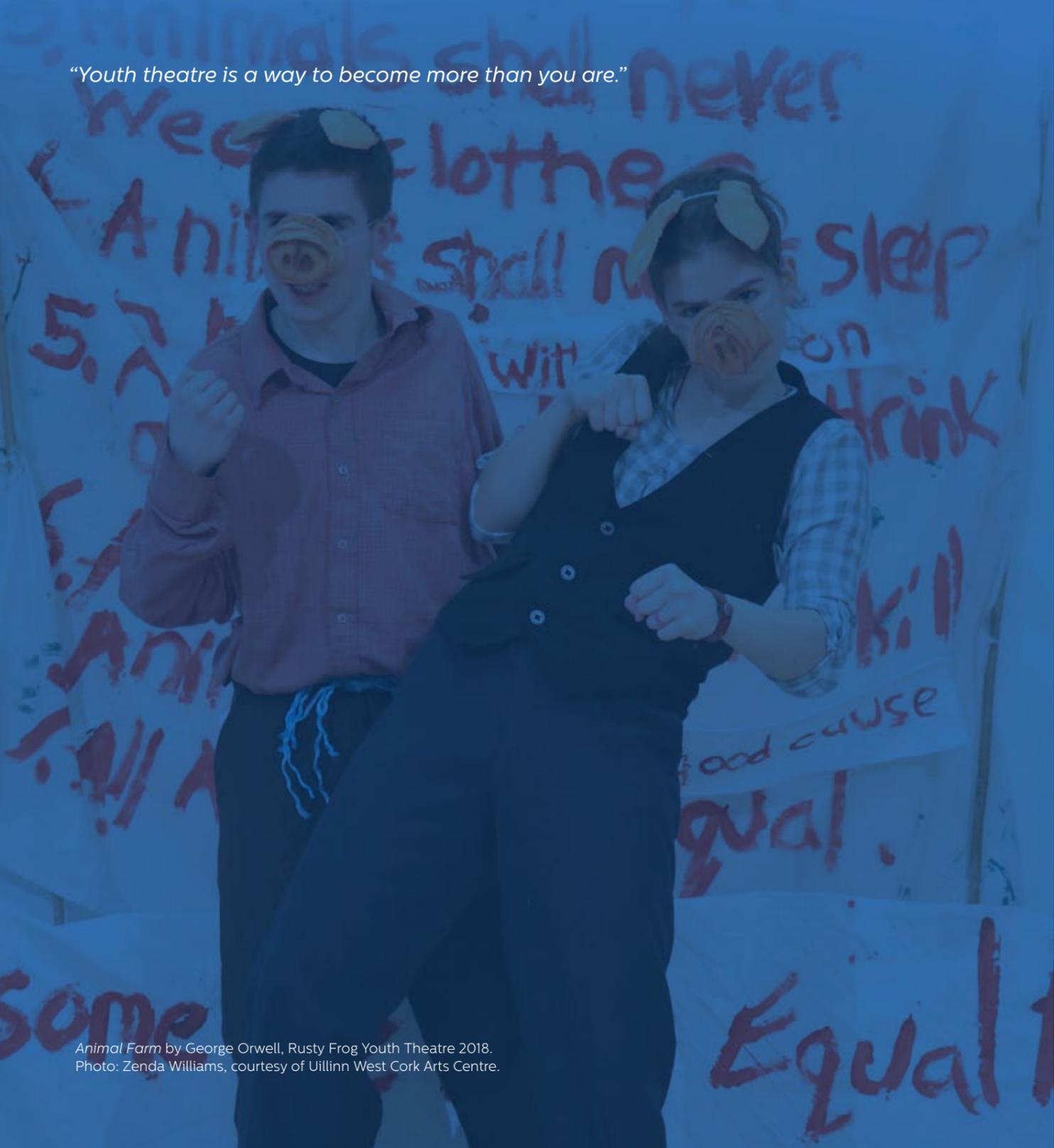


Chapter 4: Youth Theatre Practice

“Youth theatre is a way to become more than you are.”



Animal Farm by George Orwell, Rusty Frog Youth Theatre 2018.
Photo: Zenda Williams, courtesy of Uillinn West Cork Arts Centre.

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A youth theatre is a drama group for young people that offers a year-round programme of activities including a workshop programme and performance experiences. The young people are ‘members’ of the youth theatre and collaborate with skilled, professional and voluntary leaders to create theatre that is uniquely relevant to the experience and character of the group. Youth Theatre is open to all young people. It is run on a not-for-profit basis, takes place outside of school and young people actively choose to take part. Youth theatre is about the development and empowerment of its membership both as theatre makers and as people.

4.1.2 Features and Values of Youth Theatre Practice

Key Findings

- Members and leaders believe that ‘Fun’, ‘Inclusion’ and ‘Respect’ are the most important values underpinning the ethos of youth theatre.
- ‘Provides a safe and supportive space for young people to express themselves’ and ‘Supports the personal, social and artistic development of young people’ are ranked as key features of youth theatre practice by members and leaders. Youth theatres are described as a supportive space where young people can discover theatre, express themselves, take creative risks and realise their potential.

Centre Stage Context

In describing the ethos of youth theatre in 2009, the Centre Stage +10 report discussed a number of key features and values that had been identified by the sector. These included:

- **Personal, social and artistic development:** Youth theatres worked to achieve a wide range of developmental outcomes for its membership.
- **A unique form of theatre:** Youth theatre valued the unique relationship between young people and theatre.
- **Young person-centred:** Youth theatre was designed to meet the needs and interests of the young people in its membership.
- **The ensemble experience:** Youth theatres worked together as a ‘company’ over long periods of time, using group or ‘ensemble’ approaches.
- **Workshops and performance opportunities:** Youth theatre offered a balance of workshop and performance opportunities.
- **High artistic standards and production values:** Youth theatres aspired to the highest artistic standards and production values that their resources allowed.
- **Voluntary participation and non-formal settings:** Youth theatre occurred in non-formal educational settings where young people chose to take part.
- **Opportunities for Progression:** Youth theatre provided opportunities for continuous development through new experiences and training.
- **Inclusion:** Youth theatre welcomed all young people.
- **Productive Fun:** Work was characterised by fun and enjoyment as well as discipline and commitment.
- **Youth Participation:** Youth theatres involved members in the decision-making processes of the organisation in different ways.
- **Respect:** A mutual respect existed between members and leaders, contributing to a collaborative relationship.

Features of Youth Theatre Practice

Table 4.1 details the key features of youth theatre practice as identified by youth theatre leaders through the Centre Stage +20 Youth Theatre Questionnaire and by youth theatre members through the Centre Stage +20 Member Workshops. There was a general acceptance by leaders and members that all the listed features played a part in shaping youth theatre practice, but members and leaders had differing opinions on what the most significant key features were.

Table 4.1: Key Features of Youth Theatre Practice

Youth Theatre Features	Ranked Key Features Members	Ranked Key Features Leaders
Provides a safe and supportive space for young people to express themselves	1	2
Provides an atmosphere of enjoyment and fun	2	6
Supports the personal, social and artistic development of young people	3	1
Explores skills, ideas and stories relevant to the young people in membership	4	7
Young people have collaborative working relationships with leaders	5	12
Young people are members of the youth theatre and help make decisions about their youth theatre	6	5
Provides opportunities for young people to progress (as Young Leaders, developing a particular skill, taking part in a Youth Theatre Ireland project, etc.)	7	11
Encourages commitment and hard work	8	13
Young people choose to take part	9	10
Aspires to high artistic standards	10	9
Is a not-for-profit: youth theatre is not a commercial activity	11	14
Is open to all young people aged 12 upwards	12	15
Uses ensemble theatre approaches where members learn, explore and create as a group	13	3
Is facilitated by skilled youth theatre leaders	14	8
Provides an annual programme which balances workshops, rehearsals, performance opportunities and other experiences	15	4

Rankings are based on responses from 103 Member Workshop participants and 30 respondents to the Centre Stage +20 Youth Theatre Questionnaire.

- **Provides a safe and supportive space for young people to express themselves:** Members describe youth theatre as a supportive space where they can express themselves, take creative risks and step outside their comfort zone without fear of being judged. Youth theatre facilitators speak of ensuring that everyone feels they have a voice in the youth theatre and feel listened to. Members also report that they have a role to play in creating that safe, respectful environment where everyone feels valued.

“Youth theatre was my first space where people were kind of like me... kind of like-minded. And even if you weren’t, you could just express yourself and nobody would mind or judge you. You can say anything and do anything as long as you’re respectful and kind.”
Participant, Limerick Members Workshop

- **Supports the personal, social and artistic development of young people:** Youth theatre practice is focused on supporting members to develop as artists and as people, planning activities which support the artistic, personal and social development of members. As a form of youth arts, youth theatre supports young people to realise their potential.

“It’s a group that builds not just our skills but our friendships... just moving forwards and learning about yourself and learning about other people.”
Participant, Limerick Members Workshop

- **Provides an atmosphere of enjoyment and fun:** Young people report that youth theatre activities are a huge amount of fun! Fun has a positive effect on motivation levels, it helps the learning process, keeps young people curious and encourages them to come back to youth theatre for

the next workshop. Fun is a crucial factor in creating a sense of play in youth theatre, in helping young people relax so they can be open to new ideas and new areas of theatre practice.

“I know no matter what we’re going to be doing in youth theatre, I’m going to be having fun.”
Participant, Longford Members Workshop

- **Uses ensemble theatre approaches where members learn, explore and create as a group:** The ensemble approach is a fundamental principle of youth theatre practice. The youth theatre members work together as a company over a long period of time, working together to establish trust, making decisions collaboratively, sharing ownership of the artistic work and taking collective responsibility. Leaders work with young people to help them through the process of becoming an ensemble.
- **Explores skills, ideas and stories relevant to the young people in membership:** The creative process in a youth theatre starts from the particular mix of personalities, interests and needs within the membership. This results in programming which is uniquely relevant to the young people in membership of the youth theatre.
- **Provides an annual programme which balances workshops, rehearsals, performance opportunities and other experiences:** Youth theatres provide a rich programme of activities for members which centres on the workshop programme and extends outwards to a range of opportunities that push the boundaries of members’ experience of theatre, including: devising, rehearsals, productions, projects, theatre trips, exchanges and other activities.
- **Young people have collaborative working relationships with leaders:** A mutual respect exists between members and leaders. The working relationship is collaborative in nature and focused on responding to the potential and needs of members.

“You’re not being looked down upon by your leader. You’re working with them rather than working for them. They’re there to show you new things but they’re also a person you can go to and they really understand you.”
Participant, Dublin Members Workshop

- **Young people are members of the youth theatre and help make decisions about their youth theatre:** Youth theatre is a democratic space where members actively participate in making decisions about their youth theatre and its activities. The term ‘member’ reflects young people’s sense of belonging to the youth theatre and its use in youth theatre practice places young people’s opinions, interests and needs at the heart of the work.
- **Provides opportunities for young people to progress:** Youth theatre provides opportunities for continuous development through new experiences and challenges. Youth theatre members may be able to specialise in specific elements of the art form in their youth theatre and can participate in Youth Theatre Ireland’s national programme with their group or on a solo basis. Older members can train as a Young Leader with the support of their youth theatre and participation in Youth Theatre Ireland’s training programme for leaders.
- **Encourages commitment and hard work:** Youth theatre requires discipline, focus and commitment. It supports members to reach their potential through hard work as well as play.

“When we did the one-act festival where we did everything ourselves... for example, I was in charge of the set and if I didn’t pull my weight and make the set, then it wouldn’t be as good a play as we could make it. It encouraged me... like I can’t let other people down. Everyone has to put in all they have.”

Participant, Longford Members Workshop

- **Is facilitated by skilled youth theatre leaders:** The youth theatre experience is facilitated by skilled leaders who can: create supportive environments and a healthy dynamic in the ensemble; introduce members to theatre skills and techniques; facilitate the creative processes which lead to new youth theatre productions and projects; inspire and encourage members to find their own creative voice. Skilled youth theatre leaders shape the learning experience for members and facilitate the process through which members gain autonomy over their own creative work.

- **Young people choose to take part:** Youth theatre is characterised by the voluntary participation of young people, as they make an active choice to take part.
- **Aspires to high artistic standards:** Youth theatre members and leaders have ambition for the work they create together. Youth theatres aspire to high artistic and production standards, placing value on the creative output of young people.
- **Is not-for-profit:** Youth theatres are run on a not-for-profit basis. All income is used to run the youth theatre and pursue the main objectives of the youth theatre.
- **Is open to all young people aged 12 upwards:** Youth theatres have an inclusive ethos that encourages the participation of all young people regardless of their gender, background, race, sexuality, religion, ability or economic situation. Youth theatre is traditionally aimed at young people aged 12 to 25 (with the majority aged 12 to 19) but many youth theatres also run junior youth theatre groups for younger children.

Values that underpin Youth Theatre Practice

Members and leaders agreed on the ‘Top 3’ values which they felt provided a foundation for the ethos of youth theatre: ‘Fun’, ‘Inclusion’ and ‘Respect’. These values are echoed in the key features described above. Youth theatre members and leaders rate a sense of play, fun and enjoyment as central to the youth theatre experience, creating an environment where learning, discovery and creativity can thrive. The active inclusion of young people of all backgrounds and the non-judgemental environment is valued by members and leaders alike. Respect was also considered to be a core value that was essential in building collaborative working relationships and a supportive environment. Youth theatre members and leaders also agreed on the importance of teamwork, participation, creativity and growth in youth theatre practice.

Table 4.2 details the key values and compares how they are rated by youth theatre members and leaders. Young people were more likely to rate ‘friendship’ and ‘community’ as core values that underpin youth theatre practice. These concepts were central to their experience of youth theatre in terms of the relationships and sense of family or community it created. Young people were also more likely to rate ‘commitment’ as an important value, acknowledging the hard work and responsibility they associated with youth theatre. Leaders were much more likely to rate ‘empowerment’ and ‘imagination’ as important values of youth theatre practice. Empowering young people to develop their own agency and create their own theatre work was hugely significant for leaders.

Members felt very strongly that values such as ‘excellence’ did not describe youth theatre. The word had negative connotations and members stated that they felt it would exclude people. Many other members had similar reactions to words like ‘ambition’, ‘achievement’ and ‘integrity’.

Table 4.2: Values of Youth Theatre Practice

	Members Key Values	Leaders Key Values
Fun	1	3
Inclusion	2	1
Respect	3	2
Teamwork	4	6
Creativity	5	4
Friendship	6	10
Participation	7	7
Commitment	8	-
Community	9	-
Growth	10	9

Imagination	-	8
Empowerment	-	5

Figures are based on responses from 103 Centre Stage +20 Member Workshop participants and 28 respondents to the Centre Stage +20 Youth Theatre Questionnaire.



Examples of 'Top 5' values chosen by young people during Centre Stage +20 Member Workshops. Photos: Rhona Dunnett.

Evolution of Youth Theatre Practice

As part of the Centre Stage +20 Youth Theatre Questionnaire, leaders were asked to reflect on the changes they had seen in youth theatre practice over the previous decade. Many youth theatre leaders reported an increased focus on supporting young people's participation in youth theatre, both in terms of making youth theatre a more democratic space for members and supporting young people with complex needs to take part in youth theatre activities.

"Youth theatre is more democratic with young people having a stronger voice in the movement"
Waterford Youth Arts Leader

"We are more aware of the diversity of our members and how theatre can improve and support all members."
Blessington Youth Theatre Leader

"I think it is harder. The balance between youth and theatre has changed. There's a lot more youth work than theatre work. More young people have special needs and mental health issues are more transparent."
County Limerick Youth Theatre Leader

The impact of legislative, regulatory and policy changes on youth theatres over the past decade contributed to leaders discussing administration and management in response to this question. Very few youth theatre leaders spoke about changes in the creative practice of youth theatres. Those that did were positive about an increase in standards within youth theatres but also highlighted the importance of promoting the key values and features of youth theatre practice amongst the sector.

"Higher standard in workshops and facilitators."
LYTC Carrigallan Leader

"I think the standard of shows has been slow to rise, but it is getting there. We are influenced more by European theatre practices, and opportunities like the Young Critics

programme helps young people aim for a higher aesthetic achievement than 10 years ago perhaps. There is still not enough training of theatre artists (directors and theatre-makers), and with the loss of Arts Train we probably need more training of facilitators too. The role of YTI is absolutely crucial to keep promoting the values of youth theatre - to prevent the sector from turning into stage schools; or from becoming limp and unambitious weekly workshops with nothing else in the programme; or from becoming an appendage to second-level TY programmes with a weekly class of games. These are three areas I see growing across the country."

