



Ruthless Research

Final report:

The impact of Covid-19 on the Scottish youth theatre sector

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About Ruthless Research

Ruthless Research is an Edinburgh-based independent research consultancy, through which Ruth Stevenson provides a range of qualitative and quantitative research solutions to organisations who work for the benefit of the community.

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Background and context

Background

YTAS wanted to explore and understand the impact that the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic had on youth theatres in Scotland.

Methodology

Independent researcher Ruth Stevenson of Ruthless Research was commissioned to undertake this piece of work.

The survey was set up in web survey format and was available online between 8th September and 27th October 2020.

The survey was open to those who responded 'yes' to the question: *Can you tell us about the impact of Covid-19 on an organisation that uses drama or performance in their work with young people in Scotland?*

The findings are summarised in the following report.

Summary of findings

Delivery of activity during Covid-19

We asked the youth theatres to tell us when did, or does, their organisation expect to be able to work face-to-face with participants again following the Covid-19 lockdown period.

	%
July 2020	0
August 2020	0
September 2020	9
Oct – Dec 2020	35
2021	33
Don't know	23

Following lockdown, none of the youth theatres had face-to-face contact with their participants before September 2020.

A third (33%) of the youth theatres did not expect to be able to have face-to-face contact with their participants until 2021, and around a quarter (23%) did not know when they would be able to have face-to-face contact with their participants again.

We asked the youth theatres to tell us about the actions they had taken during the Covid-19 pandemic period.

- 98% had cancelled planned events because of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 81% had moved planned events online because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The vast majority of the youth theatres had made both of these changes to their programme as a direct result of Covid-19.

Financial consequences of Covid-19

We asked the youth theatres to tell us whether their organisation had any additional financial support to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic.

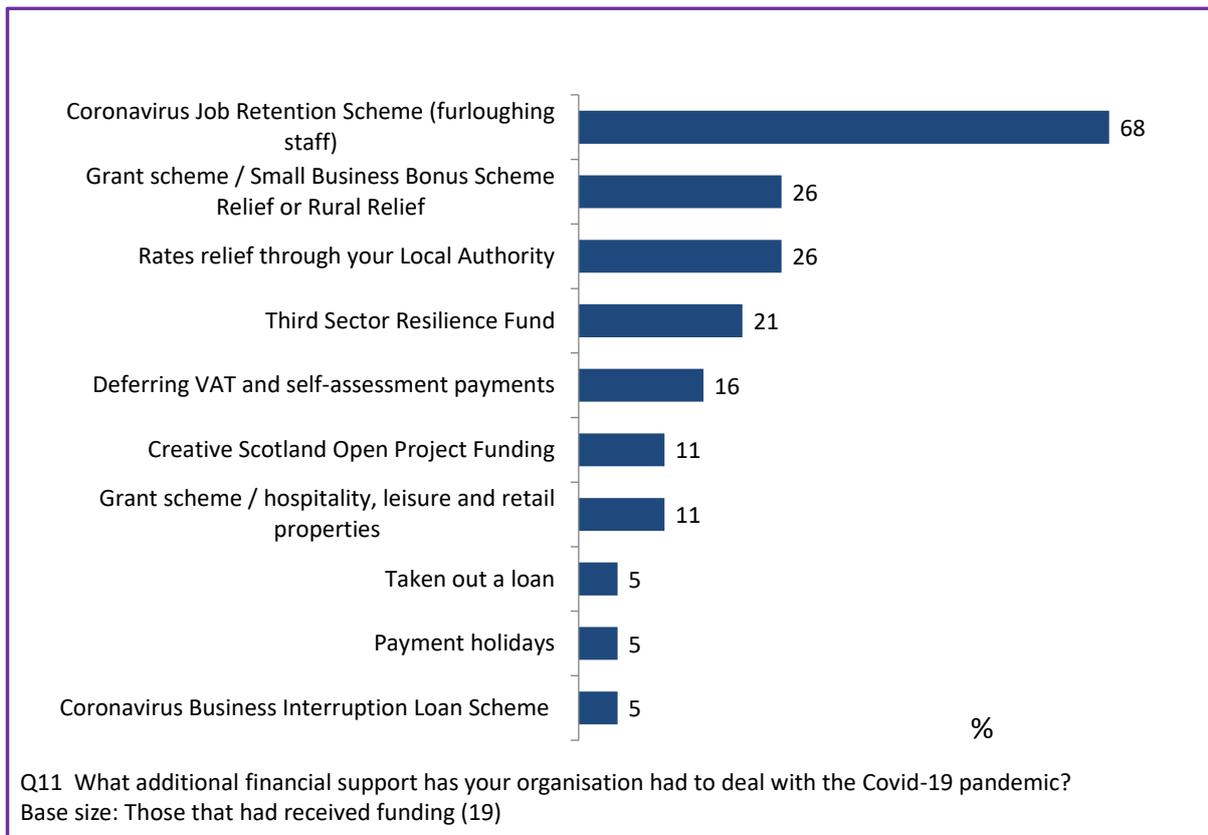
	%
Yes	44
No – but we have applied for some	9
No – we are not aware of any funds that we are eligible for	35
No – we don't need any	5
Don't know	7

In total 44% of the youth theatres had received additional financial support to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic.

