

The Impact of the Scottish Attainment Challenge on the attainment gap:

A response from The Prince's Trust - February 2022

The Prince's Trust is the UK's leading youth charity, supporting young people to transform their lives. We help disadvantaged young people aged 11 to 30 to build their confidence, increase their motivation and improve their employability and enterprise skills.

We support over 7,000 of the most excluded young Scots who are the furthest from education and employment in work each year. We've helped them to overcome their personal barriers and develop life and social skills. Three in four young people supported by The Prince's Trust move into work, education and training.

In partnership with nearly 120 secondary schools across Scotland we helped over 2,000 vulnerable young people through our education offer last year and aim to support even more in 2022 and beyond. We also leverage direct support from many of Scotland's leading businesses, working with them to identify skills gaps and ensure that young people are job ready when they leave school.

Our youth workers across Scotland work with staff in local schools and other education settings to run **Prince's Trust Education** clubs and enrichment opportunities. Working on a needs-led basis, teachers refer young people who are struggling with mainstream education, suffering adverse life events (such as bullying, difficulties at home, or being at risk of youth violence) and facing barriers such as disability, wellbeing concerns or living in a deprived area.

We bring a youth work approach to school learning and most of those who benefit from our support are aged 14-15 – we make a difference at the critical turning point, when compulsory education is coming to an end. Many of the young people we support gain our accredited qualifications, giving them a valuable asset they can use in an application for their next step in education, or on their first CV.

Introduction

The Prince's Trust Scotland welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Education, Children and Young People committee inquiry into the impact of the Scottish Attainment Challenge on the attainment gap. Our vision is that every young person should have the chance to succeed. It's important that all young people are given opportunities from a young age to ensure that they can reach their full potential, irrespective their background.

Response to consultation questions

Q1: What has worked well?

The Prince's Trust Scotland agrees with the objective that young people across Scotland have, and continue to benefit, from additional funding and resources:

improving their opportunities to achieve equity and address the national priority: closing the attainment gap between young people living in our most and least deprived communities. It also aims to bring a focus and accelerate targeted improvement in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing.

As a charity supporting thousands of young people with few or no qualifications, we know the impact that low attainment can have on future prospects and social mobility. We strongly believe that key to improving attainment is improving young people's confidence, behaviour and attitudes to learning.

The Education Recovery Fund was a positive example of the youth work sector working in partnership with local government as part of the Scottish Attainment Challenge. A partnership between The Prince's Trust and Venture Trust has provided disengaged young people in Dundee secondary schools with a new opportunity to develop their personal and social development.

A teacher at Baldrigon Academy in Dundee believes that the partnership helped participants to improve their engagement in school – **“This has been such a brilliant opportunity. All of the kids who have completed the course said they thoroughly enjoyed it and have come back having improved their core skills which will be useful to them in future. It has been a much-needed pick-me-up...and has hopefully reset a few attitudes towards learning. It has also broadened the learners' horizons on their future. We would love to take up this opportunity again should the offer be available.”**

We know that poor engagement at school limits future life chances and The Prince's Trust is determined to grow our intervention support, promoting activity which reflects evolving priorities throughout the secondary school journey. We are acutely aware of the need for an enhanced delivery package for 16-17-year-olds who return to school largely due to it being the only option to avoid a negative destination. The partnership in Dundee offered solutions to individual schools who struggled to ensure alternative youth work focused activities due to the multiple knock-on effects of Covid. During Covid at a time of prolonged uncertainty, fear and lack of control, this was a chance for participants to improve their wellbeing and discover new possibilities.

As part of our education provision, young people are encouraged to explore personal and social development, life skills and prepare themselves for work. We offer formal SQA-accredited qualifications which seek to ensure learners have every opportunity to gain formal recognition of their skills and achievements. We also equip young people with a Certificate in Personal Development and Employability Skills (PDE) which recognises the breadth of personal skills, qualities and attitudes required by employers across a range of sectors.

We collaborate with secondary schools, local authorities and other third sector partners to address school attainment challenges. Our education provision offers flexibility to create a more bespoke offering which can cater for different needs on a school-by-school basis. This model has proved very popular; the programme is now active in a third of all Scottish secondary schools. Our PDE qualification is an excellent example of our work in schools directly improving attainment.

