

The background of the cover features a torn piece of paper with a light beige texture. On the paper, there is a definition of creativity: "for what is the ability to be best in point of view" and "Creativity" in a large, bold, serif font. Below "Creativity", the words "ability to cr" and "creates so" are visible. A large, solid teal triangle is positioned in the bottom right corner, partially overlapping the torn paper.

Creativity

THE
ROTHSCHILD
FOUNDATION

CREATIVE EXPLORERS

'LOOK, LISTEN, LEARN'

2019 - 2020
EVALUATION REPORT



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Executive Summary

The Rothschild Foundation's Creative Explorer programme launched in 2019 to support young people's access to culture and to widen opportunity and future pathways. In its first year, the fund was awarded to the 'Look Listen Learn' project that connected local cultural organisations and a creative industry partner with four secondary schools.

2020 was a year of turbulence, and with the national closure of schools, the project shifted all engagement online. Despite the crisis hitting all sectors, 876 pupils took part in artist-led sessions across a range of disciplines and 6 teachers engaged in high-quality teacher professional development.

The project approach of generating effective partnerships was strengthened by re-visiting strategic development with schools to position the value of the arts against the increasing pressures of school life. This careful and nurturing partnership cultivation has been an important aspect and was successful in seeing two schools from a target of three, through this first year into Year 2.

So far, the project is making a small but positive difference in raising the visibility of the arts and creative industries in these two schools and both schools have committed to the accredited Artsmark Award. As a result, it provides Year 2 with the success characteristics of digital interaction, the currency of the Artsmark, the emphasis on real-world experiences to influence GCSE options and a greater understanding of the levers and opportunities in recruiting further schools to this and other long-term partnerships.

The impact of Covid-19 disrupted all planned activity with pupils and offered no direct access and the evaluation report details the hidden labour of the project team in pivoting at speed and the costs therein. Two schools were not able to complete a year and the report evidences the project obstacles that teachers faced, and the fragility of schools' commitment coupled with staff churn.

Evaluation is a lens for research enquiry and while the project team continues to ask what might motivate a school to put cultural activity more centrally to drive up the quality of provision, the project is helping these schools begin to articulate and embed arts and culture more sustainably.

The Project Team

Dominique Unsworth MBE – Co Director and CEO, Resource Productions

Abhi Arumbakkam – Project Manager, Resource Productions

Paul Guenault – Director of Music, Buckinghamshire Music Trust

Kathryn Maidment – Community Liaison, Pinewood Studios

Acknowledgements

Sinead O' Sullivan – Head of Music, Mandeville School

Will Meadows – Head of Careers and Expressive Arts, Bourne End Academy

Ian Beeston – Assistant Principal, Khalsa Academy

John Fletcher / Mr Tang – Outgoing and New Head Teachers, The Beaconsfield School

Introduction

In 2019, The Rothschild Foundation made a long-term commitment to catalyse collaborative and sustained engagement between Buckinghamshire schools and cultural organisations in order to fuel young people with the benefits of long-term engagement with arts and culture. This commitment acknowledged national initiatives and the national conversation around increasing creativity in education and was with a clear understanding of the significant impact that could be achieved by a funded intervention at a local level.

The fund set out to focus on projects that provided clear pathways for access to arts and culture, particularly for young people who experience the challenges of a selective education system and those where most benefit would be found in widening horizons into the arts and creative industries as potential careers.

The Rothschild Foundation priorities also align with and feed into the Buckinghamshire Cultural Strategy and Buckinghamshire's Skills Goals Analysis which evidenced the inequality that affects pupils in non-selective schools achieving lower attainment scores, reduced intake to post 16 education and reduced chances of developing local in-demand skills. This analysis called for Buckinghamshire's education and training providers to work together towards holistic and joined up provision.

Separate to this, but with a similar vision for connecting provision across sectors is the Cultural Education Partnerships network through Arts Council England. There was opportunity for the Creative Explorer programme to be to be pro-active in its contribution.

Strength, therefore in providing long-term sustainable quality relationships between local cultural providers and schools was fundamental to any successful bid to the Creative Explorers fund. The 'Look, Listen, Learn' partnership project between the three local cultural organisations and schools below proved just this at application stage and was awarded the first Creative Explorers grant 2020 – 2022.

This evaluation focuses on the development and first delivery year, 2020. It seeks to position the project in the national cultural education landscape, document the approach and methodology, and evidence the radical pivot needed during the year.

The report shares the findings and limitations of the project in 2020 with recommendations into 2021.

Cultural Education Context

On the 15th December 2020, the RSA marked the life and legacy of creativity pioneer Sir Ken Robinson, who died this August. He devoted his life to the importance of creativity and his TED talks, including 'Do Schools Kill Creativity'¹ have been viewed by over 21.5 million people, making him the most-watched TED speaker in the world.

1 https://www.ted.com/talks/sir_ken_robinson_do_schools_kill_creativity?language=en

The year also marked 20 years since his National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education report to the Secretaries of State - the NACCCE All Our Futures report² - which has influenced a generation of educators and sector leaders.

