SOME CHOICES

IRISH YOUNG CURATORS AND CRITICS PROGRAMMES:

AN ANALYSIS AND TOOLKIT

Sample-Studios

garter lane arts centre

WATERFORD YOUTH ARTS

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The title *Some Choices* emerged from the interviews with the participants and organisers conducted in the course of this report. The respondents were drawn from ten projects that took place at different times across the country over the last 24 months, July 2020-July 2022.

It became apparent that the young people involved in these projects became aware of choices they wouldn't otherwise have had, had they not participated in these programmes. Rich choices in friendship, in ideas, in identities, in career options, in artforms, in ways of expressing themselves and more. To paraphrase economist and philosopher Amartya Sen, they became aware of choices in who they could be and what they could do. The projects studied here brought together young people around a shared interest and variety of artistic disciplines to work together and play together, to see possible selves, test various identities, and to document and catalogue that journey in performance, in visual art, in film, in music - to make art out of the journey of becoming.

The projects that inform this report have thrown the "Mantle of the Expert" onto groups of young people, asking them to think and behave as critics and curators of arts, delivering to them ever more choices in what can be thought, said and presented. In a very real sense these projects are about empowering the young person through meaningful decision making in the arts context. Through these projects, participants discover new choices in what they can be and what they can do. They discover "...individual capabilities to do things that a person has reason to value"[1]

A successful Young Curator/Critic project is one that allows the participants to discover and develop some choices of their own: to discover personal taste, to discover likes and dislikes, to discover choices in ideas, and to discover choices in who they are and who they may become.

UNDERPINNINGS

These projects are underpinned by the work of Dorothy Heathcote"s Mantle of the Expert (MOE)[2] . Although most of her work was designed for the formal education sector and focused on using drama to reframe the relationships between teacher, pupil and knowledge, her approach subverted the formal setting by introducing the values and behaviours of arts work with young people.

Much has been written about Heathcote and The MOE, but a brief description is useful here. In a formal educational context a teacher will create a fictional context and invite the students to take on the responsibilities of a team of experts. The team of experts is then "commissioned" by a fictional external client to complete a specific project. For example, the team could be asked to imagine themselves as salvage experts and the assignment could be to "Raise The Titanic" on behalf of a Maritime Museum or a Government department. The "commission" requires the students to conduct research and develop skills in a range of curriculum related areas. In this example students developed skills in maths, physics, engineering, geography, accounting, and business as well as a wide range of soft skills in team work, self management,

1 Sen, A. (2000). Development as freedom. New Delhi: Oxford University Press

2 Heathcote, D. and O'Neill, C. (2015) *Dorothy Heathcote on Education and drama essential writings*. London: Routledge.

research, negotiation etc. The teacher sits into the fiction alongside the students as a guide as opposed to an authority, working with students to resolve problems, pointing toward possible sources and solutions, and occasionally setting specific tasks.

We can see the elements of MOE at work in all of the Young Curator/Critics programmes within this study. In each of them, a group of young people is treated and facilitated as a team of experts, and "commissioned" to deliver an expert service (the Exhibition or the Review Panel). The facilitators work alongside the young people to resolve problems and point toward information sources and solutions. The context may not be entirely fictional but the real world risks are managed (it would be terrible if the final exhibition or panel discussion were "bad", but the commissioning body will not lose funding, audience, or reputation). Having said that, the extent to which these risks are managed varies across the programmes studied here. The focus in the work is always on the young participants, on their experience of the process. There is a desire on the part of everybody involved for the final output to be of a high quality, but the experience of the participants will not be sacrificed in pursuit of that quality.

MOE is a framework; it does not guarantee "success". The success of these projects is dependent on the values and behaviours of the facilitators, combined with their skill in working with young people. Heathcote herself acknowledged the centrality of values and behaviours to the work, stating that

> Mantle is not a cloak by which a person is recognised. This is no garment to cover. I use it as a quality: of leadership, carrying standards of behaviour, morality, responsibility, ethics and the spiritual basis of all action. The mantle embodies the standards I ascribe to. It grows by usage, not garment stitching. (Heathcote, 2009)

The programmes included here have placed the young participants at the centre of the experience. This is clear in the design of the programmes and is attested to in the interviews conducted with participants and facilitators. In the best tradition of MOE, these programmes have allowed the participants to discover what they want and need to know, to discover what they think and feel, to discover their aesthetic tastes, and to understand and develop the knowledge that underpins the skills required to work in a professional arts context.

The programmes clearly demonstrate the nuances of the phrase "youth led". While the participants sit at the centre of these projects, positioned as experts within the design frame of the project, they are supported by facilitators and expert advisers throughout. As one respondent described it, the scaffolding may be invisible, but it is always in place.

METHODOLOGY

Throughout the early part of 2022, Sample-Studios conducted eleven interviews with organisers and participants from ten different Young Curator/Young Critic programmes throughout Ireland, as well as "alumni" who participated in such programmes 5 to 25 years ago. Two focus groups were held with participants from two recent projects.

The interviews and focus groups were transcribed and summarised.

In August 2022, an independent consultant a contracted to analyse the material and draft the final report. An additional four interviews (one organiser, two participants, and one "alumni") were conducted, transcribed and summarised.

THEMATIC ANALYSIS

The interviews were analysed using various techniques including sentiment and thematic analysis. The emerging themes and ideas were weighted on the frequency of their occurrence and then categorised and grouped.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

THE FOCUS GROUPS

The participants who took part in the focus groups said that the most valuable and/or enjoyable part of their experience was

- Learning about different career pathways in the arts
- Gaining confidence
- Meeting new and like minded people
- Socialising with people
- Hearing about the various paths people took to get to their current career or art practice.
- New connections
- Practical/participative workshops
- Trying new mediums/learning new skills
- Visiting exhibitions/ performances/ arts events
- Talking to young people about experiences of art
- A relaxed but respectful atmosphere
- Freedom of choice/self-directed learning
- Non-intimidating artists

When asked what they valued least about the programme, the answers were again overwhelmingly positive, referencing the constraints on the projects, rather than the quality of their experience. The participants want more time, more resources, and more communication. The responses were:

- Not long enough
- Lack of information about joining/applying in youth friendly fora
- Lack of information about funding/starting off.
- Instructor presentations were not specialised in the areas.
- Lack of time to explore our own ideas
- Less visibility on workspaces available for students to work outside of college
- The number of trips

When asked to identify the highlights of the experience the responses were

- Hearing success stories
- Meeting new/like-minded people
- Learning new skills
- Feeling at home

- More of an interest and love for art
- Meeting artists
- Visiting art spaces and exhibitions
- Creating with other people, with the same passion
- Trips
- Having our own exhibition

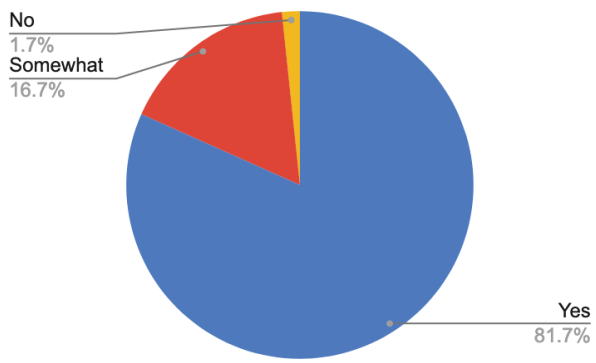
These responses suggest that the core value of these projects lies in meeting like-minded people in a "professional", experiential, learning framework. Heathcote"s MOE can be felt throughout these responses. The personal and social outcomes emerge from belonging to a new network of relationships and friendships built on shared interests in the arts, and the opportunity to do things they value, and to be who they want to be.

Participants gain an understanding of practice, develop their aesthetic sensibilities, and realise that there are many possible career paths within the arts, but the real value is the other people. The personal impact in terms of confidence, identity, validation, capability etc, is driven principally by being involved in working on a project with like minded people (including the facilitators) of various ages, and various backgrounds.

The participants were also asked to respond to 6 questions, with the answers "Yes", "Somewhat" or "No". The questions were

1. Did you learn new creative skills, having participated in your group?
2. Did you have a better understanding of the arts, after participating in your group?
3. Are you more inclined to visit galleries/ art venues, having participated in your group?
4. Are you more aware of galleries/ art venues and cultural resources available to you, having participated in your group?
5. Are you more aware of different creative paths, having participated in your group?
6. Do you feel more inclined to pursue a creative career path, having participated in your group?

The answers were all positive with over 80% responding "yes" to each of the questions. The aggregated results are as follows:



THE INTERVIEWS

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants, alumni, organisers, and facilitators. In one case, the respondent had participated in a programme twenty-five years ago. These longitudinal insights have not, to our knowledge, been captured elsewhere, and indicate that, to a certain extent, that these programmes can result in a lifetime of positive and independent engagement with an institution.

The semi -structured nature of the interviews meant that there was room to explore answers in greater depth before moving on.

