

# National Theatre

## National Theatre releases new research revealing significant impact of youth theatre on wellbeing ahead of Connections and New Views Festivals this summer

- New research report demonstrates positive impact of youth theatre as Connections participants report positive mental wellbeing significantly above national averages
- Eight new plays will premiere at the Connections Festival at Lowry in Salford, performed by youth groups from across the UK
- Six new plays written by teenagers to be platformed at the National Theatre on 2-3 July, directed by Miranda Cromwell and Mumba Dodwell



For images, click [here](#)

**Tuesday 19 May 2026**

New research released today reveals the significant impact youth theatre can have on young people's wellbeing, as the National Theatre prepares to host its Connections and New Views Festivals this summer.

As part of a report commissioned by the National Theatre and conducted by Dr Kirsty Gardiner, Be More Ardent Consulting Ltd, survey data collected in 2025 from 340 young people aged 13-19 who took part in Connections found **very high levels of mental wellbeing** amongst them, significantly above the national averages.

The research found:

- **90%** of Connections participants reported a very **high level of belonging**
- More than **80%** felt a **strong sense of identification** with their local theatre group.

- Participants demonstrated high levels of confidence, empathy, resilience and purpose

Over the past 31 years, over 130,000 young people have taken part in Connections, the National Theatre's flagship annual youth theatre festival, producing over 230 plays written specifically for young people.

The research findings reinforce growing evidence across the cultural sector that sustained creative engagement can have a profound and lasting impact on wellbeing. At a time when many young people are experiencing increased loneliness, anxiety and social isolation, shaped by the long-term effects of the pandemic, the pressures of growing up online, and uncertainty about the future, the report highlights the vital role youth theatre can play in helping young people build confidence, connection and community.

In an increasingly digital world, programmes like Connections offer something many young people are actively searching for: meaningful in-person experiences, spaces to express themselves creatively, and opportunities to form real human connections and shared purpose.

The findings are released as the National Theatre prepares to shine a spotlight on the voices and creativity of young people across the UK this summer. Its **Connections** and **New Views Festivals** will feature performances and plays created by youth theatre groups and young writers nationwide.

The two festivals are the culmination of the National Theatre's annual nationwide programmes that champion the talent of young people across the UK. By offering opportunities to work with professional directors and writers, both programmes offer young people a feeling of belonging, the chance to explore and develop their own voices as well as develop key skills for their future careers.

This year's Connections Festival will take place at the Lowry in Salford from 25–28 June, the first time the festival has been held outside London. Eight youth groups from across the UK will perform their own interpretations of new plays specially commissioned for young performers. Following this, the New Views Festival returns to the National Theatre on 2-3 July, showcasing six new plays written by young people over the past year through the National Theatre's playwrighting programme will be performed on the NT's Olivier Stage. These readings will be directed by **Miranda Cromwell** (*Director of The Authenticator*) and **Mumba Dodwell** (*Associate Director of Les Liaisons Dangereuses and co-founder of Diversity School Initiative*).

From developing new ideas to the final curtain call, young people have had the opportunity to dive into every part of the theatre making process, gaining hands-on experience, building new creative skills, and exploring the exciting world of backstage and offstage roles. Each year, the Connections' plays are born from discussions and workshops with young people across the country focusing on themes that inspire and stories that matter to them, with the new writing this year including themes of global warming, national identity and bullying. Young people are given further space to voice their own perspectives through New Views, with this year's plays exploring identity, gentrification, racism, masculinity and family relationships.

**Kirsten Adam, Head of Participation at the National Theatre**, said: *"We are really pleased we are able to launch new research today spotlighting the truly transformative impact Connections has had on young people's wellbeing. These findings only scratch the surface of the power of youth theatre and supporting young people to find their voices and tell the stories that matter most to them can have, especially in a time of heightened youth isolation. Each year, it is an honour to watch thousands of young people from across the UK develop the confidence to express themselves authentically through our Connections and New Views programmes and build meaningful communities together. We cannot wait to celebrate this year's extraordinary energy and creative visions with young voices taking over both our own Olivier Stage and in Salford through our partnership with Lowry."*

**Jenny Riding, Director of Learning and Engagement at Lowry**, said: *"We are absolutely thrilled to be hosting the NT Connections Summer Festival at Lowry for the very first time in its 31 year history. This is a landmark moment for us and for Salford, and we're incredibly proud to be welcoming so many vibrant, talented young companies from across the country to our stages. Their energy, creativity and voices are at the heart of the future of theatre, and we can't wait to share their work with audiences here this summer."*

Tickets for Connections are £5 per performance or £8 for two performances in an evening and will be on sale via the Lowry website on 22 May. New Views is a free ticketed event available to book via the NT website from 19 May.

### **Connections Festival**

Connections is the National Theatre's annual nationwide youth theatre festival that champions the talent of young people across the UK celebrating the power of youth theatre. For the past three months, over 5,000 young people from more than 250 companies and schools have performed at home venues and on one of 33 professional stages across the country. To date, 130,000 young people have taken part in Connections since it was founded 31 years ago. The programme has helped shape the early paths of many career routes from teachers to doctors, as well as standout performers, including Rose Ayling-Ellis, Keira Knightley, David Oyelowo, and Callum Scott Howells.