In the UK, the decade after the NACCCE report, the government's Creative Partnerships programme made a significant investment and impact on the momentum of schools and cultural robust working partnerships³. Designed to roll out in 36 areas of deprivation, it ran for nearly ten years with over a million pupils before its DCMS funding was cut after the 2010 election, with activity in schools ending in summer 2011.

Jumping forwards, the World Economic Forum in 2019, cited creativity as one of the top three required skills, and policy makers across the world have adopted creative and cultural learning systemic change in their approaches to education.

However, while discourse around arts and culture in schools in England is far more developed and cultural education continues to be a central focus in the cultural sector, the National Curriculum mentions creativity just once and cultural education is part of a cluttered marketplace with schools bombarded with new practice opportunities from different sectors (e.g. Science & Technology; Sport; Health & Well-being) that often come with robustly tested propositions explicitly linked to progress and attainment.

In such an environment it often appears that the arts and cultural sectors are being out-competed – and we know schools (in the main) choose new approaches and initiatives that look like they have minimal risk and are explicitly aligned with the metrics against which they are measured. This, in turn impacts training, resources and Ofsted ratings.

As a result, has been the well charted dramatic fall in opportunities to study arts subjects. The decline in entries to arts GCSE and A Level subjects over the last ten years makes for bleak reading, impacted further by the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) not including arts subjects in its core requirements. Results in August 2020, from Ofqual⁴ show a 37% decline in the number of arts GCSE entries and a 30% decline in A Level arts entries.⁵ Only 5,000 students study music to A Level now, compared with over 7,000 six years ago, and Media, Film and TV Studies fares the worst of all arts subjects.

Set against this sobering backdrop, the Rothschild Creative Explorers programme set out to support schools and pupils with the very best access to arts and cultural provision, professional dialogue and partnership working between schools and cultural organisations.

2020 was a hopeful year.

So timely aligned to this project was the newly launched 2020 Ofsted framework with its focus on a broad and balanced curriculum that specifically marked out cultural capital, ambition and quality.

Ofsted's Chief Inspector, Amanda Spielman's invitation in January 2020 to schools went further to ensure that:

... 'pupils are confident creators, able to be the 'cultural omnivores' that can make informed decisions about what culture they consume and participate in and can articulate why it has value.'

2 <http://sirkenrobinson.com/pdf/allourfutures.pdf>

3 <https://archive.is/20131017205459/http://www.creativitycultureeducation.org/tag/research>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/results-tables-for-gcse-as-and-a-level-results-in-england-2020>

⁵ NB this figure was not skewed in 2020 by COVID as both GCSEs and A Level entries were submitted in Feb 2020.

The 2020 Durham Commission called for a 4 – 19's strategy for embedding creativity in all schools⁶ and there could be no better time to mobilise schools in a long-term creativity in education programme to demonstrate the value of sustained arts engagement for pupils – for their voices, their wellbeing and their careers.

The 'Look Listen Learn' Creative Explorers partnership project offered an invaluable opportunity to explore the impact of a sustained arts and creative industries opportunity in this increasingly arts-free education offer - a chance for reflection and evidencing in an era dominated by a narrower curriculum and the dramatic fall in opportunities to study arts subjects.

In responding to the local decrease in access to arts subjects, a principle driver for the Creative Explorers programme was to make visible the creative industry within the Local Industrial strategy. Young people's first engagement with the arts is typically through a local arts organisation but locally, there was an observed lack of connection or progression to the wider creative industries. Harnessing new partnerships to connect with schools and to widen young people's horizons was crucial.

The programme set out to provide powerful longitudinal insight that is, with a programme of its length and investment to creative learning, rare now in the sector. The approach was wholeheartedly about funding new and long-term partnerships between local publicly funded and creative industry organisations to work together with schools to generate new pathways for pupils' access to the arts and to real-world experience of the industry.



⁶ <https://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/creativitycommission/DurhamReport.pdf>

Project Aims and Objectives – Focus on Impact

‘Look Listen Learn’ was designed for impact and the generation of a robust evaluation. Led by an external evaluator, it demanded a collective endeavour in shaping its direction and supporting delivery. Resource Productions, Buckinghamshire Music Trust and Pinewood Studios set out the proposed scope and roadmap for an agile approach for Year 1 while the project took root in each school and then to focus on generating evidence-rich impact into Year 2 and 3 where the focus on reflective practice would also become more explicit with teaching staff and school leaders.

With a focus on pupils aged 11 – 14, project partners were acutely aware of timetable restrictions and how teachers remain under pressure to deliver results. Governed by policy and a timetable seeming to champion a narrower curriculum, the choice and cultivation by the project team of the participating schools was crucial for longitudinal impact to be achieved.