Nine principal themes emerged from the analysis of the interviews, namely

1. Outcomes, Benefits and Challenges for Participants
2. Outcomes, Benefits and Challenges for Institutions
3. The Starting Point
4. Sources of Ideas
5. Designing Your Idea
6. Recruiting The Participants
7. Values

OUTCOMES FOR PARTICIPANTS

If we understand the outcomes of these projects, then we can design them to deliver those outcomes and we can build an evaluation process that measures their impact.

BROADENING HORIZONS

"We were all taken so seriously in an unquestioning way. Even the space which we were given to have those meetings: in the City Hall in Waterford, where I had never been before. It was a very luxurious, stately room with large paintings on the walls, and it felt very much like we were being treated very well."

"I work in PR now; I work in media. It definitely got the ball rolling in terms of applying my interests, like more of a workplace setting, project management style, and working with other people. All of that is a huge benefit too."

"I met my still best friend and life long companion through the group, whom I am still incredibly close with five years on. It also allowed me to see into the world of art curation and how much work goes into it."

The idea that occurred most frequently in the interviews was **"broadening horizons."** The other outcomes can be all understood as aspects of this. Broadening horizons includes the idea of new and deepened interests, potential careers and possibilities, but it also includes

meeting new people from different places with new experiences and ideas but the same interests; it includes going to places they've never been before (a city, a gallery, a landmark); and it includes discovering new capabilities and even career paths through taking responsibility for delivery.

ACCESS

"A lot of accessibility to arts events!"

"It gave me a sense that some of the things that I have done since then are more participatory and more multidisciplinary in relation to education. It was the first time I was in a facilitated conversation-based place. Some parts of that stayed with me like respecting others' decisions. Young Curators gave me a sense of more familiarity in the way of talking to an artist from other art forms".

This was the second most cited outcome. This can be understood as access to new people, ideas, experiences, skills and arts organisations. The experience of being taken seriously by adult arts professionals, being listened to, being seen, these are all aspects of access.

FINDING OUR PLACE

"Empowering experience that gives you a sense of entitlement but a healthy kind"

"A rare opportunity of leaning on our autonomy which was rare to get that time for fifth year or fourth year students".

"There was a chance to express your instinct and opinion about a piece of art that was then taken so seriously without a question put into this exhibition and given a place and time in a space. That's a sort of validation of your opinion".

The experience of bonding with **new people with similar interests**, of making new friendships, and discovering a sense of belonging and validation in this new environment was the third most frequently cited outcome.

The practice of making this new social group responsible for the delivery of the project (albeit supported by an experienced facilitator and other experts) leads to feelings of **autonomy, empowerment and personal growth**.

"A youth-led project. Catherine gave us over to the decision-making. It definitely wasn't a directed experience. The context made it very clear what we were doing and a way of doing it was provided. But, in my experience, it was all very facilitated. We all had ownership of the title, of the poster, of all the pieces in there".

It is interesting to note that although new skills are undoubtedly acquired in the course of these projects, their acquisition is not the most significant outcome from the perspective of the participants. With these outcomes in mind we can construct our own indicators for evaluation based on the specifics of our particular projects.

CHALLENGES FOR PARTICIPANTS

The challenges identified by the participants tend to be personal and social in nature, and many can be addressed and managed effectively by an experienced facilitator and a working knowledge of the MOE framework. The challenges identified can be categorised as either personal, process or practical.

PERSONAL

"A lot of grown-up responsibilities. It may be kind of an adulty at the start".

"...the usual things like getting used to other people".

"Going into some spaces like arts settings where you are surrounded by a lot of people who have been here for years and have been doing it for a very long time"

The personal challenges cited by the respondents cluster around that creative feeling of being an imposter, or a stranger in a strange land. This is an inevitable part of the design of these programmes. The young person is attracted by an opportunity, but the opportunity asks them to rethink, or reimagine themselves. They may have to get used to being taken seriously, realise that there are other people like them, and so on. An experienced facilitator understands these feelings and the process that has to be gone through for the participants to "step into their capabilities".

PROCESS

"A lack of knowledge about what we were getting into"

"The level of conversation and dialogue was a barrier ...it was a group of twelve of us that sat around a long table in a very nice office and talked about these things".

"It was hard to envision what this might look like at the end. If we had seen that...it might have been much more exciting".

Working with groups of any age is a skill, working with groups of young people brings an extra set of requirements. The importance of a skilled facilitator cannot be overstated. How we set out the project, how we bring the group together, how we empower without creating anxiety, how we put the scaffolding in place without making it visible are all a part of the process.

PRACTICAL

" there was a lot of "I won't be around here for the next two months."

"Accessing the programme if you have a part-time job is quite difficult"

"Getting into town on the evenings as the meetings tended to be very late when there was no public transport available"

Young people have complex lives. They have to work their free time around their families, their school work, family holidays, part-time jobs, where they live and so on. In many cases, they are not in control of their schedules. These all constitute barriers to access and it is important to design the programme to eliminate or mitigate these barriers.

OUTCOMES FOR ORGANISATIONS

VISIBILITY

"It gives us visibility as an institution. How many festivals are run by young people for young people?"

"Inviting a group of young people. Viewing a selection of films and reviewing them. Then, they shared that review with a bigger audience through social media and the website, which attracted a good number of visitors."

"But young people amazed me because they gave the festival a face and attracted more young people, perhaps more than before".

Visibility was identified by interviewees as the key outcome for the organisation, which included galleries, theatres, festivals and arts centres. Visibility in the community and local media, visibility with young people and their families, and visibility with funders. Projects of this nature tend to look innovative, exciting, and media friendly. While this is a positive, it needs to be managed with some care, and we need to be conscious of the ethical considerations around this kind of visibility. This visibility can be a huge advantage in a competitive environment, allowing the organisation to reposition itself in a marketing sense and build audiences sustainably for now and into the future.

It is interesting that although visibility was mentioned most frequently, interviewees spoke with more passion about other transformative organisational and individual outcomes.

ORGANISATIONAL CLARITY OF PURPOSE

"The gallery staff met with the curators and got the ideas from first-hand experience, which really helped. Cross-departmental... It reduced the fear factor"

"I don't actually necessarily see it as a benefit for the institution, but it is a great benefit for Waterford because you are creating tomorrow's leaders. We push this idea of leadership."

"I think it was great to be, I suppose, a part of the next generation of artists from a very young age. We had members of Red Bird, who are writers and artists now and doing amazingly. It is fantastic for Galway Arts Centre to know that they played a small part of that. From an art point of view, to be able to engage with young people and show them what we do as well, helping the next group of artists, curators, or film-makers, just to be a little part of that, is amazing for us"

Seeing the transformation this work has on young people can have a significant positive impact on the team, in terms of greater clarity on the value of their work and motivation.

These projects can underline and develop a feeling of relevance within the organisation, as people feel that they are part of "the next generation".

The organisation has much to learn from the participants, and these projects give the team an opportunity for reflection and self-evaluation.

IMPROVED ACCESSIBILITY

"There was a demonstrable genuine interest in the collection on their part and a pride in what they achieved".

"One of the benefits is giving a space to young people where their voice is heard".

Some spoke to the advisory role young people can play in an organisation. The measures taken to make arts organisations more accessible for them often have the impact of making it more accessible for other audiences.

It's important to remember that young people are not a unique constituency, nor are they inherently problematic. They are people and if we don't work with people from a young age then they will not engage with us when they are older. We should also remember that the arts are a lifelong passion and a lifelong pursuit.

One of the great benefits - and one of the responsibilities - of these programmes is the lifelong relationships that can develop, relationships of positive engagement and perception of accessibility and sense of ownership.

"A whole different way of understanding modern art. I think if I hadn' had that experience, I probably would have lost one perspective in relation to modern art that would have been inaccessible and not understandable...a life-long relationship with IMMA".

CHALLENGES FOR INSTITUTIONS

The challenges for institutions focused on the logistics of the project. The practicalities of child protection, of finding a skilled facilitator, of finding the time and resources, of developing a working method for specific groups.

REQUIREMENTS FOR WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

"Child protection and welfare is particularly important where you have a group with some under 18 and some over 18"

Putting the basic requirements is vital but time consuming. If you are going to initiate a programme with young people, making sure that your organisation has the right policies in place, that staff have been trained in safeguarding young people, that all relevant members of the programme have been Garda Vetted etc is crucial.

RESOURCES

"Funding, deadlines, patience"

"The practical challenge for me is that I have a lot on my plate. I would like it if there were more facilitators, like a second person with me. So capacity is a big one."

"The spaces were in higher demand...but after seeing the work, the scale of the work, and the quality, they felt that it needed those exhibition spaces".

"Lack of resources is a challenge such as physical spaces sometimes, finding facilitators, online access and funding so far in advance".

"The main challenge, administratively, was staff. There was a lack of youth art staff or people involved in youth arts activities, generally, to work beyond office hours".

Ask yourself, have you the people, the place, and the time to make this programme work, and have you the funding in place, or can you secure the funding.

ACCESS AND ENGAGEMENT

"Access was a key challenge for the institution".

"Recruitment is a little bit of a problem, getting the people in".

