UK Arts, culture and young people

Innovative practice and trends

Main report of findings

November 2024

By tialt -

there is an alternative

The British Council is the UK's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities. We support peace and prosperity by building connections, understanding and trust between people in the UK and countries worldwide.

Contents

Glossary

Action-research model: An approach that combines active intervention and research, allowing for ongoing learning and adaptation as activities are delivered

Austerity: A period of reduced public spending by central and local governments (in the UK context a policy from around 2010 to present)

Co-creation practices: Collaborative approaches that involve people in the decision-making and sharing of control in creative processes with others

Co-production: A collaborative approach where organisations work together to design and implement projects, often involving young people in the process.

Creative activism: The use of art and culture as a means for young people to engage with and respond to social and global issues

Hybrid approach: Combining in-person and digital engagement methods in youth programs

Intersectional barriers: Overlapping forms of exclusion (e.g., due to gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality, geography) that young people may face in accessing arts and culture

Iterative funding: Funding models that allow for ongoing adjustments and learning, rather than fixed, predetermined project plans.

Neurodiversity: The variation in neurological differences among people, often referring to conditions such as autism, ADHD, and dyslexia

Peer learning: A structured approach where more experienced young people share knowledge with less experienced participants

Place-based programmes: Activities conducted in specific locations such as venues, theatres, or galleries, or seeking to make an impact in specific neighbourhoods

Psychological safety: An environment where participants feel comfortable expressing themselves without fear of negative consequences

R&D funding: Financial support for exploratory, research-driven projects that may not have predetermined outcomes

Scaffolding: Providing structured support to help young people develop skills and confidence which is gradually reduced as they develop

Socially engaged practice: Creative work that actively involves communities and addresses social issues

Youth voice: The active input and participation of young people in matters that affect them, including decision making in arts and cultural opportunities

Youth-led practice: Approaches that prioritise young people's agency, ideas, and decision-making in project design and implementation.

Introduction

Tialt was commissioned in October 2023 to conduct a research review of arts and cultural provision for young people (aged 11-24) across the four nations of the UK.

The British Council commissioned this research as part of its international cultural relations activity focusing on the transformative power of arts and culture. This work promotes artistic and cultural expression in the widest sense and recognises its potential for a more inclusive and sustainable future through supporting artists, cultural practitioners, and underrepresented groups.

The research forms part of an exploration into how youth participation and leadership in the arts and culture can contribute to more inclusive and sustainable development. The information and insight gathered is being shared as a resource to help inform potential opportunities for building meaningful international connections, relationships, and learning.

The research intends to provide an up-to-date, although not exhaustive, account of the key issues that young people taking part in arts and cultural activities are facing, and how creative practice is responding to these needs.

It intends to be useful for arts and cultural organisations, practitioners, funders, and policymakers to better understand current practice and provision for different groups of young people in diverse geographical areas.

Ultimately it is hoped that the research can encourage further discussion and action to ensure that all young people have access to high-quality arts and cultural opportunities and that those supporting them to do so can be better networked and resourced to enable them to fulfil their creative potential.

Background

The review was especially interested in identifying interesting and effective practice relating to the following categories:

- Supporting artistic expression and cultural participation

- Inclusion-focused

- Using a co-creation or youth-led model

- Focused on enhancing young people's agency to address challenges

- Encouraging awareness-raising/activism

- Providing access to networks and/or showcasing work

- Addressing barriers to engagement

- Providing capacity-building and leadership opportunities

The research was focused on the following questions:

- Who are the key stakeholders, influencers, actors, organisations, festivals and networks which are leading this work within the cultural sector in the UK? Where are they based, who are they engaging with and how are they working?

- What are the most relevant and notable practice, programmes or initiatives which are taking place at a national, regional and/or grass-roots level across the UK that recognise, innovate or advocate for the core categories identified? Who is leading these and where can they be found?

- In what ways do local, regional and national public policies and funding mechanisms (including foundations) support such programmes and initiatives? What are the main institutional and funding bodies?

- How does the arts and culture sector respond to public policies on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) and socio-economic benefit for young people and communities at a local, regional and national level?

- Can the British Council add value, complementarity to these young people programmes? If yes, how can the British Council Cultural Relations Approach engage with existing/emerging work or initiatives taking place across these fields in the UK, to establish itself as broker, add value, advocate and act as a thought leader in this space?

To answer these questions, we conducted the research in five phases:

- A literature review of recent policies, strategies, evaluations and research reports, largely from the past five years, relating to key programmes and initiatives across the four regions of the UK (the findings are summarised in Appendix 2)

- Interviews with each of the main publicly funded arts funding bodies in the four nations, along with Esmee Fairbairn Foundation and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, as significant independent foundations supporting arts and cultural provision for young people

- A survey for arts and cultural organisations across the UK to nominate themselves as providing interesting and effective practice according to the categories of interest outlined above. This included a question relating to their thoughts on current issues in policy and practice for young people

- An online workshop with a subsample of those responding to the survey to discuss their practice in greater depth

- Nine case studies (online or in person) with organisations and projects sampled to represent a range of geographies, populations, artforms and practice types.

The following report summarises the key findings from each of these phases and can be read in conjunction with the case studies published as a separate and accompanying document. It ends with a selection of opportunities, suggested as 'stepping off' points from some of the observations and findings raised in the research.

Case Studies

The nine case studies selected were:

- The Agency (national)

- Beat Carnival (Belfast, Northern Ireland)

- Future Yard (Birkenhead, England)

- Hot Chocolate Trust (Dundee, Scotland)

- Nerve Centre (Derry/Londonderry, Northern Ireland)

- Taking Flight Theatre (Cardiff, Wales)

- Thamesmead creative studio (London, England)

- WAC Ensemble, The Citizens Theatre (Glasgow, Scotland)

- The Warren Youth Project (Hull, England)

Limitations

As with any research exercise there are several limitations to the study:

- It is not seeking to provide a comprehensive or exhaustive review of the literature relating to policy and practice for young people's participation in arts and culture

- Asking organisations to self-nominate via the survey, and taking recommendations from national funders has been effective in supplying a diverse range of organisations and their practice, although there will always be innovative and effective practice that is 'off the radar' in different ways

- Case study visits and conversations were taking place at a particular moment in time (notably immediately prior to a UK general election). The contexts in which young people are taking part in art and culture are always changing and can be affected by changes in policy at local, national and UK levels.

Nevertheless, the research provides a timely reflection on the issues currently facing young people across the UK and how the organisations supporting them are responding. It acts as a basis for further discussion within and beyond the UK, ultimately ensuring that what is working in arts and cultural provision for young people is further bolstered and young people are supported to achieve their developmental potential.

Nerve Centre
(Derry/Londonderry, Northern Ireland)

Beat Carnival
(Belfast, Northern Ireland)

WAC Ensemble, The Citizens Theatre
(Glasgow, Scotland)

Hot Chocolate Trust
(Dundee, Scotland)

Future Yard
(Birkenhead, England)

The Agency
(England and Northern Ireland)

The Warren Youth Project
(Hull, England)

Thamesmead creative studio
(London, England)

Taking Flight Theatre
(Cardiff, Wales)

The key issues facing young people engaging with arts and cultural organisations
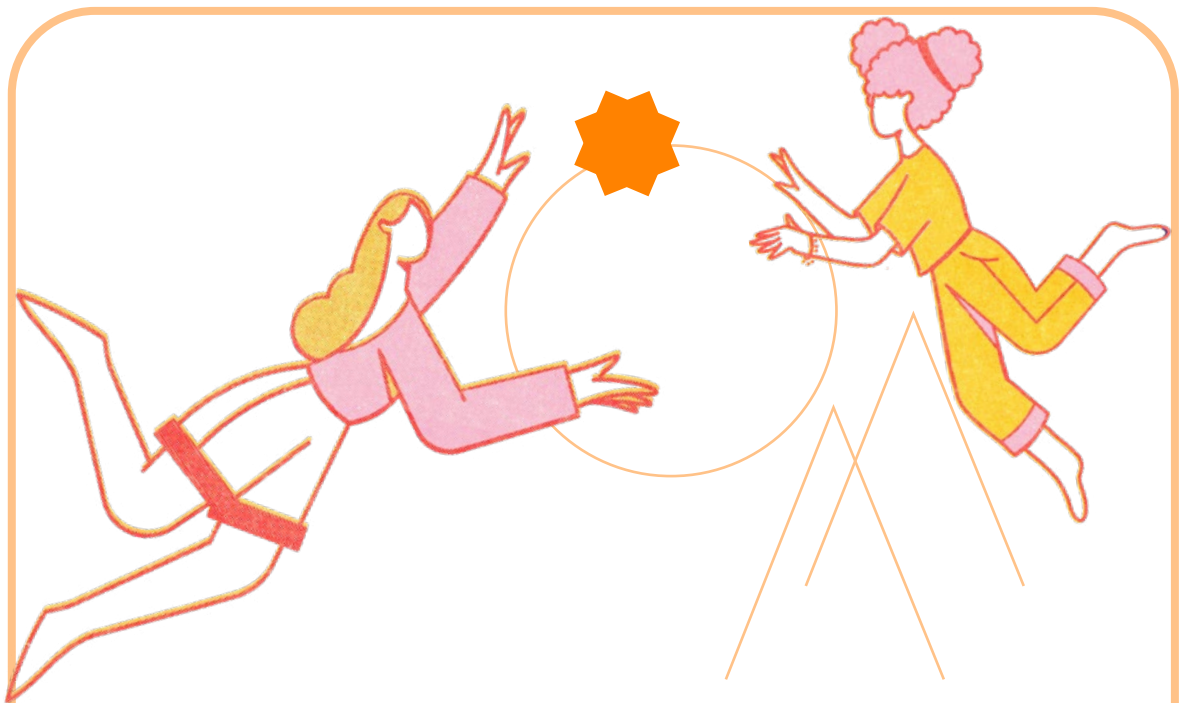
Summary

Core issues identified by arts organisations working with young people include:

Representation and access – There is still work to be done to ensure that all young people can access provision and see themselves represented in arts and culture.

Mental health and wellbeing – The widely reported increase in young people's poor mental health is equally prevalent in the arts and culture sector. A sector that can use methods to potentially support an improve young people's wellbeing.

Neurodiversity, disability, and diverse learning styles – While there is a reported improvement in awareness and adaptation to neurodiversity and a broader range of learning styles, there remains a need for the arts and culture sector to adapt and accommodate these consistently.

Global crises and activism – The complex and overlapping crises across the world are stressful for young people who can feel powerless in response. Art and culture can support them to process and respond, building a sense of agency.

Skills and training – It's recognised that creative subjects have been deprioritised in formal education. Many organisations are working to support young people to develop creative skills as an educational right, as well to prepare the future creative workforce.

Rights and youth voice – Research respondents understand that young people can be alienated by the social structures and institutions around them. Many work to enable young people's voices and perspective to be prioritised and at the centre of their provision.

Introduction

The following findings are based on the responses we received in the sector survey, the online workshop, and the in-depth case studies. We thematically analysed the data and present the main themes emerging.

While the research questions are largely focused on presenting the practice of working with young people in arts and culture, it is equally important to understand the context of the work. Youth arts practice doesn't exist in a vacuum. Enabling a shared understanding of how arts and culture practice is responding to the needs of young people helps to clarify why certain practices and approaches are being developed and find common cause among those providing arts and cultural activities.

Representation and access

The theme of representation and access came up in almost all conversations. Young people themselves talked about inequity in access to creative learning, creative careers and fair work.

The barriers experienced by young people were described as interconnected and intersectional. In this sense, there was not one form of exclusion reported as more prevalent than others. Many young people face multiple and overlapping forms of exclusion to take part and progress in arts and culture. In some cases it can be a combination of poverty, lack of infrastructure and access, institutional racism, ableism or classism, or other forms of more explicit and implicit bias that can act against young people taking up opportunities.

Respondents highlighted that this is in the context of many years of austerity, decreased funding, and what feels like consistent deprioritising by local councils. For many organisations supporting children and young people there is often a funding precarity that limits their abilities to commit to long term planning and support.

I think one of the things that I'm really aware of is the underfunding of youth services more generally across the UK, with austerity. Many of the communities that we are working in, their youth services are just non-existent, or the hours are really stripped back, so some of the work that we do plugs a gap that maybe didn't exist in the same way it might have 20 years ago [Organisation]

The combined effects of austerity, inequity of access, and intersectional barriers were felt even more acutely by respondents in smaller towns as compared to the bigger cities where cultural infrastructure has remained more prevalent. For young people who lack material resources to travel and engage where the creative and cultural sector is active, there are simply less opportunities for them to develop according to their creative potential.

Mental health and wellbeing

All those we spoke to mentioned mental health and wellbeing as an acute issue facing young people. This was reported across the scale from occasional low mood to a perceived significant increase in life-limiting clinical mental health conditions.

Most indicated that this was made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic, the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, and the increase of screen use, social media, and other forms of digital engagement. The isolation and alienation exacerbated by these factors was considered detrimental to young people's mental wellbeing, alongside the pressures of constant comparison with peers and others that young people are exposed to in their digital lives.

In some cases organisations have enhanced their digital offer to adapt to the established practices of many young people, in other cases, there are attempts to double down on in-person and group-based contact to ensure that social interaction and collaboration are core to young people's creative development.

There is a resistance to labels, yet a proliferation of them in areas such as gender, mental health, and identity. Some find mental health diagnoses helpful for understanding their experiences, while others may see them as a self-fulfilling prophecy. Our work focuses on fostering resilience, determining what constitutes proportionate stress, and challenging misconceptions fed by social media, like the illusion of constant happiness. We work with many young people with diagnosed mental health conditions, not undermining their experiences but encouraging them to navigate their own paths. [Organisation]

Neurodiversity, disability, and diverse learning styles

Respondents reported a perceived increase in diagnoses of neurodiversity, as well as young people becoming more informed about their own learning needs and styles. In most cases this was welcomed as a way of practitioners and organisations being able to adapt their practice to meet individual needs. It was also considered by many to be a useful way to counter the inequity and intersectional barriers discussed above, as a broader range of learning needs become normalised and mainstreamed.

For those who provide alternative provision to formal education (i.e., most of those we spoke to in the research) this was especially welcomed as developing a stronger narrative and public knowledge of the specific support required by some

young people, as well as highlighting their potential. Although several respondents also highlighted the need for cross-sector and strong partnership working to ensure that the opportunities that exist for young people to have more specialised support are not missed.

> *Schools are not equipped to teach creativity and young people with non-academic learning styles are being excluded from education which also has a knock-on effect on confidence and mental wellbeing. It can often mean that schools are not best placed to identify and target these young people or share other opportunities with them. [Organisation]*

Global crises and activism

Linked to the findings on mental health and wellbeing, several respondents discussed how young people are feeling overwhelmed and exhausted by the overlapping global crises they are exposed to.

While the climate crisis and environmental issues are of particular concern to young people, many respondents also discussed how military conflict in Ukraine and Palestine, as well as rising tensions between global powers in general was creating stress for the young people they work with. The overlapping issues of the rise of far-right politics, migration, financial insecurity (at micro and macro levels), increasing global inequality, and changing employment and population patterns were also reported as being of concern to young people.