Three schools met the project criteria of benefitting the most pupils in need:

The Mandeville School

Non-selective secondary mixed
981 pupils on roll
303 pupils with English as an Additional Language
182 SEND pupils
247 pupils receiving Pupil Premium
Ofsted rating - Requires Improvement 2018

Bourne End Academy

Non-selective secondary mixed
759 pupils on roll
120 SEND pupils
213 pupils receiving Pupil Premium
Ofsted rating - Requires Improvement 2016

Khalsa Secondary Academy

Non-selective academy free school
522 pupils on roll
Ofsted rating – Inadequate 2019 (a new inspection during the project life cycle)

A replacement school to the project was secured in Summer Term 2020 (see Project Findings p12)

The Beaconsfield School

Non-selective secondary mixed
851 pupils on roll
88 SEND pupils
164 pupils receiving Pupil Premium
Ofsted rating – Good 2019

In the prioritising of outcomes with partners and the invited school leaders, the ambitions for the project were not about tracking young people pursuing a career in the creative industries or cultivating professional artists, rather about helping them to recognise and develop confidence in their creative expression along with vital creative skills and an awareness of the opportunities within the creative and cultural sector.

With a curiosity in the impact on careers and accessible pathways, the evaluation set out to track these creative choices, the development of broader skills and the richness and depth of learning experience working with artists and through real-world creative industry access.

Noted at the start of the project, was the new statement from Ofsted's Chief Inspector, Amanda Spielman requiring schools to consider how they developed their pupils' cultural capital to help them succeed in life – the value of young people encountering culture. With access to some of the very best local arts and cultural practitioners, combined with real-world industry access to Pinewood, the schools that accepted the invitation to participate saw an invaluable opportunity for their pupils.

'Over the last few years, the number of creative events in school have dwindled. Sixth Form students have mentioned this in their interviews for senior prefect roles in school. This is due to a number of factors, new staff, issues of funding new equipment and lack of a string music presence in school.'

John Fletcher, Head teacher, The Beaconsfield School

At Bourne End Academy, there are now only 2 options to pick at GCSE with arts numbers dramatically declining. The previous year had seen GCSE Drama drop from 17 to 8 pupils and Dance in a similar position.

Schools have each cited the urgency for them in pursuing the project opportunity for their pupils. They were unanimous that this was about making the case for the impact of arts and culture and to their school community, working with pupils in Year 8 and 9 before they made their GCSE option choices.

The project then was driven by the driving question:

What happens to learning, confidence and pupil choice when immersed in an intense period of creative intervention with artists and industry partners?

2020 Derailed – Education in Crisis and Recovery

Project activity was to launch in March 2020, with a summer term then plotted in three schools with pupil intervention across three pupil cohorts and trips to Pinewood. In the meticulous planning and cultivation of the project schools, no project risk register could have forecast the global crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic that struck the UK from March 2019.

What was a health crisis fast became an education and employment crisis that closed schools nation-wide, threatened livelihoods and took organisations to the brink of collapse. In the middle of the storm, the project partners had to look at new ways to forge ahead and find fresh energy with a project offer now no longer possible face-to-face and with schools in such precarious position in supporting their pupils.

Nationally, the fragility of schools returning and the uncertainty they faced, was laid bare towards their re-opening in the autumn term as they looked to consolidate learning gaps, operate at full-capacity and for Head teachers to rethink and rebalance. It was clear to the project team that making the case for creativity was a vital part of schools' recovery and pupil wellbeing, along with the time to build new appetite and trust within this recovery and renewal.

Teacher morale was reflected nationally, and studies were starting to emerge that echoed the fragility felt in the project schools.

'The negative portrayal of teachers in the media has had a significant impact on teachers' wellbeing and is considered a potential threat to the ongoing recruitment and retention of teachers.'

Education in a Time of Crisis - Chartered College of Teaching⁷

By early autumn morale was low with project school staff in a period of firefighting and confusion. By necessity, timetables were fluid in each of the three schools, self-isolation and pupil absences were high, and despite the project schools remaining open through the autumn, the pandemic was hitting hard.

'We are in a fix and struggling. Under any circumstances there are to be no visiting practitioners, no trips, no visits and no school shows. Our school is bubbled by location and the drama studio lies empty. All Drama is now being taught in the maths room so there's no practical work.'

Will Meadows, Bourne End Academy

The Ofsted Briefing in November 2020 went on to report that 'many' schools reported restrictions on teaching the arts and more widespread adaptations to the curriculum to focus on core subjects, with Amanda Spielman stating;

'It's important that these adaptations are short term and do not slide into a more corrosive, longer-term narrowing of the curriculum.'

Despite all the signs pointing to any school's relationship and intervention of any kind being derailed, the project team and participating teachers pivoted the project to pilot where possible, to trial digital and to focus on embedding the commitment at senior leadership level to pave the way for Year 2.

Project Methodology and Shift in Approach

In August 2020, the project team regrouped as the original plan was no longer a viable reality in schools. The priority was to keep them on board, to focus on digital and all programme with a firm eye to the future.

The project careers fair for 5,000 pupils was cancelled as was any face-to-face option for pupils or indeed, time at Pinewood.

This pivot now allowed for a deeper dialogue with senior leaders in each school as to where this programme could have greatest impact as part of school renewal, and the model was flipped from a focus on pupils to senior staff investment for the longer term.