"Engagement - so there are no barriers including financial"

"When you are a poet, etc., it is private, but when you announce it, it is more like "I am here so bully me." That is the fear. It is a small risk, but still it is".

If you are developing a programme for young people for the first time, remember that barriers to access can be both visible and invisible, practical and psychological. Do you have any way of communicating with potential participants? How do young people view your organisation - assuming they've ever heard of it? Do you have the resources to take everybody? If not, how will you select people? How is artistic practice perceived in your area? Can that be changed? Take time to think about who you will engage with, what channels you need to use and relationships you need to build, and how you need to position the programme. Then take time to think about the practical and psychological barriers participants may experience, and what you can do to remove them.

PRACTICE

"Finding facilitators who understand young people and put them at the centre"

"The needs of specific groups because all groups are different"

"Must be responsive so the agenda has to be loose"

"Finding the right fit in terms of engagement format...Things like anonymity were necessary for the participating young people".

"An extra resource that is necessary is an experienced mentor".

"One of the biggest challenges is the age range".

"The key challenge was how to show young people's artworks"

Working with young people in a creative and collaborative fashion is a singular and highly skilled practice. The modes of work and engagement can pose challenges to organisations with no experience, or with a traditionally "adult" audience focus. The age range of young people can span multiple levels of maturity and understanding and at the same time age is no guarantee of either. The single most important resource you will need is the skilled and experienced lead facilitator. That person needs to be at the heart of both the design and the delivery of the programme.

THE STARTING POINT

"What really makes Youth Theatre Ireland"s Young Critics programme work is the balance between youth work and youth theatre practice, and academic rigor...Having a skilled youth arts/youth theatre professional AND a professional Theatre Critic/ Academic means that both professionals are working in concert to provide the most appropriate experience for the group" -

- Alan King, Youth Theatre Ireland

The importance of having a quality youth facilitator was mentioned 15 times, the single biggest occurrence throughout the interviews. Youth arts facilitation is a highly specialised practice. What we are embarking on with a Young Curator/Critic programme is a piece of work that is youth focused and youth led. It is important that this is not simply an opportunity for young people to do something new. We need to ensure that the right supports are in place to support them on their journey, and the key support is an experienced facilitator.

It's also important that the project provides "real world" opportunities. This can be an actual curated exhibition open to the public, to a public panel discussion at a festival or event, through to networking opportunities to meet with working arts professionals.

SOURCES OF IDEAS

"The Apollo Project came about from some research that was done in the Education Department of the Gallery. Research was done in 2016/17 with a gap analysis of what audiences we weren't reaching and working with at all. Young people, 16–25, were identified as a big gap."

- Catherine O"Donnell, The Apollo Project

WHERE DO I START?

The simplest answer is that this is about the participants so it's okay to borrow ideas from other places, or simply replicate what already exists somewhere else. Conducting some research into what's happening and what's working is a good starting point which is why we make these findings and case studies available to support other organisations with a toolkit. The majority of the case studies emerged from the people and resources already in place in an organisation, and have been tried and tested successfully with young people.

Look around at what resources you have, and more importantly who you have in terms of their skills, interests and networks and ask, what can we do with these resources? Look at your existing collaborations and partnerships and see if there are opportunities there. For example, does your arts centre have a youth arts group (theatre, visual arts, film, literature etc) already? Do you have an existing relationship with educational institutions? With cultural institutions? With the local ETB? Youth Services etc. Is there an appetite and can those relationships be leveraged. Of course there are personal networks, for example, is there a staff member or a board member connected with potential partners?

DESIGNING YOUR YOUNG CURATORS AND/OR CRITICS PROGRAMME

"This year we are taking a new direction simply because of the numbers...We wanted young people who were interested in organising a festival but it was not going to be just literature; it was going to be music, film, comedy, and even dance....The other idea was, "While we are organising the festival, why don't we create a piece of art as a committee?" The musicians will collaborate; some of them are into rock music and some rap, and they are going to see if they can create a piece that blends two artforms".

- Ollie Bresin, Director, Waterford Youth Arts

Ultimately the design of the project will be dependent on your resources and constraints and the needs and interests of young people. In designing it, remember that it is the quality of the experience for the young people that determines success and that their sense of quality is driven in a large part by the experience of being with a diverse group of people with similar interests. The residential approach worked well for some of the projects - specifically Youth Theatre Ireland"s Young Critics programme but bear in mind this brings with it a range of additional costs, staffing requirements and child protection considerations. The idea of residence can be a part of the project (not the whole duration of the project) and part of the rationale is to extend participation beyond the local, create opportunities for bonding, and allow young people to experience places beyond their reach.

While the project design should be youth focused and youth led, acknowledging their taste and interests, remember that people can't curate what they don't know. In keeping with the MOE framework set out earlier, it is important to bring in experts to provide information and guidance, to open possibilities and point toward sources. Some of these people may be skilled and experienced in working with young people and some may not. So again, ensure that a good facilitator is at the heart of the project design.

Be conscious of age, gender and other factors such as geographic isolation. For example, the range of experience, knowledge, self awareness etc. across the span of youth (10 - 24) is vast. Age alone is not the only determinant but it can be a useful starting point to grouping participants so long as it is not the only determinant. One project also reported that it lost boys when trying to deliver the project online. There are other projects that did not report this phenomenon, but what it points to is that engagement is a complex issue, again reinforcing the need for a skilled and experienced youth arts facilitator. In general, we need to accept that there is no single way of doing this, no single activity template. The shape of the project will emerge as the young people get to work.

It is important to keep in mind what we are designing. For example, we are not designing a curation project or a critics project. We are designing a project that allows young people to develop a stronger sense of themselves, their interests and their capabilities by working with other young people of similar interests within an arts context. Curation and critiquing are the activities that carry the young people on that journey. The project design needs to work backward from the intended outcomes, and needs to serve and support the participants. All of this can be iterative of course. The longer running projects point out that each year's cohort will inform the following year's design. Building a robust evaluation process into the project allows for ongoing improvement and sustainability that is youth-led.

RECRUITING THE PARTICIPANTS

"Open Calls for the programme start when the schools go back in September. We send out the posters, emails and radio. Around the second week of October, the group starts to form. Two to three weeks before, we start pushing it to the schools. If the teachers pick up, you have an audience...After we recruit the group, they design a poster and we use it for next year's recruitment. They need to be bright and colourful to attract attention with buzzwords. We ask the group about the best location to hang the posters and the best social media platforms to use".

- Sandra Kelly, Visual Arts and Outreach Manager, Garter Lane Arts Centre, Waterford

The first thing to bear in mind is that potential participants are predisposed and will follow their interests. In other words, these projects are not for everybody, and that means that the engagement strategy needs to be targeted and focused. For an organisation with an existing youth remit (e.g. Youth Theatre Ireland) recruitment is carried out through the existing membership. For organisations without an existing youth membership then recruitment will depend on partnerships, usually with other (youth) arts providers in the area (e.g youth theatres, youth film etc.), with youth services (e.g. via the EBT Youth Officer), or through schools.

If you are going to advertise, then think about the channels that young people respond to, ask young people what channels are most impactful in their area and make it easy for them to keep their interest private. As one respondent pointed out, it can be genuinely challenging for some young people in some settings to publicly admit to an artistic interest, so don't make a presentation to a class group and then ask people to raise their hands if they're interested! An application process is useful as a filtering tool or demonstration of commitment from the young person, but keep it simple: a short essay on why they want to take part for example or a sample of a review, or a sample of work. Be clear about the selection criteria. For some projects it might be about finding the most committed and for other projects it might be about ensuring equity of opportunity. In drawing up the selection criteria, remember that this is first and foremost about developing capabilities by presenting opportunities to young people.

Remember that the success of the project depends in part on the interpersonal dynamic within the group. This is a common aspect of all groups and sometimes the group fails to "gel" or to work effectively together. That's okay. It's a difficult balance between access, opportunity and compatibility, and although it mostly works out well, be conscious of the fact that the mix needs to be right, and that it's not always in your control. Keep in mind that you may wish to group the respondents depending on the age range.

LOGISTICS

PREPARATION

"We try to create a space where young people guide us (Youth-led project). We try to give them the ownership. I am just a form of protection. They run it themselves. After the group forms, a list is given to the group and ask people what they want to do: We suggest facilitators, trips and visiting exhibitions. Then I send them to research and chat among themselves about what they are hoping to achieve. We only try to path them away from the really serious admin but we also want them to be aware of the financial value."

- Sandra Kelly, Visual Arts and Outreach Manager, Garter Lane Arts Centre, Waterford

It was evident from the case studies that projects can take up to twelve months to develop, design and fund. If you are new to working with young people, then make time to get the basics right. Understand child protection and garda vetting requirements and processes, familiarise yourself with Hub na nOg and the participation framework, and consult with an experienced youth arts facilitator at an early stage to ensure that you have covered the basics and are clear about the practicalities of working with young people.