In some cases this was described as a tangible cause of overwhelm for young people who report feeling powerless in the face of such complex and intractable issues. Others reported how their work with young people was providing a source of relief as it could provide space to explore these issues and how young people may or may not be able to respond.

Instead of feeling powerless in the face of these issues, it was suggested that art and culture, and developing creative skills more generally, can equip young people with the resources they need to take action. In many cases the creative output and processes being developed with and by young people were seeking to directly influence the multiple crises around them.

> *It seems that young people are to blame for everything, but also supposed to be the solution for everything. It's really stressful. We need to be getting young people to look at society and ask, 'why is this making us ill?' [Organisation]*

Skills and training

The decreasing rates of uptake and provision of creative subjects in formal education was described by many respondents as directly affecting the opportunities available to young people, alongside a perceived devaluation of creative skills and careers in general.

Most reported that their provision was focused on a young person's right to be creative and to develop creative skills. In many cases this included exposure to a broad range of creative activities, enabling specialisation, as well as combined creative skills across artforms.

Respondents highlighted a need for a more coordinated approach to developing the future creative workforce, as well as enabling young people to develop multiple creative capacities to be adaptable to the unknown demands of the future workforce more generally. Some were cautious of overreliance on economic justifications for supporting young people's creative development, but most could recognise that the skills and training they were providing was becoming increasingly rare in the mainstream education opportunities available to young people.

Rights and youth voice

Related to many of the issues described above is the need for a greater commitment to respecting young people's rights and providing opportunities for them to be authentically engaged in decision making about the arts and cultural opportunities that are made available to them.

Many respondents described how they have mechanisms in place to embed young people's voices and perspectives in their work (whether via co-creation practices, advisory panels, youth boards or other approaches). However, it was also reported that this was not universally the case, and that many of the institutions and organisations that young people are in contact with have no consistent ways of engaging with them. This may result in even greater levels of alienation and disengagement, as well as fewer opportunities for young people to use the cultural infrastructure that does exist as a way to deal with the issues and needs identified above.

The sections below relating to responsive practice and centring young people's rights go some way toward sharing ideas and practices that may be useful in meeting the identified need of honouring young people's rights, listening to, and responding to their perspectives.

How effective practice is responding to young people's needs

Summary

Creative practice – Many organisations are challenging themselves to develop new and interesting ways to support young people. This can focus on developing creativity within a specific artform or enabling creativity more generally across multiple artforms and fields.

Co-creation and co-design – Young people are trusted to make decisions about how practice should be structured. Professionals see themselves as enablers of young people's development journeys more than teachers of how things should be (or be done).

Establishing respect and trust – A foundational aspect of practice is respecting young people's perspectives, experiences and ideas. Practice is based on mutual trust, setting boundaries and parameters, and being ok with things being open-ended and process focused.

Flexibility and responsiveness – Due to the complex issues that many young people are facing, effective practice needs to be flexible and responsive. This can mean being reflective and changing approaches and plans as activities are underway. It can also mean developing relationships or partnerships to enhance opportunities for young people in real time.

Pacing and progression – While there is a need to be open and responsive, effective practice is also about challenging young people to develop in ways that will meet their potential. This is about making sure that practice has appropriate pacing, not over-generalising about people's needs and abilities, and recognising that 'progression' comes in many forms.

Quality artists and practitioners – At the core of effective practice is high quality artists and practitioners. In many cases this can include practicing artists who are in the 'real world' and can demonstrate what this looks and feels like for young people. Supporting practitioners to have up to date and relevant training and skills is essential for a strong arts and cultural offer for young people. people's voices and perspective to be prioritised and at the centre of their provision.

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Creative practice

All respondents indicated that they prioritise creative techniques and approaches in their practice. This can range from enabling young people to have very open and explorative interactions with artists, to using creative games and methods as a way of opening up young people's ideas. In many cases practitioners focus directly on the issues that young people are dealing with and offer an opportunity to explore these issues using creative expression.

> We don't have a language to talk about young people's 'culture' – we take the view that the creative impulse is universal and respond to that. [organisation]

A need for psychological safety in the practice environment was reported as essential for creativity to be developed. This can often mean checking in with participants and understanding what they are bringing to the activity on that day, as well as having a broader understanding of their current circumstances and specific needs. There is not always space for creativity itself as an outcome to be encouraged for young people in their day-to-day lives, whether because of the pressures on schools to focus on other skills, or the demands of funders for creative activities to be linked to other instrumental outcomes (e.g., personal development).

Organisations indicated that they intentionally broaden the definition of creativity beyond artistic practice and outputs. They support young people to engage in activities based on problem solving, drawing on knowledge from across subjects and disciplines, taking a research and inquiry-led approach to their work and to consider how creative thinking can be used to tackle social problems.

> We really see the value of allowing young people to explore creativity without the pressure to produce a specific artistic output. This approach can empower young people to discover their creative potential in various contexts, whether in the kitchen, through community engagement, or in other non-traditional forms of expression. [organisation]

Practitioners aligned their support of creativity alongside storytelling, across diverse media and artforms. In this sense, young people are encouraged to apply a structure to the stories they want to tell and enabled to express this in ways that feel appropriate.

> I think that's where the creative arts can come in, let's just do something and see where it takes us and kind of take people on a journey that they might not otherwise get to do and that can 'kick' people out of a rut or, I suppose, help people think about things that they don't currently think are possible. I think quite often what arts organisations can provide is the 'extra-ordinary', for want of a better word. [organisation]

> *Read more about the use of creative approaches in The Agency case study here and the Nerve Centre case study here.*

Co-creation and co-design

Co-creation and co-design were central to innovative practice. Respondents described the various techniques that they use to facilitate these processes:

- Understanding the difference between consultation and co-design. Establishing parameters for what is possible and the extent to which young people have agency and control in decision making

- Working with a range of creative practices and practitioners and allowing young people to decide which they would like to focus on

- Discussing and negotiating whether processes should lead to products and the implications of this for programme design

- Supporting young people to develop skills and knowledge that will make them feel more able and confident in making decisions and taking responsibility

- Supporting young people to engage with a range of voices and perspectives from their communities and bringing more people into the design and creation process as needed

Several projects also discussed how they take a structured approach to supporting peer learning, often with more experienced young people being partnered with less experienced participants to share their learning. This is more and less formal across different settings but is often identified as useful way to enable co-creation and co-design without the input of practitioners.

> *We use creativity as the methodology but it's not inviting young people to take part in an arts project. So, you know, while it's a theatre-based methodology, it's not 'come and be involved in it like this'. And as a result, we follow their desire and ideas. it's about what you're interested in doing. And we then wrap around the support for you to deliver that. [organisation]*

> *Read about co-creation approaches used by Beat Carnival here*
>
> *Read about the innovative approach to commissioning art for a new development in Thamesmead here*

Establishing respect and trust

Much of the practice described was centred on treating young people as emerging professionals. By working with professional artists and practitioners in processes of co-design and co-creation, young people are given an experience of what a professional creative life can entail. This is done through establishing mutual trust and respect and setting appropriate levels of challenge and novelty in activities.

Many practitioners aim to establish a home-like environment (and importantly, a place of safety and security for those whose home environments may not offer these conditions). Spending time considering how to make the environment accessible, inclusive and safe was considered essential to support young people to relax into activities, build rapport and commit to their learning journeys.

Payment for travel was mentioned several times as a relatively easy way to support participation, as well as a gesture of understanding that many young people experience challenging material circumstances. In some cases payment for participation was offered, particularly for activities where young people were being asked to contribute to boards or advisory groups, or encouraged to take

part in engagement processes that went beyond regular participation. While this was reported in two of the projects featured in the research, it raises an important point about how and when remuneration may be appropriate for increasing commitment and responsibility from young people.

> *Paying a stipend has always been a key thing. It's not a payment for time, but it's about removing some of those barriers. It's about that value, and we give value to your time, and to your participation. And this matters [organisation]*

> *Read about Hot Chocolate's approach to 'radical hospitality' in this case study*

Flexibility and responsiveness

Every young person is different and respecting and understanding that is key to how organisations deliver their programming. Practitioners are encouraged to check in with young people regularly to understand their broader situations, as well as how they are developing within provision and any adaptations required.

Listening and responding to young people's positions and needs was regularly cited as core to effective practice, along with being transparent about decisions and boundaries throughout the duration of any programme.

Practice as described as effective because it is often hands-on, practical, and applied, often in 'real' creative settings (i.e., venues, theatres, galleries etc). Often being place-based in this way enables a more relaxed approach to provision, with relationships building over time and young people becoming familiar with the 'ways of being' that emerge in these settings.

Being playful was also mentioned often as an important aspect of effective practice. Being focused on creating active, playful, and fun programmes that involve a lot of games can help in building relationships and confidence among young people and make them want to return to the opportunities.

Some respondents mentioned adapting their practice post-pandemic. In some cases this has led to the development of a more hybrid approach where opportunities to engage digitally have become frequent and 'normalised', with organisations challenging themselves to make the most of digital opportunities. Some mentioned that this feels more

inclusive than place-based programmes which can remain exclusionary despite efforts to support travel.

Others highlighted how they are very deliberately trying to get young people to come to spaces physically and have adapted their practice to focus more explicitly on collaboration, recognising that this, along with general levels of confidence, seem to have been most negatively impacted by the pandemic.

More generally, respondents highlighted that reflecting on what is and isn't working as they go along, and being responsive to young people's changing needs within the provision itself are core elements of their practice.

> *Everything we do is a pilot in some way. In any project we're constantly testing, iterating and adapting. From that learning we can develop the next programme as well making sure that the current one is meeting young people's needs as they emerge. [organisation]*

Read about how trust and flexibility are core to the approach of The Warren here

Pacing and progression

Direct and practical experiences in creative development that is not on offer elsewhere was offered by most organisations. In some cases this includes direct work experience and applied training.

Practitioners described quite a specific approach to setting the right pace for development (e.g., messing around on a mixing desk for a while before being supported into more formal DJ tuition). For some young people this is tied into formal accreditation processes and applied work experience within settings.

Individualised pathways were being negotiated with young people, where the provision can respond to their needs in a bespoke way that is not necessarily replicated in more formal education and training opportunities.

Several of the young people we spoke to indicated that it is the mixture of opportunities made available to them, along with the support and relationships developed with the practitioners and organisations that they identify as unique compared to other education opportunities around them.

Several respondents indicated that they aim to instil an entrepreneurial and experimental spirit into the work, so that young people are encouraged to consider taking their learning to the next level, but at the same time, to explore the multiple avenues that their development can take.

> *It's completely changed my trajectory because I just didn't know about those careers. They're invisible. [Young person]*

Read about how Future Yard are helping an emerging young music workforce in Birkenhead and Merseyside here

Quality artists and practitioners

Working with the highest quality artists and practitioners was regularly mentioned as a way of enabling the best outcomes for young people. In many cases this was about ensuring that artists and practitioners were supported in their own professional development to respond to the diverse needs of young people.

Working with practicing artists was regularly mentioned as a way of demonstrating to young people that there are a range of opportunities available to working in the creative sector, as well as enabling artists to share their career experiences directly.

This included employing artists and practitioners with shared lived experiences with the young people, whether through ties and familiarity to a local area, or experience of being D/deaf disabled, from the global majority, or other identity-based experiences.

> *It's a team of Deaf, disabled, neurodivergent and non-disabled performance artists. Activists, musicians, a live musical stage, the design is we will have a lot of tactile access materials, which is something that we really find important, particularly for a younger audience [organisation]*

Read more about Taking Flight Theatre's unique approach working with Deaf young theatre makers here

Putting young people's rights at the centre of practice

Summary

Process over product – Practitioners often describe that the developmental *journeys* for young people are more important than the *destinations*. The essence of effective practice is that it is reflective and adaptable, this also means that things won't always work out as planned and learning that emerges is acted upon.

Setting clear parameters – Treating young people with respect and developing trust can only be enabled where there are clear parameters about how much agency they have to influence things. Parameters for development are also crucial so that young people can set and meet expectations for themselves.

Formal and informal participation – There are a number of models for how young people's participation is enabled in projects and activities, ranging from formal board membership, paid consultation roles, to regular opportunities for reflection on progress. The level of formality in young people's participation is less important than that approaches are intentional and thoughtful.

Celebrating and advocating – A core aspect of supporting young people in art and culture is to validate the work they are doing. This can be done through public celebration events, marketing and promoting the work, and providing platforms for young people to talk to each other and the institutions around them. Organisations supporting young people can make the most of their platforms to enhance young people's perspectives in lots of ways.

Introduction

The majority of those contributing to the research indicated that their practice was embedded within respecting young people's rights and enabling youth voice and participation. There were varying degrees of formality in how this was enacted in practice, but it was overwhelmingly expressed as a core value.

The following section outlines the various elements that were described as enabling young people's rights and perspectives to be honoured in practice.

[For an in-depth look at co-production in practice, please read this case study on Thamesmead creative studio]

Process over product

Putting young people's rights at the centre of practice included a wide range of models, but there were a number of consistent approaches described:

- Addressing all accessibility needs (including transport, food)

- Providing one-to-one personal support

- Teaching the group how to offer peer support

- Scaffolding a co-creation process over time

- Using creative activities to support expression and skills building

- Teaching skills and providing material support for young people to develop and implement cultural events (e.g., learning to fundraise, manage budgets, commission, contact artists, marketing, evaluation).

In this way the process allows for young people to shape projects according to their abilities and preferences. Practitioners are there to listen, sculpt and shape projects with young people, and capture the emerging models of practice.

Almost all respondents practicing in this way indicated that it was this process of supporting and enabling young people's ideas and perspectives that led to them being fulfilled by their experiences, even more so than the success of the eventual output or 'product'.

We ensure all adults on projects have up to date training in facilitation and focus on process and top-quality collaborative experiences for young people, this is way more important over the creation of the 'perfect product' [organisation]

Setting clear parameters

Respondents indicated that true agency is achieved for young people when they have a clear understanding of the boundaries and parameters of their involvement. It was very rare that there was genuinely a 'blank page' available for their ideas to come to reality. More often there would be limits in terms of budget, capacity and resources, and it was important to support young people to understand this and negotiate their ideas within those parameters. Several practitioners reported that they saw their responsibility as listening to the young people and then using their own experience and networks to enable and support their ideas, including feeding back when things were not likely to be possible or were unrealistic.

This also applied to the rules of engagement. Several respondents indicated that they develop a manifesto or set of guidelines within which consultation and practice must sit. Often this would extend into an emerging model of practice that could be used by the organisations or the young people in other projects and settings.

Read about how the WAC Ensemble at the Citizens Theatre has developed an approach to theatre making focused on giving young people real-world experiences here
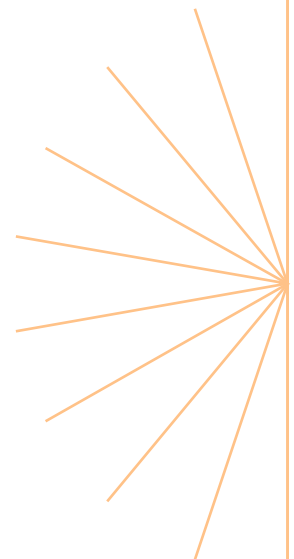
Formal and informal participation

Projects and organisations reported a range of ways in which they centre young people's rights, ranging from formal arrangements to more informal practices and embedded 'ways of being' that they structure their practice around.

