

National Convention of Youth Drama 2023



Introduction (Video Transcript)

Kenny: My name is Kenny McGlashan. I'm the CEO of Youth Theatre Arts, Scotland. It's my pleasure to welcome you all to the National Convention of Youth Drama 2023.

Audience: [cheers]

Kenny: This is really exciting for us and actually for the sector because I was remembering that it's actually been five years since we've had an event bringing us together like this, which quite start when I remember that as well. As I introduce the event today, some of the people, and also what we'll be doing during the programme, I'll talk a little bit about some of the things that has maybe changed, changed for YTAS, and things that we realised through that as well. It's really exciting to be together because having been pulled apart and having been really busy, these chances to get together we know are so vital.

Throughout the day, it's really important that the sessions that you get involved in, that the people that you get a chance to meet, take that opportunity. If there's any way that we can help you introducing people or at any point, just let us know that's what the day is for and it's for you and for us to meet together. I've actually gone wildly off my script already. I'm probably going to get a kick from our helpers here today who we're going to introduce in just a second. Some of the other people that are helping us with the event today, you'll have met Helen Bain, who's our General Manager, downstairs when you registered. She was also with Rachel Gorry, who's the Administrator... and there's Helen there.

[chuckles]

Right on cue. Other people from the YTAS that you'll meet throughout today is Emma, who's our Sector Development Manager. She'll talk a little bit about the programme of the day and explain some of that in a second. The other people are Hollie who is our Communications and Marketing Manager. She's on the slides at the moment, but she'll be doing various other things throughout the day, and also, Andy who is our photographer today. His day job with us is our Marketing Coordinator, who helps us with our social media, and so on. Today, Andy's going to be taking photos throughout the day.

Just to highlight, if anybody doesn't want their photo taken as part of the event, just make yourselves known to Andy and he will remove you from the pictures that we'll circulate and take them out. Just let Andy know directly. The other person that's on the YTAS team is not here today, so that you'll get to know everybody, it is Catherine Makin, who's our Projects Producer. Some of you will know that tonight we've got our Emergence programme, which is for directors developing new work with young people. They're doing the works-in-progress tonight. She's down there, frantically involved in techs and doing various stuff as well, but Catherine has been really integral in organising all this, so we'll let her know if everything falls to pieces later.

Audience: [laughter]

Kenny: The other people to introduce you to, of course, are Sabine and Anna, who are assisting us today as our sign language interpreters. Hopefully, it reminds me not to speak as fast as I normally do. The other people also to mention as well are our venue partners, Capital Theatres, who've been fantastic. Claire Swanson. I think there's Claire over here and who is the Head of Creative Engagement. Also, we've got fantastic help from front of house and Cormac and their technical team, we appreciate that as well.

I think that's everybody's introduction. Just a few other housekeeping things and then Emma runs through the programme, and it'll be that. You've got the Wi-Fi codes in your programme. If anybody needs the Wi-Fi, then it's in the programme. If you're tweeting today, the hashtag is #DramaCon2023, which has become DramaCon as a shorthand for the National Convention of Youth Drama.

Onto our next slide and to introduce for any of you who are new to knowing about Youth Theatre Arts Scotland. We are the national development agency for Scotland Youth Theatres. Our purpose really is - I would imagine shared by you, is helping to make the lives of young people in Scotland better through youth theatre. Our mission in that is to support, connect, and inspire youth theatre participants across Scotland and the leaders that support them.

Those are the foundations which link our values, which guide our work and the values are something that we've really spent a bit of time on over the last few years firming up to be clear about how that drives our work. Our values are helping others, community, collaboration, excellence, and joy. This is a really exciting slide of our Strategic Framework. [laughter] I wanted to share it with you because one of the things that we've taken time over the years on your behalf as your development organisation, the body that many of you are members of, is to try and be really clear about the role that we play for and the overall aims that we have, the outcomes we're trying to achieve, and the purpose so that you're clear and we're clear about how we can move ahead with it.

That's just so the outlines gives you a sense of how our values fit into the range of activities that we undertake, which are providing sector support, enabling sector development, hosting national youth events and projects, and also often supporting other people who are hosting national or regional projects and acting as the sector's intermediary. The short and medium-term outcomes that we monitor help keep us on track towards the longer-term vision, aims, and outcomes that we're all trying to hit towards.

