



Scottish **Arts** Council

**Scottish Arts Council  
Review of Youth Theatre  
(RES10)**

Report written by Bonnar Keenlyside for the Scottish Arts Council.

**June 2002**

**Scottish Arts Council**

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## **1. Brief and Process**

- 1.1. The Scottish Arts Council (SAC) asked Bonnar Keenlyside (BK) to undertake a Review of Youth Theatre in Scotland
- 1.2. The purpose of SAC in commissioning the research was to inform the positioning of youth theatre within SAC strategy
- 1.3. One of the objectives was to collect evidence to support or challenge anecdotal evidence that youth theatre in Scotland was not meeting the needs of young people
- 1.4. Youth theatre in Scotland has grown in importance following the publication of Scotland's National Cultural Strategy, the focus on children's creativity and the investment in Scotland's theatre resources. It is also recognised that youth theatre can aid the personal development of young people, encourage the development of skills, and bring separate communities together thereby meeting government objectives of life long learning and social inclusion
- 1.5. The review was commissioned within this context
- 1.6. The focus of the brief was on gathering information to describe the current position of youth theatre in Scotland. The areas of investigation specified in the brief were to:
  - map youth theatre and identify geographic gaps
  - ascertain reasons for any geographic gaps
  - establish details of activity and participants for each organisation

- establish the socio economic profile of participants and determine gaps relating to access and opportunity
- look at youth theatre activity
- investigate staffing and funding issues
- ascertain available pathways beyond youth theatre and gaps in opportunities
- examine opportunities and gaps in training
- examine the current role of SYT
- investigate demand for a national umbrella body

## **Process**

- 1.7. An advisory group was established to oversee the review. The group met to agree the research methodology, for a report on findings, to discuss the findings and approve the report. The group comprised:
  - Angela Hogg – Scottish Arts Council
  - Sylvia Dow - Scottish Arts Council
  - Stewart Aitken - Scottish Borders Council
  - Mary McGookin - City of Edinburgh Council (chair)
  - Kate Black - North Ayrshire Council
  - John Batty - Highland Council
  - Phyllis Steel - Giant Productions
  - Maggie Singleton - Glasgow City Council
  - Jacqueline McKay - Aberdeen City Council
  - Steven Small, Royal Lyceum Theatre

- 1.8. A briefing meeting was held with the advisory group. At this meeting the context for the review and the imperatives for the research were identified. It was agreed that:
- the scope of the review should include all youth theatres in Scotland including the voluntary sector, commercial providers and those operating within the local authority and theatre sector
  - that youth theatre was defined as serving young people aged 12-25
- 1.9. Two dimensions were identified for the review – a quantitative mapping of the sector and qualitative consultation with stakeholders. It was agreed at the briefing meeting that the focus should be on gathering as much information as possible through a survey of all identified youth theatre groups
- 1.10. There was a recognition that there were gaps in information about current providers of youth theatre activity and that resources should be invested in developing a comprehensive database of youth theatres

### **Database**

- 1.11. In order to develop a database of youth theatres in Scotland, several sources of information were used:
- Scottish Youth Theatre (SYT) database
  - Scottish National Association Youth - Theatre (SNAYT) archive
  - yellow pages, the internet and other information directories
- 1.12. In addition all local authorities in Scotland were contacted and asked to provide information about the youth theatres in their area

- 1.13. The Scottish Community Drama Association (SCDA) also contributed to the development of the database
- 1.14. The development of the database identified that there was no single comprehensive source of information about youth theatre. Local authorities varied in the records they kept – some had details only of the youth theatres directly provided, or funded, by the authority. Others had a detailed knowledge and some admitted that their information was not up to date

### **Survey of youth theatres**

- 1.15. In order to collect information about participants, activity, funding and training needs amongst other areas, it was agreed to undertake a survey of youth theatres
- 1.16. A self completion survey was selected. This methodology was chosen as many of the groups were voluntary and would not be contactable by telephone
- 1.17. Fewer surveys were returned than hoped for, further responses were collected through telephone administered surveys
- 1.18. SCDA also sent the survey to the youth theatres on its mailing list
- 1.19. These two interventions brought the number of responses to more than 90 which represents a response rate of 29%

## **Consultation**

- 1.20. Over 30 youth theatre practitioners were consulted as part of the review. Interviews were held with youth theatre leaders, artistic directors and administrators across the sector. The consultation involved the full scope of the sector with representatives from commercial, voluntary and professional youth theatres; those in rural communities and those in social inclusion partnerships
- 1.21. The consultation focused on the current position of youth theatre in Scotland and opportunities for the future
- 1.22. Organisations with a role in supporting the development of youth theatre were also consulted including SAC, SYT and SCDA
- 1.23. The findings were presented to the steering group and discussed before the report was produced.

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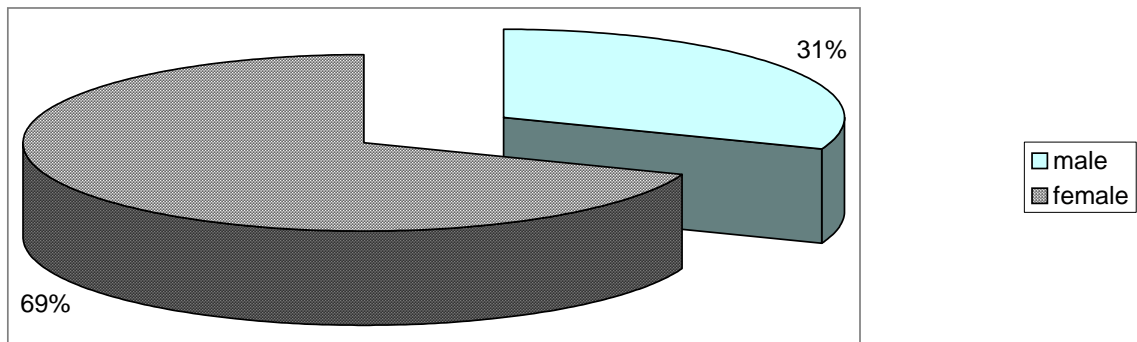
## **2. Mapping**

- 2.1. One of the principal tasks of the brief was to map the scale of the youth theatre sector in Scotland
- 2.2. The mapping was conducted by compiling a database of youth theatres in Scotland. Information was collected from local authorities, Scottish Youth Theatre, SNAYT archives and other information directories
- 2.3. The process of compiling the database highlighted some key issues about the sector:
  - there was both a duplication between databases and variation, for example some members of the SCDA were not known to SYT; some local authorities had an incomplete knowledge about the provision of youth theatre
  - it was particularly difficult to map activity taking place within schools, community centres and within the commercial sector
  - the errors in the databases indicate that data is not kept up to date
- 2.4. From the development of the database alone, it was possible to identify one of the key characteristics of the sector which is the great variety of different types of youth theatre. The broad range of youth theatre includes:
  - commercial drama activity providers
  - school youth theatres
  - voluntary and community groups
  - youth theatres connected to a professional theatre
  - youth theatres connected to an adult amateur theatre company
  - local authority provided youth theatres – through the arts, education or community education departments
- 2.5. From the names on the database alone, it is evident that many organisations define youth theatre broadly and also embrace other areas of the performing arts such as music and dance within their activity
- 2.6. The database was mapped by local authority to identify gaps
- 2.7. Through the mapping it was possible to identify the number of youth theatres operating within each local authority
- 2.8. From the responses to the survey, it was possible to map the number of identified participants in youth theatre
- 2.9. The table on the following page shows the results of the mapping
- 2.10. In the table a youth theatre is counted as a single theatre group although it may deliver more than one group or workshop. For example, West Lothian Youth Theatre is counted as one theatre, despite providing up to thirty workshops each week

Area	1999 population estimates aged 10-24	Number of identified umbrella youth theatres	number of known participants	% young people participating in youth theatre
Aberdeen City	41,032	11	320	0.8
Aberdeenshire	42,968	26	551	1.3
Angus	19,605	7	55	0.3
Argyll & Bute	15,689	4	70	0.4
Clackmannanshire	8,566	6	13	0.2
Dumfries & Galloway	24,235	11	214	0.9
Dundee City	28,587	7	254	0.9
East Ayrshire	21,930	4	95	0.4
East Dunbartonshire	21,287	4	0	0.0
East Lothian	15,716	1	30	0.2
East Renfrewshire	16,644	6	0	0.0
Edinburgh, City of	86,642	22	434	0.5
Eilean Siar	4,848	2	18	0.4
Falkirk	25,528	4	49	0.2
Fife	66,772	20	647	1.0
Glasgow City	123,304	24	956	0.8
Highland	36,663	34	287	0.8
Inverclyde	15,943	6	31	0.2
Midlothian	15,765	5	91	0.6
Moray	16,472	5	40	0.2
North Ayrshire	26,912	14	241	0.9
North Lanarkshire	64,889	3	220	0.3
Orkney Islands	3,381	4	154	4.6
Perth & Kinross	23,258	12	150	0.6
Renfrewshire	32,293	11	1400	4.3
Scottish Borders	16,999	2	250	1.5
Shetland Islands	4,344	3	35	0.8
South Ayrshire	20,641	3	199	1.0
South Lanarkshire	58,561	16	179	0.3
Stirling	17,926	17	235	1.3
West Dunbartonshire	19,342	7	123	0.6
West Lothian	30,205	7	400	1.3
	<b>966,947</b>	<b>308</b>	<b>7741</b>	<b>0.8</b>

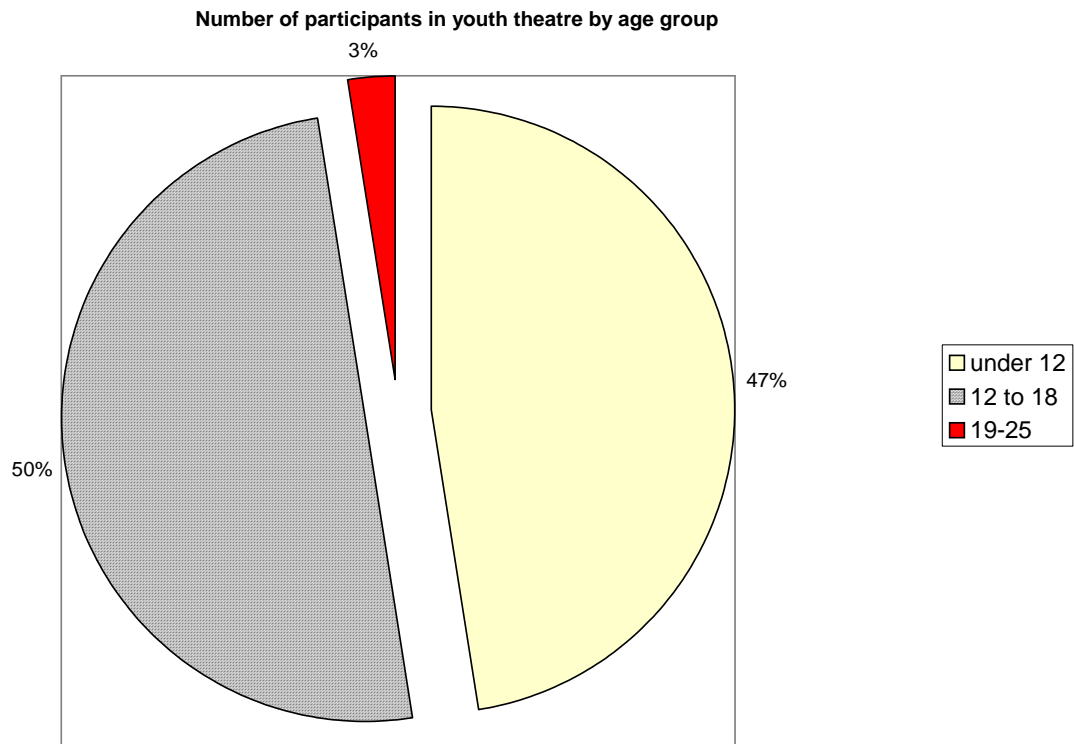
- 2.11. The mapping identified that there were over 300 umbrella youth theatre groups operating in Scotland, with many providing more than one group or workshops in several different communities and venues
- 2.12. There are over 7,700 identified participants in youth theatre in Scotland
- 2.13. The majority of participants are female, comprising nearly 70% of youth theatre members

