

The Cashback Highlands Impact Report 2022-2023



Cashback Highlands Year 3 Evaluation Report
Dr Douglas Lonie
September 2023



tialt
there is an alternative



Executive summary

Cashback Highlands is Eden Court's flagship youth engagement programme, designed to empower young people to feel more confident, to learn new skills and increase their aspiration. The programme is embedded in the Highlands, enabling the region's young people to develop their creative skills and contribute to the region as its next generation of cultural producers.

Outputs

Year 3 of the Cashback Highlands programme engaged 469 children and young people across 220 sessions and three main programme strands (Creative Learning work with schools and community-based projects, Open Studio, and Next steps). Most participants were aged 10-15, with more focused development work taking place with older age groups. Participants were engaged from across the Highlands in a model which used the extensive facilities on offer in Eden Court, alongside bespoke sessions taking place in high schools, primary schools and youth clubs across the region. 40% of activity took place in the 20% most deprived areas of the region.

Outcomes

Strong outcomes and impacts were reported for psychosocial outcomes (i.e., confidence, positive behaviour and learning, ability to do new things), wellbeing, and attitudes towards learning. Many participants reported that they were inspired to rethink their careers and creative identities as a result of taking part.

Stakeholders discussed how the approach to practice at Eden Court creates a safe and trusting environment where young people are supported to develop on their own terms, and in many cases provides a nurturing environment not always available to them elsewhere.

Qualitative research with participants and stakeholders indicated further important outcomes relating to the importance of the relationships developed with practitioners, the need for practice to remain flexible and responsive, the importance of alternative communities for many young people, and how the programme has contributed to young people being able to imagine positive future selves.

Why does it work?

The Cashback Highlands practitioners have developed an approach to their practice which draws on the values and principles of social pedagogy. This method is about ensuring that young people who have complex lives, and in many cases are trauma-experienced, can develop supportive relationships with adults, can direct their learning according to their own terms, can identify ways in which they are progressing, and can build and develop supportive communities. The care and attention of the Eden Court staff team is central to enabling positive outcomes for those taking part.

Recommendations

Since continuation funding for Cashback Highlands Phase 6 (2023-2026) was not successful, there is an opportunity for the Open Studio element to be reviewed and enhanced through funding from other sources. This is an essential service for many vulnerable young people across Inverness and the Highlands at a time when other services are under strain. It is also a core progression route for a diverse and representative cohort of young people unlikely to progress in other mainstream education settings in the same way. The focus of Eden Court moving forward should be on how to develop an offer that makes the most of the sophisticated practice and meaningful relationships (with participants, their families, and referral partners) that have been developed in Phase 5.

Contents

Executive summary	2
1. The Cashback Highlands Programme.....	4
2. Achievement against the Cashback for Communities outcomes	6
Findings from qualitative data collection	8
Diverting young people from criminal behaviour or involvement with the criminal justice system	10
3. Participant demographics, attainment, and positive destinations.....	11
Age.....	11
Gender	11
Sexuality.....	11
Disability	12
Ethnicity.....	12
Religion.....	12
Marital and pregnancy status	13
Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation.....	13
Attainment and positive destinations.....	13
4. Key lessons and recommendations.....	14
5. Evaluation approach and methodology.....	15

1. The Cashback Highlands Programme

Cashback Highlands is Eden Court's flagship youth engagement programme and is part of the Scotland-wide Cashback for Communities programme which uses money seized from criminals to reinvest in young people and create more positive futures.

The programme is designed to empower young people to feel more confident, to learn new skills and increase their aspiration. It exists within a broader national aim to reduce offending and antisocial behaviour and improve lives through building stronger communities. In line with Eden Court's mission, the programme is embedded in the Highlands enabling the region's young people to develop their creative skills and contribute to the region as its next generation of cultural producers.

The Cashback Highlands programme is especially needed in the Highlands where rural poverty and access to creative developmental opportunities outside of school is especially precarious. While Inverness has some infrastructure for media and creative arts training, this is not replicated across the region. Inverness and its surrounding areas also has high levels of deprivation, and young people in the region are particularly at risk of isolation and lack of access to resources that are enjoyed in other parts of the country.

Year 3 of the Cashback Highlands programme focused on consolidating the offer that had been developed in Years 1 and 2. The third year was the first that was not largely affected by Covid-19 regulations and limitations. It enabled Eden Court to develop established and further partnerships and ensure that the young people they had built relationships within recent years could continue to access developmental opportunities that met their needs.