All of these really are actually about-- I'm not sure if you can pick it up just on the left-hand side, but it's really just about helping to address the diverse and evolving needs that the sector experiences that are summed up here are quite simply on the left. Now, these are persistent issues and that's why they're set there and remind us that that's the work that we concentrate on that we do with and for you. They're just the headlines. There's a lot more behind them as all the conversations I had this morning with those individual groups and their experiences.

I just wanted to highlight that, give you a sense of who we are, and if you haven't come across us before or actually you maybe have but you didn't know some of the events and some of the things that we do. Just also to highlight these issues and all the work that flows through our Strategic Framework is really guided by you and those issues are informed, all the things that are behind them are informed by what's happening for you right now. That's why the events like these, the research we do, the projects we do, and the feedback we get from you, really does inform everything we'll be doing.

We talked a little bit about research and we talked a little bit about the sessions today, but I do want to remind you that even the exchanges that you have with different people here today, they will inform the work of the sector going forward if you can put as well. That's why over many years, events like this have come to reflect the changing character of our sector. I've seen that and actually I've been talking to a number of people who've been at some of these events have seen the sector evolve over the last few years or many years before and you can see the change of character in the sector reflected in events like these.

Before this convention existed, YTAG, Youth Theatre Arts Scotland, YTAG, held an annual Symposium with the core purpose of bringing the sector together to share ideas, challenges, and opportunities which influence all of our work. The penultimate Symposium that we held actually was in here seven and a half years ago, before we evolved that into calling it the National Convention of Youth Drama. In 2018, which was the Year of Young People, we thought about where we were at, what was moving, what were some of the ambitions of the sector trying to mark that moment. At that time, there was a couple of things that we looked at.

We established the National Convention of Youth Drama and it really was about reflecting the sector's desire, at that time, to reach out to sectors that were also important to children and young people. We wanted to show them that we could speak the same language together, which is why we've used the National Convention of Youth Drama title. It was the language that some of the sectors owners recognise so that we could speak their language and the hopes that we shared some of their ambitions as well. Also importantly, you can see, we wanted to highlight that we were talented at passing the mic to young people who themselves whose voices we could help amplify.

That was great success in partnership with our friends at the Macrobert. We planned the next one in 2020 and then we were all booked up and ready to go, fully booked up and it turned out it was the week before COVID lockdown took us all away for several months, if not a year. We took the hard decision to cancel it very last minute, but I think it was the right decision when we were concerned about people's safety at that time. Luckily, what we were able to do was devolve some of those sessions that had been planned and some of those discussions into the online delivery.

A time when like you YTAS entered a whole new chapter and needed to adapt much of what we would normally do. Now as we get to the point of opening the convention in 2023, we can see how those previous events but also those years since 2020 have started to impact and influence our work in this event today. This slide here just demonstrates some of the journeys that we've been on with our sector over the last few years. Going from left to right, you can see there's lots of online training and also some direct support. A lot of people with guidance and people trying to navigate the situation that we were in.

We also held an online festival for the first time, I ♥ YT, and we provided new grants for the first time as well with youth groups for emergency adaptations and done their development with their company and just delivery. Then last year, I think it's the words looking at the right-hand side there, you can see the return of our in-person training and festivals. Also, something they saw on here but also was the return of international travel and collaboration that was involved in our BUZZ Network project that's funded by the EU.

What you can't see up here, and I'm sure a lot of you will have experienced as well, is that YTAS used some of those years to develop other practices behind the scenes, both for our charity and for the sector. We established a new website and CRM. We also developed multiple new contacts and activities that were really intended to help improve our role in research and also cross-sector advocacy. The last few years have really left an impression on YTAS. When we came to programme the event today, we noted how assured that we felt of the sector's role and impact. That really wasn't in question anymore.

What felt most important was, again, going back to that primary purpose that we should be together to share ideas, challenges, and opportunities which will influence our work. Emma and the team have created a joyful day. It's one of our values, a joyful day which reflects everything else that YTAS does as well. I'm going to pass over to Emma now just to give an outline of the programme. Then I'll finish up by telling you a little bit more about some of the things coming up for YTAS in 2023. Then I'll pass on to our keynote for the day. Over to Emma.

[applause]

Emma: Hi, everyone. Nice to see you all in one place. Still very exciting. I'm still getting used to that. This morning, we'll be getting comfortable here in the Studio. You can sit back and relax and take in quite a bit of information, first from Kenny and then from our keynote speaker, Dr. Livia Tomova. You'll hopefully have noticed your programmes, I've got mine here, that we've created spaces for you to take notes. Very exciting. Please do use them. That's what they're there for. We'll be sharing the delegate list with you digitally afterwards. You don't necessarily need to write down details of who's from where because you can match that all up afterwards.