**Gender of participants**



- 2.14. The vast majority of participants in youth theatre are aged 18 or under. Only 150 participants were aged over 18





2.15. The mapping exercise identifies that:

- there are over 7,000 participants in youth theatre, taking part in over 300 youth theatres
- it is not possible to make a robust measurement of the scale of the youth theatre sector
- because no one single organisation takes an overview of the sector there is little benefit to small, community youth theatres in making themselves known to public agencies and sector bodies
- the difficulty in compiling a comprehensive overview of youth theatre highlights the lack of profile of the sector
- provision of youth theatre may be related to local traditions

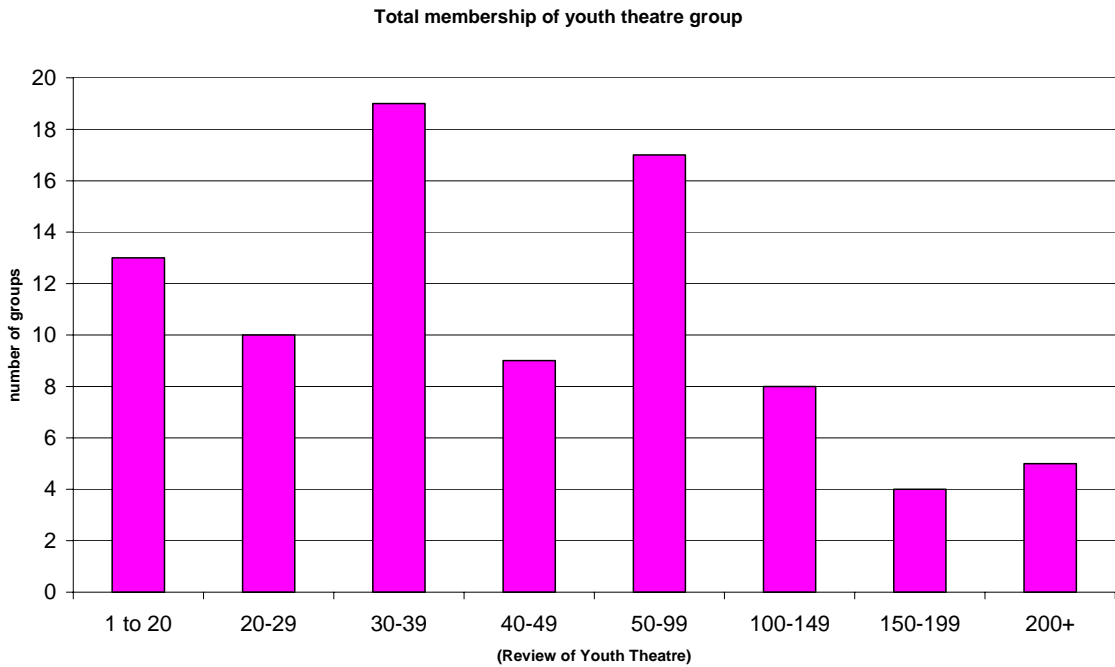
- population centres are increasingly served by commercial organisations providing drama activities for young people
- 2.16. Owing to the difficulty in collecting data, it is not possible to infer from the data whether the identifiable gaps are gaps in provision of gaps in information.

### **3. Survey of youth theatres**

- 3.1. The survey was sent to all identified youth theatres from the database compiled
- 3.2. There were 90 valid responses to the survey. This represents a response rate of 29%
- 3.3. The survey looked at:
  - membership
  - activity
  - barriers
  - funding
  - pathways to training and participation
  - training
  - identification of needs and opportunities

#### **Membership**

- 3.4. The survey identified that there were over 7,700 participants in youth theatre
- 3.5. There is a range in the size of youth theatres with some umbrella youth theatres providing many different youth theatre groups and working with several hundred young people, while others are very small with under 10 participants

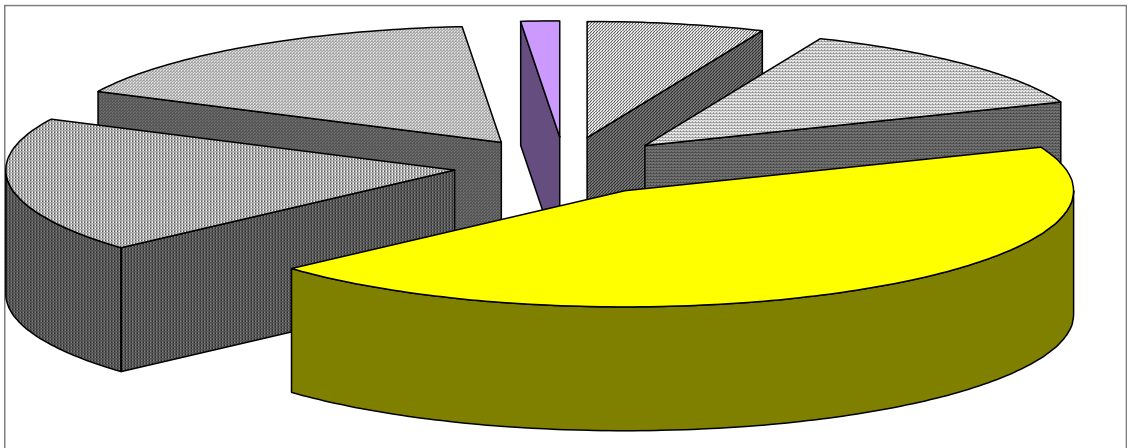


- 3.6. 38% of youth theatre groups have a total membership (across all age groups) of more than 50. Around half of the youth theatre groups have a total membership of less than 30
- 3.7. The majority of participants are female with only 30% of male participants
- 3.8. In the majority of cases, boys comprise less than 50% of a youth theatre membership

3.9. 40% of groups cover the wide age range of under 12 through to 25

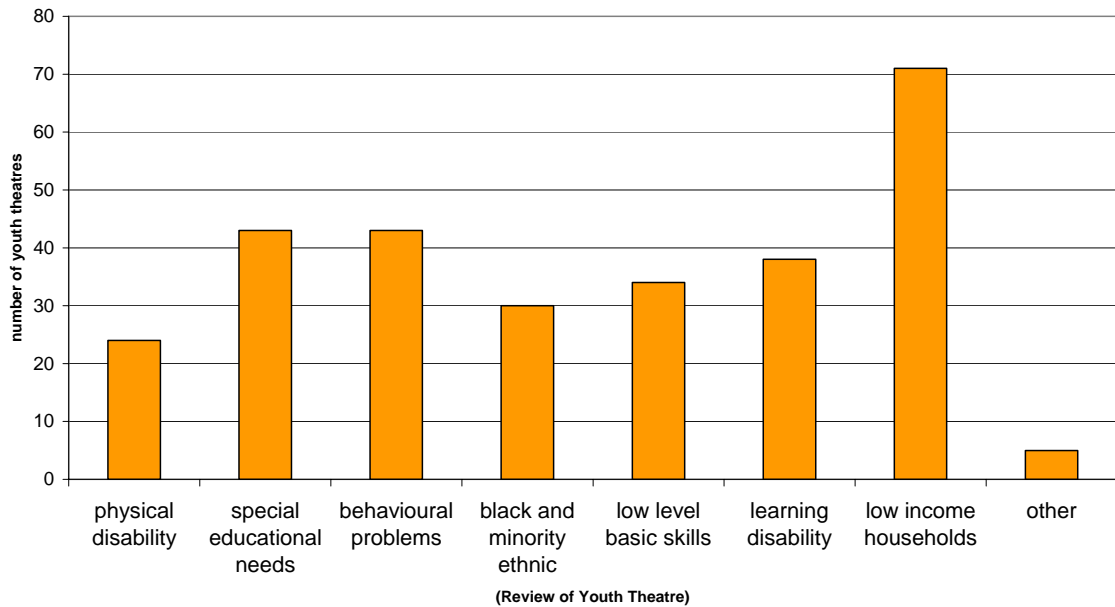
Age ranges of youth theatre groups

under 12 only   under 12-18   under 12 to 25   12 to 18   12 to 25   18+ only



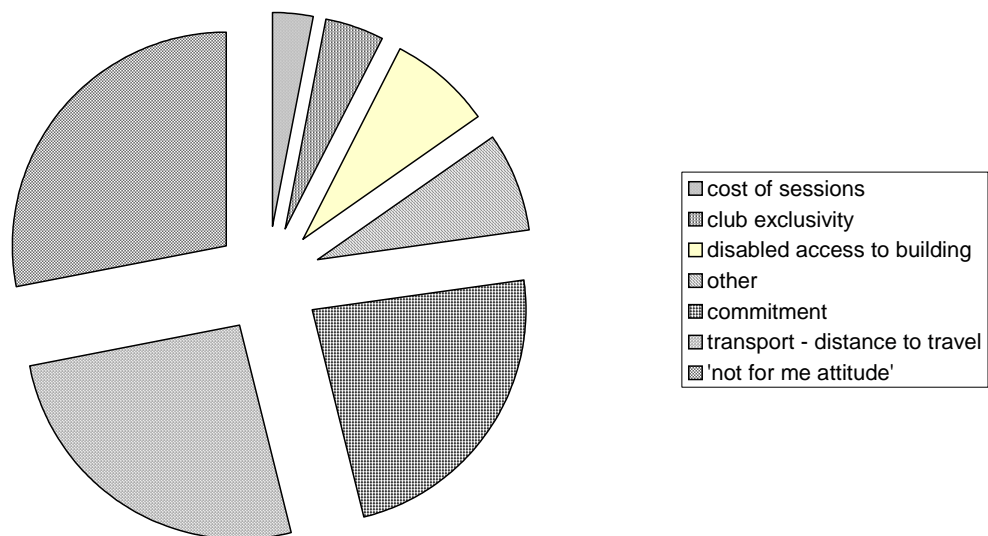
3.10. The survey asked respondents whether the group included participants from various sectors of the community. The responses indicate that youth theatre is inclusive with around 40% of groups including participants who have special educational needs, behavioural problems or learning disabilities. The majority of groups include participants from low income households

Youth theatres including participants from various sectors of the community



- 3.11. The youth theatres were asked whether there were particular sections of the community who were not currently involved in the youth theatre and that they would like to attract. 12 youth theatres reported that they would like to attract more male participants; some also reported a lack of older participants (again especially boys). There was an interest in attracting more participants from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities and with a disability
- 3.12. The additional comments indicate that the youth theatre groups consider themselves to be inclusive, welcoming all young people
- 3.13. The respondents to the survey report that the major barriers to participation in youth theatre are not the cost of sessions or disabled access but instead a 'not for me attitude'. Transport and distance to travel are also barriers particularly in rural areas

