Evidence to Scottish Parliament Education and Cultural Committee in the role of the third sector and the private sector in improving attainment for all school pupils, particularly those whose attainment is lowest, by Graham Main Artistic Director of Electric Theatre Workshop.

What we do

We are a creative agent for schools working in Dumfries & Galloway – and we use grant funding from the Holywood Trust to support the role of an Associate Director who is based in schools with lower than average attainment.

Why we work with them

These communities were not participating in our year round Youth Theatre programmes, or taking part in the wider events we ran and our research showed us that the young people in this community needed a specific Youth Arts model that was flexible. We created a model that was considerate of their needs which we run in curricular time. Taking part in Youth Arts was seen as an important complement to the school community.

Why is this work delivered in schools?

Schools offer third sector organisations like ours knowledge about the pupils and can add value to the work we do by supporting us to work with young people. All pupils in the school get access to our Creative Agent, regardless of their background which helps us to support an equality of opportunity.

What services we provide

We offer cultural activity which has a direct pathway to potential employability when the young person leaves school – and connect their activity to the wider work we do with the community. This gives the pupils work high visibility and the school community feels involved in the whole community celebration. Often pupils with lower attainment need additional
support to enable them to take part.
We support teaching staff by giving them access to our resources, and help to inspire their teaching practise by connecting them to the creative industries. We support young people directly with examination preparation in Expressive Arts by giving them additional time and space to understand the subject they are studying.

**Does it work?**

There is little information or research at this early stage to suggest that social inclusion projects have any impact on pupil attainment, particularly as our company is only four years old, but the social and human capital gain has been overwhelming.

**Our recent research highlighted:**

49% of pupils felt more able to express themselves following the work

66% of pupils felt more able to contribute to group work and share ideas

57% of pupils felt more able to work with new people in the future

91% enjoyed being part of a community project
About Electric Theatre Workshop

Electric Theatre Workshop is a contemporary theatre company, producing original work for local and national audiences, based in the centre of Dumfries makes a real commitment to the creative health of the Dumfries & Galloway, encouraging artists to draw from it and urging communities to participate in it.

Our work tries to reach new audiences by mixing a variety of different art forms through collaboration, and presented across unusual spaces which might appeal to a new generation of theatre goers. We create work which is energetic and deeply spirited, usually with a political or historical dimension. When we tell you a story – you better hang on to the seat of your pants.

Our audience – like our company, have been on an exciting journey with us, and have embraced some of our wildest ideas by engaging with our new and original style.

We believe that every member of our community has the right to access and experience quality creative experiences, and we support over 350 people a week to engage in a wide range of cultural activities – taking place in our Performing Arts Hub in Dumfries town centre, or as part of our outreach programmes in several communities in Dumfries & Galloway.

Our Performing Arts Hub in Dumfries is open day and night, and together with our partners we are helping to transform the local economy in the area, by creating activities which encourage our community to find their creative potential.

Collaboration and Inclusion are at the centre of our company ethos, and in just 4 years we have developed one of the largest Community Arts organisations in Scotland, by creating a foundation platform for several organisations based in the area, including Dumfries Youth Theatre and Dumfries Community Choir.
Our Creative Sparks programme is a once in a lifetime opportunity for emerging talent to shine by working with us as Associate Artists over one year. Artists get to rationalise their artistic vision with us, and then begin an intensive year long programme which culminates in the development of major work.

We provide networking and resources that support artists to connect with each other and the audiences their work is intended for, and we support national companies by being the local performance gateway for national and international companies.

“Good community arts work is a result of a contributory cycle that places intelligent demands on the individual and motivates the participant to increase their overall engagement to the work, and subsequently acts as a catalyst for individual or collective action “

**Shop-front-theatre**

Our hub is deliberately visible and takes place in an old furniture shop in the centre of Dumfries – it has played a leading role in helping to transform the way that the town centre connects with local people, and means the community have a place to find us.
Models of supporting attainment

Our work is driven by where the opportunities are needed the most, and this helps us identify who our target participants are. The existing programme has been shaped to reflect the current level of need and gaps in provision, and in particular where poorer levels of attainment are achieved by the school community. We refer to statistical information about the community, and cross check this against our existing audience intelligence. If a greater percentage of the community is not crossing the threshold to see shows or events—then there is a likelihood that we will want to find a way to unlock their curiosity.
Creative Schools
Ages 3-14

We are currently piloting the Creative Schools projects in four primaries, and one secondary school in areas of the region where there are known lower levels of attainment, and higher levels of multiple deprivation. The projects are not time-bound and the creative staff on the project develop the cultural activities based on the exact needs of each group. We act as a Creative Agent for local and national organisation.

Partnership schools to take part in other opportunities on offer by bringing them closer to the creative industries.

Pupils take part in our Creative Workshops which are group-based and encourage the participant to step out their comfort zone and increase their confidence in the process, often in areas where lack of confidence has a negative impact on overall potential.
Dinners by Children
Ages 7 – 15

The Dinners by Children project was a piece of theatre that audiences could go and experience, which formed part of our annual theatre programme. It was a collaborative project between a primary school, secondary school and local Italian restaurant. Pupils were taken through the restaurant management process, ranging from the supply chain, making the food and serving it to the paying customers.

Primary pupils were facilitated by secondary pupils who supported stronger community working, and understanding about health and wellbeing.

Some of the parents have never heard of this Italian restaurant and the project shifted attitudes and meant that they had a compelling reason to cross the threshold.

Not only did the project inspire teaching, but it presented the community in a different way.
Burns Night Carnival
Ages 11-14

Burns Night Carnival is a 6 month project that works with secondary school pupils to engage them in one of the biggest community art events in Scotland. Part of the project is a performance inspired Carnival which uses theatre, dance, puppetry and physical theatre as a programme of creative learning which is then showcased to thousands of people on the streets, and subsequently distributed digitally through BBSTV.

In schools – second year pupils from three local secondary schools take part in weekly workshops which run in their schools across Art, Music and Drama subject areas. Teacher’s uses this as an active model for interdisciplinary learning, and additional support staff use this as an inclusive project which the whole year group can take part in.

Participating secondary schools also take part in week long intensives at the projects central hub in Dumfries, which includes more intensive skills including Circus, Puppetry, Creative Producing and Physical Theatre which are taught by contributing practitioners.
Creative Sparks
Ages 16 – 22

Our Associate Artist Programme is Scotland’s only live work based entry to the Creative Industries – and each year student’s work alongside our practitioners to deliver high profile work. Students are taught under a module based system of three modules per semester, and there are two semesters in each year (Sep-Jan, Feb-July)

Our Creative Sparks programme is a once in a lifetime opportunity for emerging talent to shine by working with us as Associate Artists over one year. Artists get to rationalise their artistic vision with us, and then begin an intensive year long programme which culminates in the development of major work.

Course Content: Directing for Performance, Acting & Performance, Community Arts, Creative Producing, Professional Development, Devising & Playwriting