



TIMET 
SHINE

“That spark”

How have young people joined
in decision-making through
Creative Scotland’s youth
empowerment programme?

An evaluation of the National Youth Arts Advisory Group
model (NYAAG) commissioned by Creative Scotland
and written by Northern Star.

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1. Executive summary

Key findings

In November 2013, the Scottish Government published a youth arts strategy called Time to Shine. The National Youth Arts Advisory Group (NYAAG) was founded in 2014 under the name 'Youth Arts Voice Scotland' (YAVS). NYAAG, composed entirely of young people and facilitated by Young Scot and Creative Scotland, has been a voice for young people in the development and delivery of the Time to Shine strategy from 2014 onwards. In December 2017, as they prepared for the Year of Young People 2018, Creative Scotland commissioned Northern Star to evaluate the effectiveness of the NYAAG model in terms of both process and impact and to provide guidance on areas of improvement and development.

This evaluation has found that, through NYAAG, young people have been extensively involved in activities across Creative Scotland and its partners at local, organisational and national levels. Young people have contributed to decision-making across a range of strategic endeavours, which operated at national, local and organisational levels. Young people taking part in the Group have acted as a focus for this strategic work, often magnifying the voices of its young members who have also been involved at their local level.

A key area of impact in young people sharing decision-making has been the set-up and delivery of the Nurturing Talent Fund as a youth-led funding stream, which has awarded £63,704 to over 200 young people since 2014. This is a strong example of how an authority can, with the right support from a facilitating agency, devolve both decision-making power and funding for strategic and operational delivery to young people.

Through NYAAG, young people felt able to influence priorities for Creative Scotland and through them to other organisations and government. Part of their influence has been in increasing the involvement of young people in working with other organisations in the arts sector. NYAAG has pioneered the concept of young people working alongside adults on collaborative projects in the arts sector in Scotland. Young people have contributed to prioritisation of objectives in the Time to Shine strategy. They have been empowered to progress from involvement in the delivery of specific outcomes and projects, through to the point of expressing a desire to control the agenda, to influence the sector, to make their voice heard.

Three key areas of benefit to young people are evident through NYAAG: increased confidence; broader experience; and pathways for progression. Evidence from young people shows their belief that their opinions being valued in the context of NYAAG discussions has led to them being able to voice their opinions more. Adults also observed that when adults facilitating NYAAG demonstrated attention to the views of young people, that catalysed an increase in self-confidence. Participation in NYAAG increased the realm of young people's own experience, and opened up pathways for progression in their own lives, their awareness of networks, connection and contacts having been increased.

Creative Scotland devolved power to young people and set up a structure in the NYAAG that effectively supported young people to make decisions. Most effective practice has been where Creative Scotland has identified discrete projects which devolved to young people to make decisions with the minimum of adult influence, but with appropriate levels of support. The recruitment and management of NYAAG has been broadly effective. All

involved would like the membership to become more diverse, although membership has been broadened to include young people from all but two local authority areas in Scotland. The organisation of group tasks has been effective in engaging young people in strategy although the young people need to be better informed about the impact that their strategic input has had in Creative Scotland's work, and many expressed a desire for NYAAG to have greater autonomy. There are some challenges around communicating outwith face-to-face residential, in bringing young people into day-to-day work of Creative Scotland and in ensuring impartial and fresh facilitation of discussions. Some members of NYAAG have gone on to facilitate the Time to Shine sector working group, which is perhaps the most highly developed example of youth empowerment in a policy-making body outside the youth work sector. On the whole, NYAAG has enabled meaningful decision-making, although with a greater degree of participation in operational decisions and a lesser degree of input into strategic decisions.

Recommendations

- Young Scot and Creative Scotland should consider ways to map and capture the expertise from experienced NYAAG members as they leave the group. Methods could include inviting outgoing group members to present their key learning and their recommendations to the rest of the group, using whatever format they choose – ie performance, spoken word, visual art, video, etc.
- Young Scot and Creative Scotland should implement more ways to accredit the experience and volunteering of NYAAG members – perhaps through Youth Achievement Awards or other similar accreditation schemes.
- Creative Scotland should reflect on the range of opportunities for involvement in decision-making that it offers to young people, with a view to bringing young people into more parts of the organisation and offering different levels of participation, from short-term working-group input through to committed partnerships at higher levels of strategic decision-making.
- Monitor diversity characteristics of newly recruited group members by asking them to share information about protected characteristics such as gender identity, disability, marital status and maternity. Asking such questions during recruitment might be too personal, but anonymous analysis of the characteristics of a recruited group would at least give a baseline to understand exactly where they reflect the diversity of Scottish youth, against which they can compare future changes.
- Focus on active recruitment of young people from diverse backgrounds by building relationships with existing youth work groups involved in arts and marginalised groups. For example, facilitating visits of NYAAG members to local youth groups to discuss issues on the NYAAG agenda and look to recruit future members from those groups.
- Spend more time during the residential get-togethers setting the context of the discussion and being clearer about what impact the results of the discussion will have on Creative Scotland. Between residentials, document the impact of young people's views and feed this back to them so that they can see where their words have been used, even if this is just how this has informed the viewpoints of members of staff, or that their views have been shared internally with other Creative Scotland teams.

- Young Scot and Creative Scotland should consider taking their communication to the platforms that young people are already happy using, without usurping the spaces that young people are curating for themselves. Communication between adults and young people needs to suit both parties and may be better using multiple parallel channels. So, for example, add another WhatsApp group which is for disseminating information from adults to young people. It could also be discussed with NYAAG what other platforms are already used by members and set up duplicate groups on these platforms, with the same information posted across all platforms.
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- On issues on which Creative Scotland has a strong view, ensure that Creative Scotland's view is represented by adult participants in discussions, and use other adults such as Young Scot staff to perform the role of facilitator during these discussions. Use more participatory ranking and voting tools to allow all voices in discussions to carry weight. Record minority voices and ensure that their contributions do not get lost in the progress from deliberative phase to the convergent phase of discussions.
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- Consider ways to mix young people from NYAAG with other Creative Scotland staff teams, perhaps by hosting meetings in Creative Scotland offices, inviting young people in to use office facilities and by developing shadowing opportunities between staff and young people. Consider ways to build the relationship with the Board, such as by opening a seat on the Board to a young person as a full member, and setting up formal mentoring relationships between adults and youth.
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- Consider more tightly framing the questions that groups are asked to respond to, with specific questions for discussion rather than more general topics. Consider using different participatory tools such as Open Space or Snowballing.

Recommendations on sharing the wider learning

The following recommendations gather together learning for the project to share with other organisations looking to involve young people as advisors.

Recommendations on recruiting young people as advisors

- Decide what kind of audience of young people your organisation is capable of facilitating. Do you want to work with young people that are already involved in the arts and want to give them further progression as leaders, or do you want to get people to try that art form for the first time? Think not only of who you would like to reach, but whether you are able to cater for that audience.
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- Reach out to young people to encourage them to apply – visit and talk with young people, as it may take a lot of confidence and encouragement for them to apply.
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- If you use a selection process, select young people that are obviously passionate and dedicated – but be careful not to place unrealistic expectations on their involvement.
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Recommendations on working with young people

- Treat young people as people. Give them all the respect that would be shown to peers within the organisation.
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- Take care to create an unpressured, relaxed atmosphere, without formal rules that people might not know how to navigate.
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- Be sensitive to the unique challenges that young people face: their world is changing rapidly, and they are learning how to best deal with their emotions.

- Use staff and partners who have experience in working with young people.
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- Young people may experience barriers to participation more acutely than adults. Consider carefully how barriers can be overcome, for example, by covering expenses for travel and childcare, as well as accommodation and food, if necessary.
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- Consider how accessible the opportunities are to people from different backgrounds. Is communication support provided for people with English as a second language or for people who have disabilities? Are the venues accessible?
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Recommendations on running an advisory group

- If young people are involved as advisors, set expectations that the young people are here as equals, not that they are especially lucky to take part.
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- Allow those young people to work together frequently enough and on issues that they're passionate about, so that they then are comfortable with working with each other, and then allow them to do the work specifically that they want to achieve.
-

- Arrange opportunities for young people to shadow adults in their professional roles so that they can gain insight into the organisation and meet important people.
-

- Allow time for the advisory group to form relationships with one another.
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Recommendations for future projects

- Allow young people's voices to be heard more in decision-making.
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- Learn from and consult existing youth advisory groups.
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- Hear from a wide variety of young people.
-

- Give young people genuine power.
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NYAAG member on panel at TTS Uncon
(Photo: Eoin Carey)



2. Introduction

About NYAAG

In November 2013, the Scottish Government published a youth arts strategy called Time to Shine. Time to Shine has a vision to support all Scotland's children and young people to flourish and achieve in, and through, the arts and creativity, along with a mission to establish Scotland as an international leader for children and young people's arts and creativity.

23 strategic objectives were developed from a national discussion process, and grouped according to three themes:

- Participation — creating and sustaining engagement
- Progression — nurturing creativity and talent
- Provision — developing infrastructure and quality.

The key objective that established Creative Scotland's youth empowerment programme was the first in the Participation theme:

“Establish a national young people’s advisory group to advise on the implementation and development of forward plans of Time to Shine.”

— Time to Shine, p.22

It's notable that the Introduction to the strategy states an ambition for the place of young people in Time to Shine:

“It puts young people at the core of our thinking, at the heart of what we do. It is a reminder to listen and to hear what young people are saying and involve them in decision-making.”

— Time to Shine, p.11

The National Youth Arts Advisory Group was founded in 2014 under the name 'Youth Arts Voice Scotland' (YAVS). Young Scot were commissioned by Creative Scotland to manage NYAAG and a total of 15 young people were selected from across Scotland through an open recruitment process to support and provide feedback to the implementation phase of Time to Shine.

During that time, YAVS had four main roles:

- Inform future development of Time To Shine
- Assess the implementation phase of Time to Shine based on identified outcomes
- Influence the strategic actions of Time to Shine (such as the Nurturing Talent Fund)
- Influence, curate and manage project work relating to delivery, such as digital activity and hosting the UNCON, the national children and young people's arts conference.

Due to falling numbers as group members moved on, the group was renewed in May 2017, bringing the number of members up to 34. The group was renamed the National Youth Arts Advisory Group (NYAAG), and has continued to be managed by Young Scot. As part of the advertising to potential new members, the role of NYAAG was described in the following terms:

“We will be working with the Scottish Government, Creative Scotland and Young Scot as well as many other key partners on some very exciting projects! We will continue to oversee the Nurturing Talent Fund and we will design and deliver the Time To Shine Uncon 2.0 which will take place during 2018 – the Year of Young People. We will work directly with key stakeholders from the youth arts sector and we will help identify the priorities of young people to provide recommendations for local, regional and national youth arts delivery.”

– Join the National Youth Arts Advisory Group recruitment webpage hosted by Young Scot during 2017

NYAAG is structured around quarterly residential weekends, with the first taking place in June 2017, and with plans to run until March 2019. Working in partnership with Young Scot, Creative Scotland use residential weekends as a chance to work closely with the NYAAG, making key decisions regarding Time to Shine and helping shape the scope and direction of future projects. In between residential weekends, Young Scot and Creative Scotland communicate with NYAAG using the online platform Basecamp to post events and other projects the members might be interested in.

About this report

This report was written by Northern Star as an independent evaluator, in response to Creative Scotland’s commission:

“We require an experienced external evaluator to evaluate the effectiveness of the NYAAG model in terms of both process and impact, and provide guidance on areas of improvement and development as we go into the year of Young People 2018.”

Specifically, this report set out to answer the following research questions:

Impact

- What impact has the NYAAG had on the delivery of the Time to Shine Strategy?
- What have been the benefits to the young people involved of being in NYAAG?
- How effective has the NYAAG programme been in embedding youth decision-making in the Time to Shine process?

Process

- How effective is the recruitment and management of the NYAAG model? Are there areas which could be improved?
- What lessons can be learned from the experience of the NYAAG regarding empowering young people to be decision makers on creative programmes at all levels?
- How effective is the NYAAG as a body for empowering young people to be decision makers in a national level arts strategy?

Wider Learning

- What are the common elements of good practice, and what can organisations looking to set up their own youth panels learn from our experience?
- How can learning from the NYAAG and other relevant models be used to influence future projects, both within and outwith Creative Scotland?
- How does the NYAAG compare to other national level youth advisory models, both nationally and internationally?

Methodology

Northern Star carried out a programme of fieldwork designed to investigate the research questions. As well as conducting interviews with adults and young people, we observed a residential held in January 2018 and reviewed session plans, residential programmes, evaluation data, and independent evaluations relating to NYAAG from 2014–2018.

We also developed and delivered a participative workshop that involved nine NYAAG members in considering the specific experiences and knowledge held in NYAAG; they were supported to write topic guides for interviewing one another, which they then used to interview other NYAAG members. Data from these peer-to-peer interviews, alongside interviews conducted by Northern Star, increased the range and depth of material available to the evaluation and ensured that young people were involved not just in commissioning the evaluation but in carrying it out. In this way, young people's voices were heard at more stages of the evaluation process, rather than solely being the subjects. They also played a role as Action Researchers, developing their own skills as they shaped this evaluation. The independent nature of the evaluation was maintained as Northern Star also carried out interviews, performed analysis and wrote the final report.

Northern Star conducted Detailed Thematic Analysis* on mixed-method research data:

- 10 in-person interviews with a sample of NYAAG members.
- 3 action research interviews devised and delivered by NYAAG members.
- 3 interviews in single, pair and triplet, with colleagues from Time to Shine, Creative Scotland and Young Scot.
- Observational research and participative evaluation workshop at NYAAG residential, 19–21 January 2018.

* Detailed Thematic Analysis is a recognised analytical approach for semi-structured interviewing which can also be applied to responses from questionnaires and qualitative evaluation activities. It uses research questions as theme headings and all responses for each question are then examined to identify any areas of consensus and difference, and what other sub-themes are emerging. We then note unanticipated themes and organise responses accordingly. This approach emphasises richness, diversity and complexity rather than merely identifying consensus with themes.



TIME T SHIN

NYAAG member speaking at TTS Uncon
(Photo: Eoin Carey)



3. Findings:

Reflecting on Impact

This section brings together the findings of this research about the impact of NYAAG. The key research question is “what difference has the NYAAG brought to Creative Scotland, its work in delivering the Time to Shine strategy and to the young people involved?”

What impact has the NYAAG had on the delivery of the Time to Shine Strategy?

In considering the impact made by NYAAG on the work of Time to Shine, it is worth reflecting on the intentions for youth empowerment work set out as one of the strategy’s seven key principles:

“Place young people at the centre of the strategy’s aims and ambitions, but also at the centre of plans to deliver the strategy. Young people will have a central role in shaping the actions that support this strategy’s vision. We should all ensure that young people help determine priorities at the local, organisational, and national levels, contribute to how priorities are developed, and play leading roles in evaluating the outcomes. In practice, this will mean working with cross sector organisations, sharing effective ways of engaging meaningfully with young people; providing each other with the training, tools and skills needed to do this; creating ways for young people to share decision-making at different policy levels; and developing robust evaluation tools that prioritise the young person’s perspective and lets them contribute to setting the agenda.”

— **Time to Shine Strategy, p. 17**

The following key activities, whilst not exhaustive, sum up the range of involvement that Creative Scotland has orchestrated between 2014–2018:

At the local level, members of NYAAG have:

- attended and asked questions at the ‘Cultural Hustings’ in the run-up to the 2016 Scottish Parliament Elections;
- played developmental roles with various Youth Arts Hubs between 2014 and 2016, including attending events, speaking to youth steering groups and meeting with local arts practitioners;
- spoken at Time to Shine network events, including sector events and Youth Arts Hub network meetings, including the Time to Shine One-Year-On event held in 2015

Within the organisations that have played a part in the delivery of Time to Shine, young people from NYAAG have:

- sat on the working group for GENERATION, a visual arts project throughout 2014;
- assessed applications and sat on the panel for TTS.Digital, a digital development fund which ran 2015/16;
- sat on a total of 16 Nurturing Talent fund panels since launch in 2014;
- worked with Research Scotland as part of the first Time to Shine evaluation;
- spoken at Creative Scotland Board meetings twice since 2015 and had a one-on-one meeting with the then Chair of Board, Richard Findlay.

At a national level, young people from NYAAG have:

- spoken at the 2014 Young Writers Conference and 2014 Youth Theatre Arts Scotland Symposium;
- spoken to at least five cross-party and/or strategic subcommittees at the Scottish Parliament since 2014;
- sat on the panel for the Scottish Book Trust young writer awards every year since 2015;
- led the planning and delivering of the #UNCON in 2016;
- spoken at the Edinburgh International Culture Summit (EICS) 2016, which led to then being involved in the planning and delivery of EICS 2018;
- Attended a reception for youth ambassadors from Taiwan on behalf of Creative Scotland.