Some models mentioned include:

Young ambassadors – paid roles for young people who have participated in previous opportunities to return and be involved in programme design, be on the project advisory group, support the delivery of projects

Youth board members – young people, usually with some degree of experience with an organisation, are made official board members of the organisation. The three organisations who discussed this approach also indicated that young people should be supported in any training and development needs and that their role and responsibility should be made clear to them, and communicated clearly to all other board members

Youth action groups – project specific groups where young people are given specific tasks and responsibilities based on the skills they would like to develop (e.g., fundraising, marketing, research and evaluation). They are supported to produce personal development plans for individual development as well as work together on overall project design and management

Other forms of youth participation and engagement are less formal and built into how organisations and practitioners operate. There may be more incidental opportunities for young people to decide which activities are provided in a particular session, or to feedback their perspectives at various stages with the practitioners responding and being transparent about it.

> *Just having space to learn life, on your own terms, I suppose, is actually really rare. A lot of what we do isn't really rocket science, but because it's not normal for a lot of young people when we behave like, 'treat people like human beings', it comes across to some others as, 'wow, that's really innovative practice!' [organisation]*

Read about the formal and informal ways that Nerve Centre involve young people in their work in this case study

Celebrating and advocating

Another core element of centring young people's rights was providing moments for celebrating their achievements and providing opportunities for them to advocate for themselves and others.

Linked to the observations above about practitioners using their networks, experience and influence to enhance young people's ideas, the same applies to providing platforms for their work to be shared and their perspectives to be brought to the attention of those outside of a specific project or programme.

Often these opportunities can act as a way of affirming the efforts made by young people, as well as stimulating further ideas and opportunities to build from initiatives. As with other elements of the practice it remains important to clearly establish the aims of public facing events and outputs, and to manage expectations of what may be possible or not due to external factors.

Read about how Taking Flight Theatre and Hot Chocolate are using performance as a way of highlighting young people's perspectives

Collaboration, networks and the support of funders
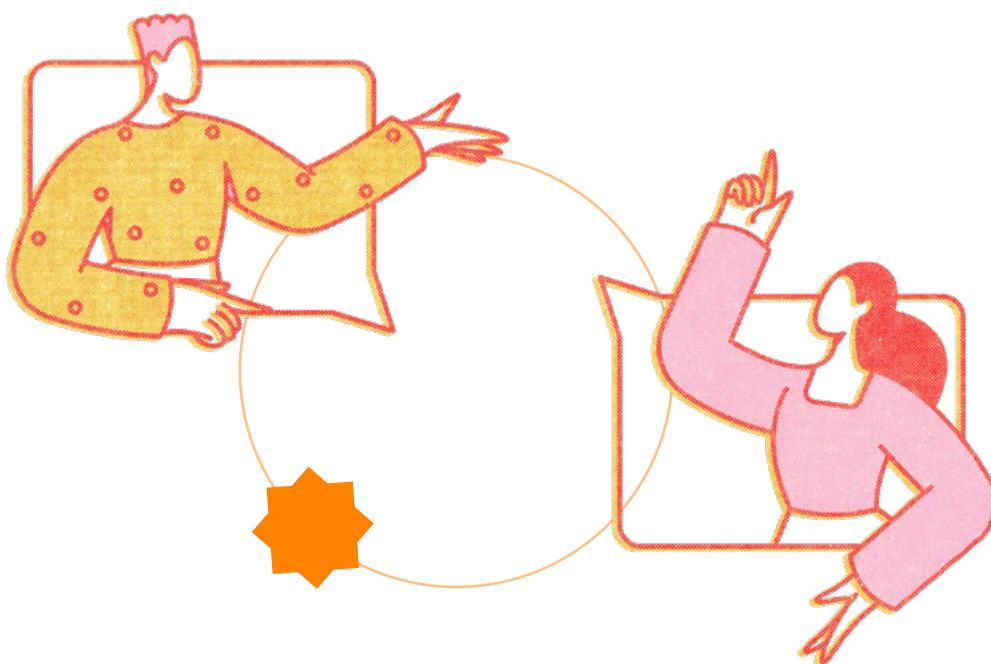
Summary

Co-production and collective reflection – Organisations highlighted how they see value in co-producing activities with partners (as well as with young people). They also indicated that there should be protected time for collective reflection on what is happening in projects so that practice can be adapted accordingly.

Long-termism – Respondents highlighted that there is a need for long-term funding for effective partnerships to be built, as well as building meaningful relationships with communities of young people. The aim for many organisations is for their work with young people to become self-sustaining.

Network building – Strong networks and communities of practice are essential to support effective practice with young people. Respondents indicated a commitment to learning form peers and collectively advocating for their work and young peoples' rights.

R&D funding – Funding for research and development was highlighted several times. This would enable more responsive and flexible practice to take place. Action research models (where projects have an enquiry-based approach and can respond to emerging needs and outcomes) was said to be especially effective in working responsively with young people.

Conversations not 'forms' – Several respondents indicated that they would like a more conversational approach with those funding their work. In some cases this would support accessibility (e.g., enabling BSL interpretation) and overall would enable organisations and young people to engage in deeper and more meaningful discourse about what is happening in the work.

Introduction

When engaging with the research participants it was impossible to discuss what they do in their work (i.e., practice), without also considering the broader conditions in which their work is taking place. The following section explores how collaboration between organisations and the broader funding landscape influences their practice and the experiences they are able to provide for young people.

Co-production and collective reflection

Explicitly embedding co-production and collective reflection in their approach was reported by organisations as being ore to effective partnership working. In some cases this has been written into a memorandum of understanding, with timetabled moments for collective reflection and review, in other cases there is a less formal agreement based on 'ways of being' for the partnership, which may include the methods that will be embedded to capture learning as it emerges and share this between partners.

Respondents indicated that agreeing on an approach to collective reflection in partnership working allows for capacity issues to be addressed, reviewing the allocation of resources, and sharing complementary assets, ultimately adding value on all sides.

> *Embedding co-production approaches and iterative learning processes amongst all partners on a regular basis helps us build trust and amplifies the overall benefits for everyone. [organisation]*

Long-termism

Taking a long-term approach to projects and programmes was mentioned in relation to both partnerships and funding. For partnerships it was noted that deep and supportive work with communities and young people takes time for relationships and trust to be developed, and even more so if a co-designed approach is to be taken. There is huge potential for partners to learn from each other and to develop responsive approaches that can have maximum impact for young people, but only if there is the scope for long-term commitment in terms of funding and establishing opportunities for reflective partnership working.

> *In partnerships it's really important for us that we're working with organisations that have a shared value set in a way, it doesn't have to be exactly the same values, but they need to be engaged deeply with the community in which they're working. They need to commit over a long term, at least two years, it's not a parachute, that just doesn't work. [organisation]*

This was echoed in terms of how funders can best support work with young people. Organisations indicated that they want funders to think long-term and to commit to iterative funding where they can see what is emerging over time and how learning is being acted upon. In this way programme-based work can be 'generative and sustainable', for individual young people, groups of young people, and the communities around them.

This commitment to longer-term funding was also supported by respondents who saw it as a way for funders to divest over time as programmes became embedded and self-sustaining in different ways.

> *We're actually always moving towards a situation where we don't need external funding and frameworks to keep it going - a teaching people to fish mentality rather than lots of one-offs or short-term projects. [organisation]*
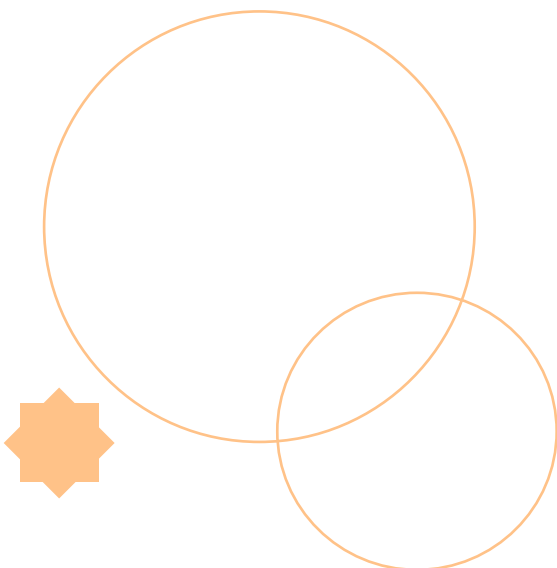
Network building

Partnerships are central to the success of projects and programmes, not least because of the opportunity to exchange ideas and pool resources. Beyond drawing on expertise, many respondents indicated the values of partnership working as building networks and communities of practice around the work they are doing to support young people.

These networks, whether local, regional, national or international, provide an opportunity to share learning, failure, and success. Given the broad range of innovative practice discussed in this research, many of those we spoke to indicated that they would appreciate even more opportunities to talk about and share their work more broadly, including giving the young people they work with access to forums to exchange and discuss their experiences with each other.

Several respondents indicated that they would appreciate the opportunity to share their experiences and learning outside of the cultural sector. This could also provide an opportunity to explore where creative practice is (or is not) providing something unique for young people, as well as to explore and develop shared terminology with other sectors.

We're completely local in our identity and focus, but networked nationally and internationally in ideas [organisation]

R&D funding

Much of the work described is exploratory and iterative in nature, but this can be challenging to communicate to potential funders who are more outcomes focused. For that reason, several respondents indicated that they would appreciate the opportunity to access funding for research and development.

Some suggested that a more 'action-research' based model would suit their work with young people, particularly where there is a co-creation element to the practice and outcomes and outputs are likely to be emergent over time. Opportunities to financially support the 'process over product' approach described in this research would be welcomed.

This was also stated in relation to how funding application processes are currently operated. There was a consensus that application processes could be lighter touch, more exploratory and accessible, with funders encouraging short expressions of interest before organisations spend huge resources on speculative bid writing.

Linked to this was a perspective noted by several respondents that they felt a need to justify creative and arts-based work according to its instrumental value. While recognising that their work with young people often does lead to additional outcomes and

benefits, there was a creeping sense that the need to justify funding on these terms felt inhibitive. A more open-ended approach to the funding made available to arts and cultural organisations would therefore be welcomed.

With different funds your project has to respond, one has a progression thing, another to fix everyone's mental health, to promote fair work, fix the climate crisis and be for every group that there can possibly be. And they're all super good impulses. But I think that just drives up the fear of like, 'Ah, how can we possibly be good enough to do all that?' And I think that it becomes clear that the, the uselessness of art is the useful thing. In a weird kind of way. But I'm sure you wouldn't put that on an application form. 'Yeah, this is good, because it doesn't serve a purpose'. [organisation]

Conversations not 'forms'

Linked to the above, respondents indicated that they would prefer evaluation and reporting to be far more conversational than at present. This was especially the case for funders to understand what youth-led means and looks like in practice.

Several respondents highlighted how the journeys and stories of the young people they work with are difficult to boil down to the outputs-focused reporting templates they are often expected to complete. Instead, more observational, relational, co-designed and creative methods of evaluation would be preferred, although there was an understanding that this requires additional capacity and a shift in current funding practice.

Others we spoke to indicated that there is a need for applications and funding to be made more conversational, in a specific example, for BSL options to be integrated into application and monitoring processes (i.e., where even the offer of a phone call is not necessarily appropriate).

More broadly and linked to several issues already identified in this research, there is a need for open dialogue about terminology, concepts, and practices within and across organisations providing opportunities for young people, and with those who are funding them.

I think there's something about the funding context that we don't have a language to talk about. Young people don't even want to talk about 'young people's culture', because that sounds like something alien to them. How can we have more conversations about what this actually all means to young people? [organisation]

Comparing the findings with a Cultural Relations Model

British Council has done a significant amount of research exploring what its cultural relations model is in practice, and how it does or does not lead to soft power and other development outcomes. Drawing on a recent report*, the elements of cultural relations practice that are valuable for delivering development outcomes are as follows:

- *Co-creation of solutions (Mutuality)*

- *Community ownership*

- *Brokering of relevant partnerships (Local and international)*

- *Sharing and exchange*

- *Convening*

- *Embracing Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI)*

- *Embracing marginalised communities and groups*

- *Adhering to rigorous protocols (e.g. safeguarding)*

- *Being evidence-driven*

- *Being values-driven*

These elements are replicated in the practice described by the organisations contributing to this research, particularly co-creating solutions, brokering relevant partnerships, embracing EDI, embracing marginalised groups, adhering to rigorous protocols and being values driven.

Future research may wish to explore how the elements of effective practice reported in this research map on to the elements of cultural relations practice in different international settings. This could be a useful way of deepening understanding of how effective work with young people can lead to development outcomes outside of a UK context.

A Cultural Relations Approach to Development Why and how the British Council approach to development works (British Council, August 2024)
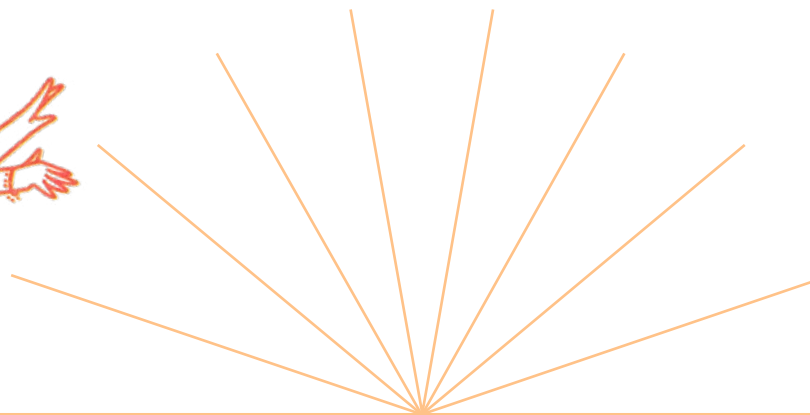
Top priorities for arts organisations

Summary

Sharing practice (UK and international) – Most organisations indicated that they would like more opportunities to share their practice with peers and funders. This was especially the case across the four nations of the UK, and in international contexts.

Making connections and exchange (UK and international) – As with practice sharing, respondents saw clear value in building networks with like-minded professionals across the UK and internationally.

Youth voice and representation – The practices described in the research relating to enabling youth voice, participation and representation were especially seen as having value to be shared nationally and internationally, where good practice can be shared and organisations can be informed by models that exist elsewhere.

Local and Global activism – Organisations indicated that they see themselves as having a clear facilitating role for supporting young people to be activists, advocating for issues that affect them locally and globally using creative outputs and methods.

Introduction

We asked respondents about what they considered to be priorities for supporting their practice moving forward, at both a UK and international level. These were largely in line with the themes discussed in relation to the perceived needs of young people and how their practice is responding to these needs.

Sharing practice (UK and international)

Respondents would like the opportunity to share their practice with more organisations across the UK, particularly beyond their home nations, where it was felt there was likely interesting work taking place that was 'off the radar'. Several indicated that they saw organisations such as the British Council and the national arts councils as ideal convenors of practice sharing opportunities.

All the organisations we spoke to indicated that they saw the value in making more international connections. This was especially the case for sharing their own practice and learning from others.

