

Playwrights' Studio Scotland

A group of people are seated in a circle, engaged in a discussion or workshop. A woman in the foreground, wearing a blue and yellow jacket and glasses, is clapping her hands. Other participants are looking towards the center of the circle. The setting appears to be an indoor space with large windows in the background.

Annual Report

2020

76 playwrights

Davey Anderson Robert Ballantyne Sadie Beauchamp
Victoria Beesley Benn Brown Drew Campbell Giles Conisbee
Jacqueline Conn Alice Mary Cooper Linda Cracknell
Bob Davidson Mick Duke Ansley Echols Andy Edwards
Oliver Emanuel Marjorie Ferry Joanna Glum
Davey Goodwin Annie George Stephen Greenhorn David Greig
Maryam Hamidi Lesley Hart John Harvey Lewis Hetherington
Jules Horne Kieran Hurley Jaimini Jethwa James Ley
Jane Livingstone Simon MacCallum Rehanna MacDonald
Iain Macrae John McCann Nicola McCartney Janine McEwan
Linda Duncan McLaughlin Linda McLean Mairead Martin
Douglas Maxwell Mara Menzies Laura Miller Amy Rhianne Milton
Mairi Morrison Laurie Motherwell Rona Munro
Ahmad Musta-ain bin Khamis Angela Ness Martin O'Connor
Michael John O'Neill Sean O'Neil Karolina Oleskiewicz
Mariem Omari Adura Onashile Frances Poet Morgan Powell
Mhairi Quinn Lynda Radley Omar Raza Ellen Renton
Michelle Rodley Sara Shaarawi Rebecca Sharp
Francisca da Silveira Gabriella Sloss Stef Smith Diane Stewart
Ellie Stewart Sandy Thomson Julie Tsang Elspeth Turner
Meghan Tyler Myette Whalley-Godwyn Lesley Wilson
Isabel Wright Morna Young

Rona Munro, Chair

These are strange times. We are reporting on a year of the Studio's work which was undertaken in one reality at the point at which we're entering another.

At time of writing, our understanding of what this reality will be like, for playwrights and for theatre, is changing almost daily.

One thing which is clear, is that playwrights have never been more needed. Our communities need to process what is happening to us all, through drama and through stories.

Playwrights' Studio and the Scottish Society of Playwrights recently hosted an online gathering at which a large number of playwrights, from all parts of Scotland, came together online to discuss our response to the pandemic and to the challenges facing live theatre. Playwrights also participated with other freelancers in the many depositions, lobbying documents and appeals that were sent to government, highlighting the imminent collapse of our live theatre without financial help.

Financial help has been offered. I imagine we all expect that the detail of how that money is allocated will involve further scrutiny, lobbying and appeals but, basically we were heard, our value was affirmed, we should empower ourselves and remember that going forward.

The other result which emerged strongly, for me at least, from these online meetings and particularly from the Playwrights' Gathering, was a powerful statement of intent about the theatre culture playwrights want to see surviving and emerging from this difficult time. There was a generous and egalitarian ambition amongst playwrights to strive towards a healthy culture, inclusive in every sense, both in the voices it promotes and in the audience it seeks to reach.

Playwriting is about more than the big shows. Playwrights' Studio has always been invested in the work of encouraging theatre at the grass roots, in smaller venues, in community and education, where the majority of us actually earn our money. It's always been concerned with developing new Scottish playwrights representing all Scotland's diverse and potent voices. Personally, I feel, there is a strong sense, not just from playwrights but from all Scottish theatre makers, that this is the transformative work that can sustain and invigorate our culture until the time it can fully re-emerge into live performance.

Looking at what the Studio did in 2019/20, that work is already strongly there. And I'm confident it will continue, in whatever form is available to us.

Fiona Sturgeon Shea, Creative Director

As Rona says in her introduction, it feels strange to reflect on 2019/20 as the last year of 'normality,' given there was so much work to be done in improving the situation for most artists.

As we knew from the latest [Survey of Scotland's Playwrights](#), the difficulties indicated as far back as [2014](#) were becoming acute. It was increasingly difficult to earn a living from playwriting alone. Commissions were getting shorter and we risked losing important voices from the arts. The landscape was more fragmented and the fragility of the theatre infrastructure was revealing itself.

[Our submission to the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee](#), compiled from the views of playwrights, provides a snapshot of just how stark it has become. We will work with the Scottish Society of Playwrights and other organisations to play our part in ensuring that recovery includes support for playwrights.