SCHEDULING

"Meeting on a fortnightly basis creates inconsistency. If you have a meeting this week and a young person can't attend, they are missing two weeks. We would prefer a weekly basis but resources are not realistic for that."

- Sandra Kelly, Visual Arts and Outreach Manager, Garter Lane Arts Centre, Waterford

Remember, above all, that your project is optional in the world of the young person, so think about their time constraints and about the timeline and the schedule very carefully. Is your project overlapping or conflicting with other schedules (e.g. other extra curricular activities). Increasingly young people have less free time in the senior cycle of their education, after the transition year. Youth Arts Organisations are reporting losing members once the leaving cert cycle kicks in. If you are developing a project for this age group, try to design it so that it fits into what available downtimes they may have. This was the second most frequently mentioned piece of advice from the interviews.

From the young person's perspective, continuous and consistent engagement is important. Meeting weekly is better than fortnightly because if I miss one week I can catch up the following week, but if I miss a fortnightly meeting then a month goes by and engagement is weakened. Think about the optimum duration for your project. There is no simple answer to this; it needs to be long enough to achieve what it wants to achieve, but short enough to create the sense of urgency and excitement. The YTI programme has a six month duration, however the participants meet for a residential week at the start, at the midpoint, and at the end of that period. Engagement for the rest of the period is at a distance and relatively informal. The Waterford Young Arts Critics continues fortnightly for the duration of the school year. The Cork Young Curators and Critics Programme runs once or twice weekly for a 3 month intensive. Your resources and what your young people want to achieve will determine the duration.

DELIVERY - IN PERSON/ ONLINE: As the research period included the period of Covid-19 lockdowns, many of the case studies took place in part or in whole, for a time or persistently, online. If you're planning a hybrid project or a fully online project, remember that not everybody has the technology or internet access available to them or, if they do, they may be living within a household where they dont have exclusive use of a device. You may need to provide support in this area, and that may be as simple as providing a dongle, or as costly as making laptops or tablets available. The point here is "don't assume"

RESOURCING

"...Child protection and welfare, facilitators who understand young people and put them at the centre, can you meet the needs of a specific groups (because all groups are different), making sure there are no barriers to participation including financial..." Alan King , Youth Theatre Ireland

"The spaces were in higher demand. Typically, she used more commercial spaces to book them for a number of days to facilitate exhibitions, but after seeing the work, the scale of the work, and the quality, they felt that it needed those exhibition spaces".

- Helen O'Donoghue, IMMA

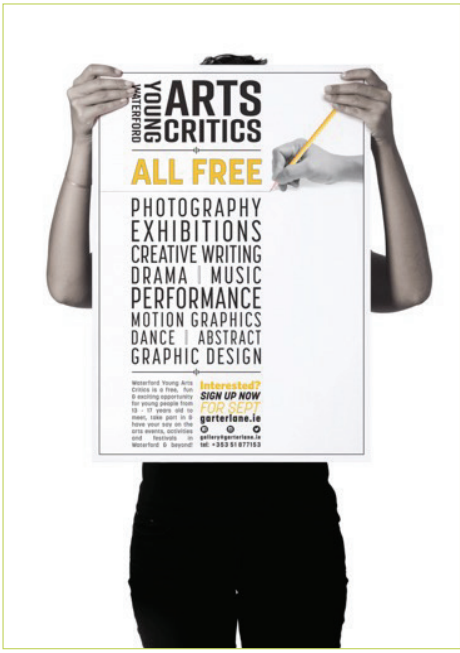
Ask yourself, do you have the resources and the capacity to deliver the project? Can you and your team make the time to work with the young people? Do you have space and a realistic budget for the delivery of the project? Regardless of how simple the project idea may seem it will come with costs, and you will have to find a way of funding it. If you can do that from a general programming budget then that's great, but if not then allow time at the start to make a realistic budget, identify potential funding sources, and build the application and decision making processes into the timeline. See our 'Funding' section at the conclusion of this report for some ideas on resourcing for your project.

CASE STUDIES

1. WATERFORD YOUNG ARTS CRITICS - GARTER LANE ARTS CENTRE, WATERFORD

"We try to create a space where young people guide us. We try to give them the ownership. I am just a form of protection. They run it themselves. After the group forms, a list is given to the group and ask people what they want to do: We suggest facilitators, trips and visiting exhibitions. Then I send them to research and chat among themselves about what they are hoping to achieve. We only try to path them away from the really serious admin but we also want them to be aware of the financial value".

- Sandra Kelly, Visual Arts and Education Manager, Garter Lane Arts Centre, Waterford



The Waterford Young Arts Critics programme was established in 2013 by Garter Lane Arts Centre, Waterford City, although youth-led theatre programming dates back to the early days of the centre in the 1990s. Since 2013, through this programme, young people have led successful arts projects, exhibitions, performances and collaborations, including curating exhibitions of the IMMA Collection, National Self Portrait Collection of Ireland, the Waterford Municipal Collection and the Arts Council Collection, presented in Garter Lane Arts Centre.

The project is facilitated by Sandra Kelly, the Visual Arts and Education Manager at Garter Lane Arts Centre. The programme is open to 13-17 year olds, with and is free to participants, though Sandra Kelly notes that the groups tend to have more 15-17 year olds who are able to "come on a more regular basis because they have more autonomy on their schedule". It describes itself as an exciting opportunity for young people to take part in and run youth arts activities, events and exhibition in Waterford. The current programme starts in mid autumn, following the school calendar year and holds an information evening for young people as part of its recruitment process, which is led by previous and continuing participants: "We ask the group about the best location to hang the posters and the best social media platforms to share".

Sandra Kelly notes that in her experience, it is ideal to keep the group to a smaller size and to meet on a regular, even weekly basis, to offer young people a consistent space to allow their individual voices to be heard but she acknowledges that resourcing of this can be challenging. She states that for the individual young person, having their voices heard within this context can be transformative and facilitates confidence building, peer to peer learning and community building within a non competitive environment.

2. WATERFORD YOUTH ARTS LIT FESTIVAL

"I do exercises around them getting to know each other, finding out who they are and what they are passionate about. Then, I give them the formats of the other festivals and let them decide what they want to do. They see the previous years' programmes of the Lit Festival but I am completely open about what they want to do".

- Ollie Breslin, Director of Waterford Youth Arts

The Lit Young Writers Festival is an annual festival by young people for young people who are interested in reading and writing, established in Waterford City in 2017. It was created by Waterford Youth Arts' 14-19 year old creative writing group who felt there was no event in Waterford (and Ireland at large) that encouraged people of their own age to actively engage with literature, reading, creative writing, spoken word and other forms of literature. Inspired by New York-based creative writing programmes aimed at marginalised youths and events run by Children's Books Ireland, Waterford Youth Arts supported the young people to secure an Arts Council Youth Ensemble Scheme fund to establish their own festival.

Young people are supported to lead their own festival to benefit other young people in the community. They are facilitated by Director Ollie Breslin and key coordinators, with invited guest tutors also. The youth are guided with a framework whereby they researched formats of other festivals but allowed themselves the freedom and openness to develop new ideas. They recruit new people, assessing applications themselves and then manage all aspects of the festival production, including tech, marketing, budget and design. The festival has recently expanded the understanding of literature to include writing, music, film, comedy and dance fusions and collaborative events, to encourage a wider cohort of young people to attend and in response to the changing interests of the committee itself.

Ollie Breslin noted significant individual benefits arising from participation including a sense of being supported within a group and learning environment which he describes as patient and accepting:

"The programme facilitates young people to make their own mistakes but with a support function behind them. Young people learn to overcome challenges such as marketing and opening their projects to the public."

While he acknowledged the institutional benefit of greater visibility for Waterford Youth Arts, the key outcome of the programme, he stated, was the promotion of leadership skills in young people in the community:

"I don't actually necessarily see it as a benefit for the institution, but it is a great benefit for Waterford because you are creating tomorrow's leaders."

Capacity within the organisation to facilitate the young people in such an demanding and intensive process as festival development was a key challenge noted by Ollie Breslin. Recruitment and retention, he felt, was increasingly challenging in Waterford where young people may move away as they leave secondary school.

3. FIRST CUT YOUTH FILM FESTIVAL YOUTH ADVISORY COUNCIL

"The first one came about organically. It came from the workshop programme, and actually, workshops came about organically as well. Young people wanted a filmmaking workshop. Then we started to make films very quickly—in three years. Then, we talked about showing the films".

- Mary McGrath, Director of First Cut Youth Film Festival

First Cut! Youth Film Festival in Co. Cork, provides young filmmakers between the ages of 12 and 24 with an annual platform for screening their short films. It is committed to fostering the creative development of young filmmakers from every background and provides a broad range of programming from animation workshops and screenings for primary school students right up to events aimed at emerging filmmakers entering the film industry in young adulthood. First Cut! is youth centred, placing great emphasis on bringing young filmmakers together. The festival creates a space where young filmmakers can share their passion for making films with their peers. Whether working individually or as part of a school or youth group, panel discussions with participating filmmakers allow young audiences to take inspiration from the experiences of their contemporaries.