In the period March 2017–January 2018, since the relaunch of YAVS as NYAAG, young people from NYAAG have:

- Attended the Edinburgh International Film Festival Youth Hub launch;
- Met with the Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs, Fiona Hyslop, at the launch of the new NYAAG;
- Sat on the Glasgow 2018 European Champion cultural fund panel, and helped assess applications;
- Met with a delegation from South Korea as part of a British Council-organised trip to UK.
- Provided a keynote speech at Queens University, Belfast at a conference on Young People's Perspectives on Culture, Identity and Cultural Participation.
- Chaired and facilitated the meeting of the Time to Shine Working Group in October 2017, which brought together youth arts and youth work organisations. The January 2018 NYAAG residential was timed to prepare for the next Working Group meeting in February 2018, at which NYAAG members would again meet with sector representatives.

The current group of NYAAG members continues to provide input on the delivery of the Time to Shine Strategy and assess applications to the Nurturing Talent Fund, whilst also working in four subgroups:

- NYAAG Advocacy Group – who are using film and media projects to develop a dialogue between NYAAG and wider stakeholders.
- 2018 Edinburgh International Culture Summit (EICS) Group – who are working to host the youth element of this summit at the Scottish Parliament next year.
- Cultural Exchange Working Group – who are developing an international exchange project with the national youth panel of the Danish Ministry of Culture, Slots og Kulturstyrelsen.
- #UNCON 2.0 Working Group – who will design, curate and deliver a youth arts conference in 2018, which will be a 'Year of Young People' partnership event.

It's clear that through the members of YAVS, then of the NYAAG, that young people have been involved in activities across Creative Scotland and its partners at local, organisational and national levels. Looking at these key activities, as well as interviewing young people from NYAAG and adults in Creative Scotland and Young Scot, shows that the NYAAG have seen a lot of involvement in Creative Scotland's activities between 2014–2018. This in itself is an example of how young people's voices are being heard in the sector, but it bears some analysis to consider how the specific principles laid out in the Strategy for young people's involvement have been implemented.

Key principle: *"We should all ensure that young people help determine priorities at the local, organisational and national level"*

Young people were clear that, through the NYAAG they felt able to influence priorities for Creative Scotland and, through them, to other organisations and government. Sometimes this was regarding local priorities; sometimes focusing on the work of Creative Scotland as an organisation, and sometimes focusing on national priorities.

“it gives Creative Scotland that direct link to youth opinion it’s just that link between adults and youth for the arts.”

— NYAAG member

One channel for determining priorities has been through ongoing work at many residencies considering the Time to Shine strategy, NYAAG member’s priorities for it and their views on how it can be implemented. Typically, the Creative Scotland team charged with delivering the youth empowerment programme would work with the YAVS and NYAAG members at residencies to discuss their views. This team would then return to their work at Creative Scotland more informed by the views of young people.

“I think it encourages the people that work at Creative Scotland to take in views other than those that they would naturally come across in their day-to-day life.”

— NYAAG member

The Time to Shine strategy was influenced by a wide process of youth consultation, which involved over 100 young people. Despite this input, young people have taken pains to get to grips with the language and have wrestled with the challenges they found in implementing it and in influencing such a wide-ranging and diffuse strategy document.

“There was some points of the strategy that initially from day one at YAVS we were looking at some of the outcomes and going, that’s not relevant; why is that even in here? Some of them just weren’t achievable at all. Even in the ten years, if we’d had that same level of funding, it wouldn’t have been physically possible, so to really pick it apart has been really interesting.”

— NYAAG member

This work giving feedback on the Time to Shine Strategy has continued throughout the YAVS period and into the current NYAAG group’s role. The implementation of Time to Shine was funded for three years, from April 2014 to March 2017 supported by over £5m through the Scottish Government and Creative Scotland. As this implementation phase of Time to Shine ended in March 2017, so young people’s input to Creative Scotland took account of this.

“It’s really interesting to see the more strategy development work that we’re doing and sort of really honestly criticising a strategy in a place where we now know that we don’t have millions of pounds, and we know the situation economically and also with the government.”

— NYAAG member

“we’re looking at the actions of the strategy and we’re trying to decide what we want the future to look like for the strategy.”

— NYAAG member

As young people formed their opinions through discussions around the strategy, Creative Scotland and Young Scot also put in place many opportunities for the members to meet with politicians and discuss arts issues on a national level. One NYAAG member described how her voice had been amplified by her membership of NYAAG:

“And it means that as a young person I’d never be able to get the opportunity to speak to Fiona Hyslop about politics and express my view to her in a way that she would respect me unless not that she wouldn’t, but unless I was on NYAAG.”

— NYAAG member

In terms of determining priorities at a local level, many NYAAG members interviewed for this evaluation discussed their views on regional Youth Arts Hubs, which were funded through the Time to Shine implementation programme from August 2014 through to March 2017. An earlier evaluation of the Time to Shine implementation found that some Youth Arts Hubs had significantly involved young people in local decision-making around the direction of the Hubs.

Young people involved in this evaluation of NYAAG, discussed the strong advocacy they had given for the future funding of the Hubs beyond this period.

“we spoke a lot (in a NYAAG discussion) about the Hubs and we wanted to keep those up. And it’s not necessarily been Creative Scotland saying no- it’s just funding. Funding’s always the massive problem with a lot of these things.”

— NYAAG member

It was evident that they believed this infrastructure to have been important for involving young people in decision-making at a local level, and regretted that their influence was not able to secure longer-term funding of the Hubs.

“the Hub was the centre of my community and I could come away from that, but still have a reference point back and go, hey guys in (local authority area), what do you think? And reach out through the Hub. But now that doesn’t exist anymore, it feels like NYAAG is actually even more tokenistic than I felt like it was before. So that’s frustrating as well. Because that was a really great example of enriching young people’s lives.”

— NYAAG member

In relation to this, adults facilitating NYAAG have encouraged young people to consider other ways of bringing local considerations into decision-making:

“But then we’ll try and build up getting that representative story through other means, through surveys or other ways of reaching out beyond their existing group.”

— adult staff member

There is more evidence that young people have helped determine priorities for local infrastructure when we consider the Youth Art Ambassadors pilot. Plans for Ambassadors as local voices for young people in the arts were developed by Young Scot with significant input from YAVS during 2015. Although this Ambassadors project did not develop past the pilot phase, young people who were involved at this time, now see this an example of learning that they can share with newer recruits, to help the whole group progress in its advisory role.

“we trialled actually having arts ambassadors and that didn’t work out, so we can feed that back and say, well, we’ve actually trialled this and that doesn’t work, or can we try it a different way. So we’ve got past experience that obviously the new people don’t know. And they’ll get their own experience, but we can help that and whittle it down and say, right we know these things don’t work, or this is an issue here and we can address that. I think that’s quite important.”

— NYAAG member

Young people who have been involved in the NYAAG and are moving on have accrued insight and experience about ways to influence priorities through NYAAG. Capturing this learning is an important part of valuing the contribution of young people and will make the continuing group members more effective in their roles.

It is clear from this evidence that young people have contributed to decision-making across a range of strategic endeavours, which operated at national, local and organisational levels. YAVS and then NYAAG have acted as a focus for this strategic work, often magnifying the voices of its young members who have also been involved at their local level. What came through very strongly from observations at the January 2018 residential, as well as in interviews with NYAAG members, is how much they value local arts infrastructure and opportunities. NYAAG members' influence and participation at organisational and national levels did not lessen their desire for locally-based creativity; instead, they placed great importance on the existence of local opportunities to be involved in arts and the opportunities for young people to be involved in making decisions about the arts in local areas.

- **Recommendation:** Young Scot and Creative Scotland should consider ways to map and capture the expertise from experienced NYAAG members as they leave NYAAG. Methods could include inviting outgoing group members to present their key learning and their recommendations to the rest of NYAAG, using whatever format they choose – ie performance, spoken word, visual art, video, etc.

Key principle: *“Young people will have a central role in shaping the actions that support this strategy’s vision. In practice this will mean working with cross sector organisations, sharing effective ways of engaging meaningfully with young people”*

Over the four years since the youth empowerment programme was launched as YAVS in 2014, part of their influence has been in increasing the involvement of young people in working with other organisations in the arts sector. Young people talked about how, at the start of YAVs,

“we were setting up our reputation as such. Because it was such a new concept; it was the first time Creative Scotland had done anything like this, so it took a lot to get our name out there and get people to pay attention to us, as such – which is good that we’re at that point now where they listen, but it took a while.”

– NYAAG member

Young people found that whilst some organisations, notably Scottish Book Trust, were receptive to the idea of young people taking part in decisions such as awards panels and event working groups, YAVS and NYAAG have had to pioneer the concept of young people working alongside adults on collaborative projects.

“I think it’s gradually filtering through, now that they’ve seen the success of YAVs/ NYAAG. It’s gradually they’re starting with a focus group here, a focus group there and then it builds to, like, oh we’ll invite these two young people to come and sit on this panel. And it’s just taking time, which it was always bound to. It was never going to happen overnight. But I think it’s just getting there, but it’s so frustrating when we’re all sat here and we all want to share our opinions.”

– NYAAG member

A key expression of this cross-sector involvement has been through the Edinburgh International Culture Summit (EICS), a partnership between the Scottish Parliament, the Scottish Government, the UK Government, British Council, and the Edinburgh International Festival. The Scottish Parliament describes the significance of this Summit as “as a place where ground-breaking artists, thinkers and arts leaders from around the world can come together with culture ministers to inspire positive change in arts and cultural policy.” The involvement of young people as decision-makers in this event started when Creative Scotland facilitated a group of six YAVS who attended in 2016. As one adult who witnessed it explained:

“they had a youth strand of it, but it was almost like a kid’s table during the course of the summit a small group of them put their names forward to speak in the main chamber. They had a matter of a few hours to prepare, but then spoke about the work that they’re doing as a group. And, yeah, just seeing that actually getting that opportunity to talk, that wasn’t there - and then delivering on it.”

— **adult staff member**

Following this, one strand of NYAAG’s current project work is a subgroup preparing to host the youth element of this summit at the Scottish Parliament in 2018. It’s clear that going to the EICS had been a transformatory experience for several of the young people:

“when I attended the first time it was such an incredible experience, so I really was passionate. We got to pick which subgroup we went into and that was the one I felt most connected to, because the weekend was so incredible for me. I really want to make that an experience that other young people can take part in.”

— **NYAAG member**

A young person from this subgroup described in January 2018 the nature of their involvement:

“we’ve had a meeting as well. That was a couple of months ago with a woman who is involved and is liaising between us and the actual Culture Summit Group.”

— **NYAAG member**

Another NYAAG member reflected on the impact of this:

“we are helping influence and shape how the Edinburgh International Culture Summit will run ensuring that young people are not only considered, but are present and are inputting in this process.”

— **NYAAG member**

In this example, we see the role of Creative Scotland and Young Scot as being able to connect young people into spaces where the young people themselves can increase their participation from spectator into more sustained and meaningful decision-making.

Further impact of the young people’s involvement was seen at international level as one young person described how EICS had given her a platform to influence the thinking of policy-makers.

“when I was at the Culture Summit a year and a half ago now, We were all just chatting away to all these people who were so interested. I was having a really interesting chat with the Culture Minister of Bangladesh, and he was just asking about the way we work and he was talking about this project that they run with their libraries and how they want to use a similar thing for that.”

— **NYAAG member**

One of the strong messages from young people who contributed to this research was an appetite to talk directly to policy-makers, politicians and influential stakeholders outside the organisation that housed them. Young people often referred to this idea as cutting out the middleman — in reality, this is a reflection of how much the middleman has prompted these young people to understand themselves as agents of change.

“the biggest issue with obviously letting us free is what we’re going to do with that freedom. So they might be a bit worried that we’re going to possibly take it the wrong way. But I think with this group we all balance each other out so we won’t be able to. But, at the same time, we’ve got to be careful how we structure these arguments towards the government. And we’re still going to need Young Scot and Creative Scotland to show us the best way to structure these arguments. Because obviously they’ve been dealing with them for so long that they know that if we go and talk to this person, they’re more likely to get it through than trying to speak to someone at the bottom. So we need them for the networking, but we want to be the ones that’s actually doing the talking now.”

— **NYAAG member**

Creative Scotland and Young Scot have increasingly built in higher-level participation opportunities for shared decision-making for adults and young people together, such as the UNCON, and delegated decision-making such as the Nurturing Talent Fund. In taking part in all of these interventions, young people have witnessed for themselves the greater power and influence held by government and the wider sector of policy-makers beyond Creative Scotland.

“so realising the power and influence that we have within NYAAG as members of NYAAG with Creative Scotland and the Scottish Government in shaping policy, take that into our own lives and have more like, a stronger sense of self if I can influence policy then I’m pretty sure that I can do this thing too.”

— NYAAG member

In summary, NYAAG has been an effective vehicle to bring young people’s voices into organisations and networks that previously did not hear their views or discuss issues with young people directly. NYAAG has the advantage of bringing the experiences of young people directly into organisations, rather than organisations relying on reported experiences or second-hand interpretations of young people’s views. Creative Scotland and Young Scot have gradually built the skills and experiences of young people taking part in NYAAG so that young people can use the opportunities to work with other organisations more effectively.

Key principle: *“Young people will have a central role in shaping the actions that support this strategy’s vision. In practice this will mean sharing effective ways of engaging meaningfully with young people, providing each other with the training, skills and means to do this.”*

One strategic objective set out in Time to Shine was to establish a National Children and Young People’s arts conference every two years to share good practice with the arts and other related sectors.

This objective was fulfilled in the Unconvention — the UNCON — a youth-led conference which Creative Scotland and Young Scot effectively facilitated.

It is clear that, through this event, YAVS were empowered to perhaps the greatest degree so far. They were responsible for making all decisions about the event, from curating its content through to organising the details of the day and delivering and hosting the event. One senior member of staff described its significance as a youth-led process as:

“the biggest example we’ve got through Time to Shine is the Unconvention. I mean, it absolutely was one of the most powerful things, where it was driven, delivered, hosted and evaluated by the young people themselves. You know, that was really powerful and, actually, it was their agenda, it was how they wanted to conduct it — hence the name Unconvention. And actually it was everybody else being invited into that.”

— adult staff member

It is clear from talking to both adults and young people that this was genuine delegation of power and responsibility, even if some parameters were set by adults. UNCON, along with Nurturing Talent Fund, were described as:

“real triumphs in where we’ve really managed to effectively allow young people to have the freedom to do what they want.”

— adult staff member.

Young people agreed, with one commenting:

“UNCON was totally YAVS, full agency over that.”

Adults also felt that young people had taken on learning through exercising this responsibility:

“All those nitty gritty things that, if you’ve organised events you know, but if you’ve never done one before, you haven’t thought about it. But I remember having a conversation with some of them after the UNCON – and they were absolutely on a high but saying they had no idea of what was involved and that they thought, oh yeah this will be fine, we’ll put on an event but actually: all the detail, all the things that had to be thought of that was a massive learning curve for them.”

– **Creative Scotland staff member**

Some key factors for the success of the event as a way to engage meaningfully with young people were identified by Creative Scotland staff, firstly in how the event was staffed.

“we did have an overall coordinator that we hired in to run the project which was a real beneficial aspect.”

– **adult staff member**

Through the staffing there was also a direct link to the voluntary group of the YAVS:

“they ended up embedding one of the YAVs as a project assistant for the delivery of the last UNCON. It meant that there was someone representing the group working on what the event looked like as well. So that brought the rest of them along with it as well.”

– **Creative Scotland staff member**

The depth of young people’s involvement in the decision-making and delivery of the event also led to its success in connecting with young people.

“the fact that it appealed to young people and the biggest complaints we got were from adults who felt the event was a bit uncomfortable but to me that is a stamp that it was very much a youth-led event.”

– **Creative Scotland staff member**

Most recently, Creative Scotland has initiated a new project, Our Shared World, and employed a young person to work in partnership with NYAAG members to help create an international community of creative young people. The Our Shared World project has been initiated to give young people from Scotland the opportunity to take the lead in exploring how the concept of an international community of young people can be developed. An Our Shared World focused seminar will be developed as part of the EICS in 2018 inviting an international delegation of young people to explore approaches to youth agency and digital engagement. Although this project is in its early stages, staff members and young people share a hope that it will be their most participative example yet of a sustained, youth-led space on an international scale.

“the aspiration would be for Our Shared World to be that young person’s space but again it is adults that have to create that space, there has to be funding, there has to be support.”

– **Creative Scotland staff member.**

Young people who have benefitted from opportunities on an international scale also supported this as part of NYAAG’s role.

“there’s such an international opportunity that we can really take to not just influence culture in Scotland, but influence how youth arts is done worldwide, which I think is something that doesn’t happen that often. When there’s an opportunity like that, I really think you should grab it.”

– **NYAAG member**

It can therefore be seen that Creative Scotland is building on the experience of participation pioneered in NYAAG to create further spaces for young people, and crucially is giving young people the opportunity to lead in these spaces, rather than simply contributing to a project being led by adults.

Key principle: *“Young people will have a central role in shaping the actions that support this strategy’s vision. In practice this will mean creating ways for young people to share decision-making at different policy levels.”*

A key area for impact in young people sharing decision-making has been the set-up and delivery of the Nurturing Talent Fund as a youth-led funding stream. The Nurturing Talent Fund (NT Fund) was launched in December 2014. The fund, which has been refined several times since launch, allows a young person or group of young people aged between 11–25 to apply for up to £1000 to help them overcome barriers to accessing their art form. The panel is made up of young people from the NYAAG. Since its inception, the NT Fund has awarded £63,704 to 155 projects and over 200 young people. Like the NYAAG, the NT fund is managed by Young Scot on Creative Scotland’s behalf.

