

## Chapter 2: Youth Theatre Models and Structures

*“Youth theatre is a place where I can be myself and make new friends.”*

*The Comedy of Errors by William Shakespeare,  
Dublin Youth Theatre 2018. Photo: Aoife Herry.*

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## 2.1 Youth Theatre Provision and Location

### 2.1.1 Current Youth Theatre Provision

#### Key Findings

- Youth theatre provision in Ireland has grown slowly and steadily over the past two decades. Provision has expanded through the creation of new youth theatres and increased capacity in existing youth theatres.
- 55 youth theatres are operating in 24 out of the 26 counties in Ireland.
- 2,663 youth theatre members regularly engage in youth theatre activities.
- One youth theatre is operating per 11,314 young people aged 10–19 in the country.<sup>1</sup>
- Cavan, Kildare, Laois, Leitrim and Longford have the highest levels of youth theatre provision.

#### Centre Stage Context

This is the first time that provision has been accurately recorded in the Centre Stage research project. Centre Stage +20 will provide the baseline for future comparisons. Comparing levels of provision over the past two decades is difficult as the research samples in Centre Stage and Centre Stage +10 do not include all affiliated youth theatres from those times and do not accurately reflect the size of the sector during those research periods.

#### Current Provision

Youth Theatre Ireland membership records show a slow growth of youth theatre provision over the past decade and 55 youth theatres were operating around the country during the Centre Stage +20 research period. The number of youth theatres affiliated to Youth Theatre Ireland has remained between 54 and 60 over the past 10 years. The evolution of new youth theatres has been offset by the amalgamation of some youth theatres (e.g., Activate and Physically Phishy Youth Theatres under Graffiti Theatre Company), the loss of branches of youth theatres run by Local Authority Arts Offices in some counties (e.g., Portlaoise, Stradbally, Mountrath and Rathdowney Youth Theatres run by Laois Arts Office now exist as Laois Youth Theatre) and the closure of other youth theatres (e.g., Clondalkin Youth Theatre).

However, membership levels within youth theatres have increased as youth theatres are now more likely to be running multiple groups within their youth theatre, serving different age levels, experience levels and interests. For the first time in the youth theatre sector, over half of all youth theatres (55%) have multiple groups and the capacity of individual youth theatres has grown (see Section 2.3.2).

#### Levels Of Participation And Provision

During the Centre Stage +20 research period:

- There were 2,663 youth theatre members engaged in regular youth theatre activities;
- There was one youth theatre per 11,314 young people.

Youth theatre provision varies across the country, with some counties having a much higher ratio of youth theatre per youth population. Table 2.1 details the ratio of youth theatres to youth population in each county.

Key to reading Table 2.1:

Counties highlighted in grey have the five highest youth theatre to youth population ratios

Counties highlighted in blue have the five lowest youth theatre to youth population ratios

Counties highlighted in navy had no youth theatre provision within the research period

Table 2.1: Ratio of Youth Theatres to Youth Population by County

Youth Population Census 2016 Data	Centre Stage +20 Youth Theatres	Ratio
<b>Dublin:</b> Dun Laoghaire Rathdown (10 - 19): 26,675	1	1 per 26,675
<b>Dublin:</b> Dublin City (10 - 19): 53,374	3	1 per 17,791
<b>Dublin:</b> Dublin Fingal (10 - 19): 39,204	0	0 per 39,204
<b>Dublin:</b> South Dublin (10 - 19): 37,617	1	1 per 37,617
Carlow (10–19): 7,821	1	1 per 7,821
Clare (10–19): 16,588	1	1 per 16,588
Cork City (10–19): 13,531	2	1 per 6,765
Cork County (10–19): 56,759	3	1 per 18,919
Cavan (10–19): 10,811	2	1 per 5,405
Donegal (10–19): 22,678	2	1 per 11,339
Galway City (10–19): 8,945	1	1 per 8,945
Galway County (10 - 19): 24,853	1	1 per 24,853
Kerry (10–19): 18,724	2	1 per 9,362
Kildare (10–19): 32,601	6	1 per 5,434
Kilkenny (10–19): 13,601	1	1 per 13,601
Laois (10–19): 11,913	2	1 per 5,956
Leitrim (10–19): 4,200	3	1 per 1,400
Limerick City And County (10–19): 25,665	3	1 per 8,555
Longford (10–19): 5,674	2	1 per 2,837
Louth (10–19): 18,247	3	1 per 6,082
Mayo (10–19): 17,360	1	1 per 17,360
Meath (10–19): 28,415	1	1 per 28,415
Monaghan (10–19): 8,379	1	1 per 8,379
<b>Offaly (10–19): 11,267</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0 per 11,267</b>
Roscommon (10–19): 8,544	1	1 per 8,544
Sligo (10–19): 8,690	1	1 per 8,690
Tipperary (10–19): 21,764	3	1 per 7,254
Waterford City And County (10–19): 15,900	1	1 per 15,900
<b>Westmeath (10–19): 12,341</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0 per 12,341</b>
Wexford (10–19): 20,727	3	1 per 6,909
Wicklow (10–19): 19,424	3	1 per 6,474

Figures are based on 55 Centre Stage +20 youth theatres and Census 2016 Youth Population data is drawn from: Statbank E3006: Population 2011 to 2016 by Age Group, Sex, County and City and Census Year, www.cso.ie

<sup>1</sup> Census 2016 data is drawn from: Statbank E3006: Population 2011 to 2016 by Age Group, Sex, County and City and Census Year, www.cso.ie

### Counties With High Levels Of Provision

- Five counties have high provision levels where one youth theatre is operating for a maximum of 6000 young people: Cavan, Kildare, Laois, Leitrim and Longford.

The majority of counties with high levels of provision have very low youth populations of between 4,200 and 11,913: Cavan, Laois, Leitrim, Longford. These counties all recorded two or more youth theatres during the Centre Stage +20 research period which lowered the ratio of youth theatres to youth population. Kildare is the one exception, with a high youth population plus a large number of youth theatres.

- Leitrim has the highest level of provision in the country and the smallest youth population in the country. The strategic development of youth theatre in the county through the Local Authority Arts Office and local partners has contributed positively to provision levels.
- Current youth theatre provision in Cavan and Longford is largely driven by autonomous youth theatres (see Section 2.2.2), volunteers and amateur drama groups. A low youth population matched with local communities' commitment to providing theatre experiences for young people has improved provision.
- Laois reflects a mix of strategic youth theatre development from the Local Authority Arts Office and the organic growth of an autonomous youth theatre to respond to the needs of its own local community.

#### Case Study: Kildare

Autonomous youth theatres and youth theatres run by theatre companies and amateur drama groups have flourished in Kildare to form a thriving youth theatre community. These youth theatres are between three and 22 years old, with a mixture of paid and volunteer youth theatre facilitators delivering activities. Two decades of active youth theatre development has built a strong youth theatre culture in the county. Though Kildare has a high youth population, the number of youth theatres means that there is a good ratio of youth theatres to young people. They are mainly located in the north of the county where the youth population is concentrated.

Though Kildare Arts Office did not initiate any of these youth theatre groups, its openness to funding youth theatre groups that are not part its own activity programme has contributed significantly to the sustainability of youth theatre in the county. Kildare Arts Office gives two independent youth theatres the status of regularly funded organisations and assigns them core funding. The county now has a mix of provision including: two large youth theatres (Kildare Youth Theatre and Griese Youth Theatre); a smaller autonomous youth theatre with paid facilitators; two small, autonomous youth theatres run by volunteers; and one voluntary youth theatre run by an amateur drama group.

### 2.1.2 Areas with Low Youth Theatre Provision

#### Key Findings

- Areas of the country which have a high youth population but lack a corresponding level of youth theatres have the lowest provision. Dublin is the most under-served region in the country. County Galway and Meath are also of concern.
- Westmeath and Offaly are the only counties with no current youth theatre provision.
- Each county with low provision has its own set of unique contributing factors, however some common issues include: an absence of community-driven autonomous youth theatres (see Section 2.2.2); a lack of engagement from local arts centres/venues; a lack of local arts or youth work infrastructure; and challenges within local strategic youth arts development.

#### Centre Stage Context

Youth theatre provision as ebbed and flowed in many counties over the past two decades. During the Centre Stage research period (1998), there was low provision in rural areas and in particular across the Midlands and Connaught. Ten years ago, youth theatre provision had spread right across the country, providing increased access in rural areas but leaving gaps in the Midlands and Monaghan. Centre Stage +10 also noted the decline of youth theatres in the Dublin area.

#### Dublin

The past decade has seen a significant decrease in youth theatre provision in Dublin. Many of the oldest youth theatres thrived in the city for long periods but as some closed, new youth theatres have not evolved to match the growing youth population.

- A quarter of all young people aged between 10 and 19 live in the four Local Authority areas in Dublin. However, only 9% of Centre Stage +20 youth theatres (five) serve this area;
- Across the four Local Authority areas, there is a ratio of one youth theatre to 31,374 young people.

Many of the small, autonomous youth theatres and youth service-run youth theatres which served young people in Dublin have closed. Section 2.2.3 outlines some of the reasons for the closure of youth service-run youth theatres. Communities in Dublin are not working together to create autonomous youth theatres in the same way that they are in small towns and rural areas across the country. Only one autonomous youth theatre based in Dublin affiliated to Youth Theatre Ireland in the past 20 years. Small autonomous youth theatres which served their communities for years such as Clondalkin Youth Theatre and Tallaght Youth Theatre have now both closed. Dublin's Local Authority Arts Offices did not engage in the strategic development of youth theatres in a similar manner to other areas of the country. Over the past two decades, arts centres, venues and other organisations were also generally absent from youth theatre development.

Outside of the Centre Stage +20 youth theatres<sup>2</sup>, there have been some recent exceptions to this situation:

- Draóicht Arts Centre runs the D15 Youth Theatre in Blanchardstown (Fingal);
- Giant Wolf Theatre Company recently started a youth theatre in partnership with The Civic and based in Tallaght (South Dublin);
- The dlr Mill Theatre Dundrum has recently start a youth theatre company (Dun Laoghaire Rathdown).

However, taking into account these three additional youth theatres and the recent closure of Tallaght Youth Theatre, the provision ratio remains low: one youth theatre per 22,410 young people. It also still leaves the South Dublin and Fingal areas in particular with a ratio of one youth theatre to 37,617 and 39,204 young people respectively – the very lowest level of provision in the country.

#### County Galway and Meath

County Galway and Meath each recorded one youth theatre during the Centre Stage +20 research period. However, these counties both have significant youth populations between the ages of 10 and 19 and youth theatre provision is low. Meath has a very high youth population of 28,415 and County Galway

<sup>2</sup> Inclusion criteria for Centre Stage +20 is explained in Section 1.3.

has a youth population of 24,853.

- Galway City is served by Galway Community Circus and the currently un-affiliated Galway Youth Theatre.<sup>3</sup> With the closure of East Galway Youth Theatre (Loughrea), however there is an acute shortage of youth theatres in the county. New enquiries (primarily by individual practitioners) have not resulted in any new youth theatres.
- Meath recorded one autonomous youth theatre which is run in partnership with the Solstice Arts Centre and has just achieved regular funding for five years in an agreement with Meath Arts Office. Act Out Youth Theatre is currently considering expanding to another town in Meath and becoming a multiple-centre youth theatre. This will expand capacity in the county to some extent. Three other youth theatres have run briefly in the county over the past two decades but did not manage to establish themselves permanently.

### Westmeath and Offaly

Westmeath and Offaly are the only two counties in Centre Stage +10 with no current youth theatre provision. Westmeath has a population of 12,341 young people and Offaly has a population of 11,267 young people aged between 10 and 19.

Both counties had previously hosted youth theatres:

- Westmeath had an autonomous youth theatre called Moate Youth Theatre which has not been affiliated to Youth Theatre Ireland since before Centre Stage +10;
- Offaly Youth Theatre ran for a number of years in between the Centre Stage +10 and Centre Stage +20 research periods. It was an autonomous youth theatre run in partnership with Offaly Arts Office and incorporated three branches. Offaly has a tradition of the Local Authority Arts Office and venues like Birr Theatre and Arts Centre working with freelance practitioners to provide youth theatre activities. A recent Youth Arts Review for the county and the upcoming appointment of a new temporary youth arts facilitator may signify positive change.

### 2.1.3 Location of Youth Theatres

#### Key Findings

- Centre Stage +20 highlights the continued growth of provision in regional towns and rural areas and the decline of provision in cities, particularly in Dublin. Only one of the city-based youth theatres in Centre Stage +20 was founded in the past 10 years, indicating a stagnation of provision for young people in Irish cities.
- Rural provision has continued to thrive and provision in large Irish towns has continued to grow, accounting for 44% of all youth theatres in the country.
- Organisations, agencies and communities have been most active in creating new youth theatres in rural areas and large towns with 80% of new youth theatres from the past 10 years established in these settings.

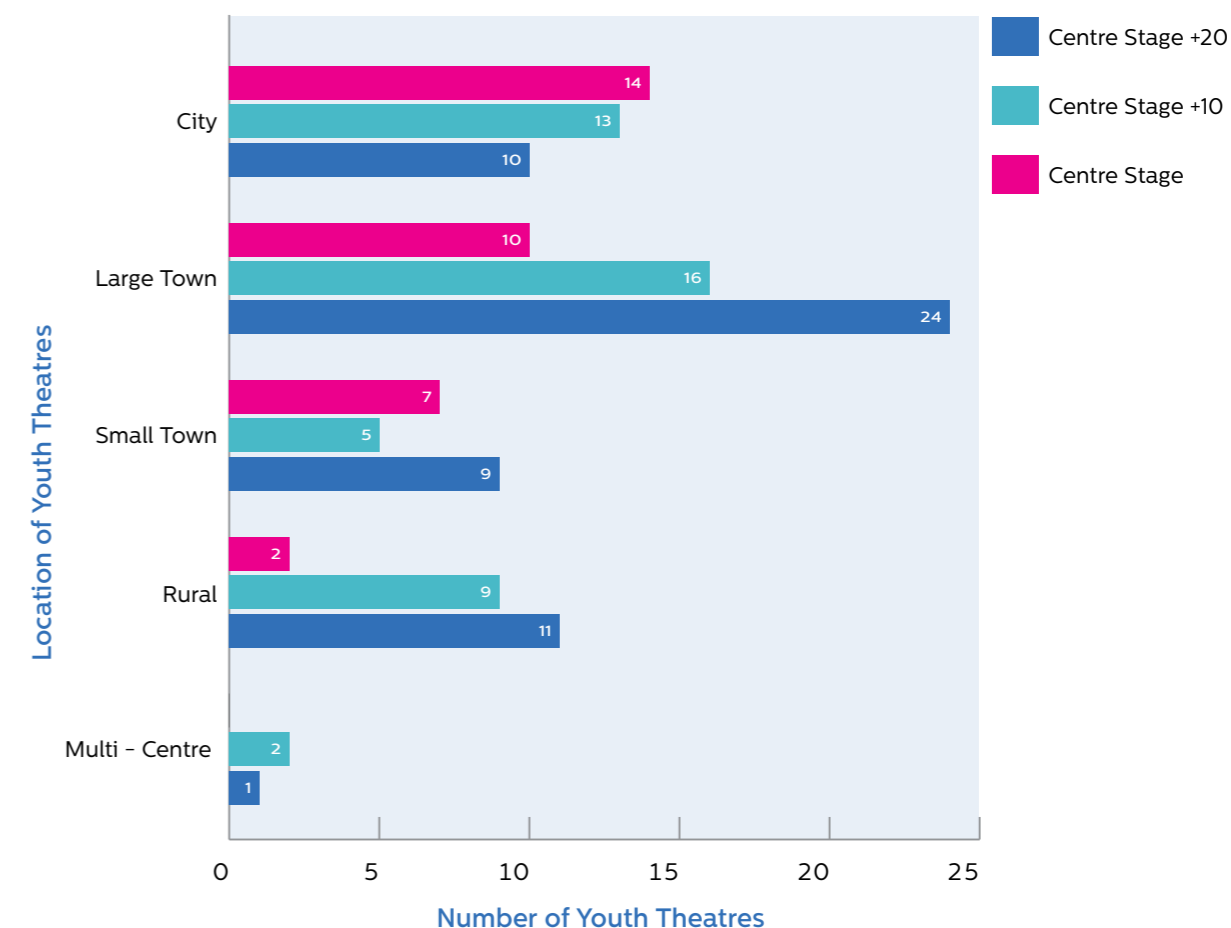
#### Centre Stage Context

The Irish youth theatre sector began in towns and cities in the late 1970s and 1980s where the resources and expertise existed to support the developing theatre practice with young people. By the time of Centre Stage in 1998, 73% of participating youth theatres were still based in large towns and cities. A third of Centre Stage youth theatres were based in County Dublin alone.

In Centre Stage +10, youth theatres run by parent organisations other than Local Authority Arts Offices were based in cities and large towns (a Connemara branch of the Galway City-based Na Crosáin Youth Theatre was the only exception). Local Authority Arts Offices spearheaded the provision of youth theatre to smaller towns and rural areas as part of their mission to provide equality of artistic opportunity across the county.

<sup>3</sup> Galway Youth Theatre was un-affiliated for a period of time between Centre Stage +10 and Centre Stage+20 but has re-engaged with Youth Theatre Ireland regarding affiliation recently. The affiliation criteria and process is explained in Section 2.3.

Figure 2.1: Location of Youth Theatres



Figures are based on 55 Centre Stage +20 youth theatres, 45 Centre Stage +10 youth theatres and 33 Centre Stage youth theatres. 'Large towns' have a population of over 10,000, 'small towns' have a population of between 2,000 and 10,000 and 'rural' includes areas with a population of less than 2,000.

### Geographic Profile of Youth Theatres

Centre Stage +20 continues the trend towards growth of provision in regional towns and rural areas and the decline of provision in cities, particularly in Dublin.

- 44% of youth theatres are now based in large towns with a population over 10,000.** This type of location has seen the most significant growth in the past 20 years. Youth theatres in large towns have more than doubled where the arts infrastructure, resources, expertise and youth population have supported youth theatre development.
- 20% of youth theatres are based in rural locations with populations under 2,000.** Youth theatres have continued to expand into rural areas, making a significant contribution to the inclusion of young people from rural backgrounds in the arts. These youth theatres are spread across eight different counties, with amateur drama groups, autonomous youth theatres and partnership models dominating. Rural youth theatres have grown from a very small base of two groups in 1998 but have increased 450%. The average age of these youth theatres is 11 and just under half of this cohort were formed within the last decade.
- 16% of youth theatres are based in small towns with a population of between 2,000 and 10,000.** There has been a small growth in the number of youth theatres based in small towns. These small towns tend to be the main town in a county with a lower population density (e.g., Roscommon town, Carrick-on-Shannon) but also include key towns in specific regions of a county (e.g., Skilbberien, Ballybofey). Interestingly, seven of these nine youth theatres are based in arts centres

/venues indicating the importance of local arts infrastructure in supporting the development of youth theatres in this type of location.

- **18% of youth theatres are based in cities.**

Youth theatres based in the main cities have continued to decline in number throughout the past 20 years. The 10 youth theatres have an average age of 25, with only one of the city-based youth theatres being founded within the last 10 years. The organisations, agencies and communities of Ireland's cities have not been investing in the development of new youth theatres with the result that provision in Dublin city in particular has not grown in parallel with the youth population.

Of the 15 youth theatres founded in the past decade:

- Seven have been in large towns (population over 10,000);
- Two have been in small towns (population between 2,000 and 10,000);
- Five have been in rural areas (population under 2,000).