Kildare Youth Theatre Leader

Conclusions

There is a strong, shared understanding of youth theatre practice within the sector. However, discussions with members and leaders also highlight the importance of continued critical reflection on how the ethos and key features of youth theatre practice are described and put into practice.

4.2 Programming

4.2.1 The Youth Theatre Year

Key Findings

- Youth theatres are all delivering a skills-based workshop programme as part of their youth theatre year. The majority schedule blocks of workshops between September and December, while those that are in production at that time of year typically postpone workshops until the following term.
- The vast majority of youth theatres are staging productions or performance opportunities between January and May (84%), with a peak in youth theatre productions between the end of March and the beginning of May.
- Youth theatres align their programming with the academic year. However, only 26% of Centre Stage +20 youth theatres report taking a complete break from activities during the summer months.
- 26% of all youth theatre activities with young people take place on Saturdays, with 66% of activities being spread evenly across weekday evenings. Sunday is the least popular day for youth theatre activities.

Centre Stage Context

Centre Stage +10 reported that youth theatres typically operated from September to May, however the youth theatre year varied in length and structure depending on the profile of the membership, the resources and funding of the youth theatre and the artistic opportunities that were available to them. Some youth theatres closed from June to August while the summer months marked the busiest time of year for others. This aligning of the youth theatre year with academic term times was also recorded in the Centre Stage report in 1998, where workshop activity was least likely during the summer months. Levels of activity varied during the youth theatre week as well, with both Centre Stage and Centre Stage +10 reports noting that Saturday was the busiest day for activities with members. Centre Stage +10 (2009) also recorded a significant growth in activities on weekday evenings in comparison with 1998 where members were taking part in nearly half of all artistic activities on Saturday and the remaining workshops and rehearsals were spread out across the week.

Structure of the Youth Theatre Year

As part of the Centre Stage +20 Youth Theatre Questionnaire, 31 youth theatres reported on the structure of their youth theatre year and annual programming. Though each youth theatre builds its own programme in response to its membership, artistic opportunities and resources, some common themes emerged in how they described the structure of their year.

September to December

Youth theatres recorded a range of member recruitment activities in September including taster workshops in schools/youth groups, 'Open Days' for new members, registration events or 'audition workshops'. Once the group of members was formed for the year, youth theatres tended to move into a workshop programme to build skills and the group dynamic. The majority of youth theatres include new members within the core group of existing members (or an age appropriate group), with experienced and new members working alongside each other to: explore improvisation; work with text, sound and movement; and establish a supportive environment which encourages discussion and feedback. Some youth theatres programme particular events linked to Culture Night¹⁵, Halloween or Christmas or participate in specific festivals (e.g., Dublin Youth Theatre and the Dublin Theatre Festival) at this time of year. Some youth theatres also programme a production for the end of November or start of December, particularly in youth theatres with a large membership where there is more than one production a year. Theatre trips and social events are also common close to Christmas.

January to March

Weekly workshops often move into a devising and rehearsal process as groups return for weekly activities in January. A significant number of youth theatres work towards their annual production at this time of year with a peak in production levels occurring between the end of March and the start of May. Some youth theatres with large memberships or significant resources also maintain general weekly workshops alongside these devising/rehearsal activities. It is also a popular time of the year to bring in freelance facilitators for specialist theatre workshops or aspects of a production process.

April to June

April is one of the busiest months for youth theatre productions, with many youth theatres building towards a culmination of their activities around this time of year before exam pressure and GAA schedules begin to draw young people away. Of the Youth Theatre Questionnaire respondents, 84% staged productions between January and May each year. Some youth theatres return to weekly workshops once productions finish, or explore a particular project or theatre specialism with freelance facilitators. Many youth theatres finish their youth theatre year with a theatre trip, evaluation workshop or social activity. Two youth theatres that responded to the questionnaire did not run at this time of the year as resources only covered the delivery of two terms of work.

July and August

Outside of academic term times, youth theatres usually step away from regular weekly workshops and either take a break for the summer months, or participate in specific projects, festivals or production experiences. Youth theatres run summer camps, participate in exchanges or the National Festival of Youth Theatres (Youth Theatre Ireland) or use the holidays to develop new material with young people such as film projects or production-based work. Waterford Youth Arts, Limerick Youth Theatre and Dublin Youth Theatre all use the summer months to build towards a large-scale production in August. Of the questionnaire respondents, 26% mentioned taking a complete break over the summer holidays so leaders could take a break themselves, because of budget constraints or because their members were not available on a regular basis across the holidays due to other commitments.

¹⁵ Culture Night is an annual, free public event that celebrates culture, creativity and the arts. On Culture Night, venues, arts and cultural organisations extend their opening hours to allow for increased access to the public and programme a series of unique events and workshops.

Case Study: PlayActing Youth Theatre

September to December: Recruitment activities, weekly youth theatre workshops and Christmas theatre trip.

January to March: Specialist skills workshops, NT Connections play rehearsals and performances in Newbridge and Belfast.

April to June: Review and evaluation activities, BBQ for members, new member drive and summer project tasters.

July & August: Two summer projects (subject to funding).

Case Study: Mayo Youth Theatre

September to December: Recruit new members and run weekly youth theatre workshops. Take part in Excel Youth Arts Festival Masterclass.

January to March: Start preparing for annual production – devising or rehearsing within weekly youth theatre times.

April to June: Annual production takes place.

July & August: Break

Case Study: Waterford Youth Arts

September to December: Term of drama workshops for three different age groups (9–11 years, 12–14 years and 15–19 years) plus one outreach drama workshop in a specific community. The 15–19 age group devise a street theatre promenade show called 'Horribly Historical Trails' and a Christmas show.

January to March: Term of drama workshops for three different age groups plus one outreach drama workshop in a specific community.

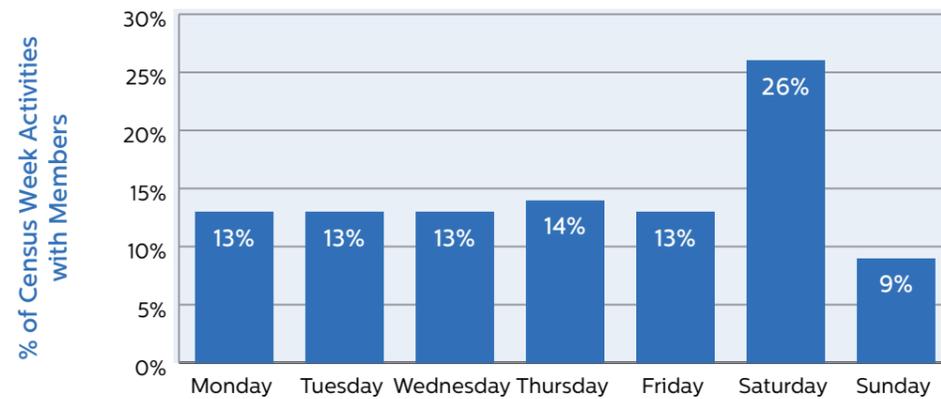
April to June: Term of drama workshops for three different age groups plus one outreach drama workshop in a specific community. The 12–14 age group stage an outdoor summer play.

July & August: Summer project and production.

Programming the Youth Theatre Week

Programming and levels of activity vary across the youth theatre year but also during the youth theatre week. Figure 4.2 illustrates the levels of activity with members which took place on each day of Census Week 2017:

- 26% of all activities with young people took place on Saturday, including 26 regular weekly workshops as well as a host of specialist theatre workshops, devising workshops, rehearsals, performances, social activities, fundraising tasks and an exchange. Saturday retains its position as the most popular day for youth theatre activities, returning to levels of activity reported by the Centre Stage report in 1998.
- 66% of activities with young people took place on weekday evenings, with a very even spread of 13% to 14% of activities taking place each evening. Again the majority of activities were weekly youth theatre workshops (52 across the five evenings), but week-day programming included higher levels of rehearsals and outreach activities to schools and youth service settings, as well as a mix of other specialist theatre workshops, meetings, theatre trips and devising activities.
- Sunday was the least popular day for running activities with young people. Youth theatres are more likely to schedule additional rehearsals or production-related activities on a Sunday rather than regular workshops. Only 19% of activities that took place on the Sunday of Census Week were weekly workshops.

Figure 4.2: Scheduling of Activities with Members Census Week 2017

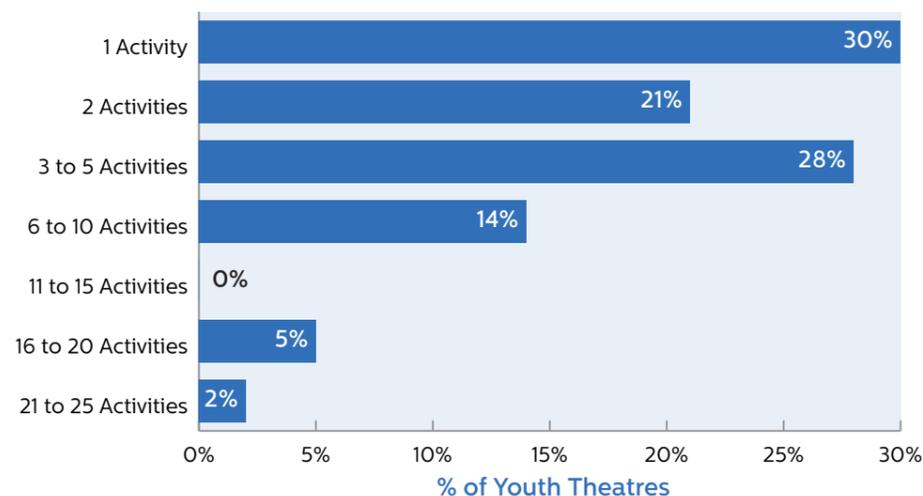
Figures are based on 175 'activities with members' that were logged during Centre Stage +20 Census Week. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

4.2.2 Levels of Activity

Key Findings

- Census Week 2017 youth theatres logged 420 hours and 40 minutes of activities with young people, giving each youth theatre an average of 9 hours and 48 minutes. If this ratio is extended to all Centre Stage +20 youth theatres, it would give an estimated weekly total of 538 hours of youth theatre provision.
- Direct work with young people accounts for 55% of overall activities during Census Week 2017.
- Youth theatre members in many groups are participating in multiple activities each week. Census Week 2017 youth theatres recorded 3,113 participant contacts for the 1,543 active members that week, giving an average of two activities per member.
- Youth theatres record a large range of activity levels, with membership size, the nature of the programme that is being delivered and resources featuring as contributing factors.

Figure 4.3 depicts the number of 'activities with young people' undertaken by youth theatres during Census Week 2017.

Figure 4.3: Number of Activities with Young People during Census Week

Figures are based on 43 respondents to the Centre Stage +20 Census Log. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Centre Stage Context

During the Centre Stage Census Week, 32 youth theatres logged 100 activities involving young people (89% of overall activities). The level of administrative work carried out by youth theatre leaders in 1998 is unclear, however it appears that activities with members were the priority in service provision. These activities lasted for 257 hours, with each youth theatre organising an average of 3.1 activities that lasted 8 hours.

During the Centre Stage +10 Census Week, 39 youth theatres logged 129 activities involving young people (53% of overall activities). The level of supporting administrative work had grown significantly for leaders, but they were still delivering 299 hours of activities directly to members in those 30 youth theatres. They were organising an average of 3.3 activities per youth theatre which translated to 7 hours and 40 minutes of activities.

Levels of Activity Involving Young People

The Census Week of Centre Stage +20, showed that high levels of activity were taking place with youth theatre members. The 43 youth theatres who logged their activities during Census Week 2017 recorded:

- 177 activities with young people, 55% of overall activities during Census Week 2017¹⁶;
- An average of 4.1 activities per youth theatre. This marks an increase of nearly one activity (0.8) per youth theatre since Centre Stage +10;
- 420 hours and 40 minutes of activities with young people;
- An average of 9 hours and 48 minutes of activities per youth theatre. This marks an increase of 2 hours and 8 minutes since Centre Stage +10.

If this level of activity is applied to the 55 Centre Stage +20 youth theatres, that leads to an estimated 266 activities or 538 hours of activities with young people in one week.

This level of activity during Census Week was typical for a majority of youth theatres (61%) who were focused on delivering regular weekly workshops and other types of rehearsal or project activities with their group. Of the 43 Census Week youth theatres, 30% said they were a little busier than usual because of rehearsals for upcoming productions or because they were performing during Census Week. A further 9% said they were less busy than usual. Census Week takes place during the same week in November during each Centre Stage project to ensure that activity levels can be compared accurately.

Levels of activity varied greatly between youth theatres that took part in Census Week (Figure 4.3). Of the 43 Census Week youth theatres:

- 30% of youth theatres ran one activity with members. These youth theatres had one group of members and were running their weekly youth theatre workshop. For example, Belturbet Youth Theatre ran one workshop with a small group of members.
- 21% of youth theatres ran two activities. These were typically weekly workshops for junior and senior groups within the youth theatre, or a weekly workshop paired with a project/devising/rehearsal session or trip. For example, Roscommon County Youth Theatre ran a weekly workshop and members went to see a professional theatre production.
- 28% of youth theatres ran between three and five activities. These were generally a mix of weekly workshops with rehearsal and production sessions. For example, Ardclough Youth Theatre ran four rehearsal sessions with members and one weekly workshop.
- 14% of youth theatres ran between six and 10 activities. In general, these were youth theatres with a large membership that were running weekly workshops plus other types of activities. Sligo Youth Theatre ran: three weekly workshops for different age groups: a set construction session with members; a mentoring session with young people preparing to audition for drama schools; and a film screening for the membership. One exception was Glengarriff Youth Theatre. A voluntary youth theatre with a small membership, it was involved in a devising project while also rehearsing and performing in a local pantomime with its parent organisation, Glengarriff Theatre Group.
- Three youth theatres ran significantly more activities for members than other youth theatres. Galway Community Circus (21 activities) and Waterford Youth Arts (16 activities) are large youth arts organisations with multiple groups participating in weekly workshops and other regular project activities. Kildare Youth Theatre was also in this group (18 activities) as it was running regular workshops alongside rehearsals for different projects and international exchange activities.

¹⁶ The level of administrative and management tasks being carried out in youth theatres during Census Week is investigated in Sections 3.4 and 6.2.

Length of Activities

The vast majority of youth theatre workshops and rehearsals last two hours, with some junior youth theatre groups working for one and a half hours. Of the activities which took place with members during Census Week 2017, 72% lasted for up to two hours. Rehearsals, dress rehearsals and performances were the regular activities which were most likely to stretch beyond two hours, with 19% of Census Week 2017 activities lasting for between two and four hours.

Some members and leaders were contributing a significant amount of time to longer activities, including the 7% of activities during Census Week 2017 which lasted between four and eight hours. These activities included: extended dress rehearsals and performances; fundraising tasks including cake sales; set construction sessions; planning, shooting and editing a film; attending an event on behalf of the youth theatre; and one extended weekly workshop with social time.

Four activities lasted 10 hours or longer and included three days of an international exchange (Kildare Youth Theatre) and an extensive fundraising activity carried out by M.A.D. Youth Theatre leaders and members.

Numbers of Young People

Members are typically active for about two hours each week, with their participation rates rising during rehearsal and production periods, exchanges or projects. The 43 youth theatres that logged activities during Census Week reported an active membership of 1,543 during those seven days. These young people were very busy in youth theatre alongside school and other extra-curricular activities, as:

- The 43 youth theatres recorded 3,113 participant contacts (the sum of members numbers per activity);
- Each member attended an average of two activities per week.

In reality, members in 30% of the youth theatres attended their weekly workshop only and other members were far more active during Census Week. This is illustrated in the LYTC Carrigallen and Donegal Youth Theatre case studies which contrast the different levels of work carried out by youth theatres in rehearsal/production periods or during regular workshop programmes. This level of participation was normal for the 43 youth theatres that logged activities during Census Week, with 77% reporting levels were typical, 11.5% reporting it was more than usual and 11.5% reporting it was less than usual.

Case Study: LYTC Carrigallen

During Census Week 2017, LYTC Carrigallen was running weekly workshops, rehearsing for an upcoming production and staging three performances of 'The Field' by John B Keane. The youth theatre delivered 41 hours of activities with 59 young people that week.

- 1 Weekly workshops with junior groups. (four hours: 40 members in all and two leaders)
- 2 Rehearsal of Act 1 of 'The Field', on set and with props. (two hours: 19 members and three leaders)
- 3 Rehearsal of 'Act 2', on set and with props. (three hours: 19 members and three leaders)
- 4 Full run-through of play with cast. (three hours: 19 members and three leaders)
- 5 Technical run through. The lighting technician 'toped and tailed' scenes to set and cue lights. (3.5 hours: 19 members and six leaders)
- 6 Opening night performance of 'The Field'. (four hours: 19 members and eight leaders)
- 7 2nd performance of 'The Field' (four hours: 19 members and eight leaders)
- 8 Final performance of 'The Field' (7.5 hours: 19 members and eight leaders)

Case Study: Donegal Youth Theatre

During Census Week 2017, Donegal Youth Theatre was running its regular workshop programme for members.

