

Submission to the Cultural Commission on behalf of the National Youth Performing Arts Companies of Scotland

National Youth Choir of Scotland
National Youth Orchestras of Scotland
National Youth Pipe Band of Scotland
Scottish Youth Theatre
YDance (Scottish Youth Dance)

The Chairs and Chief Executives of the National Youth Performing Arts Companies of Scotland have met to discuss common elements in the responses of each company to the questions posed by the Cultural Commission's review process.

Whilst each company has made an individual response specific to their artform, and been part of other artform groupings, the group feels that it is important that the Cultural Commission recognise the unique position of the National Youth Performing Arts Companies and their shared experiences in fostering participation in and appreciation of the performing arts amongst young people in Scotland. The companies currently promote the twin pillars of Scottish Executive Cultural policy: 'Access' by offering a range of participatory opportunities to young people and 'Excellence' by providing a performance structure for talented young people.

Education

The National Youth Performing Arts Companies are by their nature principally concerned with arts education and performance, both within the formal education sector and outside of it. The range of opportunities offered by the five companies to children and young people covers participatory work, performances both by young people and for them as audiences, in-service training for teachers and development programmes for talented young people all over Scotland.

The Commission in its interim report identified as a key area for the future cultural health of Scotland the education of our young people in the field of culture. The National Youth Performing Arts Companies would argue that the current status of the performing arts (especially dance and drama) within our education system is a major obstacle to the development of a population which is informed about, and engaged with, the performing arts. In order to enable adults to take up cultural opportunities offered to them, they must have experienced a range of such activities at an early age, and be encouraged to explore their own individual talents and interests.

Under the present system, the performing arts in general have a low status within the school curriculum. They should be recognised both as essential subjects in their own right (dance, for example, is currently a sub-section of the PE curriculum), and also as a means both to develop "soft" skills such as self-confidence, communication skills and inter-personal skills, and to enhance the teaching of other curriculum subjects (witness the programme of *"Arts across the Curriculum"* now being piloted by Scottish Arts Council).

It is noted that the Youth Music Initiative currently being supported by the Scottish Executive is seeking to enhance the range of opportunities for the provision of music for young people. The benefits which will emerge from this must be consolidated into mainstream provision and funding.

The training of teachers is crucial to the raising of the status of the performing arts disciplines within schools. Primary teachers in particular, should have more emphasis on the performing arts in their training, and teacher education institutions should be able to call on the expertise offered by the National Youth Performing Arts Companies in their respective fields.

All school pupils in Scotland should be afforded regular opportunities to work with the National Youth Performing Arts Companies - as participants in constructively planned, long-term workshops in schools, as members of selected orchestras, bands, choirs or performance companies, and as audiences for performances. Currently, the number of times a child is able to participate or to see work, whether by youth companies or others, seems dependent on individual school budgets or budgets held by other local authority departments or Cultural Co-ordinators, on money raised by Parent-Teacher Associations, or on payment by parents and guardians themselves.

Developing Talent

All of the National Youth Performing Arts Companies are committed to the development of individual young Scots in their various disciplines. Through intensive training courses the companies encourage the growth of skills and development of talent in those young people who have particular aptitude for and interest in their artform.

In order to sustain this work, and to develop it on a long term basis, the National Youth Performing Arts Companies would like to see a more stable funding and planning process in Scotland, incorporating a recognition of the need to establish training for practitioners in working with young people, and the establishment of a viable career path within Scotland for such practitioners.

The likelihood of Scotland being able to retain the best performing arts practitioners working with our young people would be greatly enhanced by an increase in opportunity for them to work in schools, and to engage with teachers in developing innovative and sustainable arts programmes in our education system. Such a development would naturally follow from the raising of the status of the performing arts in schools as outlined above.

Strategic Planning and Funding

All of the National Youth Performing Arts Companies have similar experiences in our engagement with the planning and funding process in Scotland. All of us work with a plethora of funding bodies, with our SAC core funds forming only a small proportion of our income. Working over the whole geographical spread involves us in trying to fulfil the widely varying criteria, differing application timescales and policy initiatives of the Local Authorities and other agencies, taking a disproportionate amount of administrative time and expense and at times creating conflicting aims and objectives for a single project.

In addition to the 32 Local Authorities, we also work with a number of Scottish Executive Departments (Education, Health, Culture, Justice), and other agencies including Sportscotland, Health Boards, Youth Organisations, Voluntary Organisations, Broadcasting Companies and trusts and sponsors.

The planning and delivery of the arts within Local Authorities varies a great deal. The Cultural Co-ordinators in Schools programme has had only intermittent success due to there being no nationally-defined remit for them. Each Local Authority has created their own remit – from direct delivery of artforms to facilitating and management roles, leading to uneven provision throughout the country. In contrast, the approach taken by Sportscotland in its **Active Schools** programme has been much more successful because a common remit has provided a more consistent provision of physical activity.

We would recommend that the system of cultural planning and financial support for National Youth Performing Arts Companies be rationalised and simplified. There is a need for the National Youth Performing Arts Companies to be able to work with a central cultural body, in a joint planning process whereby each company is recognised as the expert in their discipline, providing work on a national basis. Core funding, directly from a central non departmental public body, or Scottish Executive Department concerned with national cultural provision, should be set at a realistic level, to allow organisations to carry out an agreed programme of work on a long term basis, with appropriate targets and reporting requirements established at the beginning of the period, as is now the case with SAC. Decisions on the level of funding should flow from negotiation on the scope of work to be undertaken rather than based on historical funding levels.

Such a planning and funding process could bring together the main sources of funding for the companies at a national level into a single agreement, removing the need for the arts organisation to conduct lengthy negotiations with a number of national bodies working towards the same ends. Companies would then be free to seek other funds from local and independent sources to develop new areas of work and to enable the provision for our children and young people to grow year on year.

A similar approach to funding individual participants involved in our programmes aimed at developing talent would allow the National Youth Performing Arts Companies to offer to young people the same opportunities no matter where they live in Scotland. This could be achieved through a central bursary fund, accessible only to participants from the National Youth Performing Arts Companies. The present system whereby individual local authorities have their own policies for funding individual participation in courses and events organised by the National Youth Performing Arts Companies leads to discrimination based on post code.

Status / recognition of National Youth Performing Arts Companies

It is generally assumed in Scotland that the “National Companies” in the cultural sector are those funded at a high level to deliver (in the main) professional performances generally for adult audiences in Music, Dance and Theatre. The role of the National Youth Performing Arts Companies in providing a range of work for our children and young people from performance opportunities to participatory work seems to be vastly undervalued at the national level. We would like to see our work recognised as being of equal importance to the current “National Companies”, and would welcome the opportunity to talk to the Commission about the crucial involvement we have in nurturing cultural participation amongst young Scots.

The National Youth Performing Arts Companies should be offered more opportunities to represent Scottish Culture on the international stage. Individually, or in collaboration, we represent the best young performing artists that Scotland has to offer, and can promote Scotland overseas as a vibrant and creative country. We would also welcome more opportunities to work together within Scotland.

Consistency in the treatment of the National Companies (including those working with our young people) would be promoted by having a strong central voice, with a focus on funding and national overview planning for the cultural and arts sectors.

Conclusion

The National Youth Performing Arts Companies welcome the opportunity to present their shared concerns and recommendations to the Cultural Commission. As the experts in the field of performing arts with children and young people in Scotland, we believe our work is crucial to the further development of our cultural life, and to the growth of an informed population, involved with the arts, and able to decide for themselves how to participate in the vast array of cultural opportunities open to them in a future Scotland.

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