These statistics illustrate the types of locations where organisations, agencies and communities are currently active in setting up youth theatres.

#### Youth Theatre Coverage

- The 55 Centre Stage +20 youth theatres are based in 24 out of 26 counties in Ireland.
- Westmeath and Offaly are the only counties with no current youth theatre provision.

Youth theatre provision has spread from Dublin and other key cities into the towns and villages across Ireland over the past two decades.

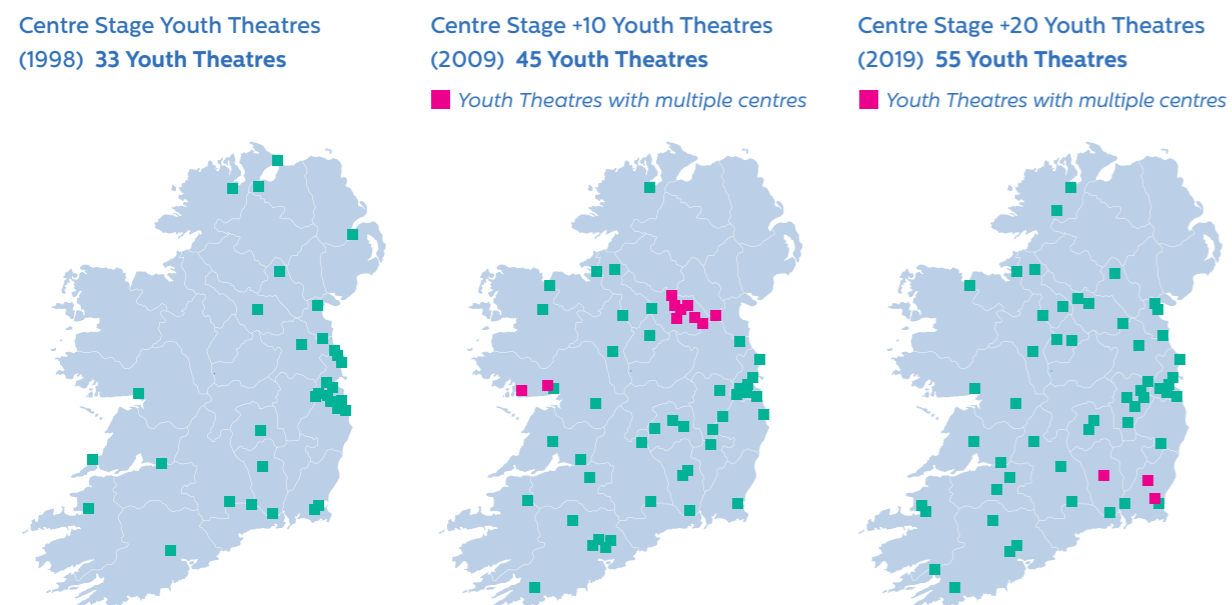
Looking at the current map of youth theatre provision, it can be seen that there are geographical gaps in:

- The Midlands: Offaly, Westmeath;
- Co Galway and Mayo;
- South Kerry;
- East Limerick/North Kerry;
- East Cork/West Waterford.

These geographical gaps are significant as they reduce youth theatre accessibility for young people, even in counties where the young person to youth population ratio indicates a good level of provision.

Figure 2.2 illustrates the spread of youth theatre provision across the country from Centre Stage (1998) to Centre Stage +10 (2009) to Centre Stage +20 (2019).

**Figure 2.2: Changes in Youth Theatre Models from Centre Stage to Centre Stage +20**



#### Conclusions

Young people in many areas of the country have the opportunity to participate in quality youth theatre experiences however some areas of the country have poor levels of youth theatre provision. This is of direct relevance to Youth Theatre Ireland's mission to provide young people with equality of access to youth theatre. This should also have an impact on the Local Authority Arts Offices, ETBs and other organisations in these areas who have a duty to support young people's engagement with the arts and ensure local youth arts provision.

Targeted development projects (in partnership with other agencies and organisations) are necessary to ensure the creation of new youth theatres in areas where there is low provision and address accessibility issues for young people.

Counties with high provision levels have adopted strategic approaches to youth theatre development work or more commonly, have taken a flexible approach which supports the organic development of different kinds of youth theatre models as part of a county-wide provision.

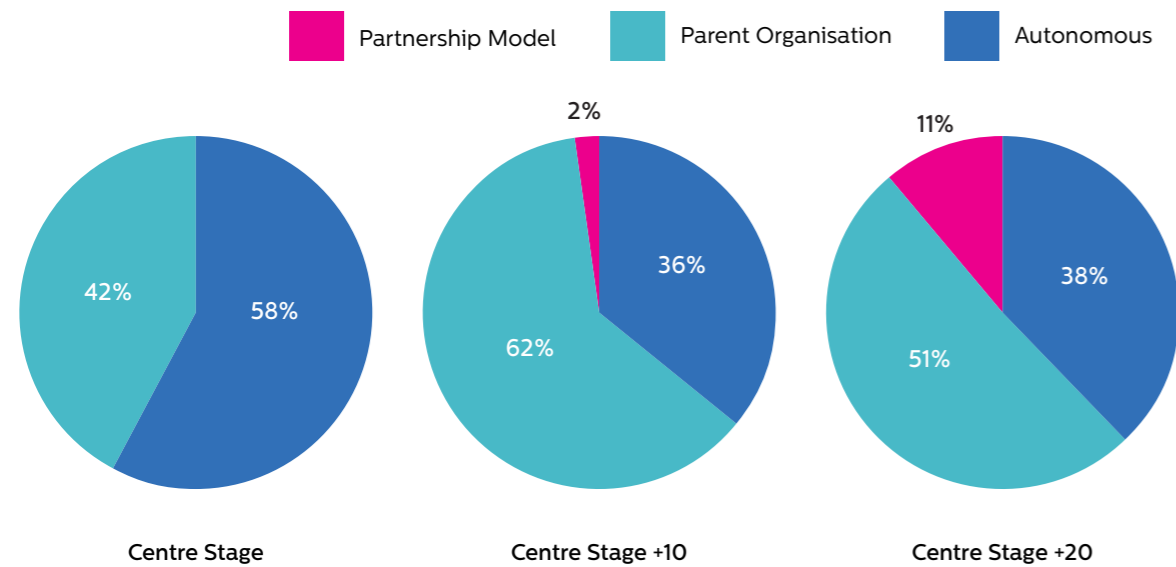
## 2.2 Youth Theatre Models

### 2.2.1 Overview Of Youth Theatre Models

**Key Findings**

- Since Centre Stage +10 in 2009, the sector has continued to see evolution within youth theatre models. Though many of the old youth theatre models are still thriving, there is now a greater variety of parent organisations running youth theatres and increased partnership work between organisations to ensure local youth theatre provision.
- Of the 55 Centre Stage +20 youth theatres: 38% are autonomous, 51% are run by parent organisations and 11% are run in a partnership model of provision.

Figure 2.3 Compares the growth and decline of models over the 20 years since the first Centre Stage report.  
**Figure 2.3: Changes in Youth Theatre Models**



Figures are based on 55 Centre Stage +20 youth theatres, 45 Centre Stage +10 youth theatres and 33 Centre Stage youth theatres. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

#### Centre Stage Context

The Centre Stage research project did not discuss youth theatre models but did introduce the term ‘parent organisation’ for those bodies running youth theatres as part of their programme for young people. The sector was dominated by autonomous youth theatres at the time, including those established in the late 1970s such as Dublin Youth Theatre, those from the 1980s, including Cabinteely Youth Theatre and a cohort which grew in the development surge of the 1990s. A smaller range of arts, community or youth organisations and agencies were involved as parent organisations of youth theatres, including the first youth theatre to be set up by a Local Authority Arts Office (Laois Youth Theatre). In 1998, Youth Theatre Ireland still included youth theatres based in Northern Ireland within the membership.

Ten years later, Centre Stage +10 introduced the concept of ‘youth theatre models’. The research project captured a surge in the growth of youth theatres run by parent organisations and a drop in autonomous youth theatres. The number of youth theatres run by Local Authority Arts Offices was a key characteristic of the time, with a third of all youth theatres belonging to that model. That decade also witnessed a growth in the number of youth theatres run by professional theatre companies.

### Overview of Current Youth Theatre Models

#### Why Identify Youth Theatre Models?

Every youth theatre is different, characterised by its own unique membership and approach to theatre. Youth Theatre Ireland has found it useful to identify ‘youth theatre models’ and categorise youth theatres according to the organisation that runs them. This develops an understanding of the range of advantages and challenges associated with each model and helps to identify sustainable ways for the youth theatre sector to move forward. These models were identified through the Centre Stage +10 research project.

In Centre Stage +20, youth theatres are categorised as:

- **Autonomous youth theatres:** Independent organisations that are self-governing and have a committee/board;
- **Youth Theatres run by parent organisations:** Arts, youth, and community organisations/agencies delivering youth theatre as part of their programming or service provision for young people;
- **Youth theatres run through a partnership model:** A formal resource and responsibility sharing arrangement between different organisations that want to develop youth theatre provision in their local area (usually formalised in a partnership agreement or contract).

#### Centre Stage +20 Profile

Twenty years after the first Centre Stage, a solid cohort of autonomous youth theatres still exists, making up 38% of the sector and ranging from small, volunteer-led youth theatres to large youth theatres with multiple groups and part-time/full-time staff. Half of all youth theatres are run by parent organisations and a wider range of art, youth, community organisations and agencies are involved than ever before. A growth in the partnership model sees just over a tenth of all youth theatres (11%) being run by partners including Local Authority Arts Offices, arts centres and community development organisations that formally share the resources and responsibilities necessary to run a youth theatre.

### 2.2.2 Autonomous Youth Theatres

**Key Findings**

- Autonomous youth theatres are independent entities that are self-governing, with a board or committee. Twenty-one autonomous youth theatres of varying sizes were working during the Centre Stage +20 research period, 38% of the participating youth theatres.
- Volunteerism is active within autonomous youth theatres, with six youth theatres being run entirely by volunteers and others being governed by voluntary boards.

Table 2.2 lists the autonomous youth theatres included in the Centre Stage +20 research.

Table 2.2: Autonomous Youth Theatres		
Backstage Youth Theatre	Autonomous – Unincorporated Association	Longford
Blessington Youth Theatre	Autonomous – Unincorporated Association	Wicklow
Cabinteely Youth Theatre	Autonomous – Unincorporated Association	Dublin
Celbridge Youth Drama	Autonomous – Unincorporated Association	Kildare
County Limerick Youth Theatre	Autonomous – Company Limited by Guarantee	Limerick
Dublin Youth Theatre	Autonomous – Company Limited by Guarantee	Dublin
Duisigh Youth Theatre	Autonomous – Unincorporated Association	Kerry
Dundalk Youth Theatre	Autonomous – Unincorporated Association	Louth
East Galway Youth Theatre	Autonomous – Unincorporated Association	Galway
Explore Youth Theatre	Autonomous – Unincorporated Association	Kildare

Gonzo Youth Theatre	Autonomous – Unincorporated Association	Cavan
Griese Youth Theatre	Autonomous – Unincorporated Association	Kildare
Lightbulb Youth Theatre	Autonomous – Unincorporated Association	Cork
Limerick Youth Theatre	Autonomous – Unincorporated Association	Limerick
M.A.D. Youth Theatre	Autonomous – Unincorporated Association	Louth
Mr Sands Youth Theatre	Autonomous – Unincorporated Association	Wicklow
Playacting Youth Theatre	Autonomous – Unincorporated Association	Kildare
Sligo Youth Theatre	Autonomous – Company Limited by Guarantee	Sligo
Stagecraft Youth Theatre	Autonomous – Unincorporated Association	Tipperary
Tallaght Youth Theatre	Autonomous – Unincorporated Association	Dublin
WACT Youth Theatre	Autonomous – Unincorporated Association	Wexford

### Centre Stage Context

The autonomous youth theatre was the most common model 20 years ago in Centre Stage, including 58% of the sector. Many of the oldest youth theatres in the country belong in this category. Historically, youth theatres were created by individuals or groups of people who believed in the positive, creative experience that youth theatre can offer young people and wanted to see one created in their local community. They existed as independent organisations that could, to a large extent, design their own programme of activities with young people and control their own development path. Though this model saw a significant drop of 22% in the decade leading to Centre Stage +10 (2009), autonomous youth theatres have held their own and provide a strong backbone to the youth theatre sector.

### Autonomous Youth Theatres

- Six autonomous youth theatres were run on a voluntary basis during the research period, with a voluntary board and regular youth theatre leaders working on a voluntary basis: Backstage Youth Theatre, Blessington Youth Theatre, Celbridge Youth Drama, East Galway Youth Theatre, Explore Youth Theatre, Tallaght Youth Theatre.
- 11 autonomous youth theatres were run by a voluntary board /committee with regular leaders who were paid for their role or were paid with some additional voluntary hours.
- Four autonomous youth theatres were larger organisations, the majority of which were registered as Companies Limited by Guarantee and had a staff member or a contracted Artistic Director.

### Autonomous Youth Theatres run entirely by Volunteers

Autonomous youth theatres used to be termed 'Voluntary youth theatres' because of the voluntary boards/committees which governed their activities. Many of the early autonomous youth theatres were run completely by volunteers. The decade between Centre Stage and Centre Stage +10 witnessed a growth in the professionalisation of the youth theatre facilitator role and the sector started to see a more complex mix of volunteers and paid facilitators delivering activities within autonomous youth theatres. Youth theatres that are run completely by volunteers at board and operational level do still exist and Centre Stage +20 registers a number equal to Centre Stage +10. Three completely voluntary youth theatres were set-up during the 10 year period – Blessington Youth Theatre, East Galway Youth Theatre and Explore Youth Theatre. This model is struggling, however, under the weight of additional administration related to compliance, child protection and funding, and leaders are reporting feeling 'over-stretched' in their work. Both East Galway Youth Theatre and Tallaght Youth Theatre closed their doors during the research period.

### Autonomous Youth Theatres Who Pay Staff/Facilitators

The voluntary committees /boards of the vast majority of autonomous youth theatres pay a youth theatre facilitator or a team of facilitators and assistant facilitators (depending on the size and structure of the youth theatre) to carry out a range of roles within the youth theatre. These youth theatre leaders may receive payment for all hours worked or, more typically, may work additional voluntary hours. Committee/board members within autonomous youth theatres of this size will typically take on voluntary operational duties as well as their governance role. Of the 15 autonomous youth theatres who do pay regular leaders at some level, seven were set up during the past 10 years. This was the only model which really grew during the economic recession post-2008 as communities returned to the tradition of initiating their own youth theatres when arts/community/youth organisations did not have the funding to create youth arts projects.

#### Case Study – Lightbulb Youth Theatre

Lightbulb Youth Theatre is an autonomous youth theatre based in Mallow, Co. Cork. It was set up in 2003 by members of the local community with the support of Avondhu Development and Cork County Council Arts Office. It is structured as an unincorporated association and is governed by a voluntary committee of parents and members of the local community. The committee contract a youth theatre facilitator to design and deliver the youth theatre programme, facilitate workshops and direct productions, manage a team of assistant facilitators (many of whom are alumni of the youth theatre) and lead direct work with young people. The youth theatre has managed to retain the same youth theatre facilitator for 16 years, as well as a team of committed volunteers.

### Evolution Within Autonomous Youth Theatres

There is some fluidity within the autonomous youth theatre model. Tallaght Youth Theatre had previously paid youth theatre facilitators but was working on a completely voluntary level during the research period due to funding and organisational challenges. Dundalk Youth Theatre and Cabinteely Youth Theatre changed from completely voluntary youth theatres to groups which paid youth theatre facilitators during the research period, mainly due to founder volunteers retiring and the need to re-think the practical running of the youth theatre. County Limerick Youth Theatre has evolved from a Local Authority Arts Office model to an autonomous youth theatre.

### Characteristics And Challenges

Autonomous youth theatres value their independent identity and their ability to respond to the interests/needs of young people in their own community and forge their own unique artistic path. Autonomous youth theatres have a range of funding options open to them (including fundraising) without the complications of a parent organisation's existing funding arrangements with local/national funders. To a large extent, autonomous youth theatres evolve at their own rate and in the direction of their choice, limited only by their human resources and available funding.

There are, however, challenges for autonomous youth theatres in securing core funding to cover regular expenditure (facilitators, venue rental and insurance), particularly where a Local Authority Arts Office has not been involved in its foundation. Many of these youth theatres work very hard to piece together a precarious annual income from a range of sources. The increased administration workload over the past 10 years due to regulatory compliance, policy change and funder requirements has also impacted the autonomous model and its leaders. Youth theatre leaders in this model require higher levels of support and are most frequently in contact with Youth Theatre Ireland.

## 2.2.3 Youth Theatres run by Parent Organisations

### Key Findings

- 51% of youth theatres are run by different types of arts, youth, and community organisations as part of their service provision for young people. These organisations vary in purpose and size but they share a commitment to providing opportunities for young people to develop as artists and as people through theatre activities.
- The range of these 'parent organisations' is a key change in the past 10 years. The sector has grown from eight different types of 'parent organisations' to 12 and no individual type of parent organisation is dominant in the sector.
- The number of youth theatres run by Local Authority Arts Offices has decreased from 15 to five over a decade.
- The number of youth theatres run by arts centres/venues has grown from two to nine.

Table 2.3 lists the Centre Stage +20 youth theatres which are run by a variety of parent organisations.