The NT Fund has been a project where design of funding parameters, decision-making power and operation of the fund have been devolved by Creative Scotland to young people, with the facilitation of Young Scot. One young person described their ownership of the fund from the beginning:

“on our first residential in Callander Youth Hostel we came up with the application form and set the criteria by ourselves. The only thing was the age limit was stuck, but that’s because it was wrote in the strategy that sort of pre-dated our ideas. Apart from that, everything came from us. We’ve changed it slightly, just played about with the fund a wee bit just to see how it would go, especially at the start and then at the end of YAVS. We sort of went, well, individuals could apply for up to £600 and raised the limit, just to see what the quality of work would come out which has been really good to have that sort of freedom to just go, and then to nip wee problems with your funding in the bud.”

— NYAAG member

Another young person described the strength of their involvement with this Fund.

“I really feel quite personally attached to it, because we’ve been working on it from the beginning. It wasn’t our idea, we had been given stuff, but it’s quite like we shaped it right at the beginning. So even just going down to the littlest things, just like the wording of it. And we got to well, not choose, but have a fair bit of input in how much money to give it to, how to structure the form, and then obviously we actually do sit on the panels and decide who gets it. It seems to be very — from our point — it’s been very youth led.”

— NYAAG member

As with Our Shared World, the NT Fund is a strong example of how an authority can, with the right support from a facilitating agency, devolve both decision-making power and funding for strategic and operational delivery to young people. It’s clear that young people’s priorities have been instrumental in shaping this Fund’s strategy over the long term, and that it has taken young people and their facilitators, in this case Young Scot, a sustained period of focused work to produce this consistent body of success.

What have been the benefits to the young people involved of being in NYAAG?

Three key areas of benefit to young people emerged from interviews with NYAAG members as well as from adults who contributed their observations of young people. These themes are: confidence; experience; and pathway and progression.

Confidence

Almost every young person interviewed for this research mentioned increased confidence as an impact that involvement in NYAAG /YAVS had had on them. Discussions of confidence often mentioned the increased ability to speak up, to use their voice. Sometimes this would be voiced in literal terms, for example, “I can speak at that presentation”. At other times young people would discuss confidence as more about belief in one’s own worthiness to be heard, *“a greater appreciation of how to communicate with bigger organisations, but not in a very subservient way”* Other aspects of increased confidence mentioned include belief in one’s self as an artist,

“I think I wouldn’t have done a hell of a lot of stuff if I wasn’t in YAVS. I’d probably just be working at a crappy retail job, but even just the confidence to be able to, before, I wouldn’t have ever called myself an artist whereas now, I’m getting a lot more comfortable with the term actually, I can paint and sketch and write poetry.”

— NYAAG member

Evidence from young people shows their belief that their opinions being valued in the context of NYAAG discussions has led to them being able to voice their opinions more:

“some of the other people I’ve seen that are getting more confidence through NYAAG because you’ve got to step forward, you’ve got to speak.”

— NYAAG member

“it’s really good at getting people opening up the conversation. So it is very good for confidence building.”

— NYAAG member

Adults also observed that when adults facilitating NYAAG demonstrated attention to the views of young people, that catalysed an increase in self-confidence:

“I do get the feeling now that they believe they have a voice there is an authentic opportunity there for a voice that they have been listened to and that they begin to trust that.”

— adult staff member

Experience

Another key aspect of benefit from NYAAG that young people valued was the way in which participation in NYAAG broadened the realm of their own experience.

“it was a lot to learn and a lot of new language and a lot of new techniques and a whole new understanding of arts that I hadn’t had before. I’ve used the skills I’ve learned here to join other advisory groups in different sectors.”

— NYAAG member

This broadening of experience was mentioned by several interviewees, with one commenting,

“Having done NYAAG I’ve done loads of this kind of thing and actually that’s going to be super-relevant, and I know how to handle these situations now.”

— NYAAG member

One young person identified that their involvement in the NT Fund “helps with being a good decision maker”. This goes beyond just self-confidence, through increasing the range of experience that the young person has had access to, which in turn further grows self-confidence:

“I’ve always been really engaged and I like to share my opinions being in this group it really gave me the confidence to make my own decisions about my life, I was just at Creative Scotland board meeting yesterday, no big deal!”

— NYAAG member

“it’s definitely given me confidence to apply for more things and be confident in my ability to work in a team and to do policy-based work.”

— NYAAG member

Pathway and progression

It was notable that so many young people described the benefit to them of NYAAG opening up pathways for progression in their own lives.

“I think that I couldn’t have gotten so many of the opportunities that I have without doing this specific thing. Given me opportunities to be professional, I can be more confident and express my opinions and be taken seriously, given these opportunities that are very high status.”

— NYAAG member

Young people described their awareness of networks, connection and contacts having been increased through their involvement with NYAAG.

“It made me more aware loads of different opportunities, even if I can’t always take them. For me, I don’t really have any contacts in any artistic industry. No one in my family is in the arts. So, for me, a lot of it is connection.”

— NYAAG member

“it’s a good way to learn about Scotland in general and the Scottish youth arts and the culture around this. It’s just interesting to see youth arts from a different perspective.”

— NYAAG member

Whilst not everyone who was interviewed expressed an interest in the arts as a career, many of them were able to frame their involvement in NYAAG as an asset to their own professional development. This appeared to be a strong motivating factor for many of the young people who applied to NYAAG and were successful.

“I am more confident and more communicative and more connected to other people, other young people, in the arts but other organisations. And that will probably help me moving forward in my career.”

— NYAAG member

Some young people expressed a desire that the work they had done in the Advisory Group should be recognised by a formal accreditation, which was perceived as having more worth to employers than the young person’s own testimony of their experience.

- **Recommendation:** Young Scot and Creative Scotland should implement more ways to accredit the experience and volunteering of NYAAG members — perhaps through Youth Achievement Awards or other similar accreditation schemes.

How effective has the NYAAG programme been in embedding youth decision-making in the Time to Shine process?

Operational decision-making as well as the creating of new spaces for the exercise of choice, are both aspects of meaningful participation. Embedding young people as decision makers requires the organisation to have accepted that young people can and should be involved in decisions that affect them. The more challenging aspect of youth decision-making for adults is when young people begin to question why they can take part in some decisions, but not in others. Many conceptual frameworks of participatory practice use an idea of gradations of involvement in decision-making: from hearing the views of participants through to full decision-making clout, with consultation and advisory models as somewhere between the highest and lowest levels of participation. Sherry Arnstein’s influential paper, *“A Ladder of Citizen Participation”*, from 1969, comments on these levels of participation: *“When they are proffered by powerholders as the total extent of participation, citizens may indeed hear and be heard. But under these conditions they lack the power to insure that their views will be heeded by the powerful. When participation is restricted to these levels, there is no follow-through, no “muscle,” hence no assurance of changing the status quo.”*

It is in this context that that many young people expressed their awareness of the limitations of their power in the NYAAG model, identifying power holders as Creative Scotland, with others pointing to the Scottish Government.

“that little team in Creative Scotland, they definitely do listen to young people it’s just when some of our actions don’t happen I think that’s not maybe not necessarily their fault. And they have to have a certain input as well I think, because they work there, we can’t dictate everything otherwise we should just be given the jobs, that’s not how it works. But I think we do have a fair amount of input.”

— NYAAG member

Within these limitations, adults and young people were able to acknowledge the success of NYAAG in putting young priorities into decisions where previously there had been none:

“the positive impact they’ve had on government, civil service views on including young people, the voice of young people.”

— adult staff member

“I say we are a group of young people that help shape and help influence the public arts sector it’s definitely different from what it was at the start.”

— NYAAG member

Staff and young people characterised increasing youth participation in decision-making as a journey, which NYAAG had taken a long way from its starting point.

“inevitably it has to start like that doesn’t it? If we’re talking about governments and civil servants and public bodies, it has to be. It has to start there I think. But I think we have made significant progress.”

— adult staff member

“So whether it was tokenistic involvement from the side of Creative Scotland, just so they could say that they got us involved, or whether they were always on our side, they definitely do now appreciate what we, as young people, have to say. And they do meaningfully listen to what we have to say and what we want, really, as young people and what we need from both Creative Scotland and the rest of the sector.”

— young person

Looking back over the course of the four years of the NYAAG programme, one adult staff member commented that there were two aspects to how young people had contributed to decision-making in Time to Shine.

“I think there’s a strategic one, which is about how you can do all that brainstorming with young people and get that whole diverse range of ambitions and ideas, and actually focusing it down into a handful of manageable priorities that then have clear objectives attached to outcomes and so on. So that’s one aspect of it. I think the other is about, in the practical sense, how they have a sense of ownership over the things that are funded, which gives rise to the activity and helps deliver against the priorities and the outcomes. So it’s dual; I think it’s strategic and operational, actually. And I think what that does is further empower them in their confidence about having control of the agenda.”

— adult staff member

A young person who had been part of the process since the beginning observed the varying degree of youth decision-making during early days:

“a lot of it was written in a strategy but our outcome was for us to deliver it. So, there was sometimes pre-prepared semi-formed plans.”

— NYAAG member

A NYAAG member who joined in 2017 reflected the different perspective that

“it’s not a case of what we can do to influence the strategy, but more to how we can influence the sector on which aspects of the strategy we, as young people, feel could be focused on more.”

— NYAAG member

Looking at the evidence around different strategic and operational opportunities from 2014–2017, these can be characterised as an evolution: from involvement in the delivery of specific outcomes and projects, through to young people expressing a desire to control the agenda, and to influence the sector. This aspect of empowerment in itself indicates that young people have become accustomed to using their power — that they are now looking to exercise their power in less prescribed ways and extend their influence beyond channels that have been prepared for them. Over the course of the NYAAG programme, Creative Scotland have begun to develop more open-ended decision-making opportunities, such as, (to an extent) the Unconvention, and Our Shared World, where young people’s decision-making will be exercised in an exploratory mode as well as in delivery of operational decisions.

- **Recommendation:** Creative Scotland should reflect on the range of opportunities for involvement in decision-making that it offers to young people, with a view to bringing more parts of the organisation in, and offering different levels of participation, from short-term working-group input through to committed partnerships at higher levels of strategic decision-making.



**Young person leaving feedback for
NYAAG evaluation box at TTS Uncon
(Photo: Eoin Carey)**



4. Findings: Reflecting on process

What were the strengths and weaknesses of the NYAAG model in achieving impact?

This section considers the effectiveness of the NYAAG model in the areas of recruitment of members, management of the group, and at empowering young people to be decisionmakers.

How effective is the recruitment and management of the NYAAG model? Are there areas which could be improved?

Recruitment

There have been two main phases of recruitment of young people to join NYAAG, in 2014 and 2017, with a few young people joining at other times. The process of recruitment was led by Young Scot both times, with significant involvement from Creative Scotland and young people. Recruitment during both these periods included advertising of the opportunity through the two organisation's networks, and publicity through Young Scot's extensive web presence. Young people were able to submit applications using a format that suited them; written, video and audio expressions of interest were all encouraged. The two partner organisations screened applications and then chose applicants to invite to selection events.

"I enjoyed it, because the initial callout, the form that you could submit, your application in a format that you wanted, so an audio file or a video or written piece, which I thought was quite cool. The interviews in Dundee, which, again, were quite immersive and quite different."

— NYAAG member

By the time of the 2017 recruitment, the still active core of YAVS were heavily involved in recruiting new members. They recorded their own video appeal, changed the way selection was carried out and made decisions about successful applicants, alongside adults. One factor which was considered was how well applicants would be able to cope with the pace and the strategic work.

"It was too much of a gap for where those young people were at and then (there was) high level work that we had to get started on straight away."

— young person involved in 2017 recruitment

This growing involvement in decision-making reflected the strong ethos of co-production that had grown up between the remaining YAVS and staff from Creative Scotland and Young Scot.

"The selection was quite straightforward, was pretty reflective of what it's actually like and they were definitely trying to include everybody and people who were perhaps less confident and people who were people who would also benefit from it the most."

— NYAAG member

"from our experience at the initial recruitment and then their experience throughout, we tweaked a little bit and adjusted to how we thought it was easiest and best and most accessible. Me and a couple of the other ones attended the interview day and helped facilitate that, which was really good."

— YAVS member involved with 2017 recruitment

One of the issues brought up by many young people and all adults interviewed for this research, was the diversity of NYAAG, and the desire for the membership to reflect the population of Scotland. By 'diversity', some interviewees were explicitly meaning the protected characteristics of 2010 Equalities Act, which include characteristics such as age, race, gender, sexual orientation, and disability.

"After 2014 recruitment we found that we weren't as diverse as we wanted to be. Even now, we're still not as diverse as we want to be. We're very white, for example, we didn't get that many diverse applications, which is something we need to work on."

— NYAAG member

Certain interviewees were particularly concerned with diversity of socio-economic background or of previous involvement in art.

“It was a new group, so it was really sort of only advertised in your in-crowd of young people that work with all these great organisations. That was good because we needed that experience, but it was also sometimes the group was a wee bit detached from what’s happening in parts of the country. People that aren’t as engaged sometimes it was hard for you to understand that there’s like 15-year-olds who have never been in an art gallery or a theatre in your whole life and would never feel comfortable in that.”

— **NYAAG member**

“at that time, one of the ambitions of Time to Shine in terms of the strategy was to attract young people who would never have participated in the arts before. And I think there was an element of that that we were trying to attract in the recruitment process, but which probably didn’t happen, because I think the recruitment of the group and the young people that we recruited were very involved in the arts, we actually sat down with the group and thought about, right okay, so how can we attract more young people that wouldn’t necessarily participate. So I think in terms of the recruitment, we probably didn’t attract those young people. Which was fine, but then began to think later on about how we could, so that we were meeting the ambition of the strategy.”

— **adult staff member involved in 2014 recruitment**

Several interviewees commented that the NYAAG group recruited in 2017 contained more diversity than the YAVS group.

“now it’s broader I feel with NYAAG we have got such a different breadth of experience, it’s more accepted that not everyone goes to drama school and art clubs and theatre twice a week.”

— **young person involved in both YAVS and NYAAG**

One theme that emerged across most of the adults and young people interviewed was a general concern that the NYAAG had a duty to represent all young people in Scotland and that the NYAAG should contain members from diverse backgrounds.

“what was a shortfall of the YAVs and there are still shortfalls in NYAAG, as they are so not truly representative — but I think the important thing with that is they themselves realise that, and they themselves are constantly badgering us to do work to try, and we do try and do that work but sometimes we just can’t get all the young people represented in the group.”

— **adult staff member**

Another theme was the perception that involvement in arts is elitist and that NYAAG’s membership should address this by including young people from less privileged backgrounds.

“for me it’s still important that that diversity and reach right across the social spectrum, the gender spectrum, the geographic spectrum, all of those — diversity and so on, so forth — all of those different characteristics, in effect, are in play. So that it’s not just what is traditionally a, kind of, white middle-class, young person’s perspective, that’s either represented directly on the group or indeed that that group is interacting with and actually is trying to influence, progress is being made. But I think it’s really important that nobody takes their eye off that ball.”

— **adult staff member**

“it’s something that we’re continuing with the current group in terms of meeting them to develop their sense of empathy and understanding of others who might not have the opportunities that they’ve had to get to where they are in relation to their career and their access to various arts provision and things like that. So something that we keep coming back to and putting on the radar of the group.”

— **adult staff member**

“I think it’s something that we’ve talked about quite a lot, that people in NYAAG are all from the same sort of economic background. And so I think for people that maybe come from a poor area, or they’re not as well supported by their family or anything like that, I think it probably would be more difficult for them to be inclined to join the group. But I think that really comes down to the difficulty in engaging the disengaged, definitely. Because this group is all people that are really enthusiastic about the arts. And it tends to be a certain sort of person, from a certain sort of class, and that’s the sort of stigma that we all need to break down.”

— NYAAG member

At the time of recruitment, Young Scot and Creative Scotland had not collated information monitoring the protected characteristics of NYAAG, although they did collect some of this information during the application process by asking applicants to specify race and age. The current members of NYAAG come from 30 of the 32 local authorities in Scotland, with only the Borders and Na h-Eileanan Siar not currently represented. Some interviewees commented that there were some aspects of diversity in NYAAG that are reflective of wider Scotland, with one adult commenting that NYAAG contained someone with a looked-after background. Several adults talked about the work they’d put in to reach young people from diverse backgrounds during the advertising of the opportunity, such as making contact with organisations working with minority groups and asking them to share the opportunity with their members.

- **Recommendation:** monitor diversity characteristics of newly recruited group members by asking them to share information about protected characteristics. Asking such questions during recruitment might be too personal, but anonymous analysis of the characteristics of a recruited group would at least give Creative Scotland a baseline to understand exactly in which area they are reflective of the diversity of Scottish youth, against which they can compare future changes.

- **Recommendation:** active recruitment of young people from diverse backgrounds by building relationships with existing youth work groups involved in arts and marginalised groups. For example, facilitating visits of NYAAG members to local youth groups to discuss issues on the NYAAG agenda and look to recruit future members from those groups.