The national picture of shifting priorities and Head teachers' decisions for their emerging schools was in the balance for positioning this project.

⁷ https://my.chartered.college/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/EducationInTimesOfCrisisII_FINAL20200708.pdf

'This has to be looked at now as a pilot year approach. It is ever more essential to get people in the room.'

Paul Guenault, Buckinghamshire Music Trust

Evaluation focused on;

Baseline Surveying – understanding of ambition, scope, challenges and constraints across all partners, artists and school leaders.

Monitoring – A light touch process with the schools to provide a flow of project information. Early-stage information included pupil cohort details, baseline observations and participating numbers, numbers of teachers, their subject specialisms, intensity of engagement through numbers of sessions or project days.

Telephone interviews – depth interviews with senior leaders, teachers and artists at key moments in the life cycle to explore further the strategic approach to project design in the autumn term.

Project Metrics – Year 1

Despite a world in flux, the following figures headline:

37 project interactions during 2019-2020

A total of 6 teachers from 5 schools took part in the development of this 'pilot' year. This evaluation is based on quantitative data provided by the schools and Resource Productions, monthly reflective meetings with the Project Manager, three interviews during the year with project partners, observation of a teacher training session and six telephone interviews with school staff as the year progressed. (Project Limitations on p18 outline why pupil surveys were not possible during the year.) Interactions in this pilot year include school meetings between partners and staff, teacher training, pupil workshops and assemblies.

- 25 cultivation and development meetings between project partners and school staff
- Field trip to Pinewood Studios with 8 students – Khalsa Academy
- Virtual visit to Pinewood Studios with 20 students – Bourne End Academy
- 3 x teacher professional development sessions with a total of 6 teachers
- Digital careers session for 8 students – Bourne End Academy
- Digital workshop for 28 Year 10 students – Bourne End Academy
- Digital session for 12 pupils – Mandeville School
- Digital school assemblies x 4 to a total of 800 students – Bourne End Academy

Findings

The following findings have been drawn from a year that pivoted radically from its original project intentions and against a national and global landscape that was shifting week by week.

- Adapting to Change - what is core what is flexible?

It's clear that in a year of unprecedented upheaval on a local, national and global scale, it was creative endeavour that shone through in general press and news coverage. This same approach was

evidenced by the project team, living their creative values of adapting to change, imagination, persistence and tolerating uncertainty. What was mapped and budgeted for in project planning, by March 2020 was no longer viable but the core remained the same – to reach schools to demonstrate the impact of arts and culture, to fuel practice and to access the pupils in most need. It had to be digital and it had to be fast.

The project also had to be responsive at speed to the shifts of school governance, a challenge in any normal year. Pre-Covid, there necessitated a very late shift to secure a replacement school for Khalsa Academy that received a termination notice from Ofsted in January 2020. Development activity had already taken place in school and with pupils. No project risk register forecast this sudden blow for its school community – a last resort Ofsted action that has seen less than 100 free school academies close since the programme was introduced in 2010 that has allowed charities, parents and faith groups run schools independently from the local council.

Post-lockdown, its replacement, The Beaconsfield School, then had to re-appraise its involvement during the pandemic and project progress was unfortunately curtailed in September along with its outgoing Head teacher.

With the backdrop of many arts and cultural organisations ceasing all public activity during the pandemic, with crucial project staff furloughed or on reduced hours and operating on a thread, the project team continued to adapt, to forge ahead and to re-strategise two core objectives against sharpened need and opportunity:

- to cement long-term strategic commitment with schools at Head teacher level rather than the project remaining with department leads.
- to be responsive in the moment to teacher and school needs, demonstrating the start of new collaborative design with teachers rather than the original roadmap.

'We constantly improvised and drew on what we knew so we didn't miss golden opportunities. This is what it's all about'.

Abhirami Arumbakkam, Resource Productions

In response to teacher needs and appetite, Resource Productions worked with one-day's notice during the first lockdown to deliver a virtual careers session to a class of Year 10 students.

The project team pivoted to fit an assembly model to reach 800 pupils across 4 virtual sessions when a similar short-term opportunity arose. Working within a loose framework of core objectives combined with agility, speed of response and preparation to deliver has seen the project survive and in one school, take flight:

'Working with Resource Productions has been a fantastic opportunity this year. At times, the outlook has looked very bleak for Performing Arts provision in school with trips, performances and workshops becoming impossible to run.

To have the opportunity to keep students engaged with the practical workshops and careers sessions offered by the Creative Explorers project has been invaluable for our students. Resource Productions are always open to ideas, supportive and inspirational and this has allowed our students to keep their horizons open at a time when events in the world would otherwise limit them.'

Will Meadows, Bourne End Academy

Adapting to change and seeking further opportunity to position the currency of arts in schools, Resource Productions they worked flexibly to re-map the project budget and take on Arts Award delivery partner training. They established themselves as Artsmark Partners and also as Cultural

Creative Careers Advisors and this flexibility has since gained traction with long-term Head teacher commitment.