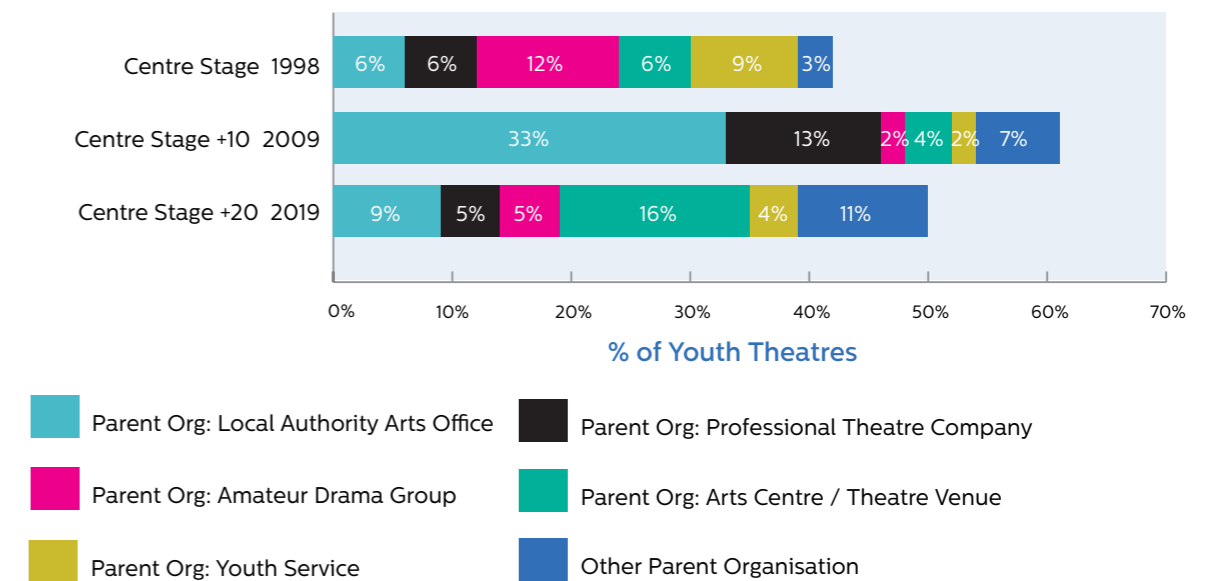
Table 2.3: Youth Theatres Run By Parent Organisations		
County Carlow Youth Theatre	Local Authority Arts Office	Carlow
Mayo Youth Theatre	Local Authority Arts Office	Mayo
Roscommon County Youth Theatre	Local Authority Arts Office	Roscommon
Clare Youth Theatre	Local Authority Arts Office	Clare
Laois Youth Theatre	Local Authority Arts Office	Laois
Activate Youth Theatre	Professional Theatre Company	Cork
Kilkenny Youth Theatre	Professional Theatre Company	Kilkenny
Kildare Youth Theatre	Professional Theatre Company	Kildare
Buí Bolg Youth Arts Group	Outdoor Arts Company	Wexford
Donegal Youth Theatre	Community Arts Organisation	Donegal
An Grianán Youth Theatre	Theatre Venue	Donegal
Monaghan Youth Theatre	Theatre Venue/ETB	Monaghan
Ardclough Youth Theatre	Amateur Drama Group	Kildare
Glengarriff Youth Theatre Group	Amateur Drama Group	Cork
Mostrim Youth Theatre	Amateur Drama Group	Longford
CIT CSM Youth Theatre	Educational Institution	Cork
Complex Youth Theatre	Arts Centre	Dublin
Courthouse Youth Theatre	Arts Centre	Wicklow
Droichead Youth Theatre	Arts Centre	Louth
Fracture Youth Theatre	Arts Centre	Tipperary
Nenagh Youth Theatre	Arts Centre	Tipperary
Rusty Frog Youth Theatre	Arts Centre	Cork
Free Radicals Youth Theatre	Arts Centre & Theatre Venue	Kerry
Footsteps Youth Theatre	Youth Service	Limerick
Roundabout Youth Theatre	Youth Service	Dublin
Galway Community Circus	Circus Arts Organisation	Galway
Mountrath Youth Theatre	Community Development Company	Laois
Waterford Youth Arts	Youth Arts Organisation	Waterford

### Centre Stage Context

Youth theatres run by Local Authority Arts Offices appeared in the 1990s and were acknowledged in the Centre Stage report (1998). They came to dominate this model in 2009 when Centre Stage +10 reported that 15 youth theatres (or a third of all youth theatres included in the study) were run by Local Authority Arts Offices.

Figure 2.4 illustrates the changes in the prevalence of different types of parent organisations in the Centre Stage research from 1998 to 2019.

Figure 2.4: Change in Prevalence of Parent Organisations 1998–2019



Figures are based on 28 out of 55 Centre Stage +20 youth theatres, 28 out of 45 Centre Stage +10 youth theatres and 14 out of 33 Centre Stage youth theatres. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

### Local Authority Arts Offices

- Five youth theatres were run directly by Local Authority Arts Offices during the Centre Stage +20 research period: Co. Carlow Youth Theatre, Mayo Youth Theatre, Roscommon Co. Youth Theatre, Clare Youth Theatre and Laois Youth Theatre.

A key change in this model over the past decade is the decrease in the number of Local Authority Youth Theatres from 15 to five and the centralisation of youth theatre provision in some counties. This process has been characterised by the divestment of Local Authority Arts Office Youth Theatres and their evolution into different types of models.

Analysis of Youth Theatre Ireland development files shows that Local Authority Arts Offices aren't generally resourced to manage long-term youth arts projects such as youth theatres and it has been difficult for staff to maintain the level of administration and management support necessary for youth theatres to thrive. Many of these youth theatres were also affected by changes in procurement practice within Local Authorities where regular youth theatre facilitators who were on repeat short-term contracts were deemed to be part-time staff (an unfeasible option for Local Authority Arts Offices) or Arts Officers were requested to put the youth theatre facilitation contract out to tender rather than automatically engaging the facilitator who had been working regularly with the youth theatre.

Of the remaining five Arts Office youth theatres, three have been exploring other potential models and structures which might suit the evolution of their youth theatre.



### Closure of Multi-Centre Youth Theatres

One factor that contributed to the drop in Local Authority Arts Office run youth theatres, was the closure of multi-centre youth theatres across the past decade. These multi-centre models ensured a strategic provision for young people by delivering services in multiple locations throughout a county but they were particularly vulnerable to funding cuts during the recession and to facilitator shortages in some counties (see Section 2.3.3). For example, the four youth theatres run by Laois Arts Office in Mountrath, Portlaoise, Rathdowney and Stradbally were reduced to one youth theatre run centrally in Portlaoise. This was a process that had begun before the Centre Stage +10 research period had concluded, as the sector saw the closure of Cavan Youth Drama which had been working with 15 different groups in eight centres around the county. Currently, no Local Authority Arts Office directly manages a multi-centre youth theatre or more than one youth theatre.

### Evolution of Local Authority Arts Office Youth Theatres

Arts Officers have shown immense belief in youth theatre and the outcomes it offers young people locally through their efforts to re-structure youth theatres and ensure they remain part of local youth arts provision. A crucial point in this divestment process has been that all Arts Offices have maintained the core funding that pays for regular facilitators to work with the youth theatres and other key expenditure items, acknowledging the lack of other core funding opportunities. It is most common for these youth theatres to become part of the programme of a local arts centre (contributing to the growth of this model), to become an autonomous youth theatre or to evolve into a partnership model but Arts Officers have worked hard to find a solution that works best for their own unique situation.

- County Limerick Youth Theatre re-structured into an autonomous youth theatre (Company Limited by Guarantee) when its parent organisation, Limerick County Council was subsumed into Limerick City and County Council.
- Fracture and Nenagh Youth Theatres in Tipperary were run directly by the Local Authority Arts Office and moved to become part of the programme of the Source Arts Centre in Thurles and Nenagh Arts Centre respectively.
- The three youth theatres in Leitrim, LYTC Carrick-on-Shannon, LYTC Manorhamilton and LYTC Carrigallen, have evolved into a partnership model where the youth theatres are run by local arts centres (Carrick-on-Shannon and Manorhamilton) in partnership with the Arts Office or have changed into an autonomous youth theatre (Carrigallen) which runs in partnership with the Arts Office.

### Characteristics and Challenges

This model has been characterised over the years by individual Arts Officers' commitment to youth theatre and by a desire for equity in the provision of quality youth theatre experiences for all young people in a county. The evolution of the model illustrates some of the challenges that are faced by Local Authority run youth theatres. These youth theatres are usually dependent on their Arts Office funding alone. Strict budgets mean that these youth theatres lack a flexibility to add to the agreed number of annual facilitator hours. Their growth and development path is largely dictated by the capacity of already over-stretched Arts Office staff and funding.

### Arts Centres and Theatre Venues

- Two youth theatres are run by Theatre Venues.
- Seven youth theatres are run by Arts Centres.

This model of youth theatre has grown significantly since two venue-run youth theatres were recorded in Centre Stage +10, partly due to policy change which sees local arts centres at the heart of arts engagement and participation at a local/county level. Staff belief and commitment matched with a strategic vision of the youth theatre as core to the venue/arts centre's programme delivery for young people has helped these youth theatres continue.

This model includes youth theatres such as Rusty Frog Youth Theatre (run by Uillinn, West Cork Arts Centre) and An Grianán Youth Theatre (run by An Grianán Theatre, Letterkenny) that have been operating for 21 and 15 years respectively. This model also includes Monaghan Youth Theatre (run by The Garage Theatre), the only youth theatre in the country under the remit of an Education Training Board (ETB). New arts centres have also developed youth theatres as core programming elements for local young people over the past decade (e.g., Complex Arts Centre, Dublin 7).

### Evolution within the Arts Centre/Venue Model

The evolution of other youth theatres into the Arts Centre model has contributed significantly to its growth over the past 10 years. Siamsa Tire in Tralee worked in partnership with the autonomous youth theatre, Free Range Youth Theatre, for many years until it was incorporated within its own programming for young people as Free Radicals Youth Theatre. This story is echoed in the experience of Droichead Youth Theatre in Drogheda which existed as an autonomous youth theatre for more than 16 years before moving formally under the umbrella of Droichead Arts Centre. Another area where local arts centres have been able to assist with changes in youth theatre models, is in assuming the management of some Local Authority Arts Office youth theatres.

#### Case Study – Droichead Youth Theatre

Droichead Youth Theatre is based in Drogheda, Co. Louth and is run by its parent organisation, Droichead Arts Centre. The youth theatre spent many of its 28 years of existence as an autonomous youth theatre that had a close partnership with the arts centre before formally being absorbed into its programme. The youth theatre is run directly by contracted theatre practitioners, is guided by the work of an Advisory Committee, is line-managed by the Director of the Arts Centre and governed by the board of the Arts Centre.

An Artistic Director is hired to programme and deliver the work of the youth theatre, facilitate workshops and direct productions, manage a team of assistant facilitators and guest practitioners and a host of other responsibilities. The youth theatre has had a series of long-term Artistic Directors and its work is supported by a tradition of developing Young Leaders and engaging with alumni who have progressed to work professionally in the arts.

### Characteristics and Challenges

As the Arts Council's 'Arts Centre Policy and Strategy 2019' document states, *'the ability of ... [arts] centres to grow and develop, to support and engage with their communities, has consistently been hampered by the absence of necessary resources: physical space, production expertise, human resources and funding for the production of work.'*<sup>4</sup> Arts Centres have in general lacked the resources to develop youth theatres within their own programme. Assigning funding for youth theatres from their existing Local Authority Arts Office or Arts Council funding allocation has been a challenge for some arts centres/venues. At the same time, their existing funding renders them ineligible for specific project grants that a youth theatre would normally apply for from these sources (e.g., the Arts Council's Young Ensembles Scheme). An analysis of Youth Theatre Ireland development files shows that arts centres/venues have recently partnered with autonomous youth theatres rather than creating their own.

The key resources an arts centre/venue can offer a youth theatre are space (for workshops and productions) and staff. However, the vast majority of arts centres/venues do not have specific staff members to manage participation projects for the local community and it can prove challenging for some arts centres/venues to manage long-term youth arts projects such as a youth theatre within their existing staffing structures.

### Professional Theatre Companies and Amateur Drama Groups

- Three youth theatres are run by professional theatre companies.
- Three youth theatres are run by amateur drama groups.

### Professional Theatre Companies

A small group of professional theatre companies have been running youth theatres for between 16 and 28 years. These dedicated companies have been involved in a spectrum of practice which incorporates youth theatre, educational theatre, theatre for young audiences and work with emerging actors and non-actors in a range of settings: Barnstorm Theatre Company, Graffiti Theatre Company, Crooked House Theatre Company and Bare Cheek Theatre Company (in partnership with Wexford County Council Arts Office).

Centre Stage +20 records a drop of three youth theatres run by professional theatre companies including the discontinuation of Na Crosáin Youth Theatre (An Taibhdhearc), Boomerang Youth Theatre (Boomerang Productions Ltd.) and the amalgamation of Physically Phishy Youth Theatre into the multi-group Activate Youth Theatre (Graffiti Theatre Company).

### Amateur Drama

The Amateur Drama community has maintained its engagement with young people and youth theatre over the 20 years since Centre Stage, and the sector currently includes three youth theatres being directly run by amateur drama groups (Ardclough Youth Theatre, Glengarriff Youth Theatre Group, Mosttrim Youth Players) and one running a youth theatre in partnership with a Community Development Company (Belturbet Youth Theatre). Youth theatre leaders within these amateur drama groups have been open to developing their workshop facilitation practice and moving beyond the traditional rehearsal/performance practice typical within many amateur drama groups.

### Characteristics and Challenges

The professional theatre model hasn't grown over the past 10 years. Though there continues to be an enriching connection between professional theatre companies/practitioners and Irish youth theatres, it has been 16 years since a professional theatre company became involved in setting up a youth theatre.

Volunteerism is a distinctive characteristic of the amateur drama model and these groups operate in a similar way to some of the smaller, autonomous youth theatres with a voluntary ethos. The voluntary nature of these groups roots these youth theatres firmly in the local community. With their strong voluntary ethos, these youth theatres were largely recession-proof but as with the smaller autonomous youth theatres, they have struggled with the additional burden of regulatory compliance and policy change. They often require a higher level of support than youth theatres led by other types of parent organisations.

### Youth Services

- Two youth theatres are run by local youth services.

Youth theatre is a form of youth arts and seeks to support the artistic, personal and social development of young people through non-formal theatre activities. Youth theatre is a natural choice for youth services who are seeking to engage young people through youth arts because of its ensemble nature, its use as a tool to explore ideas and themes, its ability to provide a public voice for young people's stories, and its value for money compared to the materials and equipment required for some other art forms. The number of youth service-run youth theatres in the sector has remained low over the past 20 years.

Roundabout Youth Theatre is run by Ballymun Regional Youth Service (BRYR) and is the oldest of the current youth theatres run by youth services having existed since 2001. Roundabout Youth Theatre is strengthened by the existence of a part-time staff member to manage and facilitate its activities and its access to non-arts funding due to its location in Ballymun, a designated area of disadvantage. The other youth theatre, Footsteps Youth Theatre was run by a rural youth project (Foróige Local Youth Service in Kilmallock, Limerick) and closed during the Centre Stage +20 research period.

### Characteristics and Challenges

The closure of Footsteps Youth Theatre echoes a similar experience in three other youth service-run youth theatres which existed for a number of years between the Centre Stage +10 and Centre Stage +20 research periods: Boolabus Youth Theatre (Crosscare in Dun Laoghaire, Dublin), Manic Fantastic Youth Theatre (Youth Work Ireland Tipperary) and Sphere 17 Youth Theatre (Sphere 17 Regional Youth Service in Darndale, Dublin). A combination of staff hours being cut due to the recession, lack of funding to bring in a regular facilitator where staff members did not have youth theatre facilitation skills, a prioritisation of other youth work methodologies or programmes within the youth service or, in one case, an increased interest in other art forms amongst the young people led to the closure of the youth theatres.

### Other Types of Parent Organisations

- Six youth theatres are run by other types of parent organisations, including: an Outdoor Arts Company; a Community Arts Company; an Educational Institution; a Circus Arts Organisation; a Community Development Company; and a Youth Arts Organisation.

The past 10 years has seen a wider range of parent organisations delivering youth theatre activities as part of their core programme for young people and adopting youth theatre practice as a means of carrying out the mission of their organisation.

### Circus and Outdoor Arts

The youth theatre sector's approach to theatre practice has broadened to include youth circus and street/outdoor arts where elements of theatre are woven into the workshop and performance experience. Galway Community Circus is a pioneer of youth and social circus in Ireland and is a large organisation delivering workshops to children, young people, adults and families. Bú Bolg Outdoor Arts has been running a free Youth Arts Group in drama, improvisation, street arts, puppetry, circus skills and stilt walking as part of its core activities since 1994.

### Community Development

Many youth theatres are generated in a community setting and remain deeply rooted there. The past decade has seen a Community Arts Organisation (Balor Developmental Community Arts) and a Community Development Company (Mountrath Development Association) emerge as founders of Donegal Youth Theatre and Mountrath Youth Theatre respectively, delivering youth theatre activities to young people in their area to fulfil their missions of community-engaged art and community development.

### Youth Arts Organisations

Waterford Youth Arts began in 1985 as Waterford Youth Drama and has grown into an established, multi-art form organisation for children and young people in Waterford. Its work is unique in Ireland and it remains the only youth theatre run as part of the programme of a large youth arts organisation.

### Educational Institutions

As youth theatre practice developed and Youth Theatre Ireland's affiliation criteria for youth theatres were established, affiliated youth theatres stopped being run directly by secondary schools. In line with youth work practice, youth theatres are described in the affiliation criteria as 'existing outside of formal education' and by Centre Stage +10, no secondary school-run youth theatres were included in the research.

Only one youth theatre included in Centre Stage +20 is run directly by an educational institution, the Cork Institute of Technology's 'Cork School of Music'. Another youth theatre run directly by the Theatre Department of UCC has also affiliated since completion of the research. These youth theatres are characterised by the external recruitment of members from the local community, the voluntary participation of young people and the existence of non-formal, youth theatre practice within the framework of the formal education institution.

## 2.2.4 Partnership Models

### Key Findings

- A key trend in current youth theatre models, is the growth of the Partnership model to the extent that just over a tenth (11%) of youth theatres involved in Centre Stage +20 were run by partners including Local Authority Arts Offices, Autonomous Youth Theatres, Arts Centres and Community Development Organisations.
- The partnership model is characterised by a formal resource and responsibility sharing arrangement between different organisations that want to develop youth theatre provision in their local area. The partnership is usually formalised in a partnership agreement or contract.

Table 2.4 lists the youth theatres which are run in the manner of a partnership model.

Youth Theatre	Partnership Model	Location
Act Out Youth Theatre	Autonomous Youth Theatre in partnership with an Arts Centre	Meath
Belturbet Youth Theatre	Amateur Drama Group in partnership with Community Development Company	Cavan
County Wexford Youth Theatre	Professional Theatre Company in partnership with a Local Authority Arts Office	Wexford
LYTC Carrick-on-Shannon	Arts Centre in partnership with Local Authority Arts Office	Leitrim
LYTC Carrigallen	Autonomous Youth Theatre in partnership with Local Authority Arts Office	Leitrim
LYTC Manorhamilton	Arts Centre in partnership with Local Authority Arts Office	Leitrim

### Centre Stage Context

County Wexford Youth Theatre was the first partnership model to appear in Centre Stage research in 2009. Though partnerships existed between other youth theatres and local venues/agencies, this was a formal arrangement between Barecheek Theatre Company and Wexford Arts Office. Barecheek Theatre Company now manages County Wexford Youth Theatre as part of a contractual agreement with Wexford Arts Office which is awarded through a tender process.

### Current Partnership Models

- Six Centre Stage +20 youth theatres are run according to a partnership model.

#### Local Authority Arts Offices and the Partnership Model

Leitrim Arts Office decided on a partnership approach when it was exploring ways to divest full responsibility for its three youth theatres and find a more sustainable model that would suit the county. The Arts Office still considers the youth theatres branches of Leitrim Youth Theatre Company (LYTC) but LYTC Carrick-on-Shannon is now managed by The Dock (Arts Centre), LYTC Manorhamilton is managed by The Glens (Arts Centre) and LYTC Carrigallen has just finished a transition process into an autonomous youth theatre (unincorporated association). Formal arrangements exist between the partners around funding, programming and child protection and insurance.

#### Autonomous Youth Theatres and the Partnership Model

Act Out Youth Theatre is an autonomous youth theatre in Navan, Co. Meath which has a formal partnership arrangement with the Solstice Arts Centre encompassing in-kind venue and theatre rental, recruitment of members and inclusion policy, child protection and insurance.

Belturbet Youth Theatre in Cavan is a developing youth theatre run by an amateur drama group in partnership with Breffni Integrated CLG, a community-led Development Company working at a local level across Cavan.

This trend has also continued with developing youth theatres that were established during the Centre Stage +20 research period:

- Giant Wolf Youth Theatre is the youth theatre in residence at The Civic in Tallaght, Dublin and has developed a formal partnership arrangement and an advisory committee which includes staff from Giant Wolf Theatre Company, The Civic and the membership.
- PoD Youth Theatre (formerly Ramor Young Players) has evolved into an autonomous youth theatre which exists in partnership with the Ramor Theatre, Virginia, Co Cavan.