The three main programme strands were:

Open Studio – a 'drop in' opportunity provided on Thursdays and Fridays for 33 weeks of the year, particularly targeted at young people who have additional support needs, some of whom are not engaging in mainstream education. Open Studio provided a safe and welcoming space for young people to develop creative and transferable skills across a range of media and artforms. The work of the young people was also shared publicly in annual film and music showcases at the One Touch theatre in Eden Court.

Creative Learning Programme – Due to the impact of the pandemic on partnerships with schools in Years 1 and 2 the originally planned 'Artist in Residency' strand was repackaged as a more responsive and flexible programme where Eden Court Artist Practitioners could design a bespoke project in partnership with schools and community groups across the region ('Artists in Communities'). In Year 3 this included partnerships with Alness Youth Centre, Golspie High School and Gairloch High School, Clay Studio in Merkinch, Hiton Community Centre and a number of primary schools, providing vital access to creative education across the Highland region.

Next Steps – Next Steps provided a focused progression programme for young people to develop their creative skills in a 3–5-day residency in Eden Court, collaborating on producing a creative output (e.g., a film, a performance, a recording). The main Next Steps programme in Year 3 took place in the summer 2022, coinciding with the Under Canvas festival at Eden court.

Alongside these programme strands, participants are also offered opportunities to attend workshops linked to the Eden Court main performance programme, providing young people with direct access to cast and crew and getting a firsthand understanding of professions in the arts. A full list of sessions and activities delivered over the year is provided in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1 - OVERVIEW OF ACTIVITIES IN 2021-2022

April 2022	Spring Next Steps @ Eden Court	4 sessions
	Artists In Communities Residency: Golspie High School	6 sessions
	Open Studio	12 sessions
	Partner Referral Sessions: Highland Council Placement Services	8 sessions
	Partner Referral Sessions: HLH Young Leaders	3 sessions
May 2022	Artists In Communities Residency: Golspie High School	15 sessions
	Open Studio	12 sessions
	Partner Referral Sessions: Highland Council Placement Services	8 sessions
	Partner Referral Sessions: HLH Young Leaders	2 sessions
June 2022	Artists In Communities Residency: Golspie High School	9 sessions
	Open Studio	12 sessions
	Partner Referral Sessions: Highland Council Placement Services	8 sessions
	Partner Referral Sessions: HLH Young Leaders	2 sessions
July 2022	Summer Next Steps @ Eden Court	4 sessions
	Artists in Communities: Surge Street Theatre @ Belladrum Festival	10 sessions
	Artists in Communities: Youth Club Tour	10 sessions
August 2022	Open Studio	6 sessions
	Artists in Communities residency at The Clay Studio	2 sessions
September 2022	Open Studio	12 sessions
	Artists in Communities residency at The Clay Studio	4 sessions
October 2022	Open Studio	6 sessions
	Artists in Communities residency at The Clay Studio	2 sessions
November 2022	Open Studio	12 sessions
	Artists in Communities residency at The Clay Studio	4 sessions
	Film Showcase @ Inverness Film Festival	2 sessions
December 2022	Open Studio	2 sessions
	GiveBack Pantomime @ Eden Court	1 session
January 2023	Open Studio	12 sessions
February 2023	Open Studio	12 sessions
	Partner Referral Project: Connecting Young Carers	4 sessions
March 2023	Open Studio	12 sessions
	CashBack Highlands Final Live Showcase @ Eden Court	2 sessions

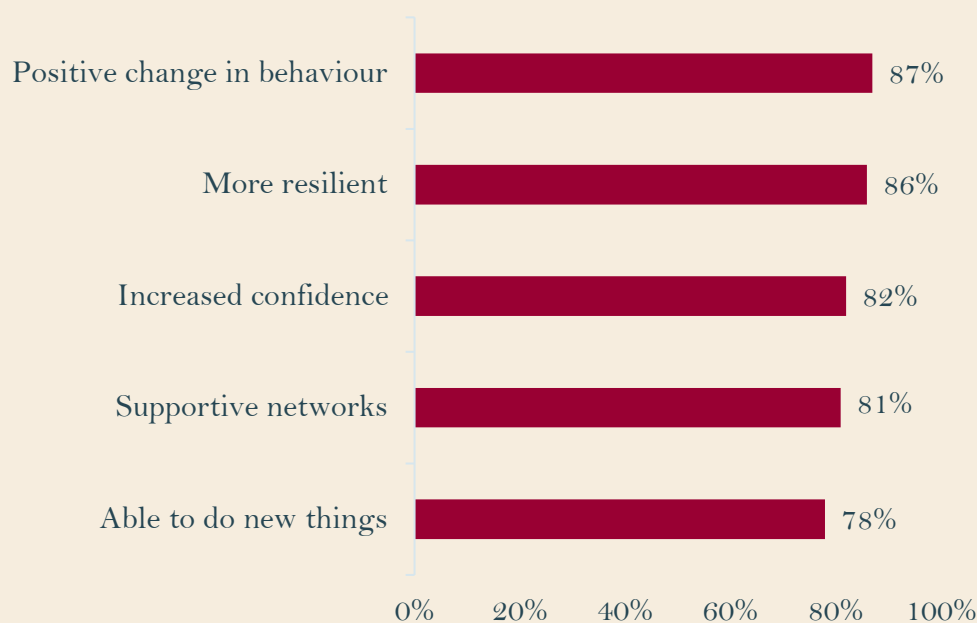
2. Achievement against the Cashback for Communities outcomes