- 1 Weekly workshop exploring basic performance techniques and improvisation exercises (two hours: 10 members and two leaders)

4.2.3 Planning and Programming

Key Findings

- A majority of youth theatres are now planning on an annual basis (65%) with another cohort preferring to plan for each term (32%).
- Youth theatres take a collaborative approach to planning, often involving youth theatre members and leaders, staff of parent organisations and committee/board members.
- Youth theatres aim to develop imaginative and distinctive plans inspired by their own artistic policies and the characteristics of members and leaders.
- Levels of advance planning are influenced by: a desire to follow best practice; the practicalities of complying with child protection legislation and other regulations; the necessity of applying for project funding or reporting on annual programming to funders; and an ambition to engage quality theatre practitioners and venues.

Centre Stage Context

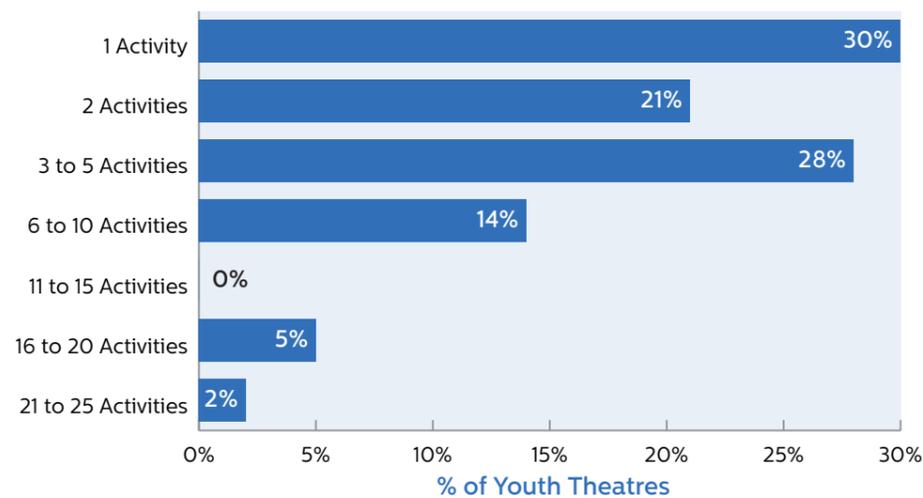
Strategic planning and annual programming were becoming more common by the time of Centre Stage +10 (2009). Youth theatre leaders were more likely to develop an annual plan in response to their artistic policy, the aims and objectives of their youth theatre, youth theatre members, key artistic personnel and board members. On a day-to-day level, youth theatres were also thinking further in advance with 76% of activities during Census Week 2007 organised more than one month in advance of the activity, and 42% of leaders planning the content of the artistic activity in the week leading up to its delivery. Youth theatres that were formalising their planning processes were responding to a sense of best practice as well as to the requirements of funders but many smaller youth theatres were struggling to plan ahead because of uncertainties over levels of human resources and funding. Individual planning meetings were logged during the Census Week of 1997, but the first Centre Stage research project did not investigate the planning approaches of youth theatres.

Current approaches to Planning and Programming

As part of the Centre Stage +20 Youth Theatre Questionnaire, 31 youth theatres reported on how they approach youth theatre planning and programming:

- 65% of youth theatres reported developing an annual plan;
- 32% of youth theatres were planning on a term-by-term basis or were developing a plan for an un-specified period of time. Some mentioned having an overview of their year in mind, but were taking a more flexible approach to planning;
- Dublin Youth Theatre reported developing a multi-annual plan.

This strategic approach to planning was evidenced during Census Week where 55% of activities were planned at least one month in advance, with 30% of activities being planned at least three months in advance (Figure 4.4).

Figure 4.3: Number of Activities with Young People during Census Week

Figures are based on 43 respondents to the Centre Stage +20 Census Log. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

In general, youth theatres described planning as a consultative process which involved multiple stakeholders: youth theatre members; youth theatre leaders (including Artistic Directors); staff in parent organisations; board members.

“We plan on a term-by-term basis. The Artistic Director works in consultation with a Co-Facilitator, Members’ and Parents’ Committee.”
Mr. Sands Youth Theatre

“We have an annual plan which we prepare over the summer for the coming terms in consultation with members of the youth theatre and the committee members.”
Dundalk Youth Theatre Leader

“The Artistic Director develops an annual plan in consultation with Youth Theatre Members and the Activate Facilitation team, and in consultation with the Artistic Director of Graffiti, the General Manager of Graffiti and core staff that may be required to support the work.”

The type of youth participation structures and methods employed by youth theatres to involve young people in decision-making are explored in Section 2.3.5.

Factors Effecting Planning and Programming

Youth theatres continue to develop shorter-term plans (term-by-term) or annual plans to help them set goals with the members, work towards agreed outcomes (development of skills, completion of projects, staging of productions, etc.) and plan their resources effectively. Aside from a sense of best practice, youth theatres reported a number of other factors which influenced their approach to planning and programming:

- Youth theatres need to plan further in advance to ensure that all adults facilitating youth theatre activities or regularly supporting activities are garda-vetted before they are formally offered work with the youth theatre;
- Youth theatres are planning in advance to secure funding for projects or in response to funding requirements related to programming or core funding grant opportunities;
- Youth theatres are also planning in advance to secure the services of specific theatre practitioners they wish to work with or to secure venue rental for productions or workshop programmes;
- European projects and funding requires longer-term planning to build partnerships, apply for funding and deliver activities (potentially as part of a multi-annual project);
- Delivering spontaneous youth theatre activities has become more challenging in terms of ensuring

the correct ratio of leaders to members, complying with garda vetting legislation, arranging consent from parent/guardians and other child safeguarding procedures;

- Some youth theatres like to plan on a shorter-term basis where possible to ensure that planning is responsive to the changing needs and interests of the membership or to be able to profit from impromptu artistic opportunities.

Distinctive Programming

Though youth theatres are guided by a shared ethos and practice when they programme their work, they develop their own imaginative and distinctive plans within the framework provided by individual artistic policies and mission statements as well as the unique characteristics and interests of their members and leaders. The programming of some youth theatres is characterised by art form specialisms (e.g., Bui Bolg and outdoor arts), an interest in new writing (e.g., Complex Youth Theatre), the younger age range of members (e.g., Mostrim Youth Players) or European partnerships (e.g., County Limerick Youth Theatre).

Case Study: Complex Youth Theatre

Complex Youth Theatre’s programming and choice of productions is influenced by its commitment to devising and new writing.

MISSION STATEMENT

Complex Youth Theatre works with young people in all arts disciplines to create new and original theatre. It provides a wide range of structures that encourage the personal and professional growth of its members through emancipatory workshops, development of the imagination and creative writing, with the emphasis on individual creativity and freedom of expression through performance. It aims to promote excellence in theatre practice and deliver a high quality process and outcomes.

Case Study: Galway Community Circus

Galway Community Circus’ art form specialism and inclusive approach to participatory practice informs its planning and programming.

MISSION

To unlock personal and creative potential and deliver social inclusion for young people through circus arts.

ARTISTIC POLICY

Galway Community Circus aims to create work that is of equal social and artistic excellence. We believe it is important to involve our performers in projects which are entirely inclusive and where the process is safe and nurturing but also where the final product is of high artistic quality. For us, artistic ambition translates to participatory processes, that allow each person to reach their potential. We endeavour to create innovative, artistically excellent work that engages with diverse audiences and a wide range of creative collaborators, showcasing circus as an exciting, accessible and meaningful art form.

Conclusions

Youth theatres are planning annual programmes which result in high levels of activity and an increased range of creative opportunities stretched right throughout the youth theatre year. In 2019, members have increased opportunities to experience youth theatre activities which will impact on their artistic, personal and social development.

There is huge variance within the sector in terms of the levels of activity being delivered and the length of typical annual programmes. On one end of the spectrum, some youth theatres would benefit from additional resources, support and inspiration to develop the creative opportunities they offer their membership. On the other end of the spectrum, some youth theatres would benefit

from a programme review to ensure that resource capacity exists to maintain such a high level of activity.

Youth theatres are planning at a more strategic level in 2019. A majority of youth theatres are now developing annual plans in a collaborative manner to provide direction for leaders and members, to assess the level of resources and funding required on an annual basis and to build the best possible artistic programmes for members.

4.3 Youth Theatre Activities

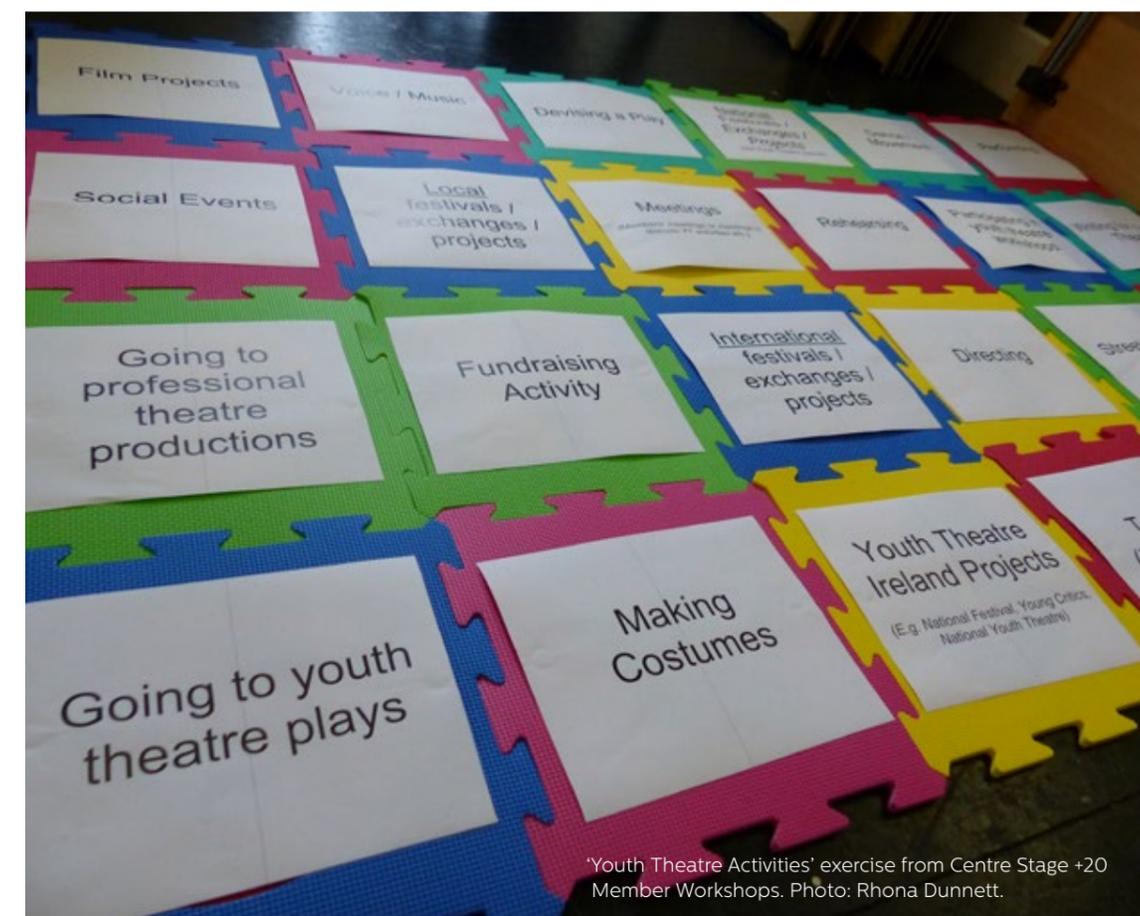
4.3.1 Types of Youth Theatre Activity

Key Findings

- Youth theatres are developing unique programmes to meet the needs and interests of their membership.
- Workshops form the core element of the youth theatre programme, featuring in the annual programmes of all Centre Stage +20 youth theatres and ranking as the most common youth theatre experience reported by members.
- Youth theatres are also providing a range of programme elements including: devising projects and rehearsals; productions and performance opportunities; trips to see professional theatre and youth theatre productions; theatre production activities; film projects; participating in local festivals and exchanges; and participating in the Youth Theatre Ireland programme and international projects.

Table 4.3 details the different activities and experiences recorded by members who completed Centre Stage + 20 Member Questionnaires.

Table 4.3: What Experiences have you had in Youth Theatre?	
	% of Members
Participating in Youth Theatre Workshops	86.1%
Performing	82.6%
Rehearsing	79.5%
Dance/Movement	58.5%
Devising a Play	57.9%
Going to Youth Theatre Plays	54.6%
Social Events	44.8%
Voice/Music	43.5%
Going to Professional Theatre Productions	41.7%
Fundraising Activity	30.1%
Meetings	26.9%
Film Projects	25.6%
Youth Theatre Ireland Projects	24.6%
Participating in Local Festivals/Exchanges/Projects	23.5%



'Youth Theatre Activities' exercise from Centre Stage +20 Member Workshops. Photo: Rhona Dunnett.

Common Youth Theatre Activities

Each youth theatre develops its own artistic programme which is designed to meet the needs, interests and skills of its members and leaders, within the resources available to the youth theatre. Youth theatres develop their own individual and distinctive programming, however there are some common activities which are standard in most youth theatre's annual programmes including activities which may appear on a regular if not annual basis.

Weekly Youth Theatre Workshops: Members have regular opportunities to participate in workshops, with 86% of members reporting that they had participated in a workshop and 46% of all Census Week 2017 activities being described as weekly workshops (Fig 4.5). They are the core element of a youth theatre's artistic programme and are explored in Section 4.3.2.

Rehearsals and Performances: Significant levels of the membership reported that they had been involved in rehearsals and performances (venue-based performance, site-specific performance, informal 'sharing' of work, works-in-progress, etc.), with 83% reporting they had experience of performing and 80% reporting they had experience of rehearsing with their youth theatre. Youth theatre productions are explored in Section 4.3.3.

Devising: 58% of respondents to the Member Questionnaires had experience of devising their own performance piece through facilitated workshops. Some youth theatres with a preference for scripted productions will still typically fold improvisation and devising work into weekly workshop plans.

Movement and Voice: Members recorded high levels of experience with movement/ dance (59%) and voice/music (44%). Theatre being a multi-disciplinary art-form, these skills and forms of expression are encompassed within youth theatre workshops, and rehearsal and production processes. Some youth theatres also programme discrete specialist workshops in movement or voice to support skills development. For example, Mr. Sands Youth Theatre worked with the movement director Michael McCabe and the choreographer Karen Gleeson during 2018 to support skill development during a rehearsal process and three movement/dance workshops took place during Census Week 2017.

Going to Youth Theatre or Professional Productions: Considerable numbers of members are also attending youth theatre (55%) or professional productions (41%). The data indicates this is taking place on a regular basis, but to varying levels within youth theatre programmes depending on resources and the location of youth theatres in particular (See Section 4.3.4).

Production work and design: Though youth theatres aspire to provide a rounded theatre experience which offers theatre production and technical theatre experiences as well as acting, it is clear from the data that only a minority are offering these experiences regularly in their programme. Of the Member Questionnaire respondents, only 12% to 15% reported experiences in design, making costumes, set construction, stage management and technical theatre.

Directing and Writing: Less than a fifth of Member Questionnaire respondents (19%) reported having experience of writing or directing in youth theatre. Though many youth theatres include aspects of these skills within weekly workshops, it appears that extended work or projects which empower young people to develop as writers and directors are not commonplace in youth theatre programming, or are not available on a regular basis for all members. Within the Centre Stage +20 Member workshops, directing (21% of participants) and writing (10% of participants) were the areas where members most wanted to input into decision-making.

Film Projects: Just over a quarter of respondents (26%) to the Member Questionnaire had worked on a film project in their youth theatre. Film has moved from a niche activity to a common element of youth theatre programming over the past decade as members' interest in film, improvements in technology, the availability of filmmaking equipment/software and project grants have supported its popularity.

Festivals and Exchanges: A quarter of respondents from the Member Questionnaire had participated in events and projects organised through Youth Theatre Ireland (National Festival of Youth Theatre, Young Critics, Playshare, National Youth Theatre, etc.). This was the most common way for youth theatres to connect their members with other youth theatres at a national level. Between 14% and 15% of members had experienced other types of national (and international) exchanges or festivals, indicating that this valuable experience is available in a limited number of youth theatres or on an irregular basis for members.