Barriers to participation by young people



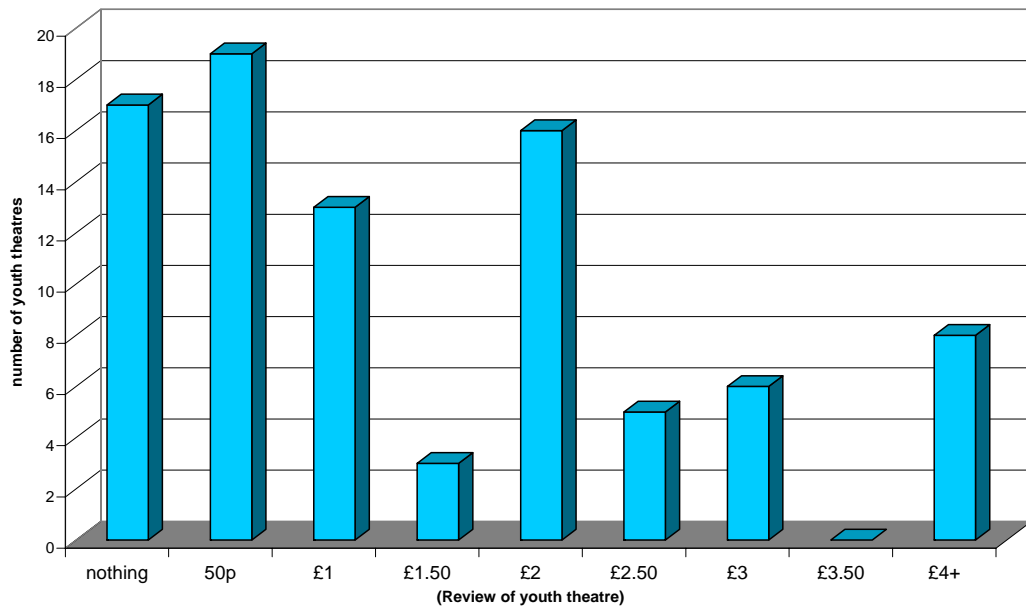
## Activity

3.14. The vast majority of youth theatres (93%) meet at least once a week, with 19% meeting more frequently

3.15. Most young people have to pay to take part in youth theatre activities. Some youth theatres charge participants a weekly fee, others an annual or fee per term. 17 respondents did not charge participants any fees

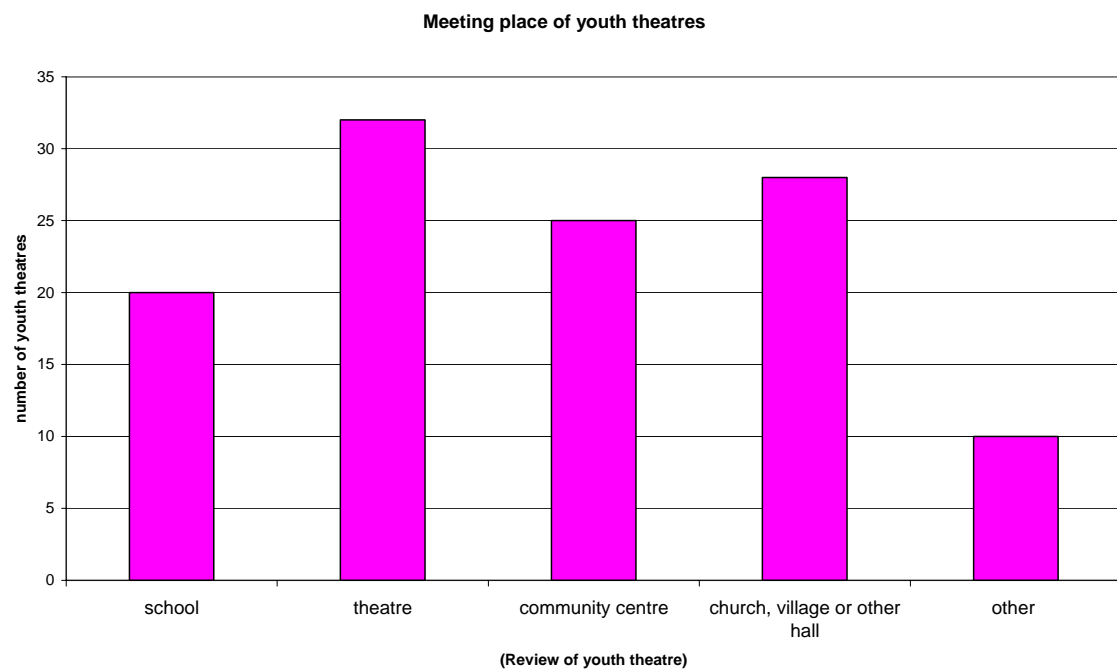
3.16. Taking into account both the youth theatres who charge per session and those who charge by term, the average cost per session is around £2

Average cost per session





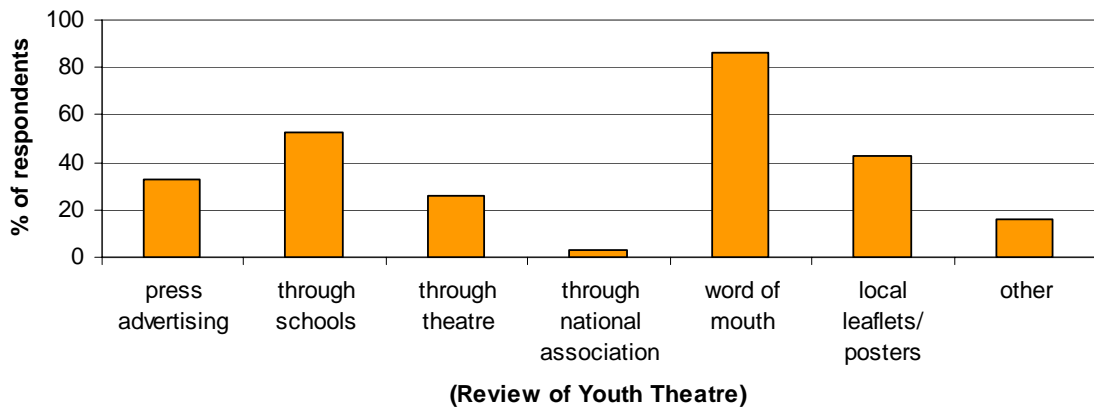
3.17. The majority of youth theatre activities take place in community venues including schools, community centres and village halls



## Demand

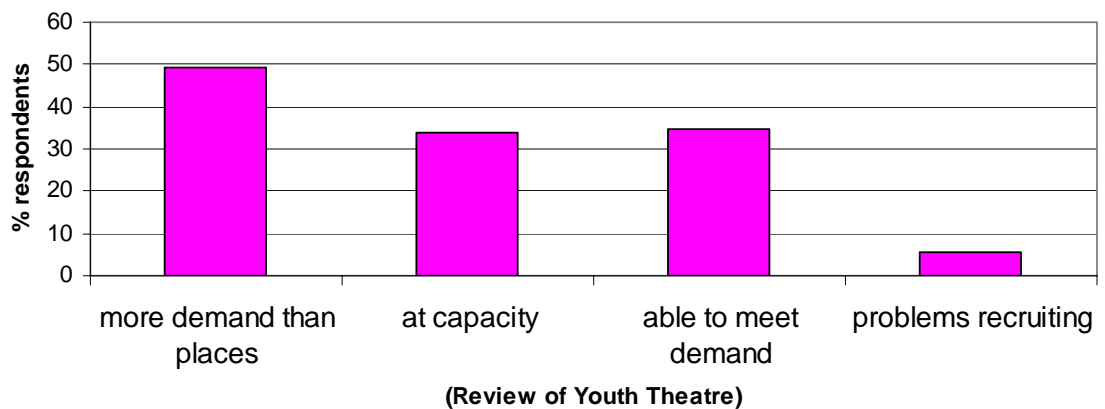
3.18. The majority of youth theatres attract new members through word of mouth. Some take more proactive actions using schools (50%) and local leaflets (40%) to recruit new members

How youth theatres attract new members



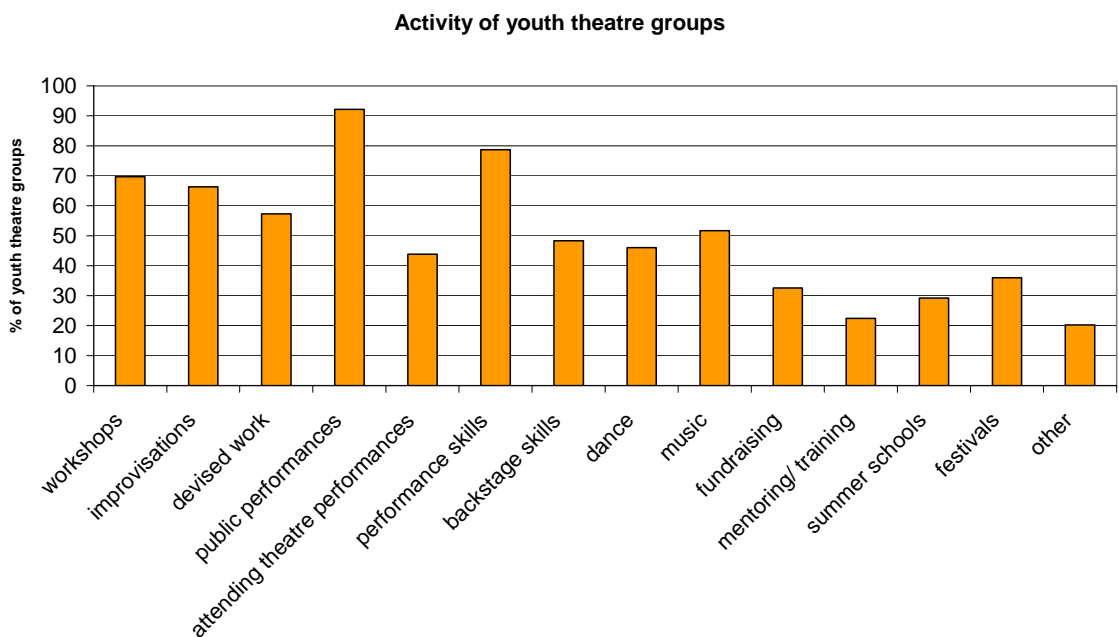
3.19. The informal nature of recruiting new members may be related to the capacity of the youth theatres. A third of respondents report that they are at capacity and 50% have demand that cannot be met