While local and national networks and partnerships were welcomed, several respondents reported how their practice had improved significantly due to previous experiences of international partnership working. This was especially the case for those working in socially engaged practice and 'deep' community work.

We were starting to do international work when the pandemic happened, and we've not quite managed to get back out there again. So it would be great to start doing that cross-pollination of ideas again with international partners. [organisation]

As our democratic, economic, social and environmental frameworks in the UK are crumbling, we can look to and learn from global approaches to how other countries and cultures develop models of practice that respond robustly and urgently - how can we be more urgent, subversive, thrive through change and pressure? How can we ready ourselves for our own futures? [organisation]

Read about the Nerve Centre's approach to practice-sharing across and beyond the UK here

Making connections and exchange (UK and international)

Beyond sharing practice, there was also a strong appetite for exchange opportunities for practitioners and for young people. It was felt this could enrich the practice and the experiences of all involved. Several respondents indicated that this felt more urgent than ever, given the ongoing impacts of Brexit on partnering with European organisations, and the global political 'moment' of the rise of right-wing politics and increasing nativism, which is also disproportionately driven by older over younger age groups.

Several organisations indicated that international collaboration they had engaged with (largely pre-pandemic) had broadened horizons and provided once in a lifetime opportunities for the young people they work with. Taking trips together can act as a great way of developing bonding social capital among the groups taking part, as well as bridging social capital between groups internationally.

International working makes the young people's world bigger – it can create hope, inspiration and joy [organisation]

In person exchanges though currently limited, could positively impact young people. Visits to international counterparts bring the projects to life. International collaboration could empower young people by exposing them to global perspectives. For many, engaging with peers from different countries is a transformative experience, especially for those who haven't travelled outside their local communities. [organisation]

It was highlighted that those with additional support needs and young people with complex needs should not be deterred from international exchange opportunities, but that the potential additional support this may require should also be considered in any initiatives or opportunities offered.

Read more about the value of international exchange to Hot Chocolate here

Youth voice and representation

As has been outlined throughout the research the issue of young people's rights and their right to influence the institutions and organisations around them is a strong theme. Many organisations we spoke to indicated that this needs to remain on the agenda at all levels. There is scope for further convening around these issues and bringing together organisations and young people on this topic in more regular and strategic ways.

The need to ensure that young people from a broad range of backgrounds are represented in these conversations and initiatives is crucial, whether domestically or internationally. The importance of representing diverse lived experience in enhancing arts and cultural opportunities for young people was highlighted by all the respondents contributing to this research.

We need to cut through the policy bullshit and make a stronger connection between the young people we're working with and the people in positions of power deciding what resources they'll have access to. That's a local and a global issue. [organisation]

International collaboration could resonate personally for young people from immigrant backgrounds as it connects them to their cultural roots and broadens their understanding of global dynamics. [organisation]

Read more about The Agency's approach to supporting young people in a nationally scalable way here

Local and Global activism

International working could enhance young people's motivation to use artistic and creative interventions as a form of activism. While in some cases this often has a local focus, there is scope to develop a global perspective that could influence the motivation and practice of young people through international connections.

The issues highlighted earlier in the report about young people experiencing isolation, alienation and in some cases, hopelessness, could perhaps be dealt with through sharing their experiences with others, building stronger networks locally, nationally and globally.

In sharing practices and approaches and learning we strengthen our own art forms and create global solutions to issues. We break down insecurities and barriers when we collaborate. A socially engaged arts practice is a global arts practice where we can co-create for a better future. [organisation]

Read about how the creative studio in Thamesmead is enabling a new way for young people to take a central role in local development here
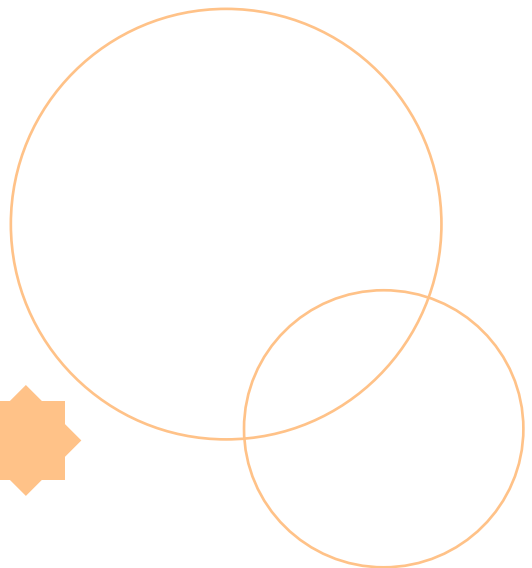
Overall trends and opportunities for arts and culture for young people in the UK

Summary

Centering young people in policy – The arts councils of the four nations each have different strategies and priorities for supporting young people's participation in arts and culture. These are responsive to broader policy trends and needs in each nation. Across all arts councils there was a clear aim to enable young people to be more central to how policies and practices are developed.

Issues facing young people and funder priorities – The strategic stakeholders reported many of the same issues as the organisations and young people we spoke to. Poor mental health, the lack of support for creative subjects in formal education, an increased risk of alienation and declining collaboration skills post-pandemic all featured strongly in the discussions.

Progression within and across fields – Funders largely support multiple forms and measures of progression, including and beyond formal accreditation. Most indicated that they see a clear overlap between how young people develop personal and social skills and how they develop creatively in arts projects. They saw a clear role for arts organisations to support the next creative workforce, as well as contributing to young people's quality of life in general.

International working – Funders did not draw on a huge range of examples of international work with young people, despite mention of a few specific projects. All indicated that they are interested in developing this in their work and would appreciate the opportunity to explore it further with each other and with the British Council.

Introduction

We conducted interviews with the main arts councils of the four nations of the UK (Arts Council England, Arts Council Northern Ireland, Arts Council of Wales, and Creative Scotland) to explore the issues outlined in the research questions for this study. Additionally, we interviewed representatives from Esmee Fairbairn Foundation and Paul Hamlyn Foundation recognising their significant investment in creative programmes for young people in the UK.

The following section outlines some of the recurring themes that were raised in these interviews, including a discussion of priorities at the level of individual nations. It ends with some suggested opportunities for the future, based on these reflections and the overall findings presented in the research.

Issues facing young people and funder priorities

Funders are responding to increasingly complex needs. Mental health and wellbeing and the ongoing impact of the pandemic, changes in demographics and integration of newly arrived communities, poverty and the impacts of austerity are still creating big issues for young people and communities.

There's a recognition that arts and creativity can be essential tools in exploring themes of identity, place, community and connection, which are all essential in the complex issues young people are facing today.

It was suggested that this could also create strain within the cultural sector as artists and practitioners are increasingly being expected to work with young people with complex needs, who in some cases are traumatised. This is potentially leading to greater burnout and precarity among the workforce in an already strained sector. This is on top of the pressures that many organisations are facing to survive in a hostile funding environment, several funders mentioned that survival is the top priority for too many organisations, and that in some circumstances this could have consequences for the quality of provision being offered.

Poor mental health, lack of confidence, and poor collaboration skills were also highlighted as core issues for young people, not least due to increased alienation during the pandemic and their ongoing digital existence. Funders highlighted the importance of safe public spaces for young people to gather and collaborate, but that these spaces are increasingly rare, and that young people's leisure practices have shifted online in a trend that is unlikely to reverse.

The role of creative practice as a means by which young people can engage with the issues that affect them was mentioned by all those we spoke to. The need to better understand complex conditions, articulate their needs and responses, and engage in supported and developmental creative expression was highlighted as a crucial way for arts organisations to support young people's needs, alongside the systemic changes needed to deal with poverty and its effects. Some mentioned that the youth period itself will always be challenging for people as their identities form, and that a diverse, supported arts and cultural sector should always be in place to help young people navigate this life stage.

Some funders highlighted the ongoing issues with arts subjects in schools and a general lack of political support for creative learning, as well as creative subjects themselves. It was suggested by two funders that the opportunities provided outside of school are better sites for the types of multi-modal and disruptive creative opportunities that young people want to take part in and often thrive in (crucially, placing artists at the centre of the work). Others felt there was an equal or more pressing need to support arts and culture within the school system given its (almost) universalism.

Progression within and across creative fields

Funders described how they think of progression as more nuanced than counting accreditations or tracking destinations. Several indicated that they understand the complexities of attributing progression trajectories to one single programme or organisation. Important distinctions were made between young people's creative development for the sake of it, and supporting those who wish to pursue a career in the creative industries.

One funder commented that the focus should be on 'creative development for life', rather than 'talent pipelines'. The role of language was raised more generally as often being problematic; that the progression journeys of young people are articulated falsely because of short-term funding and what organisations expect funders want to hear. Those organisations who are able to support young people over the long term find it easier to articulate the complex progression journeys that young people experience and their role within them.

Collaboration and co-creation are also linked to progression; organisations are sharing ideas on how to support and track young people's progression as well as being more personalised in how young people develop their own trajectories.

International working

Funders did not list many examples of international working and it was not generally stated as an area of focus for investment, although most agreed it clearly had value and were very interested in how collaboration with the British Council and others could add value to what is happening domestically, particularly enhancing practice through international exchange.

Funders indicated that they could see an interesting role for British Council to support and develop comparative frameworks for youth cultural provision that could enable young people themselves to connect and exchange experiences and ideas. This could help to develop practice across countries, connect into existing and developing frameworks (e.g., the recent UNESCO arts education framework[1]). Enabling young people and the organisations who support them to connect in this way will likely aid understanding of cultural specificity and difference, as well as shared experience in how creativity and culture is being used to support young people to articulate and deal with issues that affect them.

Several funders indicated that they would appreciate the opportunity to talk to each other about the issues discussed in these interviews, comparing strategies, ideas, and examples of their approaches.

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1   https://www.unesco.org/en/wccae2024-framework-consultation

Opportunities for the future

Convening and discussing

It has been raised several times in the research that there is a need for organisations and practitioners to be brought together with funders and policymakers to discuss their mutual needs and aspirations in supporting arts and culture for young people. These could range from more and less formal networks, to seminars, workshops and conferences. There is a recognition that the issues young people are facing have changed significantly in recent years, and a shared sense that there could be a more coordinated effort to exchange knowledge in this area and enable a stronger response.

Forums for sharing practice

Alongside more policy-focused discussions, there is a need for organisations and practitioners to be supported to come together and share their practice. This research presents a fraction of the innovative practice currently taking place across the UK, and there is a need for strategic bodies to provide further forums for people to share their practice in safe and supportive ways. It was clearly stated that this would be welcomed within and across the four UK nations, as well as with international stakeholders and peers.

Handing more power to young people

The themes of young people's rights, youth voice, engagement and participation are threaded through the research. There is a need to clarify language and terminology relating to this practice, as well as to bring young people more centrally into the conversation. The opportunities described above relating to convening and sharing practice should be extended to young people themselves with an associated 'handing over of power' to how they may want to set the agenda, and decide what actions and activities are provided in response.

Celebrating young people's creative lives and future-making

Beyond providing platforms for engagement, there is a huge amount of amazing work being produced by young people across the UK and more could be done to share this more widely. The activist and changemaker spirits of young people described throughout the research show that they have a passion to engage with complex global issues, not just in discourse, but via the broad range of creative activities and expressions they are being enabled to produce. There is arguably a duty to further showcase and celebrate this, recognising the vital role it can play in developing shared human understanding and global cultural relations.
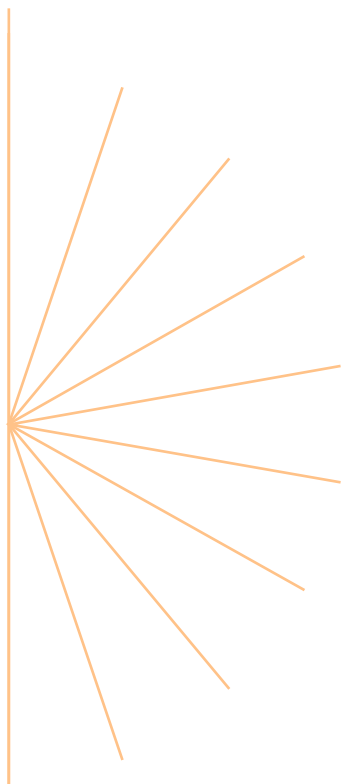
Appendix 1 – Methodology

We began the research by conducting a rapid literature review of recent policies, strategies, evaluations and research reports, largely from the past five years, relating to key programmes and initiatives across the four regions of the UK. The literature was 'crowdsourced' from the research team and British Council colleagues and was not intended to be systematic or exhaustive, but instead to provide an updated context to frame the primary research approach and questions. A total of 32 documents were reviewed and the summary of key findings and the literature included is provided in Appendix 2.

This was followed by interviews with each of the main publicly funded arts funding bodies in the four nations (Arts Council England, Arts Council Northern Ireland, Arts Council of Wales, Creative Scotland) along with Esmee Fairbairn Foundation and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, as significant independent foundations supporting arts and cultural provision for young people. The questions focused on the main issues that they identified for young people in accessing and developing within arts and cultural provision, issues facing practitioners and organisations supporting them, areas of strategic focus for young people, and examples or plans in relation to international working.

To identify case studies of effective practice we launched a survey asking arts organisations across the UK to nominate themselves as providing interesting and effective practice according to the categories of interest outlined in the research brief. We asked respondents to indicate why they thought their practice was effective, any information they could share on the nature of the practice, outcomes and impacts, and if the work was complete or ongoing. The survey also included a question relating to their thoughts on current issues in policy and practice for young people. The survey was promoted by British Council and tialt, as well as by the funders taking part in the strategic interviews. We received 66 responses to the survey.

From the survey responses and nominations by the funders we selected 10 organisations to approach to be featured as case studies. The selection criteria was based on achieving a diversity of geography, artform, participant demographics and practice approach. All those approached agreed to be featured as a case study, with the exception of one organisation in Wales who stopped responding to repeated attempts to arrange fieldwork.

In person case study visits were conducted for seven organisations between March and June 2024, where members of the research team spoke to project managers, practitioners and young people taking part in activities. A further two case studies were conducted online, one including an online workshop with participants, the other with the delivery team only.

Questions explored with the case study organisations included:

For organisations/partners:

1. What are the current issues you are dealing with in providing your practice for young people?

2. What do you see as the main innovations that have developed in your practice in the past few years?

3. What approaches do you take in supporting young people's participation (i.e., space, voice, audience, influence)?

4. What does successful partnership or collaboration look like in your context?

5. How could funders or other strategic bodies better support your work?

6. What do you most want to share with the sector about these issues?

7. How might international working or collaboration add value to your practice?

For young people:

1. Why do you want to take part in this?

2. What do you get most from taking part?

3. How much do you feel you can influence the activities you take part in?

4. What does 'art and culture' mean to you?

5. When do you feel most creative in the activities? What does being creative mean to you? How does this feel?

6. How important is it to you that you can improve your skills in the activities? What are your longer-term goals for what you are learning or doing?

Those responding to the survey but not selected as a case study were given the opportunity to take part in an online focus group in May 2024. This included a further eight organisations who were asked to consider the same questions explored in the individual visits.

All data collected was transcribed and thematically analysed by the research team, resulting in the core themes presented in the report. Brief summary case studies for each organisation featured were also produced and 'signed off' by the participating organisations.