Local festivals and projects feature more frequently in programming. Youth theatres are more successful at building connections and initiating projects at a local level, with nearly a quarter of Member Questionnaire respondents (24%) saying they had this type of experience in youth theatre. Festivals and Exchanges are explored in Section 4.3.5.

Non-Artistic Activities Involving Young People

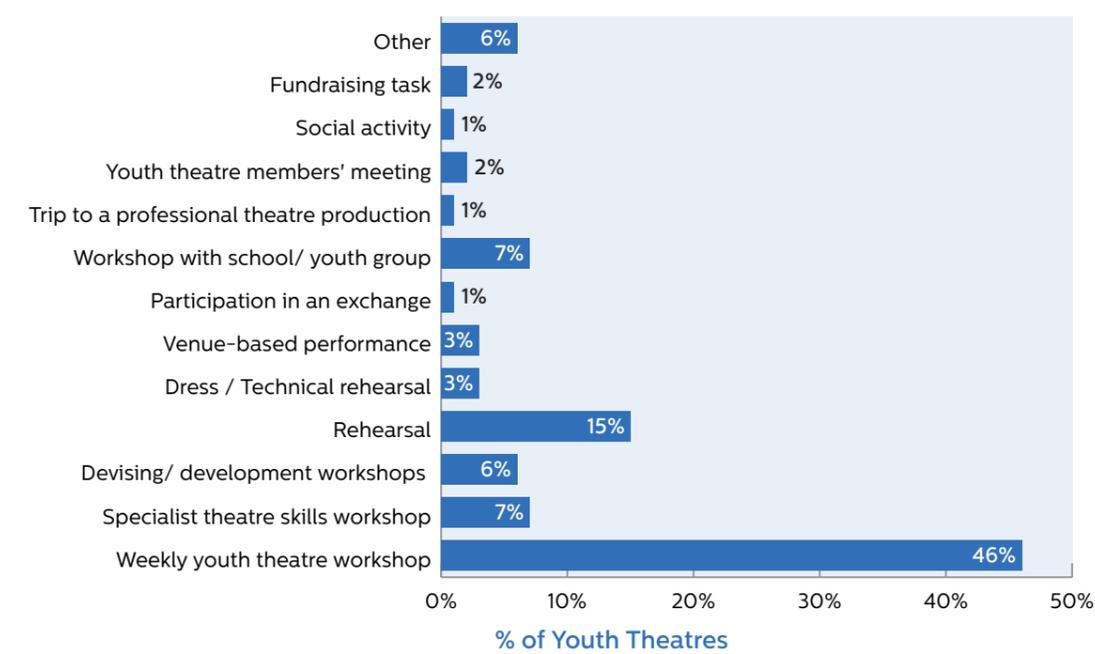
Alongside a range of artistic activities, youth theatres are also including a series of non-artistic activities within their annual programmes. For example, 55% of Member Questionnaire respondents had taken part in social activities with their youth theatre such as end-of-term parties, weekly 'hang-outs' before workshops, barbecues, outings, cinema trips, etc. Youth theatres are creating opportunities for members to socialise, build friendships and strengthen the group dynamic through these social activities. During Census Week 2017, members of Sligo Youth Theatre attended a film screening together.

Youth theatre members are also contributing to the management of their youth theatre through fundraising committees and activities such as bag-packing in supermarkets, cake sales, etc. (reported by 30% of Member Questionnaire respondents). Members' forums and meetings about projects, productions, fundraising or consultation events were reported as having been experienced by 27% of Member Questionnaire respondents. Many members also get involved in recruitment activities for new members at their schools or within their communities. For example, Mountrath Youth Theatre members delivered youth theatre flyers to local schools during Census Week 2017.

Youth theatres are representing themselves at different kinds of events to promote their work. This type of work can be artistic in nature (for example, members performing at conferences or participating in local events/parades) but can also involve young people representing their youth theatre within consultation events, meetings, media engagement, etc. For example, during Census Week 2017, a member of Activate Youth Theatre attended a committee meeting of Young Writers at Cork City Library to invite them to apply for a Young Playwrights programme, and to tell them about the work of Activate Youth Theatre.

The balance between the artistic and non-artistic activities in Census Week 2017 is indicative of a typical youth theatre programme: a focus on weekly youth theatre workshops that are supplemented by regular rehearsal, production and project experiences and complemented by intermittent non-artistic activities which enhance young people's participation and the management of the youth theatre.

Figure 4.5: Types of Activities Involving Young People During Census Week 2017



Figures are based on 177 Activities involving members which took place during Census Week 2017. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Case Study: Griese Youth Theatre

Griese Youth Theatre (an autonomous youth theatre) is based in the village of Ballitore (South Kildare) and runs activities from a venue it manages for the local community called 'The Meeting House'. It has a large membership and multiple workshop groups in different age ranges. Its annual programme from September 2017 to July 2018 includes a wide variety of youth theatre activities.

Workshops

Griese Youth Theatre runs weekly workshops for seven different age groups with registration commencing in September each year.

Performances

The youth theatre stages multiple productions each year (typically in December, January and May/ June) because it offers performance experiences to many of its different workshop groups. In 2018, groups were involved in winter productions at The Meeting House of 'The Elves and The Shoemaker' by Karen Boettcher – Tate, 'Strawberries in Winter' adapted by Evelyn Merritt from Alexander Chodzko and the pantomime 'Frozen' by Warren McWilliams. Rehearsals started in March for end of year shows, gathering momentum in May and June. Junior groups performed 'Dumpling and the Golden Goose', 'The Pied Piper' and 'The Tallest Tale Ever Told' by Vivian Stipes at the Meeting House.

Senior groups ran intensive rehearsals throughout June for their productions of 'Hoodie' by Lindsay Price, 'Cloudbusting' by Helen Blakeman and 'Burying your Brother in the Pavement' by Jack Thorne which took place at the Riverbank, Newbridge. Griese Youth Theatre also took performances out to community contexts, including the Outpatient Department of Tallaght Hospital and Crookstown National School.

Performances at other Local and National Events

Griese Youth Theatre members represented their youth theatre at both local and national events:

the 'Spaces to Belong To Conference' at Queen's University, Belfast; NYCI's National Youth Work Showcase at the Mansion House, Dublin; a TUSLA conference and a performance at the Carlow TUSLA offices (Carlow outreach group with the support of Griese Young Leaders).

The youth theatre was involved in staging artistic events at their venue (members shared storytelling and poetry as part of a Winter Solstice evening and screened films for Culture Night) and in the village (two ex-members scripted and directed work as part of a 'Leinster Loop' performance').

Other Projects and Activities

Griese Youth Theatre ran some summer projects and mid-term activities. Members maintained connections with other youth theatres by travelling to Laois to take part in a day of workshops with Mountrath Youth Theatre. Members also attended other professional and youth productions (e.g., Swan Lake at the Newbridge Town Hall).

Griese Youth Theatre oversees the operations of the Griese Ballitore Young Film Makers, facilitated by Eamonn McMahon. Griese Youth Theatre members participated in both partnership film projects and solo film projects during the year resulting in screenings of 'I'd Rather Die' (directed by Peter Kelly) and 'HIM' (with Kildare Young Filmmakers).

Training

Leaders attended training events such as: 'Tender' workshops at Abbey Theatre; Youth Theatre Ireland's 'Leading On...' training course; and Erasmus + training on opportunities for youth exchanges.

4.3.2 Workshop Programmes

Key Findings

- Workshops feature in all youth theatre programmes and form the core of the youth theatre experience for members.
- Workshops explore: group and theatre skills development; specialist skills, theatre techniques and genres; devising; exploratory work and process drama; specialist practice and other art forms.
- Workshops aim to create a safe environment where members learn to take creative risks; begin the process of becoming an ensemble; and learn to give, and hear, feedback and constructive criticism.
- Youth theatres deliver a structured workshop programme that responds to the developmental needs and interests of their membership, shaping a learning experience for members across a term of workshops as well as creating a learning arc in each individual workshop.

Centre Stage Context

Workshops were at the heart of the youth theatre programme during both Centre Stage and Centre Stage +10. In 1998, drama workshops accounted for 46% of all Census Week activities. Workshops described during Centre Stage explored theatre, performance and stagecraft with a focus on improvisation methods and issues which were relevant to young people's lives. In 2009, all Centre Stage +10 youth theatres ran workshops during the youth theatre year and 65% of activities involving young people during Census Week 2017 were workshops. They were the most common experience for youth theatre members. Workshops covered areas such as: skills development; group development; issue-based and process drama; specialist skills and theatre techniques; technical theatre workshops; dance and other art forms.

Youth Theatre Workshops

Workshops form the core of a youth theatre programme. Workshops are a sequence of planned drama activities which engage young people in an active exploration of drama /theatre. They provide a safe place for members to play and to experiment, to create and to learn. Youth theatre workshops involve group or ensemble drama approaches and respond to the developmental needs of the participating young people.

- All Centre Stage +20 youth theatres ran workshops during their youth theatre year.
- Census Week 2017 data shows that 59% of the 177 activities which took place that week with young people, were workshops, including specialist theatre workshops (7%) and devising workshops (6%) which were part of project/production processes.
- 86% of Member Questionnaire respondents had taken part in youth theatre workshops (Table 4.3).

Workshop Content

A sense of play is central to all workshop experiences, but underneath this layer of fun lies a serious purpose. Each workshop activity is included to achieve a specific objective and is connected to the overall aim of the workshop as well as the artistic, social and personal learning arc for all members. Workshops are designed for the specific age range and developmental needs of the members in each group, as well as to suit their skill and experience levels. Workshops can explore a wide range of skills, practices or issues, however all youth theatre workshops will typically:

- Aim to create a safe environment where members learn to take creative risks and develop their self-expression;
- Support members through the process of becoming an ensemble by working together on tasks, supporting each other in workshops and working together to overcome challenges;
- Invite members to give feedback, to offer opinions and constructive criticism, to hear other members speak and learn to respect differences of opinion.

Group and Skills Development

Youth theatre workshops explore and develop basic drama and theatre skills. As core components of weekly workshops, leaders explore key skills such: improvisation; movement; sound and voice; working with text; character development; group and ensemble work; and devising. Youth theatres aim to develop basic group skills by developing trust, teamwork and approaching tasks as an ensemble.

Census Week Workshop: "Drama workshop exploring rhythm, ensemble work and using physicality to create movement and sound which culminated in members making their own soundscapes."
Laois Youth Theatre

Specialist Skills, Theatre Techniques and Genres

Some youth theatres may offer specialist theatre workshops in movement, voice, clowning, mask, stage combat, etc. or opportunities to engage with other theatre forms and practices such as 'Playback', 'Viewpoints' or 'Commedia dell'Arte'. These workshops are generally delivered by core youth theatre facilitators and by freelance theatre specialists. For example, Complex Youth Theatre held specialist workshops with actor, director and movement director, Bryan Burroughs and actress, Hilda Fay in 2018 and during Census Week 2017, Dublin Youth Theatre's 'Writers' Group' had a session led by the Irish Writers' Centre Playwright-in-Residence which explored feedback on drafts of members' one-act plays.

Census Week Workshop: "Weekly workshop -theatre games, mime, improv, mask and rehearsal for a 'demonstration' in mask."
Rusty Frog Youth Theatre

Census Week Workshop: "Workshop on the Theatre of the Absurd: part of the weekly workshop programme for the 2nd year members."
Dublin Youth Theatre

Devising Workshops

Devising is a method of theatre-making where the performance emerges from collaborative work and improvisation. It offers youth theatre members an opportunity to develop their creative ideas and work as an ensemble to stage their own original piece of theatre. As a core skill, devising forms an important component of regular weekly workshops. However, devising can also be the primary purpose of a workshop within a larger project or production process which aims to generate a new piece of theatre. During Census Week 2017: Kildare Youth Theatre held a weekly devising workshop for their play 'The Act of Oblivion'; Gonzo Youth Theatre held a devising session with a playwright to explore their next production; and Kilkenny Youth Theatre held a devising session for the AB project (involving

other youth theatres, The Abbey Theatre and the David Glass Ensemble) using photographs, poetry and articles relevant to emerging themes.

Census Week Workshop: “Junior Group: We explored how to devise a script, creating characters through improvisation exercises and generating material that will contribute towards a showing of their work.”

Activate Youth Theatre

Census Week Workshop: “Devising workshop. Using writing from the members to frame short plays (writing beginning and ending sentences). Encouraging teamwork, play and use of the ensemble to create quick pieces of theatre. Looking at collective consciousness.”

WACT Youth Theatre

Exploratory Work and Process Drama

The primary purpose of a workshop may be to explore a particular theme or issue rather than develop specific theatre skills. Youth theatres may employ process drama techniques, exploratory drama activities or writing/devising activities to investigate an issue that is relevant to the group for a stand-alone workshop or as part of a larger devising or production process.

Specialist Practice or Other Art Forms

Youth theatres engage with other art practices such as dance or music as part of regular workshops, but may also be offering specialist workshops to expand the experience of members and push the boundaries of their youth theatre practice. Youth theatres regularly engage with specialist facilitators in circus, film, movement or voice to develop new skills or enhance aspects of a production process or project. During Census Week 2017, Rusty Frog Youth Theatre members took part in a movement workshop with the contemporary Dancer-in-Residence at West Cork Arts Centre, Helga Deasy and WACT Youth Theatre members took part in a workshop with performance artist, Vivien Brodie Hayes to explore ensemble performance and apply what they had learned to a staged extract of “The Black Eyes” by Bev Clark.

The specialist practice of youth theatres such as Galway Community Circus or Bui Bolg Youth Group means that outdoor and street arts experiences, aerial skills, stilts and acrobatics, unicycling and juggling are all part of their core workshop programmes alongside the development of teamwork and performance skills.

Case Study: Kilkenny Youth Theatre – Census Week Workshop Plan (based on Leaders’ Notes)

Focus: Devising and exploring possible movement sequence for next year’s production

1. **Warm Up:** A game of ‘Hy Ya’
Leader of the Band: Guessing the leader in the group
2. **Walk Around:** Walking with someone (organic)
3. **Follow the Leader in groups of 5/6:** Leader brings group around the room with sound and movement. *Discuss what worked in terms of offers being taken up. Could they read the group in terms of offers enjoyed? What was difficult or tiring? Repeat activity with what you now know.*
4. **Flocking** Divide groups by gender or into groups getting ready for a night out. *Discuss what worked in working together?*
5. **Working as a Chorus:** Getting ready to go on a night out with peers – physical, clumping, exaggeration.
6. **Show**
7. **Feedback** Discussion with members: *What worked? What could we keep? Play with? Develop towards next year’s production?*
8. **Close:** Finish on game of ‘Hy Ya’.

Structuring a Workshop Programme

A majority of youth theatres deliver a structured workshop programme that responds to the developmental needs and interests of the membership. Not only are leaders building a learning arc during a two-hour workshop, they are also designing a learning experience for members over a term of workshops. The design of the workshop programme will usually take into account:

- The experience profile of the group and the balance between new and experienced members;
- An assessment of the theatre and group skills of members, as well as the group dynamic;
- The wishes and interests of the members;
- Project or production plans for later in the year which may require specific skill sets;
- The skill set of youth theatre leaders or the resources available to bring in specialist facilitators.

As part of the Centre Stage +20 Youth Theatre Questionnaire, youth theatres described the content of their workshop programmes:

“Weekly workshops in: acting, improvisation, stagecraft, voice, script work, street theatre, puppetry, physical theatre, clowning, dance, percussion, devising, writing, directing and technical skills.”

Rusty Frog Youth Theatre Leader

“General workshops led by our core facilitators cover: theatre games, warm-ups, team-building exercises, improvisation, story-telling, role-play, devising, script-reading and voice-work.”

Mr. Sands Youth Theatre Leader

“Our general workshop programme between September and December is based on the ‘Laying the Foundations’ template.”

Dundalk Youth Theatre Leader

Like Dundalk Youth Theatre, some leaders mentioned basing their workshop programme on the ‘Laying the Foundations’ resource written by Dave Kelly, Youth Theatre Ireland’s National Training Co-ordinator, (see case study below). Some youth theatres were delivering the workshop programme in its entirety while others were using it as a basis to inspire their own unique programme for their members. For example, during Census Week 2017, Belturbet Youth Theatre was delivering ‘Workshop 3’ of the ‘Laying the Foundations’ resource as part of a term of workshops with new members.

