



Committee for Culture,
Arts and Leisure Inquiry
into Inclusion in the Arts of Working
Class Communities

Ulster Association of Youth Drama (UAYD)
Submission

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Executive Summary

The Ulster Association of Youth Drama (UAYD) is the lead body working in Northern Ireland to support and promote youth theatre and drama for young people aged 11 – 25.

Youth Theatre can be defined as ‘a group or several groups of young people who come together regularly to participate in theatre/drama and performing arts related activities’. These groups are facilitated by experienced/trained staff (paid or voluntary). The ‘participation of the young people is voluntary and outside of statutory education. Youth Theatre is a local activity rooted in the community and facilitates the creative interaction of young people. It has a youthful energy with the empowerment of young people at the core of its reason to exist’.¹ In Northern Ireland there are over 30 groups and organisations providing youth drama activities. These groups are spread throughout the region and engage thousands of young people every year.

‘Participation in youth theatre can lead to a multitude of different personal, social and artistic outcomes. The diversity of outcomes is influenced by the variety and quality of existing youth theatre programmes and by the fact that outcomes are often determined by the needs and interests of each individual youth theatre member’.²

UAYD welcomes the opportunity from the Committee of Culture, Arts and Leisure to respond to this inquiry. UAYD’s vision is of a Northern Ireland where young people from all backgrounds are enthused about drama and are easily able to find the opportunity and support needed to attend and participate whether for education, personal development, pleasure or career.

Evidence utilised by UAYD in this submission has been gathered through several means. These include an audit conducted by UAYD in 2013 and recent direct consultations with individuals and groups engaged in youth drama regarding this issue. Desktop research on the benefits of the arts was also carried out and reports from leading arts organisations and researchers have been incorporated into this report.

¹ National Association of Youth Theatres (England). *NAYT’s Definition of Youth Theatre*. Retrieved March 12th, 2014, from http://www.nayt.org.uk/definition_principles

² National Association for Youth Drama (ROI). (2009). *Centre Stage + 10: A Report on Youth Theatre in Ireland*, pp.159, available at < <http://www.nayd.ie/resources/research-projects/> > [retrieved March 12, 2014]

According to the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, 'more people are getting involved in the arts...82% of adults reported attending an arts event in 2012, representing an 8% increase since 2009 and this rose to 88% for young people'³. In this submission UAYD will provide examples of young people from different communities and areas participating in youth drama activities and events over the past year.

However as a result of the recession and its impact on budgets, UAYD has found that an increasing number of barriers to inclusion in youth drama are faced by young people and in particular by members of working class communities. These include:

- A reduction in the number of youth theatre groups run by local authorities and arts venues, and an increase in profit-making drama groups
- Increased overhead costs passed on to customers through enlarged fees for participation in youth drama
- Fewer subsidised or free youth drama activities and projects
- Limited financial support for young people to pursue an interest in the arts and to develop their own artistic practice
- Fewer options for funding support for youth drama groups
- Substantial ticketing costs for youth drama performances
- Reliance on volunteers, lack of qualified drama practitioners and use of unsuitable spaces impacting negatively on young people's experiences of drama

In addition to these, UAYD recognises systemic barriers, not necessarily connected to the recession, which can prevent young people from accessing youth drama activities.

- Transport – high costs and limited options of how to get to an activity. Public transport may not always be feasible due to the timing and location of activities. Parents may not want their child to travel on public transport in the evenings when a number of youth drama activities take place.
- Perception of the arts – our consultation with the youth drama sector suggests that arts activities can sometimes be stereotyped as 'middle class' by working class young people and/or their families. Young people may be unwilling to participate in activities for fear of

³ Arts Council of Northern Ireland. (2013). *Annual Business Plan 2013/14*, pp.9

feeling inferior or of 'not fitting in'. The arts may not be considered a suitable career route by a young person's family. Certain arts venues may be perceived by some communities as exclusive. Gender stereotyping with regards to drama may be more pervasive in certain communities.