Appendix 2 – Case Studies

These case studies have been produced as part of the Innovative practice and trends in arts and culture with young people across the UK research. Research for the case studies was conducted between April and July 2024.

Case studies could self-nominate via an online survey and were selected to represent a range of geographic regions across the UK and diverse practice across artforms with different demographics of young people. Research included interviews and focus groups, both in person and online with the project managers and practitioners, as well as with groups of young participants themselves.

They are not intended to present an exhaustive representation of current arts practice across the four nations of the UK, but instead to provide snapshots of innovative practice responding to the needs and conditions reported across the broader research project.

Each case study discusses key aspects of the practice, how it is responding to need, and links to further information for each organisation featured.

Nerve Centre
(Derry/Londonderry, Northern Ireland)

Beat Carnival
(Belfast, Northern Ireland)

WAC Ensemble, The Citizens Theatre
(Glasgow, Scotland)

Hot Chocolate Trust
(Dundee, Scotland)

Future Yard
(Birkenhead, England)

The Agency
(England and Northern Ireland)

The Warren Youth Project
(Hull, England)

Thamesmead creative studio
(London, England)

Taking Flight Theatre
(Cardiff, Wales)

Case sttudies location

Case Study: The Agency (England and Northern Ireland)

The Agency was originally developed by the Brazilian theatre maker, activist and journalist Marcus Faustini in the favelas of Rio De Janeiro. The programme was brought to the UK through a partnership between Battersea Arts Centre (BAC), Contact Theatre and People Palace Projects (PPP). Instead of asking what they can do to help young people through the arts, they thought about how they can pool their resources, knowledge and expertise to foster change based on the desires of young people.

The Agency supports young people to create youth-led social enterprises, events and projects that will have a positive and long-lasting impact on their local areas. It does this through facilitating young people to have the self-confidence, skills and a creative mindset needed to be protagonists in their lives and the world around them.

The following summary brings together key themes and takeaways from two separate conversations: one with The Agency team members, and the other The Agency Steering group of young people.

A creative entrepreneurship programme enabling young people aged 15 to 25 from some of the most underserved areas in the UK to generate social change projects based on the needs they identify in their own communities.

© 2024 The Agency National Gathering, OVO Gallery. Photo by Olalekan Victor Oderinde. Courtesy of The Agency

Creativity and Self Expression

Creativity is at the heart of The Agency's mission in the broadest sense. Their work emphasises the importance of freedom and authenticity in creative expression, encouraging young people to think outside the box and explore various artistic forms such as drawing, poetry, music and as well as business development ideas and more outside of the artistic field. This approach not only brings personal fulfilment, but also boosts the productivity and ambition of the young people they work with. Artistic expression in particular serves as a vital outlet for young people to convey their thoughts, emotions, and perspectives.

The Agency Steering group members reflect:

> *It gives us freedom to express and be unique.*
>
> *Focusing on self-development and growth*
>
> *It provides us with continuous learning and taking on creative projects.*

The Agency team members reflect:

> *The Agency uses creativity as the methodology, but it's not inviting young people to take part in an arts project. While we use a theatre-based methodology, it's not "come and be involved like this", instead we follow their desires and ideas. It's about what you're interested in doing. And then we wrap around the support for you to deliver that.*

Influence and Participation

The Agency's work places a strong emphasis on listening to young people and actively involving them in decision making processes, especially those young people from marginalised communities, who may struggle within the mainstream education system. Through structured groups (like its steering group) and community consultations, young people often influence the direction of projects and activities. This involvement develops a sense of ownership and ensures that the initiatives resonate with their interests and needs. By participating, young people shape their experiences, build confidence, and develop leadership skills. Providing additional resources, like a stipend to young people for their participation helps in retaining engagement, especially for those who might not initially connect with the artistic aspects of the programme.

Steering group members reflect that they take part in The Agency because:

> *I feel like I can input and have our voices heard.*
>
> *We have Influence through direct communication and experience.*
>
> *Participation in steering groups helps us be part of decision-making*

The Agency team members reflect:

> *Paying a stipend has always been a key thing. It's not a payment for time, but it's about removing some of those barriers. It's about that value, and we give value to your time, and to your participation. And this matters.*
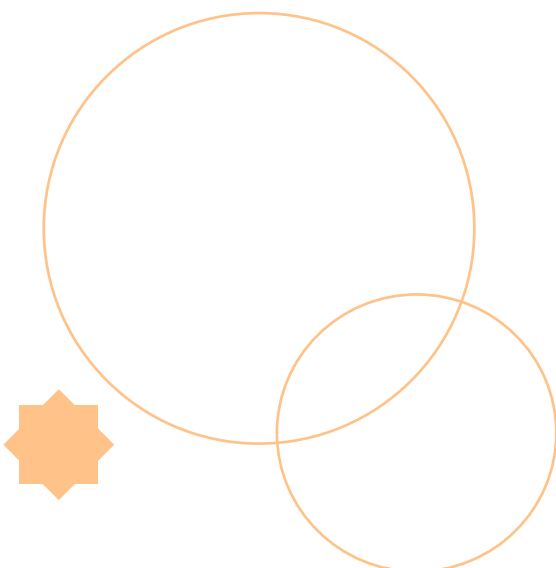
© 2024 Life Is What U Make It – a project by Osmond Gordon-Vernon, created at The Agency. Photo by Osmond Gordon-Vernon.

Community Connection, Network building and Support

Community connection is a pivotal aspect of The Agency's work. They facilitate network meetings and help young people identify and connect with local resources and contacts to support their projects. This approach not only strengthens interpersonal skills and networks but also helps young people overcome challenges and gain insights into various areas and goals. The sense of community and support that The Agency fosters is crucial for young people's development and wellbeing, and in person exchanges positively impact young people.

The Agency recognise international network building to be important to their work but recognise this has become more limited post-Brexit. International collaboration could empower young people by exposing them to global perspectives. For many, engaging with peers from different countries could potentially be a transformative experience, especially for those who haven't travelled outside their local communities or those from immigrant backgrounds.

Steering group members reflect that they take part in The Agency because:

It is important to be exposure to diverse people and experiences.

Understanding business processes and pitching ideas

Building a sense of community and overcoming challenges

Active and Playful Programmes for Confidence Building

The Agency has developed an innovative, playful programme that involve games and activities designed to build relationships and confidence among young people. These programmes are not only engaging but also create a supportive and dynamic environment for young people to develop their interests and creative ideas. By focusing on active participation and fun, The Agency helps young people develop essential social and emotional skills.

Community Engagement and Feedback

Engaging with the community is a cornerstone of The Agency's approach. They involve young people in community consultations and events, ensuring that their projects are aligned with societal needs as well as their own. This process builds confidence and strengthens the connection between young people and their communities. By gathering feedback and addressing local issues, The Agency ensures that their initiatives are relevant and impactful.

Need for Flexible and Sustainable Funding Models

The Agency recognise the need for more flexible funding to adapt to the changing needs of young people, especially in the post-COVID era. For the Agency, the need for sustainable funding models that combine external support with self-generated income streams is seen as an opportunity to ensure long-term viability and responsiveness to youth engagement needs. By securing flexible funding, The Agency can continue to innovate and address the evolving challenges faced by young people, as well as supporting their dreams and aspirations.

Additional information

https://wearetheagency.co/

© 2024 The Agency National Gathering, OVO Gallery. Photo by Olalekan Victor Oderinde. Courtesy of The Agency

Case Study: Beat Carnival (Belfast, Northern Ireland)

Beat Carnival has a 30-year history working within community arts in Northern Ireland, moving from East Belfast to their current home on the border of North and West Belfast in 2008. Beat Carnival works across different projects being visible in a number of ways, from hosting large- and small-scale carnival events, to working closely within the community through outreach, youth-led programmes and social action. Beat Carnival exists to provide safe, inclusive & creative spaces for people to explore, shape, & make their own futures through the medium of carnival, so that people have access to joy, skills, and hope for a positive future for themselves and their community.

Youth engagement work in the arts has been essential to Beat Carnival since their inception. Currently this is employed through four core youth-led projects:

Creative Youth
Multi-arts classes for children and young people aged 5-18. Working with freelance artists to create safe and supportive spaces for young people of all abilities to express themselves and explore their creative side through visual arts, music and performance whilst developing essential skills such as communication, problem-solving, wellbeing, ambition, leadership and teamwork. There are 3 classes a week: Tiny Beat for primary school ages, Junior Beat for secondary school ages and BEATnTECH, a specialised samba drumming group learning STEAM skills through percussion and music technology.

Youth Arts for Social Action
Multi-arts classes for youth aged 14-25. A safe, creative space that empowers young people to explore art as a vehicle for positive social change. The project provides young people with the opportunity to have their voices heard, exercise autonomy, grow in confidence and lead with their heart in a unique, young person driven environment.

Outreach programme
Engaging with 100s of additional young people across Northern Ireland annually through outreach classes in schools, youth and community groups that spread joy, foster creativity and encourage personal growth through arts activities.

Future Leaders
Professional and personal development for 16-25 year olds. Coaching and mentoring a small group of young leaders, developing skills for future leadership and supporting entrepreneurship in the wider community with project funding allocated for them to budget for, organise and lead their own creative project each year. Future Leaders is a recent initiative. Young people who finish the programme will be offered a chance to form a Beat Youth Advisory Committee where young leaders will help develop plans and contribute to Beat's overall purpose.

These four strands form a core part of their offer. However, it is not exhaustive, including an annual week-long summer programme, and enhanced support sessions for participants. Encouraging empowerment and agency is core to the approach used by staff and fostered through the relationships held with young people, parents and partners. They use carnival arts to provide a platform for cultural expression and youth-led action.

Creativity, Collaboration and Celebration through Carnival

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Providing space for young people's voices through arts

Crucial to the Beat Carnival offer is ensuring every young person's voice is listened to and valued. Beat's relationship with young people is about providing them with a supportive, safe space so they can have a deeper understanding of themselves, empowering them to create these spaces for others too.

Beat Carnival staff acknowledge that it is a difficult world to be a young person. Mental health, political division and wider global issues are all impacting the lives of young people. Staff say *"we want to tackle hard issues with our young people through creative experiences, in a way that feels accessible. We can help lighten the load by bringing a little bit of silliness and joy".* Beat Carnival's programme gives a platform for often unheard voices in communities. A young person said *"I value that when I talk about my interests, people care and listen to what I have to say"*

Co-Design

Working through a youth-led model, Beat Carnival employs several methods to ensure a strong co-design element is present throughout the organisation. *"We aim to create a space and opportunity for artists and facilitators, as well as participants, to be involved as much as they want, having choice in decision making, programme development and over what their contribution to Beat Carnival looks like. We want to make sure everyone in the process has a good experience – participants, partners, artists, staff, funders and audience."*

© 2024 Photo courtesy of Beat Carnival.

Showcasing

Beat Carnival ensures the work of young people is showcased and supported within the community and is championed to a wider audience. This is an important aspect to the youth arts for social action programme, ensuring that the work young people produce is able to reach the relevant communities and institutions where possible, to make and inspire real change. This is also supported by hosting events and exhibitions both at Beat Carnival Centre and in city centre spaces. Young people enjoy being able to share their work that reflects issues they feel strongly about. Showcasing has a wider benefit to the public, inspiring ambition, creative expression and cultural celebration.

Community and partnerships

Beat Carnival regularly seeks collaborations with like-minded, values-led organisations and attends networking groups. These interactions provide opportunities to share knowledge, gather diverse perspectives, and build a supportive community around their projects. They engage with both arts, youth and community organisations to explore shared visions, goals, and the value of arts and culture and the broader impact for young people and communities.

Previous international collaborations taught Beat the importance of learning and peer sharing. Being able to learn from other partners expands their own practice and therefore enhances the experiences of the young people. Beat have valuable connections across the world and are members of an international YouthHUB and Arts EducationHUB where they share learning, best practices and experiences with youth-arts organisations across Europe. Despite Brexit and inaccessible European funds, they hope to continue these connections into the future and provide their young people with opportunities to connect with other creative youth around the world.

Additional content

Beat Carnival Website: www.beatcarnival.com
Social Medias: /beatcarnival

Spaces of Transformation in Arts Education programme report: https://www.beatcarnival.com/spaces-of-transformation-in-arts-education/
What's the Story? booklet: https://www.beatcarnival.com/whats-the-story/

© 2024 Photo courtesy of Beat Carnival.

© 2024 Photo courtesy of Beat Carnival.

© 2024 Photo courtesy of Beat Carnival.

Case Study: Future Yard (Birkenhead, England)

Future Yard is a music venue in the heart of Birkenhead, Merseyside, an area of acute need and deprivation. Since opening in 2020 it has grown to be an essential part of the Liverpool City Region's grassroots music scene, regularly hosting gigs and events, as well as developing an onsite community campus working with young people from the local community to develop sector-specific skills.

Sound Check, their flagship youth training programme, provides a pathway for local young people who have a passion for live music, but no working experience, often due to personal and socio-economic barriers, to form successful careers in the music industry. By building referral partnerships with local youth hubs, housing associations, mental health charities and other local services, they ensure that the programme is accessed by those needing it the most.

Sound Check is a free-to-access live music industry training programme, which introduces young people to careers in the live music and events sector. Based in the venue, young people aged 16-25 with a passion for live music take part in workshops and practical sessions introducing them to event management and technical production. Paired with weekly shadow shifts at real-life gigs taking place at Future Yard, young people gain hands-on experience in sound engineering, lighting, box office, artist liaison, event management and more. The programme has several strands: a 12-week Monday-night course for independent learners; an 18-week daytime traineeship for those facing additional barriers to employment, which includes teaching of functional skills and provides intensive support for young people. There is also a new 16-week skills bootcamp, which is an extension for learners who have completed one of the other Sound Check programmes and has a keener eye on employability (alongside more advanced learning, the skills bootcamp course provides work experience in other venues across the city region, and guarantees an interview upon completion).

Place-and-future-making in a local music venue with a national and international worldview

© 2024 Photo courtesy of Future Yard.

Being embedded in the local area

Future Yard is proudly based in Birkenhead and works with a range of local partners to ensure that young people are aware of the opportunities, as well as contributing to the general redevelopment of the local area, building confidence on all sides. They partner with housing associations, as well as local education providers and other arts and cultural organisations to target young people who can benefit most. This is symbolised in the phrase 'The Future Is Birkenhead', which proudly adorns the front of the venue as well as merchandise, hashtags and the crew T-shirts worn by participants while on the course.

Local campaigning has meant they have had a local night bus route reinstated since the pandemic, meaning the venue and its opportunities is accessible. This is all part of a strategic effort to get over the 'just outside' issue they face in competition to the cultural and learning infrastructure over the river Mersey in Liverpool. For young people and local residents for whom the river is a symbolic (and material) barrier, it is important to have a confident cultural offer in the local area.

The young people we spoke to were exceptionally proud of their association with the venue and the fact it is happening in their local area, particularly when the regional and national narrative is that music venues are struggling to stay open.

Skills development in an authentic setting

At the end of the Sound Check programme, Future Yard report improvements in participants' social skills, resilience, confidence and wellbeing, with the majority migrating onto positive destinations - from college and apprenticeships to jobs with major cultural institutions including Liverpool Philharmonic and the Royal Opera House. The organisation is very proud that over 90% of Future Yard's in-house production team, including sound and lighting engineers and event managers, have come through Sound Check, providing local people opportunities to flourish in creative careers in Birkenhead and beyond.