Case Study: ‘Laying the Foundations’ Workshop Programme

A number of youth theatres reported that their workshop programme was based on, or inspired by, the resource “Laying the Foundations by Dave Kelly (Youth Theatre Ireland’s National Training Co-ordinator) which outlines an introductory workshop programme for new youth theatre members that builds basic drama and group skills through a series of planned workshops in:

Workshop 1 – Introduction; **Workshop 2** – Moving Groups; **Workshop 3** – Movement; **Workshop 4** – Give and Take (Improvisation); **Workshop 5** – Improv Circle; **Workshop 6** – Voice, Song and Story; **Workshop 7** – Ensemble and Tableaux; **Workshop 8** – Dialogue, Character and Text; **Workshop 9** – Soundscape Stories; and **Workshop 10** – Devising and Interpreting Stories.

Individual workshops within the programme are also designed to achieve a series of aims. For example, the aims of the first ‘Introduction’ workshop are:

- Introduce the participants to each other;
- Introduce yourself to the group;
- Create a safe, positive workshop environment;
- Begin the team building process;
- Encourage participants to engage with each other, physically and vocally;
- Develop a collective, sensory awareness;

- Introduce the participants to drama terminology (e.g., frozen image, neutral position, Scale of 1 to 10);
- Have fun.

As the workshop programme progresses, participants: work together as a team; experience different means of making drama; overcome challenges together and take on more responsibility in creating the stories they want their audience to experience. The aims of Workshop 9 'Sound-scape Stories' illustrate this progression for members:

- Explore non-verbal communication/expression;
- Create soundscapes, atmospheres and environments and translate these into stories;
- Heighten sensory awareness;
- Introduce a deeper level of trust;
- Build ensemble and develop problem-solving skills;
- Explore the creative versatility of the actor/performer.

4.3.3 Productions and Projects

Key Findings

- Youth theatres are exploring a wide range of theatre practices and production styles in their work, including: scripted texts and adaptations; devised plays; new writing by playwrights that developed from collaborations with young people; and new writing by young people.
- Youth theatre productions are experimenting with staging possibilities such as site-specific work and promenade performances as well as venue-based productions.
- Youth theatre productions of all types are developed collaboratively with members so that young people's ideas, interpretation and stories are central to the production process.

Centre Stage Context

In Centre Stage (1998), youth theatres were staging an average of two productions a year. Just over a third of productions were devised by members and more than a quarter were scripted plays. Youth theatres also reported staging new writing by young people, commissioned plays from professional playwrights, musicals and performances inspired by poems or stories. In 2009, youth theatres reported a similar combination of scripted and devised work. Centre Stage +10 also highlighted new developments in multi-disciplinary theatre, the use of multi-media in youth theatre and the range of performance opportunities provided by some youth theatres outside of the traditional venue-based production.

Youth Theatre Productions

For most youth theatre members, productions are the highlight of their youth theatre year and performance was the most popular youth theatre activity amongst Centre Stage +20 Member Workshop participants. Productions provide members with an opportunity to showcase the skills and abilities they have developed in workshops and can provide a public voice for young people on stories and ideas that are relevant to their lives. Youth theatre productions are a positive celebration of young people's artistic contribution to their own communities. They can offer unique theatre experiences in terms of themes, characters and ensemble theatre.

Scripted Plays

The majority of youth theatres include scripted plays as part of their repertoire. Some youth theatres have a preference for exploring scripted texts which are written specifically for young actors to perform. Leaders and members may share a preference for exploring issues which are directly relevant to young people's lives or may hold a belief that young actors should only play characters within their age

range. Other youth theatres have a preference for undertaking classic plays from the Irish, European or American canon, exploring a variety of theatre genres or universal themes.

Youth theatres report that it is important that the choice of play is a good match for the abilities and interests of the members. When choosing plays, the youth theatre leader is balancing: the interests and wishes of the members; the age group, gender and experience level of the members; the opportunities for ensemble playing or for experimenting with different performance styles/genres; the theme of the play; their recent production choices; the level of experience of the director; the production budget and venue available to them.

Youth theatres reported that they source scripts from the traditional canon, from the Playshare collection curated by Youth Theatre Ireland, from the NT Connections¹⁷ back-catalogue or seek inspiration from the productions of theatre companies and other youth theatres. In 2018, youth theatres performed scripted texts such as: Shakespeare's 'Comedy of Errors' (Dublin Youth Theatre); 'The Black Eyes' by Bev Clark (Laois Youth Theatre); 'Don't Shoot the Messenger' by John Morton (LYTC Carrigallen); 'These Bridges' by Phoebe Éclair-Powell (PlayActing Youth Theatre) and 'DNA' by Denis Kelly (M.A.D. Youth Theatre).

Case Study: Limerick Youth Theatre 'Coriolanus'

In 2018, Limerick Youth Theatre staged 'Coriolanus' written by Shakespeare and adapted for the stage by Tara Doolan. The adaptation explored the greed and politics at the heart of the play and updated it to a contemporary setting. The designers created 3-D architectural models that created a virtual environment which replicated the stage plot, elevations and sections of the original script. Technology supported the youth theatre to create an atmosphere of deception. Members worked with the complexity of the text as well as the functionality of digital video and interactive video mapped sets.

Devised Plays and Commissioned Plays

Youth theatres devise many of their own productions, offering opportunities for members to work collaboratively as an ensemble to create their own unique piece of theatre, often through improvisation, group writing activities and devising techniques. A devising process offers members an opportunity to develop ideas, themes and characters that interest them and shape their own stories into pieces of theatre they can share with a wider audience. Many youth theatres include devised work in their production programme because it is central to their youth theatre practice and ethos. However, other leaders report that devising also allows them to create work that is a unique fit for their members in terms of age and gender profile, interests and size of the group. For example, during 2018: Act Out Youth Theatre performed 'Inception' which included three one-act plays devised by members; Gonzo Youth Theatre devised 'Lost and Found' around the themes of friendship and exclusion; and Kilkenny Youth Theatre staged 'There is Only Now' which explored the interactions between a group of friends and was devised by the cast and written by Anna Galligan.

Youth theatres are also working directly with playwrights and dramaturgs to explore themes through improvisation and devising activities which are developed into scripted productions. It is no longer common for commissioned playwrights to develop plays without this phase of exploratory work with young people. There is an emerging practice of writers participating in devising activities with groups of youth theatre members before drawing back to write the script for the rehearsal phase of a production. For example, 'Beetroot' a play about embarrassment was written by Lucy Montague Moffatt after a series of devising workshops with Backstage Youth Theatre members.

Youth theatres are also developing new pieces of theatre in collaboration with theatre companies. Dublin Youth Theatre worked with Pan Pan Theatre Company to collaboratively create 'The Sleep-walkers' (2019) from ideas generated by Dublin Youth Theatre Members and found texts.

¹⁷ NT Connections (managed by the National Theatre, London) commissions ten new plays for young people to perform each year. Groups apply to participate, stage a local production of their chosen play and participate in a theatre festival staged by a partner venue in the UK. One production of each play transfers to the National Theatre festival in London.

Case Study: County Wexford Youth Theatre ‘Rate Me’

In workshops, County Wexford Youth Theatre explored what it is like to be a girl growing up in Ireland in 2018 and members’ opinions, stories and writing were captured by dramaturg, Marnie McCleane-Fay in the play ‘Rate Me’. The play was written against the back-drop of the #MeToo movement and explores how young women navigate growing up in a patriarchal world.

“You should always be happy and positive with who you are but in this society of slut shaming, fat shaming and just plain bitching it can be really challenging.”

County Wexford Youth Theatre Member

Case Study: Complex Youth Theatre ‘Dubs’

‘Dubs’ was devised by Complex Youth Theatre with Anthony Goulding & Killian Kirwan in 2019. In the play, a group of young housing activists take over the house of ‘The Dead’, where John Houston filmed the iconic film, based on James Joyce’s short story. Their mission is to highlight the growing housing crisis in Dublin and its detrimental effects. The solidarity of the group is threatened as other interests emerge, pitting preservation against housing. All the unnecessary attention hinders the landlord’s plan to develop the site for a hotel or student accommodation and he will not stop until the property is returned to its rightful owner. ‘Dubs’ was a site-specific production.

New Writing by Young People

Youth theatres are also staging work by young writers, whether they are current members, ex-members or young writers which have emerged through other arts programmes. Youth theatres are staging plays which were created through The Tenderfoot programme (an initiative of the Civic Theatre, Tallaght), through Young People’s Tiny Plays for Ireland (Fishamble: The New Play Company), as well as producing work written by current members. Members One-Act Festivals are a popular context for new writers in youth theatre to experiment and develop their skills (e.g., Dublin Youth Theatre). Writing groups and programmes are also available to youth theatre members. For example, Fighting Words at Graffiti Theatre have run a Young Playwrights Programme which Activate Youth Theatre members can participate in, and Dublin Youth Theatre Writers Groups have recently worked with Playwrights-in-Residence Dylan Coburn Gray, Michelle Read and Louise Melinn. Waterford Youth Arts run regular creative writing workshops and the LIT Young Writers Festival. Some youth theatres are also producing full-length plays by members and ex-members. For example, Waterford Youth Arts produced ‘If The Lights Change’ in 2017 by Martina Collender (a previous member of the youth theatre, young writer and current staff member) which explored the story of a young girl’s life and her reflections as she reached adulthood.

Case Study: Activate Youth Theatre

In 2019, Activate Youth Theatre produced ‘Almost Forgotten’ by Kel Menton (associate writer and previous member of Activate Youth Theatre). The play was developed with members and written by Kel Menton with the guidance and support of a playwriting mentor (John McCarthy who was also a previous member of Activate Youth Theatre). The production process was supported by a professional artistic team, with members and the young writer having ownership over the design of the final production. The production was supported by the Arts Council’s ‘Young Ensembles Scheme’.

A drama about minority cultures, magic, and stories, Almost Forgotten explores a beautifully realised mythical world, through storytelling and ensemble work.

“What happens when a story is forgotten?”

Are you ready?

Close your eyes...

Staging and Production Styles

Youth theatres are developing their practice by exploring the use of particular elements of theatre practice, performance styles and technology within their work. For example, Sligo Youth Theatre’s

practice has been very influenced by the physical theatre approach of Jacques Lecoq. Galway Community Circus displays the interdisciplinary nature of circus through its productions, including 2018’s ‘The Circus Guide to Chaos Theory’, a collaboration with Maleta Company which explored the dichotomy between chaos and order using the circus and performance skill sets of members. Droichead Youth Theatre has been creating new musicals with its members, such as ‘All Over and Out’ as well as exploring scripted pieces with songs such as Joan Littlewood’s ‘Oh What a Lovely War’. Youth theatres are exploring the use of technology within the themes of devised work and also within production design (see Limerick Youth Theatre case study above). Griese Youth Theatre and Backstage Youth Theatre regularly explore the genre of panto with their members, providing opportunities for youth-led creativity, exaggerated performance styles and community celebration.

Youth theatres are actively exploring non-traditional performance spaces and genres within their work, broadening members’ concept of theatre. For example:

- Working with the playwright Philip Doherty, Gonzo Youth Theatre members devised and performed the site-specific show ‘Disco Purgatoria’ in a nightclub in Cavan town;
- Activate Youth Theatre performed ‘Holiday Inn’ by young playwright Cillian Sheehan in a room at a hotel in Cork City. The play explored the homelessness crisis and the impact of temporary hotel accommodation on one family;
- StageCraft Youth Theatre’s production of Wedekind’s ‘Spring Awakening’ was staged inside the abandoned Kickham Barracks Church which was completely converted for the production;
- Droichead Youth Theatre performed ‘Nine Hot Lives’ in 2018, a promenade show which explored the wealth and poverty of 1920s Paris to a background of jazz.

Case Study: County Limerick Youth Theatre

As part of its exploration of local history and in collaboration with local communities, County Limerick Youth Theatre (with Lampróg Theatre) presented a series of theatre pieces in May 2019 which explored the rescue of the Volunteer Seán Hogan from Knocklong Railway Station using a variety of site-specific, promenade and interactive performance styles.

‘The Dance’: An inter-active performance at Knocklong Community Centre.

‘The Plan’: Site-specific plays starting in Galbally Community Centre and moving to different locations and houses around the village.

‘The Escape’: A 7.7km promenade theatre performance retracing the actual escape route of wounded Volunteers from Knocklong to Glenlara.

‘The Trial’: A re-creation of the trial (based on court extracts) at Knocklong Community Centre.

A Spectrum of Performance Opportunities

Youth theatres are providing a variety of performance opportunities beyond the traditional, annual production, to ensure that members can experiment and take creative risks within an appropriate performance context. Some youth theatres hold ‘closed’ performances for invited friends and family members where new work is shared in a low-key performance situation. Others have created ‘works-in-progress’ performances to test new work, such as Kildare Youth Theatre’s ‘work-in-progress’ performance of the devised play ‘Act of Oblivion’ (2018) which included a post-show discussion with the members.

Youth theatres have demonstrated a resurgence of interest in one-act festivals where members stretch their creative muscles and develop new skills as writers, directors and designers, as well as actors, in each other’s short plays. Dublin Youth Theatre has traditionally organised two one-act festivals for members each year: one is an opportunity for first-year members to act in short plays directed by professional theatre practitioners, and the second provides opportunities for members to write, direct, produce and act in their own short plays. In recent years, M.A.D. Youth Theatre, Roscommon County Youth Theatre, Activate Youth Theatre and Lightbulb Youth Theatre have all adopted ‘one-act festival’ approaches through short play festivals and summer projects.

Youth Theatre Projects

Youth theatres develop long-term projects exploring specific themes or working in partnership with other young people or communities which typically culminate with a sharing of work but sometimes are planned as a purely participative experience. For example, Clare Youth Theatre broadened its local partnerships by developing an intergenerational project in a hospital setting in 2018 and Droichead Youth Theatre expands its programme by running a summer camp project called ‘Drámaíocht trí Ghaeilge’ to create theatre work in the Irish language. The LYTC Manorhamilton case study is an example of a long-term youth theatre project which finished with a partnership production of a new play.

Case Study: LYTC Manorhamilton ‘Across The Lines: Youth Theatre – Creative Collaboration I’

This was a cross-community and cross-border project which created an opportunity for young people involved in the Manorhamilton Junior and Senior Youth Theatres to engage with Fermanagh-based young people (led by Sally Rees) in a new drama project, as part of The Glen Centre’s ‘Across The Lines’ International Fund for Ireland Programme.

This 12-month project took as its departure the ‘no-longer-in-existence’ Sligo Leitrim and Northern Counties Railway line which once linked the people of Enniskillen and Sligo and the villages and townlands in-between. LYTC Manorhamilton members and young people from Fermanagh developed skills of enquiry, interviewing members of active age groups, historical societies and railway enthusiasts to unearth the stories of the ‘SL&NCR’. The youth participants discovered the landscapes of ‘the border’ for themselves working with the artist Seamus Dunbar and exploring themes and drama approaches with their youth theatre facilitators. Participants also worked with the Fermanagh based playwright Carlo Gébler and Paula McFettridge of Kabosh Theatre Company (Belfast) directed the work of three youth theatre groups into a cohesive integrated production. This project led to a new script written by Carlo Gébler, ‘SL&NCR : an entertainment that goes A-Z but not in that order!’. The script inter-weaves fictionalised lived experience with the imagination, and the social with the environmental. It conveys connectivity between people and place, across jurisdictions whilst playfully addressing difference and sectarianism. The play premiered at The Glens Centre, Manorhamilton on 29 March 2019, the original Brexit date and was followed by a performance in Ardhown Theatre, Enniskillen.

4.3.4 Attending Youth Theatre and Professional Productions

Key Findings

- A majority of youth theatres are programming trips to youth theatre productions and professional theatre productions on an annual basis.
- Professional theatre trips are programmed to encourage members to engage critically with theatre, broaden their experience of theatre practice and to inspire them in their own theatre-making.
- Trips to youth theatre productions are also programmed to inspire members but typically happen within the context of existing relationships where young people want to support each other’s artistic achievements.
- Youth theatres are increasingly programming post-show discussions and young critics events to enhance members’ experience of theatre productions and their understanding of the production process as well as developing their critical voice.

Centre Stage Context

Visits to the theatre featured highly within the programming of Centre Stage youth theatres in 1998, with more than half of all members stating that they had attended youth theatre productions with their own youth theatre. During Census Week 1997, two groups reported theatre visits. By the time of Centre Stage +10, the majority of youth theatres reported that they included at least one visit to a professional theatre production within their annual programme, but only 44% of members reported they had seen a professional production with their youth theatre. Youth theatres also tried to see local youth theatre

productions where possible. Seeing good quality theatre that would open members’ eyes to different stories, styles and approaches was an important, if irregular, part of the activity programme.

Attendance at Theatre Productions

Youth theatre leaders want their members to experience challenging, high quality theatre that will inspire them in their own theatre-making and encourage them to engage critically with the art form. Of the 605 respondents to the Centre Stage +20 Member Questionnaire:

- 55% of members reported that they had seen another youth theatre production;
- 42% of members reported that they had seen a professional theatre production with their youth theatre.