### Case Study – Act Out Youth Theatre

Act Out Youth Theatre was set up in 2017 as an autonomous youth theatre, with a voluntary board and a contracted Artistic Director to develop an artistic programme and deliver activities directly with young people. The youth theatre created a strategic partnership with the Solstice Arts Centre in Navan to provide youth theatre activities for young people in the area. Their relationship was formalised in a partnership agreement which outlined the roles and expectations of both organisations and covered issues such as: venue donation for workshops and an annual production; marketing and programming collaboration; child protection; and sponsorship of a student and youth leader mentorship programme. The voluntary board of the youth theatre take responsibility for governance, child protection, financial management and funding amongst other tasks.

### Characteristics and Challenges

The successful division of responsibilities and resources is key with the partnership model. One of the partners typically will carry more weight by ultimately being responsible for the youth theatre in terms of governance and child protection. This is why the youth theatres are termed 'Autonomous Youth Theatre in partnership with an Arts Centre' or 'Arts Centre in partnership with Local Authority Arts Office'. It is important that there is clarity around child protection policies and reporting, financial responsibilities, insurance, decision-making capacities, programming, identity, employment/contracting, etc. to ensure the safe and smooth running of the youth theatre.

### Conclusions:

No individual model of youth theatre provision is the ideal model. Youth theatres can thrive in a range of settings.

Youth theatre ethos and practice can live successfully within many different types of parent organisations once they have a compatible mission and the necessary resources, people and experience to develop a youth theatre as part of its programme. Funders of youth theatre need to explore how a range of parent organisations (arts centres, venues, theatre companies, youth work services, etc.) can access core funding to operate youth theatres within the structures of existing organisations. Youth Theatre Ireland staff need the expertise to carry out development work with a wide range of parent organisations, understanding the characteristics, structures and challenges of each one.

Autonomous youth theatres need higher levels of support from Youth Theatre Ireland to thrive. Youth Theatre Ireland staff need the expertise and resources to simplify administration and governance for autonomous youth theatres. Autonomous youth theatres that did not evolve from Local Authority Arts Offices need access to core funding to stabilise their regular youth theatre activities.

The characteristics and challenges of the developing partnership model need to be assessed in more detail. The development of case studies and resources would support the development of partnership model youth theatres so they can learn from best practice where it exists.

## 2.3 Youth Theatre Structures

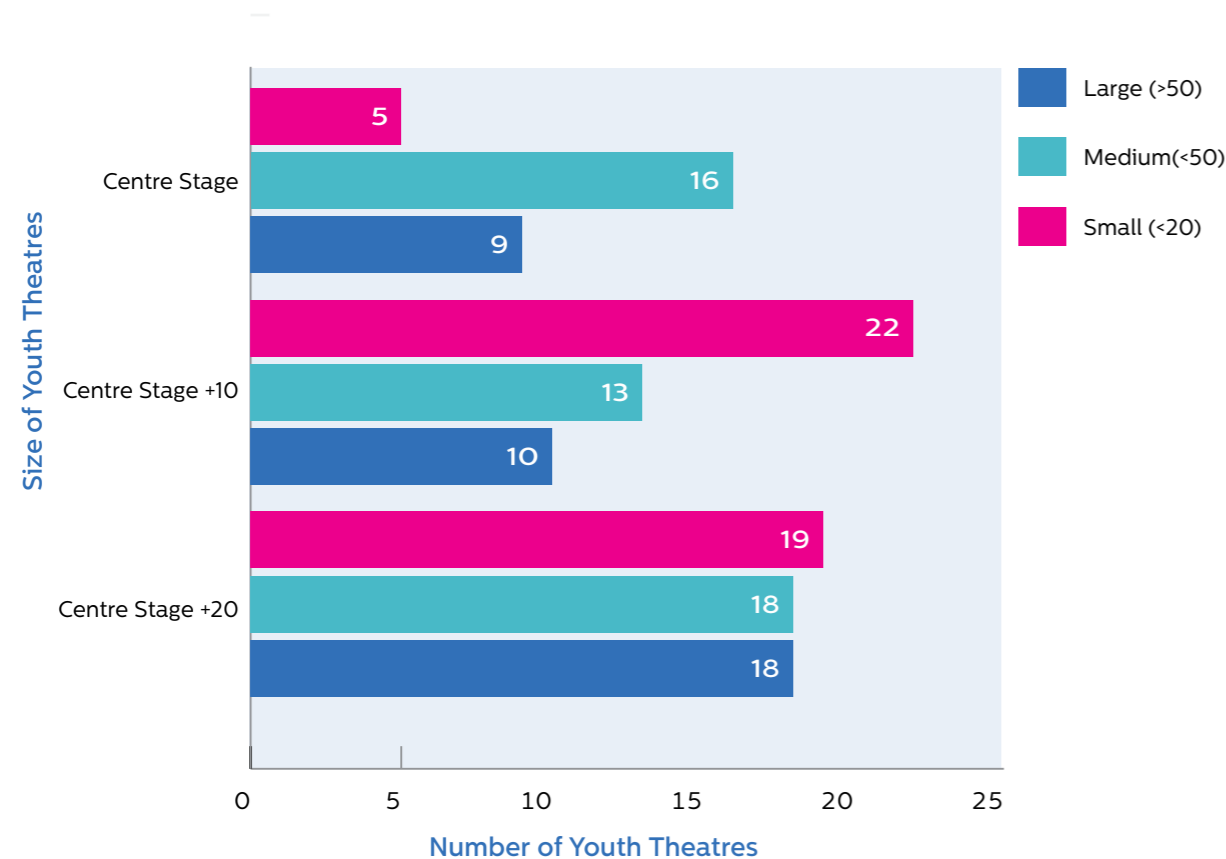
### 2.3.1 Membership Size

#### Key Findings

- There is a balanced distribution of small, medium and large youth theatres in the sector, with Centre Stage +20 recording:
  - 35% of youth theatres are 'small' (20 members or less);
  - 33% of youth theatres are 'medium' (21 to 50 members);
  - 33% of youth theatres are 'large' (51 members or more).

Figure 2.5 depicts the membership size of youth theatres included within Centre Stage +20, Centre Stage +10 and Centre Stage.

Figure 2.5: Membership Size of Youth Theatres



Figures are based on 55 Centre Stage +20 youth theatres, 45 Centre Stage +10 youth theatres and 30 of the Centre Stage youth theatres.

#### Centre Stage Context

The youth theatre sector has always encompassed a wide variety of membership sizes. Centre Stage (1998) revealed a sector dominated by 'medium' sized youth theatres with a membership of 50 or less and an average membership of 46. Centre Stage +10 (2009) reported a large rise in 'small' youth theatres with single groups of up to 20 members. At the time, these 'small' youth theatres were evenly spread across the country, with half being run by Local Authority Arts Offices and nearly a third structured as autonomous youth theatres. In 2019 however, the average membership size was still that of a medium sized youth theatre (47).

#### 'Small' Youth Theatres

- 35% of youth theatres are 'small', with a membership of 20 members or less.

Membership levels of 15 to 20 work very well in a single-group youth theatre, providing a good number of participants for workshops, allowing for diversity in the membership and suiting the working capacity of the youth theatre. 'Small' youth theatres are thriving youth arts hubs in their own communities. They are capable of sustaining themselves for 37 years as Cabinteely Youth Theatre has evidenced and many are reaching the development potential they aspire to.

The prevalence of 'small' youth theatres within the sector has balanced out with the growth of 'medium' and 'large' youth theatres over the last 10 years. Eight of the 'small' youth theatres are autonomous youth theatres and the remaining 10 are run by a range of parent organisations.

Membership levels under 15 (and particularly membership levels under 10) can indicate a problem in some 'small' youth theatres:

- 10 Centre Stage +20 youth theatres reported less than 15 members;
- Three of these youth theatres closed during the Centre Stage +20 research period;
- Three of these youth theatres were just forming or re-building their membership after a break from activities.

Low membership levels can indicate a crisis phase for a youth theatre. They may be struggling with approaches to membership recruitment, with resource capacity or funding issues, with the quality of their youth theatre facilitation and programme or with communication and marketing challenges around their local profile. Some youth theatres can get caught in a cycle of decreasing membership numbers where the low level of membership impacts on the quality of workshop experiences for existing members and causes further difficulties.

#### 'Medium' and 'Large' Youth Theatres

- Two-thirds of all youth theatres are now 'medium' or 'large' youth theatres'.
- There is an 80% increase in 'large' youth theatres (eight) and a 38% increase in 'medium' youth theatres (five) in the past 10 years.
- The average membership size is 48, the size of a medium youth theatre. This has not changed significantly in the past 20 years.

The growth of 'medium' and 'large' youth theatres within the sector has helped to expand provision by increasing the membership capacity within the sector over the last decade. 'Medium' sized youth theatres are primarily run by parent organisations (14) and are based in a broad mixture of cities, towns and rural areas.

'Large' youth theatres are predominantly based in towns and cities where a centralised provision draws young people from surrounding areas (e.g., Waterford Youth Arts, Dublin Youth Theatre, Activate Youth Theatre). However, notable exceptions include Griese Youth Theatre in Ballitore, Co. Kildare with a membership of 134 and LYTC Carrigallen in Leitrim with a membership of 79 which are both based in rural locations that have a population of under 2,000.

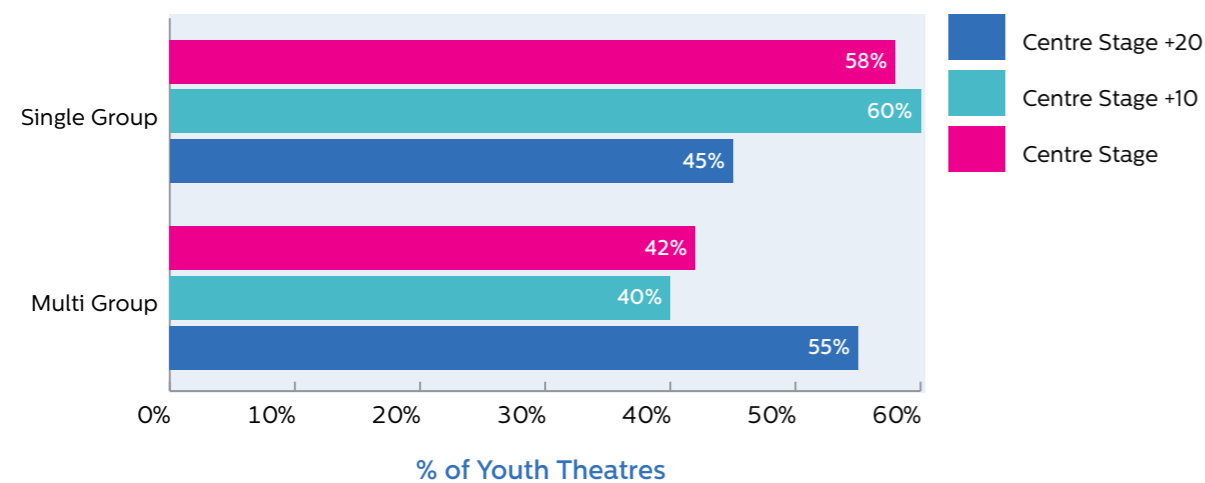
- Half of all 'large' youth theatres are autonomous, even though they only form 38% of the sector. These youth theatres often have more control to shape their own development path and respond to local demand where flexible funding and resources allow them to grow.
- The other half of 'large' youth theatres are run by parent organisations (six youth theatres) or as part of a partnership model (three youth theatres) where commitment to youth theatre has built over decades in some cases.
- Age and experience are the most dominant characteristics of 'large' youth theatres, as the 18 youth theatres have an average operating age of 20. Dublin Youth Theatre was the oldest at 42 and M.A.D Youth Theatre was the youngest 'large' youth theatre at eight.
- Remarkably, two 'large' youth theatres are run on a completely voluntary level as autonomous youth theatres: Blessington Youth Theatre and Backstage Youth Theatre, Longford.
- The largest single membership was found at Galway Community Circus where they reported 500 children and young people aged five to 20 participating in weekly youth circus activities.

### 2.3.2 Multiple Groups and Age Range

#### Key Findings

- For the first time in the youth theatre sector, over half of all youth theatres have multiple groups (55%). Separate workshop groups are operated for young people under the umbrella of the youth theatre, offering a different range of projects and productions.
- 45% of youth theatres operate one single group of members who workshop together and share all youth theatre production and project experiences.

Figure 2.6: Comparison of Group Structures across Centre Stage Research Projects



Figures are based on 55 Centre Stage +20 youth theatres, 45 Centre Stage +10 youth theatres and 33 Centre Stage youth theatres. 'Large towns' have a population of over 10,000, 'small towns' have a population of between 2,000 and 10,000 and 'rural' includes areas with a population of less than 2,000. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

#### Centre Stage Context

The existence of multiple working groups within a youth theatre has been a trend since the 1990s, when Centre Stage reported that 58% of the 33 youth theatres worked with multiple groups. This dropped to 40% of the sector in Centre Stage +10, due to the rise of the 'small' youth theatres with a membership of 20 members or less.

This growth in multiple groups has reflected the extension of the age range served by youth theatre beyond the original 14 to 18 age range. By Centre Stage +10 in 2019, three out of 10 youth theatres were working with children aged under 12 and just over half of youth theatres were working with young people aged 18 or over.

#### Single Groups

- 45% of youth theatres work together as one single group of members.

Youth theatres with a single group of members tend to work with the traditional youth theatre age of either 14 to 19/20 or 12 to 19/20. Blessington Youth Theatre is an exception, as it works with under 10s all the way up to 18 year olds within one working group (the widest age range). This cohort of youth theatres have a very similar profile to those working with less than 20 members (Section 2.3.1). The majority of youth theatres start with one working group of approximately 20 members and often add further groups as they develop. However, though some of these youth theatres are only a few years old, the average age in this cohort is 15. In general, these are mature

youth theatres that have the resources to run one group and a local demand that matches their capacity.

Seven 'medium' sized youth theatres were also working as a single group. Of these, three simply had a slightly larger workshop group of between 21 and 25 members, but the remaining four youth theatres had up to 62 members working as one group. Occasionally, these youth theatres coped with their membership size by asking members to 'opt-into' workshops rather than requiring weekly participation but others that work consistently as one large group, have encountered facilitation challenges in dealing with such large numbers and sustaining the engagement of members.

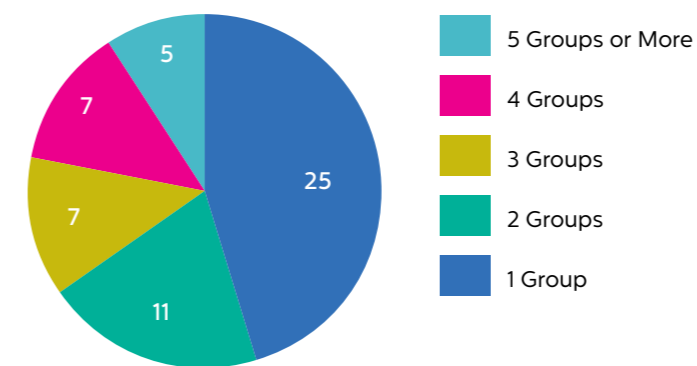
#### Multiple Groups

- 55% of youth theatres operate multiple groups of members.

Youth theatres create additional groups for a number of reasons: to extend the age range they serve; to extend their overall membership capacity; to take a more age appropriate approach to their youth theatre practice; and to support young people's development at different skill and experience levels.

Figure 2.7 shows a breakdown of the numbers of multiple groups within Centre Stage +20 youth theatres.

Figure 2.7: Number of Groups within Centre Stage +20 youth theatres



Figures are based on 55 Centre Stage +20 youth theatres.

Typically, the larger the number of groups in operation, the wider the age range the youth theatre is working with.

- It is most common for these multiple group youth theatres to have two groups (20%): one for the younger adolescent age-range and one for an older adolescent age range. Within the Centre Stage +20 youth theatres, 98% were working with 14 to 18 year olds and 73% were working with 12 and 13 year olds.
- By the time youth theatres are beginning to add a third group (13%) or a fourth group (13%), the majority are starting to work with the 10 to 11 and under 10 age groups. Within the Centre Stage +20 youth theatres, 36% were working with 10 and 11 year olds and 27% were working with children aged under 10.
- Within the Centre Stage +20 youth theatres, 47% were working with young people in the 19 to 25 age range. However, very few youth theatres were running separate groups for this age category. County Limerick Youth Theatre runs the Leading LYTs group which supports the development of young leaders and works on youth theatre projects and international activities. Kildare Youth Theatre also has 30 members aged 18+ who work on specific productions, projects and international exchanges and festivals.

Youth theatres with multiple groups are very close in profile to the ‘medium’ and ‘large’ youth theatres described Section 2.3.1. The five large youth theatres which report five or more working groups within the youth theatre all have some unique circumstances which impact on their structure, as well as working with a wider age range in the majority of cases. For example, Galway Community Circus registers 20 separate groups (the largest number) working with children and young people, and aside from age range, divides activities by context and by specialist skills within circus. WACT Youth Theatre is working in multiple locations as well as running junior and senior groups, and LYTC Carrigallen is working with a large age range but also running a group called ‘Bright Sparks’ which is aimed at young people who are coping with challenges and thrive with extra attention.

### Additional Reasons for Multiple Groups

Aside from age profiling, youth theatres also expand their working groups for other reasons. A small number of the larger, autonomous youth theatres like Dublin Youth Theatre like to keep new youth theatre members separate for a period of time so they can participate in a specially designed programme to develop their skills before they join the remainder of the members. Some youth theatres will occasionally divide their membership to assist with young people’s choice of a specific annual project. Other youth theatres will add an extra working group because of a wish to expand capacity rather than age range.

### 2.3.3 Multiple Centres

#### Key Findings

- Youth theatres delivering regular activities across multiple centres in their county are no longer a common feature of the youth theatre sector.
- Between Centre Stage +10 and Centre Stage +20, youth theatres working in 33 different centres reduced to 12 centres. Of these groups: 45% closed; 30% reduced to one youth theatre centre; and 15% evolved into other youth theatre models.
- Only WACT Youth Theatre in Wexford is still running activities in multiple centres.

Table 2.5 lists the status of youth theatres with multiple centres (or multiple youth theatres run by the same parent organisation) that existed between the Centre Stage +10 and Centre Stage +20 research periods.

**Table 2.5: Status of Youth Theatres with Multiple Centres/Multiple Youth Theatres run by the Same Parent Organisation between Centre Stage +10 and Centre Stage +20**

Youth Theatre	Model/Parent Organisation	Number of Groups/Centres	Status
Cavan Youth Drama	Cavan Arts Office	8 youth theatre centres	Closed
Na Crosáin Youth Theatre	An Taibhdhearc	2 youth theatre centres	Closed
Offaly Youth Theatre	Autonomous youth theatre in partnership with Offaly Arts Office	3 youth theatre centres	Closed
East Galway Youth Theatre	Autonomous	2 youth theatre centres	Closed
County Carlow Youth Theatre	Carlow Arts Office	2 youth theatre centres	Reduced to 1 centre
Mountrath, Portlaoise, Rathdowney and Stradbally Youth Theatres	Laois Arts Office	4 youth theatre centres	Reduced to 1 centre, Laois Youth Theatre
Mayo Youth Theatre – Ballina & Mayo Youth Theatre – Castlebar	Mayo Arts Office	2 youth theatre centres	Reduced to 1 centre, Mayo Youth Theatre
County Limerick Youth Theatre – Abbeyfeale & County Limerick Youth Theatre – Lough Gur	County Limerick Arts Office	2 youth theatres centres	Reduced to 1 centre, County Limerick Youth Theatre
LYTC Carrick-on-Shannon, LYTC Carrigallen and LYTC Manorhamilton	Leitrim Arts Office	3 youth theatres centres	Evolved into 3 partnership model youth theatres
Fracture Youth Theatre & Nenagh Youth Theatre (previously Play Youth Theatre)	Tipperary Arts Office	2 youth theatres centres	Evolved into 2 youth theatres run by arts centres
WACT Youth Theatre	Autonomous	3 youth theatre centres	3 youth theatre centres

### Centre Stage Context

An increase in arts funding and the development of strategic and spatial planning in local arts services in the 2000s, contributed to an increase in multi-centre youth theatres during the Centre Stage+10 research period. In general, these multi-centre youth theatres were run directly by Local Authority Arts Offices and were a direct response to the desire for equality of access and participation, particularly in rural areas. They expanded youth theatre provision and contributed to the accessibility of youth theatre. In some cases, Local Authority Arts Offices ran many individual youth theatres rather than operating one youth theatre with different branches around the county.