- Commitment in a Pandemic

Time and again in the survival and development of the 'Look, Listen, Learn' project this year has been the commitment evidenced by project staff and schools alike. But it has been tested and the strain on all involved has been clear.

Well chartered this year in the public domain has been the citing of Head teachers working under immense stress and confronting real hardship and government tension. It was a huge project blow to lose The Beaconsfield School when it came under new leadership in September 2020. There had been promising discussion of what the new academic year would offer without the scrutiny of league tables and Ofsted, the possibility of rethinking exams through the Lord Baker initiative⁸ and how pupils would flourish through the project. The commitment of the outgoing Head teacher in handing over the project in the midst of firefighting at the height of the pandemic was evidenced in the swift organisation of an online meeting between both Head teachers and the project manager to ensure that pupils would be able to continue the commitment in the autumn term.

Beaconsfield School remained 'cautiously eager' in September but was struggling with not having enough staff members - several staff already having to self-isolate or were awaiting tests at the start of term and this was putting a strain on the resources. In the end, the project became untenable for Beaconsfield but it's testament to the project's impact at development stage that the outgoing Head teacher has since opted to continue the relationship with Resource Productions for his new school outside of Buckinghamshire and beyond this project.

Bourne End and Mandeville school staff remained committed to the project and continued in dialogue with the team despite the weekly challenges of the pandemic through the summer and autumn terms.

'It's just heart-breaking – if this was a normal year the school would have bitten your hand off. So much has been pushed back. We are now a school very much in transition sitting in the Ofsted balance and with so much disruption.'

Will Meadows, Bourne End Academy

'I'm trying to teach lessons in five different ways at the moment and my exam groups are chaotic – they can't perform and I can't assess.'

Sinead O'Sullivan, The Mandeville School

In dialogue with Resource Productions and Bucks Music Trust, both schools attended professional development sessions, sought ways to leverage the project with their Head teachers and have focussed discussions with the project manager in re-invigorating the pupil focus for 2021.

⁸ <https://www.tes.com/news/state-and-private-schools-movement-scrap-gcses>

- Hidden Labour

The project was challenged pre-Covid by the strains facing the education sector in any normal year. Engaging schools is hard with much already documented in the arts and cultural sector about the mismatching of creative project offers and intentions with the reality on the ground for schools and programme design.

This project had a head start with one key project partner, Paul Guenault, a former Head teacher himself, a school governor and an Artsmark trainer with an acute understanding of how to hit at the heart of school needs. All too aware of the paucity of understanding from many arts organisations about how to ensure successful schools engagement, his and the project manager's dialogue with Head teachers and other key staff was tireless and sensitive.

The hidden labour of cultivating successful relationships with schools should not be underestimated. Reaching schools in this period became even more difficult and each school presented its own challenge as well as opportunity – navigating the right path with each was hugely time consuming and for Abhi Arumbakkam, school liaison was entirely new and the terrain so different from initial expectations of schools.

Academies are businesses with huge dependencies on their own success in the market and in the sector – risk averse and driven by results, many academy chains in the pandemic have prioritised further the core subjects and reduced arts provision in school.

The project cultivation of Khalsa as a new academy and 15 months of project investment came to nothing, with nothing more that could have been done in due diligence to foresee this curtailment. The hidden labour is also evidenced in staff churn between Head teachers in a project of this length, and of shifts in department leads and priorities.

The crucial part played by single and passionate members of staff in gaining internal leverage has been a pattern in all 5 schools engaged with this year. Without Sinead's tenacity in pursuing her senior leadership team at Mandeville School and her new Head teacher, the championing, belief and commitment in the project would not have taken flight, there is just too much to compete with for Head teacher focus.

At project inception, Will Meadows was the Head of Careers at Bourne End Academy with successful leverage in positioning the curriculum intent of the project for its pupils. Now in a different role as Head of Arts and feeding into the priorities of his new Multi-Academy Trust of 28 schools, he and the project team have needed to work much harder to secure the place of the project and fight for its worth and the impact it will have.

At the time of writing, the lead contact for Mandeville School and the staff member with the most project investment and commitment, Sinead O'Sullivan, has just announced her maternity leave from March 2021. The evidence of staff churn is a risk for this long-term programme and combatted by spreading senior leadership responsibility in school – please see the report finding on Artsmark.

- The Shift to Digital

Arts and cultural intervention in schools is traditionally delivered face to face and on-site. Without this as a possibility, the skilful use of technology has enabled progress of the Creative Explorers programme and since the coronavirus pandemic, this exploration of digital interaction as an effective engagement tool was wisely prioritised.

It was the shift to digital that allowed the project to pivot. It was the speed and energy of both project team and school staff to gear up to Zoom capabilities that meant by April, three schools were engaged with the project partners in online professional development.

An unintended consequence of the forced experiment into digital, was that previously, diary management and travel logistics had prohibited shared planning across the three schools. Now suddenly with the economy of time, they were present online and interacting with relative ease in a completely new component to the project.