How effective is the management of the NYAAG model?

Management of the NYAAG group

The structure used by Young Scot during the NYAAG period, March 2017 to January 2018 and planned into 2019, is a co-design process. The intent behind this approach is to “enable young people and organisations to explore insights and experiences and develop ideas together”

The approach divides work with young people into sequential stages:

1. **Explore:** Uncover issues through gathering insights and genuine experiences from young people.
2. **Create:** Generate ideas and co-create solutions with/by young people.
3. **Reflect:** Consider the future impact and sustainability of the ideas produced.
4. **Recommend:** Produce influential ideas/solutions with young people.
5. **Implement:** Young people and organisations take forward actions for change

Most of the active work on the Time to Shine strategy, and in the subgroups planning other interventions, takes place during residential which happen every 3–4 months. At these residential Young Scot organise a gathering of as many of the NYAAG members as possible for a weekend, staying in hotels or youth hostels and using Young Scot offices or youth hostel spaces for discussions and group work.

Several themes emerged around the effectiveness of the management of NYAAG: the way discussions and work was organised, the progress of work from one residential to another, the pressure of time, and communication between adults and young people.

Effectiveness of managing NYAAG

The logistics behind bringing a group of up to 30 young people from across Scotland together with adult facilitators for two days and two overnight stays were seen by interviewees as being significant. Young Scot was seen by young people and adults as being effective at organising the logistical side. Young people also appreciated how the provision of travel, accommodation and food enabled them to participate.

“(we) talked at length at the beginning about how we could manage such a programme within Creative Scotland. And I think it was pretty established early on that Creative Scotland didn’t quite have the structures to deal with managing a youth group”

— **Creative Scotland staff member**

“I know that there were operational logistical problems, issues, challenges within the partnership within who is doing what and just the logistics of getting young people together that live around the country that are different ages and stages, it is very very difficult and I know but I think my impression now is that it’s been a really quite a deep learning experience for us particularly now I think it’s very well structured, the way that the tasks are divvied out”

— **Creative Scotland staff member**

Several young people talked about how they valued the freedom they were given to hold wide-ranging discussions without adult influence.

“they know what they need from us, so that’s always outlined at the very start of the residential, and then it’s mostly left up to us how we achieve that. It’s very flexible within that.”

— **NYAAG member**

A number of young people expressed a feeling of distance and disappointment at a lack of communication about how their work in discussions was progressed by Creative Scotland in between residential.

“I feel like a lot of the discussions are kind of wishy-washy. I don’t know what’s actually going to come out of us discussing things because a lot of what we say is just, school should have more of this, and it’s quite obvious, but there are financial constraints and a lot of practical issues that we just can’t immediately fix. I suppose that aspect is frustrating sometimes. It would be good to meet more people who actually have knowledge about the plans and how to actually change things.”

— **NYAAG member**

“sometimes I come to these residential and I’m, like, oh, am I going to walk away with this feeling of deep hopelessness and absolute fear? Seeing really concrete results of what we do at these weekends (would empower me more), whether that is a revised publication of the Time to Shine strategy and being able to go, that was us, then there’s also seeing those actions carried out and carried through and evidenced in some way as well.”

— **NYAAG member**

- **Recommendation:** Facilitators spend more time during residential setting the context of the discussion, and being clearer about what impact the results of the discussion will have on Creative Scotland. Between residential, document the impact of young people’s views and feed this back to them so that they can see where their words have been used — even if this is just how this has informed the viewpoints of members of staff, or has been shared internally with other Creative Scotland teams.

Effectiveness of Residentials

Participation at residentials was seen by adults and young people as one of the difficult aspects of the model to manage. Not all members could come to every residential and fitting this commitment around the rest of their lives was one of the logistical problems facing both the organisers and participants.

“the actual residentials are good, it’s just the massive spaces between them. It’s hard to keep momentum up. things need to happen quickly in order to keep people up. Because then it’ll just fizzle out and then you have to wait until the next residential before things get rolling again.”

— NYAAG member

One adult gave the example of a particular young person who was engaged but busy:

“So he’s now got prelims and he’s focused on his studies, so it’s that, you know because we really want to continue. And he’s responding and hooked into the group, but he’s just not able to attend the residential in a few weeks’ time. So that’s a bit of a weakness of the model.”

— adult staff member

“I don’t know whether it would be better to separate the work up a bit instead of condensing it into weekends I’d say that, but then I know when it comes to the middle of the term I’d probably don’t want to be doing random bits of NYAAG work.”

— NYAAG member

Having a larger group in NYAAG than in YAVS was seen as an improvement to counteract the problem of time pressures.

“that’s what’s really good about this group; you can dip in and out when you have time, which allows a lot more young people to be involved. Initially, it was very much, like, you always need to be doing stuff, and then we realised that it was easier to have a larger group and share the workload more.”

— NYAAG member.

For some, the periodic bursts of activity at residentials outlined their height of their ambitions to make more impact.

“personally I don’t struggle too much to fit it in, but I almost want to struggle to fit it in, because that would mean we’re doing more throughout the year.”

— NYAAG member

Interviews with young people point to a tension between the burden of fitting in their NYAAG work, and a desire to make more impact.

Effectiveness of Communication

Communication between adults and young people in the periods between residentials was frequently mentioned as a challenge. Some criticism was levelled at the use of the online project management and team communication app, Basecamp, as the primary means of communication.

“Basecamp is well, the way it’s set up the folders and stuff can get really confusing. It’s groups and then it’s just a message board and obviously if you want something from a few months ago on the message board you’re scrolling up and it takes forever. So it’s the compartmentalisation, the filing system, is a bit, what is going on? But if it was organised right it would work.”

— NYAAG member

“We use Basecamp which is pretty ineffective as we’re discovering, because some of the young people use it, some of them don’t, so the residentials I think have become more important.”

— adult staff member

Not all young people found Basecamp to be a poor communication tool. However, the contrast between intensive communication at residential weekends and less connected relationships at other times is a common observation by many of the participants in this evaluation. Many young people expressed satisfaction that they were able to disconnect from the work of NYAAG in between residential weekends, as it allowed them to focus on their other responsibilities. However, one strategy to minimise the burden of keeping in touch would be to minimise the number and frequency of communications and broadcast them on platforms that young people are already using, rather than expecting young people to add another platform to the channels that they already use. This is a practical expression of the participative principle of meeting people in spaces they are already using and are comfortable to share, rather than expecting young people to come into a space that suits the organisation.

- **Recommendation:** communication between adults and young people needs to suit both parties and may be better using multiple parallel channels. Young Scot and Creative Scotland should consider taking their communication to the platforms that young people are already happy using, without usurping the spaces that young people are curating for themselves. So, for example, add another WhatsApp group which is for disseminating information from adults to young people; also discuss with NYAAG what other platforms are already used by members and set up duplicate groups on these platforms, with the same information posted across all platforms.

How effective is the NYAAG as a body for empowering young people to be decision makers in a national level arts strategy?

Through interviews with both adult and young people involved in the NYAAG and through observation at a residential weekend in January 2018, it became clear that there are areas of effective practice but also challenges which limit how effectively young people can be empowered.

Effective practice in youth empowerment through NYAAG

The most effective practice through NYAAG has been where Creative Scotland has identified discreet projects which it devolved to young people to make decisions with the minimum of adult influence, but with appropriate levels of support. The Nurturing Talent (NT) Fund is the first example of this: a dedicated funding stream whose focus was entirely on young people and where adults supported young people with training and clear parameters, with the possibility of tangible outcomes. The UNCON is another strong example of this good practice: young people were placed in an organisational structure that was able to fund the staffing and resources necessary to put on a high-quality event.

Young people were not expected to make something out of nothing – neither were they expected to possess the skills of event organisers, but instead were empowered to develop those skills alongside professionals.

This good practice has been developed further by involving NYAAG members in chairing and facilitating the Time to Shine Sector Working Group in 2017. This built on the developed skills of some young people who had become immersed in the strategic plans of Time to Shine and had been supported to develop their understanding and their own critique of the strategy. They were then delegated authority and supported by Creative Scotland to lead adults in progressing the cross-sectoral work around youth arts.

This last is perhaps the most highly developed example of youth empowerment in a policy-making body outside the youth work sector. Creative Scotland is noteworthy for enabling young people to present their voices in a meaningful way to colleagues from outside the organisation and to further progress the work that young people have been doing in strategy development, as co-producers with adults.

Challenges which limit youth empowerment

Three areas of challenge emerged from this evaluation: how to facilitate young people making decisions with adults; how to bring young people into the day-to-day work of the organisation; and how to keep engagement with young people fresh over the long term.

Young people making decisions with adults

In youth empowerment work, and indeed in the wider field of public participation, one important principle for facilitators is to put aside their own power and to take an impartial stance on the issues being discussed. Facilitators have power in their very control of the process of discussion and if they privilege their own opinions by framing the summary of discussions in a way which fits their perspective, they may influence the outcome of the discussion. It is a conflict of interest for a facilitator to express a view about a topic and to moderate a discussion on this topic.

A challenge to youth empowerment in Creative Scotland is in bringing the opinions of young people into decision-making that impact on adults. The Time to Shine strategy encompassed delivery of work which cannot be done without adults, as this was a cross-sectoral vision with implications for many organisations.

In this context, Creative Scotland can be seen as a facilitator of NYAAG that also had an interest in the outcome of NYAAG's discussions. As a facilitator of NYAAG, Creative Scotland is therefore not impartial – Creative Scotland, the body, has its own agendas and constraints beyond those of youth empowerment. This conflict of interest could be seen at points during the facilitation of the residential weekend, where staff had roles as

both facilitators of discussions and in shaping the outcome of those discussions to influence members towards a particular direction.

One of the strengths of the co-design process is in the involvement of both youth and adults as partners in production. Young Scot's expertise in this process can help Creative Scotland to work in partnership with young people, as Young Scot could provide more impartial facilitation of sessions, enabling adults from Creative Scotland to be participants in discussions without also facilitating them.

- **Recommendation:** Creative Scotland should participate in discussion but it should separate more clearly its role as a facilitator from that of a participant. On issues where Creative Scotland is heavily involved, staff should ensure that Creative Scotland's view is represented by adult participants in discussions, but use other adults such as Young Scot staff to perform the role of facilitator. Creative Scotland should consider using more participatory ranking and voting tools to allow all voices in discussions to carry weight. Staff should also record minority voices and ensure that their contributions do not get lost.

Bringing young people into day to day work of the organisation

Another challenge to the youth empowerment model of offsite NYAAG meetings is that it distances young people from the day-to-day workings of Creative Scotland and from contact with Creative Scotland staff. Young people talked about not having a space that they could access, contrasting it with the approach of Media Education who had offered advocacy group members an open invitation to use their office space.

"If we were able to have our own space, where we could literally just drop in at any time and do some work, that would be good if we had that kind of space it would become more continuous, because all we've got at the minute is we've got a virtual space which is base camp."

— young person

Adults, too, expressed a view that Creative Scotland could perhaps open up its silos more, to make young people's voices more central in its work.

“the bigger thing that I want to see happen is to do with getting out of silos, whether it's an art form silo in here or whether its, we're arts managers and those are our audience – just breaking down those barriers so that there is more collaborative thinking and less fear around the issue of having a dialogue, a meaningful dialogue (with young people) to improve the policy and the product.”

— adult staff member

Whilst young people had attended some Creative Scotland Board meetings and been treated with respect and appreciation, allowing more accountability in this relationship over the long term could do more to enable young people to make meaningful contributions to Board decisions.

“I still don't really know what Creative Scotland and Young Scot are about. I've never really met anyone who works there apart from the people who are involved in NYAAG. It'd probably be more useful if we could do some shadowing. I don't know what my role is or what I can do to help better, so maybe it would be better if we had a clearer understanding of things.”

— NYAAG member

“I'd like to see us on Children and Young People Learning Group as well. I think that's totally relevant, and there is a management team that meets and does that group but allowed greater access into these networks. A lot of the time it's great, we're invited to these events and there's quite high-profile people there but then we don't actually have full access to them or to continue ideas. There's not that real honest open dialogue.”

— NYAAG member

“There could be some real cutting edge work to be done here in letting them in a bit more. If we haven't really asked, I guess we haven't really pushed that – but I think it would be really interesting if rather than visiting the Board they would like to be part of the Board or ask for some of their decisions.”

— adult staff member

- **Recommendation:** consider ways to mix young people from NYAAG with other Creative Scotland staff teams, perhaps by hosting meetings in Creative Scotland offices, inviting young people in to use office facilities and by developing shadowing opportunities between staff and young people. Consider ways to build the relationship with the Board, such as by opening a seat on the Board to a young person as a full member, and setting up formal mentoring relationships between adults and youth.

Keeping engagement fresh

Another challenge to managing youth empowerment processes over the long term is in keeping methods of engagement fresh. Some young people, not all of whom had been with group since the beginning, expressed a desire for variety in their ways of working.

“after a certain amount of time you do feel like, right well maybe this model is allowing you to write down or collect, in a cohesive manner, what you're wanting to know, but it's not facilitating the creativity as much, because it is technically a creative project, or creative task that we're doing to collect that information, but it's not maybe promoting creative ideas as much.”

— NYAAG member

“the spaces that we work in, they seem to maybe stagnate our discussions sometimes, if you're in the same space or a space that seems the same, you're being humans you're just going to regurgitate the same discussions having that change in location would be quite useful to helping us be more creative.”

— NYAAG member

With a larger group of NYAAG members, the possibility opens up of using more large-scale participative tools that wouldn't be practical to do with a group of less than 10 people. These tools also have the advantage of enabling large group discussions whilst still building consensus and relationship between participants, as opposed to the traditional discussion groups. There are more flexible participatory discussion tools such as Open Space Technology, or a more tightly structured convergence process such as Snowballing, where participants have to choose their two favourite ideas in a pair – then meet up with another pair and choose their two favourites, discarding two – then each group of four finding another four and discarding two ideas – and so on until the whole group has met and chosen their priorities.

- **Recommendation:** consider more tightly framing the questions that groups are asked to respond to, framing very specific questions for discussion rather than giving more general topics. Consider using different participatory tools such as Open Space or Snowballing.



NYAAG member at one of the group residential gatherings (Photo: Aonghus Mitchell)



5. Findings: Wider learning

The NYAAG model shows many elements of good work which exemplify best practice in the youth participation field. During the research, young people and adults identified factors which they valued as good practice in empowering young people to take part in decision-making, reflecting both on their experiences in NYAAG and in other settings. Young people and adults also gave their views on the best way to set up youth panels: these reflections are presented as recommendations for engaging young people as advisors.

What are the common elements of good practice, and what can organisations looking to set up their own youth panels learn from our experience?

What is youth participation?

Children and young people's participation in decisions that affect them is enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The UNCRC describes participation as:

“Ongoing processes, which include information sharing and dialogue between children and adults based on mutual respect, and in which children can learn how their views and those of adults are taken into account and shape the outcome of such processes.”⁴

Save the Children have written an influential definition of participation:

“Participation is a process where someone influences decisions about their lives and this leads to change.”⁵

There are some important things to highlight about this definition:

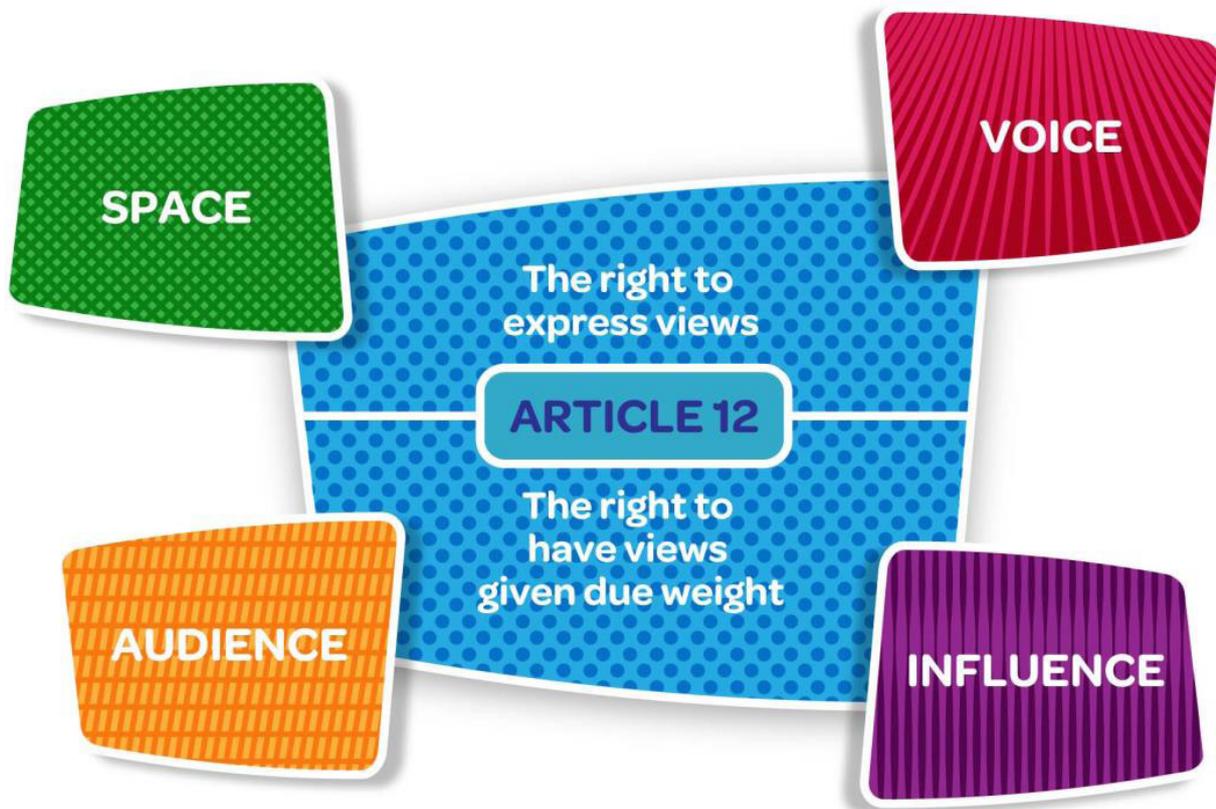
- Process – participation is ongoing, not a one-off event.
- Influences decisions – participation is about being involved in shaping and making decisions both small decisions and large, strategic decisions.
- Change – participation is about making change. It is about changing behaviour, people and available opportunities to be more responsive to young people.

