

A Culture Strategy for Scotland - Draft for Consultation

Written submission from Youth Theatre Arts Scotland



Youth Theatre Arts Scotland (YTAS) is the national support and development organisation for Scotland's youth theatre sector. We deliver national and targeted youth theatre projects, training and professional development, and information and advocacy for a broad range of Scotland's participants, leaders, artists and audiences.

We believe that the insights and experience we have gained over the last two decades means YTAS can offer an important practical and strategic perspective to this consultation. We hope that our written submission, and indeed our organisation and Members, can play a key role in developing the next draft of the Strategy and its subsequent implementation.

Background

Since 2004, YTAS has helped a small, informal community to develop into a motivated network of practice. 16,500 young people now take part in youth theatre activity every week across Scotland, supported by 1,800 professionals and volunteers. As a result, the Youth Arts Strategy, 'Time to Shine' highlighted in 2013 that; *"Scotland's youth theatre sector is well networked and, through the work of Youth Theatre Arts Scotland, is proactive in its self- development"*.

YTAS now has 110 registered members operating throughout all 32 local authorities which engage the majority of participants in Scotland. Our Members range from small, unfunded, volunteer-run groups to larger established companies with many years' experience, staff and their own venues. We also take care to provide many of our activities and resources for free and accessible to non-Member groups and leaders across the country. This diversity of practice sits at the heart of YTAS's support, development and advocacy role.

Summary

YTAS is supportive of the broad Vision, Ambition and Aims of the draft Culture Strategy for Scotland. We have some questions in relation to the actions proposed for the 'Transforming through Culture' and 'Sustaining Culture' ambitions and look forward to more detail in the next draft of the Strategy, as well as subsequent action plan, costings and implementation phase.

YTAS and its Members believe they could play a key role in representing the views and needs of diverse stakeholders across the country for a new Culture Strategy for Scotland, as well as implementing and mainstreaming strategic and practical improvements.

Vision and Purpose

- **Purpose** - YTAS supports the purpose of the Strategy as outlined on the page 1 of the draft for consultation: *“The strategy seeks to stimulate a step change that will bring about a shift in how society and government view and value culture. It aims to build collaborative alliances that will help to realise the full potential of culture for everyone and every community”*. We particularly support the focus on influencing “change” and realising “the full potential of culture” through improved “collaborative alliances”.
- **Vision Statement** - YTAS supports the definition of culture in Scotland as “innovative, inclusive and open”. We also support the assertion that culture in Scotland is “fundamental” to “wellbeing”, should celebrate “present and emerging” cultural excellence and should better utilise its “empowering and transformative” capabilities.
- **Realising the Vision** - YTAS supports the Government’s collaborative approach to realising the vision *“along with many other stakeholders, partners, businesses, audiences, participants and funders”*. We believe that organisations, such as YTAS, which represent a broad network of cultural activity and stakeholders will be key to realising the Strategy’s long-term vision. This includes representing the views and needs of diverse stakeholders across the country, as well as implementing and mainstreaming strategic and practical improvements.

Ambitions, Aims and Actions

- **Ambitions and Aims** - YTAS supports the focus of the three ambitions, and their underlying aims, in seeking practical improvements to Scotland’s current cultural landscape. We believe the intention which lies behind the Ambitions could be summed up as:
 - Transforming Scotland’s *existing political and civic approaches* to culture;
 - Empowering the *role that individuals and communities across Scotland feel* towards culture;
 - Sustaining the *current progress* of Scotland’s creative industries, workforce, skills development pathways, funding models and international ambitions.

Viewed in this way, it is clear that the nature, focus, and timescale of the three ambitions is quite different. This differentiation could be helpful as it highlights the different approaches required as well as where the most fundamental changes in Scotland are needed. However, for the avoidance of any confusion, we believe that a future draft of the strategy should include a clearer action plan which defines the different approach, focus, timescale and goals for each ambition.

- **Transforming through Culture** - YTAS is encouraged by the 'Transforming through Culture' ambition and in particular its aim to increase the *"profile and strategic potential of culture and to recognise that culture can be at the centre of wider societal shifts"*, including how it is *"embedded into broad policy decisions"* and cross-sector innovations.

At present however, YTAS feels that the actions outlined for 'Transforming through Culture' all feel quite high-level and top-down, which runs counter to other aspects of the Strategy which seek to empower individuals and communities in a new way. We are also concerned at how the proposed 'cultural leaders', 'strategic thinkers', 'national partners', 'academic partners' and 'cultural alliances' will be defined and selected. At present it is unclear how this will be done any differently than short-term initiatives in the past, or how these partners and leaders will represent Scotland's broad and diverse cultural landscape or have the ability to implement and embed the political and civic transformations targeted. Further clarity on these matters in future drafts of the Strategy would be helpful.

Again, we would advocate for the role of organisations and networks, such as YTAS, which already represent an alliance of views and needs across a diverse range stakeholders in Scotland; as well as having the ability to implement and mainstream strategic and practical improvements.