### Youth Theatres working in Multiple Centres

- Only 36% of multiple-centre youth theatres are still operating in some form. Youth Theatres working in 33 different centres have reduced to 12 centres between Centre Stage +10 and Centre Stage +20.

In general, multi-centre youth theatres have been vulnerable to: funding cuts; local youth theatre facilitator shortages; resource capacity changes within parent organisations; changes to Local Authority procedural and procurement processes; and differences in artistic vision between individuals involved in the network. Table 2.5 illustrates the closure, reduction or evolution of these multiple centre youth theatres or multiple youth theatres run by the same parent organisation. In a few cases, an identical activity programme was encouraged for each branch of the youth theatre, preventing the young people from developing their own unique identity as a group and preventing the leaders from responding to the unique needs and interests of the youth theatre members in each group. Budgets were often tight within these multi-centre structures where an agreed number of annual facilitator hours shaped annual programming and the youth theatre models prevented branches from seeking other sources of funding to respond to their own unique needs or plans.

### Evolution

In an effort to overcome some of the challenges of the multi-centre structure, some youth theatres have evolved into other youth theatre models. Leitrim has managed to maintain youth theatre coverage across the county by adapting to a partnership model of delivery (see Section 2.2.3) and continuing to provide core funding. Tipperary Arts Office directly ran two youth theatres that evolved into Fracture Youth Theatre and Nenagh Youth Theatre, run by the Source Arts Centre and Nenagh Arts Centre respectively (with continued core funding from the Arts Office).

### Outreach

Many of the larger youth theatres and their parent organisations run outreach youth theatre projects in their county (e.g., Waterford Youth Arts, West Cork Arts Centre, County Limerick Youth Theatre) and extend their youth theatre provision by working on a temporary, project basis with young people from a range of different communities and areas. These have included under-served areas in their region, direct provision centres, youth services, secondary schools and other community groups.

#### Case Study: WACT Youth Theatre

Wexford Artists Community Theatre Youth Theatre (WACT Youth Theatre) is a small, autonomous youth theatre based in Wexford Town that runs junior and senior youth theatre groups in multiple locations (Wexford, New Ross and Enniscorthy). The youth theatre believes in providing an expanded service so that youth theatre is also accessible to young people in Enniscorthy and New Ross where there is no youth theatre provision.

## 2.3.4 Company and Governance Structures

### Key Findings

- All Centre Stage +20 youth theatres, their parent and partner organisations are structured formally as either Unincorporated Associations or Companies (typically Companies Limited by Guarantee) with governing documents and governance structures.

### Centre Stage Context

Twenty years ago, it was normal for autonomous youth theatres to have very loose governance structures. Youth theatre leaders would speak of a Constitution that someone had misplaced a few years ago, the ‘board’ would often be a group of committee members that organised activities rather than providing oversight and governance, or potentially some governance documents would be in place, copied from the local GAA club or amateur drama group. Parent organisations of youth theatres were more likely to be formally constituted or registered as a company with the Companies Registration Office (CRO). However, many of the smaller parent organisations (including theatre companies, amateur drama groups, etc.) also had very informal governance structures. This had begun to change prior to Centre Stage +10 as the majority of autonomous youth theatres were formally constituted and parent organisations had governance structures appropriate to their size.

### Company and Governance Structures in Centre Stage +20 Youth Theatres

- All Centre Stage +20 youth theatres had adopted a structure suited to their operational size (unincorporated associations or companies limited by guarantee) and had governance structures in place.

The formalisation of governance structures gathered pace in the past decade for a number of specific reasons which are explored more fully in Section 2.4:

- The Children First Act 2015;
- The National Vetting Bureau Acts 2012–2016;
- The reporting requirements and eligibility criteria of funders;
- Charity registration and reporting with The Charities Regulatory Authority.

### Autonomous Youth Theatres: Unincorporated Associations and CLGs

Autonomous Youth Theatres typically take the structure of an Unincorporated Association or a Company Limited by Guarantee (CLG):

- 18 autonomous youth theatres are unincorporated associations;
- Three autonomous youth theatres are Companies Limited by Guarantee (CLGs).

The vast majority of autonomous youth theatres adopt the simplest structure – an unincorporated association. These youth theatres consist of people bound together by mutual agreement, who meet on a regular basis to pursue a common interest. They create a governing document (a constitution) and set-up a voluntary committee/board. An unincorporated association is a suitable structure for the vast majority of public funders and is recognised by the Charities Regulatory Authority as a suitable structure for a charitable organisation. A challenge associated with this structure is that “An unincorporated association is not a separate legal entity nor does it have limited liability or a legal personality of its own.”<sup>5</sup> This means that it is the members who are responsible for the organisation (i.e. board /committee members) that enter into youth theatre contracts or are liable for youth theatre debts rather than the youth theatre itself. It is important for these autonomous youth theatres to have the appropriate policies and insurance in place (including Trustee/Individual Committee Member Liability).

<sup>5</sup> Forming a Charity Factsheet, Page 5, The Wheel, July 2018  
[https://www.wheel.ie/sites/default/files/media/file-uploads/2018-08/Factsheet\\_Forming\\_A\\_Charity.pdf](https://www.wheel.ie/sites/default/files/media/file-uploads/2018-08/Factsheet_Forming_A_Charity.pdf)

A small number of autonomous youth theatres have adopted the structure of a Company Limited by Guarantee. It is more common for a youth theatre to evolve into this structure once its income and staffing levels reach a level which suggests incorporation. The legal identity provided by incorporation limits the liability of members and allows the youth theatre to enter into contracts in the name of the youth theatre. The main disadvantage is that incorporation requires higher levels of administration to comply with company law and the Companies Registration Office. There can also be costs associated with forming and maintaining the company.

Before a new autonomous youth theatre starts running activities with a group of young people, it must: decide on an appropriate structure; bring together a committee/board and draw up a Constitution; write its Safeguarding Statement, Risk Assessment and Child Protection Policy; and register as a charity. The emphasis on governance is necessary for youth theatres to comply with national regulations but it also forces the formalisation of youth theatre structures and front-loads administration work at a very early stage in the youth theatre development process.

### Governance within Parent Organisations of Youth Theatres

The parent organisations of youth theatres tend to be larger organisations with higher levels of income, property and employees. They will typically be registered as companies and, because the majority of them have charitable status and are publicly funded, they will typically be registered as a Company Limited by Guarantee (CLG) as the most appropriate company form. To be compliant with national regulation and funding bodies, these parent organisations tend to have robust governance structures which are monitored by a number of different bodies (funding bodies, Charities Regulatory Authority, Revenue, etc.).

Some parent organisations also establish advisory committees to work with a key youth theatre facilitator and have oversight over programme development and delivery. For example, Droichead Youth Theatre is run by Droichead Arts Centre which contracts an Artistic Director and other freelance practitioners to deliver the youth theatre programme. The Artistic Director reports to the Director of the Arts Centre and also participates in an advisory committee which has oversight over the development of the youth theatre.

### 2.3.5 Young People's Participation in Decision-Making

#### Key Findings

- Youth theatres manage at least one informal or formal youth participation structure through which members can contribute to decision-making in their youth theatre.
- Youth theatres describe a range of methods, including: discussion and feedback; structured consultations and evaluations; members' committees or representatives; youth-led or self-directed projects; and young leaders.

#### Centre Stage Context

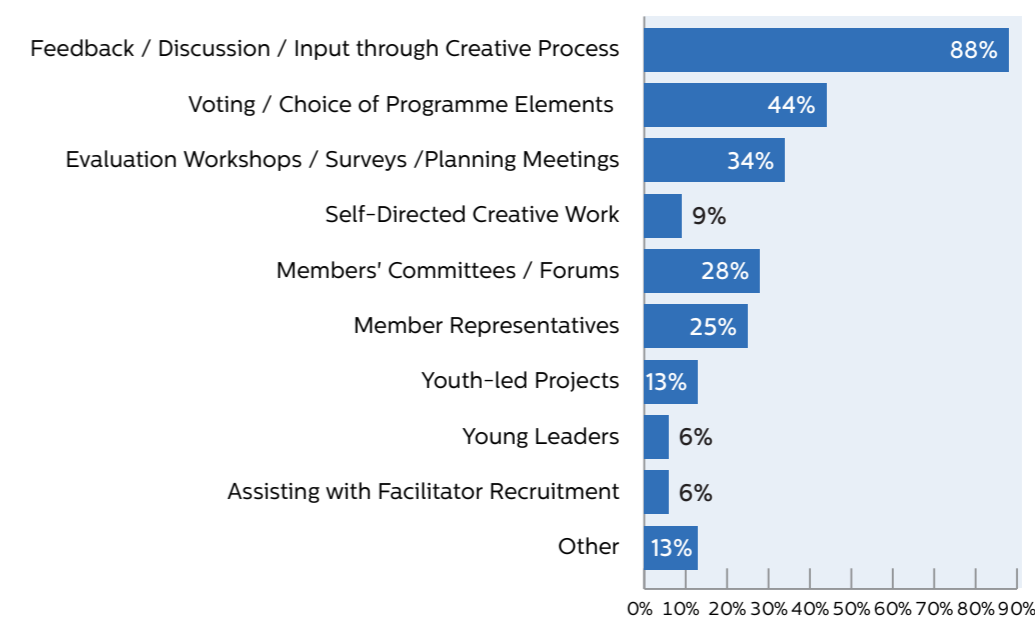
Youth participation methods and structures grew within the autonomous youth theatre model and in Centre Stage (1998), 111 young people were involved in members' committees. The independence of this model means that it has been better placed to take young people's views into account and respond to them. In Centre Stage research, formal youth participation structures were least common in youth theatres run by parent organisations, where decision-making processes usually involved contracted facilitators and a key member of staff.

#### Levels of Youth Participation

- All 32 youth theatres who engaged with this question as part of the Youth Theatre Questionnaire had methods for ensuring and promoting young people's voice within decision-making and delivery of activities in the youth theatre.
- Of the 32 youth theatres that completed the Centre Stage +20 Youth Theatre Questionnaire, 91% felt that youth theatre members were a key support for their youth theatre's development.

Figure 2.8 outlines the different ways that youth theatres include young people's voices in decision-making within youth theatre.

Figure 2.8: Young People's Participation in Decision-Making in Youth Theatres



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

Young people are 'members' of their youth theatre, and their opinions, interests and needs are at the heart of youth theatre's decision-making processes. Youth participation methods and structures have been promoted across the arts and youth work sectors over the past decade, and now it is common practice for youth theatres run by parent organisations as well as autonomous youth theatres to ensure young people's voices are central to planning and delivery. This practice is reflected in policy development such as the 'National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015–2020', in self-evaluation tools for youth work such as the National Quality Standards for Volunteer-Led Groups and in assessment criteria for project funding such as The Arts Council's Young Ensembles Scheme.

*"It's important for members to be involved in helping to make decisions."  
Participant, Dublin Members Workshop*

Youth theatre members who took part in the Centre Stage +20 Member Workshops felt they had most input in creative decisions around: rehearsing; performing; directing; and youth theatre workshops. The areas of work where members *wanted* to have most input were also all creative in nature, and included: directing (most popular amongst members); rehearsing; production design; and writing for youth theatre.

*"All of what we do is by discussion with our membership. Our role is to facilitate young people to find their voice and to help them in a safe space to express their ideas and to communicate in a respectful manner with each other and to learn that everybody's input is important."  
Glengarriff Youth Theatre Leader*

#### Discussion and Feedback

- 88% of youth theatres mentioned this form of youth participation. The basic standard of youth participation is informal discussion and feedback with young people as part of workshops and other youth theatre activities. Young people give their opinion on



their experience of activities, their reaction to what they've seen, their view on what project/skill /play they should address next. There is an active and respectful sharing of ideas. This is also key to the creative process in youth theatre, where young people's ideas, improvisations, stories, writing are used to build devised plays that are uniquely of them.

*“Feedback is a core element of everything we do and is always welcome before or after the core work of the session.”*

*Mr. Sands Youth Theatre Leader*

### Structured Consultations and Evaluations

- 44% of youth theatres mentioned voting on their choice of programme elements.
- 34% of youth theatres mentioned formal evaluation workshops or surveys.

Some youth theatres will ask young people to vote on their choice of play or other programme elements such as specialist workshops, theatre visits, social activities, etc. For example, Droichead Youth Theatre takes votes in workshops for issues like summer programme themes; planning residential; use of youth theatre funds; and fundraising ideas.

Some youth theatres will also organise formal evaluation workshops at the end of terms to consult with members about their experience of youth theatre and their views on youth theatre activities. Sometimes these types of consultation are also carried out through surveys and planning meetings. For example, Limerick Youth Theatre carries out online surveys with members and recently conducted a research project with them on the impact of youth theatre participation on their development. A few youth theatres also reported that they had a formal application process for new youth theatre leaders which involved them facilitating a youth theatre workshop and members voting for their preferred option.

### Members Committees and Forums

- 28% of youth theatres mentioned having committees or forums.

Youth theatres also create formal youth participation structures such as committees and forums to help ensure that the work is youth-led and relevant. These groups will often have particular tasks to complete, agendas to discuss or activities to organise. They typically feed back to a particular youth theatre leader or the board in an autonomous youth theatre. Members of these committees are often elected by the general membership or might be volunteers in some small youth theatres. For example, Activate Youth Theatre (run by Graffiti Theatre Company) operates a Youth Council.

### Member Representatives

- 25% of youth theatres mentioned having member representatives.

Some youth theatres elect member representatives to speak for the members on advisory groups, boards or to youth theatre personnel. If these member representatives are 18 or over, they can sit as a full member of the board of an autonomous youth theatre where appropriate. Youth theatres reported that member representatives had sat on selection panels for new youth theatre facilitators. For example, Backstage Youth Theatre elects two member representatives to their committee each year and Mayo Youth Theatre (run directly by Mayo Arts Office) encourages members to be part of its steering group.

### Youth-Led/Self-Directed Projects & Young Leaders

- 9% of youth theatres mentioned offering self-directed artistic projects.
- A further 13% mentioned youth-led projects.
- A final 6% mentioned young leaders as a youth participation method.

Some youth theatres spoke about youth-led projects (such as one-act festivals, fundraising events or Erasmus + projects) and self-directed projects such as plays that are scripted, devised or directed exclusively by youth theatre members as creative examples of youth participation.

Young Leaders were also viewed as a great way to ensure young people's views were being heard and acted upon as these 18-25 year olds were involved in the planning and delivery of all youth theatre activities. For example, Clare Youth Theatre (run directly by Clare Arts Office) includes youth-directed productions in its programme offer and the different youth sub-committees of Griese Youth Theatre plan events and activities such as 'Open Mic Nights'.

### Case Study – Rusty Frog Youth Theatre

Rusty Frog Youth Theatre is run by Uillinn, the West Cork Arts Centre. Young people inform all stages of the work. Informal feedback and discussions take place with all members during workshops and their key annual decision is choosing what play to perform. The youth theatre groups do an annual review of their Group Contract (guidelines on how they want to work together as a group). Formal feedback also takes place through a log book, forms and scheduled, annual open-discussion.

The youth theatre members elect two 'reps' to liaise directly with the Programme Manager at Uillinn, West Cork Arts Centre, twice a year. The Programme Manager also visits the whole group at least twice a year for feedback and information sessions. The 'Reps' were particularly helpful in engaging a new youth theatre facilitator and working with staff to get feedback from other members during the 'change over'.

Members are responsible for social media, poster design, photography and local fundraising (working with the Uillinn Project Assistant).

### Conclusions

Youth theatres of all membership sizes can deliver quality youth theatre practice for young people. Youth theatres that would like to increase their membership size should be encouraged to do so at a sustainable pace in tandem with increases in human resources and funding levels. Funding the expansion of a youth theatre's capacity is one way of increasing provision in an area.

Low membership levels in youth theatre are often indicative of underlying problems. These youth theatres may be at a vulnerable stage in their development and need assistance to re-build their membership to more sustainable levels.

Youth theatre history demonstrates that it is difficult to sustain multi-centre youth theatres or multiple youth theatres run by the same parent organisation. Local organisations/agencies interested in this model of provision should explore the associated challenges before pursuing its development. Slow and sustained growth, the availability of flexible funding, an openness to allowing branches to develop their own unique identity and programme, sufficient human resources and a limited number of branches are key issues to consider.

Many youth theatres operate groups for children under the age of 12, an age-group outside of the remit of Youth Theatre Ireland. There is no national organisation supporting the development of children's theatre groups and this poses challenges in terms of these groups being supported to have the appropriate child protection policies, artistic resources/ training and national opportunities.

The operation of good governance structures is now a key part of running a youth theatre. The required emphasis on governance has impacted not only on youth theatres, but on the type of support provided by Youth Theatre Ireland, the training of its staff and the development resources it is required to provide. Autonomous youth theatres and amateur drama groups that run youth theatres in particular require a lot of support with governance structures.

Good practice in youth participation reflects a wide variety of approaches designed to meet the needs of individual groups. Youth theatres need support to develop youth participation practice where the culture within a parent organisation is not inclined towards democratic decision-making.

## 2.4 Policy and Regulatory Compliance

### 2.4.1 National Policy and Regulatory Context

#### Key Findings

Youth theatres now operate in a complex legislative, regulatory and policy environment. The context they work in has been influenced by:

- Developments in child safeguarding and garda vetting;
- The regulation of charities and the creation of governance standards;
- Reforms in company law and data protection;
- The creation of national standards in youth work;
- Policy and programme developments in the arts and youth work sectors;
- Increased reporting requirements from funders.

Table 2.6 lists the key legislative, regulatory and policy changes that impacted on the youth theatre sector over the past decade.