Levels of demand for youth theatre



## Activity

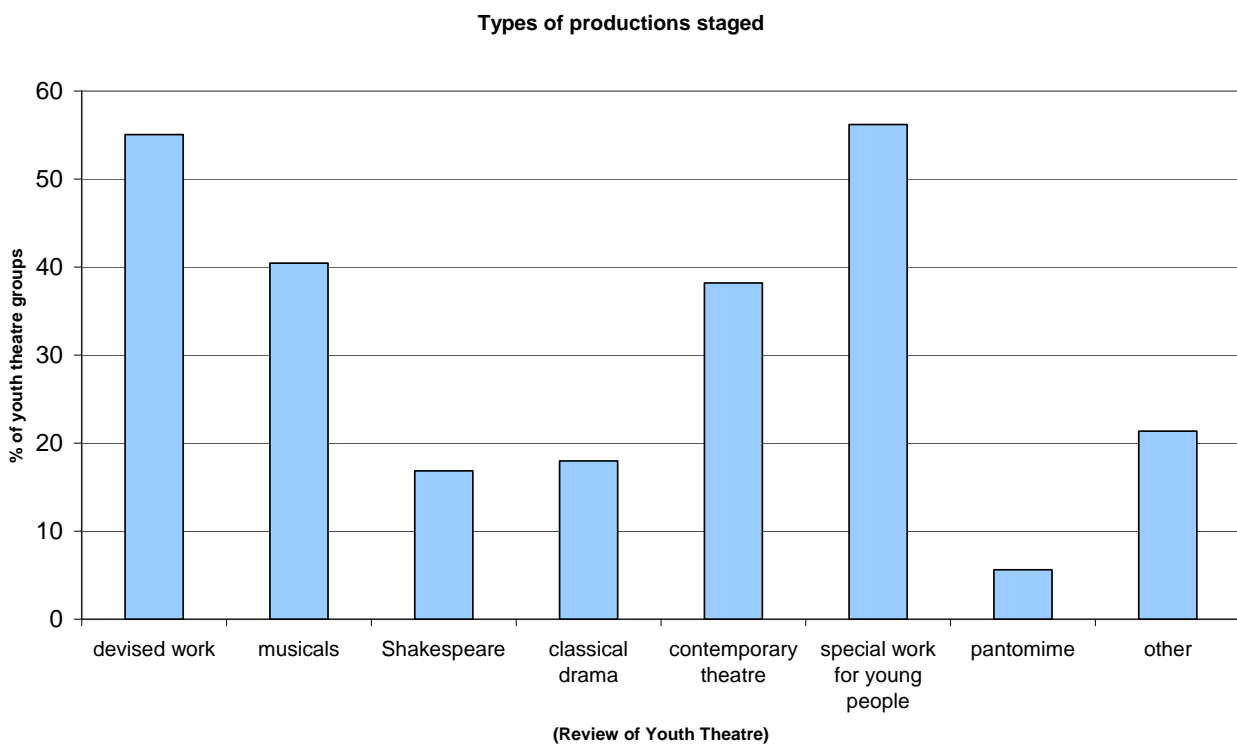
- 3.20. Over 90% of youth theatre groups stage public performances. As well as undertaking performances, many youth theatres create devised and improvised work and participate in workshops
- 3.21. In terms of skills, the focus is on performance skills, although around 50% of groups include backstage skills within their activity
- 3.22. As indicated in the mapping exercise, many groups define youth theatre activity broadly and include music and dance within their activity



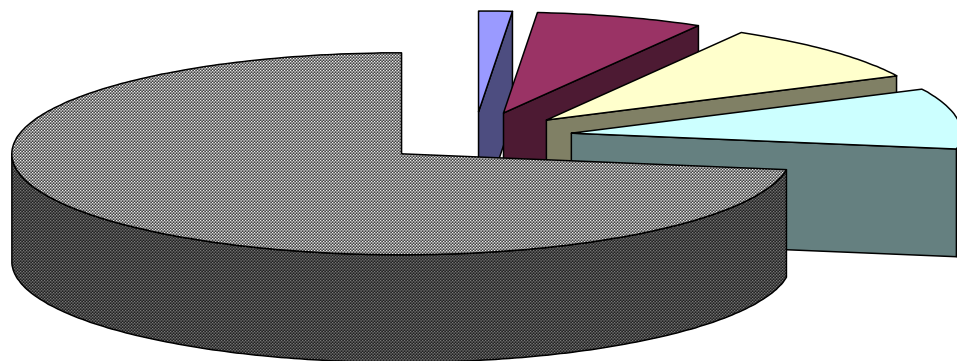
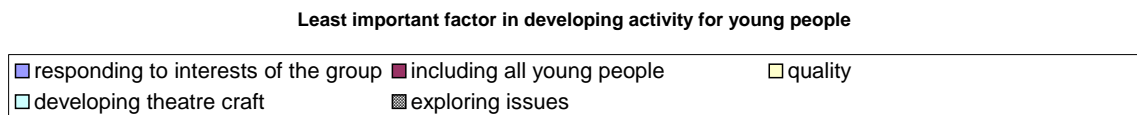
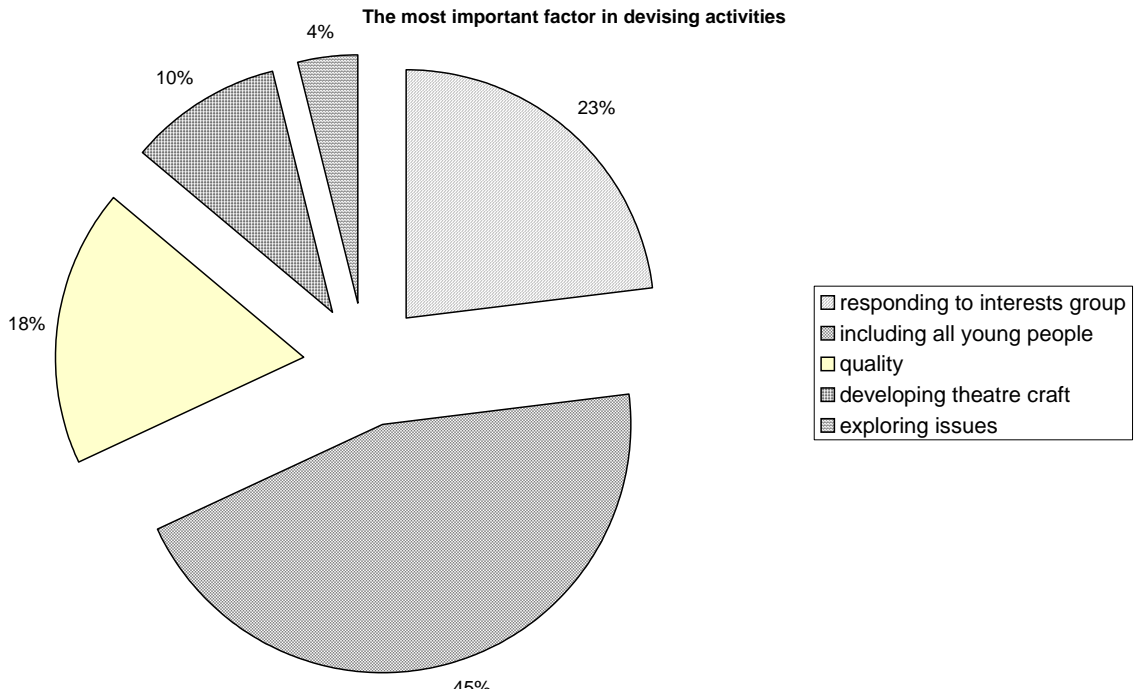
(Review of Youth Theatre)

- 3.23. The majority of youth theatres stage one or two productions each year

3.24. Much of the production work undertaken by youth theatres is work specifically for young people, either devised with the group or using scripts written for young performers. 40% of the youth theatres perform musical productions

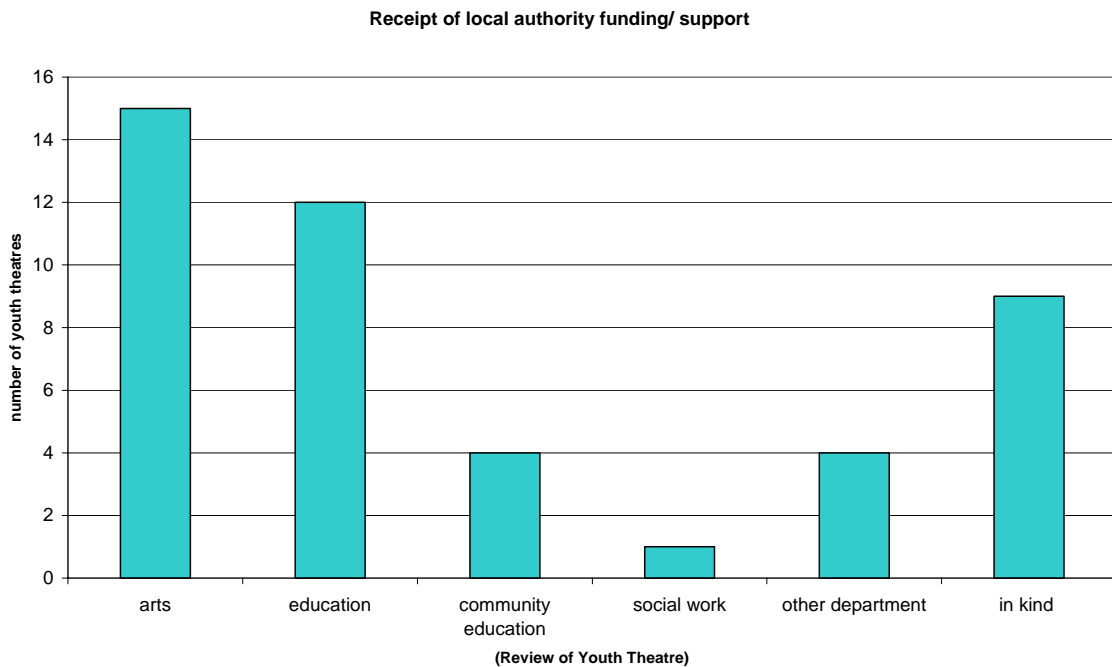


3.25. In devising activities and undertaking productions, youth theatres generally considered including all young people to be the most important factor. Exploring issues was not an important factor



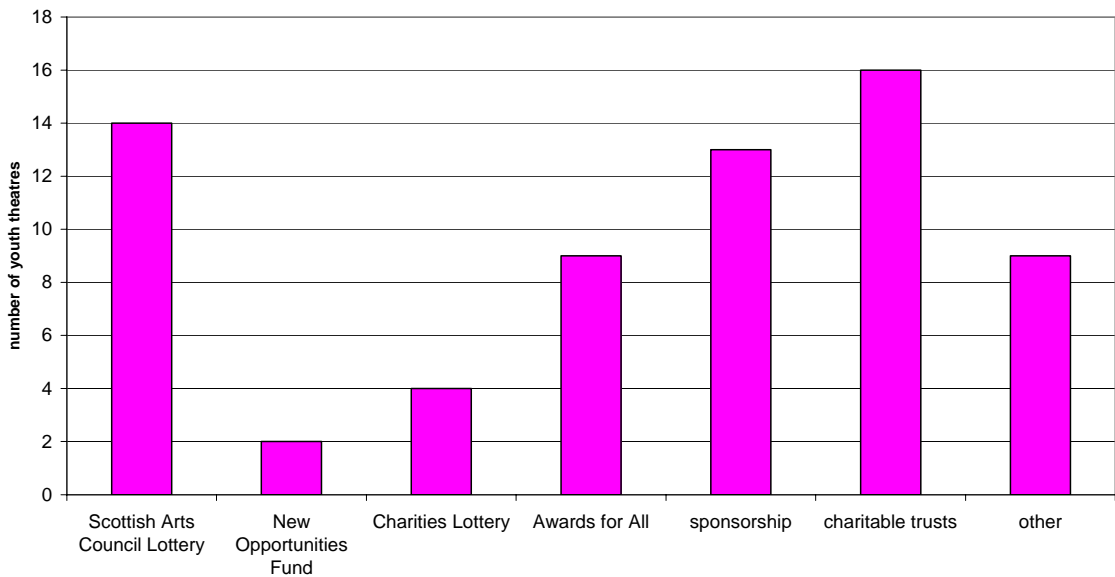
## Funding

3.26. 45% of the youth theatre groups who responded to the survey received some form of support from the local authority. Both the arts and education departments provided funding. Most of the in kind support came in the form of venue hire; other areas included transport and administration support