The quick rapport that was created online, the quality of planning and content and the subsequent trust between partners and school staff was evidenced in the ease with how the project manager went on to prioritise further teacher development sessions. Abhi provided additional support and could be responsive to separate and bespoke CPD for Khalsa, Mandeville and Beaconsfield staff during the lockdown period.

More challenging was the potential for pupil interaction. Well into the autumn term, state schools nationwide were still finding their way with visiting practitioner engagement online, the e-safety of delivery platforms, safeguarding policies for online engagement and ensuring the level playing field for pupil digital access. With the careers session delivered online in the summer term lockdown, the project practitioners delivered to pupils who were entirely passive – they were able to log on but only connect with their audio mute and cameras off. Trialled in the autumn were digital assemblies, and a play-writing workshop which could be more present as the content or live interaction was broadcasting to pupils together in class.



Bourne End Academy pupils engaged in a Resource Production live play-writing workshop on screen.

'If you're delivering 1:1 then on screen can be so productive. But not beamed into the classroom or on a smartboard it's so passive and it it's a whole class just watching it's not as personable. CPD was just great as a small group.'

Sinead O'Sullivan, The Mandeville School

The benefits of video call have allowed for strategic Head teacher meetings, development meetings with school lead contacts, a virtual tour of Pinewood Studios and an Artsmark development day. Beyond the constraints of remote contact, the project has demonstrated that digital has become a project tool that should remain into Year 2 as efficient, agile and effective.

- The Value of Real-World Experience

At the heart of the Arts Council England's 'Let's Create' ten-year strategy⁹, launched at the start of 2020, is a focus on the access that children and young people have to 'express and develop their creativity with more opportunities to enjoy the widest possible range of culture.' The strategy recognises that opportunities inside and outside school are far from equal across the country and it echoes the new Ofsted requirement for cultural capital.

Central to the 'Look, Listen, Learn' project team arsenal and the funder intentions of connecting schools to local cultural providers and the creative industry, was invaluable real-world access to Pinewood Studios and team.

'Many of our students would currently regard careers in the creative arts as something other people do and not them as realistic career paths. This project will help us raise our ambitions as a department and also help to encourage further uptake in the performing arts at GCSE and beyond into the Sixth Form.'
Will Meadows, Bourne End Academy

Clear to the schools engaged was the value in this exposure to career choices, access to new places and Pinewood Studios as a massive source of employment.

'We are all about demystifying creative subjects to help students understand the backend of jobs. The fuelling of teacher practice is also massively important. I want to debunk the career myths of the creative industry as I was never given that opportunity at school.'
Kathryn Maidment

Planned for 2020 at Pinewood was the official project launch, industry access days, project workshops and a careers fair for 5,000 pupils. None of this was possible due to the pandemic and Kathryn was furloughed for 6-months from her role. Despite the derailing of activity in the main, a virtual assembly was delivered and successfully energised Bourne End pupils towards the end of the autumn term.

'The assembly on Pinewood matched the brief superbly. The format was excellent and the information about was comprehensive. I really liked how Kathryn had identified the entry level jobs that our students could aspire to as it gave some real relevance to them. Again, highlighting Apprenticeships is excellent to introduce our students to different pathways. I think her identification of all the training routes at the end really contextualised and gave this assembly definite purpose. You went well beyond the call of duty and offered something so current and useful making our students well informed global citizens.'
Will Meadows, Bourne End Academy

The Cultural Learning Alliance has long lobbied for the impact of arts and culture in schools, and its 2019 report on cultural capital¹⁰ cites this opportunity for schools to define it for themselves and level the playing field. For the project schools, cultural capital and future aspiration have shown to be intertwined.

'Through this project, I hope to be able to introduce students to career paths they may never have thought of or known about and to give them the experience of visiting places which inspire them to develop a further love and aspiration to aim towards.'

⁹ <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/letscreate>

¹⁰ <https://culturallearningalliance.org.uk/what-is-cultural-capital/>

Sinead O'Sullivan, The Mandeville School

Access to Pinewood, its industry experts and practitioners, those behind the scenes and those engaged in training are as valuable to teachers as guardians of pupils' horizons and opportunities as they are to pupils themselves.

'We've got to fight against the Year 9 creep – options are chosen at end of Spring and the careers assemblies helped hit this timing.'

Will Meadows, Bourne End Academy

The project ambition remains, to afford vital access to Key Stage 3 pupils, especially those in Year 9 pre-options who haven't yet made their GCSE choices and where early exposure to the creative industry could prove most formative.

'It is so great that we have been able to put Pinewood and the artists in front of all our students - we are so grateful. It really answers our objectives about establishing a clear career pathway in the arts and highlighting the relevance of the Creative Arts to the economy and as a viable career for our students to aspire to.'

Will Meadows, Bourne End Academy

- The Currency of Artsmark

Evidence indicates that in harnessing a national kite-mark such as the Artsmark Award and a school's senior investment in signing up to this national accreditation, it avoids the vulnerability of a project being held by a single person. In the autumn term, the new focus on strategic development and design with each school led to the project introduction of the Artsmark Award.¹¹ The Artsmark invitation added gravitas and further value in deepening senior-lead discussions and contractual obligations for the future of the project.