In light of the challenges identified above, UAYD proposes the following recommendations:

1. Local government arts and arts venues need to re-engage with youth theatre.
2. Establish a local-authority-run youth drama group in each of the 11 newly reformed council areas. These groups would operate on a not-for-profit basis that will ensure that all young people can access free or affordable high quality arts experiences in purpose built venues throughout the regions.
3. Help young people to access arts facilities: provide young people throughout Northern Ireland with regular, free or low-cost use of rehearsal space and opportunities to showcase their work.
4. Incentivise and support arts venues to provide their facilities free of charge or at greater subsidised cost for community and youth drama groups.
5. Develop more youth-centred arts projects and youth-managed arts festivals.
6. Increase funding support for young people to access and pursue arts opportunities and further training.

Introduction

1. The Ulster Association of Youth Drama (UAYD) is the lead body working in Northern Ireland to support and promote youth theatre and drama for young people aged 11 – 25.
2. Youth Drama can be defined as a ‘unique youth work practice that engages young people as active participants in theatre by using group or ensemble drama approaches. Contributing to the artistic, personal and social development of young people through their commitment and voluntary participation’⁴.
3. Since UAYD was set up in 1998 by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, the organisation has been providing a range of support services for the youth drama sector such as publications, training, promotion, advice and events. UAYD is currently funded by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland’s Annual Funding Programme. UAYD is recognised as a Charity by the Inland Revenue and is a Company Limited by Guarantee.
4. In UAYD’s role to develop the youth theatre and drama sector in Northern Ireland the organisation operate a variety of activities and programmes to promote and support its wide-ranging membership. UAYD membership, drawn from across Northern Ireland, includes:
 - Not for profit youth theatre groups (see below for the definition of a not-for-profit youth theatre)
 - Independent youth theatre groups, which may make a profit from their activities
 - Associate members, supporting or delivering youth drama as part of a wider programme
 - Individual members including freelance drama practitioners and performing arts students
 - Youth members, under 18 interested in or participating in youth drama.
5. UAYD define a not-for-profit youth theatre as a group/organisation with a governing set of principles/constitution displaying not-for-profit aims and objectives. A not for profit youth theatre is not prohibited from making a profit. Those profits however are not for the

⁴ National Association for Youth Drama (ROI). *What is Youth Theatre?* Retrieved March 12th, 2014, from <http://www.nayd.ie/youth-theatre/what/>

personal benefit of members or leaders and should be reinvested in the youth theatre. This does not prohibit the payment to individuals for services provided to the youth theatre.

6. All members subscribe to UAYD's five core development principles for youth theatre:
 - Young People are actively engaged in the creative process of making youth theatre and feel they have a stake in both the organisation and the work produced.
 - Both the process of making youth theatre and the end product are equally valued with a firm buy-in to youth development principles.
 - Pro-active attempts are made to engage young people from all social, political, religious and cultural backgrounds and to be open to all abilities.
 - A commitment is made to giving young people a high quality artistic and professional experience of theatre using a diverse range of techniques including devised and issue based work, autobiography and new writing.
 - A commitment is made to building a wide and inclusive audience for youth theatre beyond immediate family through effective marketing and audience development initiatives.

7. Vision

UAYD's vision is of a Northern Ireland where young people from all backgrounds are enthused about drama and are easily able to find the opportunity and support needed to attend and participate whether for education, personal development, pleasure or career.

8. Mission

UAYD's mission is to develop and support youth drama in Northern Ireland.

9. Strategic Themes and Objectives

Theme 1. To Support and Enable

- Objective 1. To deliver programmes that improves skills and quality
- Objective 2. To deliver programmes that enable arts activities and projects
- Objective 3. To deliver programmes that develop capacity

Theme 2. To Engage and Consult

- Objective 4. To deliver programmes that connect the youth drama sector
- Objective 5. To provide services that provide quality information on the sector

- Objective 6. To deliver programmes that promote youth drama

Theme 3. To Represent and Advocate

- Objective 7. To deliver programmes that ensure the sector is represented with influencers and decision makers
- Objective 8. To deliver programmes that promote excellence in models for youth drama
- Objective 9. To deliver programmes that develop theatre and drama policy and practice

Theme 4. To Resource and Govern the UAYD organisation

- Objective 10. To effectively govern, finance and manage the UAYD organisation

10. UAYD welcomes the opportunity from the Committee of Culture, Arts and Leisure to respond to this inquiry. UAYD's vision statement highlights the organisation's commitment to ensuring youth drama in Northern Ireland is accessible to all. Evidence and points referenced in this submission have been collated by UAYD through several means. UAYD conducted an audit of the youth drama sector in 2013. The results of which have been integrated into this submission. Relevant literature and publications written by arts practitioners on this area have been researched to illustrate the benefits of youth arts. UAYD continually engages with the individuals and groups involved in youth drama. Feedback gained through discussions with the sector at UAYD Network meetings, training events and visits to youth theatre groups have been incorporated into UAYD's response to this inquiry. UAYD members were also asked specifically to respond to this inquiry through the creation of a survey. The UAYD survey asked the following:

A) Do you or your organisation deliver youth drama activities in, or involve young people from, working class communities?