3.27. 14 youth theatres had benefited from the SAC Lottery, 15 had received funding from another Lottery source. 13 groups received support through sponsorship and 16 from charitable trusts including Children in Need and Lloyds. Other forms of support included local arts bodies and subsidy from an associated theatre group. Some groups commented that they used income from productions to subsidise activity throughout the year

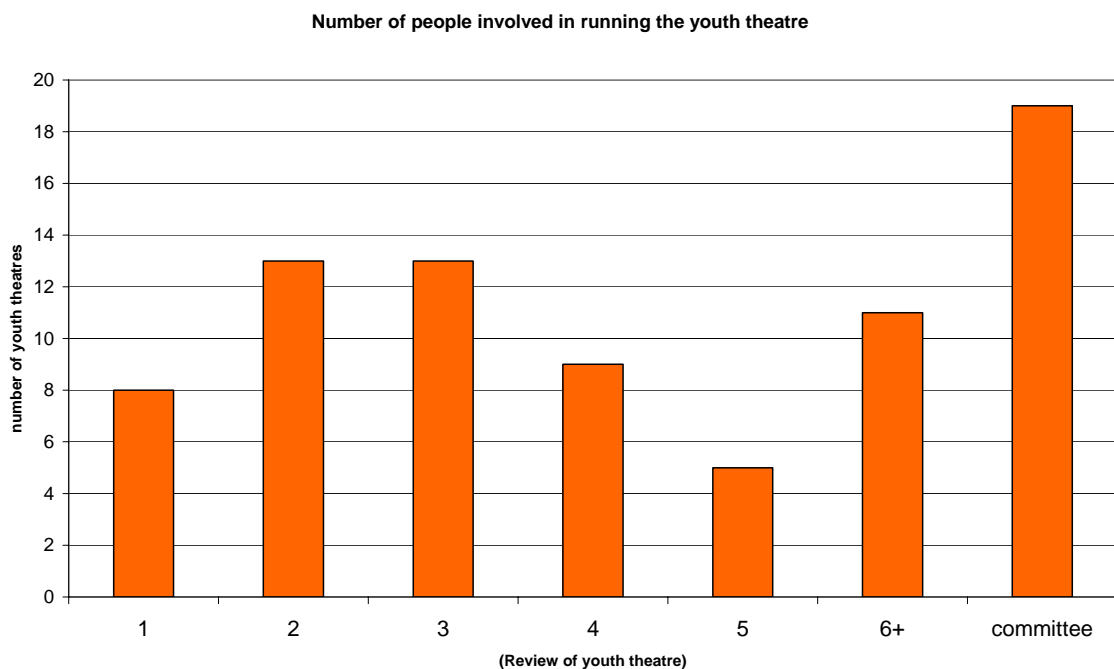
**Receipt of other sources of funding**



(Review of Youth Theatre)

## Organisation of groups

3.28. The survey asked respondents about the number of people involved in running the youth theatre and their roles. The responses to this question reflect the variety within the sector



3.29. Some groups are run by a single worker or volunteer. Others are run by a committee, with some including representation by young people

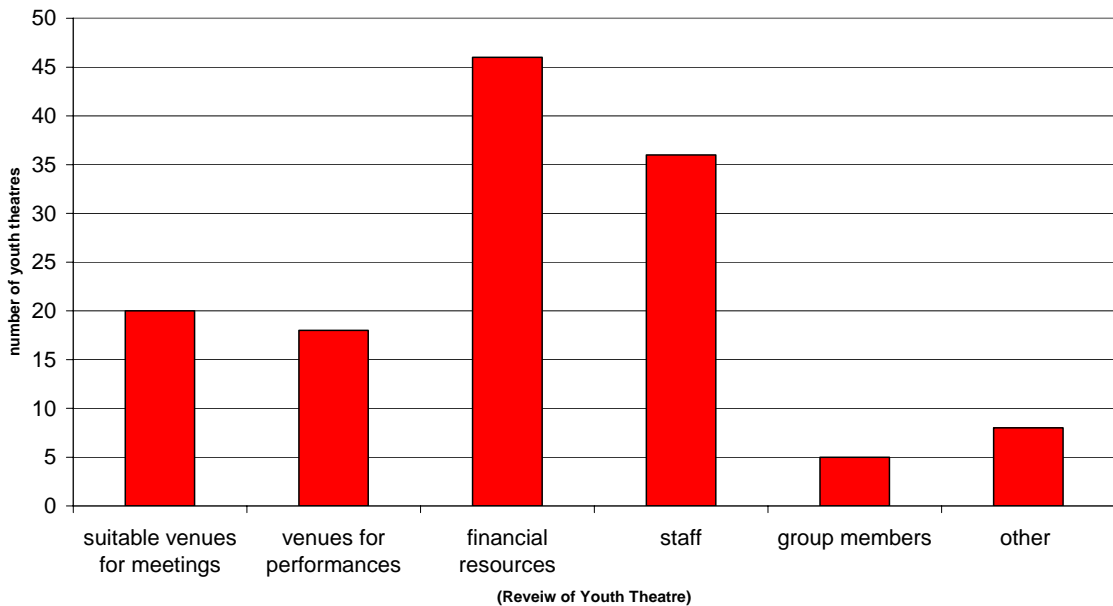
3.30. The roles undertaken within youth theatres are wide ranging including director, musical director, production manager, education, administration, costume, script writing, stage management and workshop leading. Although most of the groups have a dedicated director, the other roles are often filled by freelancers, volunteers and parent helpers



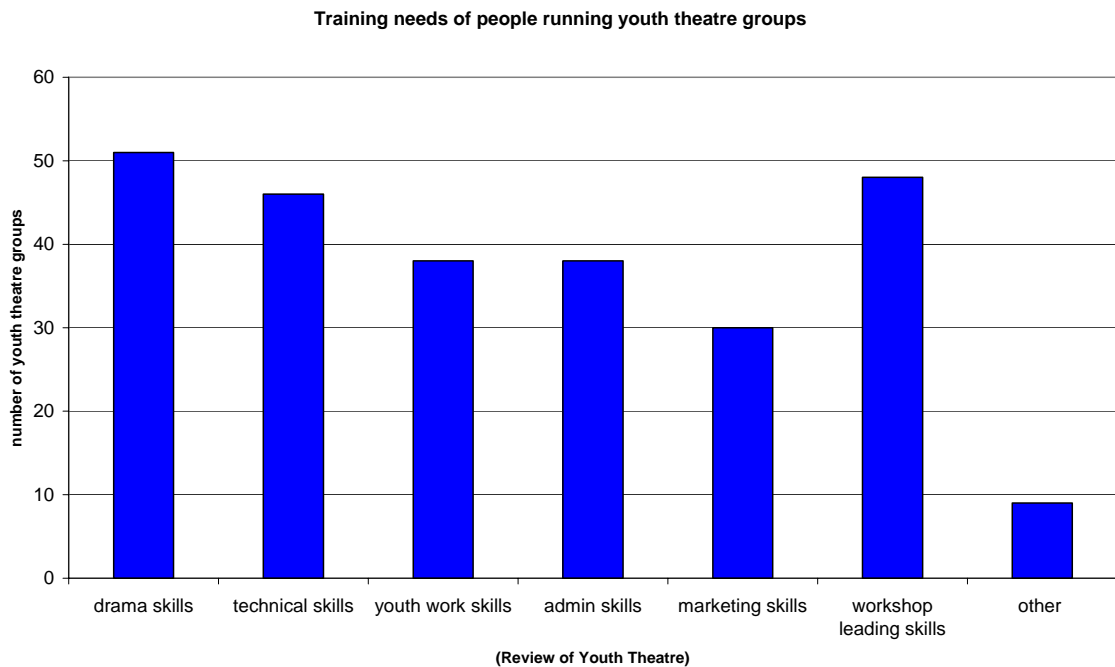
### Barriers and needs

3.31. The youth theatre groups reported that the main barrier to the development of the group was a lack of financial resources. This was closely linked to a lack of staff which was also a barrier for more than 35 groups

Barriers to the development of youth theatre groups



3.32. Over 50 groups expressed a need for training in drama skills. Generally there was high demand for training including developing skills in workshop leading and technical areas



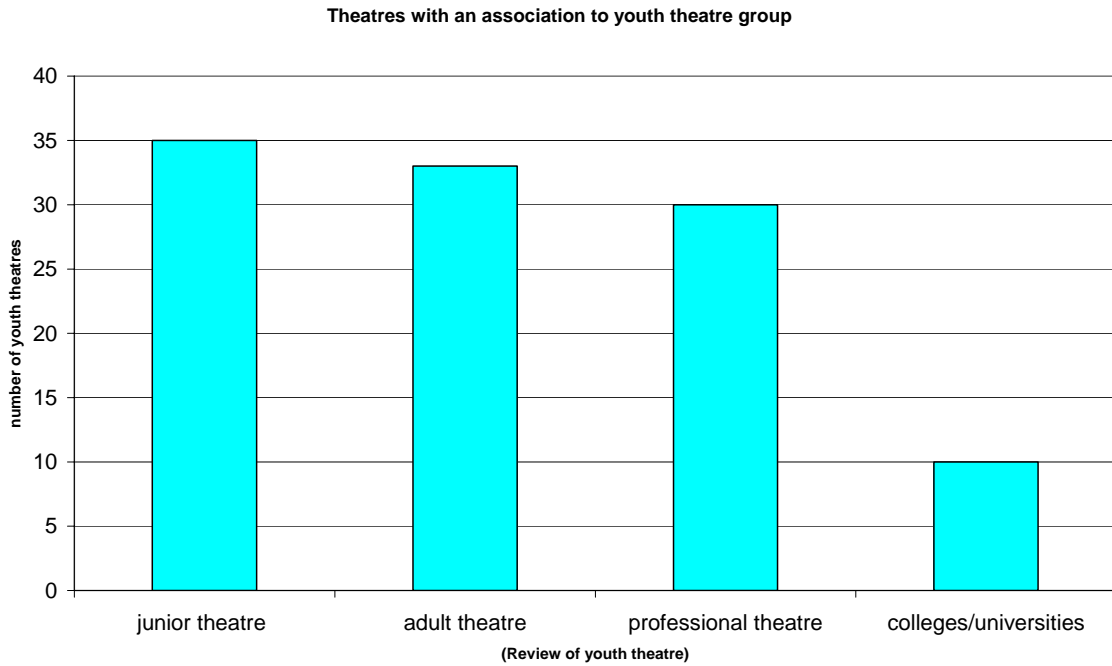
3.33. The majority of the groups did not consider that their training needs were currently being met. There were a variety of specific areas in which respondents wanted training including:

- the implications of the Children’s Act
- first aid
- marketing
- finance and funding applications
- voice work
- commissioning work for young people
- working with special needs children
- technical