The Cashback for Communities national programme has six outcomes that funded projects must seek to achieve and report on:

- Outcome 1: Young people build their confidence and resilience, benefit from strengthened support networks and reduce risk taking behaviour
- Outcome 2: Young people develop their physical and personal skills
- Outcome 3: Young people's health and well-being improves
- Outcome 4: Young people participate in activity which improves their learning, employability and employment options (positive destinations)
- Outcome 5: Young people contribute positively to their communities
- Outcome 6: Young people are diverted from criminal behaviour or involvement with the criminal justice system

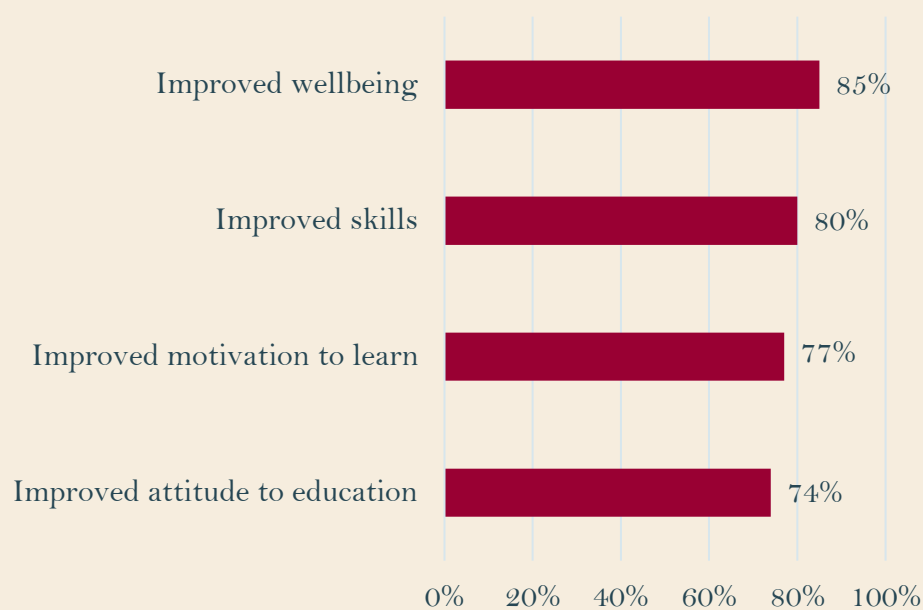
The total number of participants in Year 3 was 469. At the end of taking part in a project provided as part of the Cashback Highlands programme participants are given a short feedback survey to fill out about their experience and if it has helped them in some way. The reporting against outcomes below summarises the percentage of participants reporting 'agree or strongly agree' against the dimensions measured and shows that in all cases there has been positive impacts reported in line with the targets agreed in the grant letter.

FIGURE 2 - PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES



For psychosocial outcomes (i.e., those relating to resilience, risk taking behaviour, and skills) consistently high scores were recorded by participants. The positive changes in behaviour most often related to being able to work well with people (practitioners and other participants) to produce a creative output. The 'new things' that participants were able to do often related to learning new technical skills using particular equipment, or technology, or learning to play an instrument. Developing in both of these ways led participants to be more confident in their creative abilities and often introduced them to new techniques and ideas for how they may want to develop further in the future.

