



Youth Theatre
Arts Scotland
Events

National Convention of Youth Drama 2018 Report

“Pass the Mic...”



National Convention of Youth Drama 2018

The National Convention of Youth Drama was a two-day event held in March 2018 at the Macrobert Arts Centre in Stirling which celebrated the breadth and depth of youth drama and theatre arts practice across Scotland. Attendees came from across the UK and internationally to share ideas, hear about a diverse range of projects, contribute to discussions and participate in workshops and masterclasses.

Welcome and Keynote

The day kicked off with a warm welcome to the building from **Kirsten Ross** of the Young Company at the **Macrobert Arts Centre**. Kirsten spoke about her first involvement with the venue, through an outreach project, and how she went on to engage with further activities. Kirsten was inspired to help other young people who couldn't access these types of opportunities and successfully applied for funding to establish new activities in her local community.



Kirsten Ross of Macrobert Youth Dance Company.

“Today has been energising and has allowed me to reflect on my practice and feel empowered to go out and do something about it.”

Attender

Youth Theatre Arts Scotland's CEO, **Kenny McGlashan**, thanked Kirsten and Macrobert for lending the Convention their building for the day. He then welcomed all delegates, saying that youth theatres and drama clubs across the country offered their participants a 'place' and a 'community' where they could 'be' and 'become' who they wanted to be. He hoped the Convention would reflect that commitment too.

Then there was a powerful and impassioned keynote from **National Theatre of Scotland's** Artistic Director, **Jackie Wylie**, who reflected on her first year in post. She argued that the term “participatory arts” didn't feel suitable any longer for the vibrancy of work being produced by artists collaborating with communities. She challenged the Convention to come up with a better term which reflected the social and creative impact of contemporary work. Jackie concluded with a quote from NTS's Youth Project Team which reverberated throughout the rest of the weekend: *“Young people don't need to be told they have a voice – just pass us the mic.”*

Presentations, Discussions and Debates

Throughout the day, Convention delegates attended a variety of themed presentations and workshops. An outline of each session is captured over the next few pages.

People at the event said that they felt moved to “pass the mic” and were excited to see what would come from that.

Vikki Doig, Youth Theatre Arts Scotland

Pathways and Positive Destinations

Catherine Wilson introduced **Staged for Life**, an employability programme which uses technical theatre as a training ground for young people not currently in employment or education. Catherine spoke about how they overcame issues of getting female participants to engage in their technical theatre courses.

Martin Danziger from **Modo** explained how they used circus to engage some of the most hard-to-reach groups of young people, as a physically demanding but transportable art form. This has seen Modo emerge as an invaluable resource for student support services in Aberdeenshire.

Stuart Bird from **Centrestage** went on to talk about the growth of their company, including funding from the Scottish Government and expansion to develop their Creative Hub in Kilmarnock.

Together the panel and delegates discussed the importance of some of the most basic barriers to participation; such as food and after school care. Addressing these through a more holistic approach to creativity and learning made a huge difference to developing confidence and connecting with young people who experience chaotic lives.



Using Drama and Theatre to Promote Intercultural Understanding

Marion Geoffray from **Theatre Sans Accents** shared her experience using drama to teach languages. She asked delegates to share a time when they had been 'lost in translation' which prompted lots of discussion on the topic amongst the group.

Aileen Ritchie from **Ignite Theatre** talked about their work with young refugees, asylum seekers and the local community. She went on to focus on how drama could empower us to speak out without fear of judgement, recrimination or censorship. One of Ignite's participants, **Zara**, shared her own experience, telling delegates how she had been a selective mute as a child but by taking part in drama it had shown her "the power of my words".

Emma Picken of **BE United** rounded off the presentations by sharing how they use dialogue and theatre to create understanding across cultures, particularly highlighting the importance of cultural misunderstandings and not jumping to conclusions.

The panel and delegates went on to discuss a variety of topics including; how to effectively work with people who speak different languages; creating shows with people from different cultures which were still accessible to a broad range of audiences; and how artists and organisations could better support, champion and fund this kind of work.