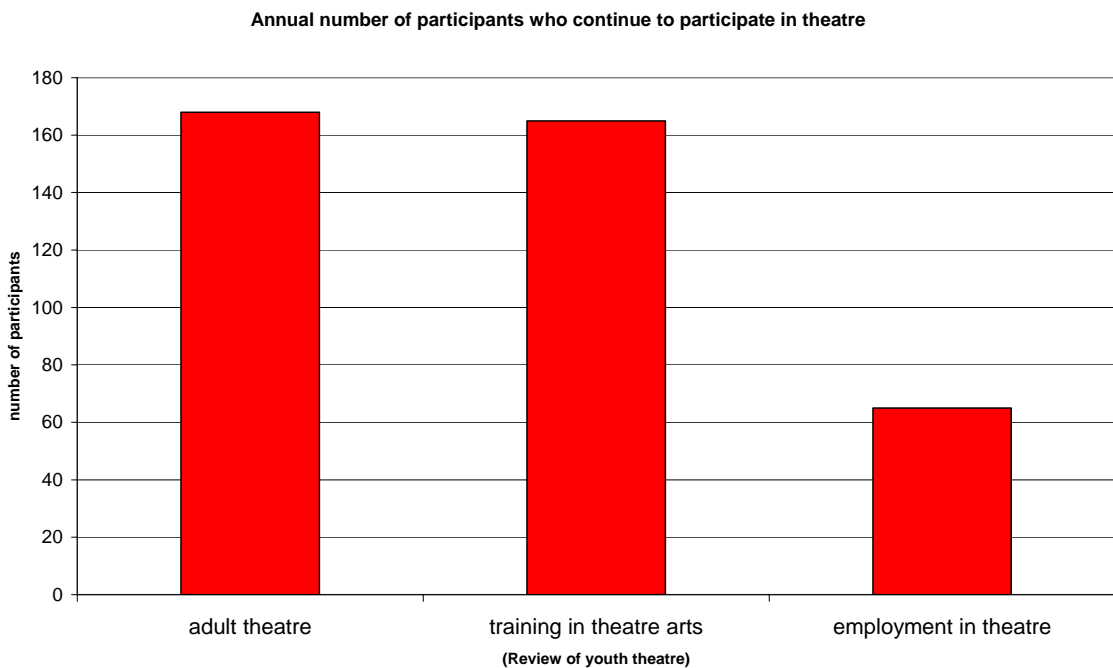
- 3.34. There was interest from experienced drama practitioners in skills sharing and having access to new ideas and ways of working
- 3.35. The barriers to training were predominantly time and money. The groups did not have access to the resources to pay for training courses. The fact that many of those running youth theatres are volunteers or working on a freelance basis also limits their ability to access training. Those living in rural and island communities had particular barriers to taking part in training. Lack of information was also an issue
- 3.36. Some respondents were members of the Scottish Community Drama Association and had access to training, however it was felt that demand outstripped supply

### **Links to other theatre groups**

- 3.37. Reflecting the age ranges of the participants in youth theatre, many of the respondents had links with a junior theatre for primary aged children; in many cases the youth theatre also included these children. Other groups had an association with a professional theatre company or venue, some of the youth theatres were based in and run as part of a professional theatre. Some of the survey respondents were an offshoot of an adult drama group



3.38. The survey made a very approximate measure of the number of young people continuing their relationship with theatre after they leave youth theatre. The survey respondents reported about 400 young people moving on from the youth theatre to either participation in an adult group, training or employment

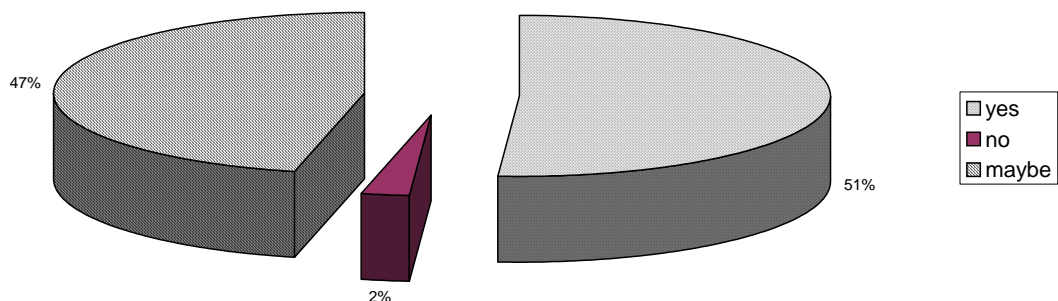


- 3.39. 25 youth theatres reporting having undertaken workshops with Scottish Youth Theatre. Members of 32 youth theatres had participated in SYT programmes
- 3.40. The survey asked respondents which other youth theatres they have collaborated within and outwith Scotland. 14 youth theatres had not worked with any other youth theatre groups. Others had linked with other groups in the region or through the SCDA 1 act play competition. Some groups such as West Lothian Youth Theatre had established relationships with several groups

### Membership organisation

- 3.41. There is strong interest in a membership organisation for youth theatre groups. 51% of respondents were definitely interested in becoming part of a membership organisation and an additional 47% responded that they might be interested

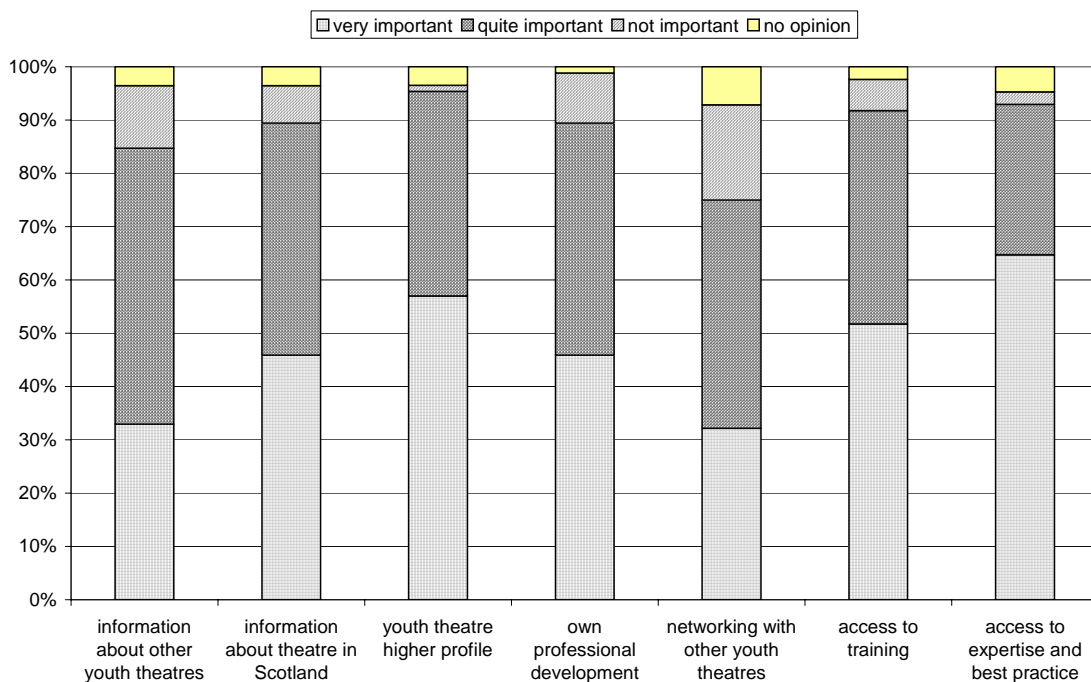
Interest in becoming part of a membership organisation



## Attitudes

3.42. The survey asked how important various developments were to respondents. Generally, all of the potential developments were important. Those which over 50% of respondents considered very important included:

- access to expertise and best practice
- that youth theatre has a higher profile
- access to training



3.43. Overall, networking with other youth theatres was the least important of the potential developments. However this was still considered to be very/important by 70% of respondents

## **Conclusion**

- 3.44. There is demand for youth theatre which is not currently being met with many groups having extensive waiting lists for places
- 3.45. Although across the sector performance remains a central element of the activity of youth theatres, many youth theatres are undertaking activities which focus on process and on improvisation and devised work
- 3.46. Many of the groups who responded to the survey did not define their activity purely as drama but included music and dance within their core activity
- 3.47. Youth theatre is inclusive, open to all and including participants, mainstreaming young people with disabilities within youth theatre activities
- 3.48. The cost of participation may be a barrier to those from low income households
- 3.49. Another barrier to participation was identified as the 'not for me attitude' this may link with the lack of available places and the fact that youth theatres do not need to undertake proactive promotion
- 3.50. Lack of finance was a barrier to the development of the youth theatre groups. This impacts on the ability of the groups to use professional drama workers and employ additional human resources to expand the capacity of groups
- 3.51. There is strong demand for training across the sector ranging from basic, generic training to specific skills and areas of expertise
- 3.52. The issues connected with access to training include the availability and cost of training. There are particular barriers to training for those working with youth theatres in a voluntary capacity and on a freelance basis
- 3.53. Some youth theatre groups operate within a network with connections to a professional or amateur theatre group. Others have collaborated with groups within their region or with larger professional youth theatres. Some however remain isolated
- 3.54. The links established between the youth theatres and other groups enables around 400 young people each year to move on from youth theatre into continued recreation, training or employment in the theatre
- 3.55. There is strong interest in the development of a membership organisation for the youth theatre sector in Scotland
- 3.56. There is considerable demand for:
- access to expertise and best practice
  - an increase in the profile of youth theatre
  - access to training.

## **4. Key Organisations**

- 4.1. There are several organisations with a role in youth theatre beyond the delivery of activity. These include:
- Scottish Youth Theatre (SYT)– Scotland’s youth theatre with a national remit for delivery and development
  - Scottish Community Drama Association (SCDA) – a body which brings together amateur drama societies in Scotland and includes a youth network
  - Scottish National Association of Youth Theatres (SNAYT)– a membership organisation, now disbanded
  - Scottish Arts Council (SAC)
- 4.2. Specific consultation was undertaken with these bodies which have an influence on the development of the youth theatre sector in Scotland

### **Scottish Youth Theatre**

- 4.3. In 2001, SYT celebrated 25 years of operation. SYT is Scotland’s national youth theatre providing theatre arts activities ‘for and by’ young people between the ages of 3 and 25
- 4.4. Its aim is to work with young people to enable them to explore and reach their creative potential, to develop their self-esteem, self confidence and social skills and an interest in the arts
- 4.5. SYT is a core funded client of the Scottish Arts Council. In 2002/2003 SYT received a core grant of £107,000 from SAC to help it to deliver key objectives of:
- developing quality work with young people in Scotland
  - broadening the social mix of young people participating in the arts

- 4.6. SYT is also revenue funded by Glasgow City Council to deliver activity in Glasgow
- 4.7. SYT has a national remit which is delivered through the summer festival, roadshows and workshop programme
- 4.8. SYT provides the following regular activities:
- a summer festival where young people work with professional theatre practitioners over a six week period, learning basic, advanced and performance and production skills. In 2001, over 300 young people from throughout Scotland took part in the festival in Aberdeen, Stirling, Edinburgh, Stromness and Glasgow
  - weekly classes in Glasgow and Edinburgh participated in by over 600 young people aged between 3 and 25 and also schools holiday short courses. The classes are full with waiting lists
  - SYT takes roadshows around the Scotland providing schools, youth theatres and drama groups with free drama sessions
  - SYT operates outreach activities, often developing projects in collaboration with local authorities
  - SYT offers specialist training for teachers and youth theatre leaders