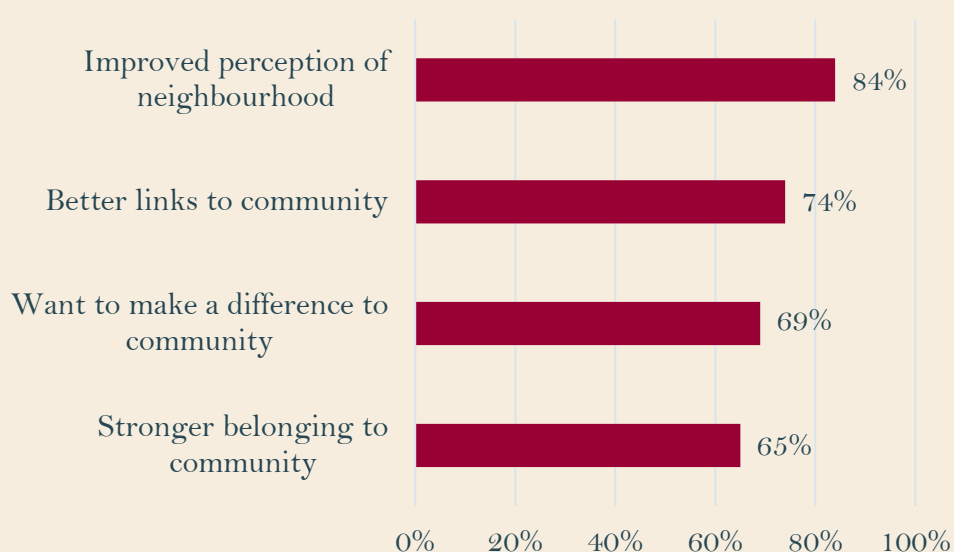
FIGURE 3 - EDUCATION AND WELLBEING OUTCOMES



A very high proportion of participants reported improved wellbeing as a result of taking part in Cashback Highlands activity. Measured using dimensions from the SHANARRI indicators, participants reported that they felt safe, included, respected and nurtured by the Eden Court Cashback Highlands team and the opportunities gave them new ideas and improved relationships.

As much of the work has taken place within schools over blocks of time, attendance was not relevant to measure in the evaluation at a large scale, although there were instances of Open Studio participants reengaging with education after being supported by the Cashback Highlands team. Instead, education outcomes have been measured in relation to motivation to learn more, and attitudes towards learning, both of which are reported highly by participants.

FIGURE 4 - COMMUNITY OUTCOMES



Participants also reported positive outcomes in relation to their communities, particularly through better understanding the resources they can draw on to help them in their learning

journeys (perception of neighbourhood), and through having links to their communities, often through the relationships developed as part of the Cashback Highlands projects.

The outcome relating to having a stronger sense of belonging to a community, while still meeting the target set in the grant offer letter, is lower than the others. This may be because many of the participants, particularly those attending Open Studio, experience marginalisation within their communities (often based on neurodiversity and/or precarious home environments). Findings indicate that these participants experience a strong sense of belonging to the community that is established at Eden Court, but not necessarily that of where they live or study.

Findings from qualitative data collection

The qualitative findings are based on three site visits in Year 3, including focus groups with participants, interviews with young people, referral partners, and the staff team. The themes emerging from the analysis indicate additional outcomes not represented in the Cashback for Communities national framework, as well as outlining the mechanisms by which positive outcomes are achieved (i.e., what it is about the practice and experience that is leading to positive changes for young people).

The core outcomes revealed by analysis of the qualitative data include:

The importance of the practitioner approach in establishing trust

Many of the young people taking part in Cashback Highlands activity have complicated lives. This can include disability, neurodiversity, being care-experienced, being young carers, and being excluded from mainstream education. The Eden Court team take a very bespoke and considered approach to how they interact with the young people, ensuring that they are engaging in trusted relationships with adults, which for many is not a feature of their day to day lives.

The importance of flexibility and the creative process

Building from these trusting relationships, the practice is also very flexible to meet a wide range of young people's needs. In some ways this means diverting planned training from one artform to another to accommodate developmental journeys and interests. In other cases, this can mean slowing things down so that a young person doesn't feel overwhelmed by their learning experience.

The importance of safe, alternative, communities

Many of the young people spoke about the unique offer of Eden Court providing respite from their complicated lives and daily stresses. The community of practice that exists in the organisation (particularly through the Open Studio model) is a place where young people can feel welcomed, included, and listened to. For those who do not necessarily feel safe or supported in their home or learning environments, this alternative space is essential to their healthy development.

Inspiration and imagining future selves

The opportunities provided by Eden Court, particularly through access to technology and equipment not readily available elsewhere, are highly inspiring for many young people. They are enabled to consider future development trajectories that had not occurred to them before. The practitioners being working artists, as well as youth workers, provide strong role models for the young people, and enable them to imagine futures that are positive and realistic.