The presentations will be filmed, the shoutouts as well as the keynotes. You can refer to that afterwards. I also wanted to point out this exciting slide [page] in the middle, which is a bit of networking bingo for you. Please do fill this out, have conversations, meet some new people.

There's a prize for whoever brings it back to the registration desk first. That should keep you busy for the day. We also have some things programmed. First off, after the keynote, we will have our shout-outs. Some of you have signed up for this in advance. Some of you might want to sign up a little bit later. You might be inspired. This will be your energy boost for the morning.

It's a fun and fast way to learn about what's going on in the sector, gain inspiration, and make some connections. Those of you who have signed up in advance, your logos will be projected on the wall behind you while you speak, which is very exciting high-tech. If you haven't signed up, you're still able to do so. We just hope to have that element for you. Please do make sure you sign up by the break. If we haven't filled all the spaces, we might figure out how we can fit you in along the way. Moving around, after the shout-outs, we'll have our lunch. The second half of the day will take place in the other part of the building in the front of the Festival Theatre.

We will be returning to the Studio at the end of the day for our final wrap-up. I'd encourage you to take your belongings with you so that you don't lose them. That involves collecting your coats and things like that, especially if you want to go outside. It's a rainy day. You're going to need to them. When it comes to changing spaces, the lovely front-of-house staff can direct you as well as the YTAS staff. We'll move all together so that we don't lose anyone in the space. If at any point you need a bit of a quiet time this morning, you're welcome to step out into the bar area. We've labeled a well-being space. There's some colouring books and things for you to do if you just want to take a little bit of a break.

We also will have a quiet space set aside on the other side of the building if you need to use that. Discussion groups. You've all been keen beans and signed up on the way in, so this might not apply anymore. If you haven't yet done so, please sign up to your discussion group for this afternoon on the wall outside here. Those sheets will be taken over to the other side. If you forget what you've signed up to, you can come over to the YTAS desk at lunch to double-check these things.

The discussion groups are about sharing experiences, collaborating with each other to generate ideas for the future around certain topics. They will be chaired by some folks from across the sector and a YTAS member of staff will be in each of those groups taking notes so that you don't have to. The notes from every single discussion group will be shared with all of you. If there's a group that you are not in, you can still see what they've chatted about. Some of you are here on a different path however, we have a few early career practitioners with us who are part of our Workshop Assistant Exchange.

Those of you who are assistants will spend the afternoon with the lovely Jo Sharp and Mhairi Gilmour, they're up there, who will be doing a two-hour workshop sharing skills and mapping the future of our Workshop Assistants' Network. There will be a few additional young people or young assistants joining that group at lunch who are really keen on YTAS and are also involved in our production tonight. They're teching and then coming over to do that workshop and then going back to perform. Gold star to them.

Finally, our wrap-up. At the end of the day, you will come back here to the studio to share the top takeaways from our discussion groups and wrap up the convention. Some of you, I believe about 20 of you, will be heading over to the Traverse Theatre this evening for our *Emergence* performance, which is the final sharing of our work in progresses from our Directors' Development Programme. I have news though. As of today, there are 10 tickets being released at some point. If you do not have a ticket and you want to come, I'll shout at some point when I say, "They're live; book now." It was sold out but there are those 10 tickets.

If you are headed over, we will have some drinks tokens for you to take so you can have a drink over at the Trav. On your way out from here today, please make sure you grab one of those tokens so that you can join us for a drink at the Traverse Theatre so you don't go thirsty when you get to the event, is what I've written here. That's it for me. I'll hand back to Kenny.

[applause]

Kenny: If you're not able to get to the show, you don't get one of those tickets and you just want to come to the drink and the chat, feel free as well. It's not exclusive. Thank you Emma for running through the programme. Now just before we hear from Dr. Livia Tomova, take a few more moments of your time just to share some of the things that we're looking forward to in 2023, some of which she might be interested in getting involved with. I've just tried to outline and I've said to you before that how we've become even more clear about the values that we hold and the work that we do and how that drives the work we do. I'm just going to outline them just under these values.