Year	Policy/Legislation	Department/Agency
2011	National Quality Standards for Youth Work (NQSF)	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
2011	Children First National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (2011)	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
2012	The National Vetting Bureau Acts 2012–2016	
2012	The Governance Code	The Governance Code Working Group (GCWG)
2013	National Quality Standards for Volunteer-Led Youth Groups (NQSPLYG)	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
2014	Better Outcomes Brighter Futures: The national policy framework for children and young people 2014 – 2020	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
2014	Value for Money and Policy Review of Youth Programmes	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
2014	The Companies Act 2014	
2015	Children First Act 2015	
2015	Making Great Art Work, Leading the Development of the Arts in Ireland, Arts Council Strategy 2016–2025	The Arts Council
2015	National Youth Strategy 2015–2020 (2015) [With specific reference to Outcome 1, Objective 2 and Priority Actions 1.2 and 1.3]	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
2015	National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015–2020,	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
2015	The Lobbying Act 2015	
2015	Commencement of the Companies Act 2014	Companies Registration Office
2015	Registration Deadline with the Charities Regulatory Authority for all operating charities	Charities Regulatory Authority

2016	Commencement of the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Acts 2012 to 2016	The National Vetting Bureau, An Garda Síochána
2016	A Framework for Collaboration: An agreement between the Arts Council and the County and City Management Association	The Arts Council and the County and City Management Association
2017	Creative Ireland Programme 2017 – 2022	Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht
2017	Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (2017) and full commencement of the Children First Act 2015	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
2018	LGBTI+ Strategy	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
2018	Charities Governance Code published	Charities Regulatory Authority
2018	General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) Implementation Date	EU
2019	Review of Arts Centres and Venues	The Arts Council
2019	Arts Centres Policy and Strategy 2019	The Arts Council

#### Centre Stage Context

The youth theatres of the first Centre Stage research in 1998 strove towards best practice but the majority did not adopt formal policies and operated within a transparent but unregulated environment. The first Centre Stage report covered Youth Theatre Ireland policies, guidelines and best practice but did not focus on the policies of individual youth theatres.

A decade ago, Centre Stage +10 youth theatres all had formal Welfare and Child Protection Policies (pre-Children First), governing documents and some had a range of other policies including artistic policies, recruitment policies or youth participation policies. At the time, youth theatres were just beginning to speak about the additional burden of compliance and regulation in the sector.

#### Regulatory, Legislative and Policy Change

The past decade has seen overwhelming changes in national policy development, legislation and regulation that impacts on the youth theatre sector (Table 2.6). Care for the safety of children and young people; national scandals in charities and organisations working with children; developments in how people's data is handled; increased interest in the proper management of, and accountability for, grants from exchequer funds have all contributed to the pace of legislative and regulatory change over the past 10 years. It has been a challenge for youth theatres to deal with significant new changes every year.

#### Child Protection

The Children First Act (2015) and the National Vetting Bureau Acts 2012–2016 were the most significant pieces of legislative change to impact on youth theatres over the past decade. Youth theatres pride themselves on providing a safe space for young people to explore theatre and these pieces of legislation now guide the safeguarding of young people within the sector.

- Children First created many different child protection roles and responsibilities within youth theatres e.g., Designated Liaison Person, Deputy Designated Liaison Person, the Relevant Person, Mandated Persons, the Named Person, etc.
- Children First requires strong governance structures within which robust policies and procedures can operate. Before Governance standards evolved or the Charities Regulatory Authority was formed, youth theatres needed to strengthen governance structures in response to the Children First National Guidelines (2011).

- The staggered release of Children First guidelines and legislation over the decade meant that youth theatres were constantly having to update policies and procedures in response to each new development.
- Youth theatres were required to join a Garda Vetting Consortium, create a vetting policy and decision-making structures to deal with vetting disclosures and vet in advance of offering staff members/freelance practitioners/volunteers work. Youth theatres now have to plan and recruit in advance and need to vet a pool of practitioners to be able to react spontaneously to the absence of the regular facilitator or needs of the young people.
- Children First also necessitated the formalisation of other policy areas in youth theatre such as: Health and Safety; Complaints Procedures; Disciplinary/Appeals Procedures; Formal Recruitment and Management Procedures for Staff and Volunteers; Data Protection, etc.

### Regulatory Change

The emergence of the Charities Regulatory Authority was the most significant regulatory change over the past decade. All youth theatres have charitable aims and therefore autonomous youth theatres should register as a charity. This requires a detailed registration process, the submission of annual reports and, as of 2019, compliance with the Governance Code.

- Small autonomous youth theatres don't qualify for the simple registration process for charities with an income under €20,000 because they work with children and young people. This means that a voluntary youth theatre with an annual income of €3,000 goes through the same registration process as a charity with an income of €1,000,000.
- Youth theatres need to submit: their constitution; risk assessment procedures, safety checks and safeguards including Garda Vetting; financial accounts; a conflict of interest policy; a strategic plan; and a business plan. Youth theatres have also been asked for a 'Beneficiary Selection and Fees Policy'.
- Recently, a small autonomous youth theatre's business plan was returned for further consideration because the Authority did not believe the plan was viable. Staff at the Authority did not believe that membership fees, local fundraising and hoping for project grants was a viable approach to setting up a charity. This highlights a significant gap between the regulatory context and the practical reality for very small youth theatres.
- Many of the larger youth theatres and their parent organisations worked to comply with The Governance Code which was introduced by the community and voluntary sector in 2012. The Charities Regulatory Authority has recently introduced a new Governance Code which all registered charities, including small autonomous youth theatres, will need to comply with during 2019.
- Large youth theatres and their parent organisations have also needed to respond to reform in company law by updating constitutions and their registration with the Companies Registration Office (CRO). This was a complicated process which, because of the interplay of different regulators, required constitution approval from Revenue and the Charities Regulatory Authority as well as the CRO.

### Policy and Programme Developments in the Arts and Youth Work Sectors

Key departments and national agencies who impact on the youth theatre sector have introduced new strategic plans, programmes and quality standards systems as well as reviewing existing funding schemes in the past decade. Youth theatres have been operating in a constantly shifting landscape which is intensified by its position within the arts, youth work and community/voluntary sectors.

The Arts Council have introduced a new strategic plan, 'Making Great Art Work', to direct its work and a series of three-year plans describing investment strategies, programmes and projects which will be prioritised. The Arts Council has reviewed and changed funding schemes within Young People, Children and Education as well as Venues/Arts Centres. The Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht introduced Creative Ireland in 2017 which has led to some new funding opportunities at local and national level and also some new local decision-making structures.

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs (established 2011) has had a busy decade in policy development (including the first national youth strategy for Ireland), the introduction of quality standards frameworks for youth work organisations and volunteer-led youth groups as well as the completion of funding reviews which have resulted in a continuing adjustment of DCYA funding schemes.

### Absence of Youth Arts Policy

Different strategies and programmes have contained individual actions related to youth theatre, but one notable absence has been a cohesive, national youth arts policy or strategy. It was felt by some youth theatre leaders that Ireland needed a strategy that worked to unlock demand from young people, ensure equal access for all and provide for the professional development of youth arts practitioners to ensure quality provision. Youth theatre leaders wanted to properly resource existing youth arts provision in communities across the country and to provide investment to support the systematic development of youth arts where they are currently unavailable.

*"I think national agents for youth arts need to be more pro-active on a national level at lobbying for a national youth arts policy"*  
**Waterford Youth Arts Leader**

### Reporting Requirements for Funders

The reporting requirements associated with statutory funding are becoming increasingly demanding for youth theatres. Funders need to guarantee that they are giving funds to organisations with strong governance, robust child protection standards, financial accountability and organisations who provide value for money. Youth theatres and their parent organisations often source funding through many different sources and face a range of reporting procedures for different bodies. The interplay of the many separate, but related, regulatory and reporting requirements causes an additional administrative burden to youth theatres. For example:

#### Local Youth Club Grant Scheme (ETB)

- All youth theatres must submit their National Quality Standards for Volunteer-Led Youth Groups with their application form and include a tax reference number, charity registration number (where applicable) and a tax clearance certificate.
- As a national youth work organisation, Youth Theatre Ireland must provide assurances to each individual ETB to guarantee that affiliated youth theatres have in place satisfactory programmes, practices and people to ensure and promote the safety, support and wellbeing of young people.

## 2.4.2 Youth Theatre Policy and Regulatory Compliance

### Key Findings

- The management of youth theatres has changed utterly since the first Centre Stage research report and youth theatres are struggling to keep pace with the level of policy development and regulatory compliance demanded equally of the small, autonomous youth theatres and large, youth theatres run by parent organisations.
- Youth theatre leaders cite the additional burden of legislative/regulatory compliance and the reporting requirements of funders as the biggest change in youth theatre management and practice over the past 10 years.

Table 2.7 lists a policy, legislative and regulatory compliance check-list for an autonomous youth theatre (unincorporated association) in 2019.

Table 2.7: Compliance Check-List for an Autonomous Youth Theatre (Unincorporated Association)
<p>An autonomous youth theatre must have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A Child Safeguarding Statement and Risk Assessment;</li> <li>• A Child Protection Policy (including: a Code of Behaviour for leaders; recruitment/supervision /training procedures for staff and volunteers; procedures for reporting child protection concerns; an anti-bullying policy; procedures for dealing with challenging behaviour; policy on communications with young people and the use of images; policy on engaging with parents/guardians, etc.);</li> <li>• A Garda Vetting Policy and Procedures;</li> <li>• An autonomous youth theatre must register with a Garda Vetting Consortium and arrange for the Garda Vetting of all adults working directly with young people prior to offering them a role in the youth theatre. This includes facilitators delivering a one-off workshop. The only exception is occasional volunteers who are not working in sensitive roles with young people.</li> </ul>
<p>An autonomous youth theatre must also have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A Health and Safety Policy;</li> <li>• A Data Protection and Confidentiality Policy;</li> <li>• A Complaints Policy and Procedures;</li> <li>• A Disciplinary/Appeals Policy and Procedures.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An autonomous youth theatre must have appropriate insurance to cover its activities, young people, staff/volunteers and board members.</li> </ul>
<p>An autonomous youth theatre structured as an unincorporated association and registered as a charity must have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A Constitution and Board/Committee.</li> </ul>
<p>Many autonomous youth theatres have the following documents in place, but all registered charities will need these documents in place (amongst others) to comply with the Governance Code:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A conflicts of interests and conflicts of loyalties policy;</li> <li>• A code of conduct for board members;</li> <li>• Role descriptions for staff/volunteers and board members;</li> <li>• Risk register;</li> <li>• Financial management policy.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All autonomous youth theatres that wish to apply for public funding need to register with Revenue, acquire a Tax Reference Number and acquire tax clearance certificates as requested.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All autonomous youth theatres have charitable objectives and should register as a charity, requiring the following: organisational, governance and financial information; child protection documents; governance documents; a strategic plan; a business development plan and typically a Beneficiary Selection and Fees Policy.</li> <li>• All youth theatres registered as charities are in the process of complying with the new Governance Code and will have to comply in 2019.</li> <li>• All youth theatres registered as charities submit annual reports covering activities, organisational, governance and financial information.</li> </ul>
<p>Autonomous youth theatres will also need to satisfy the requirements of funders, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participate in the National Quality Standards for Volunteer-Led Youth Groups as part of their application for the Local Youth Club Grant Scheme;</li> <li>• Satisfy the Arts Council's conditions of financial assistance, the governance transparency scale and the Child Protection and Welfare – Quality Assurance Self-Audit if they receive a grant such as the Young Ensemble's Scheme.</li> </ul>

### Centre Stage Context

Compliance with legal, regulatory and reporting requirements was not a feature of youth theatre management in Centre Stage (1998). Around the time of Centre Stage +10, the sector was more concerned with policy development (welfare and child protection policies, artistic policies, inclusion and recruitment policies, youth participation policies, etc.) and governance. 'Compliance' was not yet a buzz-word for the sector, although leaders were already beginning to speak about the growing administrative burden.

### Impact of Legal, Regulatory and Reporting Requirements

The changes described in section 2.4.1 have had a significant impact on how youth theatres operate in 2019. They have changed how youth theatres:

- Safeguard young people;
- Recruit staff, freelancers and volunteers;
- Communicate with young people, stakeholders and the community at large;
- Plan their artistic programme and deliver activities;
- Manage their finances and fundraising;
- Report on their activities and expenditure;
- Govern their youth theatre or parent organisation;
- Self-assess their own practice, management and governance;
- Manage information.

The cumulative effect on youth theatre leaders of all these changes has been significant. It is a challenge for youth theatres with extremely limited resources to maintain their primary focus on working with young people through theatre when administrative demands are so time consuming.

*"The largest change has been to do with governance and compliance to law and national guidelines. Without Youth Theatre Ireland's help we would not be able to comply."* Kildare Youth Theatre Leader

*"Administration and reporting has become much more onerous. For example, Garda Vetting and ensuring that the Youth Theatre is GDPR compliant has resulted in a lot of administration. Applications for funding and reporting related to successful applications and projects has also become far more detailed."* Activate Youth Theatre Leader

Youth theatre leaders have found that there is no funding to match the increasing administrative workload, a position echoed by the broader charity sector.

*"The level of governance and regulatory compliance has become overwhelming and there is no equivalent rise in funding for administration to meet the ever increasing paperwork demands."* County Limerick Youth Theatre Leader

*"Charities have experienced a very significant increase in the range and intensity of legal, regulatory and funding-related compliance requirements in recent years but no additional funding has been made available for the accompanied administrative and finance work."* The Wheel,<sup>6</sup> Ireland's national association of community and voluntary organisations, charities and social enterprises

*"It's painful and demoralising to see volunteers crying in meetings because they're exhausted, to receive emails at 5am and after midnight from parents trying to juggle full time jobs and families with the paperwork that good governance demands. Who makes these rules that demand a professional level of administration but don't provide any administrative funding?"*

*And when we apply for extra funding, the reporting requirements are so onerous that the burden is increased not decreased.”*

*Youth Theatre Leader*

#### Conclusions:

The pace and level of legislative, regulatory and policy change over the past decade has increased the administrative work within youth theatres to a considerable extent. The combination of these changes within different sectors has impacted on youth theatre, which is uniquely situated between the arts, youth work, community and voluntary sectors. Funders have not supported youth theatres financially to meet these new demands. The result is that many youth theatres struggle to comply and need significant levels of support to help them meet these new requirements. This in turn has impacted on the type and level of development supports Youth Theatre Ireland needs to offer, on the training of staff and the level of one-to-one support offered to youth theatres. It pulls huge amounts of resources away from the core work of supporting youth theatres to develop challenging and meaningful theatre work with young people. Streamlining the duplicated reporting demands that different agencies and bodies make of youth theatres would help decrease the workload without decreasing accountability and transparency.

The level of compliance work has contributed to a slower pace of development with new youth theatres and a lower affiliation rate, as a higher number of aspiring youth theatres never manage to formally establish themselves and affiliate. Compliance with legislation, regulations and reporting requirements has also contributed significantly to the workload of over-stretched youth theatre leaders and their enjoyment of their roles.

## 2.5 Local, National and International Relationships

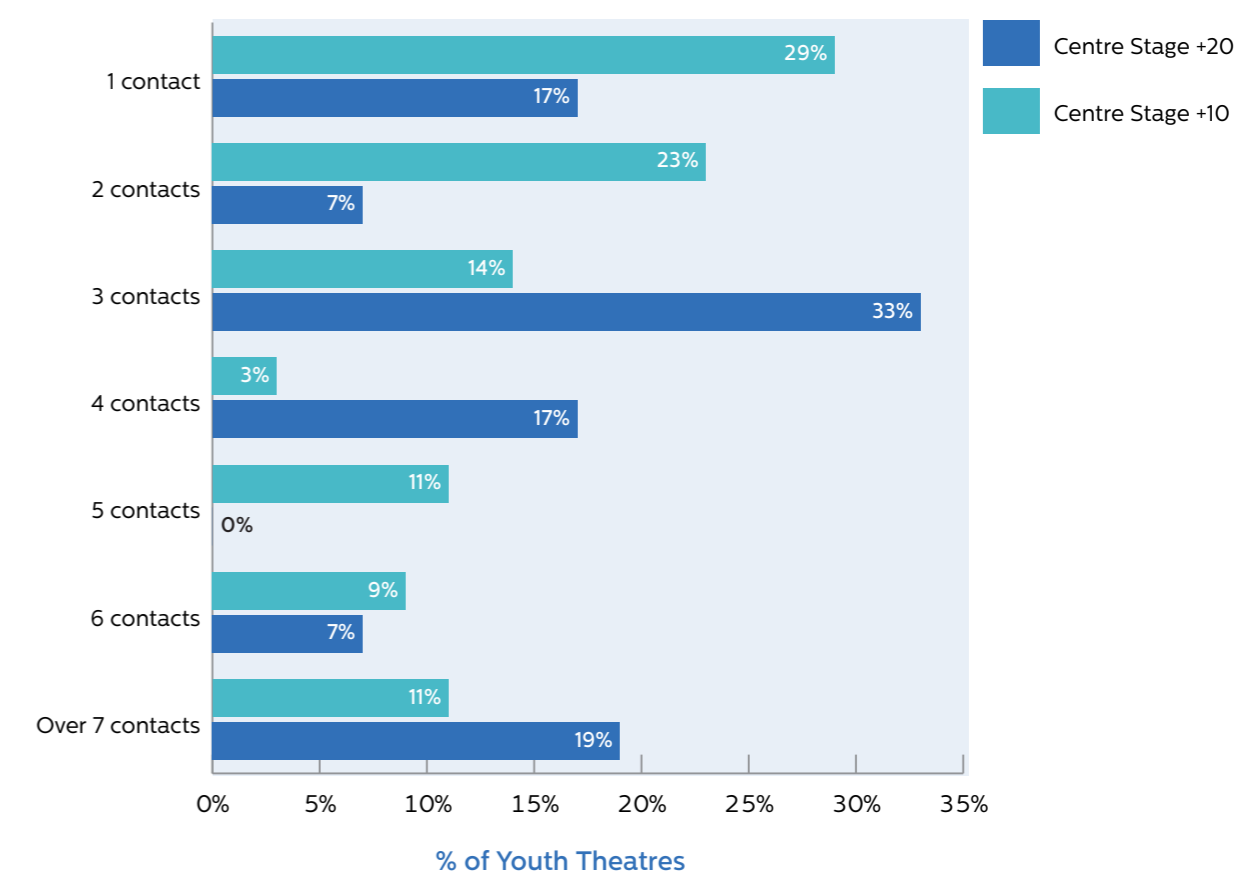
### 2.5.1 Local Relationships and Supports

#### Key Findings

- Youth theatres are more connected with local organisations, agencies and individuals than ever before. Half of all youth theatres are now in contact with three or four different local organisations, agencies and types of individuals each week, an increase of 33%.
- Many youth theatres are more empowered to identify and avail of opportunities at a local level that can enhance their development and sustainability.
- Youth theatres are engaging with an estimated local audience of 33,112 at their youth theatre productions, participation in local events and festivals.

Figure 2.9 compares the number of contacts youth theatres logged with local organisations, agencies and groups of people during the Census Week of November 2007 (Centre Stage +10) and 2017 (Centre Stage +20).

**Figure 2.9: Number of Contacts Made by Youth Theatres with Other Organisations/People During Census Week**



Figures are based on 42 respondents to the Centre Stage +20 Census Questionnaire and 35 respondents to the Centre Stage +10 Census Questionnaire. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

### Centre Stage Context

A decade ago, over half of participating youth theatres (51%) were in touch with only one or two types of organisations during Census Week 2007. Youth theatres were in contact with the Local Authority Arts Offices more than other local organisation/individual. This was chiefly because the Arts Offices were parent organisations to a third of participating Centre Stage +10 youth theatres but contacts also included meetings between autonomous youth theatres and Arts Officers.

### Engagement at a Local Level

- Half of all youth theatres are now in contact with three or four different local organisations, agencies and types of individuals each week, an increase of 33% over the past decade.

The 42 respondents to the Centre Stage +20 Census Questionnaire show that the number of youth theatres with low levels of contact (one or two different organisations) has dropped from half of participating groups to just under a quarter (24%). The youth theatres that recorded low levels of contact with outside organisations were primarily run by parent organisations of different kinds (70% of those registering one or two contacts) and they were usually in touch with their parent organisation or a venue. Though the parent organisations of these groups may be well-networked locally, their youth theatres were working on a reasonably solitary basis.