B) Please give a brief overview of these youth drama activities - what is the location, age group of participants, numbers participating?

C) How are these activities funded?

D) What barriers are there to participation in youth drama in, or for young people from, working class communities?

E) What improvements need to be made to increase participation in youth drama?

Responses to this survey have supported the following inquiry submission from UAYD.

Accessibility of the Arts

11. Throughout Northern Ireland there are great examples of young people from all backgrounds and communities accessing and participating in the arts. For instance over the last five years the Millennium Forum has coordinated a youth arts festival, InterAct during the summer for 12-21 year olds. Last year approximately 2000 young people attended the various arts workshops, masterclasses and events, the vast majority of which were free. '75% of those that attended our youth arts festival InterAct were based in communities suffering from income, employment, education, health and environmental deprivation, according to our postcode analysis.'⁵
12. To focus on the accessibility of youth drama, the Newpoint Players in Newry, for over 30 years, has facilitated a free youth drama programme where 40-100 young people are involved in a production over the summer months. 'We have an excellent demographic mix...As we don't charge there are no monetary preventives for youth joining us'⁶.
13. In 2013-14 UAYD ensured all of its activities aimed at young people were free of charge to help address financial barriers to participation. For example, UAYD facilitated a careers workshop in partnership with Creative & Culture Skills and the Marketplace Theatre in Armagh in November 2013. This event, aimed at giving young people an insight into different non-performing careers in the arts, was free of charge and groups were also offered free transport to and from the venue. There was a high turnout with feedback from the young people demonstrating that they really enjoyed the event and found it useful in understanding and discovering career options.

⁵ Kate Guelke, Education and Outreach Officer at the Millennium Forum

⁶ Donal O'Hanlon, Chair of Newpoint Players

14. Over the years there have been many commissioned reports and research findings that have demonstrated the benefits of inclusion in the arts, such as Hughes & Wilson⁷, Horitz⁸, Matarasso⁹ and Galloway¹⁰. For instance Matarasso identified 50 social impacts of participation in the arts. These impacts split into six sections include 'personal development' and 'community empowerment and self-determination'. In Matarasso's 1998 report, he came to the conclusion that participating in community arts 'enhances people's employability through skill development and confidence-building. It promotes contact and understanding through co-operative work...It enriches social lives through developing friendships and leisure opportunities. And it does these things through creative mechanisms and the exploration of meanings not common in other forms of intervention'¹¹.

As part of research undertaken by the National Association for Youth Drama, 'youth theatre members, leaders and stakeholders identified the following benefits of participation: Increased levels of confidence and self-esteem; Increased numbers of friends and an increased ability to make friends; A more developed sense of personal and group identity; A sense of happiness, fun and well-being'¹². These benefits of youth drama integrate with the Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government 2011-2015. Priority 2 of which is about 'creating opportunities, tackling disadvantage and improving health and wellbeing'¹³ and priority four aims to improve community and personal wellbeing.

15. UAYDs members and youth drama practitioners working in Northern Ireland, understand the benefits of inclusive practice and work hard to make their projects accessible to young people from all backgrounds. However the youth drama sector cannot do this in isolation. Due to various factors, which are described below, there are an increasing number of barriers that are preventing young people, and in particular those from working class communities, from accessing and participating in youth drama in Northern Ireland.

⁷ Hughes, J. & Wilson, K. (2004). Playing a Part, The Impact of Youth Theatre on Young People's Personal and Social Development. *Research in Drama Education*, 9(1), 57-72.

⁸ Horitz, T. (2001). 'B-O-U-R-N-E-M-O-U-T-H! Our Town!' Effects on Male Teenagers Participation in a Community Play. *Research in Drama Education*, 6 (1), 69-84.