As a schools' self-evaluation tool and creative quality standard, this hook had the traction of the national accreditation to reflect on and has become a project tool to enable teachers and senior leaders on the project to create clear development plans where project activity is woven in to school improvement.

The re-forecasting of the project budget costed for three main schools to pursue the Artsmark journey, with training and staff cover, and for five further schools to take up the programme from next year. New contractual statements were developed in the summer and by October half term, Bourne End Academy and Mandeville School had signed these Head teacher agreements to commit to the undertaking of the Artsmark Award alongside renewed and ongoing commitment to the project itself.

A tangible benefit to Resource Productions and attributed to the Creative Explorers programme was evidenced in the project's affordance for the project manager to undertake Artsmark and Arts Award training and for the organisation to embed itself as an Artsmark centre, promoting ways in which schools can further engage with the project and beyond.

At the end of Year 1, Bourne End Academy have completed their Artsmark training and Mandeville aim to begin theirs during the spring term 2021.

- Investment in Teachers to Embed Practice

¹¹ <https://www.artsmark.org.uk/about-artsmark>

Agility with the project timeline allowed for further dialogue with senior leaders in each school as to where this programme could have greatest impact as part of school renewal. The introduction of Artsmark was an opportunity for in-depth planning with invested senior staff and the flipped focus on teachers allowed for valuable professional development time that was not intended as part of the original plan.

Evidence points to this investment being instrumental in keeping schools on the project.

'If this project wasn't with the Head teacher it would have been a casualty of COVID. Our main hope and aim is that we as teachers will be able to carry on the work that is done after the project.'

Sinead O'Sullivan, Mandeville School.

Shifting the project lens from pupil intervention in this development year to a teacher focus provides an interesting emphasis for ongoing project enquiry in tracking the impact of artists and teachers working hand in hand towards programme design, and in turn, supporting teachers to develop their own subject knowledge and as artists.

There was an early indicator of the effectiveness of teacher training this year and building further opportunity for teacher development was stated as being welcomed by teaching staff.

'The training we did was insightful. I had chance to think about film in a way I hadn't considered previously. I really enjoyed the final task as it gave me chance to be imaginative, thinking of something interesting, effective and quite simple all at the same time.'

Sinead O' Sullivan, Mandeville School

'I thought what was interesting were the comparisons I could take from film and use in photography in terms of scene setting and use them in story-telling and narrative within GCSE Photography.'

Lesley Riggs, The Beaconsfield School

Training sessions were scheduled within school hours to make attendance as easy as possible for teachers online. Teachers reported positive outcomes on their practice, with more knowledge and improved skills (they have notably gained a range of simple and effective strategies they can use in the classroom), more confidence, and more enthusiasm.

Evidence has shown that a focus on teacher development, subject knowledge and pedagogy impacts on pupil success and this is echoed across teaching research.

'The more we know about what we are teaching and how to teach it, the greater the pupil outcomes will be.'

Chartered College of Teaching – Journal 10, Autumn 2020

Just as the teacher supply for new recruitment of arts specialist teachers reduces in schools (only 69% in 2019-2020¹²), so the increased need arises for teacher support to develop their subject knowledge and their creative industry awareness as artistically engaged curriculum developers. As DfE research indicates¹³, pupils taught by a subject specialist have better learning outcomes and the quality of teaching and curriculum planning is higher.

There is significant opportunity to grow the 'Look, Listen, Learn' project into Year 2 with a continued focus on professional development and working towards collaborative programme design and continued investment in fuelling teacher practice, confidence and motivation.

- Partnership – supporting levers

¹² <https://www.nsead.org/news/news/bursaries-2021-22/>

¹³ <https://www.tes.com/news/dfe-research-limited-evidence-holding-degree-subject-improves-pupil-outcomes>

One of the project's softer ambitions was the opportunity to blueprint successful communication, planning and design between cultural partners and schools. This has had too many obstacles for delivery in the 'pilot' development year but should remain an ambition into its future years in supporting the sector more broadly. A 'Talking to Schools' component and the learnings of the project could filter effectively through the Cultural Education Partnership and focus on the pressures and levers that ensure project success.

Abhi Arumbakkam, the project manager did the heavy lifting through this development year, with crucial support from the project partners but was increasingly aware and frustrated about the 'project sell' not being met openly by senior leadership. She asks;

'Surely this has got to be an exchange and not a sell? It's fully funded project – if a school can't see merit and value to their students then it's not a fit.'

The project approach has evidenced the importance of a working partnership for mutual gain, rather than a prescribed delivery model directed purely at pupils. This is evident right from the inception stage of the programme, when the Rothschild Foundation invited schools into consultation at Waddesdon.

Long-term cultivation and partnership understanding has been crucial in the commitment of Bourne End and Mandeville and the importance of long-term investment and pedagogic senior staff discussion with partners remains evident in understanding the levers and pressures and in building vital trust.

