



“So what happens next, then?”

Exploring learning and legacy in creative arts residencies brokered by West of England Music and Arts’ Cultural Education Hub

Executive Summary & Recommendations

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Through the Creative Residency Programme, West of England Music and Arts’ Cultural Education Hub supported schools and creative practitioners to co-design programmes that addressed identified school priorities, embedded creativity across the curriculum, built staff confidence, and widened young people’s access to high-quality arts experiences. This report provides the executive summary and recommendations from these residencies.

Executive Summary

West of England Music and Arts' Cultural Education Hub is uniquely positioned. Established in 2024, it is funded by the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority and Arts Council England through the Culture West programme.

Insightful findings shared through seven detailed case studies of creative residencies in primary, secondary and special schools, coupled with focussed research undertaken from the perspectives of creative practitioners working in and with schools, demonstrate the power of a Cultural Education Hub to establish models of working which bring together and capitalise on multidisciplinary perspectives and experiences of people and organisations, with practices that nurture and develop local and regional cultural education ecosystems.

The research illuminates the central role of the West of England Music and Arts' Cultural Education Hub in bringing about meaningful, impactful change for and with young people, schools, creative practitioners, cultural organisations and communities in inclusive and cost-effective ways, and the importance of strategically targeting limited resources and funding for maximum impact.

Case studies highlight the potential of embedding authentic, creative and cultural learning and engagement to tackle and support multiple local, regional and national

“ Opportunities for these sorts of things are really, really important in actually giving young people in this area, in such an area of disadvantage, an opportunity to express themselves through theatre, through drama, through the arts. ”

Marie Berry, Headteacher, Bourneville Primary School, Weston super Mare

priorities, many of which are highlighted in the UK Government's Curriculum and Assessment Review final report "Building a World-Class Curriculum for All" (DfE, 2025). These include:

- harnessing the power of creative and cultural education to improve school engagement;
- developing contextually aware curricula that is rich and broad, making education more motivating for young people and relevant to modern and evolving life and society;
- nurturing the development of habits, values, attitudes and behaviours that support personal and collective actions and thinking, enhance wellbeing, strengthen communication, develop resilience, promote community cohesion and engender belonging;
- increasing the visibility and accessibility of arts and creative subjects within and beyond the curriculum;
- supporting the vital regeneration of arts education and access to qualifications in a post-EBacc world;
- illuminating and embedding career opportunities that open up pathways to further study and future work.

Department for Education. (2025). Curriculum and Assessment Review Final Report: Building a world-class curriculum for all https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/690b96bbc22e4ed8b051854d/Curriculum_and_Assessment_Review_final_report_-_Building_a_world-class_curriculum_for_all.pdf

This work brings together education in and out of the classroom, crossing subject boundaries in authentic and meaningful ways and exploring the notion of 'enrichment' not just being something that happens outside of the timetabled curriculum. Each residency was built around local priorities and needs, and in doing so, supported young people's ambitions in the here and now as well as opening up opportunities to see new potential pathways for their future.

Giving schools the autonomy to choose for themselves what to work on, and in doing so, making them accountable for the outcomes, reaps rewards. For example, these schools chose to use drama, dance, music, creative writing and visual arts to ambitiously support aspects such as developing oracy and communication, tackle emotionally based school avoidance, embed more creativity throughout the curriculum and across primary teaching, explore multiculturalism and improve community cohesion alongside artform engagement, development and progression.

For the ambitions of the recent Education White Paper "Every Child Achieving and Thriving" (UK Government, 2026) to be realised, the power of arts and cultural education needs to not just be recognised but actively developed and integrated within and beyond the taught curriculum. This is complex; years of underfunding, lack of trained teachers and perverse accountability measures such as the EBacc have left universal arts access decimated in

“ This time last year we didn't have a cohort large enough to run a Performing Arts or Drama BTEC and just by running this one project we now have a class of 30. So yeah, I think what it does for us is it brings back the performing arts. So that's a huge win. ”

Liz Hackling, Head of Pupil Engagement, Bridge Learning Campus, Bristol.

many schools, as the Curriculum and Assessment Review identifies. These residences have shown that children and staff are excited by arts and cultural education and this can also be a hook into education and engagement for pupils whomay struggle in other ways. In one of the schools the momentum and quality of the residency catalysed reintroduction of a drama qualification at Key Stage 4. If, as a nation, we are serious about changing education for the better, and making arts and cultural learning accessible for all, exploring the power of partnerships and successful delivery models, as evidenced in these residencies, would be useful.