⁴ Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No 12 (2009), The Right of the Child to be Heard, p3, found at [ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/AdvanceVersions/CRC-C-GC-12.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/AdvanceVersions/CRC-C-GC-12.pdf)

⁵ P Treseder, Empowering children & young people: promoting involvement in decision-making, Save the Children, 1997 from participationworks.org.uk/about-us/

The Lundy model of child participation

Laura Lundy, Professor of International Children's Rights at Queens University of Belfast, developed a model of participation that focuses on four elements necessary for success which occur in a specific order: space, voice, audience and influence.



This model provides a way of conceptualising Article 12 of the UNCRC which is intended to focus educational decision-makers on the distinct, albeit interrelated, elements of the provision. The four elements have a rational chronological order:

- **SPACE:** Children must be given safe, inclusive opportunities to form and express their view
- **VOICE:** Children must be facilitated to express their view
- **AUDIENCE:** The view must be listened to.
- **INFLUENCE:** The view must be acted upon, as appropriate.

NYAAG's common elements of good practice in youth participation

In considering common elements of good practise amongst youth participation approaches, we can use this Space–Voice–Audience–Influence model.

A space for meaningful decision-making

One element of all youth participation models is that young people should be able to make meaningful decisions. Meaningful decisions are those which are genuine, where young people are not led or coerced in their choices and which have significance, where young people are able make a difference with the choices that they make. Meaningful decision-making does not exclude adult participation, but allows real choices to be made by young people that adults will enact or respond to.

“I have experienced this that have been part of other youth groups back home, is that often there is a direction that’s already been decided you’re encouraged to think along the certain line and to come to a certain decision and that it is technically your decision, but you’ve been encouraged a certain way.”

— **young person**

“Am I actually being heard, are you actually going to do anything? Within reason, obviously. When I’m here I think I do feel empowered, because I think I’ve actually contributed to this.”

— **advisory group member**

A promise to give space

Youth participation hinges on a promise made by adults to young people: the promise being ‘there are some things that you can change — and you really can make a difference here.’ One young person described this promise being broken:

“There’s a lot of things that just say, yeah, yeah, we’re totally listening to you, and they just ignore you. Thinking about, maybe at uni, we have class reps and they’re like, we really do value young people’s opinions and stuff like that, and you’re like, really though, are you actually going to do anything?”

— **advisory group member**

This issue of transparency — ‘are you actually going to do anything?’ — is linked to the idea of meaningful decision-making. However, it is also a responsibility of the people holding the power, that they faithfully communicate where the limits of that decision-making lie, and that they feed back to participants what has happened to the opinions that the participants share.

“I think you just have to see a genuine outcome, because I think it often in situations where it isn’t particularly genuine it is quite transparent and I think young people know that, really, this is kind of something that’s set up to make them feel as if they’re really making decisions for something that’s designed for them. I think they can just see through it and I think young people will know.”

— **advisory group member**

Support to hear young people’s voice

“there was a lot of steps that I needed to take to empower someone. As a young person who hasn’t really been involved or who wasn’t really pushed in an arts direction — just helping, supporting.”

— **young person**

Adults need to provide support for youth participation. The support required will vary according to the young person’s needs, but may include practical necessities such as covering the cost of travel, food and accommodation to attend events; knowledge and help to understand the context, interpret information and use technology; social support to encourage people to overcome shyness and reassure them that it’s ok for them to drop out from commitments sometimes.

“I like to see greater support offered to people who do struggle a wee bit with some of the technology side. Support in knowing that if something does come up you can just (say), I agreed to this, but I can’t do it now, is that okay? Just a greater realisation that sometimes stuff just happens and it’s unavoidable.”

— **advisory group member**

“Encouragement to be able to speak out and know they’re going to be heard. We do have a lot of shy members.”

— **advisory group member**

“support to access that information, support to understand the information. The fact that we are fed and accommodation is provided and transport is provided, allows for a broader age range of people.”

— **advisory group member**

An audience for their voice

Young people value the opportunities given by adults inviting them to take a seat at the table, with all the status that that phrase denotes. Opportunities might include the chance to take part in discussions, make connections and meet new people, and to go to places where they weren’t previously invited. It is important to recognise that it is not just the fact of being at an occasion that is valuable, but also the chance to be given the same worth and respect for opinions that adults enjoy at that occasion.

“it’s given me opportunities to put my opinions across and it’s empowered me to feel more confident in expressing those opinions to, not just other young people, to people high up in government and organisations, and to feel on the same par as them in terms of my opinions.”

— **advisory group member**

“I do get the feeling now that they believe they have a voice there is an authentic opportunity there for a voice that they have been listened to and that they begin to trust that.”

— **adult staff member**

A pathway to greater influence

“she chose the best path for herself at that point. But she was empowered by all the previous decisions that she’d made and the previous experiences that she’d had.”

— **young person, describing empowerment in a fictional character**

Young people who have been involved in youth participation work may describe themselves as being on a journey towards greater understanding of their own voice,

greater confidence to express their opinions and towards greater understanding of the context they’re influencing. Youth participation needs to include pathways for young people to join in, develop their skills and understanding, and change their degree of involvement. Adults should not expect that young people can drop into their organisations, with all their potential already realised: even though some young people bring incredible skill and confidence from the start of their engagement in advisory or leadership roles. Adults should expect to engage young people over a period of time in order to influence them on their journey:

“I think it’s about how connections can be created that then are cultivated over time, where actually young people continue to grow from young people into young adults and then into full careers ultimately, they are the people who are going to be setting policy and strategy in all that social policy spectrum in the future, through the boards that they sit on as well as the jobs that they hold.”

— **adult staff member**

Young people locate their opportunities for learning and increased agency alongside other experiences which nurture them.

“But because I was so young, it had never come across my radar, all this stuff that’s coming up. It’s been quite a big, I don’t want to say learning curve, because it’s not like I wasn’t going to figure this out at some point, but it’s jolted my learning into ultra-speed.”

— **advisory group member**

Pathways to greater participation should include a range of different kinds of opportunities, from casual, one-off events, through to more responsibility in a structured context, through to more sustained leadership roles. Tim Davies, a writer and youth worker, describes a matrix of different levels of participation, and also different opportunities to take part. “It is through involvement in events; in creative projects; and in short-term activities that many young people can develop the confidence to express their views and can build the networks with other young people and with supportive adults that enable and encourage them to then get involved in further participation. The middle of the matrix is a key point on young people’s pathway of participation. Without opportunities to gain experience, information and develop networks — many young people (and often the young people we most need to hear from) may never go on to speak up in forums where they could have power to make serious change happen.”

The organisations that nurture young people best provide a range of opportunities, as well as typically a strongly supportive but not overbearing relationship with an adult who is intentional about fostering growth in the young people. One young person described an experience of good practice:

“we were very much confident in wanting to go out and do stuff. But there’s probably quite a lot of young people like that, so I would probably say it’d be good to create opportunities like that, where we just had one person, one teacher who attended stuff with us. But, literally, it was just us doing everything ourselves.”

— young person

The role of relationship in developing participation

Over the course of several years of participation in empowerment opportunities, young people are able to build up relationships with one another and with the adults that facilitate the group. Participation is inextricably linked to relationship, because it is underpinned by trust. Adults can enable young people to participate more deeply through the relationships that they develop over time; and young people can develop strong relationships with one another that help them to increase the impact of the venture they’re involved in. One young person described this, saying:

“we were just able to have a whole group conversation with all of us and we’d known each other, at that time, for quite a while, so it was this very free-flowing conversation. We’re all on the same wavelength, we’re working towards a goal that’s quite important and serious, but because all of us are so comfortable talking to each other, I think that’s what makes it really good.”

— advisory group member

Staff described how the consistency of particular relationships is important for participative work:

“We had a few staff changes, which had an impact on the group, because there wasn’t that consistency. And I think the learning and certainly in terms of other groups that we’ve set up is that there needs to be that consistent team who are working with the group, so that they can then build that relationship and have that trust.”

— adult staff member.

⁷ Tim Davies (2009): Can social networks bridge the participation gap?
<http://www.timdavies.org.uk/2009/05/18/can-social-networks-bridge-the-participation-gap/>

For a group that is new, and where there are more than around 10 young people participating, this relational element is more complex and perhaps harder to build up.

“within the group itself, I feel that sometimes it is quite separate, and I still don’t know the names of everyone downstairs. Maybe it’s just because it’s such a big group and there are often people who don’t come to the residencies and stuff, which can make things, I don’t know, I’ll see people less.”

— advisory group member

Recommendations for engaging young people as advisors

Organisations looking to learn from the NYAAG experience should of course consider their own circumstances rather than looking to replicate exactly the NYAAG model. The following recommendations are drawn from this evaluation, and are suggestions of how to apply this learning to other organisations.

Recommendations on recruiting young people as advisors

- Decide what kind of audience of young people your organisation is capable of facilitating. Do you want to work with young people that are already involved in the arts and want to give them further progression as leaders, or do you want to get people to try that artform for the first time? Think not only of who you would like to reach, but whether you are able to cater for that audience.
- Reach out to young people to encourage them to apply – visit and talk with young people, as it may take a lot of confidence and encouragement for them to apply.
- If you use a selection process, select young people that are obviously passionate and dedicated – but be careful not to place unrealistic expectations on their involvement.

Recommendations on working with young people

- Treat young people as people. Give them all the respect that you would show your peers.
- Take care to create an unpressured, relaxed atmosphere, without formal rules that people might not know how to navigate.
- Be sensitive to the unique challenges that young people face: their world is changing rapidly, and they are learning how to best deal with their emotions.
- Use staff and partners who have experience in working with young people.

- Young people may experience barriers to participation more acutely than adults. Consider carefully how you can overcome barriers by covering expenses for travel and childcare — as well as accommodation and food, if you are working with them for more than very short periods of time.
- Consider how accessible your opportunities are to people from different backgrounds. Are you providing communication support for people with English as a second language or for people who have disabilities? Are the venues accessible?

Recommendations on running an advisory group

- If you are involving young people as advisors, set expectations amongst everyone involved that the young people are here as equals, not that they are especially lucky to take part.
- Allow those young people to work together frequently enough and on issues that they're passionate about, so that they then are comfortable with working with each other, and then allow them to do the work specifically that they want to achieve.
- Arrange opportunities for young people to shadow adults in their professional roles so that they can gain insight into your organisation and meet important people.
- Allow time for the advisory group to form relationships with one another.
- Provide structured group activities as well as space for innovation, allowing young people to shape that as much as possible, but setting up some high quality, interesting activities.
- Support the group as it forms and in taking part in new opportunities — give them the chance to role model their behaviour and develop the ways they wish to work.
- Remember that they are volunteers, not employees, and consider how you can recompense them for the time and skills they are giving your organisation.

- Young people may be glad if their contribution is formally recognised in a way which can enhance their CV — so consider one of the many formal accreditation schemes, and put aside time to ask young people which accreditation would benefit them.

How can learning from the NYAAG and other relevant models be used to influence future projects, both within and outwith Creative Scotland?

It is clear from reviewing the work of NYAAG since 2014, and from interviews with young people and adults involved in NYAAG, that a great deal of learning has been generated which could be applied to future projects within and outwith Creative Scotland. The situation of NYAAG as a group founded by Creative Scotland and Young Scot, but with a mandate to influence beyond them into government and arts sector organisations, means that lessons from NYAAG can be applied to other contexts. This section draws from this evaluation to suggest ways in which the NYAAG model could influence future projects across the arts sector.

- **Recommendation:** Allow young people's voices to be heard more in decision-making

“There needs to be more opportunity for young people to be heard, because there are so many decisions which are taken and made by people who don't get it, and aren't informed. Like, the gap between my parents and I: they don't know the world that I'm experiencing.”

— young person

Organisations in the arts sector as well as other sectors, have tremendous scope to bring young people in as advisors and as co-designers of services. The views of young people can challenge entrenched thinking. Adults from Creative Scotland have found that involvement from young people:

“brings fresh energy and insight that set of questions and challenges to our Board to make them think about the way that we do things; can we do them better and differently?”

— adult staff member

“I think every organisation should have a youth advisory group. Every organisation that has a focus on young people. ... why would you just ignore the feedback from your main consumer? Why would you not want to listen to that?”

— youth advisory group member

This involvement can take place on many different levels, from consultation through to advocacy, through to shared decision-making and partnership approaches. The important element, suggests one adult involved in youth empowerment work, is in hearing young people’s voices:

“we want them to be partners in decision-making. It’s not just whatever they say goes, but we want to hear their voice and genuinely think about it and consider it in the context of what our work is. I’d like to see more groups of young people having their voice authentically involved in decision-making within arts organisations across Scotland.”

— adult staff member

• **Recommendation:** Learn from and consult existing youth advisory groups

Organisations which are not at the point of setting up their own youth advisory structures, could consider inviting young people who have been involved in youth empowerment work, to enrich their existing processes. Whilst it takes some resource and time to set up an advisory group, NYAAG members are open to invitations from other arts bodies to work with them on specific projects.

“they’re starting with a focus group here, a focus group there and then it builds to, like, oh we’ll invite these two young people to come and sit on this panel. And it’s just taking time, which it was always bound to. It was never going to happen overnight. But I think it’s just getting there, but it’s so frustrating when we’re all sat here and we all want to share our opinions. There’s 30 young people who are literally sitting here waiting for people to ask us. Because we want to tell you what we think and we want to help all these companies make their stuff better so that the young people in Scotland can be really supported and encouraged and nurtured.”

— NYAAG member

• **Recommendation:** Hear from a wide variety of young people

One of the issues raised by this research has been the involvement of young people in decision-making in the arts. One approach is to involve a wider group of young people in an ambassadorial role: perhaps “a network of young people who aren’t necessarily as involved ... but are there to promote”. Another aspect of involvement is in gathering input from young people who aren’t otherwise participating: one youth advisor commented *“there’s a lot more focus on everyone having a say, more so than just in the room, outside the room as well”*. Adults also identified a need to work with a wider group of Scottish young people:

“the engagement — it’s been something that we have struggled to pin down ourselves. But to engage the disengaged people has been the most difficult and maybe that’s what the emphasis needs to be on.”

— adult staff member

Amplifying the voices of Scotland’s youth requires to be resourced appropriately:

“and if we’re acting as advocates for the youth arts, or for the young people of Scotland in regards to the arts, which I feel as if we are, then we definitely would need to have a lot more support and a lot more scope with consulting and engaging a dialogue with other young people within the arts, in Scotland.”

— advisory group member

Whilst it would be convenient for adults if youth volunteers could also deal with the task of engaging children in the widest zero to teens age bracket, the responsibility for doing this should not be placed solely on those young people. Even though inter-age group projects can release the talents of young people at engaging with children, and challenge the dynamics that characterise adult interactions with children — young people can and should speak for themselves. They are not required to become the voice of other generations. A quote from the Introduction to the Time to Shine strategy underlines this point:

“It deliberately sets out to be as holistic as possible — recognising the different needs and choices of the various age groups within the 0–25 yrs age range.”

— Time to Shine, p.9

One adult talked about the investment in time needed for wide-scale engagement approaches to bear fruit:

“one of the hardest things to crack, is actually how this work can have a resonance beyond the usual suspects, if we can call them that. You know, the people who’ve already got an interest or a propensity, but actually I think some targeted prioritisation may be required to look at how it can have that long, slow burn. But I think it might be about understanding where the big opportunities lie, actually, in how this can have a deep and meaningful targeted approach in certain aspects over certain number of years for a certain period.”

— adult staff member

Arts organisations have an opportunity to take a lead, with their partners, in establishing long-term youth engagement approaches, that offer a mix of different kinds of opportunities for young people to take part, not just in arts but in leadership roles in the arts. This mix of activities can include one-off sessions, through to short-term projects, and opportunities to take on long-term decision-making roles. This should include building new partnerships with partners who are already working with young people in marginalised or under-represented groups; and in providing

more guidance to young people about the pathways available for them in taking part in decision-making.

