

## Youth Theatre Together: Event Summary Report

### Plain Text Version

“I came out feeling truly inspired and rejuvenated. It gave me the push to go into work the next day and really strive for the young people we work with, more than ever before.”

### Youth Theatre Together Event Report

This is a summary of our Youth Theatre Together event at Contact Theatre, Manchester, in June 2025.

### About the Youth Theatre Together Event

In June 2025, Youth Theatre Together brought more than 150 youth theatre leaders together, at Contact Theatre in Manchester, to define a new future for our sector.

Youth Theatre Together was a direct response to the findings of the 2024 Youth Theatre Census, the biggest survey of youth theatres in England since 2011.

The census demonstrated that youth theatres in England are vital spaces of support, creativity and self-expression for more than 100,000 young people; but that they are also under-funded, not accessible enough and heavily reliant on a disconnected, underpaid and exhausted workforce.

The central recommendation in our report was for the creation of a new national development agency for youth theatre in England - to support, connect and advocate for our sector. At Youth Theatre Together, we took the first steps in making this organisation a reality.

### Our approach

Our aim at Youth Theatre Together was to collectively articulate the key priorities for a new national development agency for youth theatre.

In order to do this, we created a programme in which the people who lead and take part in youth theatres were treated like the experts they are.

We threw out the tired conventions of conferences in which a few ‘important’ people speak and everyone else listens. Instead, we held made open, creative spaces in which everyone could have a say. We invited the people who normally get asked to speak at conferences to become ‘Listeners’: to listen the conversations and take detailed notes.

We designed workshops in dance, zine-making, spoken word, improvisation and devising, to create space for everyone to think and talk about the future of youth theatre. We invited current or very recent youth theatre members to be paid Artists-in-Residence, participating in all the workshops and presenting provocations and responses to open and close the event.

As themes emerged in the making and conversations, we created open discussion groups to explore them in more depth and refine them into priorities for the future of our sector.

Access was key to the event. We provided accommodation and travel expenses for everyone who needed it. We had a dedicated Access, Wellbeing and Equity team ensuring everyone's access and other needs were met.

100% of participants said their access needs were met

98.5% said they felt safe and comfortable throughout the event

More than 150 people came, representing more than 90 organisations and every region of the country. The demand was so high we could have easily doubled this number if capacity and budget had allowed.

Attendees told us:

"I really loved the mixed diversity of youth theatres across the country and the opportunities to hear about other institutions and their processes."

"I loved that we had the space to talk, so many times you go to events and it leaves little time to actually talk to others and make connections."

"It had clear focus and ambition ... it provided different routes in that suited different learning and engagement styles and/or offered you the chance to try something new."

"The access, equity considerations were unrivalled. By far the best I've ever seen at any event. I was thoroughly impressed & it gave everyone the opportunity to give their whole selves to the process."

"I was a Listener and I found this role very insightful. I enjoyed the varied practical workshops and also how participatory the whole two days were."

"I was accompanied by a newish member of our team who needed a bit of support. I watched him grow more confident and able to share his thoughts and ideas throughout the weekend."

#### Artists in Residence

We invited five current or very recent youth theatre members to be paid Artists in Residence at Youth Theatre Together, each representing different regions, identities and youth theatre experience. They participated in all workshops and discussions and shared their provocations and reflections at the start and end of the event.

Here are some of their words:

“It’s time to make human nature magical again. It’s time to create a tightly knitted community. It’s time to connect each dot to dot across the country, to create a permanent magnum opus. An image which hopefully will stick across tens and thousands of generations. Shifting what it means to be human. Shifting what it means to be creative. Shifting theatre.”

Hannah Larouci

“Building young people up to be creatives but most of all the next generation of lovely people. Humans. We are sending them out into the world. This massive machine-like jungle which we are only understanding ourselves now. How can we support and build whilst allowing them to be independent. Removing this weighted blanket of pressure, shyness, non inclusion and self doubt.”