'Nothing Ever Happens Here' – Sustainable Engagement for Young People in Rural Areas

Jo McLean from **The Touring Network** and two of their Young Promoters, **Kerry Davene Baker** (from Islay) and **Ruairidh Gollan** (from Easter Ross) introduced their GET IN programme, which offers young people from the Highlands and Islands a training opportunity to tour and programme live performance in their local community.

Vikki Doig from Youth Theatre Arts Scotland shared the work of the **Rural Youth Project** including a research **film** on their website by Jane Craigie Marketing.

Lauren Oakes from **Horsecross Arts** and **Molly Goyer Gorman** from **Imagine**, who recently completed a PhD into the impact of youth theatre in rural areas, both joined the panel for a discussion. Together Jo, Vikki, Lauren and Molly discussed a number of common challenges that groups face, including; the high cost of bringing performance to the community, geography, transport, communication across regions and encouraging people to go out at all. The panellists agreed however that there remained a number of opportunities that could be seized upon, such as; utilising people embedded in the community, more innovative partnership working and giving the community a role in the project.

Ignite Theatre participant Zara (left) talked about the positive impact of drama.



New Ways to Respond to Performance and the World Around You

James Coutts, Amy Watt and **Gareth Vile** from **Youth Theatre Arts Scotland** introduced the new online **Young Critics Resource** developed in partnership with Youth Theatre Ireland, as part of their joint Creative Commons project funded by the European Union. They guided delegates through the resource suite and talked about the youth exchange and training which had informed the online toolkit. One of the key outcomes of the project was helping to amplify young voices, and encourage them to use new formats (such as the 'GIF critic') and methods of criticism.

Gemma Connell from **The Artifact** demonstrated a choreographic process 'Flow!' which she uses to help young people respond by combining movement with other art forms such as spoken word to create their own new work. Delegates tried out some of Gemma's exercises and she gave examples of how the process could be accessible for those not traditionally engaged in written work or dance. Gemma also shared a **recording** of her session.

Youth-Led Boards and Projects

Rachel Smith from **Toonspeak Young People's Theatre** reflected on the journey they had made in setting up a youth-led board. The young people were equals in their responsibilities with adult Directors and had a guiding role in youth marketing, engagement, governance strategy and the new Business Plan. She found that working with their Youth Board followed a circular process; listening, defining an action plan, delivery, feedback, and then starting listening again. Rachael suggested that working in a youth led approach still requires organisations to provide suitable experience, expertise and supports to be effective. Her final advice was to give it time to keep evolving and, like all Boards, its work will never be 'finished'.

Rosie Reid from **Vox Luminis** shared her experience of co-production working with 'KIN', a collective of young people with experience of family imprisonment. The vision for the group is that it reflects a true collaborative identity and, through this process, they have also discovered that co-producing was an ongoing, evolving approach.

Finally, **Kenny McGlashan** from **Youth Theatre Arts Scotland** introduced their new online **Young Leaders Resource** developed in partnership with Youth Theatre Ireland, as part of their joint Creative Commons project funded by the European Union. He guided delegates through the resource suite and talked about their previous Young Leaders programme and **Youth Arts Mentoring Toolkit** which had inspired the new platform.

Delegates went on to discuss a variety of key questions, including; how to provoke and question the status quo (to enable 'passing the mic'), how collective decisions are made, how to ensure the dominant voices don't overshadow others, and how to recruit young people for these different experiences and leadership opportunities.

Amy Watt discusses how a young critics project helped to amplify young voices.



Embedding Creative Learning

Heather Cassidy from **Dundee Rep Theatre** reflected on 10 Years of their Enterprise work experience programme and how beneficial it had been to embedding creative learning both for the organisation and young people involved. Heather shared a **film** of the project.

Emma Hay from the **Edinburgh International Festival** followed up with a presentation about the outreach partnership with Castlebrae High School – a three year “festival in residence” programme, which saw every department in the school involved in facilitation of the project. Emma shared a **film** of the project.