• **Recommendation:** Give young people genuine power

Young people who have been involved in a process for empowerment often demonstrate an understanding of their group as having the potential for autonomy. In participatory theory, we can understand that organisations who involve young people as advisors are using a kind of consultation approach. This approach is characterised by the authority creating a space for engagement with the community of interest, in this case young people, to the extent of discussing plans and setting priorities within an established framework, where the decision-making power is reserved by the authority.

“We’re going on that journey from the point where the adults created it and we did it, to the point where we are creating our own space. I think there’s a lot of talk about young people creating their own space, but I personally want more of a collaboration. We’re all just people, just let us talk to each other, you know!”

— advisory group member

It is fruitless to try and control young people’s progression from advisors to agents of change. It’s more realistic to recast the nature of the relationship with young people as partners, and start allowing space for young people to develop an understanding of their own agenda, the separate agenda held by the organisation, and look for areas of mutual benefit on which they can work together.

“we were the young people who were selected to represent the young people of Scotland in shaping the strategy and how the strategy is delivered, we are now advocates for young people in regards to the arts generally speaking, rather than specifically with the strategy. A lot more scope and a lot more agency to effect change, an evolution”

— NYAAG member

The notion of an adult-supported or adult-initiated space which has been taken over by young people, does not preclude adults from continuing to provide support for the young people in their endeavours. In youth work and social action fields there are examples of initiatives (Scottish Youth Parliament, 2050 Climate Group, or the partnership youth activism project Roars not Whispers, founded by Oxfam and Scottish Youth Parliament) where adults nurtured a fledgling youth engagement into a fully developed nationwide initiative, with youth-led structures. Organisations who begin to involve young people in decision-making can go on to generate a wide variety of different opportunities for participation at different levels; this can allow individuals in the group to take part at the level of participation that they choose.

How does the NYAAG compare to other national level youth advisory models, both nationally and internationally?

As part of this research, Creative Scotland commissioned case studies of five other organisations which use youth advisory models, which are presented in the Appendix. Each case study focuses on how young people are involved in decision-making in that organisation and the learning that young people and adults are willing to share. These case studies are drawn from a wide range of organisations involved in youth work, sport, the environment and culture, in different contexts across Scotland and internationally in Denmark.

The first case study explores the Young People's Sports Panel run by **sportscotland**, which brings young people from across Scotland into decision-making and leadership around the future of sport. The second case study focuses on Hot Chocolate, a youth work organisation reaching marginalised young people in Dundee city centre, which involves them in all aspects of their work. The third case study looks at Roars not Whispers, a youth advocacy project which ran nationwide in Scotland between 2006–2009, and which was an initiative around youth activism supported by Oxfam Scotland and the Scottish Youth Parliament, using a structure which brought young people and adults into partnership to run the project. Case study number four considers the 2050 Climate Group, a wholly youth-led charity running a national leadership development programme as part of a social movement combatting climate change. The final case study explores Denmark's Tænketank for Ungekultur (Youth Culture Thinktank), an established part of Denmark's Ministry of Culture, involving young people in decision-making around youth culture initiatives and funding.

In analysing the youth advisory models found in the case studies, one thing that can be noted is that most advisory groups used an intentional approach to focus on the young people's learning, as well as providing opportunities for new experiences

and decision-making alongside adults. These intentional approaches went alongside the opportunities and decision-making, but focused on the development of the individuals, as well as on the output of the advisory group. In each case study the way these intentional approaches were implemented were quite different. The Sport Panel uses a methodology called DiSC profiling, which originated in the business world. Hot Chocolate uses a person-centred approach which invites young people to build relationships with youth workers who focus on support for the individual and building resilience, responsibility and mutual esteem. Roars not Whispers used a training programme which taught participatory development techniques to young people alongside facilitation skills. In the Youth Culture Think Tank (Tænketank for Ungekultur), the facilitator chose Future Workshop as a sociological method to develop individuals' understanding whilst they created a collective group response to young people's access to culture. Finally, the 2050 Climate Group have built a leadership training programme alongside educating participants around responses to the challenge of climate change. Despite using different methodologies, the common idea was to give time and attention not only to the programme of the group, but also to nurturing the skills and attitudes of the individual.

Another notable feature of each case study was the amount of resource devoted to establishing and running each advisory group. This resource was made up of time and skill from staff and, in some cases volunteers, to develop activities and respond to the group. Although the case studies varied in the amount of autonomy expressed by young people regarding the scope of the group, in all examples adults supported young people with their time and their resources — money, meeting spaces, youth work skill. This was true regardless of how much autonomy the group had; for example, the 2050 Climate Group describe themselves as having been incubated by partner organisations, whose advice and practical support was still there even when the group had become a fully independent charity. What this observation suggests is

that, firstly, people - whether adults or young people - have to put a lot of time and energy into supporting youth advisory groups. Youth advisory groups cannot live on air, or the good will of people around them — they need to be fed with time and attention and skill. Secondly, the amount of adult contact with an advisory group does not correspond to how autonomous or youth-led the group is. The range of decisions that young people are allowed to take, which is one expression of how autonomous they are, is more to do with the expectations held by young people and adults around the group.

It's worth considering the learning around inclusion that comes from the subjects of these case studies. Inclusion in Hot Chocolate's context means meeting young people where they hang out, and accepting and welcoming them to a place where they are safe and where they drive the agenda. The Roars not Whispers project partnered with organisations who already worked with targeted groups experiencing disability or urban deprivation, and developed special versions of the programme alongside workers from those partner organisations. The Sports Panel has been reaching out by using **sportscotland's** resources to produce recruitment videos in British Sign Language and Gaelic, and by providing interpreters for applicants at recruitment events. Where advisory groups have involved young people whose voices are seldom heard, it has been because the advisory groups have made an effort to change their practice to include them.

In comparing NYAAG to these other youth advisory models, it can be seen that youth advisory groups differ in the scope of decision-making that they invite young people into. The scope of decision-making can be broadly categorised as influencing the following three spheres: operational decisions about how the organisation is run, strategic decisions about the future of the organisation, and funding decisions around the distribution of money on behalf of the organisation. NYAAG has brought young people into all three kinds of decision-making.

Another aspect of youth empowerment is how thoroughly young people's views affect the organisation: are young people heard only on certain subjects or by some parts of the organisation? One conception used by some of the case study subjects, is that of young people being heard and involved by right, not as a privilege. This is evident in 2050 Climate Group's idea of intergenerational justice: that young people will be impacted most by climate change and that they therefore have a right to be heard in decisions made about it. Another expression of this idea is Hot Chocolate's conception of a community, that adults and young people are together creating a space, and that the young people's involvement in decisions about what the community does is part of their citizenship of that community. Roars not Whispers, too, was founded and delivered by organisations which used a rights-based approach to community work, concerned with the participation of young people in decisions that mattered to them, including in directing the work of the Roars not Whispers project. In these different models of advisory group, the mechanisms by which young people were involved differed, but the expectation was that their opinions should lead the decision-making in all areas, not just in decisions considered by adults to pertain to young people.

If we compare the NYAAG model to these case study subjects, it may be helpful to consider the Lundy model of participation: Space-Voice-Audience-Influence.

Space

In terms of space, NYAAG creates a space for young people to make decisions which is bounded by adults, both in terms of what the space is about, and the purpose that young people fulfil within it. This is similar to the Sports Panel model. Other groups allow young people define their purpose within a space — such as the 2050 Climate Group which young people created from an initial discussion space about Climate Change, into a leadership programme. Similarly, Roars not Whispers provided training around activism and working with others, but let young people choose the subject matter of their group work projects. In contrast, Hot Chocolate essentially provides resources for young people to make a space their own, and to define their own purpose within that space, with adults as partners in the community venture. The Tænketank for Ungekultur began as an adult-defined space for advice, but has grown through a Year of Youth Culture into a space that young people have more chance to shape.

Voice

When thinking about voice, NYAAG provides opportunities for young people to raise their voice through a process of joining in group activities and through opportunities to speak to adults. All other groups considered in the case studies also use more intentional and/or structured processes to focus on developing the skills of young people in raising their Voice. Hot Chocolate has a fluid structure of personal development that grows out of relationships between workers and young people, which does occur in the NYAAG process but is perhaps secondary to the work of the group. In the Sports Panel, there is a dual focus on both carrying out the advisory work of the group and on reflecting on and developing one's own skills to speak out. 2050 Climate Group and Tænketank for Ungekultur both use structured personal development programmes alongside their work of influencing. There is an opportunity for NYAAG to do more about intentionally reflecting on individual's skills.

Audience

The audience that NYAAG speak to is wide-ranging – government, Creative Scotland, other arts bodies – which is comparable to other case study subjects, apart from Hot Chocolate (although they are developing their work more in this area). One thing to think about for all the groups considered here, is how much the young people are enabled to speak directly to their audience, and how much this communication is filtered through adults. Allowing young people to speak directly to adults involves risk for the young people and their adult supporters, but can be evidence of a more meaningful participation opportunity than if the young people never get the chance to take part in a direct dialogue with their audience.

Influence

Influence describes how much young people are listened to. In all case study groups, young people expressed how getting their views heard and acted upon was important to them. Hot Chocolate bases its whole approach around ensuring that young people's influence is strong in their community. Tænketank for Ungekultur has at times had very strong influence on government, particularly during the Year of Youth Culture. Whilst NYAAG through its project work has demonstrated a great amount of influence for young people, some young people in NYAAG felt frustrated by the lack of influence they perceived in the work of inputting to the Time To Shine strategy and in terms of influence on government, although recognising that they had had opportunities to raise their voices. This is an opportunity for adults supporting NYAAG to ensure that where influence has been felt by adults, that they tell young people how that influence has shaped their work.

NYA



NYAAG members at the launch of the group
(Photo: Callum Bennetts)



Appendix 1

Case studies

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Case study 1 — the Young People's Sport Panel

sportscotland's Young People's Sport Panel is made up of 15 young people aged between 14 and 23 from across the country, who represent young people on this national platform, to influence and shape the future of sport and to raise the profile of sport in Scotland.

How did the Sport Panel start?

The Young People's Sport Panel was developed in 2012. Sport panel members volunteer for a two year term and the process of recruiting members for the fourth Sport Panel is currently underway. Since the first Panel was formed in 2012, **sport**scotland has partnered with Young Scot on the project. **sport**scotland's Michelle Livingston, who has responsibility for the Sport Panel in her role as Partnership Manager, described why they established the panel: *"Young people should be at the heart of decision-making in sport, they are the future of sport and the Young People's Sport Panel is one way we can ensure that the views and opinions of young people are heard."*

Over the years, the team who work with the Panel have refined the application process and the ways of working with its members, to ensure that they are listening to feedback from young people about their experience — including those who are not successful in applying. The recruitment campaign involves both partner organisations, Active Schools coordinators from across the country, sport development officers and organisations who are working with young people. Young people can apply online by filling in a form or create a video to share their answers to the application questions. First stage interviews then take place around the country and new applicants get to meet and chat with current Panel members who talk to them about opportunities they've been involved in during their time on the Panel. Young people from former Panels are also involved in the second stage of recruitment, which brings together a smaller group of first-stage candidates to do a range of tasks in groups and an interview.

Following the second stage interviews new Panel members are chosen by the recruitment team.

Young people from across the country and from all backgrounds are encouraged to apply for the Panel. The age bracket is set at between 14-23 years and candidates must be living in Scotland, able to commit around 3 hours a week to the panel and have a passion for sport. **sport**scotland has been proactive in reaching out to many organisations who work with young people with protected characteristics and have also translated application information in British Sign Language and Gaelic. Michelle Livingston said, *"The Young People's Sport Panel represents a voice of young people in sport in Scotland and we work hard to ensure that everyone has the chance to find out about the work of the Panel and has the opportunity to apply. Through our recruitment campaign we highlight that support is available for anyone with additional requirements and have been delighted to see such a positive response to the supportive environments we create for the young people."*

What kind of work have young people been involved in?

The two aims of the Sport Panel are to raise the profile of sport and to influence and shape the future of sport. The Panel contribute online content to encourage their peers to get involved in sport, and work in project groups to focus on key areas of sport that they want to make a difference in.

Michelle Livingston said *"This Panel have been focusing on women and girls sport and disability sport, and we have supported them to develop co-design plans to make an impact in these areas over their two year period. The women and girls group for example have been influencing the Fit for Girls programme across the country and also produced a social media campaign called #unstoppablegirl to dispel the myths that can surround female sport and participation."*

The Sport Panel also consult on national policy making and work with strategic partners in sport, including Children 1st. One recent example was the new Standards for Child Wellbeing and Protection in Sport, aimed to bring a new child-centred, rights-based approach, and the Sport Panel gave input on the process, the language used and the impacts on young people.

How are young people currently involved in decision-making in the Sport Panel?

The Panel will be contributing their ideas about the organisation's new corporate plan for 2019 onwards. Recent Panel members have fed in their opinions to reviews of after school programmes and community sports hubs. *"When we've been reviewing programmes, we've taken the opportunity to involve the Young People's Sport Panel to ensure we are listening to the views of young people"* says Michelle Livingston. **sportscotland** hold networking events across the country, bringing together Active Schools coordinators, community sport hub officers and regional development officers. They've brought Sport Panel members along to these networking events, too, so that they can be part of the sporting conversation.

At the beginning of their membership, at an initial team-building residential, Panel members agree a *"way of working"* document with staff to use during their membership to ensure they stay true to their values and aims. This includes how young people can work together with Young Scot and **sportscotland**, how they can work together as a group, as well as what training and support they need to carry out their role. At this point, young people are also encouraged to set themselves some commitments and some ambitions that they want to achieve over the two-year period. At set points during their membership, young people will be asked to reflect on these, to see if they are on the path they've set themselves, and also to give them an opportunity to change their goals for their work with the Panel.

"We want to give the young people an opportunity to reflect and to update us on how things are progressing for them, as individuals but also as a collective group. We know that the young people, who really embrace the opportunities of the Panel, get the most out of it, so we are keen to always check in and reflect with the members on their progress" says Michelle Livingston.

sportscotland also see the Sports Panel as a way of building the capacity of young people to be leaders in sport beyond their time as panel members. This sits alongside other development programmes such as Young Ambassadors, which sees young people from each secondary school in Scotland promoting sport in their school and community. *"We're committed to ensure, beyond the two-year period, that we are developing confident and knowledgeable young leaders in sport,"* says Michelle Livingston. Staff gather reflections from former members about how the Panel helped them develop themselves, and how being part of it has impacted on their subsequent careers. On their website, **sportscotland** profile former Panel members discussing how their Panel membership developed their careers, such as Chris Sellar, a member of the first Panel in 2012–2014, who now works as a Sport Development Manager at Oriam, Scotland's High Performance Centre: *"The Panel positively influenced my career in a number of ways. It provided experiences that helped with my personal development while also increasing both my knowledge of the sport sector and my network of contacts. This undoubtedly helped me at an important time while I was just starting my career in sport."*

What were the challenges of involving young people in this way?

Michelle Livingston said *“the Young People’s Sport Panel is only one commitment that the young people have amongst many, including school, clubs, training, coaching.”* Michelle emphasises the importance of keeping communication going with the young people, to check in through texts and phone calls. The team has recently introduced monthly catch-ups, usually twilight sessions at the end of a school or working day. Panel members can come along in person or join by Skype, FaceTime or Hangouts. This was introduced in response to feedback from young people that they wanted more frequent contact in between their residential and development days which are held every six months. As part of these sessions they provide opportunities for training and support, to help members with the skills and confidence to deliver their role.

What learning does the project have about empowering young people?

The process that **sportscotland** and Young Scot use to develop the skills of the Sport Panel members is structured, intentional, and reflective. They have used the DiSC Profile process, a personal assessment tool which encourages participants to consider how they are as a person, and how they interact with others, using a self-reported questionnaire to suggest what their preferences are for working with others, and where they find challenges. The feedback from DiSC Profiling has been positive, with young people talking about how they are applying the knowledge to work in their schools and communities. *“It’s really positive to see how the young people use this information to develop themselves and their ways of working, both in the panel and outside in their schools and clubs”* says Michelle Livingston.

“The learning for me,” says Michelle Livingston, *“is not to underestimate the impact that young people can make through their decisions and to provide young people with opportunities to lead and to have their voice heard. The Young People’s Sport Panel is making a positive impact on sport in Scotland and as we reflect back over the years we can see how significantly the Sport Panel is contributing to influencing and shaping the future of sport and raising the profile of sport. We look forward to welcoming our new panel in June this year, during an exciting time in Scotland with the Year of Young People.”*

Case study 2 — Hot Chocolate Trust, Dundee

Hot Chocolate Trust is a youth work organisation, based in the city centre of Dundee, operating from The Steeple Church. They work with young people ages 12–21 who hang out in the city centre (around 150 different young people over the course of a fortnight).

How did Hot Chocolate start?