⁹ Matarasso, F. (1997). *Use or Ornament? The Social Impact of Participation in the Arts*. Stroud: Comedia, p.13

¹⁰ Galloway, S. (1995). *Changing Lives, The Social Impact of the Arts*. Edinburgh: The Scottish Arts Council.

¹¹ Matarasso, F. (1998). *Vital Signs, Mapping community arts in Belfast*. Stroud: Comedia, pp.22-23

¹² National Association for Youth Drama. (2009). *Centre Stage + 10: A Report on Youth Theatre in Ireland*, pp.159, available at < <http://www.nayd.ie/resources/research-projects/>> [retrieved March 12, 2014]

¹³ Northern Ireland Executive. (2011). *Programme for Government 2011-2015*

Challenges and Barriers

Arts Venues and Costs

1. Many arts venues have been established in communities throughout the regions as a result of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland's Capital Build Programme. However this has not necessarily helped inclusion in youth theatre, in rural/regional areas or for working class communities. Through UAYD's youth drama database and an audit undertaken in 2013 the organisation has found that there has been a dramatic decrease in the number of youth theatres run by local councils or arts venues compared to five years ago. UAYD has been told by councils that they can no longer afford to run youth drama programmes because of their budget constraints. Research conducted by UAYD showed that the majority of arts venues have reduced their participatory arts programme and now hire their facilities to external groups as a way to bring in finances. With fewer venue-run youth drama groups, a gap in the market has opened up. Consequently UAYD has discovered a big increase in the number of profit making youth drama organisations. Consultations with the sector highlighted that the majority of these independent businesses are not making large profits, with some just breaking even. As a result of being set up as sole trade companies, these private groups are unable to apply for funding and support, so the costs are then passed on to the customer: the young people wishing to participate in their projects.
2. Membership or participation fees are not exclusive to profit making organisations. UAYD's research of the sector has found that the majority of non-profit making youth theatres also have to charge because of venue hire and tutor costs, and increasing difficulty in securing funding support. 'Our tutors are voluntary and work very hard to provide these activities for children and if there was someone out there who could help us cover our rent then we could really reduce our membership, opening our group up to many more people.'¹⁴
3. Through desktop research UAYD has found that few youth drama groups offer publically advertised subsidised places or concession prices for young people from lower income families. Normally the charge is a flat rate per session or term. Some groups have told UAYD that they do arrange lower fees for those in receipt of benefits, or work out reduced

¹⁴ Caroline McAfee, Director, Quadrangle Productions, Ballycastle

payments plans if necessary. However if these payment options are not advertised, will individuals that need them, ask for concession rates or alternative payment plans? UAYD realise the difficulty for youth drama groups in publically advertising these options because by openly offering concession prices there may be a high uptake and it then becomes harder to meet overhead costs.

4. The need to cover costs becomes a vicious circle that arts venues, youth drama groups or individuals are unable to solve in isolation.

Funding Support for Young People

1. Research on funding support by UAYD has shown that a number of councils in Northern Ireland have small bursary funds for young people to attend further training in the arts. However not all councils have this allocated budget. Therefore young people's access to this development support depends on where they live. Of those councils that do have a bursary fund, UAYD has found that these schemes are often not publicised or communicated effectively. The funds are also extremely limited. Some councils have an application process with a deadline and guidelines for applying, where as with other councils the fund is more flexible. In the latter case the limit available per individual is at the discretion of the Arts Officer, and the number of applications already awarded. UAYD believes that all young people throughout Northern Ireland should have equal opportunities to access such support.
2. It is important to note that the criteria of these council bursary funds is often only eligible to those hoping to build on their existing arts training. Therefore young people need to have accessed the arts and developed their interest and skills to a certain level before applying for such support.

Funding Support for Youth Drama groups

3. Through research conducted by UAYD with the youth drama sector, the organisation has found that funding for drama groups is very inconsistent. On one hand the legal structure of some groups rules them out of applying for financial support. The groups that are eligible for funding are often run by volunteers in addition to their full time employment. A lack of time

and skills in fundraising can result in groups not being successful in their applications, which can deter them from making future applications. There is also a limited number of funds applicable to the majority of youth drama groups and high demand limits the chances of success.

4. UAYD have learnt through consultations with youth drama groups that more are seeking in kind support or increasing their own public fundraising events as an alternative to applying for grant aid support. This can help to secure some assistance but is rarely enough to cover all running costs. These financial issues then feed back to the customers.