However, it is notable that only 5% of the youth theatres said that they did not need any additional financial support to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic.

This means that almost half of youth theatres in Scotland felt that they needed financial support to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic but had not yet received any, either because they were not aware of any funds that they were eligible for (35%) or because they had applied but not yet received anything (9%).

We asked the youth theatres that had received additional financial support to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic to tell us which sources they had received funding from.

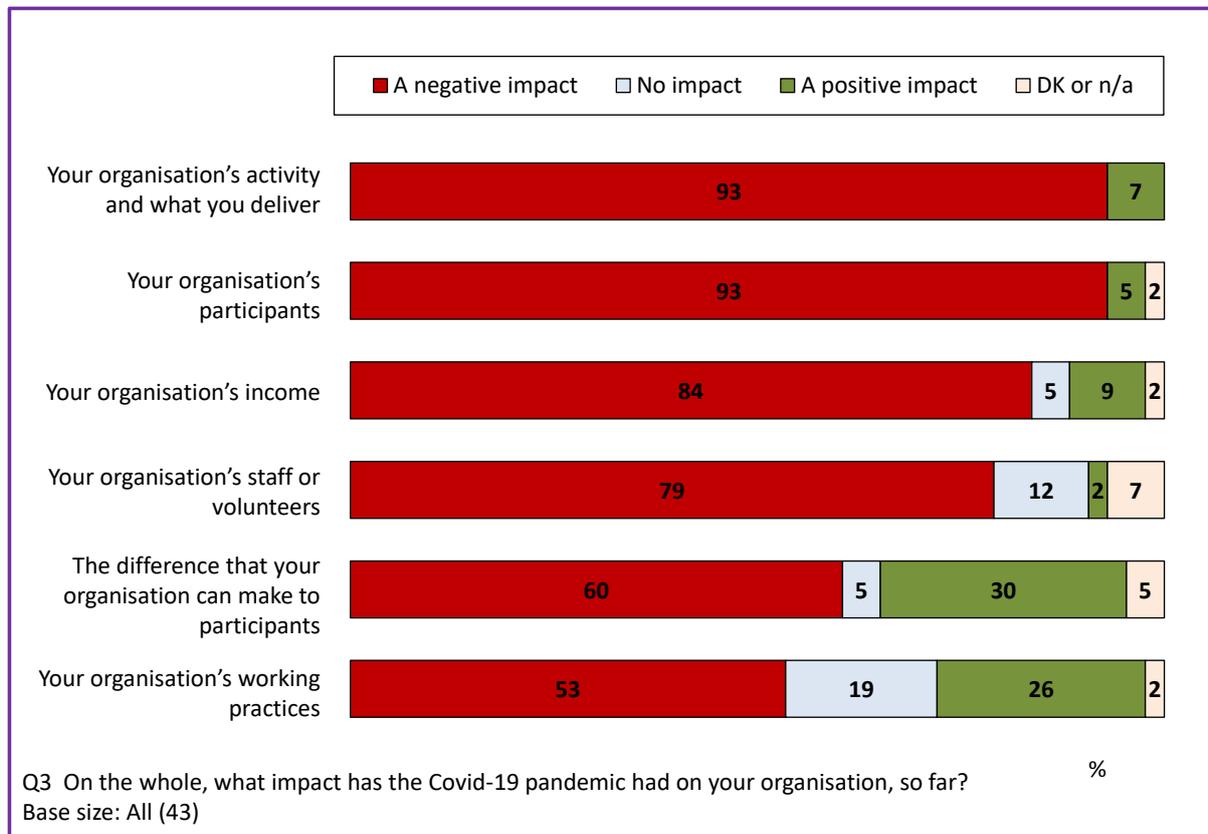


More than two thirds (68%) of the youth theaters that had received additional financial support to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic had accessed the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (furlough).

The sources of funding accessed next most often were the grant scheme offering £10,000 for small businesses who get Small Business Bonus Scheme Relief or Rural Relief (26%), rates relief through their Local Authority (26%) and the Third Sector Resilience Fund (21%).

The impact of Covid-19

We asked the youth theatres to tell us what impact the Covid-19 pandemic had on their organisation so far.