They meet the individual young person on their own terms and tailor an offer to their needs. The young men I know are interested in music production and there's nowhere else they can get this kind of support. It's developing technical skills, but also creating social interaction and trust at the same time which can be quite rare for the young people we work with.

[Participant] is rejecting and being rejected by mainstream education, you can't build relationships in that environment, he needs to be given supported and flexible time and space to develop at his own pace. He's now on a full-time college course and I don't think that would have happened without the Cashback opportunity.

- Referral partner interview

Getting children and young people to engage can be really difficult, but the guys at Eden Court are amazing at creating a positive supportive environment. They get the mix totally right, pacing things well, putting young people's perspectives and decisions at the centre. There's nothing like it in the Highlands beyond very specific freelance offers. Really, the 'wraparound' support from Eden Court is unique. I've only heard good things from the young people we've had in the Cashback programme. They have a flexibility for kids with no experience and the regular drop-in times means there's a consistency but a built-in flexibility which is good for a lot of young people over term time.

- Referral partner interview

I had some problems with my mental health and school wasn't a helpful environment for me. Coming to Eden Court has sparked my interest in filmmaking and given me loads of opportunities to try different things. Where I live in [Highlands] there's not many opportunities to take part in things like this and there's more in Inverness, but still not much. I recently went down to Glasgow to a filmmaking workshop, which was amazing. Dave [tutor] said that things like that can be great for 'lighting a spark' and convincing us of what we might want to do in the future. He wasn't wrong. It was so interesting and great for networking. I'm now just figuring out the steps I need to take to start doing this professionally.

- Participant interview

There's literally nothing else like this for us. The chance to make our own films and tell our own stories, but also getting people to come and see them is just a great opportunity. I would like to go to college and keep making films, maybe even taking it further if I can, but I wouldn't have even known where to start if it wasn't for Eden Court and all the different things they've shown us.

- Participant interview

Diverting young people from criminal behaviour or involvement with the criminal justice system

The young people taking part in the Cashback Highlands programme are generally not in the criminal justice system, although a number of them are at risk of being involved in crime due to living in areas of high deprivation or adverse life experiences.

The pedagogical approach of the Cashback Highlands team is such that young people are engaged on the basis that they have an interest in their creative development, not targeted because of involvement or potential involvement in crime.

Original plans to work with Police Scotland and youth justice partners in the Highlands were adapted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, meaning that intended interventions with those directly involved in the youth justice system did not take place as intended.

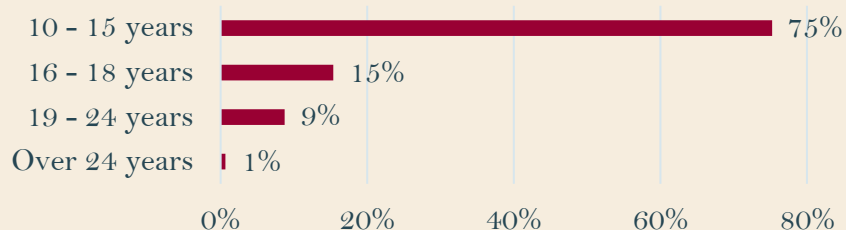
Reflecting this we did not think it was appropriate to ask young people about their criminal behaviour or activity as part of the evaluation process. Questions instead focused on the additional risks and barriers the young people face, and how those who were at increased risk of involvement in crime were able to use the Cashback Highlands programme as a positive developmental activity.

This gives us limited data on which to consider whether participants have been diverted from criminal activity or involvement in the criminal justice system as a result of Cashback Highlands activities. Several parents and referral partners have commented throughout that the offer made through Cashback Highlands is unique and significant as a way of enabling those at risk of being involved in crime (as either perpetrators or victims) to engage in positive developmental activity, much of which has declined in recent years due to the pandemic and other factors.

3. Participant demographics, attainment, and positive destinations

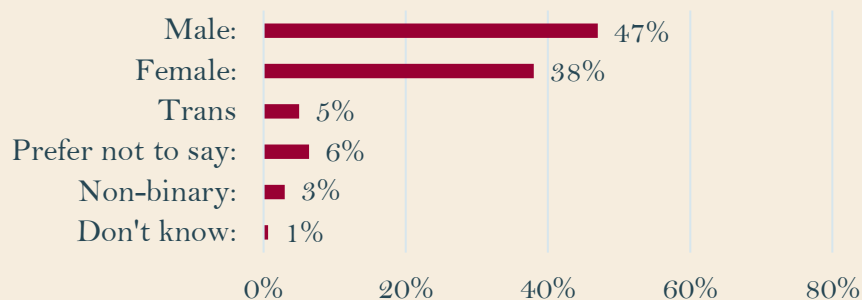
The demographics presented below show the range of young people involved in activities in Year 2. Taken together they show a diverse cohort, with clear engagement from a range of young people at higher risk of marginalisation.