Working with young people as whole individuals

Taking a holistic approach to young people's learning is core to the model of practice. Doing hands-on training means that young people can try things in applied settings, and be supported when everything doesn't go to plan, to learn and apply that learning in the future. Where a young person may experience confidence issues, or have a change of circumstances that might affect their learning, they are surrounded by experienced professionals who have come from a similar background, meaning that relationships are authentic and pacing and challenge is suited to individual circumstances.

Having training and development programmes, artist development programmes, and a live gig and events schedule means the offer can be completely integrated, creating an 'ecosystem' for progression and development. Alongside technical and personal skills, young people are building a community around the venue and several reported that they were developing confidence in networking and self-promotion.

I've been able to springboard to more freelance opportunities through people I've met here from doing shadowing here, and obviously it's a nice place to kind of have space to not be your best and therefore get better because you're getting into the lifestyle and not just some kind of educational programme. It's a lot of like, you've got to throw yourself in the deep end and you're probably gonna make a big mistake and we're in a proper show, but you can kind of fail a bit more here and get better before doing big opportunities. (young person)

Being a serious industry player

Through Sound Check, Future Yard are not only changing the local landscape, but that of the music industry. The young people we spoke to indicated that there was literally nothing else like this that could access locally and that they felt supported fully through their interactions with the organisation. Several young people indicated that they had started bands with people they had met through Sound Check, and others highlighted how they were now preparing for careers that they didn't know existed before taking part in the opportunity. By enabling young people to clarify professional identities they are becoming prepared for existing jobs in the sector as well as imagining jobs that may not yet exist.

For decades, the music industry has grown to become closed off, based on 'who you know', and often accessed through privilege. Sound Check opens the doors of a music venue and reimagines a venue as a training ground. We are an incubator of talent and feed the pipeline of the next generation of live music professionals. This directly responds to the shortage of freelance production staff, following the pandemic where people were forced to leave the music industry. (organisation)

After the enforced shutdown of Covid-19, the live and events industries lost a lot of experienced professionals from technical roles who were forced to re-skill. This created a dearth of talent when live music returned. While similar grassroots venues struggled to recruit to these roles, Future Yard had a clear advantage because of their ability to train their own staff via this model, and were able to act as a talent development pipeline for technically trained, enthusiastic and ambitious young professionals who could fill this skills shortage.

And this isn't restricted to Future Yard and the Merseyside area; Future Yard have just launched a version of the Sound Check course in Preston, in partnership with storied DIY venue The Ferret. And with further expansion to come in Greater Manchester and West Yorkshire, the benefits of this joined-up approach to skills development and place-making can start to be felt in other areas of the country that need it most. Future Yard are advancing their own innovative community music venue model deeper into an industry that can learn from its approach.

Additional content

https://futureyard.org/soundcheck/

© 2024 Photo courtesy of Future Yard. Photo by Robin Clewley.
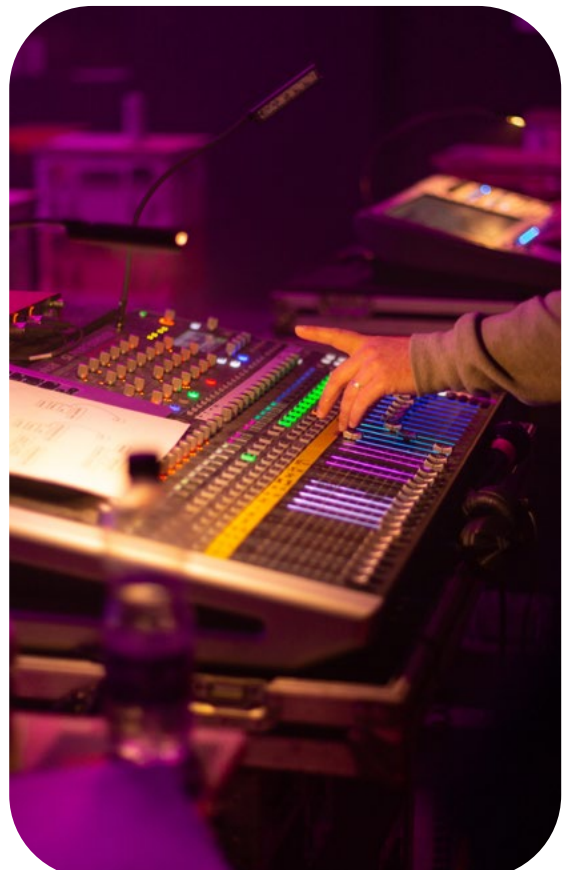
© 2024 Photo courtesy of Future Yard.

Case Study: Hot Chocolate Trust (Dundee, Scotland)

Hot Chocolate Trust in Dundee, Scotland, has been running for over 20 years. It began life as a way of breaking down barriers between a church in the centre of the city and the young people who would regularly congregate on the grassy banks outside it.

Since then, it has grown into an essential youth arts asset for the city. They run two drop-in sessions per week for young people (aged 12-21) to come into a safe environment in the centre of the city and be creative across artforms in ways they would like to. The artists and practitioners are also qualified youth workers and can support the young people from a diverse range of backgrounds to develop creatively, personally and socially. Alongside the drop-in sessions they run bespoke programmes and projects, enabling young people taking part in a lighter-touch way to engage with deeper learning opportunities.

Using 'radical hospitality' to create a safe space for young people to be accepted, create together, and build community.

> *We work on a principle of radical hospitality, it doesn't matter who you are, it's not about being in a clique. It's about meeting people that might be entirely different than you and sharing something together. But then, from that coming up with an idea of 'what can we do together?'* [organisation]

Young people empowered to make their own decisions

Youth-led practice is at the core of the Hot Chocolate approach. They recognise that young people are coming to them dealing with a broad range of issues and difficulties, and in many cases, from backgrounds where what they say or think is generally not listened to or respected.

Rather than relying on formal consultation models, HC's practice utilises Informal Education practices, embedded in everyday life: meeting the young person where they are, building reciprocal relationships where they have the power to choose how and what they engage in, and moving forward collaboratively.

"Some young people are looking to doodle and play, some to really stretch themselves creatively. Young people set the pace, and we get alongside them to resource and amplify" [organisation]

Central to the organisation's values is respecting and validating the young people's perspectives in ways that they may not experience at home or at school. Young people are appreciative of this, and it helps them to build confidence and develop stronger creative self-concepts as a result. This can often mean that the original 'seeds' of an idea can grow into something collaborative that exceeds everyone's expectations.

While there are opportunities to develop within and across artforms in quite structured ways, this is very much led by the young person, where they can seek further support to develop in the ways that they want to or move into something new or different. It is this respect-based approach to interacting with young people that keeps many of them coming back consistently and engaging with the organisation often over many years.

Working at the intersection of sectors

Hot Chocolate very much operates at the intersection of a number of sectors. While arts and creativity are part of their core offer, they also provide more traditional youth work, supporting young people with personal and social issues they are struggling with. This often includes young people struggling with mental health issues or experiencing complex needs.

Alongside this, the organisation is very well connected to the arts and cultural infrastructure of the city and works with many creative partners, most recently with Dundee Contemporary Arts, enabling some of the young people to use the print studio facilities and get a taste of life as a professional artist.

Within the organisation there are often roles that come up that also support young people to experience professional activities, such as writing content and designing the aesthetic of the annual report, creating events posters and making films or music. For the visual arts festival, Art Night, held in Dundee in 2023, the young people were supported to conceive and host an interactive installation showcasing young people's art and culture. The project explored the concept of young people as works of art, invoking themes of perception, objectification, and societal gaze.

© 2024 Photo courtesy of Hot Chocolate Trust.
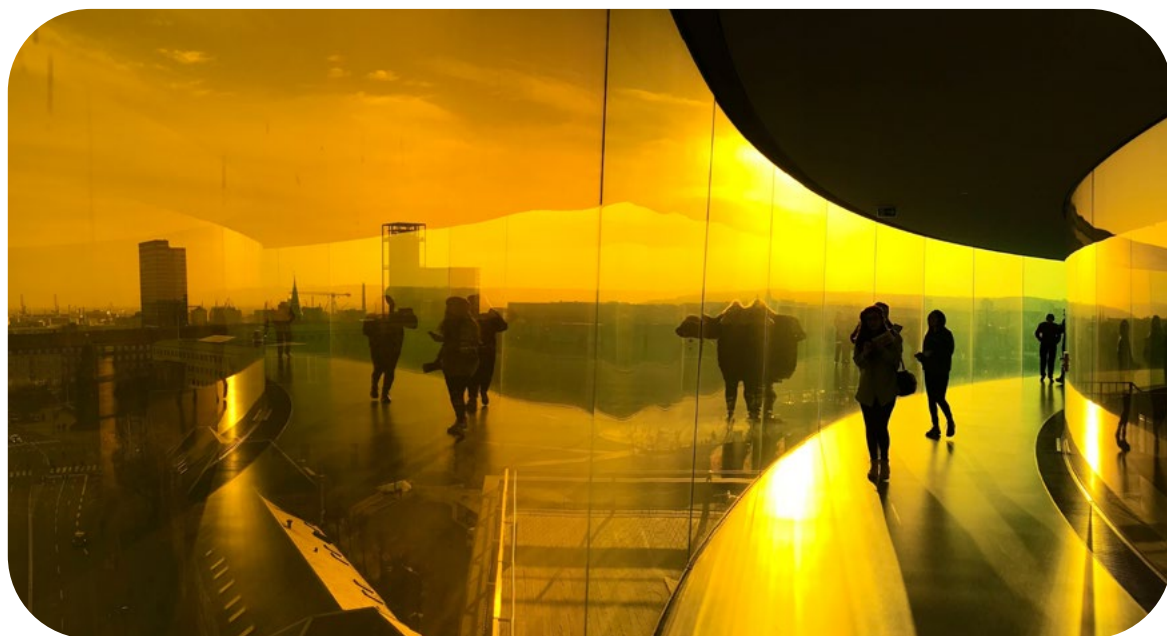
A need for young people to have supported third spaces

The concept of space itself is very important to Hot Chocolate's practice model. Occupying a large portion of The Steeple Church, the organisation has co-designed rooms and spaces across the site with the young people themselves. This includes a music room, an art room, chill spaces, and performance spaces.

The result is a mosaic of styles and uses that have been crafted over time to meet the needs and tastes of the cohorts of young people passing through. The organisation recognises this duty of handing over ownership of the look and use of spaces to the young people as crucial to making them feel it is their space; somewhere safe and comfortable for them to create, and to just 'be'.

> *In order for us to grow and develop, we need spaces to interact and learn social skills. While adults may use coffee shops or clubs, many spaces for young people are monetised or non-existent. Young people often turn to public spaces, but face restrictions, leading to a nomadic existence. So, what if we create a space without predefined rules, where what happens is collectively decided? [organisation]*

Committed to the value of international working

While international working is not a regular feature of Hot Chocolate Trust's offer, it is something they have engaged in previously and have very much valued. In 2017, as Dundee prepared a bid to be European Capital Of Culture 2023, Hot Chocolate took a group of young people on a creative journey to Edinburgh, Liverpool (former UK title holder) and Aarhus in Denmark (the title holder at the time), to explore and interrogate the idea of culture. They returned and made works inspired by their trips and curated the public exhibition "Invisible Kingdoms" in Dundee Contemporary Arts.

They took four young people to Zambia as part of a Creative Scotland and British Council partnership project during Scotland's Year of Young People in 2018. Connecting with other socially engaged organisations from Scotland and Zambia the young people took part in a skills exchange including artforms such as mural art, street theatre and circus. The opportunity apparently "blew their minds", largely due to the cultural contrasts and experiences, but also via the deep connections they made with each other and with their international peers.

Hot Chocolate Trust understand that these types of opportunities are resource intensive and therefore occasional, particularly to ensure that any young people with additional support needs can take part safely and comfortably. They remain committed to taking an international outlook in their work and would welcome any opportunities to share and discuss practice with their peers, whether in Scotland or further afield, remotely or in person if there is scope for that.

Additional content

More information about the work of Hot Chocolate Trust and contact information can be found at www.hotchocolate.org.uk

Case Study: Nerve Centre (Derry/Londonderry, Northern Ireland)

The **Nerve Centre** works across music, film, culture, and creative learning to empower and nurture the next generation of Northern Ireland's creatives. Nerve Centre, Derry, emerged in response to the burgeoning live music scene in Northern Ireland and boasts a live music venue and cinema, with both being used to support and champion arts and young people.

As a creative media and arts organisation, they support groups of young people to embed creative technology into projects with a strong focus on providing young people *"with the space and skills to speak about issues close to them".*

As part of the creative learning strand they work closely with educators to provide training in creative technology to *"equip the next generation with digital skills and facilitate lifelong learning."* As part of their work the Nerve Centre has a strong focus on the needs of young people and sees the value of creative technology as a means to amplify their voices. From this the Nerve Centre has become a core element of Northern Ireland's cultural offer , empowering young people across a range of programmes.; Examples include the film industry with the Northern Ireland Screen Academy, and heritage spaces with Re-imagine, Re-make, Re-play (RRR).

Re-Imagine, Re-Make, Re-Play (RRR) Youth Approach
Re-imagine, Re-make, Re-play was a project which enabled young people to engage and shape their relationship with heritage spaces, using digital and creative technology. Spanning over four years, a youth-led approach was developed using co-design to shape the project directly to the young people's needs. This approach taken during RRR helped to further develop the Nerve Centre model of practice used across other projects.

The following summary brings together key themes and takeaways from in-depth conversation with Nerve Centre staff and wider evaluation of the RRR programme.

A hub for music, film and culture - empowering young people through creative technology

Trust in the young person's voice

The organisation highlights the importance of not just including the young person but actively listening and trusting them. They promote this approach not just for the organisation, but also for its funders and wider partners, stating, *"trust in their [young people] voices, as they are the ones benefiting from the projects and funding".* The wider approach used by Nerve Centre and within RRR focuses strongly on co-design providing the young people with a platform and offering paid co-design and participatory sessions; providing young people with a say in the running of projects, the experts brought in, and the issues and topics being explored.

This goes further with their Youth Ambassadors programme. Providing young people who have engaged with the projects paid roles to sit in on board meetings and co-design sessions to ensure the youth voice is present in the planning and running of projects. Going further they have a say in some wider parts of the business from project running to hiring and funding.

Nerve Centre stress it is important to trust the young person's voice and engage with them in a way that is approachable and beneficial for both sides. Being adaptable and flexible is essential to ensure that young people are represented within the organisation on terms that suit them.

They are paying you a fair freelance rate for it, as well. So it shows that they really actually value your time and your skills, which is quite nice coming from university. (Participant)

Self-expression through Creativity

The use of creative technology is essential to many of Nerve Centre's projects. They see the strengths in championing creative technology as a means for both self-expression and advocacy. By providing education around creative media and technology young people are given the tools to share their story in an engaging manner for both young people and audiences:

"tech unlocks and provides opportunity for young people to tell their story with creative freedom in ways suitable to them" (Organisation)

Within projects young people are supported to develop skills in technology and to explore issues close to them. Through the Friday's Future project they explored peace-making through podcasting, animation and film making. RRR invited young people to creatively bring these issues into a heritage space, exploring LGBTQ+ issues, climate action, peace-making and possible futures. Using creative technology from film to VR to capture and reimagine their stories so they could be shared and showcased to audiences.