Laura Cairns from **Kibble Education and Care Centre** shared her experience of using creative partnerships to engage ‘at risk’ young people, most notably with Scottish Ballet. Laura shared a **video** of their project

“As a secondary teacher, is it easy to get caught up in paperwork and exams and to forget the love and passion you had for drama and the reason it is so important. It was great to be reminded of that and inspired to bring some different ideas to both the classroom and to extracurricular drama at my school.”

Attender

Supporting not Leading - a different role for the practitioner.

Stephanie Arsocka from **Little Red Theatre** explored the definition of “ensemble” and what the role of the facilitator could be in the space. **“Work with them and be prepared to do what they do.”** She noted that Little Red only has 6 members and their process works well in the small group.

Christie O’Carroll from **Reading Rep** shared insights from her work supporting the Reading Rep Young Company and opened up discussions around whether it is possible for this group to exist and work completely autonomously. The Young Company offers young people opportunities in Youth Theatre but with the addition of full ownership over the group. In this model, the Young Company felt able to take risks and felt less inclined to censor their work or their voice.

In a very engaged conversation the panel and delegates discussed a variety of questions, including; whether or not the idea of ‘control’ should have any

space in our work, how working with an autonomous groups differs from normal group work, what is the end goal - training or producing theatre, where does the ‘expert’ sit in this relationship, and if there is a gap we should acknowledge here between youth theatre and professional practise?



Jackie Wylie felt that the term “participatory arts” is no longer suitable.

Health and Wellbeing

Tom Houston from **NHS Forth Valley** reflected on 27 years of his in-school health and wellbeing project 'Max in the Middle' - a programme that blends drama, dance, discussion and food preparation to help students make informed decisions to improve their physical, mental and social wellbeing. When creating work about this topic, Tom asked delegates to think about where their creative methods and the issues they are exploring sit - do we go for the "drama" or the thing we all have in common?

Kat Wilson, a Freelance Drama Artist shared how she uses drama to teach young people about railway safety through the **Scotrail Travelling Classroom**. The project centres on the human aspect of health and wellbeing, rather than the issue itself. She asks students to consider their decision-making process and who else might be affected by the choices we make.

Finally, **Rachel Jury** from **Scottish Youth Poetry Slam** spoke about her experience using their Poetry Slam as a vehicle for supporting young people's mental health. Rachel shared her own personal stories about how the arts had saved her life on multiple occasions and how they should not be seen as a privilege, but as absolutely essential to every aspect of life.

Together the panel and delegates discussed a number of questions, including: how far can we push corporate social responsibility, how could we approach corporations (like Scotrail/NHS etc) to make art with them, and what evidence do we need to make the case for the arts in health and wellbeing to decision-makers?

'Tea Talks' - Project Shout-Outs

During the afternoon tea break **Lauren Oakes** from **Horsecross Arts** gave a presentation on how their Youth Theatre had developed a specific group for young people on the autism spectrum. This had been a life changing experience for some of the participants, as their individuality is valued. Lauren reminded us that no two young people with autism will have the same experience. As Dr Stephen Shore attests: *"If you've met one person with autism, you've met one person with autism"*.

Lyndsey McLean from the **Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society** also took the opportunity to launch some new programmes for the Year of Young People, including; a youth programming panel for Fringe Central, an accreditation scheme and youth category for the Allan Wright Award, and partnering with YTAS on their Young Critics programme for 16 - 21 year olds.



The Great Debate - The Visiting Artist: Accomplice or Provocateur?

The debate session focused on the topic 'Is the role of the artist in education to provoke or provide?' The panel included **Paul Gorman** from **Hidden Giants**, **Kirsten McCrossan** from **The Drama Box**, **Dr Will Barlow** a Lecturer from the University of Aberdeen's School of Education and **Lou Brodie**, Women of the World Perth Programmer. The debate was chaired by **Jack Stancliffe**, Arts Education Worker and Freelance Artist.