- SYT also stages productions; the SYT production company consists of senior members of the youth theatre from all around Scotland who have been identified as having a special talent. SYT productions are toured around Scotland. SYT has established relationships with the Citizen's Theatre, His Majesty's Theatre and Festival Theatre
- 4.9. Around 4,500 young people participated in projects and courses in 2001 with over 35,000 attendances at workshops and weekly classes. Almost 7,000 people attended the 38 performances of SYT productions in 2001
- 4.10. SYT is committed to inclusion. It strives to make its established activities and developing work as accessible to all young people regardless of gender, background, ethnicity or ability. Examples of projects undertaken include working with young people at risk of exclusion from school in a project with Right Track in Glasgow and working with young people in Easterhouse. SYT is developing a cultural diversity strategy with the aim of increasing the number of young people from black and minority ethnic communities participating in SYT activities; it is also developing a special needs strategy
- 4.11. SYT has a dual role – it is both a direct provider of activity for young people and also has a role in developing the youth theatre sector
- 4.12. SYT sees one of its key roles as supporting local youth theatres with advice and expertise and has investigated establishing an association of youth theatres in Scotland
- 4.13. SYT is aware that its role and position in the sector is not clear
- 4.14. It is undertaking an internal review which will consider the mission, objectives, structure and activity of SYT
- 4.15. It would like to undertake more development work and recognises the needs of the sector for continued professional development, support and access to information
- 4.16. SYT is planning to create a centre for excellence for youth theatre. The building will be located in Glasgow. It will include rehearsal rooms including those equipped for dance and music and a fully equipped studio space
- 4.17. It is anticipated that the new building make new initiatives possible and increase SYT's potential for reaching children and young people who cannot currently attend. SYT believes that the new dedicated building will allow it to expand the training programme
- 4.18. It also considers that the building can be a focal point for youth theatre activity in Scotland. It will become a physical resource – with space for meetings and rehearsals, a script library and equipment store

### **Scottish Community Drama Association**

- 4.19. SCDA is a revenue funded client of SAC. It provides advice, encouragement and practical help to amateur drama groups to encourage the development of community drama in Scotland

- 4.20. The SCDA has appointed a youth drama convenor and committee to look after the interests of young people within community drama in Scotland
- 4.21. The committee has consulted young people to find out how they would like youth drama to be developed. The young people expressed interest in establishing a One Act Festival for young people, more workshops for young people and a dedicated summer school. The SCDA has responded to these
- 4.22. The first summer school was held in 2001. It was held as a residential weekend where young people from throughout Scotland were brought together to undertake workshops with professional tutors
- 4.23. SCDA has developed guidelines for clubs involving young people
- 4.24. SCDA recognises that there is a need to provide training for volunteers setting up youth theatre groups. SCDA has an advisor who works with groups and young people to encourage the professional development of the groups

### **Scottish National Association of Youth Theatres**

- 4.25. SNAYT was a membership body run by a management committee and staffed by a part time administrator
- 4.26. Its activities included providing training, and distributing project funds for festivals and events. One key role was to bring the sector together and keep people in touch. SNAYT provided information to overcome the isolation of groups and also pastoral support for youth theatre groups
- 4.27. SNAYT was never core funded and it is felt that the organisation suffered from a lack of resources. That it was successful in meeting the needs of the sector was a testament to the goodwill and commitment of the staff and committee

### **Scottish Arts Council**

- 4.28. The Scottish Arts Council is charged by the Scottish Executive to develop the arts in Scotland. It is required to contribute towards the delivery of the National Cultural Strategy
- 4.29. The aims and objectives of the SAC which link to the review of youth theatre include:
- removing barriers to attendance and participation
  - increasing arts provision for target groups including children and young people, ethnic minorities and people with disabilities
  - championing the arts in education and life long learning
  - supporting artistic excellence
  - improving the skills base

4.30. The Scottish Arts Council has developed a strategy for drama in Scotland. The vision articulated in the strategy is

- to play a key role in creating and sustaining an environment which supports those who create, present and participate in the widest range of quality drama for the people of Scotland

4.31. The strategy recognises the value of participation and enjoyment of drama in:

- teaching young people an appreciation of team-working and discipline
- developing self-confidence
- exploring issues of identity and conflict
- serving as a tool for problem solving
- acting as an aid for training and personal development

4.32. Some of the key themes of the drama strategy include:

- training and skills development
- collaboration
- international activities
- broadening the social mix and geographic spread
- networking

4.33. SYT is included within the Drama Strategy as having an important role in delivering SAC's strategic objectives

4.34. SAC sees youth theatre as having a particularly important role in developing practitioners of the future through encouraging young people's involvement in theatre arts and through training and skills development

4.35. SAC also sees youth theatre as a mechanism for developing audiences

## **Conclusion**

4.36. There are several organisations with a role in the development of the youth theatre sector in Scotland

4.37. For each of the groups, the responsibility for developing the sector is not the major strand of their activity:

- SYT is primarily charged with delivering activity; its role in the development of the sector is not clearly defined
- SCDA is concerned with supporting the whole community drama sector in Scotland of which dedicated youth theatre groups are only a small part
- SAC has an interest in youth drama within the context of Scottish drama as a whole and achieving SAC's strategic aims including those which focus on children and young people. It does not, however, have dedicated budgets, staff or policies for youth theatre

4.38. SNAYT was dedicated to supporting youth theatre in Scotland. Its lack of resources impacted upon its ability to fulfil this role adequately. Since its demise, its activity has not been replaced.

## **5. Consultation with the sector**

- 5.1. Interviews were held with over 30 representatives of youth theatres, including group leaders, directors and administrators. The aim of the consultation was to support the evidence collected through the survey with more in depth qualitative information
- 5.2. The interviews focused on the current position in youth theatre and any emergent trends
- 5.3. The interviews confirmed the diversity of the sector. Interviews were conducted with professional youth theatre, the voluntary sector, community groups, commercial organisations, groups based in theatres and groups based in schools

### **Current position of youth theatre**

- 5.4. Youth theatre in Scotland was considered to be developing positively. This was because:
  - young people had become a political priority – youth theatre is a good fit with current strategic priorities, linking in with aims of social inclusion and skills development for young people and also the priorities of the National Cultural Strategy
  - there was felt to be an increased commitment to youth theatre from the Scottish Arts Council, illustrated by the commissioning of the review
  - the Lottery was thought to have had a positive impact on youth theatres. It was considered that the Lottery had achieved a renaissance in youth theatre and enabled the groups to focus on providing a quality artistic product

- the health of youth theatre was evidenced by the demand expressed by young people and the fact that many groups had considerable waiting lists and were unable to meet demand from young people
- it was felt that youth theatre was becoming more trendy for young people and that boys were finding it more accessible as an activity

- 5.5. Although the general impression of the current position of youth theatre in Scotland was positive, there were also factors which were considered to have a negative impact on the development of the sector:

- some groups felt that they had experienced a lack of recognition of youth theatre and its benefits from local authorities and local communities
- although the Lottery had had a positive impact, there was a recognition that Lottery awards were time limited and that the sustainability of groups was not secure; the need for additionality requires the development of new projects rather than the continued development of core activity

- 5.6. Several trends were identified by consultees, these included:

- the trend towards encouraging young people to have greater participation in youth theatre activities, from devising work and writing to taking responsibility for the management of the group
- more groups are incorporating multi media in activities and performances

## **Definition of Youth Theatre**

- 5.7. There is a diversity in the definition of youth theatre
- 5.8. Some place the emphasis on introducing young people to theatre arts and to the development of skills, they consider themselves a training ground for the theatre profession; others focus on the personal development of young people with theatre activities being used as the means to help disadvantaged young people develop confidence and learn skills such as groupwork and self expression
- 5.9. For some groups the final product of the public performance is the main emphasis with some being entirely dedicated to rehearsing and staging a production; others are almost entirely focused on process with some staging no public performance
- 5.10. Quality is the driving force for some groups reflected in recruitment and auditioning policies; while for other groups the emphasis on inclusion means that all interested young people are encouraged to participate and develop their abilities
- 5.11. Some youth theatres considered that their purpose was to provide young people with a fun leisure activity. They felt it was not their responsibility to undertake issue based work or to provide social work services
- 5.12. For many youth theatres, the activity is a mixture of various different types of activity and they
- look at both the process of devising, creating and staging work as well as the skills involved in creating a production with high performance values which is presented to an audience
  - enable young people to learn the skills of theatre arts – from voice projection to stage management as well as ensuring that young people are enabled to develop personal skills such as confidence and self expression
  - include all young people whilst ensuring that all activities are high quality
- 5.13. The diversity within the sector is recognised. It is considered important that both ends of the spectrum are catered for. So that while all young people should be enabled to participate, there should be a level which is high quality and aspirational; that while all youth theatres should enable young people to express themselves and develop as individuals, young people should also have the opportunity to learn theatre arts skills at a high level
- 5.14. It was agreed important that a continuum existed and that the pathways between different types of activity, or different levels of engagement were clearly mapped

## **Pathways**

- 5.15. The routes to youth theatre and beyond youth theatre were explored in the consultation. It was agreed that these were currently not clear

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- 5.16. There was recognition of the need to develop further the links between youth theatres and schools to ensure that all young people are aware of the opportunities available to them
- 5.17. It was considered important that young people with a particular talent and interest in theatre arts had the opportunity to further develop this through education and training
- 5.18. It was felt to be equally important that those young people who enjoyed participating in youth theatre but did not want to go on to training or employment, were able to continue to participate recreationally
- 5.19. Opportunities for young people leaving youth theatre groups aged 18 or over were considered to be limited. There was a recognition that young people may be dissuaded by their perceptions of local amateur dramatic societies and that there was a lack of dedicated theatre groups and activities for young adults
- 5.20. Concern was also expressed about the impact of leaving a youth theatre, particularly for vulnerable young people. It was recognised that youth theatre provides young people with peer and adult support outside of the environments of home or school
- Relationship to the theatre sector**
- 5.21. Some youth theatres did not consider that the professional theatre sector in Scotland understood the importance of youth theatre
- 5.22. It was considered important to establish and develop the links between the professional sector and youth theatre
- 5.23. Other youth theatres are based within professional theatres and receive the benefit of resources and expertise from the theatre. These groups enjoy the added benefit that participants are exposed to professional performance and facilities
- 5.24. Some practitioners felt that each theatre in Scotland should have its own youth theatre which is core funded as a mainstream activity of the theatre. The youth theatre should be part of the framework of the access and participation strategy of the theatre
- 5.25. In this light, it was suggested that the proposed Scottish National Theatre resource should consider its role in the development of youth theatre
- 5.26. There is currently no funding available for touring of youth theatre productions. Some practitioners expressed the value of touring youth theatre to:
- introduce young people to theatre as audience members
  - enable young people to share their work and learn performance skills within a professional venue
  - enable young people to experience the work of other youth theatre groups

