



Arts Council England, 20.02.18

# **Response to the evaluation of the Cultural Citizens pilot**

## **Background**

The Cultural Citizens programme was one of the key initiatives of the Culture White Paper, published in March 2016.

Arts Council England delivered a pilot of the programme across the 2016-17 academic year together with our delivery partners Curious Minds, Kids in Museums and A New Direction. The programme engaged almost 700 KS3 pupils primarily from lower-engaged backgrounds in Barking and Dagenham, Birmingham and Liverpool to engage in arts and cultural activities across their local communities.

This evaluation report highlights the positive impact that engagement with arts and culture can have on the development of children and young people, including those who have previously had limited access and exposure to arts and culture. The report highlights a number of lessons for the Arts Council and our work with children and young people; particularly around the importance of giving children and young people greater ownership over the cultural offer available to them. The value of participatory experience is evident throughout this pilot, as is the importance of encouraging connections between young people and the community around them.

## **Local context**

We find it interesting to note what an important role the local context played in the successful delivery of each of these pilots; the involvement of local partnerships and bridge organisations was key, which is encouraging to see. The Cultural Education Partnerships also played a central role, and were even able to use the pilots as an opportunity to develop their own networks. It is clear that a programme such as Cultural Citizens must be rooted in and guided by the place that it is taking place in – this is why, as the evaluation suggests, the model needs to be adaptable, scalable and flexible to take into account the specific

considerations of a particular place. The programme suggests that strengthening young people's networks in their local area also increases the chances of engagement remaining higher after the end of the pilot.

## **Social aspect**

The club-style approach of the sessions allowed the young people to engage with culture whilst also spending time with friends and making new ones along the way, something we know is a central in encouraging young people to engage. Placing friendships, relationships and community at the heart of such activities can encourage participation and help young people develop a greater sense of ownership and community.

## **Youth empowerment**

Central to this pilot was the idea of empowering the young people to make their own choices about the type of art and culture they wanted to engage in. The programme gave the young people ownership, and this is at the heart of its success. A clear lesson here is that young people should be involved as much as possible at all stages – choosing and planning visits, recruiting facilitators etc. if they are to feel truly engaged in the activity. This demonstrates the importance of placing young people at the heart of any effort to increase their engagement in arts and culture – no one is better placed to know what steps are necessary to reach those young people who may not be currently engaged and may feel that culture is not “for them”.

## **What being a Cultural Citizen means**

This pilot has shown that when given the opportunity to self-select which activities to engage in, the participants chose a wide array of activities, perhaps wider than they would have had the opportunity to enjoy if activities had been programmed for them without their involvement. While young people may interpret the term “culture” slightly differently to how we do, it's not to say their interpretations are any less valid, a notion which is certainly worth reflecting on.



It is encouraging to see so many of the Arts Council's [seven Quality Principles for working with children and young people](#) reflected in this work – these include ensuring a positive, child-centred experience, actively involving children and young people and developing a sense of ownership and belonging.

## Conclusion

It has been interesting to see the three different models employed by the delivery partners and what has worked well about each. This provides valuable learning for the different ways schools and arts organisations could operate a similar scheme in the future and demonstrates that any similar programme does not have to take a “one size fits all model”. Whether schools-based or clubs based, the pilots worked just as effectively. It was particularly heartening to note that 544 awards were made as part of this programme through the Arts Award scheme - this is a huge achievement for the schools and young people involved. Making these awards helped to ensure that recognising the achievements of the young people involved was central to the programme.

The three delivery partners defined barriers to engaging with culture in different ways – this could mean economic and social barriers, but also family barriers. There are many different ways to interpret these terms and it is important to bear this in mind when considering these issues and how to tackle them.

There are many exciting conclusions to be drawn from this evaluation and much to reflect upon. The three pilots achieved the targets set by the Arts Council and as laid out in the White Paper; a significant achievement for a project that had to get up and running so quickly and ran for a relatively short period of time and we are hugely grateful for the hard work of all involved, including the delivery partners, arts organisations, facilitators and evaluators for helping to achieve such great results. We are particularly grateful to all of the participating children and young people for their spirited engagement with the programme and the valuable insights they have provided. This programme has provided valuable insight into young people's motivation and behaviours when engaging with arts and culture which will inform our future work with children and young people.