

Peebles Creative Place Review

29 February 2016

Education Scotland in partnership with Creative Scotland undertook three reviews of Creative Place Award winners in late 2015. The Creative Place Awards recognise communities where people work together to celebrate and promote their town, village or area through the arts and culture. Creative Scotland and three Creative Place winners Peebles, Kilmarnock and Helmsdale wished to have an objective evaluation of their impacts and outcomes. Each organisation produced a self-evaluation and engaged in dialogue with HM Inspectors as part of the process. In each of the reviews inspection teams visited a wide range of provision. At the end of the review week HM Inspectors reported the findings to those involved. These reports will publish at the end of February 2016.

In Peebles HM Inspectors found that the Creative Place Award is a catalyst for extending the arts and culture and that The Eastgate Theatre provides strong and effective leadership as a creative hub for the community. Engagement in music is increasing membership and participation leading to a high number of cultural opportunities across Peebles. HM Inspectors suggested that they might further develop a shared vision for Peebles and create opportunities for involving artists and volunteers in planning and evaluation.

1. Context

The town of Peebles is situated towards the west of the Scottish Borders. The population of almost 9,000 has expanded rapidly over the last 20 years, with young families and retired people attracted by the amenities of the area. Like many other towns in the Borders, Peebles has a long involvement with the creative industries. Woollen mills, tweed and knitwear production, and the fashion industry are all deeply rooted in this part of Scotland.

Creativity plays an increasingly significant part in the economic and social life of Peebles. Despite its relatively small population, the Borders accounts for 3.4% of Scottish jobs relating to arts and creative industries, placing it eighth out of 32 local authorities.

Peebles boasts an impressive range of small to medium scale creative businesses including studios, workshops, a bronze foundry, galleries and shops offering a wide selection of products. There are several arts education enterprises specialising in music, drama, photography, visual arts and specialist food design. The Chambers Institution (gifted to the town by the publisher William Chambers) houses the Council's library, museum and gallery as well as the Buchan Museum.

Over the past nine years the Eastgate Theatre has become a creative hub for Peebles and the rest of the Borders. It has a year-round schedule of professional performances, community events, commercial and art house films, along with a substantial programme of community arts and education. A large team of volunteers supports many aspects of the theatre's work. In 2014 the Eastgate Theatre and its partners secured a Creative Place Award. The Creative Place Awards recognise communities where people work together to celebrate and promote their town, village or area through the arts and culture. This award enabled them to build on their strengths and to try new things. For example, additional strands of high profile creative events, which brought art, artists and audiences together in new ways.

2. How has this creative place impacted on the lives of residents and visitors?

Partners, led by the Eastgate Theatre succeeded in meeting all six aims in the Creative Scotland, Creative Place Award. Obtaining a Creative Place Award has enabled the theatre and its partners to offer more arts and culture events and activities. As a result, the Eastgate Theatre is an effective hub for increasing exposure to and inspiring participation in the creative arts. This enables more collaborative working across a range of individuals, groups and organisations.

Following the achievement of the Creative Place Award, large numbers of creative workers deliver a wide range of activities and programmes across a diverse range of venues. People of all ages took part and continue to be involved. Some of these individuals have further developed or increased their skills. Informal networking was enhanced by the Creative Place Award. This is in part, a result of the sharing of skills, knowledge and experience. Over 6200 were recorded as attending larger events, such as exhibitions or as audience members. Permanent exhibits such as *The Peebles of John Buchan* audio trail and the *Peebles Mural* now have the potential to attract further interest. For example, the John Buchan Story Museum visitor numbers have increased from 700 to 2000 visitors per year. The new audio trail which was developed as part of Creative Place Award is an additional visitor attraction which is further increasing these figures. The Tweedlove mountain bike festival was significantly enhanced by the inclusion of Free Wheeling Music, which took place in front of an international audience attending the World Series mountain bike competition. This has increased entries to the World Series as well as the number of visitors.

The local music society, Music in Peebles, regularly seeks and uses feedback from its membership and wider audience. As a result provision has steadily increased. Further improvements to how data is collected, collated and analysed would help better capture the collective cultural offer across Peebles.

Cultural activities in Peebles now effectively target and engage all ages. Targeted work to engage older people has increased their attendance at performances. The Eastgate Theatre's participation programme, *Engage*, along with outreach programmes managed by Music in Peebles and Nomad Beat engage those facing additional barriers including health issues and learning disabilities. Peebles Youth Club 'Do It Yourself' group provide opportunities for artists to work with older people in a range of settings. Older people were involved in the planning of the *Peebles Mural*. They also participate in choirs, craft groups and theatre events organised as part of *Illuminate* - Scotland's Creative Ageing festival. All of these activities are increasing social networks, reducing social isolation and improving wellbeing.

There are also well attended programmes and activities for primary school children including those with learning disabilities. Nomad Beat improves the artistic skills and confidence of young people through providing access to music tuition, music awards and opportunities for public performance. Developing a clear and shared understanding of the Health and Social care needs in Peebles would now help in further targeting of provision. It would also assist in evidencing wider health and wellbeing impacts.

There are positive links with some local schools. Increased partnerships with Peebles High School has resulted in musical learning opportunities being developed. Projects such as *read-a-licious* have increased the number and range of library books being borrowed. Young people from local schools are increasingly using the John Buchan Story Museum as a learning resource. Further strengthening of links with local schools could increase opportunities for young people to achieve through the arts.