For the majority of youth theatres, Covid-19 had a negative impact in all of the areas we asked about.

More than nine in ten youth theatres told us that Covid-19 had a negative impact on their organisation's activity and what they could deliver (93%) and their organisation's participants (93%). A large proportion of the youth theatres also felt that Covid-19 had negatively affected their organisation's income (84%) and their organisation's staff and volunteers (79%).

Some of the youth theaters described the challenges that they had faced:

"The groups that they attended and loved were cancelled without warning and everything moved online. This was initially very difficult for everyone, and morale was low."

"We noticed a significant drop in students as a result of parents/guardians being financially impacted by Covid-19."

"Most of our income comes from charging to view performances so there has been and will continue to be no income from that for a considerable while."

“We've had to close down completely so we have no income, no participants and no clear way that we can reopen again. We're carrying an overhead of £5,000 just to keep the theatre empty each year. It's an absolute nightmare. I don't know how long we'll be able to keep going.”

“We have had no contact with our participants since May/June as our team has been furloughed. Our sessional staff have all been told to explore other working options as we don't have a start back date.”

That said, a substantial minority of the youth theatres felt that Covid-19 had a positive impact on the difference that they could make to participants (30%), and their organisation's working practices (26%).

Some of the youth theaters described positive actions that they had taken:

“Delivering Zoom sessions has been a new adventure but has been positive in the sense of working with smaller groups and new members joining because of our geographically challenged area.”

“We've created some Covid lockdown specific projects that have brought hope, positivity and a sense of community to vulnerable and isolated young people.”

“We have been able to apply to COVID specific funds to adapt our activity. The new activity has allowed us to work with young people who wouldn't have attended our sessions normally, so we are developing this as a new way of working rather than just something we need to do on a temp basis.”

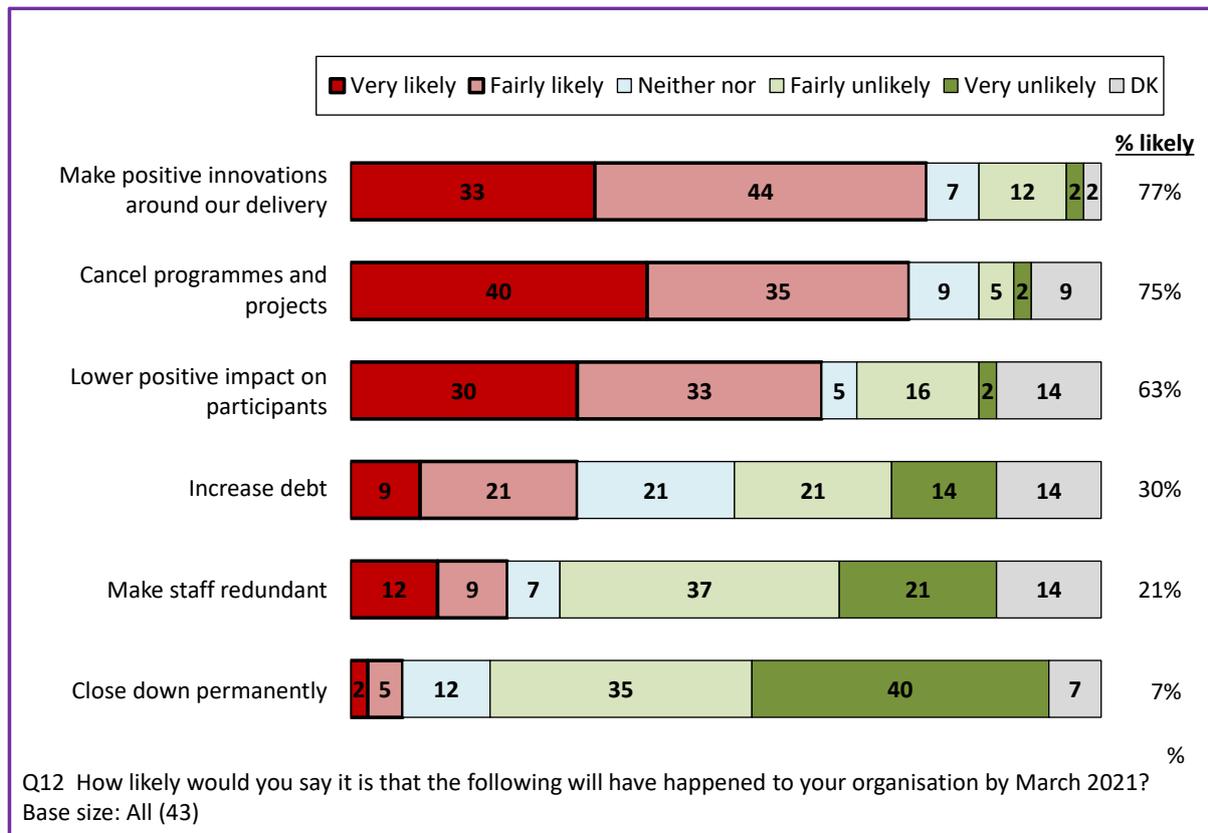
Several of the youth theatres were keen to note that the Covid-19 period had been 'different' rather than decisively positive or negative:

“We are delivering a service but a different one than what the young people signed up for.”