Nearly a fifth of the youth theatres that took part in the Centre Stage +20 Census Week were in touch with seven or more organisations, agencies and types of individuals that week with four youth theatres registering between 10 and 15 contacts (Waterford Youth Arts, Galway Community Circus, Kildare Youth Theatre and LYTC Carrigallen). As expected, large youth arts organisations and large autonomous youth theatres with employees were networking at a high level with a wide range of organisations and people in their communities. However, small autonomous youth theatres that are deeply rooted in their communities were also highly connected on a local level.

#### Case Study: Mountrath Youth Theatre (Laois)

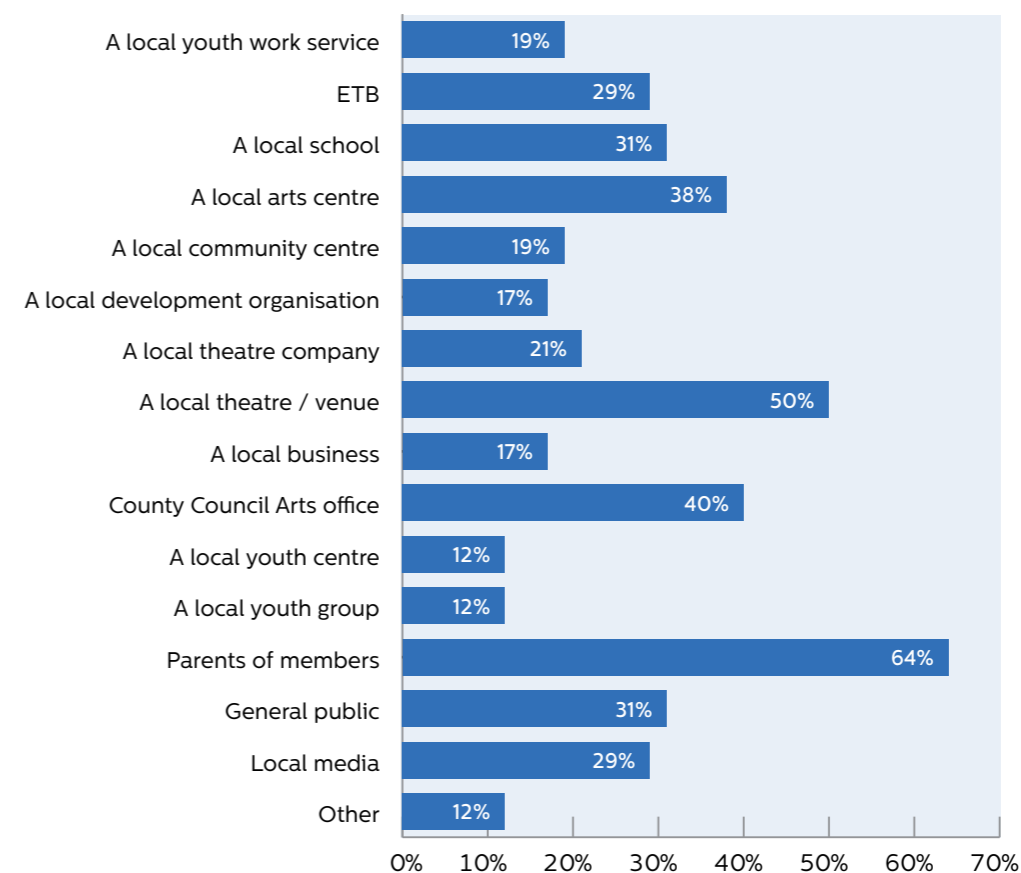
During Census Week 2017 Mountrath Youth Theatre (a small youth theatre run by a community development association) was in contact with:

- Laois Offaly ETB;
- A local school;
- A local development organisation;
- A local theatre /venue;
- A local business;
- The Local Authority Arts Office;
- Parents of members;
- General public;
- Local media.

In relation to: rental of space/venue; advice and support; fundraising; an existing funding relationship; marketing and publicity; recruitment of new members. Mountrath Youth Theatre is run by volunteers with a paid youth theatre facilitator.

Figure 2.10 depicts the type and level of contacts made between youth theatres and local organisations, agencies and groups of people during Census Week 2017.

**Figure 2.10: Local Contacts made by Youth Theatres with Other Organisations / People during Census Week**



Figures are based on 42 respondents to the Centre Stage +20 Census Week Questionnaire. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

### Type of Local Contacts made during Census Week

Youth theatres are linking in with the local arts, youth work and community structures in their county to help sustain their youth theatre's activities and research shows that parents of members are the group they are most regularly in contact with. Of the 32 youth theatres that completed the Centre Stage +20 Youth Theatre Questionnaire, 78% felt that Local Authority Arts Offices were a key support for their youth theatre's development, with 50% mentioning their local ETB and local theatre/venue. Parents and members of the local community were also a key support for 72% of the youth theatres.

The most frequent contacts with local organisations, agencies and people were in relation to operational issues. Youth theatres from a range of different models and of all sizes were making these connections. Forty-one youth theatres that participated in Census Week 2017 were contacting parents of members, local authority arts offices, arts centres and theatre venues, community centres, local schools or youth services/groups, etc. in relation to:

- Rental of space/venue (66%);
- Liaising with parent organisation (34%);
- Partners in a project (32%);
- Governance (22%).

During Census Week 2017, youth theatres were welcoming people from the local community to come and participate as:

- Audience members at youth theatre events/productions (22%);
- Volunteers with the youth theatre (15%).

Youth theatres were in contact with the Local Authority Arts Office, the ETB, local businesses, the general public, etc. in relation to:

- An existing funding relationship (22%);
- Fundraising (17%).

Youth theatres were also busy promoting themselves to local media, the general public and other types of youth and arts organisations in relation to:

- Marketing/publicising the youth theatre and its activities (34%);
- Recruitment of new youth theatre members (15%).

And finally, within the 7 days of the 2017 Census Week, 29% of the 41 youth theatres were making local contacts to ask for advice and support.

### Local Audience Figures

One positive way that youth theatres engage with the local community is through attendance at youth theatre productions.

- The 32 respondents to the Centre Stage +20 Youth Theatre Questionnaire reported an average local audience figure of 19,265.
- If this ratio is extended to all Centre Stage +20 participants, youth theatre would have an annual estimated local audience of 33,112.

Youth theatres reported a range of audience figures which reflected the variety of size and programming within the sector:

- 28% of youth theatres (nine) reported audience figures under 200 per year;
- 31% of youth theatres (ten) reported audience figures of between 201 and 500 per year;
- 16% of youth theatres (five) reported audience figures of between 501 and 1,000 per year;
- 16% of youth theatres (five) reported audience figures of between 1,001 and 2,000 per year;
- Three youth theatres reported annual audience figures just above 2,000 with a maximum of 2,020.

Large, local audience figures were achieved by youth theatres that were involved in multiple productions, that showcased work at festivals or conferences and that were involved in street arts and spectacle.

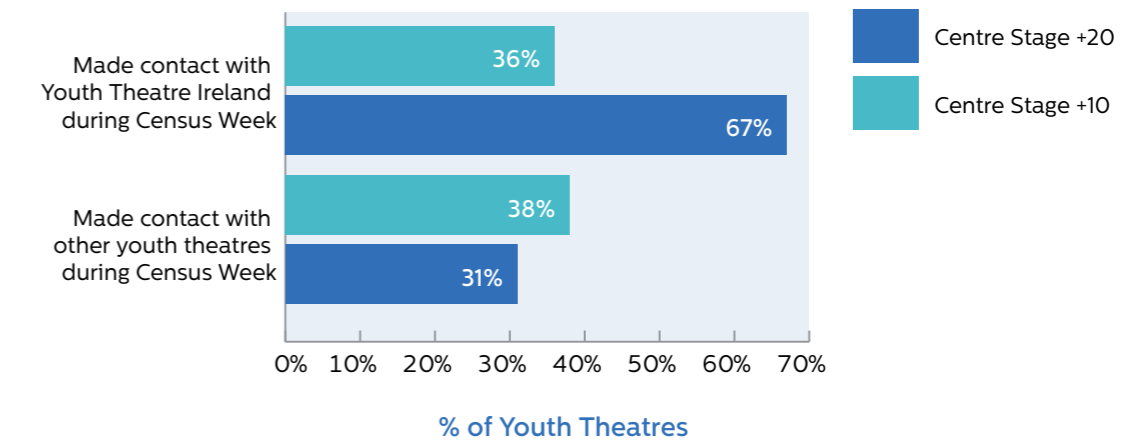
## 2.5.2 National Relationships and Supports

### Key Findings

- The larger and better-resourced youth theatres are networking at a national level to access funding and training, to promote their work, to comply with national regulations, to source advice and to develop partnerships/opportunities with theatre companies/festivals.
- Smaller youth theatres who manage to make connections at a national level, are more likely to be looking for advice, accessing training, complying with national regulations and potentially applying for project funding.
- Youth theatres have a higher level of contact with Youth Theatre Ireland than they did 10 years ago. Census Week 2017 registered an increase of 31%.

Figure 2.11 illustrates the changes in the numbers of contacts made between youth theatres and Youth Theatre Ireland during the Census Weeks of 2007 (Centre Stage +10) and 2017 (Centre Stage +20).

**Figure 2.11: Contact Levels Between Youth Theatres and Youth Theatre Ireland during Census Week**



Figures are based on 43 respondents to the Centre Stage +20 Census Questionnaire and 36 respondents to the Centre Stage +10 Census Questionnaire. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

### Centre Stage Context

By Centre Stage +10, youth theatres had built up a varied range of national relationships including funding relationships with national arts and youth work organisations and relationships with theatre venues, companies or festivals working on a national level. The majority of youth theatres also described a national network of relationships centred around Youth Theatre Ireland and other youth theatres.

### Engagement at a National Level

#### Contact with Youth Theatre Ireland

Youth theatres are in more regular contact with Youth Theatre Ireland than ever before. During Census Week 2017, 67% of the 43 participating youth theatres were in contact with Youth Theatre Ireland, a significant growth from the 36% reported during Census Week 2007. Youth theatres were in contact looking for support and advice and also in regard to their participation in projects such as the Playshare event and the Youth Theatre Practice Symposium which happen at that time of year. This level of contact demonstrates the extent to which Youth Theatre Ireland is part of the daily lives of many of the affiliated youth theatres and the demand for assistance from groups. Of the 32 youth theatres that completed the Centre Stage +20 Youth Theatre Questionnaire, 88% felt Youth Theatre Ireland was a key support for their youth theatre's development.

#### Contact with Other Youth Theatres

During Census Week 2017, 31% of youth theatres were in contact with another youth theatre, a drop of just over 7% from Census Week 2007. We know that just over half of the 603 youth theatre members (55%) that completed Member Questionnaires had met someone from another youth theatre but encounters arising from activities initiated by the youth theatre members themselves did not score as highly as other opportunities. Levels of regular contact between youth theatres in some areas of the country may be dropping.

A few counties buck the trend in terms of regular contact between local youth theatres:

- Louth youth theatres work in partnership with Louth Arts Office to run an annual youth theatre residential project;
- Cork youth theatres organise an annual ‘Midsummer Meet-up’ in conjunction with the Cork Midsummer Festival;
- Kildare youth theatres organise a youth theatre festival at the Riverbank Arts Centre, Newbridge as part of the NT Connections programme.

### Contact with Other National Organisations

Fifteen Centre Stage +20 youth theatres gave further information on their level of contact with other national organisations during Census Week. The following list catalogues the types of contact made that week but is also a good indicator of how youth theatres network on a national level and to what purpose:

- *Funders:* Youth theatres were in touch with funders such as The Arts Council and Léargas in relation to funding applications, reporting requirements and assessment of compliance with child protection legislation;
- *Publicity:* Youth theatres were showcasing their work at national events (a conference, a Léargas forum, an Irish Street Art, Circus and Spectacle event);
- *Compliance:* Youth theatres were in touch with the Charity Regulatory Authority about charity registration and reporting;
- *Training:* Youth theatres were participating in training with the Arts Council, Young Irish Filmmakers and Jigsaw;
- *Artistic Projects:* Youth theatres were in contact with The Abbey Theatre in relation to their participation in the AB Project with the David Glass Ensemble. Some youth theatres had guest facilitators from other counties working with their young people.

Of the 32 youth theatres that completed the Centre Stage +20 Youth Theatre Questionnaire, 38% felt the Arts Council was a key support for their youth theatre’s development and a further five youth theatres mentioned other national youth work organisations such as BeLonGTo, Foróige or Youth Work Ireland. Larger, better-resourced youth theatres are initiating this contact themselves and are empowered to build their own connections. Medium-sized youth theatres are most likely to be in touch with other national organisations to apply for funding or access training. Many of the smaller or newer youth theatres are not accessing national level opportunities. This is also true of some youth theatres run by parent organisations – where the parent may be well-networked on a national level but are not typically building those funding, artistic partnership, training or promotional connections on behalf of the youth theatre. Youth theatres mention a lack of time and confidence as a barrier to building relationships on a national level.

### 2.5.3 International Relationships and Supports

#### Key Findings

- Youth theatres are building international relationships to develop their artistic practice, create new artistic projects and access training opportunities for leaders and Young Leaders.
- A third of participating Centre Stage +20 youth theatres (18) had engaged in projects with an international dimension over the past few years.
- A small number of the larger youth theatres are working at a more strategic level, building networks and making international practice integral to their work.

#### Centre Stage Context

A decade ago, a small number of youth theatres had built international relationships with other organisations. Some were active relationships, but the majority described past projects and exchanges. Two youth theatres reported international work as being core to their activities and practice.

### Engagement at an International Level

Youth theatres have expanded their international work in the past decade, supported by the accessibility of Erasmus + funding and training (previously Youth in Action), by Youth Theatre Ireland events and training opportunities but, most importantly, by youth theatres’ own entrepreneurship and belief in the benefits of international exchange.

- A third of Centre Stage +20 youth theatres are currently engaged in international work or have done in the past three years.
- Five of the youth theatres participating in Centre Stage +20 reported being in contact with international partners during Census Week 2017. These included: correspondence with international partners about upcoming Erasmus + funded projects and other international projects; participation in European youth theatre exchanges; and correspondence with partners in a European network.

International projects require time, administrative ability, adequate cashflow to manage the funding instalments and funding gaps, communication skills and international contacts with appropriate partners. Not all youth theatres have the capacity to initiate and manage their own international project.

However, for a few youth theatres such as Kildare Youth Theatre, County Limerick Youth Theatre or Galway Community Circus, international work has become central to their practice development, their service provision for young people, their training strategies for staff/volunteers and their achievement of positive outcomes for young people. International work can also become central to a youth theatre’s funding strategy. These youth theatres mentioned Léargas, international youth theatres, networks and organisations as being a key support for their youth theatre’s development.

#### Types of Recent International Relationships and Projects

Centre Stage +20 research shows that youth theatres are engaging in:

- Youth exchanges;
- International projects;
- North/South projects;
- International festivals;
- NT Connections (National Theatre, England).

These different types of international projects are explored more fully in Section 4.3.5. Youth theatres tend to be connected to other European youth theatres and organisations, with the United Kingdom, Finland, Austria, France, Norway, Greece, Spain and the Czech Republic mentioned by respondents. International relationships and projects, typically develop the artistic practice of a youth theatre 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.

*International Network:* Galway Community Circus is a member of the CARAVAN Network (an international youth and social circus network of 30 circus schools from across Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Asia) through which it can take part in exchanges, festivals, training programmes, volunteer exchanges and capacity building amongst other activities.

*Volunteering and Training:* A few youth theatres have sent and received European volunteers through the EVS and the European Solidarity Corps programmes (EU volunteering programmes) to build skills, experience and knowledge. Kildare Youth Theatre hosts European volunteers each year and County Limerick Youth Theatre has sent older members to Spain, France and Austria on EVS placements. Youth theatre leaders also take part in international training events through Erasmus + funded projects, Youth Theatre Arts Scotland, NT Connections and other opportunities.



### Case Study – Kildare Youth Theatre

During Census Week 2017, Kildare Youth Theatre (a large youth theatre run by a theatre company) reported the following international connections:

- Engagement with six European volunteers who were completing placements (Erasmus+ internships and European Voluntary Scheme volunteers) at Kildare Youth Theatre. During Census Week they were running rehearsals and workshops with young people, completing administration and developing their skills.
- Performance by European volunteers at the Léargas Forum on the theme of citizenship and participation by a youth theatre leader in a panel discussion on the Erasmus + funded work of Kildare Youth Theatre.
- Kildare Youth Theatre participated in the TeeNEXTers Youth Exchange in Lille, France with host theatre company Le Grand Bleu and youth theatre participants from Belgium, France, Norway and Scotland.
- A separate group of members and leaders prepared for a youth exchange in Spain which was due to begin immediately after Census Week.

### Conclusions:

A large number of youth theatres are acting as effective advocates for themselves on both a local and national level. They are empowered to voice their own concerns, to represent themselves, and to identify opportunities and funding which can support their development. However, small youth theatres with limited resources, new youth theatres with limited experience, and large youth theatres at critical moments in their development continue to need advocacy support so they can make the necessary connections to improve their situations. Effective and targeted information provision as well as developmental support could help overcome the lack of time and confidence which can prevent leaders from building their own networks.

Many youth theatres are networking well within the youth theatre sector and there is a high level of demand for the services of Youth Theatre Ireland amongst the majority of youth theatres. If relationships between youth theatres are beneficial to youth theatre development and practice, further supports may be needed to encourage youth theatres to pro-actively create their own opportunities to work with each other.

International relationships are enhancing the practice and organisational development of youth theatres with the capacity to manage international projects. Another cohort of youth theatres need support to help them meet appropriate partners, apply for funding and manage international work. A final group of youth theatres may never have the capacity to initiate and manage international projects, and their members would need to participate in international projects co-ordinated by a third-party in order to ensure equity of opportunity.