When discussing their annual programmes in the Centre Stage +20 Youth Theatre Questionnaire, the majority of youth theatres reported that they plan a theatre trip for members each year. Members aged 15 and older, and with two or more years of experience, are most likely to have participated in theatre trips. Youth theatres also cite theatre trips as an important element of their social programme.

Youth Theatre Productions

A majority of members who participated in the Centre Stage +20 Member Questionnaire had seen a youth theatre production, and though leaders are more likely to report the programming of professional theatre trips, a majority of youth theatres include trips to other youth theatre productions as part of their annual programme. Sometimes these trips are designed to inspire the theatre practice and ambition of members by exposing them to high quality, challenging youth theatre productions. More often, these trips are an element of an ongoing relationship between youth theatres where members want to support each other’s artistic achievements, to engage with the themes, practice and process involved in each other’s work, and to see their friends.

There is a higher level of engagement between youth theatres in some regions, and reciprocal visits to productions are more common in specific counties. For example, youth theatres in Cork, Leitrim, Louth and Kildare are more likely to see each other’s work because of existing relationships developed through the youth theatre model (Leitrim) or projects/festivals. Outside of urban settings, youth theatres are more likely to see the productions of neighbouring youth theatres. For example, in 2018, Mostrim Youth Players (Edgeworthstown, Longford) travelled 15km to see a Backstage Youth Theatre production. However, youth theatres from all over the country also travel to see National Youth Theatre productions in Dublin.

Youth theatre members also see youth theatre productions in the context of festivals. For example, youth theatres from Kildare participate in an annual NT Connections Festival at the Riverbank Arts Centre, Newbridge where members can attend approximately five youth theatre productions over a weekend, before travelling to the NT Connections Festival at The Lyric Theatre, Belfast to see further youth theatre productions from North and South.

Professional Theatre Productions

Youth theatres are bringing members to see professional productions that challenge members in terms of theatre practice, genre and staging but also challenge in terms of the themes explored in the work. Youth theatres are choosing productions which young people will connect with and want to see. Youth theatres are also choosing age-appropriate productions. As indicated by the age profile of members who reported participating in professional theatre trips, youth theatres are more likely to bring older members who are better placed to handle a more challenging theatrical experience. Youth theatres also choose productions based on existing relationships with local venues or theatre companies.

During Census Week 2017, two youth theatres brought 32 members to see professional productions in local venues:

- Roscommon County Youth Theatre went to see ‘Star of the Sea’ at Roscommon Arts Centre (the youth theatre’s home venue), developed for the stage by Moonfish Theatre Company.
- M.A.D. Youth Theatre went to see ‘Romeo and Juliet’ at An Táin (Dundalk), a Quintessence Theatre Company production (a professional theatre company based in Louth).

Youth theatres independently book tickets for local, regional or national venues for productions of their choice. Some youth theatres run by venues and arts centres offer discounted ticket rates to

members to support regular theatre attendance and encourage audience development. Youth theatre members may also see professional productions in the context of a local Young Critics project or the Youth Theatre Ireland Young Critics Programme.

Young Critics and Post-Show Discussions

It is increasingly common for youth theatres to participate in post-show discussions. Venues and production companies are often open to creating opportunities for youth theatre members to engage with cast and crew members, particularly where there is a long-term relationship between a venue and a local youth theatre. It is also increasingly common for some youth theatres to hold their own post-show discussions to explore the context of their work, the themes of their plays, and the nature of their devising/rehearsal process with their audience. For example, Stagecraft Youth Theatre (Clonmel) held a post-show discussion after their production of 'The Fight' in 2019, a play devised by the members which explored the nature of masculinity, and the behaviour and preoccupations of a group of teenagers.

Youth Theatre Ireland's 'Young Critics Programme' began in 2004 and has welcomed over 240 members to the programme from different youth theatres across Ireland in the past 15 years. Through participating in workshops that explore theatre criticism, attending professional productions and using different mediums to voice their own critiques of performances they've seen, the Young Critics Programme aims to develop young people's appreciation of the aesthetic of theatre and their critical voice. With the support of training events and resources, youth theatres have begun to add Young Critics workshops to their programme to enhance members' experience of viewing theatre and shape opportunities for members to discuss and share their critical observations. Youth theatres are running Young Critics workshops alongside theatre visits (See Cork Midsummer Meet-up Case Study below) or, where resources allow, setting up a Young Critics programme within the youth theatre (Dublin Youth Theatre). The Riverbank Arts Centre has also run a Young Critics Programme for members drawn from Kildare Youth Theatre and Griese Youth Theatre. Members have taken part in a masterclass with a featured critic, attended and reviewed productions and participated in a public panel discussion.

Challenges

Limited resources are the key factor preventing youth theatres from seeing more theatre productions. The cost of tickets and travel are cited by youth theatres as issues that prevent them from engaging with professional or youth theatre productions. Some youth theatres report that their rural setting isolates them and makes it difficult to access professional or youth theatre productions without additional funding for travel. A lack of time and human resources can also be an issue, as it takes time to build relationships with neighbouring youth theatres, time to organise theatre trips and an appropriate number of leaders to maintain supervision ratios during theatre trips.

Case Study: Cork Midsummer Meet-Up 2018

Over 30 members from Activate Youth Theatre, Glengarriff Youth Theatre, Lightbulb Youth Theatre and UCC Youth Theatre attended the 'Cork Midsummer Meet-Up' in UCC on June 22nd 2018 to take part in workshops, explore critical thinking skills and see theatre productions.

- The members took part in a large workshop to help everyone get to know each other and participate in 'Young Critics' activities which questioned how young people experience and respond to theatre.
- The group attended the 'Young Playwrights' event at the Everyman Theatre presenting staged readings of new writing from nine young playwrights. These young writers developed and honed their scriptwriting skills with the support of playwright mentors at Graffiti Theatre Company as part of Fighting Words Cork and in association with the premiere of "Asking for It" by Louise O'Neill (Landmark Productions and the Everyman Theatre).
- Youth theatre members took part in a '10 Minute Dance Party' in a shipping container where the Australian artist JOF welcomed young people to collaborate, party hard and choreograph their own event for a limited period of time.
- Members attended Ériu Dance Company's production 'Rite of Spring' at the Firkin Crane. A work-in-progress, this dance show explored toxic masculinity and mob-mentality.

4.3.5 Festivals, Exchanges and International Work

Key Findings

- Participation in festivals, exchanges and other partnership projects offer youth theatres an opportunity for artistic and social exchange.
- Over half of youth theatre members (55%) have met someone from another youth theatre and 48% have travelled with their youth theatre, either within their county, within Ireland or within Europe.
- A broad range of youth theatres are engaging with each other through festivals, exchanges and partnerships projects they initiated themselves, as well as through the Youth Theatre Ireland national programme.
- A third of Centre Stage +20 youth theatres have engaged in international projects over the past three years, including; youth exchanges and initiatives; north/south projects; international projects and festivals; NT Connections; and international projects with a training focus.

Centre Stage Context

Centre Stage does not describe international exchanges and projects but does report that 40% of members had travelled within their region, 37% had travelled within Ireland and 22% had travelled internationally. At the time, Youth Theatre Ireland ran national festivals for members and sent members to participate in European Drama Encounters through its membership of EDERED (European Drama Encounters/Rencontres Europeens de Drama).

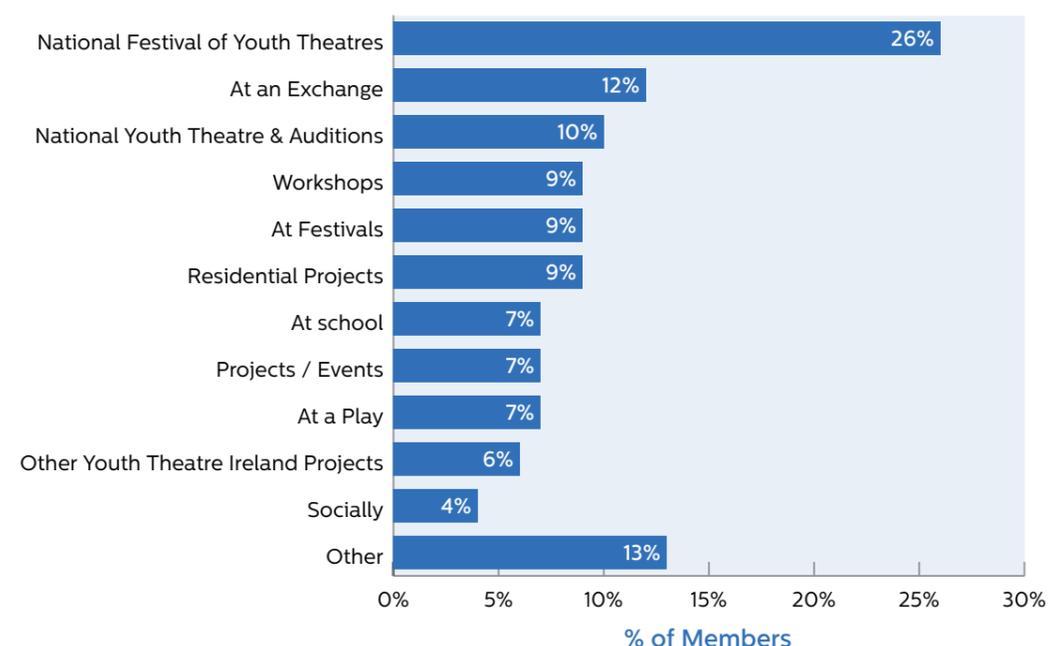
In 2009, 73% of members had met someone from another youth theatre. However, only 55% had travelled to meet other youth theatre members with 23% traveling within their own county, 40% travelling within Ireland and 9% travelling within Europe. Centre Stage +10 youth theatres had participated in: Youth Theatre Ireland festivals and residential events; EDERED European Youth Theatre Encounters; NT Connections (National Theatre, UK); local festivals and youth theatre festivals; as well as international exchanges and festivals.

Engagement Levels with other Youth Theatres, Festivals and Events

Participation in festivals, exchanges and other partnership projects offer youth theatres an opportunity for artistic and social exchange between their members and young people from different backgrounds, cultures or theatre practices. Youth theatres work with a wide range of project partners and report that work which brings them into contact with other young people, artists and communities, fosters a sense of belonging to a wider community (in an artistic and a social sense), developing and enriching their youth theatre practice with young people.

Figure 4.6 depicts the most common ways that youth theatre members meet young people from other youth theatres.

Figure 4.6: Where do you meet members from other youth theatres?



Figures are based on 272 respondents to the Centre Stage +20 Member Questionnaire who had met a member from another youth theatre. Members could choose multiple options. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

- Over half of youth theatre members (55%) have met someone from another youth theatre, an 18% decrease from Centre Stage +10.
- 48% have travelled with their youth theatre, either within their county, within Ireland or within Europe.
- No members within the sample had travelled outside Europe with their youth theatre.

Members from 32 different youth theatres had travelled with their group within Ireland and members from 10 youth theatres had travelled within Europe. Partnership activity is very high in some well-resourced youth theatres or in youth theatres where a partnership approach is at the heart of programme delivery, but for another significant group of youth theatres it is an activity that is not offered regularly to the membership. A lack of time, resources, funding expertise and connections with potential partners are all cited as obstacles to developing partnership projects.

Local and National Festivals and Partnership Projects

Youth theatres are regularly engaging with each other through their own partnership projects and festivals as well as through Youth Theatre Ireland's national programme of activities.

Youth Theatre Ireland's National Programme

A broad range of Centre Stage +20 youth theatres and their members were regularly taking part in the national programme of Youth Theatre Ireland during the Centre Stage +20 research period. It was particularly important for those youth theatres without the resources to initiate their own partnership projects, exchanges or festivals. Youth theatres participated in:

National Festival of Youth Theatres: an annual five-day residential festival for over 100 young people which has a skill-development focus and offers a programme of workshops and social activities. Over a quarter of members (26%) who had met a young person from another youth theatre, met them at this festival (Figure 4.6).

Other programmes: A further 16% of members met each other at other Youth Theatre Ireland events. Members particularly mentioned the National Youth Theatre auditions, but also mentioned the Young Critics Programme, Playshare and the Ignite Festival (a performance festival that took place in 2016).

Local Festivals and Residentials

Youth theatres initiate and manage their own partnership projects, local festivals and exchanges.

- 27% of Member Questionnaire respondents who had met another youth theatre member reported meeting them at a workshop, a festival or a residential project.

Regular events such as the Louth Youth Theatre Residential (see case study below), the Cork Midsummer Meet-Up (See Section 4.3.4) or the NT Connections Festival at the Riverbank Arts Centre, Newbridge were mentioned frequently by members. Youth theatres are also working together to create once-off partnership projects or short festivals such as:

- The Short Play Festival 2018: Activate Youth Theatre, Lightbulb Youth Theatre and UCC Youth Theatre (not in Centre Stage +20 sample) took part in a day of workshops, rehearsals and performances at Graffiti Theatre Company. Members presented short plays ranging from devised pieces to scripted plays to their peers, friends and family members.
- Griese Youth Theatre and Mountrath Youth Theatre ran joint workshops together in Laois to build connections between the youth theatres and their membership.

Case Study: Louth Youth Theatre Residential

The annual Louth Youth Theatre Residential (established in 2015) invites 36 members of Droichead Youth Theatre, Dundalk Youth Theatre and M.A.D. Youth Theatre to take part in a three-day residential event jam-packed with workshops, skills sharing and social activities, as well as master classes with guest theatre practitioners. In 2018, participation was free for members. The event is funded by Create Louth (Louth Arts Office) and is delivered in partnership with the three Louth youth theatres.

2018 Programme Highlights:

Friday

- Dance workshop with Christina Matthews (Droichead Youth Theatre leader)
- Soundscape workshop with Kwasi Boyce (M.A.D. Youth Theatre Leader)
- Table quiz

Saturday:

- Masterclass workshop in 'Improv' with Darren Yorke (guest facilitator): *This workshop explored Spontaneity, Improv Games and Scene Work.*
- Masterclass workshop in 'Ensemble' with Ciarán Gray (guest facilitator): *This workshop explored the theme of Leaders, and through movement and voice explored the qualities we look for in those we choose to follow.*
- T-shirt Printing with Creative Spark (guest artists)
- Karaoke and open mic session
- Social time

Sunday:

- Group games /skills sharing
- Active evaluation
- Games, group dance and photocall

Previous master classes have included 'Clown' with Raymond Keane, 'Directing' with Sarah Bradley, 'Film' with Colin Thornton and 'Musical Theatre' with Evelyn Shaw, and have included professional performances by Declan Gorman and Quintessence Theatre.

"For many of our young people, this is their first time away from home, living with their peers and meeting other drama-mad teenagers. The friendships formed on these residentials, both within each youth theatre and across the full group, are often highlighted as one of the strongest positive outcomes of this work. These connections generally continue after the residential with members travelling across the county to see each other's work, and attending national events together."

Droichead Youth Theatre Leader

International Festivals, Exchanges and Projects

A third of Centre Stage +20 youth theatres have engaged in international projects over the past three years. Youth theatres are typically participating in international projects to develop their artistic practice and extend the opportunities available to members. However, a limited number of youth theatres are also benefitting from international relationships in terms of training and capacity building. Youth theatres tend to be connected to other European youth theatres and organisations, with the United Kingdom, Finland, Austria, France, Norway, Greece, Russia, Spain and the Czech Republic mentioned by respondents.

Youth Exchanges and Initiatives

Youth theatres participate in Erasmus+ funded youth exchanges and transnational youth initiatives with European youth theatres and partners to exchange practice, explore ideas and make work together. For example, County Limerick Youth Theatre finished a Transnational Youth Initiative with the Loimaa Teatteri in Finland called 'Acting Out 100!' in 2018 (See case study below) and participated in the 'Unleash 2017!' Youth Exchange with Biondekbühne in Austria. M.A.D. Youth Theatre hosted a youth exchange in Louth with young people from the Authors Theatre Organisation (Moscow) to explore folklores and stories and share different approaches to making theatre together. Complex Youth Theatre created a play exploring a young Irish woman's experience of Brexit Britain called 'Her Eyes They Shone Like Diamonds' through a collaborative transnational project with Junkshop Theatre Company, Nottingham.

North/South Projects

Youth theatres in the border counties have a rich tradition of engaging with youth theatres in the North to develop partnership projects or exchanges together. For example, LYTC Manorhamilton worked in partnership with Fermanagh-based young people, a director from Kabosh Theatre Company (Belfast) and the Fermanagh-based playwright Carlo Gébler to devise and create a new play exploring local history (See Section 4.3.4).

