

Two new engagement projects launched by EIF to boost arts' access in schools

Earlier today (24th Nov.), the Edinburgh International Festival today launched two engagement projects to boost arts access in schools across the capital and encourage the young people of Edinburgh to play on in the absence of live art. Play On: Music, in partnership with the City of Edinburgh Council's Instrumental Service, sees instruments allocated to young and aspiring musicians across the city in place of those silenced by the cancellation of the 2020 Edinburgh International Festival.

A second project, Play On: Stages, involves the construction of outdoor stages in primary school playgrounds accompanied by bespoke engagement packages to support creative arts engagement. Global investment firm Aberdeen Standard Investments has supported the four stages being built as part of the project.

Play On: Music aims to remove the financial barriers to learning an instrument, provide equal opportunities for all pupils to discover music and inspire a new generation of musicians and audiences. The Edinburgh International Festival is committing to fund over 250 new instruments, which will be purchased from The Wind Section in Edinburgh.





To ensure the longevity and sustainability of the project, some of the funding will be used to repair and service the instruments, which will then be re-allocated to other pupils in the future.

The Instrumental Music Service currently does not have enough instruments to meet pupil demand, resulting in up to three pupils sharing one between them. This shortage is exacerbated by current Covid-safe guidelines, which prevent the sharing of instruments for safety and hygiene purposes.

By increasing the number of instruments available, the International Festival's project ensures each individual pupil is provided an instrument for as long as they want it, allowing them to safely continue their lessons and find joy from their music tuition.

Play On: Music initially prioritises secondary school students who are due to sit SQA music exams in the next 12 months. The project also focuses on attracting new primary school pupils from lower income households who would like to start lessons

but would not otherwise have the opportunity.

The second initiative, Play On: Stages, is a project building outdoor stage structures in consultation with schools, bringing playgrounds to life and providing teachers with a platform from which to develop learning and creative activities. The International Festival has created digital educational resources to help teachers introduce pupils to the stage and the different artforms that feature at the Festival each year.

Future activities will see pupils co-designing the backdrop of their stage followed by full engagement projects that seek to build an ongoing relationship between the schools and the creative arts.





Following a successful pilot at Hermitage Park Primary School, the International Festival has built stages at Lorne Primary School, Leith Primary School and St Mary's RC (Leith) Primary School. Generous support from Aberdeen Standard Investments enabled the construction of the stages at the four schools, all of which are feeders for Leith Academy, the International Festival's residency school.

By building the stages in these schools and developing bespoke engagement programmes, the reach and legacy of the residency is expanded further into the Leith community.

Caroline Donald, Head of Learning & Engagement at Edinburgh International Festival said: "Edinburgh International Festival as we know it had to be placed on pause for 2020, so we wanted to shine a light on the artists, musicians and stages that would usually bring the city to life each summer by creating a physical legacy that supports children across the city.

"By investing in instruments through the Instrumental Music Service, we are providing equal opportunities for all pupils

to enjoy the health and wellbeing benefits of playing an instrument and developing the next generation of musicians and music-lovers in Edinburgh.

“The outdoor stage at Hermitage Park Primary has already generated a lot of excitement for the pupils and working with the feeder schools for Leith Academy is an excellent opportunity for us to build upon our successful residency. We are looking forward to seeing this project grow from strength to strength as artists start developing creative initiatives with the schools, when possible within the guidelines.”





Cllr Ian Perry, Education Convener for the City of Edinburgh Council, said: "These new creative learning partnership projects with the Edinburgh International Festival are really bringing some welcome positive news to our schools in what is a tremendously challenging period for them. The pandemic has restricted so many of their normal day to day activities like playing musical instruments so this investment from the Festival is fantastic.

"Access to the arts is important to our young people, for attainment, wider achievement, and health and wellbeing, particularly in the current situation. This is especially true for those who may face financial barriers and are not able to play an instrument.

"The festival residencies in our high schools have been such an outstanding success and putting up these stages in primary school playgrounds is a great idea as it allows the whole school to benefit from them – learning can be taken outside with the obvious health benefits that brings. I'm looking forward to many more positive projects with the Festival over the coming years."

Faye Calder-Kelly, Headteacher of Hermitage Park Primary School, said: "The stage is a fantastic addition to the school's creative resources. The children are really enjoying imaginative play on the stage and making up performances for their peers. The stage allows us to take drama lessons outside and gives the children a professional performance space. We are really looking forward to a time we can share our performances with the wider school community!"

Jill Maxwell, Head of Brand Activation at Aberdeen Standard Investments, said: "Everyone at Aberdeen Standard Investments is delighted to be involved in the fantastic Play On: Stages project. It's been a difficult year, not least for schools, schoolchildren and their parents so with our headquarters being in Edinburgh we are proud to be supporting the local

community in this way. Hopefully this project will inspire many more young people across Edinburgh into the arts.”

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