Age



The majority of participants were aged 10-15 years, reflecting the larger number of participants attending via primary and secondary schools. The more developmental programmes (i.e., Open Studio and Next Steps) tend to work with older teenagers.

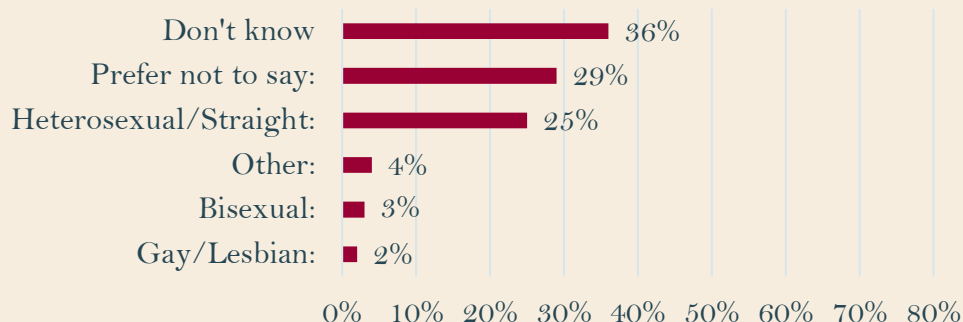
Gender



There was a slight male bias in participation, with nearly half of participants identifying as male and 38% as female. Smaller proportions identified as trans (5%) or non-binary (3%).

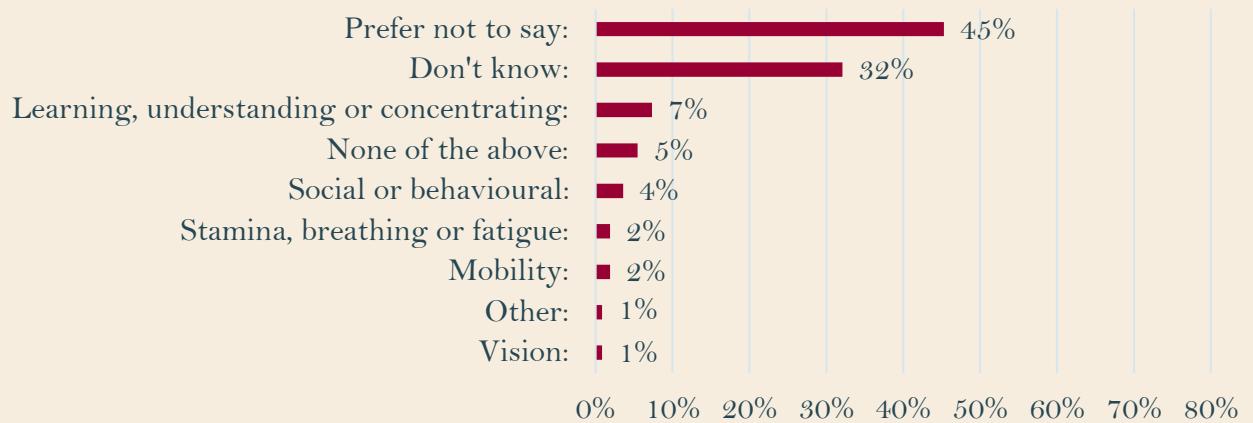
5% of participants also indicated that their gender is different from that they were assigned at birth.