© 2024 Photo courtesy of Nerve Centre. Zine Workshop with Grace Fairley.

Nurturing Creativity

One of the core aims of the Nerve Centre is to nurture and empower the next generation through the four main strands; music, culture, film, and creative learning. Providing training and programming on different aspects of music and film using the unique benefits of the space.

The creative learning strand targets a number of issues facing young people in engaging with digital technology in order to nurture and train young people in creative media skills. Through their outreach programme they approach issues around digital poverty, perceptions of 'the arts and institutions, and access to technology within marginalised groups. The outreach projects engage them with groups outside of the centre in an accessible manner to democratise creative arts activities. Through partnerships with schools, providing resources and training to teachers they can reach young people to provide them with digital media skills that will serve a life-long purpose.

The focus on outreach was partly influenced by the pandemic seeing the benefits of bringing tech to young people in a way that was accessible to them. Working with schools they are able to bring new emerging creative technologies, digital training and skills directly. Working closely to embed creative tech education into schools to ensure a stronger impact. Building on music and film they explore wider emerging technologies like VR, making and prototyping tools as a way to peak interest and inspire young people's creativity while aiding in future proofing their learning. On top of this they maintain a focus on using more accessible technology to provide young people with the opportunity to share their stories.

Partnerships and Collaboration

The core model of the Nerve Centre revolves around partnerships and collaboration. Within this the organisation has a role in working closely with young people and championing their voice within partnerships. The Nerve Centre's role changes on each project but they often find themselves bringing a youth-led approach to other partners, emphasising across partnerships that a *"youth-led approach needs to be adaptable and flexible"*.

The Nerve Centre also finds an advantage within partnerships is their manageable size and structure, this allows them to be responsive and pragmatic in their approach and able to meet the needs of the young people more dynamically than that of a larger organisation. This has been essential throughout partnerships as it allows them to move fast and work closely to meet the needs of young people and partners involved in a project.

The Nerve Centre has engaged in a number of international collaborations, providing strong learning to the organisation, particularly around working with barriers in a different context and culture. This has been essential to the development of new projects internally. International collaboration has also allowed them to take their practice to other places around the world, especially around the issues of peace-making and conflict. Seeing mutual benefit from these partnerships, Nerve Centre highlights the strengths in shared learning, locally, nationally, and internationally.

Further Information

https://nervecentre.org/

Case Study: Taking Flight Theatre (Cardiff, Wales)

Taking Flight Theatre (TFT) is an innovative, socially driven theatre production company, who specialise working with young Deaf and hard of hearing communities to transform career pathways and creative networks through developing creative theatre productions.

As part of creative and social goals, TFT nurtures young creative talent, (front and backstage) to create an empowering ecosystem for youth creative skills to grow and evolve, creating participatory theatre experiences for a wide range of audiences. As part of their work, TFT challenges perceptions of what may get labelled 'accessible' theatre. Currently the regional and national youth creative ecosystem is inadequate to elevate Deaf and hard of hearing communities' creative talent and contribution to theatre, and TFT change perceptions and possibilities with each production.

TFT's mission states its aim to 'alter the arts landscape in Wales and beyond by challenging others to think more inclusively' with 'equal representation of Deaf, disabled and neurodivergent people in theatre'. The organisation has over 10 years' experience, with its roots in Wales. Established in 2008 by co-founders Elise Davison and Beth House, the organisation has since grown to include three employees, a board of trustees and network of creative collaborators and early career creatives.

TFT have ambitions to have their own physical space so *'there's a feeling of creativity where people can run around and play out their ideas…... that can open doors'*, but currently operate in close partnership with Chapter Arts Centre in Cardiff which supports their touring productions and community based work in Cardiff.

An innovative, participatory theatre company facilitating social transformation with young people through creative productions

© Photo courtesy of Taking Flight Theatre

Centring creative engagement throughout the production process to nurture creative talent

For TFT, creative engagement is considered throughout the production process and development of theatre productions, and they facilitate a people centred process where the rehearsal space becomes a core element of their creative process. In this space, everyone is empowered to have a voice, and the time provides an organic creative process led by the dynamics of the space and team; *'it feels like everyone is learning something'.* The creative process is a vital element of how TFT approach creative engagement, which provides psychological safety for the production to emerge as *'it's quite organic in that everybody's opinion is really valid'.*

TFT's practice is rooted in nurturing conditions that supports the creative process, which is the foundation to core elements of their work:

1. **Fostering creative talent:** participation in theatre with deaf communities and creating career pathways

2. **Developing empowered theatre communities:** shared identity through a sense of belonging and creative possibilities

3. **Creative productions:** developing touring productions

4. **Creative engagement:** activities in education

Fostering creative talent

TFT address barriers for young Deaf communities in theatre by *'paving the way for the next generation of creators and making sure people are aware of opportunities'* providing production opportunities, training and mentoring. As part of their work they provide an early careers creative scheme and workplace pathways and support development of young people to create social change as 'changemakers'. Crucially, working with Deaf communities is the strength of the theatre productions developed, and not an afterthought when considering accessibility, *'although those access privileges are doing an amazing job, it kind of doesn't always feel like it's been thought about right from the start and all the way through, and therefore [doesn't] feel like it's been given the same amount of creative thought as the production'* .

Developing empowered theatre communities

TFT enables a young community to thrive through providing a platform for social and creative connections to form and develop. A community supports individuals to feel visible in theatre production with the support of TFT's work and they have examples of some young participants rarely missing a session since they joined. Those involved are able to connect and identify with other people like them, who are also Deaf, which they may not have had the experience of in other aspects of their life and day to day environments. Through the vehicle of theatre, TFT is able to support young people being part of something that is *'...about community or culture and identity. And so as young people, they need to see that they need to embody that. That needs to become them. They need that exposure'.* Individually this has a long-term impact, as for some, *'for the first time, I was 'able to see myself, you know, human, I was warranted'.*

Chapter Arts Centre

Creative productions

Rooted in an inclusive creative environment and process. TFT incorporates innovative practice such as using tactile materials to support young peoples' involvement and virtual reality in development of productions such as sensory maps and climatisation tools which supports a participatory experience as a theatre team and for the audience. The end productions involve audience participation such as interactive family adventures, and translation of productions which includes the ability to work in three languages (Welsh, English and British Sign Language - BSL). Creative captioning is centred as part of the creative process and therefore integral to how the production is developed. TFT also provides staff awareness training with other cultural professionals across the creative industries.

The challenges of supporting the development of deaf and hard of hearing theatre cultures

The processes for funding applications are challenging, particularly as there are rarely BSL options. In addition, project led funding and requirements are challenging to manage as a small team with limited capacity to manage application and reporting requirements, balanced with the stresses of maintaining stability for running over the long term and facilitating relational youth-based engagement. It would be beneficial to co-develop application methods that do not rely on phone support with BSL options, with a social model of application development so that applications could be made more collaborative. As a creatively led company, time has to be allocated *trying to pitch ourselves into a business model. That isn't what we ever did it.* A more social model would also allow for funding applications that support youth creative talent more broadly, rather than 'marginalised theatre' categories of support.

TFT would like to continue to provide further creative pathways for young people (in Wales and potentially wider) and view cultural exchange with international communities as an exciting opportunity to broaden awareness with the international sign language community to tell global stories of oppression of Deaf communities.

Additional content

Interactive family theatre experiences: https://www.takingflighttheatre.org.uk/youve-got-dragons-2024/, https://www.takingflighttheatre.org.uk/the-conjurer-of-cwrtycadno-2023/

© Photo courtesy of Taking Flight Theatre

Case Study: Thamesmead creative studio (London, England)

A team of industry professionals, newly formed under the steer of Studio Danmole and Company Place launched a new creative studio by and for Thamesmead, an area in south east London that is currently experiencing regeneration at scale.

This new creative studio for Thamesmead was co-founded with five young residents who have been through a paid set of learning modules introducing them to all elements of commissioning and curating public artwork. With the professionals' support, they have been responsible for commissioning a new piece of public artwork for the area - which will be unveiled later in 2024. The ambition for the studio is that it then takes on future projects and becomes a positive, generative energy for the area - rooted locally with the skills and the connections to spin work out of Thamesmead, as well as drawing new work into the area.

Empowering young people to take the lead on commissioning relevant and challenging public art in their locality

© Photo courtesy of Thamesmead creative studio

Supporting young people's agency in relationship with developers

The professionals behind the project freely admitted that they felt culturally unqualified to make decisions about a public art commission in the area and immediately felt that engaging a group of local young people to be trained to do so was a socially positive and culturally relevant solution to the landlord's needs. This meant that agency and control was shared with ambitious young people at a local level who wanted to play an active role in what happens and how it happens in their area.

The project has enabled more rapport between Peabody - the client and large local landlord, and the community, which is a key impact of this model of working. The model has also brought a wide range of local stakeholders together to feed into the work - including a group of intergenerational workshop attendees who also now feel they have a stake in the work, inspiring a sense of local pride. The newly formed studio is now in talks with Peabody about a second phase of the work, meaning there will likely be an evolved opportunity for the studio and the co-founding young people.

## Supporting well-paced and relevant creative and practical skills for young people

The five studio members from Thamesmead have developed a range of practical professional skills in project management and curation. The different roles required were explored throughout the process, including research, consultation, virtual studio visits, writing a brief and longlisting artists. This was seen as especially necessary given the relative geographical isolation of Thamesmead from central London and the associated creative and cultural work experience opportunities.

The project has taken longer than initially planned and this has meant keeping momentum up with the young people, each of whom have other responsibilities and demands. However, this has also meant that they have been given a realistic sense of how projects like these develop over time, and the aspects they can and cannot control in the process. Despite the delays, four of the original five co-founding young people remain actively engaged and committed to the work of the studio, which sets the studio up well for new projects moving forward - meaning the ambition for a longer-term impact for this project feels realistic.

Bringing young people into the realism of multi-stakeholder working

The professionals recognised that the work of bringing multiple stakeholders together (i.e., landlord/developer, community representatives, artists, design studios) can be messy, challenging, and compromising at times, but recognised that it is important to bring young people into that process for exactly those reasons. It offers a useful snapshot of what it's like doing this work in the real world and consider that the sooner ambitious young creative thinkers are exposed to this way of working, the wiser they'll become about potential careers and future directions.

Even though co-production, youth engagement and youth empowerment projects have been happening for decades, this work still feels emergent, and that's because it's never fully clear how teams will gel and how a project will evolve, regardless of the depth and consideration of a recruitment process. Bringing young people directly together with large clients who have significant culture budgets is certainly less common and can be a lot more impactful for everyone. But also alongside that comes some less straightforward elements too. Expectations need to be managed, different working styles need to be considered, and ambitions need to be regularly considered and re-considered. A key learning from the project is that this is how all work should be! A greater sense of consideration, flexibility and care baked into our ways of working across the cultural sector is surely the way forward."
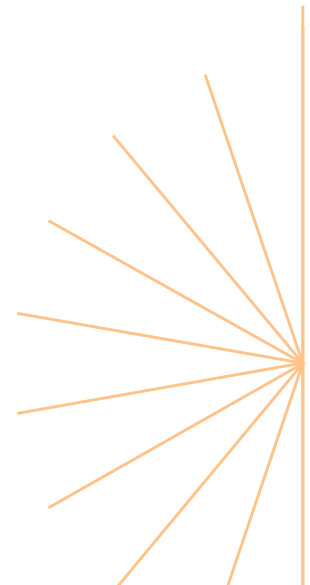
Testing new models of practice that could be replicable elsewhere

The project has provided proof of concept that empowering and enabling enthusiastic young creatives in a real-world commissioning exercise can have fruitful outcomes and impacts. This provides a space where Peabody and other big landlords and developers can understand what is possible with appropriate investment of time and resources. Replicating this approach within and beyond Thamesmead shows how young people can grow their skills, capacities and confidence and stake a stronger claim in their local cultural landscapes and built environment.

There are lots of consultants and public engagement things happening. How do we say, "Can we do this as part of what you're doing?" so we can access some of that money and also leave enough for an artist? We need to ensure we're paying young people properly so they can see the value of their contributions. Alongside that, we need real scrutiny of what we've done. Phase one might be a pilot approach, while phase two is a neatly boxed opportunity for residents to work intensively for two months. This could be appealing from a developer's point of view. We need to get the right phase of architectural development to make this impactful without being too complicated.

There are lots of examples of consultations and public engagement moments happening across the boundaries of development and regeneration at the moment, and with the Labour government's apparent commitment to new housing, this will only increase. All of these engagements, bar none, will look to exchange with and benefit from culture at a local level. When this happens retrospectively, it often doesn't work and feels extractive, disrespectful, or just lacks understanding. What we've done is say "Can we do this as part of what you're doing?" so we've accessed some of that money for learning and development, to support a more proactive approach for embedding local people in the process, and have left enough for an artist to work too.

We need to ensure we're paying young people properly so they can see the value of their contributions. Alongside that, we need real scrutiny of what we've done to ensure it gets better moving forward and that and isn't considered a shiny, static piece of engagement work. Phase one might be a pilot approach, while phase two could be a neatly boxed opportunity for residents to work intensively for two months. The possibilities feel broad and rich. We want to make sure as many people hyper-locally feel the benefits because they're shaping and steering things themselves.

© Photo courtesy of Thamesmead creative studio

Case Study: WAC Ensemble, The Citizens Theatre (Glasgow, Scotland)

The Citizens Theatre is a socially engaged theatre in Glasgow. For the past few decades 'the Citz' has had a strong youth arts practice, particularly the Young Company, supporting young artist development. Through this a breadth of knowledge and skills has been built up in working and engaging with young people in the theatre. The Young Company aims to support young people by upskilling them to be professional artists. This is carried out predominantly by professional support for the young people and recently via paid internships. The Young Company is an example of the organisation's long established youth work and programming. This helped to provide a platform for the WAC (We Are Citizens) Ensemble, Scotland's first care experienced theatre ensemble for young adults.

The WAC Ensemble is a supportive space for 18- to 26-year-olds to learn about different aspects of theatre making. Running over five years the ensemble programme recently celebrated the end of its WAC Pro iteration. Building on five years of skills development, WAC Pro provided the care-experienced participants with training and development opportunities to establish themselves in the sector. WAC Pro was a partner project between The Citizens, GMAC and Arts in the City, and was funded by National Lottery through Creative Scotland.

Throughout the WAC Ensemble projects some young people remained over the five years, others came in and out, but over that time a youth-led approach was taken that allows young people to have a supported space while learning professional skills within the theatre industry. The ensemble provides more than just skills, being Scotland's first care experienced theatre ensemble, it provides a space, community and broader personal and social support.

Scotland's first care experienced theatre ensemble for young adults

© Photo courtesy of WAC Ensemble

Care Experienced

Care experienced is anyone who has been in care, a carer or experience around care. From this, disparities for people with care experience are often created, not being able to access resources or the arts in general, due to financial challenges, childcare and living costs, mental health and trauma issues. The WAC Ensemble provides theatre education to this group in an accessible and supportive manner.