In 2001, members of the Steeple Church decided to try to get to know the young people who gathered on the grass outside the building. These sessions began with hot chocolate outside in the cold, and gradually evolved into an independent youth work organisation running from dedicated space inside the Steeple Church. Charis Robertson, Assistant Director of Hot Chocolate Trust, described their work context as *“slightly different, because it’s drop-in based and very fluid. We don’t take names at the door, so young people will come and go, and they’ll just be, until they feel comfortable enough to get to know the team and to start kind of picking up their own opportunities. I think that’s part of the reason why it works so well actually, is that the young people know they are free to choose or not choose.”*

There are other more structured opportunities, such as residentials and Exodus, a planned summer programme, but all of these are co-created by young people. Crucially, the organisation sees itself as taking part in a community with the young people. Staff and volunteers (described as the ‘team’), use a collaborative approach, and may suggest opportunities for activities, or a theme for a programme, but will not bulldoze through any decisions and will follow where young people’s interests and curiosities lead. Charis Robertson describes this collaboration as a dance: *“There does need to be that kind of dancing in and out, we’re in this together and we’re building a community together, and the young people are at the very heart of it: they’re the leaders of Hot Chocolate. But, that doesn’t mean that the adults who are part of the community don’t have something to bring.”*

Along the way, Hot Chocolate’s approach is to create a safe and uplifting community that provides a chance for young people to have ownership over the activities and the space, both physical and relational space. They place a strong emphasis on including and valuing people and on the kind of personal development that responds to individual’s needs rather than imposing targets. Team members will meet with young people 1-1 to give them individual support, around interests that matter to them. Groups and projects will form in response to the needs and interests of the community.

What kind of decision-making have young people been involved in?

Hot Chocolate use a range of different strategies to involve young people in making decisions, unified by their ethos of honouring the individual’s needs and promoting trust by giving responsibility. This might be asking participants to choose what materials they’d like to use for a particular activity, such as cooking, and giving them a tenner to go to Tescos for ingredients for soup — or it might be asking the young people to give their opinions by writing on whiteboards and flipcharts across the building. *“A lot of it will just be very conversational, so before we open up for any of the drop-ins, the team would get a briefing and they would then know what they need to be sharing or looking out for that night,”* describes Charis Robertson.

They have recently undertaken a five year strategic review, asking young people their ideas on where the community is going, what can be strengthened. This generated hundreds of ideas, which led into a series of focus groups where young people and staff considered the broad themes that had emerged. After this came a more in depth conversation asking ‘what would this actually look like?’ and prioritising actions.

Charis Robertson questions whether the goal of youth involvement should always be to reduce the control of adults and increase the power of young people. *“Given our context, and that loads of the young people we’re working with can be in sheer survival mode, so they’re homeless, and they’re hungry, and they’re needing a referral to the foodbank: they’re not necessarily going to be in a place where they want to take on imaginative leadership of our creative programme. Although, sometimes that’s exactly what they do want, to get out of their kind of highly stressful life situation. So, I think it’s just being self-aware enough to be able to reflect on the nuances between that and confident enough to say, well in this particular situation, this is how we worked it, and in that situation, this is how we worked it, and there’s space for all.”*

This nuanced way of working depends on what each person involved in a situation can bring, and how they can best be supported to develop themselves and create meaning through ownership of the art and activities that they are interested in. One young person was quoted in their 2016 Annual Review: *“Hot Chocolate’s not like other place. We decorate. We decide what happens. We fix stuff. We recruit staff. It makes it our own.”* — **Rhori, 18**

How are young people currently involved in decision-making in Hot Chocolate?

Hot Chocolate run a Youth Team programme, in which 10–15 participants in a year are invited into an accredited volunteering opportunity, which might lead through increased responsibility to a positive destination in education, employment or training, and which will be accredited through Duke of Edinburgh’s or Saltire Awards. The Youth Team are given support to reflect and learn, and a role as part of the wider team, eating dinner together, doing a debrief at the end of the session and cleaning up as a team. The role that volunteers play will depend on their own interests and the staff member overseeing that team, but might be something like music maintenance, controlling a specific budget or keeping an inventory.

Hot Chocolate deliberately invite a spread of young people onto Youth Team, including those who are natural leaders who have a lot of respect for their peers, and who are already taking on more responsibility. Others are perhaps more surprising choices, according to Charis Robertson: *“I’m thinking of one girl who was in dire straits in a homeless unit. Her self-esteem was rock bottom, and she was really embarrassed about the amount of support she felt that she needed. So, we just flipped that on its head and said, well, actually, this is not about you getting charity from us. You’re an important community member here, why don’t you come onto Youth Team and feel that you’re giving something back? It’s not just about you receiving from us. We see your contribution to us too. And, you know, she would reflect on that and say, particularly because we would have dinner together then and it would be with staff and volunteers and visitors, that that was the most healing time for her. She felt that she had a family and felt that she had a purpose again.”*

One aspect that all youth team members have in common is some kind of positive attitude to engagement. It’s clear that although staff respond in the moment to young people, and that there is a fluid, responsive quality to all their engagement with young people, that this does not mean they do not prepare for their interactions. Colleagues spend time with one another in advance of open sessions discussing ideas and plans, take time to debrief after sessions, and sit down with one another to consider how best to offer opportunities to individuals.

Hot Chocolate invites young people to share in the decision-making around staff recruitment. They use group tasks, including a formal panel with young people to judge a presentation, in order to give applicants a chance to be seen in a different light. *“We are certainly not unusual in getting young people involved in staff recruitment”* says Charis Robertson, *“but we have never appointed a staff member that the young people have been unhappy with even if we have felt that, we can take a punt on them and they would come good in the end, and we could do some work with them to pull them*

around. I think that's one of the lines that we have drawn to say, no, if the young people are equal partners here then we would rather not appoint, or we would rather go through this all again, (than) appoint someone that the young people are unhappy with."

What are the challenges of involving young people in this way?

Charis Robertson describes a challenge of working in a context where young people are flowing in and out of the space that Hot Chocolate creates. *"We would work with around a few hundred young people in a year, that would be the kind of normal numbers: a hundred of whom we would know really well, done quite intensive support with; another hundred we would know a bit and then another hundred who would be in the peripheries and who we're just getting to know. So, again, it's how you keep the folks on the peripheries moving inwards, if that is what they're wanting to do. How do you give appropriate opportunities for ownership and leadership across the different strands of the young people, so it's not the usual suspects getting all the same opportunities again and again and again?"*

The organisation contrasts a very open approach to young people, welcoming those who may have been excluded by other youth work and social institutions, with a tight focus on young people under the age of 22, with their own research showing 68% of participants are aged 16-18. Given the age range and profile of the participants, decision-making opportunities that require long term commitment are not the natural fit for young people whose lives are in a state of change. "The biggest challenge to involving young people in decision-making is to do with the fluid nature of our community ... we're not opposed to having some kind of young person's board, or some kind of more formalised structure. What we don't want to do is set young people up for failure, that we sign (them) up for something and then can't maintain it, or their life goes in a different direction, or crisis hits. Then they'd just feel that they've let someone else down in their life. This would be quite different from lots of

the (youth involvement) models out there, or someone being on a committee for a year or a couple of years. It's difficult to know, are we underselling the young people by not pushing them to that, and how much are we putting unnecessary pressure on them around that?" says Charis Robertson.

What learning does the project have about empowering young people?

Hot Chocolate work hard at gathering data about the impact they are making. Their work in monitoring their participants is rigorous, with an annual census conducted with at least 50 young people, asking them to fill out a confidential, highly anonymised questionnaire, which gathers data around all aspects of protected characteristics as well as issues such as whether young people have been victims of crime, their use of alcohol and drugs. In the most recent census they included ten questions around Adverse Childhood Experiences, a standard methodology asking about violence in the home as well as experiences of neglect, abuse and trauma relating to family circumstances. Studies using this methodology have linked high levels of Adverse Childhood Experiences with adult onset of chronic disease, as well as social and emotional problems. Many young people taking part in the census at Hot Chocolate reported very high levels of Adverse Childhood Experiences, says Charis Robertson, *"So you're just reading trauma, after trauma, after trauma. That's a really big thing and actually, that's a different way of the young people sharing their voices with us to impact our strategy and our plans ... for the year or so after."* It's a striking example of how to use monitoring information to understand participants better, rather than just as a reporting tool.

Hot Chocolate involve young people at all levels of operation and take their input to shape their strategic decision-making. However, their approach, characterised by community-building, seeks to involve young people in meaningful ways that emerge from the patterns of the community, rather than fit young people into conventional decision-making structures. *“We’ve shied away from having an official young person on our board, for example, or even having a young people’s board because our experience is that often, that can be quite a tokenistic thing, where you can tick a box on a form saying, well they’re part of our governance structure. I think what we do and the way that we do it is much more genuinely grass roots, but all of our ideas and all of our strategy comes from the young people and filters up the way, rather than from the board or from the exec and filters down”* says Charis Robertson. It’s clear from their work around delegated budgeting, youth-led programming and volunteering scheme that Hot Chocolate are not averse to handing over power and influence to young people. *“It’s amazing to see what changes in their engagement when you say actually, I one-hundred-percent believe in you and trust you. That can be quite transformative and quite powerful. I think that can be one of the key ways to engage young people that feel that they can’t trust adults, or they’re never going to be trusted by adults”* says Charis Robertson. *“I think being willing to let go of the final destination is what really matters and saying, we’re going to go on this journey together. We don’t know where we’re going to end up, but we’re certainly going to be learning stuff along the way.”*

Case Study 3 — Roars not Whispers

Roars not Whispers was a youth activism project run by Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) and Oxfam Scotland from 2006–2010, involving thousands of young people from across Scotland and internationally in youth dialogue and peer leadership.

What was this project about?

In 2005, Oxfam and SYP successfully applied for funding from the Big Lottery Fund for Roars not Whispers, a youth dialogue and peer leadership programme focussing on political, economic and social justice issues in Scotland and internationally. Roars not Whispers ran from 2006 until 2010, latterly as an independent charity, with a target age group of 16–25 years. The overall project aims were to establish a youth-led programme that would build the capacity of young people to represent themselves and others, take action on issues of concern to them and bring those issues further up the public and political agenda in Scotland and internationally; and to work with young people in Scotland to build global linkages with young people from overseas.

To achieve these aims, Roars not Whispers used participative methodologies to develop and deliver training in a range of facilitation and campaigning skills to groups of young people, the Peer Leaders, who worked with other young people in their own areas on issues of their choice. They also curated and organised two CIVICUS Youth Assemblies as part of the CIVICUS World Assemblies, international civic society conferences which were taking place in Glasgow involving over 1000 delegates each year. The Youth Assemblies brought together hundreds of youth activists from many countries, alongside young people from Scotland, to raise young people's voices at the CIVICUS World Assemblies.

How were young people involved in decision-making in this project?

Roars not Whispers grew from Oxfam's concern with voice and participation and SYP's youth-led ethos. To match this, all management and accountability structures of the project focussed on partnership between adults and young people, with decision-making powers shared between them. The project was directed by a Board made up of adult staff from both partner organisations and young people from the Board of SYP. The project staff team were recruited by a mixed panel of adults and young people, with the lead staff member line-managed by a matrix management pair of the Chair of SYP and the Head of Oxfam Scotland. In operational decisions, young people were given lead roles in groups, such as the Steering Group which curated the content of the CIVICUS Youth Assemblies, composed of an international group of young activists led by the Vice-Chair of the SYP and supported by Event Organiser of the project staff team.

What kind of decision-making did young people do?

Roars not Whispers was conceived as a standalone project bringing two partners together for a new stream of work. The initial concepts were developed in discussion between a small group of adults and young people from the two organisations. Once the funding was secured this drove the project to fulfil specific outcomes and outputs, although there was freedom within this for some innovation which was directed by youth Steering Groups. One young person involved in this way was Gayle Campbell, Chair of the Roars not Whispers Scottish Steering Group. Gayle commented in an evaluation, *"I did the training through being Chair of the RnW steering group as I wanted to gain more of a sense of what the peer leaders had done. The main benefit of the training has been the chance to evaluate and reflect on the steering group. The steering group is everyone's but sometimes it's hard to say how people want to take it forward. Also, I feel more skilled and notice a difference in the way I run meetings,*

delegate tasks and get the steering group to bond and gain confidence in themselves. Roars not Whispers has helped me make judgments, eg in the steering group it's always been difficult to maintain interest and attendance was patchy. Now many of our discussions are done electronically."

Young people partnered with adults on all major decisions of the project, and were particularly involved in strategic oversight. In many operational areas young people contributed to decisions about delivery, with young people trained in earlier cohorts helping to revise and deliver training to later cohorts, and young people from the youth parliament becoming volunteers at the CIVICUS Youth Assemblies.

What were the challenges of involving young people in this way?

Young people had always had responsibility in SYP, but this large and well-funded project required partnership with Oxfam. Oxfam staff invested time in building relationships with their counterparts in the young people with leadership positions. As these young people were volunteers, there was often a pressure on them to commit time to management and Board meetings when they also had responsibilities to their own studies and jobs. Staff had to adjust their expectations of decision makers who might not be available immediately.

Undoubtedly the youth-led structure of the SYP helped, as there was already an expectation that young people taking lead roles in the organisation would give a substantial amount of time to their roles. Young people also took part in activities that stretched their experience and skills, such as recruitment and budget oversight of complex budgets. The two partner organisations needed to support those young people in those areas which most adults would have needed training and skill development to deliver.

What learning does the project have about empowering young people?

Roars not Whispers' international workstream provided a space for young people to enact change at the adult-owned space of the World Assembly. One of the youth delegates, Joao from Brazil, spoke to an external evaluator about the impact the project had on this international conference: *"Most of the adult delegates are not used to sit and talk with young people, there is still some prejudice around young people even inside the CIVICUS network. The contribution the Youth Assembly made helped break this prejudice, showing all delegates and CIVICUS staff a bit about the potential involved when engaging with young people. I felt the results were really positive, and opened doors for future co-managed partnerships between youth organisations and other CIVICUS member organisations."* From this example, the learning was that, if effort was expended in bringing young people into influential spaces that are normally adult-only, young people themselves could lead and create new spaces where youth and adults could work together.

Roars not Whispers was a national project which worked with pairs of young people in every local authority area, with support workers based in local partners. In some cohorts, the project had young people from 10 different local authority areas coming together for residential weekends. The disadvantages arose when each local authority pair returned home from training weekends, and would often struggle to make an impact in isolation from the wider group.

The project also had a mandate to go beyond geographical diversity into a full representation of the communities and sectors of Scottish youth, including ethnic minorities, marginalised young people and those who face particular barriers to participation.

For all of these reasons, the project tried a different approach in its later phase to work with a small number of partner organisations, training larger groups of young people from specific communities, to build up greater peer-to-peer and worker support in those cohorts.

“We agreed that we needed to partner with organisations whose core work was with young people from a community or background that we hadn’t worked with. We also considered the skills that our partner organisation would need to bring to the work, in order to ensure that our projects were sensitized appropriately and that we provided good support for the young people who took part. Our partners also had to be willing to work with us through the Roars not Whispers process!” — Charlotte

Flower, participative methods consultant to the project. One of the lessons learned from this approach was that it was important that there was enough time for all relevant staff to be sure of shared vision for the programme, as well as clarity about their respective roles. It was also found to be important to keep the underlying values of the programme in sight: where this focus slipped, it had an impact on the success of the project. The team worked hard to agree and articulate what those values were and evaluated themselves against them, as well as asking the young people to do the same.

Case study 4 — 2050 Climate Group

2050 Climate Group is a national youth-run and volunteer-led organisation, aiming to start a social movement of young people to take action on climate change.

How did 2050 Climate Group start?

2050 Climate Group and Young Scot gathered a group of young people together in 2014 as 2050 Young Leaders: 23 young professionals under the age of 30 who were passionate about tackling climate change, working towards Scotland's climate target of reducing emissions of greenhouse gas by 90% by 2050. The group started by planning the *"2050: Designed by Me"* summit which took place in November 2014. 200 young people got together at this Edinburgh conference, which aimed to empower young people to lead the change towards a low carbon future for Scotland. Following the summit, the 2050 Climate Group decided to start a social movement that educates, empowers, and engages young leaders in Scotland to pursue a more sustainable future and to take action on climate change. Rebecca DeVivo is a current Board member and was one of the young people involved since the beginning: *"the reason to continue doing what we were doing (was that) we found there was a big gap in terms of leadership training for young people who wanted to take action on climate change. And that's really where we built our momentum."* The Group now runs the Young Leaders Development Programme, a free training course providing climate change knowledge and leadership skills development to young people in Scotland. Since 2015, nearly 300 young people have been through the year-long programme, with many young people going on to volunteer within the organisation.

What kind of decision-making have young people been involved in?

Young people have been leading the 2050 Climate Group since the beginning. Since the early stages, senior staff from Young Scot, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) and Edinburgh Centre for Carbon Innovation, amongst others, have been advising the Group. Members describe these organisations as incubating the Group: a metaphor which describes how the nascent Group has been allowed to develop in its own way, whilst being sheltered by more established parent organisations. For example, Young Scot acted as employers for the Group's first staff, seconding them to work with the Group, as well as providing office space; the 2050 Climate Group have sponsored events and SEPA's early support has evolved into a formal partnership agreement. It's clear that adults and adult-run organisations have been intentional about creating space for young people to form this climate-focused initiative; they have committed resources, money and time, and importantly, showed respect for the place of young people in shaping the movement as they thought best. *"The partners and funders that we have are all interested in climate change, and I think they probably see within their own organisations, a gap in engaging young people and see us as an opportunity to help them as well"* said Rebecca DeVivo.