Jack kicked off the debate with a provocation; *"Is it possible to piss people off and still be invited back?"* A passionate discussion followed between the panelists and audience, often returning to different perspectives of what an artists' 'agenda' should be when working in a school.

One delegate asked about consent; *"Do teachers have a say in being 'pissed off'? And do artists ask for permission when choosing to act as disruptors?"* Paul responded saying that he didn't ask for permission to disrupt but rather to engage and challenge. One teacher in the room said that often teachers were *"desperate to take risks but there was no time or space in the curriculum, or system, to do so"*.

A question of safeguarding also arose; *"How can we ensure we keep young people safe when working in a*

"I loved the debate ... there should be more communication between the education sector and youth theatre sector."

Attender

challenging way?" Dr Barlow responded to this, arguing that; *"Drama and art isn't safe, and we should be protecting children 'into' the fiction, not away from it"*.

As with most good debates, the audience came away with more questions than answers, and a fire in their belly for continuing discussions throughout the rest of the day.

"Thanks for supporting the role of teachers and their workload (!) - some of us do really like it when someone comes in and shakes up the class and we can see children in a new light!"

Attender

Skyping in from Perth, Australia was Paul Gorman from Hidden Giants



WORKSHOPS

When Theatre and Youth Work Collide: The Street

Regen:fx Youth Trust designs and delivers innovative solutions to youth disorder and anti-social behaviour.

The Street is their immersive theatrical youth work experience, based in Hamilton. Topics explored range from sexual health to domestic violence, knife crime, and substance abuse. It brings targeted groups of young people to their space where, in a sometimes frightening experience, they are escorted on a 20-minute walk around the dark twists and turns of The Street.

The young performers from Regen:fx presented a short piece to the delegates, followed by a workshop and Q&A with the youth workers. The workshop focused on keeping participants safe, and how to help participants reflect on situations and make better choices; rather than telling off or teaching them not to say or do certain things.

The Street are currently developing 360° VR recordings of the performance to extend the reach of the project.

“Every member of The Street has a story to tell, it’s our job to bring that out and help them share it”

Facilitator

“(It) makes you stop and think before doing things and gives you a new insight”

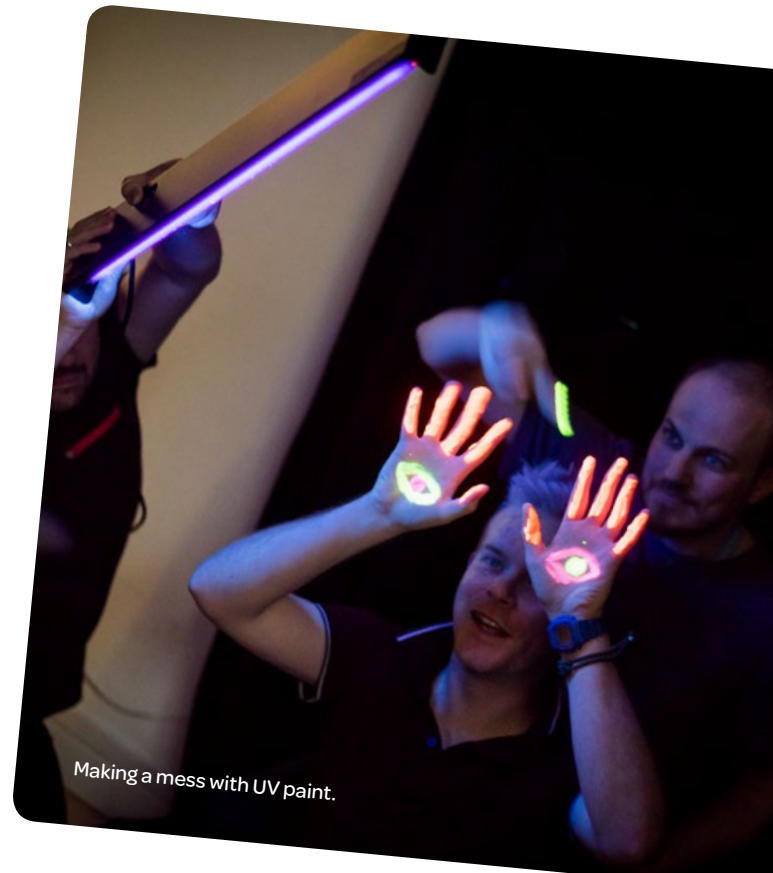
Performer

The Street brings groups of targeted young people to a ‘virtual street’ in Hamilton.