Providing Space

> It felt like a really welcoming, safe space... I remember it being said in one of the first sessions that you know, everybody has care experience in the room. And there's absolutely no need to speak about it. But you can if you want to, I think having a group like that where everybody has a different version of care experience is good for me
>
> (Young Ensemble Member)

WAC ensemble members also highlight the importance of creating a welcoming and low-pressure space 'to just be'.

Working with young people with a range of care experiences, it is important to provide them with a space to feel welcome and let them carry out conversations on their own terms. With one ensemble member admitting that even entering the space at first was scary but as they began to take part in the sessions they felt welcome and able to use the space as a means of support through collective working with others, building friendships and engaging with the activities.

Building Community

The WAC Ensemble is a place for each of the members to build a community with each other. Using theatre making as a catalyst for the conversations and relationships to develop.

> And just to know that there's, you know, nine other people that I'm close to in ensemble, that if I was going through a rough day that I could turn to one of them. And they'd be totally up for chatting about it and talking things through. And so yeah, it's been wonderful in the sense of like, I've now got, if it wasn't for that group, I wouldn't have met those people. And it's now nine other people that I've got that we can all turn to one another if we need to (Young Ensemble member)

The ensemble provides a powerful space for a community to develop providing real support for care experienced young people. This is carried out through a mix of in person sessions. Allowing the young people to 'hang out' build and develop their relationships together, while also learning and engaging in putting on theatre performances.

Youth-Led approach

The ensemble project adopted a co-design approach allowing the young people to participate and have agency over the programming, building upon the many years of this work behind the Citz itself. Providing young people with the opportunity to learn skills that they feel benefit them, allowing them to decide on the direction of the work, collaborators, and aims for the project.

The co-design aspect is more informal, being a natural part of the process. Using lab sessions throughout to create dialogue around the project. These lab sessions are held every few months bringing together the entire group, including partners, artists, and young people involved in the projects. These sessions provide an opportunity for the group to come together, share information, and have informal time to "hang out" and spend time with each other being seen as a valued way to maintain connections and a sense of community within the group, especially when the young people are often working individually with different artists. The sessions allow for open dialogue, the sharing of challenges and successes, and collective problem-solving, rather than just focusing on the immediate project tasks, and allow the Citz team to foster collaboration, build trust, and ensure the young people feel supported and engaged beyond just the creative work.

Long term skills and creative expression

A key part of the WAC Ensemble is providing skills and support with professionals that have long-term impacts while providing a strong grounding for the young people.

This is achieved through both professional partnerships and listening to the young people's needs, allowing them to guide what they learn. Helping to ensure that the skills and support provided is relevant and engaging for the young people, ensuring longevity in learning. One young person that reflected that the ensemble provided performance and collaboration skills that they could not have learned elsewhere. Gaining practical skills in acting, directing, movement, and other theatrical techniques while developing confidence, self-expression, and a stronger sense of self through the ensemble.

The work of the WAC ensemble is promoted and showcased by The Citz, enabling the creative expression of the young people to reach a broad audience. The ability to showcase their creative outputs and express themselves also helps with their confidence and building relationships with each other and with an audience. The ability to creatively express themselves is essential to the WAC Ensemble functioning, providing the young people with the skills, tools, space, and agency to be themselves and enjoy theatre while working towards a larger goal.

Additional content

The WAC Ensemble was first established by CELCIS and the Citizens Theatre, through an initiative funded by the Life Changes Trust.

For further details into the projects and performances created with the WAC Ensemble, visit the Citizens' website: The Story of WAC: https://citz.co.uk/the-story-of-wac/

© 2024 Photo courtesy of WAC Ensemble

© 2024 Photo courtesy of WAC Ensemble

Case Study: The Warren Youth Project (Hull, England)

Established in 1983 **The Warren Youth Project** in Hull works closely with young people aged 14 to 25 across the city. Describing themselves as a youth support service, at the heart of what they do is a youth-led decision-making model that impacts the day-to-day and strategic running of the Warren. Recently being granted NPO (National Portfolio Organisation) status, The Warren is a youth-led arts organisation, and the practice is embedded in every aspect of their strategy.

Throughout their work they are happy to challenge traditional structures within youth organisations and provide young people with a strong voice and a say in what provision is made available to them. The Warren has projects based on social justice, creative and digital arts, music writing and more. They aim to provide young people with opportunities to explore different forms of creative expression while developing new skills.

Exploring youth organisations and youth-arts, The Warren has a strong support strand providing counselling and mental health support for young people. At the heart of their mission is an open-door policy meaning that The Warren is free for all young people. This extends from their support strand to their wider arts programmes and activities, offering rehearsal and recording spaces and a record label for free.

The Warren is currently completing a £1.9 million move and renovation to a new space which has been designed in consultation with the young people they are working with.

Youth-Led work in the Arts, Providing young people with creative voice, space and a caring community.

Youth Empowerment Model

Being a youth-arts support service, The Warren encourages and supports young people to *"take as much control over their lives and futures as circumstances allow".* Key to this is engaging young people in the decision-making process of The Warren.

The "Thing" is the Warren's youth parliament, where young people come together every two weeks to make decisions about the organisation's projects, policies, and use of the space. This is a key part of The Warren's youth-led approach, as it gives young people a direct voice and ownership over what happens at the organisation. During the "Thing" meetings, staff will present ideas or issues to the young people, who then discuss and debate them. The young people have the power to make decisions, whether that's about small, everyday matters or larger, strategic and policy choices. This ensures the Warren is truly responsive to the needs and priorities of the young people it serves.

In the general running of the organisation the young people have a strong influence on external policy with the "Thing" nominating young people to sit on the boards. Young people also assist the hiring process and explore how funding is spent. This allows young people to have a say on the general running of The Warren. It is important when working with young people in this way to understand where to use their voice and where to take some control and provide young people with the scaffolding in which *"they can build a place for themselves".*

Coming out of the NPO award another key decision-making opportunity is the Creative Committee, a specific group of young people who are focused on making decisions about the organisation's creative projects and programming. Meeting monthly, they have a budget of £7,000 per year that they can allocate towards different creative initiatives. Previously using the funding for putting on live music events to showcase young performers, providing individual young people with funding for things like singing or guitar lessons and supporting new creative projects like a projection mapping initiative. Within the Arts programming projects the young people have a say in the types of projects they carry out, who is involved, while using these projects to speak about issues close to them.

I feel that the staff members really take on board the young people's ideas and therefore our influence can steer these sessions because they actually listen to what we want to do and how we want to do it. (Young Person)

Trauma Informed Care in Youth Work and Arts

Currently the main issues facing young people are housing and access to good quality, affordable housing; mental health challenges and struggles accessing adequate mental health support; feeling disconnected from or failed by the education system; difficulties finding employment and work opportunities; lack of access and feelings of not belonging in arts, cultural, and community spaces.

With these challenges disproportionately impacting young people from low socioeconomic backgrounds and underserved communities; only worsening through the pandemic and cost of living crisis. Addressing these issues is a key focus of The Warren's work.

For this a trauma informed approach is taken throughout The Warren's practice. For this they prioritise understanding the experiences and needs of each individual young person, rather than taking a one-size-fits-all approach. A key part of their offering is providing person-centred counselling services that allow young people to access free support for as long as they need it. The counselling service is run parallel to their other work complementing much of the creative work going on.

Other aspects of their trauma-informed approach include empowering young people to make decisions about the organisation's policies and activities, rather than imposing adult-driven rules. Actively listening to young people and responding to their expressed needs and priorities, and providing a supportive environment that allows young people to make mistakes and learn from them, rather than judging or punishing them

Exploring how this sits alongside arts programming is important, as embedding this approach within arts creates a space for young people to engage creatively while being supported through other barriers they face in their life in a non-judgmental and supportive place. Shown through their "Flipside" project aims to divert young people away from the criminal justice system through mentoring, support and providing alternative arts activities.

© 2024 Photo courtesy of The Warren Youth Project

Creative Voice and Social Justice

Some of the creative opportunities at The Warren include music projects like a record label, recording studio, and opportunities to perform live shows, creative writing, projection mapping, game design and other digital/technology-focused creative projects. With these creative opportunities being chosen through their youth-led approach.

This has led The Warren to take a proactive approach to addressing social justice issues that impact the young people directly. The "Black Holes" campaign to get education boards to include representatives who can advocate for alternative approaches to education that better support young people, especially those with special educational needs. Advocacy work with local authorities to improve safety and accessibility of public infrastructure (in one example, bridges, in response to concerns raised by young people about suicide prevention).

Community Outreach and Wider Support

The Warren Outreach programme sees teams of youth workers go directly into surrounding neighbourhoods and communities to support young people who may not be able to easily access the main facility. This helps reach young people who have never left their local estate or cannot come to the main building. This direct, community-based approach helps the organisation better understand and respond to the unique needs of young people in different areas of the city.

The community built around The Warren isn't just physical, it includes organisations exploring issues facing young people around Hull. The organisation extols the strength in building a strong base and presence within a community to achieve effective youth work. Offering wider support to marginalised groups through the outreach and "Flipside" programmes, allows for groups who don't feel comfortable in traditional spaces to receive support and benefit from The Warren.

Additional content

Website - www.thewarren.org

Youtube - https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCwC3PS7bGNaZTfuOV16NmFw

Appendix 3 - Key observations from the rapid literature review

We reviewed 28 documents ranging from 2015 to 2023[1]. The aim of the review was to explore the key themes discussed in the literature and provide an up-to-date context for the primary research taking place as part of this study. The following section summarises these themes and the questions raised by the review, which were explored further in the research we undertook with organisations and young people.

Documents highlighted and acknowledged a lack of equity in access to arts, culture, and creative development opportunities for young people. The most common themes discussed were:

- Meeting the needs of disabled and D/deaf young people

- Establishing equal gender participation

- Access to physical spaces

- Socio-economic barriers to participation

- Restrictive family attitudes and behaviours

- Affordable and accessible transportation

- Awareness of specific learning needs and capabilities

Most of the literature worked from an assumption that access to arts and culture is inherently good for all young people, particularly access to subsidised arts and culture (i.e., funded arts organisations). A critical reading of the literature indicated a need to further consider intersectional barriers (i.e., overlapping and multiple forms of oppression and exclusion) as well as broadening the definition of what young people consider as 'art and culture' in their lives within discussions on equity of access[2]. Several studies suggested young people need to be part of the conversation when defining what culture means to them and how they may or may not wish to access it[3].

Some young people will consider so-called 'everyday culture' (e.g., cooking, fashion, online making and sharing of videos) as equally valid as structured participation in subsidised arts and culture such as music, drama or dance classes. One report described misconceptions about what 'the arts' are, and that many young people do not define creative activities in these terms[4]. While there are ongoing attempts to increase access and engagement to culture for young people, there is a parallel need to talk to them about what it means to them and the role it has in their lives.

All documents in the review mentioned how arts and cultural activities can impact young people's personal development. The main dimensions reported were:

- Enabling development of creative and artistic skills

- Improved self-expression

- Developing communication skills

- Ideation and group creative skills

- Identity exploration and development of self-concept

- Deeper understanding of self and others

- Resilience, mental health and wellbeing

- Agency and empowerment

- Clearer career trajectories and knowledge of progression opportunities

Collaboration across sectors was described in much of the literature as essential for engaging with broad populations of young people and maximising the value of arts and cultural opportunities. Partnerhsips with schools and educational institutions were regularly mentioned, alongside local authority services, and in some cases housing, justice and care services.

1   A full list of is included in the references section at the end of this appendix.
2   Arts Council England (2016)
3   Arts Council England (2017)

4   ibid

Some programme evaluations described the need for long-term funding arrangements to ensure that community partnerships can be set up effectively, with clear responsibilities agreed on all sides and time for partners to understand their roles in supporting young people.

Partnerships with national organisations were mentioned as providing strategic opportunities to allow local organisations to build broader networks[5]. In many cases partnerships were encouraged where useful skills are less likely to be held in-house within arts organisations (e.g., research, social care, neighbourhood-level knowledge, specific technical expertise).

The literature highlighted how arts and cultural organisations increasingly recognise technology's role in engaging young people. In Scotland, a creative digital programme explored using technology to boost young people's arts engagement through activities like graphic design, digital media workshops, and via platforms like Tumblr[6].

There is an ongoing need for arts and cultural organisations to consider how the visual and performative opportunities afforded by digital making can more radically impact traditional forms of expression and to establish digital making as equally valid as other forms[7].

Several documents highlight career pathways and skills development in the context of cultural provision for young people, some regular themes include[8]:

- Viewing the arts as essential for a creative society, economy, and culture, advocating for arts-centric education and opportunities for marginalised young people

- The need for opportunities to develop artistic skills, confidence, and employability through volunteering and work experience

- Career advisory services to promote creative industries, more arts and culture time in schools, and exposure to creative careers

- A need to support those exhibiting talent from all backgrounds into further education, specialisation and supportive early careers

- Recognising the value of creativity in the workforce in general and the need for qualification frameworks to reflect this

Much of the literature indicated a general lack of confidence across arts organisations in using data for understanding young people's needs and a generalised resistance to data-led impact measurement and reporting. It was suggested that a co-ordinated national approach to sharing methodologies and approaches could be a useful way to drive forward practice in this area[9].

Some evaluations suggested a need for more longer-term, iterative, and participatory methods that can ensure provision is being responsive to young people's needs and experiences as they emerge, rather than using post-hoc models of assessment[10].

Many of the programme evaluation documents reviewed indicate a need for longer term funding agreements. This is especially necessary for establishing strong partnerships with schools and other partners. Funding is needed for strategic development, administration, research and evaluation, as well as funding activities directly.

Some reports indicated that schools are increasingly stretched to resource creative activities that are viewed as complementary to the core curriculum leading to a reduction or elimination of such opportunities[11].

Funding that is linked to youth arts strategies over a longer period of time (e.g., 10-years recently in Scotland) can create opportunities for partners and organisations from a range of backgrounds to understand their role and potential to support young people[12].

The documents reviewed highlight challenges in post-pandemic arts and cultural engagement, focusing on digital shifts and young people's wellbeing. The COVID-19 pandemic forced a quick move to digital platforms for arts and cultural providers. This transition offered new opportunities but also posed challenges in engaging children and young people online. Unexpected benefits included new digital skills for artists and young people. In some cases, digital provision provided opportunities for connection and a distraction from isolation, although digital access remains inconsistent across the population[13].

The pandemic and lockdowns significantly affected young people's wellbeing, increasing isolation and stress. The literature suggests that arts and culture projects provided connection, skill development, and mental health support during challenging times[14].

5   Arts Council England/BOP Consulting (2022), Arts Council England/David Parker (2023)
6   Creative Scotland/Research Scotland (2016)
7   Creative Scotland/Education Scotland (2023)
8   Welsh Government (2015), Arts Council England & Durham University (2019)

9   Arts Council England and Durham University (2019)
10   Creative Scotland/BOP Consulting (2021)
11   Cultural Learning Alliance (2024)
12   Creative Scotland/Research Scotland (2016)
13   Creative Scotland/Education Scotland 2023
14   Creative Scotland/BOP Consulting (2022)

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