In terms of helping others, after the summer, we're going to be launching our new Membership Support Hub and a role to go alongside that. The digital hub and that'll sit on the website and will probably be password-protected through your membership login and will provide guidance and training to increase the knowledge, skills, and resources that are required to run a youth arts organisation. The idea behind that was it gives you a one-stop shop to look at a bespoke set of guidance, templates, tools if you want to develop elements of your practice.

It ranges from policies and things like child protection but also about how you work with your staff. Also, elements about fundraising, all the areas that we know that we want to do but is a lot of work when you've got your day job. It gives you a place you can go to. We've done some of the hard work in pulling all those resources together. We'll launch that after the summer. That's going to be supported by a new Membership Support Coordinator who we're going to be recruiting soon. Keep an eye out for that if it's a role of interest to you or somebody that you know whom it might interest.

They're going to oversee those resources that we've already pulled together, but they're also going to work directly with YTAS members who want to review and improve their own organisation's practices. No matter what level of organisation or capacity you have, you'll have a friend, an ally there who can help work with you to take you through it as well. We recently trialled these new supports. Thanks to those of you in the room who gave us some feedback on that. We've received some great feedback on how the different scales and types of youth theory organisations said that it could help them develop their work and their capacity. We know that it'll be useful for different types and all that.

People might use it in slightly different ways, I think it's how we learned as well, which is great. In terms of excellence, Emma will help us to all keep being excellent to each other this year by developing our next sector training programme at the moment. This is the close of our current sector training programme, which has been running from after summer and autumn last year through until today. She's just wrapping up some of those elements over the next few weeks and developing the programme.

That will start delivery after summer as well. As well as taking forward the best of what we've offered online and in person last year or over these last nine months, Emma's new programme is looking to evolve to respond to some of the evolving needs that we've spotted out there too. Some of the new plans to give you an early insight into and I hope it's OK to say this, Emma, is some mini *Interchange* style weekends where there will be multiple training opportunities for local networks of youth leaders in some regions.

We're going to pilot that model in a couple of places over the next nine months and then hopefully, we'll look to maybe extend it to other regions in years to come as well. Again, keep an eye out for that. We'll launch information later in the year. We'll also be working with partners at home and abroad this year to drive forward practice. We're planning to work with Youth Scotland to pilot some new accredited youth theatre worker short courses. At the moment, we're looking at ones for volunteers, ones for practitioners, and then ones for leaders which hopefully will be coming to the next year as well.

Ones that are that volunteer, that assistant role, but then also ones that are for practitioners because it has never been and it could. It has never been a qualification for youth theatre in Scotland. One of the things that came out of our Workshop Assistants Exchange and forums was the desire and the demand for that specific route. We've been interested in that for a long time, but because the young people told us it was needed, now we've got to do it. Youth

Scotland said they would help us with an existing model that they've got, and we're going to make it the scope for youth theatre. It'll be like a short course for a weekend and you get an accredited qualification.

Keeping an eye out for that, that's something that might interest you or the people you work with. Also, the BUZZ Network artists and partners will be helping us to develop practice as well when we host the next International Artists Lab in Glasgow in June. The lab that we're hosting focuses on exploring the topic of diverse voices in youth theatre. It's a broad topic and it's still open for applications to take part. If you or anyone you know would be interested in learning more about that topic or have practice that you would be interested in sharing with other youth theatre practitioners from across Europe, then there's information on our website and you can sign up. I think the deadline is next Monday. Is that right?

Emma: 3rd of April.

Kenny: 3rd of April, that's right. As part of the week, even if you're not able to sign up to take part in that yourself, I think there's four places for Scottish participants. We're hoping to hold an extra event in partnership with Creative Scotland, which will enable the wider sector to be involved in those discussions and also to connect with the international practitioners. Again, keep an eye out for that. Even if you're not part of the lab, you're not able to be part of the lab, you might need to come and find out a little bit more about that. We'll let you know.

Finally, in terms of this developing training and better practice, other ways that we're developing a good practice is going to see YTAS undertaking the charter processes that are administered by LGBT Youth Scotland and PiPA, which is the Parents and Carers in the Performing Arts. Both of those areas will be undertaking the charter process to develop our own activities, our own training, and HR and company practices. Then as your intermediary and membership body, we undertake to share that learning with you. Some of that will go into things like the Membership Support Hub, but also training, and other events that we offer.

Partly that's some of the models we'll be looking to do for you as your development organisation, developing our own practice, understanding them, making them bespoke for youth theatre, and then sharing notes with you in a good way. Throughout 2023, we'll continue to collaborate and support many of our members on amazing projects. Currently, that includes Positive Stories, which is out right now. If you've not signed up to, you will want to be looking at or be sharing that with people. It's the third iteration of a fantastic programme. We may get a little bit more about that later on, I think.