'The first meeting was to gain a grant to fund this whole project so that it doesn't cost the school at all. Everything is funded right down to covering the teachers involved. It is an incredibly exciting opportunity for both us and the students.'

Sinead O'Sullivan, Mandeville School

Only two of five schools engaged go through to the second year of project development and delivery. This is hefty investment, thwarted by a global crisis but it points to the immeasurable value of continuing to identify the supporting levers for schools, the new pressures they will face ongoing as a result of the pandemic and engaging purely at Head teacher level for mutual partnership.

The success characteristics of Year 1 in both Bourne End and Mandeville School can be used as levers for cultivating new schools to the project and at the time of writing, Cressex School have confirmed interest at this level, with an planning session on the 4th January 2021.

Limitations of the Research

The pandemic rocked the foundations of this project that only remained afloat due to the resilience and tenacity of project team and teaching staff, passionate about its survival and eventual impact on teacher practice and pupil outcomes to follow in further years.

Due to the weekly shifts in parameters and fluidity of delivery at such short notice, pupil cohorts could not be identified by staff until the last minute and baselining pupil data was not viable, nor was post activity surveying or access to pupils for focus groups.

Neither this year was any observation of pupil sessions as they took place in closed settings, either online or in the classroom with no visitors permitted.

The delay to focussed pupil intervention into Year 2 radically trimmed the project ambition and its intentions but monitoring the process and exploring project fidelity in a year of seismic flux has

identified what is flexible and what is core – a clear underpinning of the core values and quality mechanisms of the project to be taken forward.

Final Reflections into Year 2

The unprecedented situation of this past year has shown in Covid-19 emerging studies to have led teachers to reflect on what can be learned from this crisis and how their views on education have changed.

For many teachers, it has cemented their belief in the strength, adaptability and importance of the teaching profession, and the priorities for the teaching staff on this project have reflected this same urgency to ensure the Creative Explorers project success for their school.

'We've been teaching music without music. I just can't wait for pupils to start on the project from January.'

Sinead O'Sullivan, Mandeville School

The project at Mandeville School will kick-start 2021 with six workshops with Bucks Music Trust practitioners and 57 Year 9 pupils who have semi-selected their GCSE subjects. These workshops will support their decision-making process towards GCSE music and although designed for face-to-face intervention, there is backup planning for remote sessions if needed with the provision of new music software provided by the project budget.

Despite being able to engage a small number of teaching staff and low numbers of pupils in the main, the year has proven small but significant impact in the culture of two schools who will now continue as ambassadors into Year 2, raising the visibility of the arts and the creative industry in their schools.

'At Bourne End Academy we are thankful to Creative Explorers for enabling us to keep delivering the high-quality Performing Arts education that we aspire to.'

Will Meadows, Bourne End Academy

Their satisfaction levels are high. Even with the schools receiving the project at zero cost which naturally inflates satisfaction levels, there is an authenticity to their qualitative feedback.

Year 2 should remain ambitious about whole-school shifts, changes in learning culture and helping to influence the aspirations and choices of young people with the following recommendations offered for reflection:

- Reset the expectations of pupil numbers from entire classes and year groups to smaller groups for more in-depth activity and agility. In this next year of development, chasing the energy might rest on a Year 8 & 9 focus but could also have impact on smaller A-Level and 16+ groups.
- Re-plot a theory of change to unpick the 'black box' for the project that can be used as a powerful visual aid in illustrating pupil outcomes and as a joining tool for new schools to help them understand the currency, using the Year 1 evidence as leverage, clarity on Gatsby benchmarking, career horizons, cultural capital requirement and Artsmark Award currency as project hooks on the journey.

- Continue with a digital roadmap of teacher training and professional practice opportunities that grow new expertise.
- Gain confidence in avoiding the ‘project sell’ and only engage with schools where the mutual gain is met at senior leadership level – this might entail further schools approaches beyond Cressex School if not met with senior-level partnership appetite.
- Continue to seek out and budget for school incentives, whether staff cover or transport or pupil software. Despite a project appearing as zero cost to a school, these incentives often help compete for budget-driven senior leadership attention.
- Continue to pursue an individual roadmap for each school to follow its own journey and therefore its own impact, shown to have greater project cut-through in Year 1.
- Formalise this approach further towards collaborative programme design within each school to fuel teacher practice, subject and industry knowledge, confidence and motivation.
- Remain rooted in understanding school culture through continued policy and practice research, dialogue with those at the sector coal face and those regularly engaging with Head teachers – this is increasingly and vitally important when business models and policy drivers are shifting so rapidly, evermore so due to the pandemic.
- Continue to be smart and proportionate about gathering evidence, using teacher professional insight and observation to inform direction, decision making and understanding of impact at this stage.

As the project draws to a close for this development year, the pandemic is still peaking in the UK with schools at continued risk of closure, remote learning and an academic year very much in continued flux. The project team and funders will regroup against the tide of obstacles to delivery and future development and the team can take stock of the small successes and the valuable project learnings despite all adversity in its first year.