The groups performing in the 2026 Connections Festival at Lowry are:

- **Cockburn John Charles Academy** (Leeds) will perform ***Macbeth Macbeth Macbeth Macbeth Macbeth*** by Kirsty Housley on Thursday 25 June, 19:00
- **The Egg Young Company** (Bath) will perform ***Sycamore Gap*** by Al Smith on Thursday 25 June, 20:30
- **Pendleton School of Theatre** (Salford) will perform ***Wildfire Road*** by Eve Leigh on Friday 26 June, 19:00
- **Cardiff High School** (Cardiff) will perform ***Cloud Busting*** by Helen Blakeman on Friday 26 June, 20:30
- **Westacre Theatre Company** (King's Lynn) will perform ***Fishville*** by Afsaneh Gray on Saturday 27 June, 19:00
- **Guild of Players Youth Theatre** (Dumfries) will perform ***Britney's Lock*** by Alexandra Wood on Saturday 27 June, 20:30
- **Wyke College** (Hull) will perform ***The Animals*** by Sean Buckley on Sunday 28 June, 19:00

- **Jigsaw Arts Balham** (London) will perform ***Ride or Die*** by Florence Espeut-Nickless on Sunday 28 June, 20:30

Applications for Connections 2027 are now open on the [National Theatre website](#) and close on Monday 29 June.

### **New Views Festival**

New Views is the National Theatre's nationwide playwriting programme for students aged 14-19, taking place in schools, online and with sector partners. Participating young people are paired with a professional playwright who equips them with the skills to write their own original 30-minute play. 736 plays were submitted for New Views 2026 from 132 schools and groups across the UK.

The festival will also feature a range of workshops and activities to support participants in their playwriting journeys as well as celebrate the achievements of all those involved in this year's programme. This year's six plays selected to be read at the festival are:

- ***A Dandelion in The Snow***, written by **Dominika Gruszkowska** (aged 17) from CAPA College in Wakefield, will be directed by Miranda Cromwell on Thursday 2 July
- ***Three Butterflies, Two Chimpanzees, One Lion*** written by **Emelia Foster** (aged 17) from Roedean School in Brighton, will be directed by Miranda Cromwell on Thursday 2 July
- ***Big Hair, Big Problems*** written by **Anbarien Moheb** (aged 16) from King Edward VI Camp Hill School in Birmingham, will be directed by Miranda Cromwell on Thursday 2 July
- ***Offside*** written by **Eleanor Wallis Atkins** (aged 18) from East London who took part in the New Views Writers Room at the NT, will be directed by Mumba Dodwell on Friday 2 July
- ***The Worst Part*** written by **David Okodeh** (aged 18) from Manchester who took part in the online New Views Writers Room, will be directed by Mumba Dodwell on Friday 2 July
- ***A Trial on Gentle Hands*** written by **Enya Allinson** (aged 17) from Chatham and Clarendon Grammar School, in Ramsgate, will be directed by Mumba Dodwell on Friday 2 July

Applications are open for New Views 2027 are open on the [National Theatre website](#) and close on Thursday 9 July.

**ENDS**

### **Notes to Editors**

For further information on either festival please contact Orla Bentley at National Theatre [OBentley@nationaltheatre.org.uk](mailto:OBentley@nationaltheatre.org.uk)

Images [HERE](#).

### **With Thanks**

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Connections is supported by The Mohn Westlake Foundation, Buffini Chao Foundation, Andrew Lloyd Webber Foundation, Delta Air Lines, The EBM Charitable Trust, Katie Bradford Arts Trust, Susan Miller & Byron Grote, Colwinston Charitable Trust, Mulberry Trust, Tuixen Foundation, The Simon Gibson Charitable Trust and Peter Cundill Foundation.

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### **About the National Theatre**

The National Theatre offers the widest access to high-quality theatre in the world. This year, we will produce 18 plays, following over a thousand shows that have shaped British theatre since 1963.

Our productions transfer from our home in London to the West End, Broadway and beyond, winning awards on both sides of the Atlantic. We champion bold storytelling that inspires, challenges and entertains, bringing the world to the National Theatre, and taking the best of British theatre to the world. Through our online streaming service NT at Home; our education platform, the NT Collection in schools; and in cinemas with NT Live, we reach audiences digitally in almost every country worldwide - 184 out of 195 and counting.

We operate as a registered charity with a deep social purpose and a nationwide footprint. We partner with regional theatres to tour our shows, are active in more than 90% of state secondary schools, and our Skills Centre trains 5,000 people each year.

Our dedicated NT Studio champions new writing, and we are central London's 'biggest factory' with workshops that craft every aspect of our productions. We host the world's most extensive theatre archive, and our Green Store houses more than 150,000 reusable props and costumes as part of our sustainability commitments.

For more information, please visit [nationaltheatre.org.uk](https://nationaltheatre.org.uk)

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