Khadijah Sawyers

“By creating a safer, more inclusive space for kids who are already at a disadvantage in life, we allow room for them to grow into confident adults who stand up for their right to exist ... making the necessary adjustments so that a disabled child can participate in the way everyone else does is not that much work for those that do it, but makes the world of difference to the child.”

Arco Scouler

Learning and priorities

Just by running Youth Theatre Together, we demonstrated what the future might look like - a connected, supported, confident group of youth theatre leaders and participants, working together to support and platform young people.

The conversations throughout the event were wide-ranging, ambitious, surprising and exciting. They are summarised in this report by one of Listeners, Gemma Cutler-Colclough, Lecturer in Theatre & Performance at the University of Reading.

Through the event, we identified six key priorities for our sector. They are:

Access

(Re)defining Youth Theatre to the outside world

Connectivity within the sector

Young People’s Experience and Agency

Workforce support and development

Organisational development

These priorities will drive the formation of the business plan for the new development agency for youth theatre - see below to see our next steps.

“Youth Theatre Together emerged as a vital act of collective imagining, deeply rooted in care, creativity, and shared responsibility ... What surfaced most clearly was a sector that is both passionately grassroots and powerfully ambitious.”

- Gemma Cutler-Colcough

Attendees told us ...

“I think support for youth theatre staff will only make the spaces they host better, richer and safer.”

“I think governance underpins all of the work and the practice that we want to do and it's absolutely vital that you theatres have a strong governing body or structure that they can fall back on”

“I would like to hear a national voice to advocate for creative youth services. I would love to see a joined up and collective approach to tackling issues affecting young people.”

“I think it's important to draw from other sectors and models to ensure that young people's voices are embedded throughout the new organisation.”

“Re-defining Youth Theatre and the way we are perceived (by all stakeholders - government, councils, parents etc) will have an impact on those other areas by unlocking funding and support.”

“If artists and facilitators were trained in mission, vision, values, objectives, outputs, importance of impact measurements and evaluation ... it would create a more sustainable YT model.”

## Impact

Youth Theatre Together was just the first step in a long-term journey toward a more sustainable and impactful sector, but it also had an immediate impact on the people who attended.

93% of attendees feel more inspired about youth theatre

92% feel better connected within the sector

94% feel more hopeful about the future of the sector

96% think that a new national development agency is crucial to the development of youth theatre

Attendees told us...

“I can't stop telling all my colleagues about how brilliant it was! I am motivated for my summer sessions to start, excited about the content we can produce and even more dedicated to championing access and inclusion in our community.”

“It gives me hope on hard days when I'm feeling burnt out, disheartened or worried about the financial stability of my organisation that this is worth continuing with.”

“From the very start I felt hugely emotional about the whole thing. The idea of being in a space with people who shared the same passion and experience as me was so important.”

“ I returned to my own work with more of a sense of purpose because I felt part of something bigger than just our group of young people”

“I felt connected with like-minded people which made me feel less alone in my thoughts and feelings about the sector. It was such an uplifting and joyful few days and I feel hopeful for the future and grateful I got to play a small part in it.”

“The event allowed us to take emotional subjects and turn them into actionable ideas. Everyone was passionate about the future of youth theatre and it gave a renewed hope that those struggling could still maintain what makes us so important.”

#### Next steps

Over the next few months, we will use the insights, inspiration and momentum from the Youth Theatre Together event to:

Share our report on the YTT Event across the sector - and beyond.

Publish a national directory of youth theatres who have consented to share their data from the Youth Theatre Census, and make the anonymous data available to researchers and others.

Host online events for YTT attendees and those who weren't able to make it to the in-person event

Create a new steering group that is representative of the youth theatre sector that we want to see in the future to drive the formation of the new organisation

Write a business plan for the new national development agency, led by the steering group and shared with the entire sector.

Establish the new national development agency for youth theatre.

The Youth Theatre Together event was curated by Ned Glasier, Emmy Lahouel and a coalition of six youth theatres - 20 Stories High, Burnley Youth Theatre, Company Three, Mortal Fools, Prime Theatre and Theatre Factory.

It was hosted at Contact Theatre in Manchester and funded by Arts Council England.

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