The Group realised as they employed staff and sought funding, that they needed to become formally established and they took advice from adult governance specialists as they reached this decision. They constituted themselves as a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO). They chose to make a larger Board than is usual for a charity, with over twenty Board members. Rebecca DeVivo explained, *"to us it was something we thought that was challenging the norm and ... something that, as a youth led group, we were able to do differently. We didn't really have those structures in place that are so readily defined for other organisations. To build something ourselves and identify*

what worked for us, unlike a normal Board that'll probably meet four times a year, we get together every month, but that doesn't necessarily mean that everybody can attend the meeting. So, there could be times when we do get eight people, which is quite normal. So there's some advantages where it fits around everybody's schedule, we can still have good discussions with a fewer number of people. But then when we have big strategy days and everybody's there it's been really useful, because there's lots of different opinions, but I think, for the most part, because everybody that's been on the Board has been involved in the organisation in one shape or another, either being on it from really early on or coming on it from being on the Young Leaders Programme, that I guess the vision is all the same."

How are young people currently involved in decision-making in 2050 Climate Group?

After they became fully autonomous as a SCIO, the Group developed a new structure for young people to lead: four operational subgroups, which answer to the Board and which deliver areas of work; the Young Leaders Development Programme; Policy and Communications and Alumni. They recruited 40 volunteers to work in these subgroups. They carried out a formal recruitment process for these volunteer roles, including applications and interviews, which allowed them to be fair and transparent, but also reflected that they had a lot of young people interested in becoming volunteers. This allows the Board some space to focus on strategic work, with their own subgroups focussed on internationalisation, partnerships and funding, and organisational development.

Current Chair, Richard Dryburgh, explained the reasons why they changed their structure: *"a lot of the time we were getting sucked into doing operational work which meant we couldn't focus on those strategic things. So, that's why the decision has been taken but also, that's just the way the group had developed, and the volunteers are quite keen to have that kind of different level of responsibility. We were a bit unsure how they would feel about it, making it a bit more formal and the board trying to take a bit more of a step away, but a lot of them have said this is what they want as well, so (it's) a bit clearer for them."*

In developing their organisation and in delivering their work, the Group have chosen a structured way of working, which suits both their high output of work and the profile of young people involved, most of whom are young professionals. Richard Dryburgh described how subgroups started to balance the goals of the organisation and the autonomy of the volunteers: *"Their first big case of work was putting together a strategy that had to be approved by our Board. When the strategy's in place, then they have a bit more freedom to do the work that they need to do as long as it fits that strategy, and the Board are always going to be supportive of that. If it's good work and it fits the strategy, then there's not much that really needs to get approved. We do have Board buddies, so each of the subgroups have got a Board member involved as well. They may engage in something that's a bit risky, and they can maybe write to the Board, or something like that. I think there's freedom for people ... the Young Leaders Development Programme was almost fully independent this year. They had a very good chair themselves, and they had people involved in the Board. The events themselves that they held, six massive events across the year. You know, we weren't saying what kinds of speakers and what kinds of workshops they should have. That was almost fully independent. We suspect that the other groups will head that way once they've had a bit more experience as well."*

What are the challenges of involving young people in this way?

The Group have members from across the country and have focused on increasing their geographic diversity, with young people from 12 local authority areas in the first Young Leaders Development Programme, going up to 21 areas in the most recent cohort. They have also developed their communications, using the free technologies available to charities in the Google suite including the Google Drive Calendar and the Hangouts function for videoconferencing. Volunteers collaborate using around 20 Slack channels (digital workspaces), as well as their own 2050 email address. Getting the communications tools right has been important in allowing the Group to achieve a high output of work using primarily volunteers. Richard Dryburgh commented, *“it’s making the work a lot easier and a lot better because you can collaborate all that kind of stuff on different documents, on different files. Sharing them together is really easy. That helps with the social stuff as well because, you know, you’re not just posting about work all the time.”*

Both Rebecca DeVivo and Richard Dryburgh credit the social side of the Group as important for building a team of volunteers that put in a lot of effort outside their own employment and study. Richard believes that *“that kind of group feeling as we grow is going to be really important because as a group of 50/60 volunteers, we can’t meet up all together in one place very often. We make sure we’ve got three or four events across the year where we can all get together. It’s not just done digitally, but a lot of it is digital. We need to make sure there’s an element in person as well, but I think we understand that the social part of it is very important. If it wasn’t there, and people were doing it faceless, they wouldn’t want to stay involved in the same way as they do right now.”* Rebecca commented on the challenge of keeping young people involved who aren’t living in the Central Belt.

“We’ve talked about potentially having regional hubs so that people, say, further north, up in Inverness, there’s still opportunities for them to feel engaged with the group. Because if you’re not participating all the time it can be really difficult to feel included in what’s going on.”

Another challenge that the group faces is with engaging with people who are younger than their core demographic of 20-something graduates who already have an interest in climate change. Rebecca DeVivo considers that *“maybe part of that is just how we communicate and how many different social media channels exist and what’s changing and not keeping up with the trend in that respect. But, also a barrier for us, because we tend to find that most of the people who apply to join the Young Leaders Programme have some knowledge of climate change, they’ve either studied it at school or just had a natural interest in it, (is) getting the other people who we feel like this programme would benefit, especially for a young person to get free leadership training. But there is that challenge of communicating and engaging with people that don’t maybe necessarily care about climate change.”*

Richard Dryburgh also noted how the group had begun to address the issue of how they engage with people from black and ethnic minority and low-income backgrounds. *“We weren’t really gathering that data to begin with. We should have been doing that to give us a better baseline of where we’re coming from, and we will be doing that moving forward. Until you’ve got the data, you don’t know what you’re dealing with. We do have things like travel funds for the events. People who are maybe struggling to afford to come to the events, there are funds that we can use to help them get there. ... I think we do need to do a lot more in terms of different ethnic backgrounds. We’re kind of aware that a lot of it is white educated university graduates all sitting in a room when there’s a lot more people out there that we need to reach.”*

What learning does the project have about empowering young people?

The Group has developed a way of involving young people that gives them real influence in decision-making, in educating and gathering other young people behind a globally significant task. It is clear that the Group gives young people power get things done, and meaning in the work they do, as well opportunities to build skills in a professionally framed environment which will help them in their careers. Richard Dryburgh's take is that *"as long as there's loads of opportunities for them to be able to thrive and do something different, then people are probably going to stay involved."* Rebecca DiVivo reflects that *"having that peer to peer relationship I think has been really important, because ... it's young people who are experiencing the same things. Other young people who have an idea of what young people want and therefore can deliver something that is fit for purpose, as opposed to maybe people who aren't really on the same wavelength."*

Richard Dryburgh explained why being youth-led is so important to the 2050 Climate Group. *"We say we're trying to build a social movement of young people across Scotland and if it's not young people that are standing up, voicing that and leading it, then I don't think it's a legitimate thing. ...When you're sitting in front of Parliament, or whatever it is, it differentiates you and that's why you're there, because you're standing up for your own future. Everyone is very passionate about that intergenerational justice element of our work."*

Case study 5 — Denmark's Youth Culture Think Tank — Tænketank for Ungekultur

Denmark's Ministry of Culture has a national youth panel of 15 young people aged 17–24. The current panel started to meet in June 2016 and define their own purpose as being to work to enhance the possibilities for young people to create culture and art.

How did the Youth Culture Think Tank start?

The Youth Culture Think Tank has its predecessor in a group of 15 youth advisors recruited by the then Culture Minister in 2012, chosen because they'd already taken the initiative to involve other young people in the fields of arts, culture, entrepreneurship, and sport. This concept continued with the subsequent Minister, who produced a strategy in 2014 focussing on how young people aged 15–29 can have more opportunity to empower themselves and impact cultural life through creating their own activity; self-organised or in co-creation with cultural actors — groups and organisations involved in cultural life. The Think Tank played a key role in delivering the activities of this strategy. The strategy had four main strands: bringing youth councils to more municipalities; training for young people as project initiators; focus on young people as a separate group; and improvement of knowledge and communication, which includes designating 2015 as 'Youth Culture Year'; and establishing a digital calendar where young people could post youth culture events.

Youth Consultant Mia Nadia Lippert, who facilitates the Think Tank, describes the beliefs and research that lay behind this strategy:

"At that time, there were experiences and knowledge saying that if young people have to encounter culture and art, most of them, they want to be involved — they want to have a go, have a say in producing these cultural activities and events, or at least some part. Maybe they can do some of the production processes of giving the ideas to the initiatives, they can do some kind of public relations — but they want to be involved, they don't want to be addressed as if they were children,

because they also want to have these cultural and organisational skills, and to have the acknowledgment of their contribution to this."

What kind of decision-making have young people been involved in?

The Year of Youth Culture kicked off a large number of events, which young people were involved in designing and delivering. The year was named 'URKRAFT', which in Danish means 'Prime Force', and also sounds like the word for 'culture'. The initiative was planned with a large degree of influence from 14 young volunteers. *"And that meant a lot of events, a lot of young people putting youth culture and self-organised or co-created youth culture and art on the agenda, in several places, online as well as physical context where youth culture was debated and carried out"* recalls Lippert. Some examples of these were the Mors Cultural Summit and The People's Political Festival on Bornholm. Part of the activity for this year was a fund designated as the 'URKRAFT-fund' giving young people the chance to apply for small grants to produce their own cultural activity or art works for other young people. *"The concept was that young people could apply for up to 10,000 Kroner very easily on a one-page template; and after 14 days they would have a 'go' or not (a decision), and then they would have the money"* said Lippert. There were 248 applicants in the year; 122 were awarded money from 34 municipalities all over the country, with young people, including those from the advisory group alongside other young people, deciding who to award the money to — monitored by the Youth Consultant from the Agency for Culture and Palaces. It's evident that the Ministry saw this Year as a chance to promote the cause of youth involvement as curators of culture — as a campaign to support young people as producers, not just consumers, of culture and the arts. *"During the campaigning year, young people had to work in a campaigning mode, to respond to young people who were interested in grants, and to process applications to the URKRAFT-fund"* described Lippert.

After this year, the Ministry of Culture hoped that the 98 local municipalities would establish and administer local grants schemes following this model. The strategy also advanced work which pioneered new approaches in involving young people in arts institutions as decision-makers: *“Furthermore, two experimental light-house projects were launched where young people in concrete terms challenge cultural institutions to use young people in the development of the institutions’ work directed at young people.”* – from the Strategy for Young People’s Encounter with Art and Culture (August 2014), available from the Danish Ministry of Culture website.

This Youth Culture Year catalysed the Ministry of Culture’s youth empowerment work, as Lippert reflected: *“After the year 2015, we gained a lot of experience in best practices and critical issues in how to produce a framework for young people to produce cultural activity – self-organised and in co-creation with professional cultural actors. In implementing and designing the campaign year 2015, young people were involved. A lot of young people, produced, during this year, a lot of ideas and recommendations to the cultural sector.”*

How are young people currently involved in decision-making in the Think Tank?

After the Youth Culture Year, the Minister’s group of 15 youth advisors was replaced by the Youth Culture Think Tank. Some of the former youth advisors continued as members of the Think Tank, joined by some of the young people that had contributed to planning and organising Youth Culture Year 2015, and young people who had been recruited via the Year of Youth Culture Facebook page, ‘URKRAFT 2015’. The current cohort of Think Tank members first got together in 2016. The vision they decided on for themselves was to enhance the possibilities for young people to create culture and art. There are two main areas that they make decisions on: firstly, their own ideas to support their vision, which the group describes as Microprojects; secondly, giving advice on initiatives or ideas coming from the Agency for Culture and Palaces, like funds or surveys within the field

of youth culture. The group has also assessed applications for the fund ‘National activities with and by young people’. The applicants were young volunteers in collaboration with professional cultural organisations such as music festivals, theatre companies, municipalities and public associations. The annual budget was 150,000–200,000 kroner (around £17,000–£23,000). The group played a central role in these funding decisions.

The Microprojects are ideas that the young people themselves come up with and are advanced only as far as the young people themselves lead, although all the ideas are first approved by the manager of the Youth Consultant who facilitates the group. One current project is a media strategy to continue the work of the Facebook site ‘URKRAFT 2015’ linked to the 2015 Youth Culture Year, a page with 2185 followers. Lippert explained how the young people of the group had come up with the idea. *“They would like to have a social media strategy where they post a video ... in order to introduce the member of the Think Tank and then they would just mention a project they’re doing in their own local community, respectively. And after sending the video around in our little group as a baton, a proper ‘culture relay’ should begin in order to get videos from youth culture projects all over the country that should inspire and encourage other young people to start up their own projects.”* This media strategy is being delivered by the group although the members find some challenges in carrying it out, due to the pressure of their own work commitments. The group have also thrown themselves into the preparations for an exchange with the Scottish National Youth Arts Advisory Group, writing guides for the delegation, and planning activities to showcase national and local youth arts initiatives.

What were the challenges of involving young people in this way?

Mia Nadia Lippert discussed a challenge:

“Whenever you work with a vision it’s a good idea to take a time-out when needed, in order to consider if the way you work on fulfilling the vision actually still is perceived as meaningful and useful. As for the Think Tank, a sense of need for revitalization occurred early autumn 2017. The reply from me was to facilitate the members through the process of Robert Jungk’s Future Workshop, with the vision of the Think Tank as the pivotal point.”

The Future Workshop model that Lippert brought in to the group is a participatory group process developed to empower ordinary people to make the changes they see as necessary in their everyday life. The process encourages group creativity in proposing alternative solutions to those proposed by authority. The process needs careful facilitation and requires the group to spend time working through a sequence of different activities in stages, starting with Preparation, then Critique of their current situation, an envisioning stage imagining a Utopia, a convergent Implementation stage in which the group evaluates the ideas they’ve generated and comes up with a tangible action plan, and a Follow-Up stage to monitor their own progress. The Future Workshop process is relatively well-known in Scandinavian and German-speaking community work but less well-known in English-speaking communities. A practical guide to implementing the process can be found in an article by Rene Victor Valqui Vidal here. Robert Jungk’s own English-language work on this is not easily accessed but was published in Future Workshops: How to Create Desirable Futures, by Robert Jungk and Norbert Mullert (Institute for Social Inventions, UK, 1987).

Lippert commented on the impact this process has had on the group: *“They said the process functioned well to provide them with a better understanding of their respective pre-conceptions of youth culture. That means, how and why each of the members emphasised different aspects of the topic of youth culture as critical and important. One aspect was the difference between the possibilities in rural areas compared to the big cities. Another example was the importance of creating cultural activities in order to create a feeling of belonging between a large group of people, as opposed to an emphasis on more artistic projects as the individual young person strives to become a talented artist and create their career. Besides this, I see them taking ownership over their action plan of the Implementation stage. For instance, they have identified the need to produce a youth event calendar and have already identified cultural actors who they will approach in order to collaborate. And I feel I can more and more detach myself as the facilitator of the group.”*

What learning does the project have about empowering young people?

One area of learning has been to make clear promises to the group about the extent of their decision-making power. Lippert commented, *“I have been confirmed in the importance of being very clear and professional from the start, before introducing a decision-making process to the young people. You have to be very aware of the space within (which) they can choose decisions. And if I have a mandate to give them this decision power, I really have to make sure I have the mandate, so we don’t have some fake processes. Because that’s fatal. That’s absolutely fatal. So I’d rather say no when they ask a lot of things: can we do that, can we do that, can we do that? I always start saying, for now I don’t know. But I’ll try to see if it’s possible, if we can do it.”*

Another area of learning has been using the facilitator's experience to help young people who are part of the group to overcome their own preconceptions understand and represent the perspectives of young people who are less privileged. Lippert described the group as *"what you could define as ... strong, resourceful young people who can make an initiative about culture to national galleries. And in that way that's wonderful, that's marvellous, but it gives them some limitations in order to work for all young people, because (they) don't understand their... position, their point of view. I see my role as... to distract them a little to think, and with concrete experience, because I've been working with young people in deprived areas."* The use of the Future Workshop process has been valuable to help the members of the group identify their own preconceptions about young people from marginalised backgrounds, and help them come up with plans for future work in tangible ways.

Lippert's own reflections on learning are about finding the right balance to give young people control of their own work — that nothing will happen unless they produce it — alongside the acknowledgment of the supportive, challenging role that a youth worker plays to stimulate the young people in their work.

"It's important that as a youth mentor you can prioritise to have the time (for) mentoring with the young people. Because they come around with all this positive energy, valuable inputs based on the actual real lives and local communities of young people from different part of the country. All these efforts which in collaboration with the agency can support a better national framework for the strengthening of culture by and with young people."

"At the same time I also think that we, the Agency from time to time need to look at the panel from a very rational perspective and re-evaluate if the advantage of having a national youth panel also measures up the resources we spend on it. Though, for now my assessment is that the panel creates so much invaluable, useful knowledge and knowhow for the Agency that we otherwise wouldn't have got access to. Therefore the answer is clear to me: we must keep it."



**NYAAG members visit their Danish equivalents, the Youth Culture Think Tank
(Photo: Amy Firth)**



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