“It's just very different, so some positives but probably overall negative.”

“On the whole the impact of Covid-19 has fundamentally changed what we are able to offer our participants. I have marked 'negative impact' against all of the statements above, which is not to say that we haven't been able to find successful ways to adapt our practice.”

We asked the youth theatres to tell us what impact they expected the Covid-19 pandemic will have had on their organisation by the end of the current financial year (March 2021).



More than three quarters (77%) of the youth theatres anticipated that on balance the Covid-19 pandemic would result in positive innovations around their delivery.

That said, the majority also expected that Covid-19 would have some negative effects on their delivery including cancelling programmes and projects (75%) and having a lower positive impact on participants (63%).

Unfortunately, a small number of youth theatres expected that Covid-19 would cause major strategic consequences including increased debt (30%), redundancies (21%) and in 7% of cases permanent closure.

We asked the youth theatres to tell us about anything that they had learned during the Covid-19 pandemic that will inform how their organisation works in the future.

Base: All (43)	%
Learning about online technology	37
Being resilient or adaptable	16
New delivery methods	16
Being creative or innovative	12
Positive changes to working practices	12
The importance of planning for worst case scenarios	9
Addressing inequalities	9
Understanding mental health	7
Working with peers across the sector	5
The importance of working with Trustees	5

Three quarters of the youth theatres were able to detail learning points acquired during the Covid-19 pandemic that will inform how their organisation works in the future, and the vast majority of these were positive. Many provided multiple learning points.

The learning point most often mentioned was learning about online technology (37%), which was generally described in relation to providing new delivery methods (16%) or positive changes to working practices (12%).

“We have learned to deliver youth drama online effectively and can draw on it in future.”

“We became an office-less organisation in May and will continue working in this way for the foreseeable.”

Many youth theatres also mentioned that they had learned from having to be resilient or adaptable (16%) and creative or innovative (12%).

“Being creative, we made it work and we would apply the same resilience and creativity to future projects regardless of a pandemic.”

Several stated that they now realised the importance of addressing inequalities faced by their participants:

“We have spent more focused time reflecting on equalities, diversity and inclusion within the company and will continue building on this work.”

Several also stated that they now realised the importance of risk management:

“We would always consider the possibility of the show not going on and think about the possibilities.”

YTAS support

More than half (58%) of the youth theatres told us that they had accessed support, training or resources from YTAS during the Covid-19 pandemic period.

We asked those that had accessed any support, training or resources from YTAS during the Covid-19 pandemic period what they had accessed.

Base: Those that had accessed support (25)	%
Sector Recovery Working Group	60
Resources on the YTAS website	48
Sessions for Managers	44
Training or webinars	36
Received a microgrant	24
Signposting to external information	12
Swap shop	12
Podcast	4
Personal support and advice	4

The majority of those that had received support from YTAS accessed multiple forms of support. The support accessed most often was the Sector Recovery Working Group (60%), resources on the YTAS website (48%) and the sessions for Managers (44%).

Some of the youth theatres also noted their appreciation for this support:

“I found the information and updates coming from YTAS to be very useful.”

“The support from YTAS during this time has been out of this world and we honestly don't know where we'd be without them.”

Conclusions

On the whole the Covid-19 pandemic has been a difficult time for youth theatres in Scotland, posing particular challenges around:

- Delivery of activities that would usually have been delivered face-to-face
- Working remotely
- Maintaining contact with participants
- Cancellation of events, performances, tours and activities

More than half of the youth theatres had accessed support, training or resources from YTAS during the Covid-19 pandemic period, with most accessing multiple types of support.

The vast majority (84%) of the youth theatres told us that Covid-19 had a negative impact on their income, and only around half of organisations that felt they needed financial support had so far been able to access this. A small number of youth theatres expected that Covid-19 would ultimately cause major strategic consequences for their organisations including increased debt, redundancies and in 7% of cases permanent closure.

That said, more than three quarters of the youth theatres anticipated that on balance the Covid-19 pandemic period would result in positive innovations around their delivery. Many described new projects and delivery methods that had in some cases increased participation or diversity and which consequently they plan to continue when restrictions are lifted.