### **Scottish Youth Theatre**

- 5.27. The role of Scottish Youth Theatre within the youth theatre sector was discussed with consultees
- 5.28. It was felt that SYT had begun to develop, undertaking more inclusive work such as the projects taking place in Easterhouse, recruiting well respected practitioners and providing accessible workshops
- 5.29. There was some criticism of SYT, its approach to working with other youth theatres, the cost of SYT activities and the value of involvement in SYT
- 5.30. The criticism reflects the lack of understanding of the role of SYT and how it should interact with other youth theatres
- 5.31. It was felt that other youth theatres offered an equally valuable, if not better, experience for young people at less expense to participants and that there should be investment in other professional and community youth theatres as well as SYT
- 5.32. The role of a national youth theatre company was defined as:
- to be artistic leaders and to set quality standards
  - to provide something different to other youth theatres – work of a different quality and providing participants with a different experience
  - to be on a different level to other youth theatres and extend the experience of young people

- 5.33. Essentially, it was felt that SYT should be aspirational, offering something for young people to aim for

### **Scottish Arts Council**

- 5.34. Consultees were asked about their opinion of the current and potential role and approach of the Scottish Arts Council within the development of the youth theatre sector
- 5.35. Although it was acknowledged that changes in the strategic climate had encouraged SAC to take a greater interest in youth theatre, it was still felt that SACs current involvement in youth theatre was token and that it should take a more proactive role
- 5.36. It was felt that, through investing in youth theatre, SAC can invest in the audience and practitioners of the future and that SAC should take a developmental approach
- 5.37. SAC should also take a stronger role in advocacy for the youth theatre sector and in promoting youth theatre
- 5.38. The review and consultation took place as SAC was developing its Theatre Strategy. There was little consistency in the assessment of the benefits of developing a strategy for youth theatre. Some people felt that a strategy was only of value if there was funding attached, if it was practical and developed for young people and practitioners

- 5.39. However, other people consulted thought that a strategy would be beneficial for the sector if it provided a clear definition of roles and encouraged the development of the professionalism of the sector
- 5.40. Although many people would ideally like to see SAC providing core funding for more youth theatres, there was support for development funding which could be targeted at projects, commissions and professional expertise

### **Inclusivity**

- 5.41. While most theatres consider themselves inclusive, there were different approaches to inclusion
- 5.42. All groups were open to all young people
- 5.43. Some have an audition process – advertising the recruitment process and providing all young people with an equal opportunity to join the theatre
- 5.44. Other groups advertise and welcome all young people who express interest
- 5.45. Some work with schools, local authorities and other groups to encourage participation by young people
- 5.46. Some recognise that there are barriers to participation for young people and take steps to minimise these –for example subsidising activities for those who would be financially excluded

- 5.47. For other groups, having an open door policy and advertising is not enough, and a more proactive approach to inclusion is taken, removing all barriers – for example not only providing activities for free, but also subsidising additional costs such as transport. Taking this approach, it is important to reach out to communities and proactively undertake activities which will engage the young people who would not necessarily know about youth theatre or feel that it is for them
- 5.48. There are concerns about the resource implications of taking a proactive approach to inclusion. There is also a lack of clarity and experience in how to link in with excluded groups. Some recognise that existing structures, such as community education, can be used as a conduit, but the structures and relationships are not generally established
- 5.49. Many of the voluntary groups, whilst being open to all, do not feel that they have the ability to provide a fully inclusive theatre without additional support. Many feel that they lack the expertise and human resources to include young people with physical, behavioural or learning disabilities
- 5.50. For many the main barrier to inclusion is the lack of space within the youth theatre and this raises questions as to whether it is appropriate to target certain groups



## Benefits of youth theatre

5.51. There was recognition of the benefits to young people of participation in youth theatre. There was a strong degree of consensus about what the benefits were, including:

- developing personal confidence and confidence within society
- making a commitment to the youth theatre, developing the skills of self discipline and the personal drive required to work within a group and achieve a successful outcome; in turn, gaining a sense of achievement from this
- improving communication skills both through both specific skills gained in voice projection and speaking in public and also from learning to express ideas within a group and personally
- developing teamwork skills which are transferable to other areas of life and introducing young people to the notion of cooperation, working in partnership, listening to other viewpoints and taking different roles. This enables young people to assess and establish who they are and how they fit in within that group
- developing self esteem
- broadening young people's horizons through interaction with different people, through seeing things from different perspectives and through identifying new opportunities
- developing a sense of belonging
- having fun, being creative

- being part of a structured social system which enables individuals of different ages, backgrounds and experiences to interact within a secure environment which. The social system of the youth theatre enables young people to form intergenerational relationships with adults who are not parents or teachers

5.52. Youth theatre was considered a safe space in which young people could explore issues, take risks and test their emotional and physical boundaries

5.53. For some youth theatre was recognised as a mechanism for engaging young people. Its value lies in being part of young people's culture, being relevant to them and speaking in a language which is accessible. Because of this, youth theatre can be used for various means – for example to achieve learning outcomes or to explore issues

5.54. The outcomes for young people from participation in youth theatre included:

- personal skills
- life skills
- citizenship
- enhanced prospects for employment
- improved educational achievement
- an appreciation of the arts
- training for theatre

## Barriers to the development of the youth theatre sector

5.55. Two of the main barriers to the development of the youth theatre sector are a lack of information and opportunities to network. It was considered that networking enabled practitioners to share best practice and expertise and that this would enable the sector as a whole to develop

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- 5.56. There was also considered to be a value in providing young people with the opportunity to network, this enabled young people to see how other youth theatres work and to break down barriers and challenge preconceptions
- 5.57. There was a general lack of information about resources and opportunities. A database of tutors and specialist practitioners would be welcome across the sector
- 5.58. Across the sector there was a frustration with the lack of available training. There was felt to be a need to raise the levels of professional skills within the sector and for experienced and trained drama workers to have the opportunity to refresh skills and learn about new practice
- 5.59. It was important that specific training was provided for those working with young people and in a community arts setting
- 5.60. It was also important that standards were developed to ensure that practitioners offered young people a quality experience
- 5.61. It was commented that the sector had a 'homeknitted' feel and that there was a need to develop the professionalism of the sector
- 5.62. The lack of a career structure within the youth theatre sector, with the poor pay and conditions, was considered to be a barrier to the development of the sector. This discourages practitioners from developing a career in youth theatre which has an impact on the professionalism of the sector
- 5.63. Youth theatre groups were considered to be particularly important given the lack of creative content in the school curriculum. However, it was considered that all young people should have access to drama at school and that the youth theatre sector would also benefit from this
- 5.64. Another barrier to the development of youth theatre is the lack of consistent funding. Practitioners did not consider that they had sufficient resources to meet their needs. Additional resources would enable the youth theatres to provide a quality, professional service for example employing professional staff, hiring additional specialist expertise or commissioning new work especially for the youth theatre
- 5.65. The importance of skilled, trained professional youth drama practitioners was recognised both within the professional sector and within voluntary groups who would like to be able to develop the skills of the group leaders and supplement them with additional expertise
- 5.66. A frustration for youth theatre practitioners is the inability to meet demand
- Membership organisation**
- 5.67. The establishment of a membership organisation for youth theatre in Scotland was considered to be vital for the development of the sector

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- 5.68. SNAYT acted as a membership organisation for the sector until around 1999, and has been missed by practitioners since its demise
- 5.69. Full time, professional youth theatres have developed a network of contacts within the national and international youth theatre sector, therefore the membership organisation was considered to be of greatest value to community youth theatres, those within remote communities and to those establishing a youth theatre who do not have contacts and are not part of a wider 'scene'
- 5.70. However, some practitioners did not feel that a membership organisation would solve their problems as a lack of time and resources would impact upon their ability to utilise the organisation and geography would remain a barrier to isolated groups
- 5.71. There were considered to be problems with SNAYT in terms of its lack of resources and the lack of definition between SNAYT and SYT which caused duplication and confusion
- 5.72. A membership organisation should therefore be a professional, full-time organisation which is invested in and which has defined roles and responsibilities
- 5.73. The role and activities of a membership organisation would be to:
- enable networking
  - to act as the representative agent for youth theatre and to lobby and undertake advocacy for the sector
  - provide training
  - act as an information hub
  - provide a central database of practitioners
- act as the link organisation between youth theatres in Scotland
  - initiate connections and collaborations between youth theatres including internationally
  - organise events
  - develop standards, codes of practice and ensure quality control
  - to provide a mentoring programme
  - to provide masterclasses for tutors and participants
  - to provide a festival or showcase of youth theatre work
- 5.74. The impacts of this activity were considered to be:
- an increase in the professionalisation of the sector
  - an increase in the profile of the sector
  - providing youth theatre in Scotland with a single voice
  - enabling opportunities to share and experience the work of other youth theatres
  - the development of the sector, providing support, information, training and advice
  - the encouragement of standards for youth theatre and continued quality control.

## 6. Conclusions

- 6.1. Over 7,000 young people take part in youth theatre in Scotland and there is evidence of further demand
- 6.2. The sector is very varied including:
  - community youth theatres, some of which are entirely managed and delivered by volunteers, others use freelance drama workers to deliver activity
  - youth theatres based in professional theatres who take advantage of the skills, resources and facilities of the theatre and enable participants to have first hand experience of the professional sector
  - youth theatre groups provided by local authorities or schools
  - commercial youth drama activity providers
- 6.3. The variety within the types of youth theatre is reflected in the types of activity and emphasis of the groups. Some focus on production and on developing the performance and theatre arts skills of participants; others focus on work devised with participants to explore issues and encourage the personal and creative development of participants
- 6.4. Youth theatre is inclusive and provides young people with the opportunity to:
  - explore their creativity
  - test boundaries and explore issues
  - develop theatre arts and life skills
  - increase confidence and self esteem
- meet and learn to work cooperatively with other young people and adults from different backgrounds
- learn how to express themselves and that their voices can be heard
- 6.5. Youth theatre can develop theatre arts practitioners and audiences of the future; it can also enable young people to develop the skills they need to confidently take their place in society
- 6.6. A barrier to youth theatre for participants has been identified as the 'not for me' attitude. This may link to young people's lack of experience of theatre arts
- 6.7. To overcome this attitude, there needs to be promotion of youth theatre and the opportunities available to young people. Currently promotion is limited by lack of resources and the ability of groups to meet demand
- 6.8. The barriers which currently impact on the development of the sector include the:
  - inability to meet demand from young people
  - lack of opportunities for training
  - lack of resources
- 6.9. The practitioners consulted would like the sector to become more professional in skills and outlook
- 6.10. There is demand from all sectors for:
  - more training to be provided
  - standards to be developed and implemented

- resources to be invested in youth theatre which would enable practitioners to develop a career in youth theatre and youth theatres to utilise professional skills and expertise
  - sharing of information and best practice
  - the profile of youth theatre to be developed and the benefits advocated
- 6.11. The key decision for SAC is how to enable and support the activity required by the sector to ensure that young people in Scotland have access to youth theatre of the highest standard
- 6.12. There are options for this:
- 6.13. SYT may be able to undertake some development activity. However the review identified that there are some reservations about SYT within the sector. There is consensus that SYT should focus on providing high quality activities and programmes which offer young people in Scotland something to aspire to and which is not provided by other youth theatres
- 6.14. SAC needs to consider this within its general considerations of:
- whether or not it should have a strategy for youth theatre
  - whether it wants to prioritise the youth theatre sector for development
  - the extent to which youth theatre should be encouraged within the Theatre Strategy
  - the extent to which the National Theatre should have a role in this
- 6.15. There is demand for a support and development body which could service the whole sector
- 6.16. If SAC were to support the idea as a lead agency, the next step would be to assess its feasibility in terms of finance and management.

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