International Projects

Some youth theatres have participated in the Irish element of a wider international project. For example, Kilkenny Youth Theatre, Activate Youth Theatre, Droichead Youth Theatre and Roscommon County Youth Theatre were involved in the AB Project in partnership with The Abbey Theatre and the David Glass Ensemble (UK). The AB Project was a participatory theatre project exploring social and political polarisation, drawing on young people's responses to the attack which took place on Utøya, Norway on July 22nd 2011. Irish youth theatres performed their devised work at The Abbey Theatre in 2018 while young people from England, Spain, Italy, Norway, Serbia, Canada, Singapore and China created work inspired by their engagement with the theme in their own countries.

International Festivals

Some youth theatres attend European festivals for youth theatres or equivalent styles of participatory theatre practice for young people. Some festivals are production focused while others involve elements such as workshop programmes or social activities. This type of European engagement is not common as it is difficult to fund but some youth theatres have built strong connections with particular festivals which they value. For example, M.A.D. Youth Theatre (Louth) is a regular attendee at the Class in Action Youth Theatre Festival in Prague.

NT Connections (National Theatre, UK)

Some Irish youth theatres participate in the NT Connections project (managed by the National Theatre, UK) and perform at the annual NT Connections Festival at the Lyric, Belfast. The project commissions 10 new plays for young people to perform each year, with regional partners staging performance festivals for participating groups. In 2019, Kildare Youth Theatre, Mr. Sands Youth Theatre, Monaghan Youth Theatre, Playacting Youth Theatre, Ardclough Youth Theatre and Griese Youth Theatre participated.

International Projects with a Training Focus

In the past few years, both County Limerick Youth Theatre and Kildare Youth Theatre have been involved in developing international volunteering opportunities (through EU Programmes: European Voluntary Scheme and European Solidarity Corps) within their youth theatres to support the training of

Young Leaders. County Limerick Youth Theatre has sent youth theatre members as volunteers to: Teatro On and Off (Spain); Biondekbühne (Austria) and Compagnons Battisseurs (France). Kildare Youth Theatre accepts international volunteers through the European Solidarity Corps and Erasmus+ Student Traineeships and regularly accommodates approximately four volunteers from countries such as Austria, Greece, Italy, Denmark and the Czech Republic. Taking a different approach, Waterford Youth Arts took part in an Erasmus+ funded strategic partnership in 2018 to examine, and advocate for, the development of leadership skills that young people learn whilst creating artistic work, alongside Stella Polaris (Norway) and National Theatre Târgu-Mures (Transylvania, Romania).

Case Study: Kildare Youth Theatre

During Census 2017, Kildare Youth Theatre members were participating in the **TeeNEXTers** Youth Exchange in Lille, France alongside young people from Belgium, France, Norway and Scotland. The project, which explored creative criticism in the arts and used artistic collaboration to enhance young people's ability to express their opinions, was organised by Theatre le Grand Bleu and ran alongside the NEXT Arts Festival. On the Saturday of Census Week, Kildare Youth Theatre members took part in:

10.00 – 10.30am	Group warm-up activities led by the young people
10.30 – 12.30pm	Critical Workshop with new media to discuss/critique shows
2.00 – 5.00pm	Working in small (mixed nationality) groups to make a response to the show using performance
7 – 10.30pm	Travel to see a show called 'Crowd' in Belgium

Kildare Youth Theatre also took part in other European projects that year, including:

'Visibly Vocal', a youth theatre exchange for 50 teenagers held in Newbridge, exploring ways to make site-specific theatre. Young people and artists from Kinitiras Studio (Athens), Theatre Le Grand Bleu (Lille), Bornholm Dramaskole (Bornholm), Ottovale (Bologna), Teatro On & Off (Logrono) and Kildare Youth Theatre made five performances staged around Newbridge.

'The Presence of the Other Amongst Us', was a performance devised with 10 young people from Ireland, Andorra, Catalunya, Bulgaria and Poland about the reception of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers as part of an exchange in Catalunya, called 'Play the Change.'

'Indigo', a youth theatre exchange in Athens which brought together over 30 Greek and Irish young people and theatre-makers to make performances about LGBT issues and the politics of gender.

Case Study: County Limerick Youth Theatre

County Limerick Youth Theatre and Loimaa Teatteri (Finland) have developed international projects and exchanges with each other since 2011. Over the past eight years the groups have developed three youth exchanges and three transnational youth initiative projects together involving different generations of members in an exchange of theatre practice, culture, ideas and friendship.

The most recent transnational youth initiative 'Acting Out 100' which ran from 2016 to 2018 used Ireland's 2016 centenary commemoration of the Easter Rising and Finland's centenary of independence in 2017 as a starting point to explore issues around nationalism, independence and the creation of republics. Members spent time exploring their past through drama, experiencing the commemorations together in a broader European context and investigating ideas of citizenship. Thirty young people from these rural youth theatre organisations explored the project themes in their own countries, built conversations with each other online and took part in two trans-national meetings in Ireland and Finland. The groups devised a play called 'Orange and Blues' about re-building a war-torn society and performed it together at the Loimaa Theatre, Finland.

Conclusions

Youth theatres are programming a wide range of challenging artistic activities with members to support their development and create unique theatre work that is responding to the ideas, imagination and experience of members. The workshop programmes, theatre projects and

productions, exchanges, festivals and other activities align with the description of youth theatre practice proposed by the sector.

Many youth theatres have the resources, experience and connections to initiate and deliver high quality youth theatre programming across a range of different types of activities. The range of activities reported by youth theatres is directly linked to their resource capacity. It is important to support all youth theatres to be ambitious in their programming and creation of work with young people, so that each youth theatre can reach the creative potential possible within its context and resources. There will always be small youth theatres whose limited resources prevent them from offering the breadth of activities possible in larger youth theatres. In these situations, Youth Theatre Ireland's national programme plays a valuable role in providing access for all members to a rich mix of challenging theatre opportunities.

4.4 Other Elements of Practice

4.4.1 Recruitment of Members

Key Findings

- The majority of youth theatres (81%) are using active recruitment strategies to encourage young people from a range of backgrounds to join youth theatre.
- The most popular youth theatre recruitment strategies involve the distribution of information through social media (78%), websites (38%) and posters/flyers in the local community (44%), as well as asking members to bring friends (56%).
- Many youth theatres are engaging actively with youth work services and schools through taster workshops and referrals.
- Leaders reported that a lack of time and resources hindered effective recruitment activities. Young people reported that a lack of information about youth theatre was a key barrier to participation.
- Nearly a third of youth theatres are operating waiting lists for new members.

Centre Stage Context

The most common recruitment strategies reported in Centre Stage +20 were passive in nature. 'Word of mouth' and recommendations from existing members helped to recruit new members, many of whom had realistic expectations of what to expect from joining youth theatre and were more likely to stay. The most popular type of active recruitment strategy was delivering free taster workshops in schools and other settings.

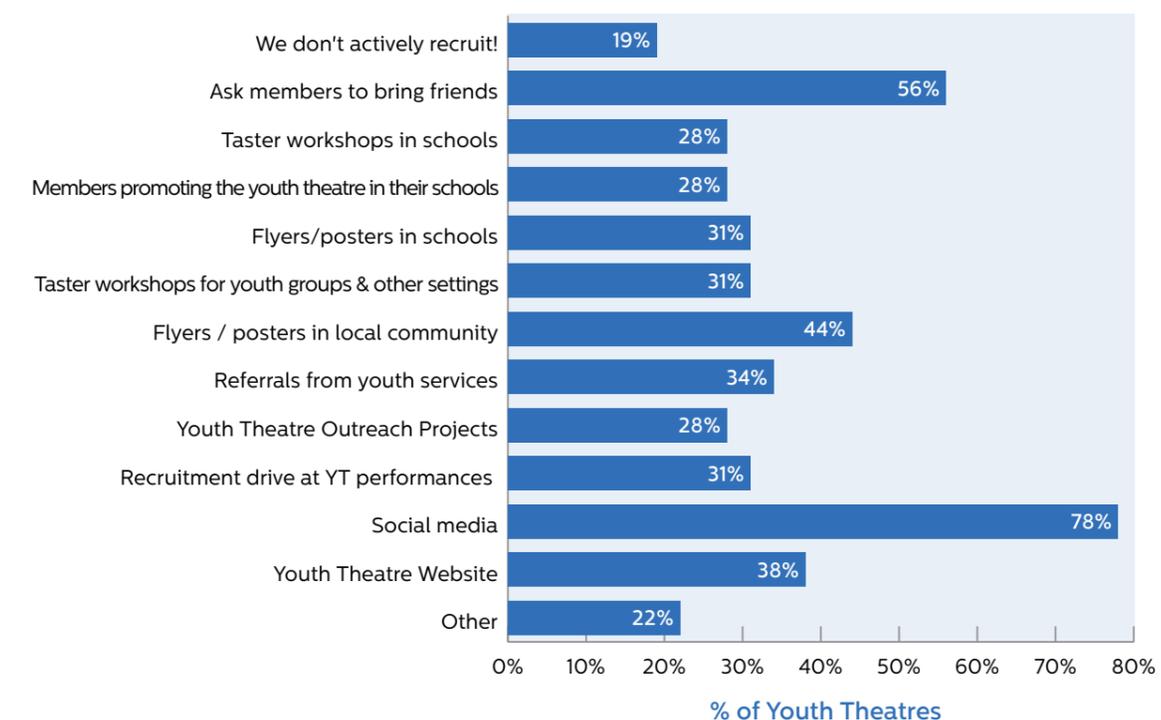
Common Approaches to Member Recruitment

The majority of youth theatres (81%) use active recruitment strategies to recruit new youth theatre members based on the 32 respondents to the Centre Stage +20 Youth Theatre Questionnaire. Common methods used are:

- Social media (78%);
- Flyers/posters in local community (44%) or in local schools (31%);
- Youth Theatre website (38%).

Some of the most popular methods of recruitment are also some of the most time effective, which suits youth theatre leaders at a very busy time of year. Youth theatres run by arts centres and venues also benefit significantly from inclusion within seasonal brochures, social media and websites.

Figure 4.7: How do you Recruit New Members for your Youth Theatre?



Figures are based on 32 respondents to the Centre Stage +20 Youth Theatre Questionnaire. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Youth theatres are using their projects and productions as promotional opportunities for youth theatre membership. For example:

- 31% of youth theatres use their annual production to promote member recruitment and 28% use outreach projects as an opportunity to encourage young people from a varied range of settings to consider joining mainstream youth theatre activities.

Youth theatres are also going directly to young people in different settings to offer them a 'taster' experience of a youth theatre workshop and to try and diversify their membership profile. For example, during Census Week, two board members from Mountrath Youth Theatre visited a local school to promote the youth theatre and recruit new members.

- 28% are running 'taster' workshops in schools and 31% are running them for youth groups and other settings.

"We run 'try for free' workshops and advertise through local media"
Act Out Youth Theatre Leader

Just over a third were taking referrals from local youth work services, including youth theatres from a broad range of models. In some cases, this was an informal arrangement based on a good working relationship between individual youth workers and youth theatres. In other cases, a partnership agreement had been created:

"In 2019, we have brokered a new partnership arrangement with Skibbereen Community and Family Resource Centre for referrals and these places may be free or have a minimal charge."
Rusty Frog Youth Theatre Leader

Youth theatre members are often deemed to be the best advertisements for youth theatre and some members help to promote member recruitment opportunities within their schools (28%) or are asked to 'bring a friend' to youth theatre activities (56%).

Challenges in Recruitment

One of the key challenges mentioned by youth theatre leaders was a lack of time and resources to carry out active recruitment strategies. There was rarely core funding to cover these type of additional activities and many paid leaders were undertaking this work on a voluntary basis. Some of the youth theatres that did not actively recruit (19%) were facing these challenges.

Under-Subscribed Youth Theatres

Ten of the Centre Stage +20 youth theatres reported under 15 members in their group and could be described as under-subscribed. Some of these youth theatres were struggling with recruitment strategies and with communicating the youth theatre experience to local young people. Of 567 respondents to the Member Questionnaire, 61% perceived that a lack of information about youth theatre and 'not knowing if you would like it' was a key barrier stopping other young people taking part, while another 59% felt that a lack of awareness of youth theatre was also stopping people.

Over-Subscribed Youth Theatres

Three out of 10 youth theatres that completed the Youth Theatre Questionnaire were operating a waiting list (31%). This group of youth theatres represented a wide range of youth theatre models and different membership sizes. However, they were all over-subscribed and their membership size was at maximum capacity for the existing level of resources within the youth theatre. These 10 youth theatres reported a waiting list of 322 young people. Many of the youth theatres that did not actively recruit were within this category.

"We don't recruit as we have a waiting list"
Blessington Youth Theatre Leader

"We leave forms at productions but have stopped actively recruiting due to being over-subscribed as we go into the new year."
Kilkenny Youth Theatre Leader

Waiting lists often reduce youth theatre's capacity to actively recruit and target harder-to-reach young people. Leaders can feel pressured to accept young people who have been waiting to join and it can seem counter-intuitive to actively recruit when a waiting list already exists. Young people also often progress automatically from junior to senior youth theatre groups, limiting the number of available places in the senior group for new members, and creating a challenge for leaders who would like to actively recruit to create a more diverse membership.

Some over-subscribed youth theatres introduce membership criteria, and operate waiting lists for 'Open Days' or workshop auditions to select young people and ensure they can still encourage diversity within the membership. In this situation, youth theatres are not usually looking for 'talent' but will instead prioritise young people from target groups to create a more inclusive membership profile. For example, Dublin Youth Theatre can take approximately 32% of applicants each year and runs 'Open Day' events and audition workshops to select new members. The youth theatre's selection criteria prioritise young people aged 14 and over, a balanced gender profile and a diverse range of Dublin post-codes. They state "No experience is necessary. It's more important that you have an open mind and are a good team player."¹⁸

4.4.2 Evaluation and Documentation

Key Findings

- All youth theatres are engaged in evaluating their work, with informal methods of evaluative discussion (97%) and observation by leaders (84%) proving the most popular.
- The vast majority of youth theatres (94%) were engaged in documenting their work, with taking photographs of youth theatre activities (97%) and archiving poster and programmes (81%) proving the most popular methods.

Centre Stage Context

Centre Stage +20 noted that youth theatres were all engaged in evaluation and documenting their work to some degree. During Census Week 2007, 56% of youth theatres had evaluated an activity and 81% had documented an activity. Most youth theatres were evaluating work on an informal and regular basis with young people, while some were using short evaluation questionnaires or activities, and a small number had engaged in more formal evaluation projects (particularly in partnership with a funder). Youth theatres were more active in documenting work. They were archiving programmes and posters from productions, filming performances, photographing workshops and keeping records of workshops plans and devised scripts. No comparative data from Centre Stage exists.

Evaluation

All youth theatres that responded to the Centre Stage +20 Youth Theatre Questionnaire (32) reported that they were evaluating youth theatre activities. The most common methods of evaluation activities were of an informal nature with members and leaders:

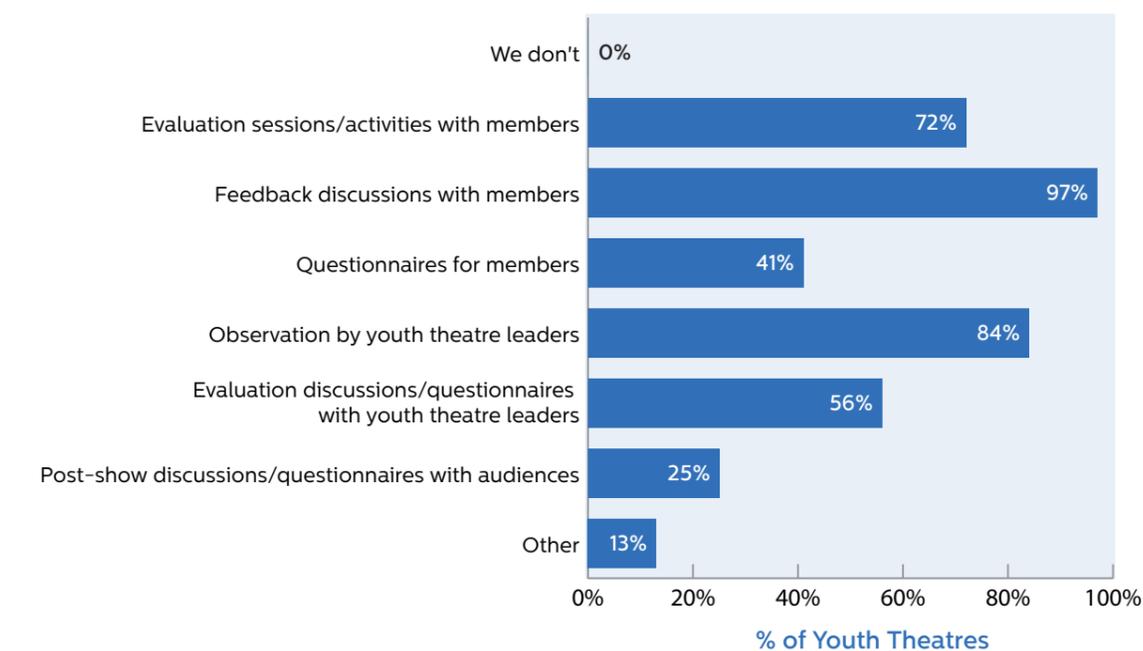
- Feedback discussions with members (97%).