Creating with Community: Making A Mess

Sara Kemal and **Daniel Livingston**, the **Macrobert Arts Centre's** Dance and Drama Artists, gave an overview of their 2-year *New Creative Voices* programme. This included work with schools to overcome issues of rural isolation, as well as engaging young carers, children and young people with additional support needs and work with student support services.

During the session Daniel and Sara shared exercises and techniques they found to be effective in engaging the most hard-to-reach young people. This included dance and drama games, creating short visual films and making a mess with UV paint, smokebombs and other random things.



Making a mess with UV paint.

"We can create an open environment for young people to express themselves. We need to collaborate with them and value their ideas."

Attender



KIN: The Golden Thread

Delegates had the opportunity to experience the roaming audio performance **The Golden Thread** which allowed the audience choose their own journey which was created by KIN, a collective of young people with experience of family imprisonment. The audio performance shared personal stories in a unique and immersive way, challenging the audience to listen and really take note of what they were hearing.

The Golden Thread by KIN.

CONVENTION 'WRAP-UP'

At the end of the day, Youth Theatre Arts Scotland, CEO, **Kenny McGlashan**, brought everyone back together to reflect on the Convention and topics explored. Together the delegates discussed how they might take things forward in their own work and creative practice.

One delegate commented that; *"Seeing all the different backgrounds, projects and perspectives had been really interesting."* Another delegate said they felt *"refilled and full of inspiration"*. One delegate said that *"moving forward I would like to include young people in the ethos and values of my company - and work with them (directly) to understand them better"*.

"Some really valuable exercises and approaches to work and projects. I also personally feel very positive and inspired - READY TO GO!"

Attender

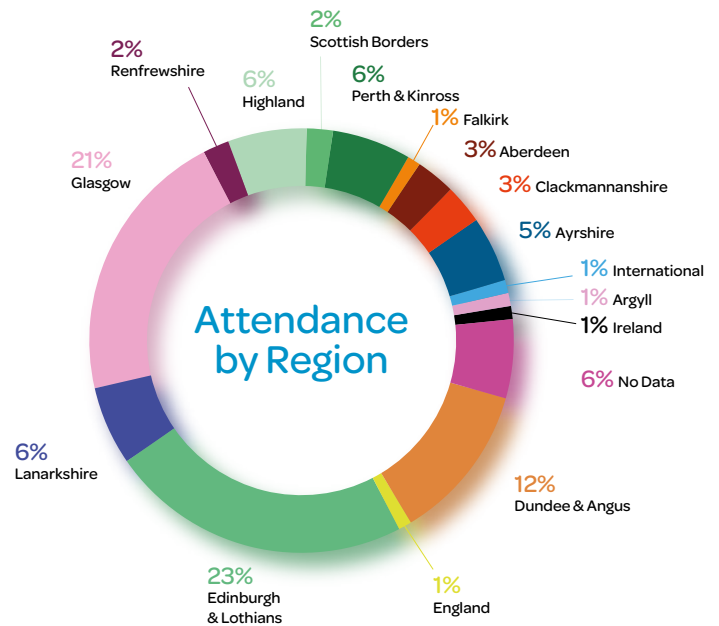
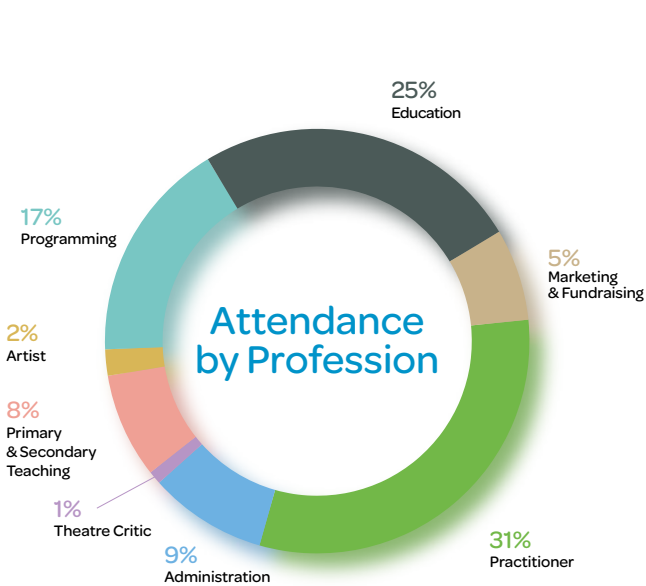
"A head full of ideas and a refreshed energy for our sector. It's always an inspiring and reassuring day spending time at a YTAS event."