Youth Drama performances

1. It is common for youth drama groups to put on at least one public performance a year. Findings from UAYDs research and consultations with the youth drama sector have found that in order for groups to be able to cover the cost of hiring a theatre space (many venues including local authority spaces charge over £450 per evening for stage hire) and other associated expenditure, has meant the cost of tickets for audience members has increased. In some cases the ticket price is over £10. The cost for all the family to attend the performance can then be quite a large sum of money, which may be on top of the participation fee, and travel to and from rehearsals and performances. This may be too high for families with lower incomes and may hinder inclusion from working class families.
2. UAYD encourage groups to build a wide and inclusive audience for youth theatre beyond immediate family members. However high ticket costs are likely to discourage non-family members from coming to watch performances.

Quality arts activities

1. The majority of youth drama groups do try to keep the costs of their classes as low as possible in order to maximise inclusivity. UAYDs own research has found that one of the ways groups do this is by relying on volunteers or senior members of youth drama groups to deliver classes and projects. For UAYD, youth drama facilitation is a profession that requires a great deal of skill and should not be devalued. Disadvantaged young people can have a range of complex issues such as behavioural problems that trained practitioners are able to

address, and adapt their teaching to the needs of the group. UAYD is aware that there is a shortage of experienced and quality facilitators, particularly outside of Belfast and Derry-Londonderry. This was highlighted in the Arts Council of Northern Ireland's Youth Arts Strategy¹⁵. This results in young people in rural areas not having the same level of opportunities as those young people in the two main cities. In addition the lack of training and qualifications in drama facilitation in Northern Ireland adds to this issue, which UAYD believes needs to be addressed and developed.

2. Kate Guelke, Education Officer at the Millennium Forum feels 'prolonged access and exposure to the best theatre professionals...opportunities to experience real life rehearsal and performance conditions' are improvements that need to be made to increase participation in youth drama. However as discussed there has been a reduction in the number of arts-venue-run youth drama groups, increased venue hire charges and limited financial support available. These factors have resulted in a number of youth drama groups being forced to find alternative spaces, as a way to lower overhead costs and the costs to young people. These venues are not always suitable or adequate for the needs of the group. This can then have an effect on the quality of the arts experience young people then receive. UAYD believe all young people throughout Northern Ireland should be able to access quality youth drama provision which utilises the arts venues available.

Transport

3. Transport is another barrier to inclusion in youth drama for young people in Northern Ireland. The majority of arts training events typically take place in Belfast or Derry-Londonderry. Through consultation with the sector UAYD have found that parents often provide the transport to these events, both for young people from the local area or those living much further away. Some young people may then be excluded from participation because their families are unable or unwilling to drive them to a youth drama group.
4. When public transport is the only available option, young people rely on the travel timetable, which may not match the timing of their activity.

¹⁵ Arts Council of Northern Ireland. (2013). *Youth Arts Strategy 2013 – 2017*

5. A large proportion of youth drama activities take place on evenings and at weekends. Parents and young people may not feel comfortable using public transport at night. As a result young people requiring public transport are more likely to rely on activities occurring in their own community. For young people living in rural areas there are fewer opportunities in youth drama, as highlighted to UAYD through the audit.
6. In addition, the cost of transport added to the cost of the arts activity can stop some individuals from being able to participate. This is especially true for training or projects taking place over an extended period of time. For example, a young person UAYD has engaged with explained that he had to decline a place on a summer drama project in Belfast because the cost of transport over seven days was £120.
7. In 2013/2014 UAYD programmed several free events outside of Belfast for young people. The aim was to provide opportunities for young people living in different regional areas. These events have been very well attended including the free acting workshop in Ranfurly House, Dungannon with the National Youth Theatre¹⁶. Demand was very high for this workshop with all spaces taken within two days of bookings opening and a waiting list in place. As well as many participants attending from the surrounding areas, young people travelled from Cookstown, Limavady, Fermanagh and Jordanstown, which demonstrates the demand for such an event.