## 2.6 Sustainability

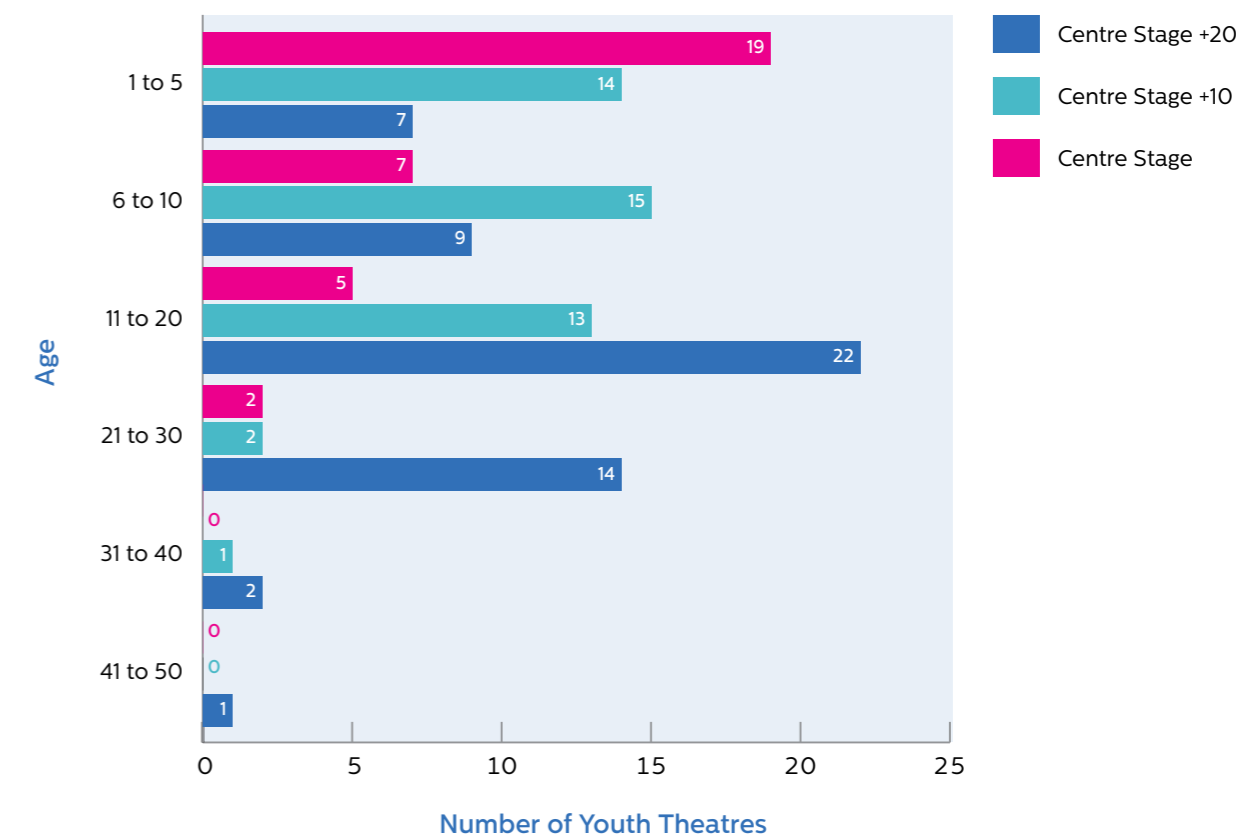
### 2.6.1 Age of Participating Youth Theatres and the Youth Theatre Sector

#### Key Findings

- Youth theatres are getting older and the average age of a Centre Stage +20 youth theatre is 15.7 years old, an increase of six years since Centre Stage +10. The largest cohort of youth theatres are aged between 11 and 30 (65%) and the oldest youth theatre is Dublin Youth Theatre (42 years old).
- The creation rate of new youth theatres has slowed down due to a number of contributing factors. The new youth theatres who were formed within the past decade only form 29% of the sector.
- Youth theatres are more likely to sustain activities past their first decade of operations, with 69% of Centre Stage +10 youth theatres still operating a decade later.

Figure 2.12 compares the age profiles of youth theatres from Centre Stage, Centre Stage +10 and Centre Stage +20.

Figure 2.12: Age Profile of Youth Theatres



Figures are based on 55 Centre Stage +20 youth theatres, 45 Centre Stage +10 youth theatres and 33 Centre Stage youth theatres.

#### Centre Stage Context

Youth has always been a feature of the youth theatre sector, not just in terms of the membership, but also the age profile of youth theatres. The average age of youth theatres in Centre Stage (1998) was 6.5 years old and half of all youth theatres were running for five years or less (58%). In Centre Stage +20 (2009), the largest cohort of youth theatres were still aged 10 or younger (64%) and had an average youth theatre age of 9.6. The very first youth theatres that were established in the late seventies and had managed to continue operations, reached their thirties by Centre Stage +10.

Centre Stage and Centre Stage +10 show a high creation rate of new youth theatres which were renewing the sector as other groups discontinued activities. In 1998, youth theatres did not have to satisfy affiliation criteria to become a Youth Theatre Ireland affiliated youth theatre. They worked according to best practice in the sector but within a very undemanding policy and compliance environment. With some expertise, resources and a good sense of youth theatre practice, it was easier to set up a youth theatre in the 1980s and 1990s. By 2009, Centre Stage +10 youth theatres were beginning to sustain operations for longer periods of time and there was an even distribution of youth theatres in the first three decades of their existence.

#### Age Profile of Centre Stage +20 Youth Theatres

Youth theatres are getting older. Centre Stage +20 shows that:

- The average age of youth theatres has increased to 15.7;

- The largest cohort of youth theatres are aged between 11 and 30 (65%);
- The new groups that were formed within the past 10 years form 29% of the sector, and only 13% of those were formed within the past 5 years.

Youth theatres are managing to sustain their activities for longer. Figure 2.12 illustrates the growing age of some of the very first youth theatres as groups like Dublin Youth Theatre, Waterford Youth Arts and Cabinteely Youth Theatre are achieving 30<sup>th</sup> and 40<sup>th</sup> anniversaries. Key factors in achieving sustainability and growth are discussed in Section 2.6.2.

A decade after Centre Stage (1998), just over half of those original participating youth theatres were still operating (55%) and two decades later, 36% are still operating. A decade after Centre Stage +10, 69% of its participating youth theatres are still operating. If the closure rate of youth theatres included in the Centre Stage research projects is explored, it appears that youth theatres are becoming more sustainable. Many leaders, however, would contradict this conclusion as they struggle to maintain the levels of resources, funding and people necessary to keep their doors open.

One factor which may be impacting on the closure rate of youth theatres is the reform of the development process for new youth theatres to address affiliation criteria, satisfy legislation and meet compliance standards. Due to the level of work involved, fewer youth theatres complete the formal set-up and affiliation process, and those that do, have the commitment and resources that make them more likely to succeed.

#### Creation of New Youth Theatres

The pace of youth theatre set-up has slowed down due to the complex policy, legislative and regulatory environment the youth theatre sector now operates within (see Section 2.4.2). There may also be other factors at play such as: the capacity of parent organisations to take on new projects; the availability of funding; the capacity of local agencies to extend funding to additional youth theatre activities; or facilitator shortages in some parts of the country. An average of 2.2 youth theatres have affiliated to Youth Theatre Ireland each year over the past five years, with three youth theatres having already affiliated in 2019. These affiliated youth theatres emerge from an average of 30 annual enquiries about affiliation or setting up new youth theatres. Over the past decade, the level of enquiries by people/organisations interested in setting up a youth theatre has increased, but the ratio of enquiries to newly affiliated youth theatres has dropped to one youth theatre per 13.6 enquiries. New youth theatres are typically taking an average of 1.5 years to move from an initial enquiry to being an affiliated youth theatre. However, development work with some emerging youth theatres can last for years.

This has resulted in youth theatres aged five or under dropping from 58% of the sector in 1998 to 13% of the sector in 2019.

#### Evolution

The youth theatre sector is constantly evolving. Some youth theatres thrive while an appropriate level of resources, funding, and people maintain activity levels but then evolve into other models or close when one of these key supports is taken away. For some youth theatres, closure isn't necessarily a failure but rather the end of a natural life cycle during which hundreds of young people have had the opportunity to experience youth theatre.

New youth theatres can bloom in areas where others have faded. New youth theatres (developing and affiliated youth theatres) have grown to replace six of the 14 Centre Stage +10 youth theatres that closed in the past decade. For example, the Co-ordinator of the Cavan Youth Drama network (which closed during the Centre Stage +10 research period) went on to set up the autonomous Gonzo Youth Theatre which is based in Cavan Town. Having said that, the closure of some Centre Stage +10 youth theatres, has not been mitigated by the emergence of new groups and young people in those areas do not currently have access to youth theatre (e.g., Clondalkin Youth Theatre, Portumna Youth Theatre).

Table 2.8 lists the Centre Stage +20 youth theatres by age, details the year of their foundation and gives other information where relevant.

Key to reading Table 2.8:

Youth Theatres highlighted in grey were included in Centre Stage in 1998

Youth Theatres highlighted in blue were included in Centre Stage +10 in 2009

Table 2.8: Age Comparison of Centre Stage +20 Youth Theatres			
Age of Youth Theatre	Youth Theatre	Year of Foundation	Notes
42	Dublin Youth Theatre	1977	
37	Cabinteely Youth Theatre	1982	
34	Waterford Youth Arts	1985	Previously Waterford Youth Drama
28	Kilkenny Youth Theatre	1991	Activity Break from 2003 to 2006
28	Droichead Youth Theatre	1991	
26	Laois Youth Theatre	1993	Previously known as Portlaoise YT in Centre Stage +10
25	Activate Youth Theatre	1994	
	Tallaght Youth Theatre	1994	Closed in 2019
	Buí Bolg Youth Group	1994	
23	Backstage Youth Theatre	1996	
	Courthouse Youth Theatre	1996	Previously known as Tramps and Poets Youth Theatre. Has experienced breaks in activities.
22	Kildare Youth Theatre	1997	
	Limerick Youth Theatre	1997	
21	CIT CSM Youth Theatre	1998	Previously known as the Cork School of Music Youth Theatre
	Rusty Frog Youth Theatre	1998	Previously known as West Cork Arts Centre Youth Theatre
	Sligo Youth Theatre	1998	
	Stagecraft Youth Theatre	1998	
20	Griese Youth Theatre	1999	
	Mayo Youth Theatre	1999	Previously known as Mayo Youth Theatre - Ballina
	Fracture Youth Theatre	1999	Previously known as North Tipperary Youth Theatre
18	County Carlow Youth Theatre	2001	
	Roscommon Co. Youth Theatre	2001	
	Roundabout Youth Theatre	2001	

17	Celbridge Youth Drama	2002	
	Galway Community Circus	2002	
16	County Wexford Youth Theatre	2003	
	Lightbulb Youth Theatre	2003	
15	An Grianán Youth Theatre	2004	Previously known as Letterkenny Youth Theatre
	LYTC - Carrigallen	2004	
14	Clare Youth Theatre	2005	
13	County Limerick Youth Theatre	2006	
	LYTC- Carrick on Shannon	2006	
	Dundalk Youth Theatre	2006	
12	LYTC - Manorhamilton Youth Theatre	2007	
	Nenagh YT	2007	Previously known as Play Youth Theatre
	Monaghan Youth Theatre	2007	
11	Blessington Youth Theatre	2008	
	Footsteps Youth Theatre	2008	Closed in 2019
	Free Radicals Youth Theatre	2008	Previously known as Free Range Youth Theatre
9	Glengarriff Youth Theatre Group	2010	
	Gonzo Youth Theatre	2010	
8	Complex Youth Theatre	2011	
	M.A.D. Youth Theatre	2011	
	Ardclough Youth Theatre		Developing Youth Theatre. Not Yet Affiliated.
7	WACT Youth Theatre	2012	
	Dúisigh Youth Theatre	2012	Activity Break from 2017 to 2018
	East Galway Youth Theatre	2012	Closed in 2019
6	Donegal Youth Theatre	2013	
4	Mostrim Youth Players	2015	
3	Explore Youth Theatre	2016	
	Playacting Youth Theatre	2016	
	Mr. Sands Youth Theatre	2016	
2	Mountrath Youth Theatre	2017	Different to the Mountrath Youth Theatre in Centre Stage +10
	Belturbet Youth Theatre	2017	Developing Youth Theatre. Not Yet Affiliated.
	Act Out Youth Theatre	2017	

## 2.6.2 Sustainability

### Key Findings

- Youth theatre leaders describe a complex set of conditions which can lead to stability and growth in youth theatre.
- Just before the Centre Stage +20 research project began, nearly a fifth of affiliated youth theatres (19%) had some concerns about their future.
- At the heart of sustainability, lies: funding targeted at core youth theatre activities; adequate levels of human resources and funding; skilled facilitators and good youth theatre practice; local and national supports; acknowledgement of the capacity limitations of youth theatres; and consistency of people, resources and environment.

### Centre Stage Context

The concept of sustainability was first explored in Centre Stage +10. In identifying the key ingredients for sustainability a decade ago, youth theatres leaders focused on consistency and continuity (of funding, venues, youth theatre leaders and facilitators, policy, etc.). Leaders agreed that a quality youth theatre programme hinged on training and access to skilled youth theatre facilitators and this was a major factor in sustainability. Ten years ago, leaders also spoke about diversity and variety in terms of youth theatre leaders, artistic experiences and membership profile, contributing to their continued existence.

### Current Sustainability Levels

In 2017, at the start of the Centre Stage +20 research period, Youth Theatre Ireland asked affiliated youth theatres how confident they were about the sustainability of their youth theatre as part of the annual youth theatre survey:

- Nearly a fifth (19%) had encountered some challenges and had some concerns for the future;
- Half of affiliated youth theatres felt strong and fairly confident they could sustain the youth theatre;
- 31% felt very strong and were very confident they could sustain the youth theatre into the future.

Youth theatre leaders and the country as a whole had come through a difficult decade, many of them struggled to survive through the recession and had just begun to stabilise as the Centre Stage +20 research project began. In Youth Theatre Ireland's annual youth theatre survey of 2013, 13% of affiliated youth theatres reported that they weren't confident they would survive beyond that year. This had dropped to 3% the following year and after that, the survey began to see a slow resurgence of confidence with about a fifth of the sector each year reporting some concerns for the future.

### Themes within the Sustainability Discussion

- **Funding the regular work of a youth theatre:** Youth theatres that receive funding for their core, weekly youth theatre activities last longer. It enables them to contract good facilitators, build annual artistic programmes that meet the needs of their members and develop good youth theatre practice.
- **Consistency:** This word arises in conversations with leaders around facilitators, venues, funding, members, available supports and policy. Consistency helps a youth theatre build solid foundations.
- **Capacity:** Having a realistic sense of your own capacity is key to youth theatre sustainability. Youth theatres expand activities to respond to local demand, young people's needs, creative aspirations and the expectations of funders. Just before Centre Stage +20 began, the 2016 Youth Theatre Ireland annual youth theatre survey revealed that 41% of affiliated youth theatres increased their programme of activities that year while only 18% of those groups had received a funding increase to facilitate that expansion. It was a common trend across the past decade, as 31% of affiliated youth theatres increased their activities programme in 2014 with no reported increases in funding. Youth theatres are not unique in being asked to do more for less funding. However, it can overstretch individuals and organisations and impact negatively on the long-term development of a youth theatre. It is important for both youth theatres and funders to understand capacity limitations in order to sustain youth theatre activities into the future.

- **Attitudes and attributes:** Youth theatre leaders say that having fun with young people and other leaders, and enjoying the work is important. In the face of challenges, youth theatre leaders identify a positive outlook, resilience and a willingness to work hard as key attributes that can stabilise difficult situations.

### Key Ingredients for Sustainability

As part of the Centre Stage +20 Youth Theatre Questionnaire, youth theatre leaders described the key ingredients that helped the sustainability of their youth theatre. Their answers can be summarised as follows:

#### Resources

- **Core Funding:** Regular, core funding is the most common answer to this question. Core funding enables youth theatres to keep their weekly programme running by paying facilitators, venue rental and insurance. It gives some security to youth theatres and enables them create an annual programme which meets the needs of its members.
- **Fundraising:** Leaders mentioned that the power to fundraise (bag-packing, raffles, cake sales, etc. See Section 3.2.4) gives them an un-restricted income source which helps them direct money towards regular activities in the absence of core funding.
- **Space:** Access to a consistent, suitable and inexpensive venue is a great support.

#### People

- **Skilled youth theatre facilitators:** Access to a skilled youth theatre facilitator is essential in providing great youth theatre experiences for young people. Youth theatre leaders mention that retaining the same, skilled facilitator over long periods of time provides stability and that being able to pay them appropriately for their roles helps with retention.
- **Committed youth theatre members and good membership levels:** Youth theatres thrive when they have a good group of young people who are committed and enthusiastic. A good recruitment plan to replenish membership levels is important.
- **Volunteers:** Youth theatres survive with the assistance of volunteers who contribute their time because of a belief in youth theatre and a desire to have one in their area. Voluntary leaders and volunteerism within paid roles are explored in Sections 3.5 and 6.2.
- **Administrative and welfare support:** Youth theatre leaders say assistance with the administrative burden of running a youth theatre is a key support. Some leaders also mention welfare assistance to help them support the participation of young people and deal with welfare/child protection challenges.

#### Good Practice

- **Planning:** Youth theatre leaders say that planning ahead helps sustainability. Clarifying the purpose of the youth theatre, its activities, the resources it needs to operate, its strategy for the next few years all helped leaders gain a sense of direction and plan ahead for foreseeable challenges.
- **Artistic Programming:** Designing a good artistic programme with the youth theatre facilitator, members and other youth theatre leaders is a key part of planning. A good artistic programme maintains membership numbers, challenges young people and facilitators, raises the profile of the youth theatre and is more attractive to funders.
- **Responding to young people and the community:** Shaping the youth theatre to meet the needs of the young people in its membership and the community it is set in, helps the youth theatre stay relevant and necessary.
- **Youth participation and ownership:** Youth theatre leaders felt that creating a democratic space where young people can feel ownership over their work and their youth theatre, knits the group together and makes it stronger.
- **Delivering strong outcomes for young people:** Achieving great outcomes for young people and being known for achieving those outcomes builds the reputation of the youth theatre.
- **Delivering a quality, reliable service:** Nurturing a youth theatre's reputation as a quality, reliable youth arts organisation builds the trust of young people, parents, the community and funders.
- **Good governance:** The leadership and oversight provided by the boards of autonomous youth

theatres is essential in running a modern youth theatre. Recruitment and retention of skilled board members is important for stability.

#### Supports

- **Youth Theatre Ireland:** Youth theatre leaders mentioned that the support of a national development organisation for youth theatre offered valuable help.
- **Local support from Arts Offices, organisations & peers:** Relationships with the Local Authority Arts Office, local arts/youth work/community infrastructure and their peers in other youth theatres help embed a youth theatre in its local community. The youth theatre can benefit from local resources and advice, as well as creating a network of supportive 'friends'.
- **An understanding of youth theatre:** Youth theatre leaders say it essential that funders, policy makers and decision-makers understand what youth theatre is and what it offers young people. Promoting an understanding of youth theatre at a local and national level supports the sustainability of youth theatre.

### What has a Negative Impact on a Youth Theatre's Stability?

#### Sharp change

Sudden change causes instability in a youth theatre. The loss of key staff or volunteers, a vital funding source, or the regular venue, can throw a youth theatre into a crisis period.

#### 'Burnout'

Leaders, facilitators and board members can be over-stretched for long periods of time and the stress of managing an excessive workload can lead to 'burnout'. For example, when an autonomous youth theatre finds it difficult to recruit or retain board members, an over-reliance on a few existing board members can lead to a collapse of governance and ultimately, the youth theatre. Many Artistic Directors or main youth theatre facilitators carry out complex and demanding roles for low levels of financial remuneration. Work-related stress has meant that 'burnout' has become an issue for sustainability. 'Burnout' is often characterised by a sudden withdrawal from the youth theatre's activities and this sudden change contributes to a crisis period.

#### Precarious income sources

Youth theatres are constantly looking for different sources of funding to piece together the jigsaw of their yearly income. Trying to contract facilitators, make an annual artistic plan or take out venue leases when a youth theatre only has access to project funding, membership fees and fundraising creates a very precarious and stressful financial situation.

#### Conclusions

The growing age of individual youth theatres indicates that the sustainability of youth theatre has improved.

To ensure that the youth theatre sector can replenish itself and develop provision in under-served areas, developing youth theatres need more support to simplify and streamline the set-up process. Assistance from Youth Theatre Ireland and other local support organisations is also needed to help youth theatres deal with crisis points in their development, evolve and change models where necessary to ensure the continuation of youth theatre activities. Leaders involved in running youth theatres may need focused support to assist with board renewal and facilitator training, as well as the promotion of more viable roles for Artistic Directors/ key youth theatre leaders which can be sustained to provide consistency and artistic growth.

The youth theatre sector needs to consider these findings, identify how they impact on advice and development work, and adapt advocacy strategies to ensure these messages about sustainability form part of the conversation with youth theatres, partners and funders.