Attender

The delegates reflected back on the challenge from Jackie Wylie's Keynote; was there a better term for "participatory"? "Humanity" and "Open Arts" were suggested. Another delegate said; "Perhaps the title doesn't matter. Perhaps what we can give is 'hope' and keep considering how we can reflect ourselves in the work that we do". Many people remarked that they felt moved to 'pass the mic' and were excited to see what would come next.

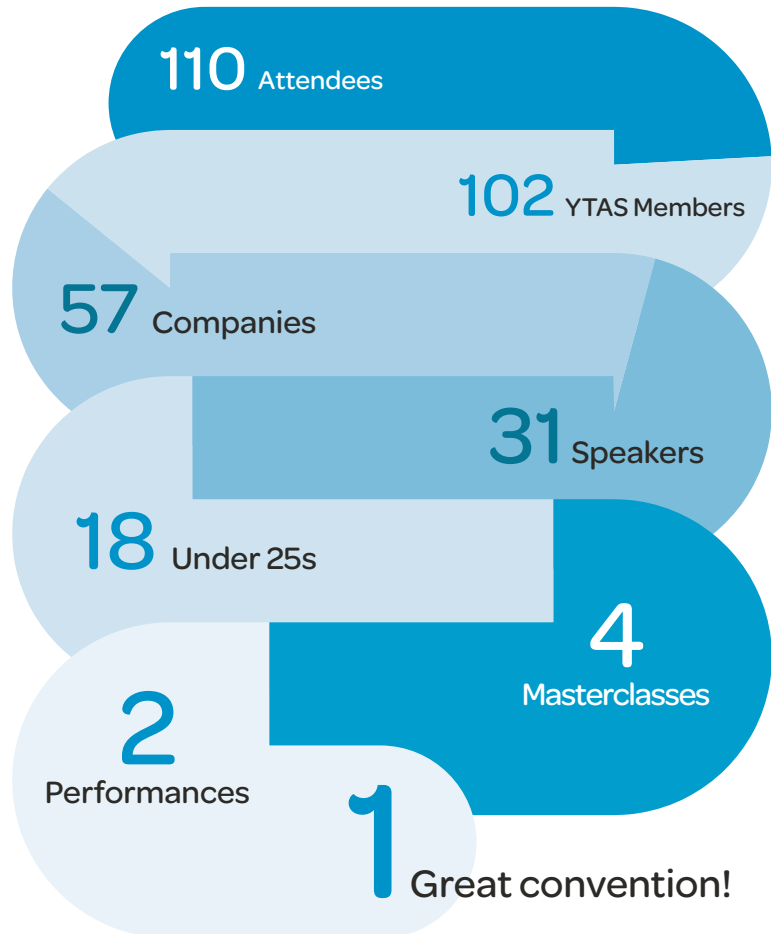


CONVENTION IN NUMBERS



After the Convention **95%** of delegates told us that:

- They had “noticed a real buzz at the event”
- They “felt challenged and provoked”; and were now “inspired to keep talking”



Credits

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