The perception of the arts

8. Consultations with UAYD members have revealed that arts facilitators find young people who have not engaged with drama before secondary level education school much harder to involve in activities the older they become. Low self-esteem and a lack of confidence to try something new can play a part in preventing inclusion in the arts with teenagers and adults.
9. Another challenge to inclusion in the arts for young people is whether family members support their involvement. If parents have not been involved or participated in arts activities in the past, will they encourage their children to engage? Members have expressed to UAYD

¹⁶ National Youth Theatre of Great Britain is a world-leading youth arts organisation that trains, and showcases performers and theatre technicians aged 14-25 from Great Britain and Northern Ireland – www.nyt.org.uk

that older teenagers from working class families also experience pressure to find work. As the arts is still perceived as a 'non-traditional' career route, some individuals may feel that drama is an extracurricular activity or hobby, which they no longer have the time or finances to support, or are discouraged from being involved with.

10. The location of youth drama activities can be a barrier to participation, as revealed through discussions UAYD has had with outreach drama facilitators. If the location of a project is deemed to be in an area that an individual may not feel safe or welcome in then they may not take part. Whether this perception comes from the young person, their peers or family members, judgements about location can play a significant role in participation. For instance if a workshop was taking place in an area that was perceived to be middle class, young people from a working class community may not feel that they will belong in the group. Arts venues and groups need to find out how their facility is perceived by young people, and tackle any issues that may arise from the findings.
11. Personal issues in how young people believe they will be perceived also play a part in whether they will become involved in drama. Insecurities for young people from working class communities can include fear they may be laughed at, looked down on or won't fit.
12. UAYD has supported the development of a new youth theatre at the Crescent Arts Centre in Belfast. The weekly drama group, for 13-18 year olds is currently free to attend, and is part of the Crescent's Education and Outreach department programme, which aims to actively encourage all sections of the community to participate in the arts. On establishment of this group, the Crescent struggled to engage young people from working class communities. This could be as a result of the different barriers as described above.

Gender and the arts

13. Gender is also an issue in youth drama that should be highlighted. Participation is predominately female. '75% described their organisation as having more girls than boys or having an entirely female membership'¹⁷. These results come from a survey conducted by

¹⁷ Kerbel, L. (2012). *Swimming in the shallow end, Opportunities for girls in youth drama, focusing on the quantity and quality of roles available to them*, pp.8, available at

Tonic Theatre with 291 teachers and youth theatre practitioners across the UK. One reason for the imbalance in youth drama could be that sport for teenage boys is perceived as a more traditional hobby, particularly in some working class communities. Participating in the drama can also have certain connotations for males that may prevent boys from participating. This also relates back to the perception of the arts and drama within families.

Arts and education

14. It is important to note that creative studies in schools can play a significant role in young people's experience and interest in the arts outside of the education system. Many children's first experiences of drama occur in schools. If drama is treated as an inferior subject, or in secondary level education is not taught by someone with this specific expertise, will young people want to pursue their interests outside of school? Reports and research pieces have been carried out to illustrate the benefits of the arts in learning. For instance Roberts (2009) states that 'drama can help reading, writing and speech'¹⁸. Therefore young people should be experiencing the arts and participating in projects from an early age right up to when they leave school. If this occurs, the next generation of young people will have parents that have had these experiences. This can lead to these parents understanding the benefits and encouraging their children and grandchildren to get involved. Barriers and perceptions of the arts are then being tackled.

Good practice

15. An example of an organisation outside of Northern Ireland with a successful model for delivering youth drama in working class communities is Toonspeak Young People's Theatre¹⁹ in Glasgow. Toonspeak has existed for 27 years providing free, high quality drama and theatre activities for young people aged 11-25 living in areas of Glasgow with very high levels of deprivation. Young people are provided with free transport to enable individuals to participate in activities outside of their local communities. As well as being trained drama

<http://www.tonictheatre.co.uk/images/tonic_theatre_Swimming%20in%20the%20shallow%20end_Report_May2012.pdf> [retrieved March 13, 2014]

¹⁸ Roberts, Y. (2009). Grit, The skills for success and how they are grown, pp.73, available at <http://youngfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/GRIT-The-skills-for-success-and-how-they-are-grown-2009.pdf>> [retrieved March 13, 2014]

¹⁹ Toonspeak Young People's Theatre – www.toonspeak.co.uk

facilitators, Toonspeak staff are also experienced in working with disadvantaged young people who may be vulnerable, have behavioural problems and/or complex needs such as literacy issues. Toonspeak does not audition and does not use scripts in order to make its productions as inclusive as possible. No such organisation offering the same opportunities currently exists in Northern Ireland.