Art work and creative writing competitions organised as part of Creative Place develop artists' confidence and skills. Some participants have continued with creative writing, and others have produced art commissions for work locally, nationally and internationally. As a result, new groups have emerged such as a writing group that now meets fortnightly in the Eastgate Theatre and a knitting group 'Needles in Peebles'. The *Airs and Gracenotes* project provides a unique opportunity for a wide range of musicians from up to three family generations and across different musical genres to come together to play and perform. A new informal performance group, the Eastgate Café Orchestra is now in place.

People from Peebles and the rest of Scottish Borders find the Eastgate Theatre cinema screenings and performances to be enriching. The profile of Peebles has been raised as a result of Creative Place and the Creative Scotland Award. There is an increase in national coverage, for example for a Royal opening of the John Buchan Story Museum. In order to build on very good informal networking creative place partners would now benefit from establishing a long term shared vision across Peebles.

3. How has this creative place impacted on the artistic and local community?

There is a strong culture of volunteering within the Peebles area. Volunteers are motivated, confident and valued in their wide and varied roles. Around 80 people regularly volunteer at the Eastgate Theatre and approximately 30 at the John Buchan Story Museum. Young people develop skills for learning, life and work through volunteering as ushers as part of their Duke of Edinburgh's awards. Tutors and board members gain work experience in cultural organisations. A few progress into paid employment, take on new roles or are gaining new skills. Artists receiving new commissions are building confidence to take on more public facing work.

The Creative Place Award helped to build civic pride and embed community cohesion through projects such as *Fish Flagante*, *Working Perspectives*, *Peebles Mural* and *The Peebles of John Buchan audio trail*. 95% of those attending the open-air finale of *Airs and Gracenotes* indicated they would like to participate in other Creative Place events. Further opportunities for joint work involving young people could be developed in partnership with Tweeddale Youth Action, Scottish Borders Youth Voice and Community Learning and Development.

Informal art and cultural networks work well across Peebles. There is an increase in commissions for art work and the use of joint spaces to work and exhibit. A few young artists are well supported through opportunities to learn from more experienced artists. However, this could be enhanced with more formal networking opportunities. Similarly, the development of a Cultural Network would help to sustain the impact of creative place, consider succession planning and reach untapped areas.

The Eastgate Theatre, Music in Peebles and the Tweeddale Society bring good quality performers and speakers as part of their regular programmes. Local schools benefit from outreach programmes. There is a growth in organisations' membership and in audience representation.

The Creative Place Award has had a positive impact on the local economy. Local businesses, report increased visitors and employment opportunities at the Eastgate Theatre. Some local young people are returning to live in Peebles post education due to increased arts-based employment. There is potential for this to be extended to the wider business sector to maximise economic impact.

4. How has this creative place improved partnership working and informed the wider creative community?

The Creative Place Award enabled extensive collaborative working across a range of individuals, groups and organisations. Activities such as *Rapt in Winter*, *Working Perspectives* and *Freewheeling Music* have enhanced partnership working among artists and local event organisers. Partners now promote and market new and existing programmes better. The increasing use of social media is widening reach. The Eastgate Theatre's quarterly brochure is now distributed to all Peebles residents.

Funding arrangements in place between the Eastgate Theatre and the Scottish Borders Council provide vital resources in which to build a core programme. The Eastgate Theatre audience figures for the last three years demonstrate a small increase in both attendance and income for theatre events and cinema screenings. Effective partnership working has led to successful funding applications which have extended activities beyond the Creative Place Award. £10,000 from Awards for All helped support the development of the *Peebles Mural*. Other partnerships now share skills and knowledge for collective benefit. This includes the links between the John Buchan Story Museum and local schools. Business partnerships with the Tweed Valley Tourist Consortium are maximising economic opportunities. Business sponsorship opportunities also continue to be strengthened. However, there is scope for further analysis of evaluations from partners and participants. This would also help inform self-evaluation processes and future strategic developments.

Implementation of the Scottish Borders Cultural Strategy provides an opportunity for the Eastgate Theatre and partners to formalise partnership working. This will also help strengthen communication to ensure strategic planning for cultural activities are maximised.

The review found the following key strengths.

- The Creative Place Award is a catalyst for extending the arts and culture
- The Eastgate Theatre provides strong and effective leadership as a creative hub for the community
- Creative approaches to widening engagement in music is increasing membership and participation
- The high number of cultural opportunities across Peebles
- A vibrant and engaged community with high levels of participation from committed and creative artists, volunteers and partners
- Improving civic pride that is leaving a lasting legacy in the Peebles community.

We discussed with partners how they might continue to improve their work. This is what we agreed with them.

- Consider developing a shared creative vision for Peebles
- Explore the most appropriate forum to further improve coordination, explore succession planning, extend reach and impact beyond Peebles and the Scottish Borders
- Create opportunities for involving artists and volunteers in planning and evaluation
- Develop stronger links with schools and explore opportunities to further accredit young people's achievement
- Improve links with community partners to share information and improve networking
- Consider developing mechanisms for capturing and reporting the contribution creative place makes to other key areas e.g. health and wellbeing and economic outcomes.

5. What happens at the end of the review?

We are satisfied with the overall quality of provision. We are confident that the Eastgate Theatre and partners can build on and take forward the key recommendations of this report. We will make no further evaluative visits in connection with this review.

Ann Kivlin
HM Inspector
29 February 2016

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