Its youth-centred approach is also reflected in the First Cut! Youth Advisory Council, a rotating group of young people who have acted as festival advisors for each edition. The Festival is a 'sister project' of the Cork Young Filmmakers which delivers filmmaking workshops to young people across Cork. By continuing this connection, Cork Young Filmmakers offers First Cut's Youth Advisory Panel an ongoing recruitment source by identifying young people with a significant interest in film. As Director Mary McGrath explains, this approach to recruitment "works really well, we have experienced and new people." This approach to recruitment is particularly important in a rural context in which geographic isolation and lack of access to digital devices are significant barriers to accessing film.

The group introduces a youth perspective to First Cut's development and planning and in return get to meet like-minded peers interested in filmmaking. The Youth Advisory Council (YAC) also takes part in specially programmed workshops, as well as taking on significant leadership roles during the festival itself, including selecting films, writing reviews on the website, marketing and PR. Most prominently, they select the annual First Cut! Youth Council Award, for which they choose a favourite film from the festival programme.

4. CORK YOUNG CURATORS & CRITICS PROGRAMME

"The participants told us that the opportunity the programme gave them to explore creative career paths they may not otherwise have considered, by meeting directly with local arts professionals and learning about their pathways to professional practice was the most valuable aspect of it ."

- Aoibhie McCarthy, Artistic Director of Sample-Studios

The Cork Young Curators & Critics Programme was established by Sample-Studios in 2021 and offers young people (16-25 years) the opportunity to learn about different creative career paths, particularly that of the curator and critic, actively through a series of workshops and self-directed arts experiences. This programme is delivered by Sample-Studios and Cork Film Centre and is supported by The Arts Council of Ireland Young People, Children and Education Project Award.

This programme facilitates young people in working directly with local arts professionals in experiential workshops, to learn about creative career paths. The weekly programme runs over three months and includes workshops in illustration, digital art, filmmaking, drawing, art criticism, curatorship, creative writing as selected by the young people and catering to the groups collective and individual interests. They go on trips to local arts venues, festivals, exhibitions and events, including talks with exhibiting artists and practitioners. The programme content is supported by partnerships with other arts organisations including Triskel Arts Centre, Cork Printmakers, Crawford Art Gallery, First Cut Youth Film Festival and Cork World Book Festival. As part of the annual programme, The Cork Young Curators and Critics travel to Waterford to meet with the Waterford Young Arts Critics for a day of activities in Garter Lane Arts Centre and the Waterford Gallery of Art, giving them to meet other like minded young people outside of their County. The participants are encouraged to reflect on their journey throughout by keeping journals and contributing to filmed interviews about their experience.

Having commenced during the Covid pandemic when restrictions limiting gathering amongst different households were in place, recruitment was a key challenge noted by coordinators which was overcome by partnering with a local further education institution to identify potential participants for the pilot programme in 2021. The other challenge was the requirements of the funding mechanisms for the content of the programme to be confirmed 1-2 years in advance, including facilitators and outcomes, which is at odds with the flexibility required for truly youth-led programming to take place, where the young people themselves can devise the content, pathways and focus of the programme. The key benefits of the programme, as identified by the participants, was the opportunity to learn about different creative career paths and meet like-minded people, while also building confidence and experience for their CVs.

5. YOUTH THEATRE IRELAND YOUNG CRITICS PROGRAMME

"What really makes Youth Theatre Ireland's Young Critics programme work is the balance between youth work and youth theatre practice, and academic rigour. Having a skilled youth arts/ youth theatre professional AND a professional Theatre Critic/ Academic means that both professionals are working in concert to provide the most appropriate experience for the group. Each brings a different sensibility to the work. We work within a fixed structure but with plenty of room to respond to the needs of each particular young person."

- Alan King, Deputy Director, Youth Theatre Ireland

The Young Critics programme started in 2003 and is one of Youth Theatre Ireland's longest-running programmes. It was established to "expose young people to the aesthetics of theatre, so that they could see and talk about things they would never get a chance to do. It's an access and appreciation programme." The participants are recruited through YTI's extensive membership of youth theatres. Participation in the programme is free: all costs are covered by Youth Theatre Ireland including theatre tickets, accommodation, travel and meals. It is open to youth theatre members aged 16 - 20 years. Applicants are asked to submit a short written application which includes a sample of critical writing, a short piece about themselves and why they want to take part. The selection process is nuanced and focused on access and opportunity.

The original (pre-pandemic) format of the programme was two residential weekends in Dublin, the first in April and the second in October to coincide with the Dublin Theatre Festival. In its current form, the project still runs over a six month period, during which, the Young Critics participate in online workshops, visit Cork and Dublin for two meetups, see theatre performances, make new friends and learn the art of theatre criticism under the mentorship of international theatre critic and academic, Dr. Karen Fricker and Youth Theatre Ireland's facilitators. In between the workshop sessions, the Young Critics have the opportunity to see other productions and make critical responses through a format of their choice, including written blogs, podcasts, memes and vlogs. The programme culminates with The Young Critics Panel in October in the Dublin Theatre Festival. This is a public discussion shared by the facilitators and participants, for an audience of industry professionals, general public, family and friends. Any of the participants who want to speak about the shows they have seen will have the opportunity to speak on the panel and to

engage in a discussion with other participants and the audience. The facilitators engage with the participants after the panel and the programme concludes in December. The feedback the young people share informs the design of future programming.

The young people benefit from access to quality theatre experiences, the opportunity to connect with and meet like-minded people, to feel valued and listened to, to step outside their comfort zones, to explore career paths and develop new skills such as public speaking. A recent participant evaluation summarised the benefit they experienced as having "changed the boundaries of their world". Facilitators noted the need for flexibility to young people's individual needs to achieve these outcomes. They also noted the need to actively remove barriers such as fees, ensure the material they engage with is age appropriate and that the facilitators are experienced in youth-centred practice.

"We work within a fixed structure but with plenty of room to respond to the needs of each particular young person"

- Alan King, Youth Theatre Ireland

6. BACKSTAGE THEATRE YOUNG CURATORS, LONGFORD AND THE LASTA PROGRAMME

"This project represents a new innovative approach to programming that has ambition to grow in the future and contributes to the development of future arts programmers and producers".

- Mona Considine, Artistic Director, Backstage Theatre, Longford

In 2019, as part of the Backstage Theatre's 25th Anniversary celebrations and with the support of Creative Ireland, a team of Young Curators were recruited to work under the mentorship of Artist in Residence at Backstage, Maisie Lee, to curate an arts festival for youth audiences in 2020. Participants were recruited largely from the youth theatre members, past and present, including those who had gone on to study theatre at third level or continued to be engaged in theatre. In response to Covid-19 restrictions, the team adapted their plans and delivered a very successful online festival in June 2020.

In 2021, Backstage approached their colleagues on the NASC venue network with a proposal to deliver the programme across all eight network venues, Backstage Theatre (Longford), Dunamaise Arts Centre (Portlaoise), glór (Ennis), An Grianán (Letterkenny), The Lime Tree Theatre (Limerick), Pavilion Theatre (Dun Laoghaire), Siamsa Tíre (Tralee) and Town Hall Theatre (Galway). The network successfully secured Brightening Air funding and recruited, via an open call, 23 young curators across the network to deliver 'Lasta', a festival of work programmed by young people for young people, under the guidance of theatre artists and lead facilitators Maisie Lee and Fionn Foley.

The Arts Council's Covid-responsive Brightening Air | Coiscéim Coiligh funding provided for outdoor events and activities in response to Covid-19 restrictions on indoor gatherings. This was awarded in March and the programme had to be active by June so the tight timeline necessitated by the nature of the funding was challenging and made it more difficult to facilitate young people within a non pressurised context. The young people were supported by the arts professionals to learn about marketing, technical/ production

considerations and financial negotiations, but this learning had to be done within this condensed time frame, necessitated by the funding. Communication and varying levels of engagement were challenges which meant facilitators needed to provide a lot of guidance and peer-to-peer mentorship.

The aim of the Lasta programme was to "...enable the Curators to develop an exciting programme of 4-8 live events in each venue...whilst providing the Curators with mentoring, skill development and exposure to the wider arts industry in Ireland". During Covid-19 restrictions, they particularly benefited from the sense of connectedness the programme gave them and sense of momentum, the "energy in the room" which was evident from the outset. The venues benefited from gaining new insights into the needs and interests of youth audiences and a new understanding of young people, particularly their resilience in the face of Covid-19 restrictions, during which time they supported the organisations to navigate the territory of online programming, with their skills, knowledge and capacity as digital natives.

This nationwide version of the Young Curators project delivered for the first time, a national arts programme curated entirely by young people. Such was the success of the programme that the network committed to delivering the programme across all eight venues once again in 2021, this time embedding the young curators input into the venue's overall programme. The young people worked collaboratively to deliver an ambitious programme of work for young people, featuring multiple disciplines, to be delivered across the partner venues and were afforded the opportunity to learn new skills and explore career paths by participating in joint sessions, panel discussions, visits to arts events such as Galway International Arts Festival and other collaborative activities. This initiative has provided learning opportunities for young people interested in working in the sector, work opportunities for artists and a new and more insightful approach to programming for young people in venues.