Q2. What could improve?

We believe the third sector has a significant role to play in closing the attainment gap. However, there is a disconnect in engagement between youth work organisations and regional and national education partners. Despite supporting over 2,000 young people to improve their attainment each year, we are not involved in, or aware of, any regional or national forums which review local needs and shares best practice.

We understand that priorities are diverse and, in some cases, competing. This is especially true in terms of effecting policy which has resulted in a lack of cohesion, particularly in the youth work sector, as well as national engagement around attainment and provision of services and resources to schools and disadvantaged pupils. We are supporting Youthlink Scotland to build engagement with regional and national education bodies to bridge the gap with youth work organisations.

The education space is a complex environment. While there are many fantastic initiatives that ensure young people living in poverty get the education they deserve, they are often unsighted. The Prince's Trust is an advocate of working closely with similar youth organisations and advocate for more joint working across Scotland and the UK. We can share best practice, learn from one another and often provide a young person with far more tools to succeed.

Currently active in almost 120 secondary schools, we could expand our presence in areas of under-representation where a significant number of young people can benefit from support. The Prince's Trust Scotland does not claim to be able to offer solutions to every challenge facing each young person but is able to work at scale and a willing partner to other providers who could be better placed to support a young person access the right opportunity for them.

We strongly encourage organisations and local authorities helping young people, to share their best practice with each other, and to strengthen relationships with the youth work sector. While there is not a one size fits all approach, it is often worthwhile for stakeholders to share initiatives that have both successful and unsuccessful outcomes.

We also need to focus more on closing the gap between those children who have core skills needed for education and employment, and those who do not. Young people need to be confident, engaged and motivated if they are attending school in order to have the right foundation for their futures. The Prince's Trust Achieve programme can provide that support to young people to help them fulfil their potential at school, despite a potentially challenging home life.

Q3. How is the impact of funding measured?

The Prince's Trust's education provision is funded through a combination of local authority investment, trusts and foundations, and philanthropy. We work with local authorities to understand local priorities and agree a package of support based on school needs. Reporting requirements can vary but we endeavour to demonstrate an improvement in a participant's personal and social development using 'distance-

travelled' methodology and attainment through our SQA accredited qualification at SCQF level 3-5.

We fully recognise the advantages of transferring responsibility for decision making and funding from local government to head teachers. However, this model does impede the implementation of scalable interventions which can be adapted to the needs of individual schools.

While we have strong and long-standing investment partnerships with some local authorities our shared ambition to enhance quality support to young people is regularly challenged by single year local government budgets and persistent funding uncertainty. The Trust acknowledges the prominence of the Pupil Equity Fund and its merits. However, its introduction presents a sizeable challenge to ensure that we have the resource and capacity to sustain our current delivery across Scotland. With almost 120 existing school partnerships and an additional 230+ schools to engage it is nigh impossible to develop and co-ordinate strategic activity without quickly losing momentum.

Q4. What has been the impact of the pandemic on attainment and achievement in schools?

The pandemic has placed a significant strain on young people who were already struggling to improve their attainment, manage their wellbeing and secure a positive pathway out of school.

A common theme across all our work is addressing a lack of self-belief in young people. In the Prince's Trust 2021 Youth Index report 47% of young Scots said their mental health had worsened since the start of the pandemic, with more than a quarter admitting they felt 'unable to cope with life'. The toll of Covid-19 is likely to have a lasting impact on the lives of young people and we believe evidence-based solutions, such as those supported by the Youth Work Education Recovery Fund should be sustained to address the legacy of this unprecedented crisis.

We are concerned that young people could be held back without the right platform and confidence to achieve, showing just how important core skill development is, including motivation, focus and determination. Any negative feelings will undoubtedly impact on a young person's education, attainment and development at school, whether they are in poverty or not.

An alternative youth work approach is a powerful early intervention to understand young people's needs and empower them to develop the skills and coping mechanisms they need to succeed in education, which will also help them later in life when they come to look for training and work opportunities.

By continuing to work within schools and local communities, youth work and The Prince's Trust has a vital role to play in a whole education system approach to support disadvantaged young people, and we look forward to continuing our work with key partners to ultimately close Scotland's poverty-related attainment gap.