Sexuality



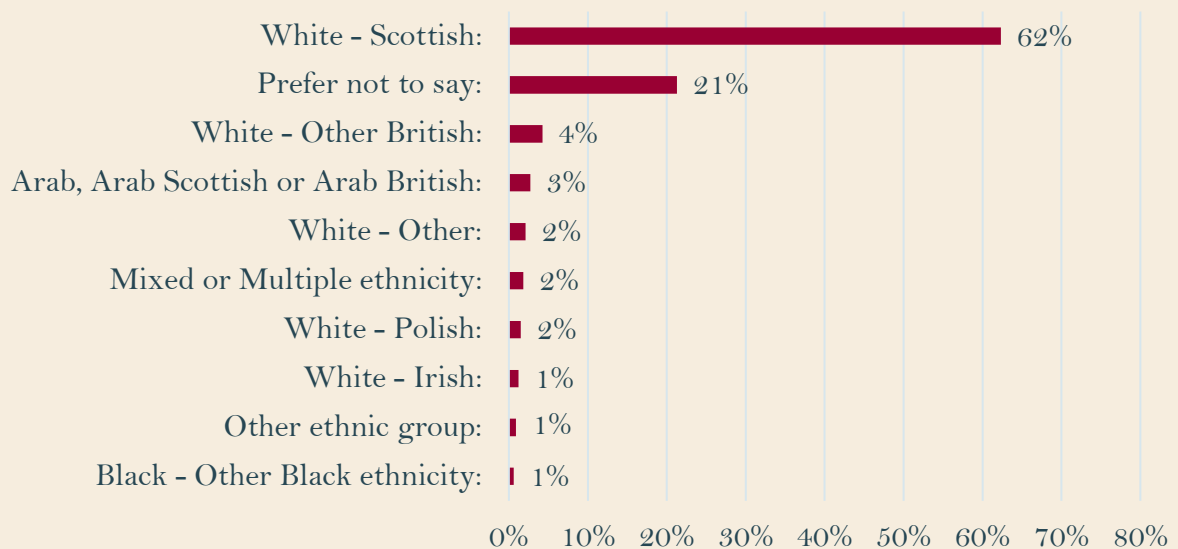
The question on participant sexuality indicated a lot of responses of 'don't know' or 'prefer not to say'. This may be a result of schools providing monitoring data on behalf of participants, and in most cases this data would not be held by schools.

Disability



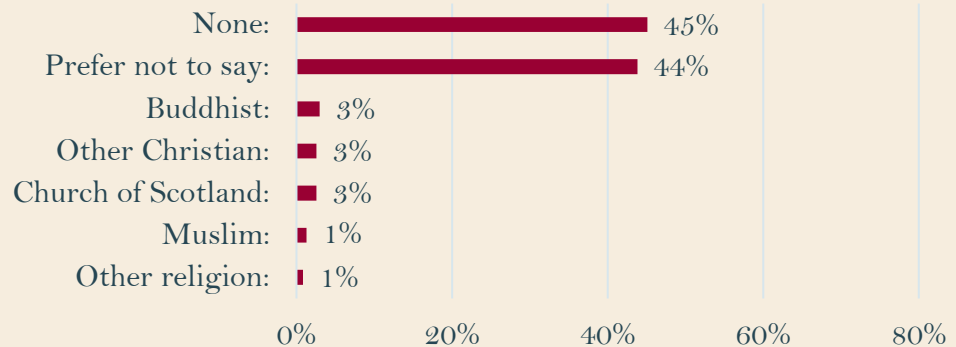
Overall, 17% of participants reported a disability, although large proportions also indicated that they prefer not to say or don't know. The largest proportion of reported disabilities related to learning, understanding or concentrating, with smaller proportions reported against the other categories presented.

Ethnicity



A large proportion of participants preferred not to share their ethnicity, although, in line with the demographics of the Highlands in general, the largest proportion reported White Scottish as their ethnicity.

Religion



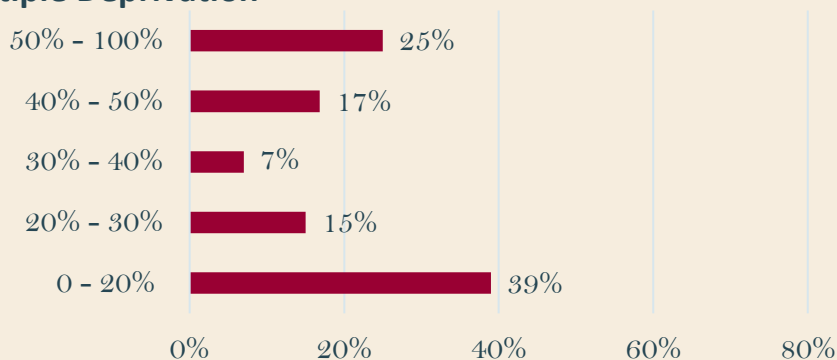
Most participants reported no religion or preferred not to disclose their religion. Religions which were shared were relatively equally distributed.

Marital and pregnancy status

Of the 108 participants who provided data on marital status, just 7 indicated they were married or in a civil partnership.

Of 113 participants providing data on pregnancy status, 3 individuals indicated they were currently pregnant or had been over the course of the year.

Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation



Postcode data reveals that almost 40% of activity took place in the most deprived areas according to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation. Just a quarter of participants live in areas in the 50% least deprived areas.