Despite all this, the energy and determination to survive and experiment artistically and to create new stories, characters and forms for the stage is still exceptionally strong. The commitment to improvement of skills and craft is equally undiminished.

All of our Programmes are open to playwrights wherever they live in Scotland. But we heard from playwrights based beyond the main central belt cities that it was important for us to meet them, in person, in their own local communities. So, in 2019, I had the pleasure of spending time with playwrights in Caithness, Dumfries & Galloway, Dundee, Fife, and Perth & Kinross at workshops and discussions, led by or focused on playwrights from those areas.

We know there are places, even in a relatively small country like Scotland, that we haven't yet visited and playwrights we haven't yet encountered. One of the positive things to come from the pandemic is the increased adoption of video conferencing, with accessibility built in right from the start. We will continue to develop this as much as possible in future to ensure that as many playwrights in Scotland feel connected to their playwriting community.

I'm struck by the generosity of the 152 additional freelance artists we employed in the development of playwrights' work. These are skilled, experienced professionals who work hard to ensure that the plays they work on are the best they can possibly be. The situations of these artists are now equally precarious and, in advocating for the value of playwrights, it's important that everyone who contributes is included.

As you can see from the statistics packed within this annual report, it was a busy year for the team. We pride ourselves on the individual attention we give to every playwright, play and project. This involves a great deal of detail, time and commitment. I want to thank Rachael MacDonald (who left in June 2019), Amy McKenzie, Emma McKee (who celebrated 10 years with Playwrights' Studio in 2019) and Hayley Sinclair, for their continued dedication to their roles.

Thank you to everyone who makes Playwrights' Studio what it is!



Image: Ruth Armstrong

Aim One

Strengthen and provide vital support and resources to Scotland's playwrights

22

playwrights supported through our core [Playwriting Programme](#), nearly double the number supported in 2018/19

101

scripts read through the [National Script Reading Service](#), and [A Play, A Pie and A Pint Script Review Service](#)

26

[scripts](#) developed across all Programmes and Projects

110

tickets for playwrights as part of a new partnership with the Edinburgh International Festival

867

publications stocked in our [Plays Library](#). An increase of more than 200 from previous years

10

playwrights working from a desk in the [Tom McGrath Writers' Room](#)

Promotion

To celebrate the launch of the Playwriting Programme, and encourage applications from a wide range of playwrights, we commissioned our first short [promotional video](#). A number of playwrights discussed their personal experience of being part of the Playwriting Programme, and the impact it had on their craft. A separate video was created in [Gaelic](#), where former participants spoke of their experience on the Programme.

A BSL [Introduction to the Playwriting Programme](#) was also commissioned, presented by playwright Bea Webster.

Project Support

We provided in-kind administrative and financial support to playwrights who had raised funds and led the development of their own projects. We worked with Michael Duke on a project which fully integrated BSL and English into his play *Irene Barr*. This was funded by Creative Scotland.

Andy Edwards and Channing Tatum (the collaboration of Rohanne Udall and Paul Hughes) also received Project Management support for their new play *Swan Song*.

Partner Projects

Partner Projects stimulated and supported new relationships between playwrights and organisations. Jane Livingstone and Dunfermline Delivers worked together to develop the play *The Best of Boy Wonders*. Ellie Stewart and Eden Court worked together on *Once in a Lifetime* (working title), a new play with songs.

What's the Big Idea?, a series of videos by Oliver Emanuel and a BSL version of the workshop, presented by playwright Bea Webster'."/>

New

We launched a Digital Learning Programme with [What's the Big Idea?](#), a series of videos by Oliver Emanuel and a BSL version of the workshop, presented by playwright Bea Webster

Aim Two

Actively promote Scotland's playwrights, their plays and the craft of playwriting

3 plays developed with support from Playwrights' Studio produced for audiences. *Love Song to Lavender Menace* by James Ley, *Pride and Prejudice* (*Sort of)* by Isobel McArthur, *I Can Go Anywhere* by Douglas Maxwell

32 students engaged across our education projects with the [University of Edinburgh](#) and [Scottish Universities' International Summer School \(SUISS\)](#)

24 [public events](#), including discussions, playwriting workshops and [Different Stages International](#), a new writing symposium for playwrights, directors, producers and dramaturgs

1,193 titles purchased from our Festival Bookshop during August, a 13% increase on 2018/19

200 plays by Scotland's playwrights promoted on the Playwrights' Studio website

943 audience members attended and participated in rehearsed readings, workshops and discussions

Different Stages International New Writing Symposium

Theatre professionals from around the world came together to share and celebrate the tremendous success of playwrights, and their work.

