, troubadours, and fakirs we want to bring back memories of our common ancestry and to trigger our longing for something larger than life.' The company is based in Sandefjord in Vestfold, Norway, but they also work at local, national and international levels. The company's partners within Norway are municipalities, counties, corporate industries, university colleges, museums, festivals, private individuals, social clubs, and sports teams. The company is funded by Sandefjord municipality, Vestfold county government, Arts Council Norway, as well as funds and endowments.

Stella Polaris is recognised throughout Europe as a unique model of practice, receiving funding through Erasmus+ to bring young people from

other countries to Norway to train at Stella Polaris and perform as part of the ensemble.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

This study was commissioned by Waterford Youth Arts and resourced by Creative Waterford in association with Kilkenny County Council Arts Office, Wexford County Council Arts Office, Carlow Arts Office and Waterford Council Arts Office. It is a preliminary study that will inform further exploration and development, to be led by Waterford Youth Arts.

The researcher utilised a combination of research methods including an in-depth review of relevant policy and a literature review of existing sources in the field. The researcher used a variety of qualitative research methods to investigate youth arts workers and youth arts participants' insights into the potential impact of a youth arts network in Ireland. These methods included online surveys, focus groups and semi-structured interviews. Additionally, the researcher identified three international case studies and youth arts organisations: Youth Theatre Arts Scotland, Youth Arts Network Cymru and Stella Polaris to assess the impact of youth arts networks in these contexts.

6.2 Summary of Research Findings

Youth Arts Workers

- The majority of respondents felt that there were not enough opportunities to connect with other youth arts organisations; Many youth arts workers who contributed to this research process felt that there were opportunities to connect with other youth arts workers in their own artform, but that this was limiting and that there was a lack of opportunities to connect with youth arts organisations

working in other artforms and in a way which address the specific needs of youth arts practice.

- The majority of youth arts workers responded positively to the idea of a national youth arts network in Ireland, noting the potential benefits to their professional practice in terms of peer learning, skills and knowledge sharing, reducing professional isolation and supporting sectoral resilience and policy development.
- When youth arts workers were asked what professional needs they have that a network would fulfil, the key needs identified were peer to peer learning, mentorship and training opportunities, opportunities to connect with youth arts workers across all artforms, partnership building, skills sharing and to celebrate and advocate for sectoral enhancement and professional recognition.
- When asked about their hopes for the sector into the future, youth arts workers spoke about the need for a comprehensive youth arts policy, increased funding, better frameworks for evaluation, increased opportunity for collaboration and exchange.
- A number of youth arts workers articulated the desire for a network to be centrally informed by the youth voice.
- Youth arts is rich in practice, led by committed and experienced practitioners. Youth arts workers remain concerned for the vulnerability and precariousness of youth arts in the absence of a national policy framework.

Youth Arts Participants

- Youth arts participants noted the positive benefits of greater connectivity amongst young people engaging in youth arts activity within the South East, citing making new friends, opportunities to learn from one another and collaborating in the future as expected outcomes, echoing the desired outcomes of greater connectivity for youth arts professionals, in many ways.

- Although the digital festival format was appreciated, there was a desire to return to in-person activities as soon as possible post-Covid.
- Many youth arts participants said that they felt their voices were heard within their youth arts organisation.

Local Authorities

- The researcher noted the presence of unique, successful and impactful models of best practice youth arts activity and programming in each County in the southeast region, with many that are replicable models for scaling further afield. There is a significant and collective opportunity for the southeast to build upon this cluster of youth arts excellence and concentration of active and innovative youth arts practitioners to establish Ireland's first youth arts professional network and drive the development of a national development professional youth arts practitioner network.
- The researcher noted a significant and ongoing commitment to provision for youth arts activity within each local authority area, demonstrable in funding provision for arts activity specifically for youth audiences.
- The researcher noted a limitation of the study was the differing approaches to monitoring, measurement and evaluation across different local authorities, which made direct comparatives and analysis challenges. The establishment of a youth arts practitioner network across the South East could support the establishment of more cohesive measurement standards to track and monitor youth arts funding provision and impact.

International Case Studies

- In the Scottish context, the development of a professional youth arts practitioner network offered practitioners and organisations training,

knowledge and skills sharing opportunities, as well as peer support to address professional isolation. The presence of a network supported ongoing sectoral enhancement and the recognition of youth arts practice as a distinct profession, with specific needs which differ to artform-specific practitioners.

- In the Welsh context, the impact of YANC was seen as hugely beneficial in supporting upskilling, connectivity and critically, resilience. During the Covid-19 crisis, the YANC has supported youth arts practitioners, organisations and decision makers to be more agile and responsive in addressing the evolving needs of the sector.
- In the Norwegian context, national strategy and interagency collaboration created a unique environment in Norway for all young people and children in the country to experience cultural and creative activity within school. The national strategy further impacted positively on the livelihoods of artists and practitioners, creating secondary and associated benefits to cultural institutions and arts organisations.

6.3 Recommendations

The findings of this research report demonstrate the need for the establishment of a professional network for youth arts practitioners in the southeast and nationally. This network would serve to:

- Support greater connectivity for the sector
- Acknowledge the unique needs of youth arts practitioners, as distinct from youth workers and artform-specific practitioners
- Offer skills sharing and knowledge sharing platforms in support of best practice in the sector

- Support scaling and replication of best practice of youth arts models in the South East.
- Inform the development of youth arts policy in Ireland
- Inform youth arts funding provision on a local and national basis
- Inform funders and stakeholders about the impact of Covid 19 on the sector and young people, supporting sectoral resilience and agility
- Ensure the youth voice is central to policy and funding provision in Ireland.

The findings of this research report signposted the need for further research into youth arts provision in Ireland, addressing the following key areas:

- Research and analysis of Local Authority youth arts funding in Ireland
- Assessing the impact of the Local Creative Youth Partnerships model for nationwide scaling and replicability
- Further International models for youth arts networks which have informed youth arts policy and provision in their respective countries

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