Attainment and positive destinations

The nature of the Cashback Highlands programme means that attainment is not always possible or relevant, particularly for projects that take place in schools over a relatively short period of time. For the young people taking part in the Open Studio strand, there is an opportunity to do a qualification, although the pedagogical model is based on being very focused on the participant's own direction of their learning journey, and many attend because there is not the same expectation to take part in formal accredited opportunities as there is in mainstream education.

Positive destinations in Year 3 have included several young people taking on a college course or gaining employment. For the same reasons as above, the cohort for which positive destinations could be tracked is relatively small (i.e., this is not something to be expected in low-dosage schools or community projects). That said, anyone who would like an opportunity to progress with the Eden Court engagement programme (or indeed, the broader organisation) is given an opportunity to do so.

4. Key lessons and recommendations

Year 3 of the Cashback Highlands programme has enabled many hundreds of children and young people to engage in developmental creative activities. This has ranged from relatively light-touch interventions via workshops at Eden Court and school events, to sophisticated long-term interventions with young people with complex lives and additional support needs via the Open Studio strand.

Across all strands the success of the programme, as evidenced by the overwhelmingly positive feedback in response to the national Cashback for Communities outcomes, is in a large part due to the work of the practitioners in creating safe, trusting and bespoke development environments for the children and young people. Pushing young people to develop further while enabling them to have agency in their developmental trajectories is a fine balance, and one that the practitioners in Cashback Highlands have perfected over the years.

The broad range of ‘presenting needs’ that young people bring (e.g., a need for trusting relationships with adults, a need to connect with peers, to have their identities respected and validated, to develop skills and knowledge using facilities not available elsewhere), are unique to each young person, and the ‘outcomes trajectory’ they follow will also be unique, as will the ‘positive destinations’ they may progress into. It’s important that this complexity is communicable in how projects such as Cashback Highlands are evaluated, and that there are opportunities for this to inform ‘national level’ outcomes as set out in the Cashback for Communities reporting frameworks.

There are several important impacts that have been achieved with young people taking part in Phase 5 activity, especially for those who are not engaging in other mainstream services and provision. It is hoped that the positive learning and development that has been achieved via the Phase 5 Cashback funding (and that preceding it) can continue in some form and that the legacy of the programme is fully enabled, albeit from other sources of funding.

Recommendations:

- When securing alternative funding for continuation of Cashback Highlands Phase 5 activities consider the importance of quality over quantity. Positive impacts of long-term intervention with children and young people with complex life situations has a greater value than lighter-touch interventions with bigger groups.
- Enhance the successful Open Studio model to enable even more young people to access the opportunities (e.g., providing services over more days in a week)
- Develop a ‘professional pathways’ element for those who have participated in Open Studio over time. This can include opportunities within Eden Court, as well as partnering with local colleges and employers to consider how onward progression can be formalised once young people are ready to take the next step. While it is not appropriate to expect all young people to engage in formal accreditation or progression, it could enhance their experience if these routes are made clear at an appropriate time.
- Encourage and enable Eden Court practitioners to engage in practice sharing and professional development opportunities wherever possible. This highly skilled youth work in the creative sector is relatively rare, and opportunities for practitioners operating in this space to talk about and share their practice will add value to their own work and that of others, ultimately achieving even greater impacts for children and young people.

5. Evaluation approach and methodology

The evaluation of the Cashback Highlands programme is linked to the overall Cashback for Communities logic model. This focuses on five shorter term outcomes relating to individual and community development and a longer-term outcome related to diverting young people from criminal behaviour and the youth justice system (summarised in Section 2 of this report).

We use two main methods to explore these outcomes. The first is a post-participation survey asking participants to reflect on their experience and how it has affected their learning and development. The survey deliberately asks participants to reflect on the development of their creative and practical skills and abilities, alongside indicators relating to psychosocial development aligned to the nature of the activity (i.e., self-efficacy, feeling supported, ideation, commitment and motivation to learning). The survey responses summarised above come from 43% of participants, a reliable sample representative of participants' experiences in this context.

Qualitative data comes from regular site visits including interviews with participants, practitioners and staff, and referral partners. Year 3 included visits in July, October and March, including three focus groups, 10 participant interviews, three referral partner interviews, two staff workshops and regular observation of sessions.

Demographic and monitoring data is collected via a mandatory registration form, which had a full response rate in Year 3 (n=469). It is possible that some young people have participated tangentially in drop-sessions, or more 'open' activities in schools and onsite at Eden Court, although every effort is made to formally register participation.