The keynote speech was delivered by David Greig, award-winning playwright and Artistic Director of Edinburgh's Lyceum Theatre. David addressed the importance of international collaboration for culture, for human beings, and for playwrights in Scotland and around the world. [It was broadcast via Livestream and Facebook Live.](#)

There were 91 delegates, including representatives from Australia, Bulgaria, Canada, England, Japan, New Zealand, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Singapore, South Africa, Sweden and the USA, while the Livestream was watched by 100 people from as far afield as Costa Rica.

Edinburgh International Festival

We began an exciting new partnership with the Edinburgh International Festival to provide professional learning experiences for playwrights. Tickets were offered to playwrights for a variety of productions across the Festival's theatre and [Departure Lounge](#) programmes. Forty-eight playwrights received tickets to 15 separate events, including 'meet the artist' opportunities.

Digital

There were 23,672 visitors to our website. We now have almost 260 playwrights on the [Playwrights' Database](#), which continues to be the most visited page on our website.

Award

At the [Bruntwood Prize](#), *Akedah* by Michael John O'Neill, which received script development support through our Professional Programme, won the debut writer's category, the Original New Voice Award.

Aim Three

Stimulate, lead and facilitate critical thinking about playwriting through discussion, debate and advocacy

28

playwrights directly employed to deliver our Services and Programmes, including Mentoring, script surgeries and workshops

152

freelance artists were employed to support the delivery of our Programmes, including actors, directors, and a composer

91

creative professionals from around the world attended [Different Stages International](#)

130

playwrights attended Playwrights Gatherings in Glasgow and Edinburgh, to discuss the preliminary findings from the third [Survey of Scotland's playwrights](#)

Advocacy

We continued our membership of the Federation of Scottish Theatre, Literature Alliance Scotland and Arts & Business Scotland. We contributed to Glasgow Life's consultation on the draft [Glasgow Culture Plan](#).

International

New Zealand

We entered the third year of the Scotland-New Zealand playwright residency and exchange programme. This partnership between Magnetic North, Playwrights' Studio, Scotland and Playmarket New Zealand, is funded by Creative New Zealand, the Arts Council of New Zealand Toi Aotearoa and, in 2018, by Creative Scotland.

New Zealand playwright Uther Dean was the third playwright to take part, working on a new play inspired by his mother's life growing up in Dundee, and exploring storytelling traditions and current practice in Scotland. His residency included being part of Magnetic North's Rough Mix creative lab, meeting playwright colleagues and industry professionals, and seeing new plays and performances.

We supported Prospect Park Productions' search for a play from Scotland to present, as a work-in-progress, at the Dunedin Fringe Festival. Applications were invited from playwrights either from or based in Edinburgh, the sister city of Dunedin. *Book Club* by Tim Barrow was selected. Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the Festival was postponed.

United States of America

Thanks to a Go, See, Network, Share grant from the Federation of Scottish Theatre, our Creative Director visited Chicago for the annual Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas conference. This connected Playwrights' Studio to new and innovative ideas, and to practitioners and academics skilled and experienced in dramaturgy. It expanded our international network and contributed directly to our project plans, marketing and funding proposals for Different Stages International and to future projects.

Belgium

Our Creative Director was invited to Belgium as part of a Scottish delegation to the inaugural Scottish Government-funded, Edinburgh Festival Fringe Made in Scotland Festival in Brussels. She chaired a post-show discussion with Jo Clifford and the creative team following a performance of *The Gospel According to Jesus Queen of Heaven* and attended various discussions on international working with colleagues in Belgium, including meetings and site visits at the Theatre National, BRONKS and Théâtre de la Vie.

Aim Four

Increase the efficiency and sustainability of Playwrights' Studio for the benefit of Scotland's playwrights and the people of Scotland

21

events and activities delivered in seven different Scottish local authority areas outwith Glasgow and Edinburgh, from Caithness in the Highlands, to Dumfries & Galloway in the lowlands.

National Programme

Associate Playwright Oliver Emanuel delivered a series of workshops across Scotland for playwrights on strengthening their ideas - and making them stand out. The workshop *What's the Big Idea?* was enthusiastically attended by playwrights in Dumfries, Inverness, and Lyth, as well as in Glasgow and Edinburgh. They were delivered in collaboration with local partners, Theatre Royal Dumfries, Eden Court, and Lyth Arts Centre.

In April we were part of Rep Stripped at Dundee Rep Theatre. Simon MacCallum delivered an *Introduction to Playwriting* workshop, and we facilitated a discussion *Where are all the playwrights in Dundee?* about the past, present and future of playwriting in Dundee.