- **The National Performance Framework and new outcome for culture** - YTAS is a strong supporter of the new national outcome for culture. However, we are keen to understand how our sector, organisation and Members could have a more informed and empowered role in advancing the outcomes and indicators of Scotland's National Performance Framework, including those beyond culture itself. We believe that our sector, organisation and Members already play a key role in impacting NPF Outcomes such as; 'children and young people', 'communities', 'education', 'health', 'international' as well as others. However, at present we believe the role that our sector, organisation and Members plays in this regard is not appreciated, supported or strategic. We are keen to address this and capitalise on our sector's existing infrastructure and commitment across these areas.
- **Culture and education, children and young people** - YTAS was disappointed at the limited focus of this aspect of the Strategy, which concentrated on formal education. The progress of youth arts, voluntary arts and creative learning in Scotland in recent years is an obvious strength and opportunity for the Strategy to build upon. Which is to say nothing for the intrinsic role that youth arts, voluntary arts and creative learning all have in transforming, empowering and sustaining culture in Scotland at present.
- **The Youth Arts Strategy** - Following on from the previous note, YTAS was concerned that the national Youth Arts Strategy, 'Time to Shine' did not feature in the 'culture and education, children and young people' section of strategy. As well as building on the considerable consultation, work and investment of the national Youth Arts Strategy, YTAS believes there are key lessons to be learnt from how 'the national Youth Arts Strategy was originally envisioned, implemented and subsequently adjusted, both in terms of its successes and challenges. We strongly advocate for the need to apply the lessons from 'Time to Shine's' implementation phase

and current status into the next draft and subsequent action plan and cost analysis for the Culture Strategy.

- **Empowering through Culture** - YTAS supports the inclusion of “*everyday and emerging*” culture as part of the ‘Empowering through Culture’ ambition. Alongside the importance of “*taking part in culture throughout (people’s) lives*” and “*recognis(ing) the importance of each community’s own local culture*” we believe the addition of “*everyday and emerging*” culture signals an important step change in how culture should be viewed and supported across individual, community and national contexts. This chimes well with how our own sector grew from a small, informal community into a motivated network of practice, underpinned by thousands of passionate volunteers, leaders, professionals and young people.

We therefore support all the actions defined under the ‘Empowering through Culture’ ambition and believe our sector, organisation and Members could play an important role in representing, implementing and embedding developments. We are also keen to capitalise on our sector’s existing infrastructure and commitment across Scotland’s communities to progress this ambition. YTAS looks forward to learning more detail into the focus, timescale and goals of each action in the next draft of the Strategy and its implementation.

- **Sustaining Culture** – The less ‘ambitious’ title of this ambition appears to reflect the significant challenges outlined in the Strategy, particularly in relation to ‘economy, funding and support’. This suggests that sustaining current progress and addressing existing challenges and opportunities already presents a considerable ambition for Scotland’s creative industries, workforce, skills development pathways, funding models and international working. YTAS supports this pragmatic approach unless there is a significant change in the level of long-term cultural investment in Scotland.

However, we are concerned that the actions under this ambition to “explore new funding models”, “develop programmes” and “explore ways” suggest a series of new and untested initiatives. This contradicts the less ‘ambitious’ title of this ambition as well as the challenges outlined in the Strategy document, particularly in relation to ‘economy, funding and support’. We are concerned this could lead to a series of new headline, short-term initiatives which are designed to highlight a new strategy being underway, rather than the long-term need to sustain progress and address existing challenges and opportunities. YTAS thinks it is imperative that the Culture Strategy builds upon existing successful models, programmes and approaches in Scotland which are struggling under the current challenges which have been outlined in the ‘economy, funding and support’ section of the Strategy.

- **Monitoring Impact** – YTAS supports the establishment Measuring Change Group for the Strategy that will focus on “*on longer-term change rather than immediate impacts*”. Whilst we recognise the importance of academic rigour, knowledge and skills for this group, we would also advocate for the importance of representing Scotland’s grass-roots cultural landscape and representatives with the ability to disseminate new approaches across a broad community of practice.

Monitoring and Evaluating

YTAS supports the establishment Measuring Change Group for the Strategy that will focus on “on longer-term change rather than immediate impacts”. Whilst we recognise the importance of academic rigour, knowledge and skills for this group, we would also advocate for the importance of representing Scotland’s grass-roots cultural landscape and representatives with the ability to disseminate new approaches across a broad community of practice.

Impact assessments

- **Business and Regulatory Impact Assessment** – At present the Impact Assessment only states that “Costs will be considered as the Strategy develops.” This is an issue as it avoids grounding the vision and ambitions in current reality. There is a similar lack of costs analysis in the draft Strategy, in relation to the vision, aims and actions. Without a cost analysis alongside a strategic plan, there is a risk that the Strategy’s vision, ambitions and outcomes will be undermined from the outset with a mismatch between the scale of ambition and available resource. Detailed proposals on the costs / benefits should therefore be a core element of the next draft.