Be sure to whether it's Positive Stories or there's another national event coming up further down the line which we'll let you know, which is connecting schools and practitioners probably towards in November and up North, we'll tell you more about and it launches all through our newsletter and social media. Make sure that you're signed up to our newsletter and our social media where all that information gets channeled out as well. We'll continue to collaborate on your behalf with many shared initiatives that are important to our cause with a range of cross-sector leaders and organisations.

Current ones we're involved in are-- I've been told to say this a bit slower. [laughs] The Federation of Scottish Theater, FST, SCVO, which is Scottish Council of Voluntary Organisations, Youth Link Scotland, which is the body which brings together youth work sectors from local authorities and from the Third Sector, Culture Counts, which is an advocacy body for culture and heritage in Scotland. Creative Carbon Scotland and the Green Arts Initiative. Also a new Children and Youth Arts Advisory Group, these forums that are working with youth arts or organisations specifically looking at advocacy. We're doing all of that on your behalf. Again, go back to the point I made at the start, any information that we gained from you today and that you're sharing feeds into those conversations and those campaigns as well.

Under the community value, I wanted to highlight that capturing the national picture of our community is a really important task for YTAS. It helps guide our activities and our support as well as many of our partners or other partners and funders too. Every few years, we undertake a review of Scotland's youth theatre sector. That helps us to identify how we can all work and

develop further. We published the results online and following past reviews that were held in 2015 and 2020, YTAS and organisations across the country use the insights that we gained to help identify our own priorities as well as to secure funding and develop new opportunities for participants and leaders.

That wasn't just us or the funders and partners or members across the board. They used some of the insights and their comparison where they were certainly against those to think about what needed to be developed in their region, in their practice. Please help us to get yourself and any others that you know onto that map by taking part in the upcoming survey. It's so important to us in fact that we've drafted Hollie for a Shout Out and she is going to tell you a little bit more about what's involved. She's promised to do it in tap shoes. [laughter]

Finally, this is maybe a bit of quick one, but although that all adds up to quite a busy year for us and for all of you, we're going to bring joy in our approach for all that we do because really what is youth theatre here without a bit joy. Naturally, what I wanted to finish today before passing on to Dr. Livia Tomova, who's going to share insights with us into the links between adolescent brain development and tackling social isolation, which feels so important from what we've learned over the last few years as well as what we're continuing to do right now.

The next slide. Many of you have seen that we published research last week about the long-term impact of youth theatre participation. Something that came from our strategic framework and feedback that we're getting, people were saying, we can tell these young people and children have an amazing time just seeing the impact. People just don't necessarily believe the long-term impact that it has on so many different aspects of their lives and even their careers. We did a large bit of research in partnership with the Scottish Graduate School of Arts and Humanities. It's already been shared by many of our members and partners online.

We'll keep using and promoting the research throughout 2023, reaching out to influence cross-sector stakeholders, conferences, publications, and platforms. Hopefully, you'll hear about it a few more times as well. The full report, findings, and individual case studies are all on our website. Obviously, I'm biased but on the website, we've done an edited version so you can skim elements of it, but there's a lot of really great stuff in there. I wanted to finish today just by pulling out some of the conclusions from the research because they certainly filled me full of joy, and it reminded me again why we're all here today just as we go into the programme.

Whilst we all probably know these are the benefits that youth theatre brings, hearing them from people 5, 10, or 20 years on from their participation on how that experience helped shape their lives and careers reminded us again why we do it. The statement at the end of the research highlights that a number of features of youth theatre experience particularly contribute to these outcomes. That included creative activities they got involved in, but also the nurturing nature of the facilitation and the supportive environment and community that they served within.

Then it goes on, in combination, these features create a system of continual positive reinforcement, meaning that any outcomes of the experience become embedded in the individuals as personal values, thus having a lifelong influence and leading to the positive long-term impacts that we see here on personal lives and careers. I kind of emphasised about how some of the changes within YTAS really showed us how we were values-guided, both as a community and as a charity.

I think what the research really reminded us was that we're also value creators and enhancers too. As we launch into this first event we've not had for five years, I wanted to thank you for your role in that over the many years that we've been a part and all the many years before it as well and the many more to come from stuff that we're going to be chatting about today.