As part of the Outwith Festival in Dunfermline, Rebecca Sharp delivered an *Introduction to Playwriting* workshop, and we facilitated a round table discussion *Where are all the playwrights in Fife?* which focused on the possibilities of support for emerging playwrights in the region.

Environment

Our main focus was monitoring and decreasing carbon emissions, particularly in relation to travel. The Space was designated a zero waste area.

Alice Mary Cooper explored sustainability and climate change in her play, *The Bush*, as part of the Mentoring Programme.

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion

Core to our role as a national organisation, we supported playwrights across Scotland who did not have easy access to development opportunities offered in the central belt. Integral to this, we launched [Perthshire Plays](#), a partnership with Birnam Arts, Horsecross Arts, Pitlochry Festival Theatre, and local playwright Lesley Wilson. An important aspect of this is the Perthshire Plays Playwriting Group, comprising **11** local playwrights working together with Associate Playwright Lesley Wilson.

Our casting for script development workshops and rehearsed readings ensured casts reflected the diverse communities of Scotland.

As far as possible, our Programmes and events were accessible to deaf or disabled playwrights and audiences. BSL interpretation was provided at six events in 2019.

The Gaelic Playwriting Award was launched in partnership with Comhairle nan Leabhraichean (The Gaelic Books Council), offering a writer the time, space and financial support to develop work for Gaelic speaking audiences.

Board and Staff

Playwrights made up 44% of our [Board](#) membership, along with experts in IT, finance, human resources, law, TV production and theatre-making. We employed three playwrights as [Associate Playwrights](#), and an additional mentor for the Mentoring Programme. The [core staff team](#) of four delivered our full programme across Scotland.

Through our third biennial survey, commissioned jointly with the Scottish Society of Playwrights, playwrights' responses regarding how well they felt we had delivered on our four main aims was very positive. For all four aims, a significant majority of respondents (84%-90%) stated that we were doing "very well," or, "quite well." Satisfaction levels among playwrights improved by a minimum of 5% on the 2016/17 survey, with Aim 2 seeing a 13% increase.

48

events and scripts

Discussions*

Anatomy of a Play: How Not to Drown / Nicola McCartney

Ways and Means: theatre in 2019 and beyond / Douglas Maxwell

Where are all the playwrights in Dundee?

Where are all the playwrights in Fife?

The Business of Playwriting

Workshops

What's the big idea? / Oliver Emanuel Dumfries, Edinburgh,
Glasgow, Inverness, Lyth

Introduction to the Business of Playwriting / Stephen Greenhorn

Introduction to Playwriting / Simon MacCallum

What is your truth? / Mara Menzies

Writing for Radio / David Ian Neville

Introduction to Playwriting / Rebecca Sharp Dunfermline, Perth

Other events

Different Stages International

Playwrights Gathering Edinburgh, Glasgow

* All discussions were part of [A Year of Conversation 2019](#).

Developed as part of the [Dr Gavin Wallace Fellowship 2018](#), hosted by Playwrights' Studio

Scripts

Crazy Shades by Sadie Beauchamp

The Woman in the Cupboard by Victoria Beesley

The Bush by Alice Mary Cooper

not-for-profit (or the diversity, equity and inclusion play)
by Francisca da Silveira

Irene Barr by Michael Duke | Me Time by Ansley Echols

Swan Song by Andy Edwards | Greek Play by Joanna Glum

At the Foot of the Stair by Davey Goodwin

Moonset by Maryam Hamidi | The Brutiful Game by Jules Horne

The Best of Boy Wonders by Jane Livingstone

Cider Maguire by Janine McEwan | The Native by Mairead Martin

A Shame by Laura Miller | Bleak Law by Amy Rhianne Milton

The National Curriculum by Ahmad Musta-ain bin Khamis

Through the Shortbread Tin: An Ossianic Journey
by Martin O'Connor #

Headland by Michael John O'Neill

Millionaires of Tomorrow by Karolina Oleskiewicz

Young Atlanteans by Morgan Powell

The Politics of the White Stuff by Mhairi Quinn

A Good Poem by Ellen Renton | Lines of Bearing by Rebecca Sharp

I Want You To F**k Me by Gabriella Sloss

The Wood The Trees by Diane Stewart

Once in a Lifetime (working title) by Ellie Stewart

What's the Weather Like Where You Are? by Laura Tansley

Below / Isabel Wright



ALBA CHRUTHACHAIL



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