7. RED BIRD YOUTH COLLECTIVE, GALWAY ARTS CENTRE, GALWAY

"I think they love being able to make their own decisions because they are at the age where they are not yet adults, still being told what to do by their parents, teachers, and everybody else. It is just really good for their confidence. It is also very good practice for life because they have to deal with the budget, organise things, figure things out."

- Karen Arnold, Administrator, Red Bird Youth Collective

Red Bird Youth Collective was established in 2010 by Galway Arts Centre for young people (aged 15 - 24) living in Galway City & County.

The Collective delivers large-scale, youth-led projects in collaboration with professional artists. Red Bird defines itself as a group of likeminded young people from different backgrounds who come together to collaborate on engaging and challenging art projects.

In terms of recruitment, social media and word of mouth were noted as the most impactful methods but an Open Day is planned for future iterations. The requirements to join Red

Bird are an interest or passion for art, though no formal background or training is necessary. The group meets weekly for projects that culminate in a public presentation with Galway Arts Centre. The other requirements for being a part of Red Bird is to commit fully to attendance of workshops, the schedule is provided in advance. The participants take ownership of projects and are involved in decision making from idea stage to completion of a project. The Collective has collaborated with professional artists on visual art, film, architecture and performance projects. They also engage with other aspects of the arts such as administration, curation, marketing and event organisation, as well as securing funding from The Arts Council Young Ensemble Scheme and Galway City Council.

The most recent project output from the Collective was a film project, developed with Galway-based artist Louise Manifold. The young people wanted to record contemporary Galway through film, inspired by a 1950s Bórd Fáilte travelogue film, Glamour of Galway. The group met weekly for two hour sessions to plan the film, they did a scriptwriting class with Alan McMonagle, a Galway writer, to produce some ideas for the script and did filming days in Galway City and Connemara, hiring an actor and supported in the editing by Louise Manifold. When presenting their film, the young people did an audience Q&A, chaired by Louise.

Individual participants benefited from being empowered as decision makers in a youth-led process, from funding application to audience presentation. This was seen to develop their confidence, develop life skills such as budgetary and general organisational skills, as well as practical artistic skills such as scriptwriting and recording. While the availability of meeting space and participant recruitment were noted as practical challenges in this case, the overall benefit for the institution in facilitating this programme was the opportunity to be "part of the next generation of artists from a very young age." The inclusion of a day trip or residential component was noted as being particularly popular and impactful with participants: "The day we went out to Connemara, because we spent the whole day together, that was the day that we became a group. . . It was still quite early in the project; everybody was still trying to get to know each other, but everybody bonded."

8. YOUNG IRISH FILM MAKERS/DUBLIN INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL- YOUNG CRITICS PROGRAMME

"Dublin International Film Festival provides great visibility for the Young Critics programme and addresses a need across the Creative Sector. There is often minimal training in critical theory–and film criticism specifically–for young people in film and animation. This programme established a free online social network and creative platform for young people to explore, develop and demonstrate their capacities as savvy viewers, critics and emerging journalists. We always have to navigate the big studio and film industry approach with the more niche world of independent film culture. The Irish screen sectors have successfully embraced both– as evident in recent growth reports, with significant skills shortages in film and animation. The VM DIFF Young Critics programme supports the next generation to critically think, talk, write about and create all kinds of multimedia in response to both national and international film."

- Sorcha Hyland, Creator/Curator and coordinator of the Young Critics Programme at Young Irish Film Makers & Dublin International Film Festival (2019-2021)

The Dublin International Film Festival Young Film Critics is held in conjunction with the annual film festival in March. The initiative was established to create a free online social networking space for young people to engage with film theory, appreciation, and criticism.

There were 21 participants in the most recent iteration of the programme, with young film enthusiasts recruited largely from the National Youth Film and Animation School. The format of the programme involved the young people voting on five of ten films which they had to watch and then write reviews, create podcasts, vlogs and/or posted content for Virgin Media TV. They had a week to watch the film, and then they had three to four questions to consider in the discursive session, facilitated via Zoom. For example, in 2022 the Young Film Critics workshopped with Fionnuala Halligan, Screen International's Reviews Editor and Chief Film Critic and two award-winning film directors featured in the festival. Fionnuala offered professional editorial feedback on their written work. Young Critics got to interview and talk to the directors and later shared their insights in a short Q&A recording on Virgin Media TV.

Young people benefited from free access to international films and film professionals enabling them to develop their critical thinking skills, to identify potential career pathways, network and meet like-minded peers. While facilitation online was necessitated in part by Covid restrictions, it also enabled participants from across Ireland, and internationally, to engage at a time when many were experiencing significant geographic or pandemic-driven isolation. Conversely, some participants had more limited access to devices and strong internet connections. Not all participants were comfortable turning on their cameras and despite the efforts to be equitable, diverse and fully inclusive– the programme did not guarantee full accessibility for all young people online. Key challenges for the organisation included logistics and the availability of youth arts staffing in the evening, which was noted as a wider sectoral challenge. Young people require experienced facilitation outside of school/college time, in the evenings and weekends predominantly and recruitment and retention of facilitators for these times consistently can be challenging. The programme has proven to be a cost effective means of improving youth audience engagement and visibility for the film festival. It also supports sustainability in terms of the development of the next generation of film critics, journalists and screen literate audiences.

9. NATIONAL GALLERY OF IRELAND: APOLLO PROJECT

"The young curators brought a fresh perspective to the Gallery's collections, and staff learned as much from them as they learned from the Gallery."

- Catherine O'Donnell, Education Officer with responsibility for Teachers, Schools & Youth, National Gallery of Ireland

"It was an exciting platform to express ourselves, finding our voice and approach."

- Oisin Kenny, Apollo Fellow (Apollo Project Participant 2021/22)

The Apollo Project is a dedicated programme by young people, for young people (ages 16-25), and facilitated by the National Gallery of Ireland. It was developed arising from internal research carried out in 2016/7 which identified young people, 16-25 year olds, as a gap in the Gallery's audiences. Three year funding was secured from The Apollo Foundation to create an Apollo Fellowship role to support the development of a dedicated youth programme.

In 2020-21, the Gallery initiated the Apollo Project Young Curators programme. . A cohort of seven young people were recruited and facilitated by the Apollo Fellow. The young people took inspiration from the national collection and co-curated an exhibition to bring fresh relevance to the historic artworks of Russborough House. The purpose of the programme was to give ownership and voice to a new diverse, under-represented audience for the Gallery.

The young people were facilitated in curating from the collection by meeting with members of staff for masterclasses across various departments, learning about their different roles. There was strong cross departmental engagement with and support of the programme. They received a list of 30-40 works which they could discuss, research and select from, with their process being facilitated through fortnightly meetings over Zoom, necessitated by Covid-19 restrictions at the time. The exhibition entitled Boring Art?(16 October 2021 – 16 January 2022) responded to bold questions, such as "how can we reconcile the art of the past with the issues of today?" Ten paintings from the Gallery's Milltown Collection were brought together in the Sir Hugh Lane Room, re-energised by the young curators with a contemporary twist.

Participants identified a number of personal benefits arising from participation in the programme. They worked together to create a space to express themselves at the Gallery, explore social and cultural issues such as gender representation in classical artworks, understand their individual strengths within a dynamic group environment and receive mentorship from professional gallery staff. Participants were empowered by the responsibility and recognition that their ideas were valued within the Gallery context: "It was nice to feel our idea was worth supporting." For the staff facilitating the programme, the key challenge was aligning the slower pace of development within an institution with the expectations of young people for quicker outcomes. Overall, the programme benefited the institution by providing positive visibility arising from a successful audience led exhibition which was a "breath of fresh air".

10. IMMA(25)

"In terms of its initial approach, which was focused around an exhibition of their work, 15 young men were involved in the programme from start to finish. It took one year of planning and development. It was conducted over Zoom mostly,"

- Helen O' Donoughue, Senior Curator, Head of Engagement and Learning Programmes, IMMA

While not strictly envisioned as a "Young Curators" project, IMMA"s work with young people in Oberstown Children"s Detention Campus has many similarities.

Inspired by the European Horizon Citizen Curation programme, the relationship between the partners resulted from a board member with connections in both institutions. The approach initially came from Oberstown and Gaisce - The President"s Award - to have an exhibition for the young people as part of the Young Gaisce programme which monitors their progress.

An existing programme in IMMA, the Spice Programme, supports engagement with the collection so, while the initial request was for an exhibition of young people"s work in IMMA, they then engaged in aspects of this programme. Following a year of planning and development, 15 young men were involved and their engagement had to be conducted online via Zoom largely. Given that the young people could not come into IMMA and see the collection there, the process evolved whereby they made work within Oberstown"s studio facilities and then identified the work in the collection that they could respond to, all facilitated remotely.

