

A jolly good fellow

Mark Fisher finds out why the EIF's Sally Hobson has been putting her thinking cap on

HOWEVER PROFICIENT we are at our jobs, it is rare to get the chance to stand back and take stock of what we're doing. That, though, has been the privilege of the Festival's programme development manager Sally Hobson for the past year. She was awarded the post of creative fellow by the University of Edinburgh's Institute of Advanced Studies in the Humanities (IASH), a role that has allowed her to spend one day a week away from the pressures of the office enjoying the luxury of lateral thinking.

'The idea is you explore your work in an environment that is supportive and produces the time to think,' says Hobson. 'It's about thinking not doing.'

Established in 2003, the scheme gives one recipient each year a quiet place for study and the opportunity of intellectual exchange with the university's academics. Hobson's predecessors are composer Stuart MacRae, who worked on his opera *The Assassin Tree*, playwright Douglas Maxwell, who worked on a draft script, and David Harrower, who wrote the hit EIF play *Blackbird* while in post. 'The institute creates an inspiring, unparalleled working atmosphere,' says Harrower whose play has gone on to acclaim in London, New York and, in December, Sydney where it is being directed by Cate Blanchett. 'It's both a quiet haven in which to reflect and ponder and, through the interaction of other national and international fellows, a challenging meeting ground in which ideas are discussed, examined and tested. My year there was invigorating; IASH itself, unique.'

The first administrator to benefit from the post, Hobson is responsible for the EIF's award-winning education and outreach work, a job she has done with great success for nearly 15 years. What the fellowship has allowed her to do is reflect on that success and to think about her department in a more analytical way. 'I decided to look at some philosophies as well as cultural theories and explore what we did in our work in education,' she says.

The joy of this particular scheme is that it is open ended. Hobson has given a couple of talks to explain how her year has gone, but she has been put under no obligation to show formal evidence of her progress. Rather, she has been given the freedom to explore ideas for the love of creative thought. 'I've been reading all the books I should have read as an undergraduate,' she says. 'I love it. I have an office and I just go and sit there. I've read TS Eliot, Schopenhauer, Kant . . . writers who talk about what it is that deadens the liveness of art.'

Inevitably, her year will feed into the work of the programme development department, not least because she feels it has made her more rigorous in her thinking about the purposes of art and education. The Festival is unusual in being a three-week event that has a year-round educational presence, giving children experience of ballet and classical music, students the chance to work with internationally acclaimed artists and adults the opportunity to enjoy study weekends with leading practitioners. Such activity

is consistent with the belief of the Festival's founders that the arts can foster the flowering of the human spirit, but only now as a creative fellow has she had time to interrogate this kind of philosophy and to ask herself hard questions about the value of art and its relevance to education.

'It's been very interesting to explore not only what we do, but why we do it,' says Hobson who plans to produce a website document explaining her department's philosophy. 'Everyone shouts about the arts being transformative, but what is that? What is the human spirit? What is the point of having a festival? It's been great to have the thinking time to go back to basics and come up with a clear road map. It's taught me to think a bit more and I hope that will make me a better educationalist and give me a better understanding of what we do here.'

Class conscious

For over a decade, Bank of Scotland Connecting to Music has been in a school of its own, finds Mark Fisher

IF THE EIF's education team are ever looking for a slogan, they could do worse than turn to the child who described a recent experience in a Bank of Scotland Connecting to Music workshop. 'I learned that you don't have to be asleep to dream,' said the ten-year-old after a session of 'focused listening' on the floor with eyes closed.

Giving children the chance to dream while they are awake has been the mission of project leader Audrey Grant, who has run the scheme for 12 highly successful years. Working mainly with pupils from Edinburgh primary schools who are bussed into The Hub for day-long sessions, Grant specialises in finding creative ways to listen to classical music. Clocking up 36 schools a year, she has also run workshops for teachers, care workers and staff from series sponsor, Bank of Scotland.

'We try to instil a strong sense of self in the child and inspire their own creativity,' she says. 'It means they take the music in quite a different way.'

Despite the project's name, Grant takes a broad approach to creativity, embracing visual art as much as music. One exercise involves the children

drawing abstract pictures using music as inspiration. It's a direct way of showing them that they are responding more deeply to the music than they realise.

'Classical music in children's minds can be boring or not accessible – those usual stereotypes,' says Grant, who hopes Bank of Scotland Connecting to Music will reappear in a new form after the scheme comes to an end in December. 'We use a variety of exercises to help them access often quite complex music, everything from Thomas Adès to Pierre Boulez to Bach 'cello suites. Their response is great because we don't tell them this is serious music. We go in by way of another route. For example, with a Sally Beamish piece, we'll get them doing rhythm and gesture exercises in which they create drawings reacting to the energy and movement of the music. They realise they know a lot more than they think.'

The Bank of Scotland Connecting to Music programme is documented at www.eif.co.uk/connectingtomusic