16. There are a number of youth drama organisations in Northern Ireland currently working to break down the barriers to inclusion in the arts for working class communities. Belfast Youth in the Arts is one example. Belfast Youth in the Arts is a cross community, non-profit making youth theatre company which works to engage young people (13 - 19 years old) from all backgrounds through the medium of performing arts regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation or political background. The organisation does not charge fees for participation in its projects. 'Our Company uses the arts as a vehicle for tackling social issues that affect young people'²⁰.

Recommendations

17. UAYD is the only development body to support and advocate on behalf of the youth drama sector in Northern Ireland. The organisation receives limited financial support, employing one freelance member of staff to deliver a busy programme of training events and development services to young people, drama groups and youth drama facilitators. UAYD recognises that while there are many examples of excellence within the sector, the youth drama infrastructure lacks coherence. Further erosion of this infrastructure will result in reduced access to quality opportunities to participate in the arts. As a result UAYD is increasing its lobbying and advocacy work to be able to start addressing the issues discussed in this report. UAYD believes that changes need be made at policy level to ensure all young people have the opportunity to access youth drama activities throughout Northern Ireland. The recommendations are as follows:
18. Local government arts and arts venues need to re-engage with youth theatre. Youth theatre should not solely be for the privilege of those who can afford to attend private stage

²⁰ Christopher Torbitt, Artistic Director, Belfast Youth in the Arts

schools. Referring back to the definition by the National Association of Youth Theatres at the start of this report, youth theatre is a 'local activity rooted in the community'. All young people should have equal access to youth drama that can contribute to their artistic, personal and social development, as highlighted in research findings documented in this report.

19. Establish a local-authority-run youth drama group in each of the 11 newly reformed council areas. In this report we have discussed the negatives that can occur as a result of unstructured, ungoverned and profit making entities. UAYD would recommend that each of the 11 new councils are supported and encouraged to establish a youth theatre that will operate on a not-for-profit basis. This will ensure that all young people can access free or affordable arts experiences in purpose built venues throughout the regions. Through being incorporated within a council structure, the quality of teaching and best practice procedures can also be protected.
20. Help young people to access arts facilities: provide young people with regular, free or low-cost use of rehearsal space and opportunities to showcase their work. Arts venues in Northern Ireland should be encouraged and assisted to open up their spaces for young people to utilise.
21. Incentivise and support arts venues to provide their facilities free of charge or at a lower cost for community and youth drama groups. This will allow groups to reduce their overhead costs and make use of the excellent arts facilities available, which in turn can improve inclusivity of the arts and venues for the wider community.
22. Develop more youth-centred arts projects and youth-managed arts festivals. Tackle perceptions that arts venues are not a place for the younger generation. The Tricycle Theatre in London has its first Takeover festival this March. 'the Tricycle Young Company are completely taking over the Tricycle, packing it with theatre, film, music and poetry by emerging and established artists. During the week you can see seven new plays performed by young people on the Tricycle stage'.²¹ The MADE festival in the MAC in Belfast and

²¹ Tricycle Theatre (2014). *Tricycle Takeover Festival 2014*. Retrieved March 13, 2014, from <http://www.tricycle.co.uk/festivals/tricycle-takeover-festival-2014-2/>

Millennium Forum's InterAct festival in Derry-Londonderry are two current youth-centred projects that take place. These types of projects help young people to participate in arts activities that they may never have been able to access or have thought of coming to before. UAYD would recommend more events similar to these occur throughout Northern Ireland so all young people are able to engage with the arts and programmes that have been developed with and for their specific age group and interests.

23. Increase funding support for young people to access and pursue arts opportunities and further training. Develop youth arts bursary schemes in all local authorities.

*'I have seen at first hand how culture, arts and leisure can meaningfully enhance – even transform – the lives of people and of communities. It is important that we are proactive in making culture, arts and leisure accessible to people in marginalised groups and from areas of social disadvantage.'*²²

For further details about UAYDs work and/or this report please contact Keara Fulton, Development Officer, at admin@uayd.co.uk

²² Carál Ní Chuilín MLA, Foreward to the Department of Culture, Arts & Leisure's *Corporate Plan 2011-2015*, p.3