The finished work was exhibited at IMMA"s Project Spaces at Kilmainham, Dublin, between Tuesday 26 April and Sunday 8 May 2022. The exhibition, called The Ride Away From The Storm after the title of one of the paintings, was a successful result of this partnership between Gaisce – The President"s Award, Oberstown, and IMMA. Overcoming the access challenges, the young people themselves were facilitated in attending their launch via a live stream. They were observed to demonstrate genuine interest in the collection and pride in what they had achieved. The artworks were made specifically for the exhibition, and the process fulfilled the Community Involvement challenge of the Gaisce Award. A potential future development of this programme is a lending scheme of the collection so the young people can engage with artworks directly.

THE POLICY CONTEXT

There are several possible definitions of "youth" and "youth arts" depending on where you look. There is also ongoing debate over whether youth arts is "youth work" or "art work" or should more properly exist in a formal or non-formal educational setting. This absence of definition means that policy is spread across many departments and agencies. The definitional problem of youth arts (are we talking about youth work or art work?) can be felt in a bias toward arts in formal education contexts. The Arts in Education Charter published in 2013 acknowledges the breadth of arts provision across the formal and non-formal, but has very little mention of informal settings and no explicit mention of "youth work" in its priorities. A lot of great work has been achieved in the last decade in bringing the departments of Education and Culture together, but the relationship still has its challenges.

In understanding the policy context, it is useful to start with the legislation, and the Youth Work Act (2001) defines youth work as:

> a planned programme of education designed for the purpose of aiding and enhancing the personal and social development of young persons through their voluntary participation, and which is – a) complementary to their formal, academic or vocational education and training; and b) provided primarily by voluntary youth work organisations. (Government of Ireland, 2001)

Internationally, we can look to Article 31 of the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which frames cultural and artistic activities as a fundamental human right, and Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states that:

> everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.

The Arts Council strategy, Making Great Art Work (2016-2025), commits to "Expanding opportunities for engagement in youth arts", and to "plan and provide for children and young people". These commitments include investment in "artists, arts organisations and key programmes dedicated to developing high quality work in arts-in-education and youth arts" and "support[ing] the provision of excellent arts experiences for young people in the public domain". The Arts Council has a YPCE (Young People, Children, and Education) team and a number of focused funding tools.

Much contemporary policy thinking around young people and creativity in Ireland has found expression in the Creative Ireland Programme/Clár Éire Ildánach 2017-2022, which has been renewed to 2027. The Creative Ireland Strategy is built on five pillars, one of which is "Enabling the Creative Potential of Every Child". Under the Creative Youth Plan Creative Ireland is committed to promoting creativity in formal and non-formal settings through collaboration with a range of partners.

The arts are identified as a contributor to young people's wellbeing in Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2014). The policy states that the government commits to enabling greater access to arts and culture for all children and young people.

Youth arts is - within the current policy environment - a poorly defined practice, and that youth arts policy (and funding sources) are consequently fragmented and distributed across various sites. In such an environment, we have to familiarise ourselves with the goals and objectives of multiple agencies, and be able to frame our projects in such a way that we can meet those goals and objectives. It is time consuming, and unfortunately necessary in this context. The policy landscape is shifting towards a rights paradigm. Young people have the right to access the arts, the right to be heard and the right to participation. They have the right to "do" and the right to "be". A substantial part of the work is to protect those rights.

FUNDING

There is no single source of funding for young curator or young critic programmes. Who you are engaging with (the demographics of the participants), how many young people are involved (value for money), your intended outcomes (are they artistic, educational, or personal), your geographic location and the nature of your organisation will all have an impact on where the funding might come from.

Funding for arts in general tends to be artform specific with little emphasis on the development of the critical/curatorial theory essential to the development of a healthy arts ecosystem. Arguably the development of such a theoretical basis is the responsibility of the educational system, but it does not feature substantially in any curriculum currently. Arts specific funding is primarily concerned with the making of art as opposed to thinking about it or critiquing it, and this framework is both a challenge and an opportunity for Young Curator/Critic programmes.

The distribution of relevant policy across various sites (arts, youth work, education, health) asks us to think about our intended projects from multiple perspectives. If our work is overtly art focused and primarily concerned with the quality of the art and the artists engaged as mentors, then our most likely partners and funders are Local Authority Arts Offices, the Arts Council and possibly Creative Ireland. If our project is framed as an educational or a youth work initiative then our local ETB and the Department of Education may well be our best partners. However, if we frame the project as a health and well being initiative then we need to be connected with Healthy Ireland funding, the HSE, and with Creative Ireland.

Depending on the design of the programme funding could be available from a range of sources including your Local Authority Arts Office, the Arts Council, Creative Ireland, your local Education and Training Board (ETB), Leargas and the Erasmus+ programme, Healthy Ireland, Philanthropic Trusts, etc. Regardless of who you apply to for funding, you want to make a good application with a high probability of success. In order to do this, you need to be clear about what your project is doing and how it will work, you need to understand the requirements of the funders, and you need to align the two by demonstrating how the project meets the requirements of the funding agency. All funding agencies have strategies and policies with missions, values, objectives and goals. Your project needs to demonstrate that it can support the funder's mission, share its values and help it meet its goals and objectives. If you can't demonstrate that then it's difficult for the funder to justify support.

When you are designing the project for the first time, assume that funding will only be

available for a one off event (don't assume that you can find long term funding to run the project each year for five years). However, by identifying the many outcomes and values, and designing a method to capture those outcomes, you are putting yourself in a strong position with potential funders for future support.

UNDERSTAND YOUR PROJECT

Before you make a funding application, ask yourself what it is, who it's for, and what it will achieve. It's worthwhile thinking about what a successful project will look like, and thinking about the evaluation model. The National Youth Council of Ireland have an excellent evaluation toolkit, 'Capturing Magic', on their website. Thinking about evaluation at this point is important from a funding perspective, as you need to be clear about what success will look like, and what the indicators are that will measure that success. The evaluation framework allows you to match your project to potential funding tools.

Consider the following:

Who will be involved in this project? Is it targeted at specific groups (marginalised or hard to reach groups, traveller or migrant communities) or is it universal, and open to all interested young people? How many young people will be involved? What's the spread of ages? What are the outcomes? Will people know more about a specific art form or practice? Will they have developed a specific artform or practice? Will they have made new friends? Will their confidence and mental health be positively impacted? Will they report better wellbeing? How will you measure these things?

OUTCOMES

Ask yourself what broad outcomes you want and expect the project to achieve. This list will include the outcomes for the organisation, for the people working on the project, and for the participants.

For example, the outcomes for the participants, the young people, could include an increased awareness of and ability in critical/ curatorial theory or increased knowledge and appreciation of the specific art form. This may be what you want to achieve, however the outcomes could also include personal development such as reported increases in confidence, wellbeing, as well as new friendships and networks. You might also notice that your project is working with young people not usually involved in this kind of project and so additional outcomes under inclusion can be cited.

Outcomes and outputs are the metrics with which you can measure success. (We targeted twenty participants but thirty engaged; 80% reported improvements in self confidence; the exhibition brought a new audience of 200 people; etc). Be clear about both the output and the outcomes of the project. The outputs are the tangible things (there will be a public opening of a launch of an exhibition curated by young people; there will be a public discussion of films by a panel of young critics; we will engage with a new and specific audience, etc.). The outcomes tend to be personal - growth in confidence, reported improvements in well being, development of personal creativity or critical faculty, etc.

It's important to consider these in advance and to see if your outcomes and outputs match the strategic priorities and goals of the funders.

CAPACITY

Capacity, organisational and individual, was one of the most significant challenges identified by coordinators and facilitators. You need to be clear with yourself about issues of capacity - your own and the funders. There are many potential sources of funding for work with young people, depending on how you frame the project and which outcomes you prioritise, as we outlined in the 'Funding' section. However, some funding comes with particularly onerous application and reporting requirements, or which ask you to project outcomes which impinge on enabling youth-led outcomes which cannot be predicted. It is important to ask yourself if you have the capacity and the structure to deal with the application and reporting components.

On the other hand, some funders are already 'over-subscribed' so it is important to do a bit of research and establish things like the "churn" - how many new clients are being funded each year; the average size of the grants and the most common size of the grant. There is very little point in applying for €15,000 award if the most likely first time grant award is €5,000. The funder's capacity also refers to the constraints on their decision making. How much money do they have? What's the average size of their awards? What criteria are they working with? Consider the alignment of the values, interests and funding available.

WHAT DO FUNDERS LOOK FOR IN AN APPLICATION

This depends on the funder, and what they know about your organisation. Funders may not know much about your location or your target audience—make sure that you tell them what distinguishes you in terms of goals, target audience and location. Think about what makes your project unique in a specific and local sense - is it the only one of its kind in your local area? This geographic uniqueness can be significant. Is it the only project serving this particular group of young people?

It's important to address diversity and inclusion, and set out the plans for ensuring this. It's also important to demonstrate an awareness of best practice around working with young people, and this could be demonstrated through track record of similar projects, existing experience on the team, or the inclusion of an experienced youth arts facilitator in the project design.