And yet, this research doesn't shy away from the identification and exploration of challenges. Even the title of the report "What happens next, then?" - a question posed by a young person towards the end of a residency - serves as a provocation for all of us, locally and nationally. From supporting access to arts and cultural learning as a right of all young people in schools, regardless of their background and ability to pay or their location, to nurturing creative artists to be able to work effectively

UK Government (2026) Every child achieving and thriving

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/every-child-achieving-and-thriving/every-child-achieving-and-thriving-html-version>

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The vision is to enable the constraints of the National Curriculum to be taught in the most inclusive and creative way possible. I think for us it was a vision initially, and it's becoming more of a reality. I think there's obviously still room for growth... thinking what other things we can be taking outdoors and teaching in a creative way. It's given a really, really good basis for that progression.

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Astral Blanchard, Head of School,
Twerton Nursery and Infant School

in partnerships with schools in formal education settings, and from models of funding to brokering sustained meaningful partnerships, 'what happens next, then?' is a crucial question.

This research demonstrates the important strategic and practical role of a Cultural Education Hub in connecting, supporting and nurturing the development of creative artists and teachers across all stages of their career and the power of professionals working and learning together in dedicated and authentic ways to bring about fundamental changes that positively impact young people, schools and communities now and in the future.

The success of this model of working is rooted in a Cultural Education Hub, led by an established and well-connected educational organisation with a breadth and depth of experience across the arts and wider learning and engagement, leveraging local expertise and regional connectivity through galvanising sector participation

around identified local and regional priorities and ambitions. This is central to supporting the development of confidence and expertise to collaboratively tackle priorities and overcome challenges in schools and communities in creative and innovative ways.

This model of working deserves recognition and further interrogation of the possibilities created by widening the network of Cultural Education Hubs to maximise potential for change. These recommendations offer insightful suggestions for policy makers, schools and educational institutions, cultural organisations, creative practitioners and all those that seek to champion creative and cultural education in harnessing the collaborative potential of artistic learning and practices. Together, we have the power to make the world a better place for everyone through broadening and deepening access to creative and cultural learning and engagement and proliferating inclusive, inspiring and ambitious opportunities for all to achieve and thrive, regardless of their background, circumstances and where they live, work and go to school.

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It is vital that schools and colleges are able to innovate and respond to local needs, and that teachers have the flexibility to extend the curriculum and draw out its relevance for the young people in their classrooms.

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- Professor Becky Francis CBE, Chair of
the Curriculum and Assessment Review
"Building a world-class curriculum for all"
(DfE, 2025)

Department for Education. (2025). Curriculum and Assessment Review Final Report. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/every-child-achieving-and-thriving/every-child-achieving-and-thriving-html-version>

A brief overview of each residency:

Bridge Learning Campus

Developing awareness of creative career pathways and raising student aspirations for drama through the development of qualification opportunities in school with Brave Bold Drama.

Bournville Primary School

Developing language, oracy and communication skills through storytelling with playwright and theatre director Toby Hulse

Marshfield CE VC Primary School

Promoting engagement with, and understanding of, a different culture. Explored through songs, stories and dance with Senegalese singer, songwriter, dancer and drummer Batch Gueye.

Horton CE VA Primary School

Connecting with and developing understanding of the local community, past and present. Creating a lantern parade with community artists Lamplighter Arts CIC

Priory Community School Academy

Creating space and opportunities for young people to explore emotional-based school avoidance through creative writing, visual arts and storytelling, delivered by Super Culture. This programme also involves working with Worle Village Primary School to explore this from a primary-based perspective and plans to lead to the creation of a toolkit for schools and teachers as an outcome of this residency.