The prevalence of this evaluation method reflects the most popular method of including young people's voices in decision-making – informal feedback and discussion with members (See Section 2.3.5). Leaders and members were: discussing the outcomes of particular activities, workshops or projects with members; exploring what worked and what they thought could have been improved; deciding on the best course of action to take after workshops/ projects, etc. were finished.

- Observation by youth theatre leaders (84%).

Leaders are observing members' participation in activities, and assessing: the group dynamic; young people's needs and skill levels; responses to particular themes or theatre specialisms; and adjusting programme delivery based on their observations. For example, leaders are using their skills and experience to: adjust plans during workshops to adapt to the needs of the group; judge whether specialist freelance practitioners are needed to support the development of a rehearsal process; and select performance opportunities which are appropriate to the experience level of the group.

Figure 4.8: How do you evaluate the work of your youth theatre?



Figures are based on 32 respondents to the Centre Stage +20 Youth Theatre Questionnaire. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Youth theatres were also engaged in structured evaluation activities:

- 71% were running structured sessions/activities with members and 41% were asking young people to fill in questionnaires;
- 56% of youth theatres were running evaluation discussions with youth theatre leaders or asking them to complete questionnaires to assess their response to, and learning from, youth theatre activities;

“We have regular feedback sessions and always hold one at the end of a production. We generally use creative, non-formal learning methods of evaluation. We also hold regular feedback sessions to evaluate work with leaders and facilitators.”
County Limerick Youth Theatre Leader

- A quarter of youth theatres were also running ‘post-show discussions’ with audiences to explore responses to their work and the processes involved in creating productions. For example, Griese Youth Theatre staged a post-show discussion with audience members after a production of Jack Thorne’s ‘Burying your Brother in the Pavement’, a play which explores the story of a girl grieving for her dead brother, as part of First Fortnight 2019 (an arts festival which raises awareness about mental health).

Evaluation during Census Week

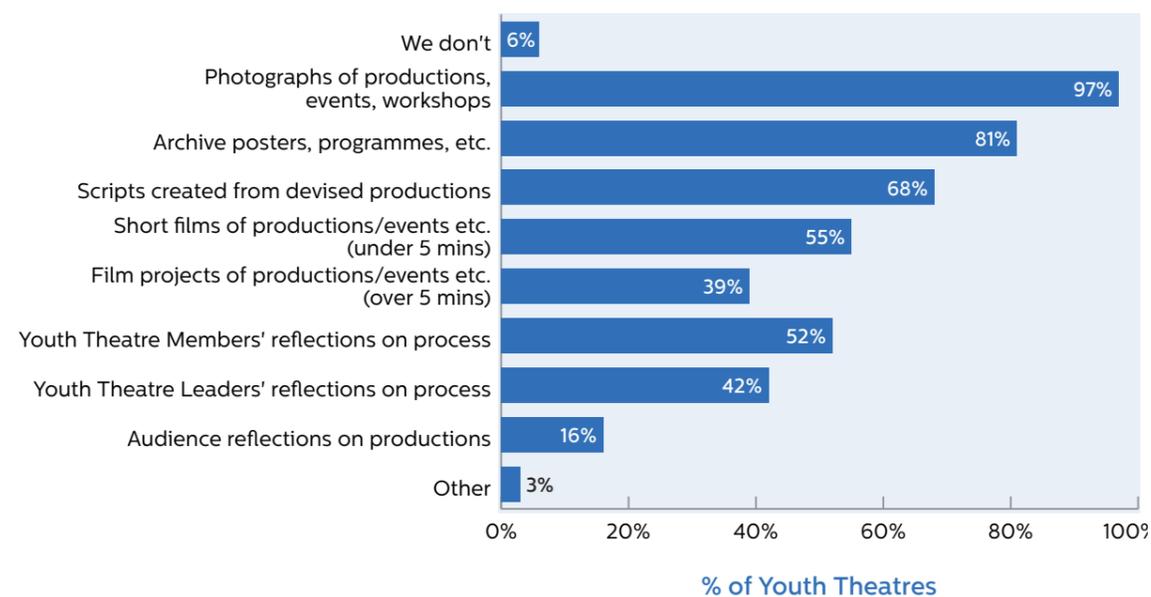
Two-thirds of the 45 youth theatres that took part in Census Week 2017 evaluated work during those seven days, indicating that evaluation is common practice amongst youth theatre leaders. The majority were focused on artistic activities, with: 73% evaluating a workshop; a third evaluating a rehearsal; 17% evaluating a project; and 10% evaluating a performance.

Documentation

The vast majority of youth theatres (94%) that responded to the Centre Stage +20 Youth Theatre Questionnaire (32) reported that they were documenting youth theatre activities. Youth theatres document their work: to record their history and the creative journey of their members; to curate their own story so they can communicate it to the wider public; to fulfil obligations to current funders or generate supporting material for future funding applications; to record their creative work and potentially use the archives as inspiration for creative re-use.

The most common methods of documentation are depicted in Figure 4.9.

Figure 4.9: How do you document the work of your youth theatre?



Figures are based on 31 respondents to the Centre Stage +20 Youth Theatre Questionnaire. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

- 97% of youth theatres took photographs of productions, events or workshops.
- 81% of youth theatres were archiving posters and programmes.
- 68% were documenting scripts which had been devised by the youth theatre. Recording emerging scripts and decisions within the rehearsal room were central to the ongoing creative process in youth theatres, but the editing of finished scripts that had been devised by the youth theatre was also noted.
- 55% were creating short films (less than 5 minutes) to document activities while another 39% had engaged in longer film projects. Developments in technology, as well as the skills of members and Young Leaders, were helping youth theatres to document work using film.
- Youth theatres were documenting the reflections of members (52%), leaders (42%) and, in some cases, audience members (16%), to capture responses to the processes involved in youth theatre workshops/ projects/rehearsals, as well as productions. For example, youth theatres were documenting evaluation discussions, using rehearsal journals and offering a comments box to audience members.

Documentation during Census Week

Just over half of the 45 youth theatres that took part in Census Week 2017 documented work during those seven days (51%), supporting the conclusion that slightly lower numbers of youth theatres are documenting work in comparison with evaluating it.

Again, the majority of these youth theatres were focused on documenting artistic activities, with: 74% documenting a workshop; 43% documenting a project; 9% documenting a rehearsal; and 9% documenting a performance. A limited number of youth theatres were documenting other aspects of a youth theatre’s work such as an exchange, a project meeting and an evaluation session.

Barriers to Documentation

The key barrier to youth theatres engaging in documentation is a lack of time. Documenting work has also become more challenging since the introduction of GDPR and guidelines around the use of images in work with young people. Youth theatre leaders need to plan ahead to ensure they have appropriate consent for documentation and dissemination, and that they are using appropriate youth theatre devices to take images and store them.

4.4.3 Communications

Key Findings

- Youth theatres use many different methods of communication with their members, but despite the proliferation of communications technology, members and leaders prefer to communicate directly with each other in person. Face-to-face communication was the preferred method for 67% of members.
- After face-to-face communication, youth theatres typically contact young people via their parents’ email and mobile phone, through Facebook, texts and email in order of popularity. While young people’s preferred methods of communication were the same, the order was different: text; email; Facebook; and via their parents’ email or mobile.
- Facebook is the most popular promotional tool for communicating youth theatre to the wider public and is used by 94% of youth theatres.

Centre Stage Context

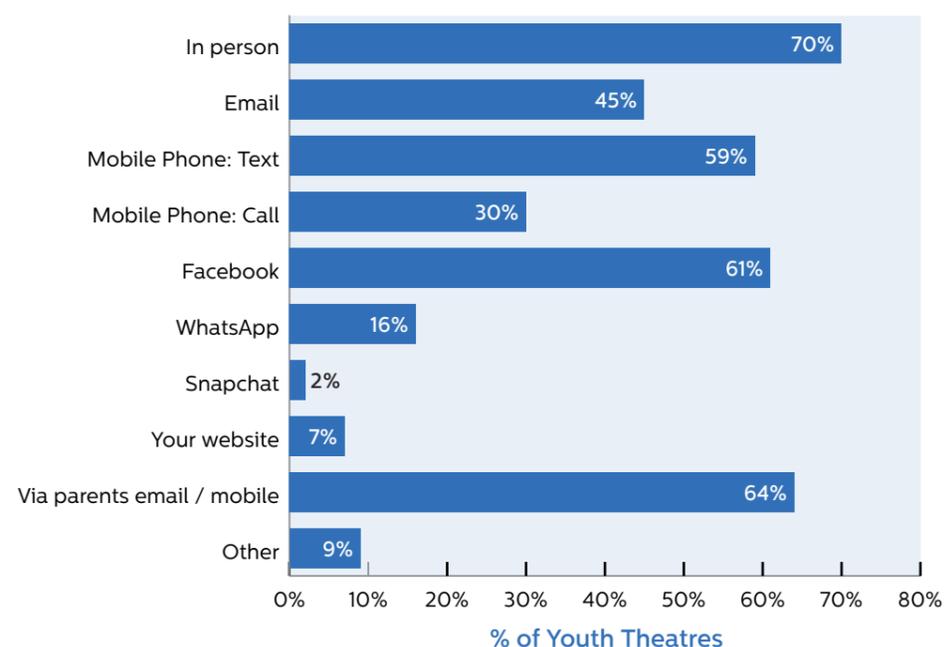
This is the first time that data has been gathered on the communications practice of youth theatres. No comparative data exists.

Communication Methods within the Youth Theatre

Communications technology has evolved comprehensively since Centre Stage in 1998, when leaders would have given information to young people directly, posted letters to them or called a family house phone. A wider range of communications methods are now available to youth theatre leaders, many regulated by GDPR and child protection legislation. Youth theatres are trying to adapt to new

trends in communications technology to ensure they are communicating effectively with their membership, while also complying with best practice.

Figure 4.10: How did you Communicate with Youth Theatre Members during Census Week?



Figures are based on 44 respondents to the Centre Stage +20 Census Questionnaire. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Young people and leaders reported on their preferred communications methods in Member Questionnaires and Census Questionnaires (See Table 4.4).

- In this age of social media and technology, it is interesting that communication 'in person' is the most common and most popular form of communication amongst young people and leaders. It was voted the 'Number 1' method of communication by 67% of members and 49% of leaders, significantly ahead of any other form of communication.

Table 4.4: Preferred Communications Methods of Youth Theatre Members and Leaders

	Members Overall Rank	% of Members who included Statement in Top 5	Leaders Overall Rank	% of Leaders who included Statement in Top 5
In person	1	88.0%	1	70.7%
Mobile Phone: Text	2	61.9%	3	61.0%
Email	3	52.2%	5	41.5%
Facebook/Messenger	4	42.6%	2	68.3%
Via parents' email/mobile	5	35.3%	4	46.3%
Mobile Phone: Call	6	35.7%	6	29.3%
WhatsApp	7	21.7%	7	17.1%
Snapchat	8	14.4%	9	4.9%
Youth Theatre Website	9	14.3%	10	4.9%
Other	10	1.7%	8	9.8%

Figures are based on 575 respondents to the Centre Stage +20 Member Questionnaire and 41 respondents to the Centre Stage +20 Census Questionnaire. Percentages are rounded to one decimal point.

- The second most common form of communication during Census Week was via parents' email or mobile (64%).

Some youth theatres with younger members choose this method of communications to involve parents and guardians in making arrangements and confirming schedules. Some youth theatres are nervous of GDPR regulations covering communications with young people and others have adhered to this method to avoid issues around the digital age of consent¹⁹ on popular apps. This method was not as popular with young people as it was with leaders, with only 35% rating it in their 'Top 5' communications methods and only 4% ranking it as their favourite method.

- Facebook was the most common social media tool for communicating directly with the membership with 61% of youth theatres using it within Census Week 2017.

Facebook is very popular with leaders as a mass communication tool which is cost and time effective, with 68% of leaders rating it in their 'Top 5' communications methods. It was less popular with members though, with 15% less rating it in their 'Top 5' methods.

- 59% of youth theatres were texting young people's mobile phones during Census Week 2017.

This was the favourite communication tool for young people which involved technology, as 62% rated it in their 'Top 5' methods of communication. It is common practice to send group texts, keep records of communications and include another adult in all group texts. Mobile texts were far more popular with young people than 'WhatsApp', which was only listed in 22% of members' 'Top 5' lists. Leaders were also very positive about mobile texts and more reserved about using the Whatsapp as a communication tool.

- Email was used by 45% of youth theatres during Census Week.

Email is a useful communication tool for youth theatres as it connects directly with members and their parents/guardians, can store message history and include other youth theatre leaders in a transparent conversation with young people. Email can be time and cost effective. It was the third most popular method of communication for members and featured in the 'Top 5' lists of 42% of leaders.

- Mobile phone calls were used by only 30% of youth theatres during Census Week 2017.

Mobile phone conversations between leaders and members were only included by 36% of members and 29% of leaders in their 'Top 5' lists of preferred communication methods. It is used in specific situations rather than as a general communications tool.

¹⁹ The Digital Age of Consent will be set at 16 when the Data Protection Bill 2018 is enacted. 'Digital Age of Consent, www.webwise.ie

Key Methods of Communication with the Wider Public

Youth theatres are also communicating their work to the wider community on a local, national and international level (See Section 2.5) and are availing of a different range of communication methods for this work.

Table 4.5 details the most common methods of communication used by youth theatres with the wider public.

We don't	3.2%
Youth Theatre Website	29.0%
Parent organisation's website (E.g., Arts Centre, County Council, Youth Service)	51.6%
Facebook	93.6%
Instagram	61.3%
Twitter	54.8%
Local media (newspapers, radio, tv)	83.9%
National media (newspapers, radio, tv)	16.1%
Post-show discussions	19.4%
Fundraising activities	38.7%
Arts Centre/Venue Brochures	58.1%
Intermission newsletter & Youth Theatre Ireland website	64.5%
Youth Theatre Ireland magazine & events	48.4%
Participation in local events, festivals, conferences etc,	51.6%
Participation in national events, festivals, conferences etc.	48.4%
Other	12.9%

Figures are based on 31 respondents to the Centre Stage +20 Youth Theatre Questionnaire. Percentages are rounded to one decimal point.

Facebook is by far the most common promotional tool for youth theatres (94%). It is useful in reaching a wide audience but also a targeted audience for specific activities. Leaders reported that it is low cost and they can take advantage of existing networks and contacts. Facebook is still more popular with youth theatres than Instagram (61%) or Twitter (55%) as a social media promotional tool.

The vast majority of youth theatres are accessing local media to promote their work (84%) and a much smaller percentage of youth theatres are accessing national media (16%). Youth theatres are using existing relationships to communicate their work, for example through the websites (52%) and brochures (58%) of parent organisations. Between 48% and 52% of youth theatres are also availing of promotional opportunities which Youth Theatre Ireland offers through newsletters, its website, magazine and events like the Youth Theatre Practice Symposium. Participation in events, festivals and conferences as well as activities such as fundraising are also used as common methods of communicating the work of youth theatres.

Conclusions

An active recruitment strategy is key to ensuring a diverse youth theatre membership. It is important that youth theatres are supported and resourced to deliver recruitment activities if diversity within the membership is desired.

Youth theatres are very active in, and effective at, carrying out process evaluation during and immediately after projects but may need more support and resources to carry out occasional impact or outcome focused evaluation work. Youth theatres are also very active in documenting their practice with young people but some youth theatres may need more support in disseminating this work to a wider audience.

Youth theatres are working hard to remain up-to-date in communication methods and styles with their membership and the public: learning about new social media sites and apps; complying with GDPR and the digital age of consent; and adapting to the communication preferences of members. There is some disparity between the most time and cost effective communication methods preferred by leaders and the communications methods preferred by members. For example, Facebook is a highly effective communications channel for publicising the youth theatre to the wider community but considering its declining use amongst young people, it may not be the most suitable promotional tool for the recruitment of new members.