COMPLETING THE APPLICATION

The more clear you are on what you're doing, who you're doing it for, and what will happen as a result then the more concise and precise you can be in the application.

Good supporting material can make your application stand out. Photographs, letters of support, evidence of partnership, examples of previous work etc. demonstrates your capacity to deliver on projects and your ability to make the most of funding.

When you have completed your application, ask somebody whose opinion you trust to look over it. You want somebody who will ask you hard questions, tell you if anything is unclear or long winded, somebody to ask questions about your aims and objectives, and question the assumptions underlying your budget. You want your application to be clear, concise and most importantly, compelling.

UNDERSTAND THE FUNDERS

Most funders will have a clear mission, a set of values, and a clear set of goals and objectives. For example, the Arts Council's decisions are informed by their Making Great Art Work strategy, built on the twin pillars of Supporting the Artist and Engaging the Public. Local Authorities have arts plans and culture and creativity plans, Creative Ireland has its Creative Youth plan and so on. All of these plans very clearly set out what the funders want to do and achieve through their various funding schemes. A successful application understands the needs of the funders and aligns the elements of the project to specific goals and objectives in the funders strategies. This is not a cynical exercise! If your project does not match the needs of the funder, then don't make the application.

FUNDING BODIES

The following is not an exhaustive list of funders. The Local Authority Arts Office and The Arts Council are the first port of call. Have the conversation before you make an application because they may point you toward sources of funding you haven't considered and that are not listed here. Funding from all sources is competitive, so whatever the outcome of an application, make sure that you get feedback form the funder, and make sure that you incorporate that feedback into the next funding application.

ARTS COUNCIL: YOUNG PEOPLE, CHILDREN AND EDUCATION

https://www.artscouncil.ie/Arts-in-Ireland/Young-people,-children-and-education/

The Arts Council's Young People, Children and Education (YPCE) team is focussed on children and young people's engagement with the arts and covers practices by, for, or with children and young people. The emphasis is on the impact on the child or young person's imagination, creativity, personal experience, and development. Arts Council funding in general is concerned with artistic excellence, which it defines as "...original, ambitious, technically competent, connects with people, and impacts on them in a lasting way". Feasibility is also important to the Council, so applications must demonstrate that they have the experience, people, and/or capacity to deliver the project.

YPCE clients are funded under a range of funding tools including Agility, Arts Grant, Bursary, Commissions, Creative Schools, Festival Investment Scheme, Next Generation Bursary, Project Awards, Young Ensembles, Capacity Building and YPCE Residency Scheme. It is good practice to familiarise yourself with the criteria for these funding tools and consider where your project fits best. For example, the Young Ensembles Scheme is "to support groups of young people between the ages of 12 and 23 to create ambitious and original work together in any art form". If your organisation is already an Arts Council funded organisation, then it may be possible to include this project as part of your Arts Grant Funding, Venue Funding or Strategic applications and, importantly, you may be precluded from applying for smaller, more targeted youth funds.

LOCAL AUTHORITY ARTS OFFICE

http://www.localartsireland.ie/

Your Local Authority Arts Office, together with the Arts Council, are your first port of call for funding and support. Every local authority manages an arts grant scheme, however the submission deadlines, application process, and amounts vary from local authority to local authority so it's important to familiarise yourself with the practices in your area. A pre-application approach to your local Arts Officer may also be helpful to identify appropriate funding routes. It's also important to familiarise yourself with the local arts plan, culture plan and culture and creativity plan to get a sense of how work with young people is positioned and prioritised, and if there are specific goals that your intended project can support.

CREATIVE IRELAND - CREATIVE YOUTH PROGRAMME, AND LOCAL CREATIVE YOUTH PARTNERSHIPS

https://www.creativeireland.gov.ie/en/creative-youth/

https://www.creativeireland.gov.ie/en/creative-youth/creative-youth-partnerships/

Much of Creative Ireland's funding is delivered through Local Authorities, so it is important that you're on their mailing list and aware of new initiatives. A key innovative delivery mechanism for the Creative Youth Programme is the Local Creative Youth Partnerships (LCYPs). They are centred in local ETBS, so the ETB is your first port of call for advice on funding through this scheme.

The aim of the LCYPs is to "provide out-of-school creative activities for young people by bringing together the whole local infrastructure. This includes Youth Officers and other relevant personnel, Local Authorities (Arts Officers, Creative Ireland Coordinators, Heritage Officers, Librarians etc.), Education Centres, representatives of the local Early Years sector (County Childcare Committee), representatives of the non-formal education sector, and local cultural and creativity resources such as arts centres etc." They have a particular focus on those young people who are marginalised or experience disadvantage. LCYPs remit includes the "arts" but it also includes all areas of cultural and creative activity including heritage and the environment, STEM and digital creativity.

NATIONAL YOUTH COUNCIL OF IRELAND

https://www.youtharts.ie/programmes/youth-arts/

If you are planning any project involving young people for the first time, the NYCI are an essential partner . The advice and resources available are invaluable, from best practice advice on engaging and working with young people, to available funding, to how to evaluate your projects. NYCI offer the Artist and Youth Work Residency Grant Scheme, which is designed "to promote innovative partnerships between youth groups, artists and (where relevant) arts organisations". NYCI youth arts programme is focused on youth arts in youth work settings so be conscious of this in the design of your project.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING BOARDS

https://www.etbi.ie/etbs/directory-of-etbs/

Each ETB has Youth Officers and they engage directly with the youth organisations in their area to provide support and guidance. The ETB administers a youth club grant scheme. Each ETB has its own deadline so contact the Youth Officer in your local ETB. The grant is very flexible so a conversation with your Youth Officer is recommended. The UBU (Your Place, Your Space) scheme is administered via the local Youth Officer. Again, these supports are primarily focused on youth services which favour a targeted approach (hard to reach or marginalised groups).

UBU provides funding to youth services that "support young people to develop the personal and social skills required to improve their life chances. This includes services covering health and wellbeing, education, employment and social connectedness. The scheme will target young people aged between 10 to 24 years who are experiencing economic, social and cultural disadvantage" with a mission "to provide out-of-school supports to young people in their local communities to enable them to overcome adverse circumstances and achieve their full potential by improving their personal and social development outcomes." The first cycle of UBU runs to December 2023.

LEARGAS/ERASMUS+

https://www.leargas.ie/erasmus-plus/

Erasmus+ is the European Union programme for education, training, youth and sport and it's focused on funding learning mobility and cross-border cooperation projects. A lot of arts and young people projects have been funded through this scheme over the years. It is unlikely that a pilot or first time project will be funded but if your Young Curator/Critic programme has established itself and you are becoming more ambitious and looking for EU partners, then Erasmus + is well worth the effort.

Remember that your project will need to encourage European exchange, co-operation and learning. Organisations must be active in Adult Education, School Education, Vocational Education and Training, or Youth. The application process is labour intensive.

CREATIVE EUROPE

https://culture.ec.europa.eu/creative-europe/creative-europe-culture-strand

If your project is well established and your ambition is to build international partnerships and networks then it is worth considering Creative Europe Funding. Again this is labour intensive, and not suitable for first time or one off projects.

PHILANTHROPIC SOURCES - THE IRELAND FUNDS

https://www.irelandfunds.org/grants/

https://philanthropy.ie/pi-map/

Philanthropic Funds can be a source of supportg for this kind of work, but they can be very focused on impact and value for money. For example, the Ireland Funds currently award funding through their Heart of the Community Fund designed "to support organisations striving to meet the ever-growing needs of people across the island of Ireland". The fund will support organisations "who work tirelessly to support their communities through crisis." While this may not sound like what a Young Curator/Critic programme is doing, it really depends on how you frame the project, who's involved in it, and what outcomes you have identified. As with all funding sources, understand what the funders priorities are, and make time for a conversation before you make an application.

CREATIVE EUROPE- CULTURE STRAND
https://culture.ec.europa.eu/creative-europe/creative-europe-culture-strand

CREATIVE IRELAND - CREATIVE YOUTH
https://www.creativeireland.gov.ie/en/creative-youth/

EDUCATION AND TRAINING BOARDS *https://www.etbi.ie/etbs/directory-of-etbs/*

LEARGAS/ERASMUS+ *https://www.leargas.ie/erasmus-plus/*

LOCAL CREATIVE YOUTH PARTNERSHIPS (LCYP)
https://www.creativeireland.gov.ie/en/creative-youth/creative-youth-partnerships/

NATIONAL YOUTH COUNCIL OF IRELAND - YOUTH ARTS
https://www.youth.ie/programmes/youth-arts/

PHILANTHROPY IRELAND
https://philanthropy.ie/pi-map/

THE ARTS COUNCIL - YOUNG PEOPLE CHILDREN AND EDUCATION
https://www.artscouncil.ie/Arts-in-Ireland/Young-people,-children-and-education/

THE ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL AUTHORITY ARTS OFFICES
http://www.localartsireland.ie/

THE IRELAND FUNDS -GRANTS
https://www.irelandfunds.org/grants/

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