Kingsweston School

Building communication, self-expression and confidence in children with autism and/or learning needs and sensory impairment working alongside dance artist Kenzi Ireland, specialist in African dance forms.

Twerton Nursery & Infant School

Building a new creative curriculum in which the arts are central to wider learning. Explored with creative producer, participatory artist and forest school leader Holly Dabbs.

Recommendations

1. The potential offered by establishing and funding a network of Cultural Education Hubs in other regions should be recognised and explored.
2. A regional network of Cultural Education Hubs should be central to supporting and developing local and regional infrastructure and ecosystems, proliferating opportunities for schools, young people, creative artists and cultural organisations to collaborate through fruitful partnership working.
3. Organisations leading Cultural Education Hubs should be well-placed to offer strategic and practical support across multiple domains and to target priority and need in the allocation and distribution of funding and resources.
4. Creative and cultural education should be recognised and embraced for its potential to catalyse development and change that capitalises and grows expertise and willingness to collaboratively identify and tackle local, regional and national challenges, ambitions and priorities.
5. Co-funded models should be explored to support broad access to limited resources and funding through targeted, needs-based allocations and supporting schools who are motivated to address needs and challenges in innovative ways.
6. Creative and cultural education programmes should promote agency and ownership, providing structures and support for schools, creative practitioners and cultural organisations to be fully accountable for their programmes, actions and outcomes.
7. Reflexivity and reflection should be central to all programmes so that activity and delivery is built upon and evaluated against bespoke focussed objectives.
8. Programmes should support the ambitions of creative artists and cultural organisations in co-developing their ideas and tools with and for young people and schools, drawing upon their own experiences and expertise.
9. Needs-led professional learning should be central to all creative and cultural arts programmes to support and develop creative practitioners at all stages of their career so that ambition and professional growth is nurtured.
10. Creative and cultural programmes should include opportunities to illuminate authentic ways of working and to expand young people's and teachers' knowledge of and exposure to the future potential of studying and working in the creative and cultural industries.
11. Creative and cultural residencies and other longer-term programmes should support a longitudinal approach to exploring legacy and sustainability.

West of England Music and Arts' Cultural Education Hub

West of England Music and Arts (WEMA) is an education charity that aims to make music, arts and culture accessible, affordable and enjoyable for all. The Cultural Education Hub was established as a new strand of work for WEMA in 2024, funded by the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority and Arts Council England through the Culture West programme.

The West of England Music and Arts' Cultural Education Hub aims to give every child in the region the chance to engage with inspiring, high-quality cultural activities, supporting them to achieve their aspirations and experience a rich, creative curriculum. It does this by:

- Building partnerships between schools and the creative sector.
- Supporting professional development for teachers and creative practitioners.
- Creating opportunities for children and young people to engage with high-quality arts experiences.

Through targeted programmes including the Creative Residency Programme, the WEMA's Cultural Education Hub responds to identified school priorities and local need, embedding creativity within education settings and enabling meaningful, sustained cultural experiences for young people.

Acknowledgements

Dr Ally Daubney

Dr Ally Daubney is a researcher, teacher and educator who has worked across all ages and stages of education from preschool to postgraduate. Alongside her extensive work on international curriculum development and assessment, Ally is renowned for her work on creative and cultural learning and engagement across education and communities. She has conducted and widely published research and evaluation funded by local, regional, national and international organisations which has impacted policies and practices in the UK and abroad. Ally led the research strand for the West of England Music and Arts' Cultural Education Hub 2024-2026. Ally is co-editor of the British Journal of Music Education and an Honorary Senior Lecturer at the University of Sussex.

Megan Clarke

Megan Clarke was the programme lead for West of England Music and Arts' Cultural Education Hub during the period of this research. She is an arts and cultural engagement professional with over 10 years of experience working with children and young people, communities and artists to deliver inspiring creative engagement projects in the cultural sector. She has a passion for supporting people from all backgrounds to engage with arts and culture and the positive impact this has on people's lives.