

Cultural Learning Alliance: our work during Covid and beyond

Our mission

The Cultural Learning Alliance champions a right to arts and culture for every child. We:

- **ADVOCATE** for equality of access to arts and culture for every child
- **DEMONSTRATE** why cultural learning is so important
- **UNITE** the education, youth and cultural sectors delivering arts and cultural learning

We act as a backbone organisation for the arts and cultural education sectors, and provide the analysis, evidence, and arguments that Alliance members and their wider sectors can use. We view the cultural learning landscape through a social justice lens and recognise the reality and impact of structural inequality in our society: see our [Social Justice Statement](#).

How we work

- **Insight & dissemination:** The CLA is a trusted source of information and evidence. It analyses emerging policy and the relevant landscapes and outcomes for children and young people, and publishes and disseminates its findings widely. It listens to its membership and records and bears witness to change.
- **Influence & leadership:** The CLA uses its agency, capacity, resources, partners and networks to deliver its collective vision and mission, and leads on making the case for cultural learning. It targets local and national policy-makers and partners to prioritise, embed and resource high-quality arts and culture in children and young people's lives.
- **Brokering & convening:** The CLA uses the breadth of its relationships and networks, across the Alliance and beyond, to bring people together to share ideas and practice, and to shape the cultural learning landscape for children and young people.

The CLA maintains a [website](#) and social media presence, [publishes newsletters](#), [Briefing Papers](#), [Key Research Findings](#), and a core publication: [ImagineNation: the value of Cultural Learning](#).

Our strategic priorities 2021-2023

1. **CORE** – We will continue to:
 - Champion children's **cultural learning opportunities and experiences** in schools and settings in England*
 - Champion the value and place of cultural learning within a **broad and balanced curriculum**
 - Advocate for the cultural learning **workforce**: teachers, artists and arts organisations
2. **COVID** – During the pandemic and beyond we will:
 - Publicly **witness and record** changes due to Covid, gathering evidence and data as needed
 - Advocate for cultural learning as a **strategic, policy and funding priority** in a Covid context
 - Prepare the ground for **transformational planning for cultural learning** in a post-Covid-19 landscape
3. **EQUITY** – We will prioritise:
 - Championing high-quality arts experiences that reflect the **lived experiences and heritage** of young people in our society
 - Ensuring that the CLA is an anti-racist, anti-ableist alliance which **supports, platforms and empowers change** in the sector

* Whilst our wider work is relevant across the UK, our direct advocacy activity during this period is focused in England.

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Context and work plan: 2021-2023

A. Context

Wider educational context

The CLA believes that the English government's stated purpose of education as set out in the National Curriculum (which is linked both to school curriculums, and to OFSTED) should change. Currently the first aim stated in the National Curriculum is:

'The national curriculum provides pupils with an introduction to the essential knowledge they need to be educated citizens. It introduces pupils to the best that has been thought and said, and helps engender an appreciation of human creativity and achievement.'

The phrasing 'the best that has been thought and said.' is a direct quote from an 1869 essay by Matthew Arnold *Culture and Anarchy*, and is troubling when taken in a modern context for a number of reasons: it is passive; it does not adequately cover all cultural forms or expressions (particularly music, dance or visual arts); and it has the potential to be used to entrench notions of class structure. We believe that rather than focusing on the past, there is a strong imperative for all of us working in cultural learning to evolve towards a more equitable landscape where education enables our children to stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before, but also to create new and exciting forms of culture.

Who has power and agency to make change in 2021-2023?

There is a real and evidenced need for urgent transformation in both the education and cultural sectors. However, we recognise that the Covid-19 pandemic has widened the existing inequity in our systems, and the voices that are currently able to lead conversations about the future of our sectors often belong to those with stable jobs, or are based in traditional organisations where there is the capacity, resource and security to think creatively.

It is the CLA's role and responsibility to ask who currently has power to effect change, who doesn't, and to ensure that conversations about transformation are representative of the full diversity of its stakeholders.

The current context:

- **The Covid-19 pandemic** has fundamentally changed the context in which we are working and will continue to do so. We will need to be reactive and responsive as this unfolds, and to recognise the developing needs of the sector, as well as our collective ambitions for rebuilding in the future. This context will need to remain one of our core strands of focus for the foreseeable future.

We recognise that much of the cultural learning workforce is in crisis or is unable to deliver in the way that it has done historically, and that teachers and schools are delivering well beyond their capacity. We recognise significant job losses across the cultural sector – for both those who are employed in organisations, and those who are freelance. We are seeing that organisations who have been champions of cultural learning are battling with competing priorities in an increasingly hostile landscape, and that the impact of Covid on children and young people's health, wellbeing and learning is profound.

We also recognise that new ways of working, resilience and creativity are in evidence right across the country.

- **The Black Lives Matter movement** has foregrounded the historic and systemic inequality that is inherent in both the education, and arts and cultural sectors. This has been a catalyst for the Cultural Learning Alliance.

We recognise that we, the CLA, have not done enough to challenge the inherent racism and wider inequality in our sector, to listen to colleagues with lived-experience of this, or worked to address it. We acknowledge our agency in this landscape and are working to implement sustainable change across all the functions, activity and systems described in this document. We recognise that this will require dedicated capacity and funds.

- **The economic landscape:** the impact of austerity on local government, education, culture and services has been well documented by the Cultural Learning Alliance. The lack of funding for these services has been compounded by the Covid-19 pandemic, with education and local authority budgets stretched beyond capacity. We believe that our **forthcoming exit from the European Union** will also have a significant adverse effect on the economy, public finances, and possibly also on the capacity of funders.

B. Specific priorities for 2021-2023

1. CORE – We will continue to:

- Champion children’s **cultural learning opportunities and experiences** in schools and settings in England
- Champion the value and place of cultural learning within a **broad and balanced curriculum**
- Advocate for the cultural learning **workforce:** teachers, artists and arts organisations

Work plan

In addition to the above we will:

- Check the validity and continued relevance of our existing [Key Asks](#) (Arts Premium, CPDL Blueprint and National Plan for Cultural Education) through consultation with our membership and sector experts.
[CPDL Blueprint check completed via summer 2020 CPDL Task and Finish group. We will implement the recommendation of the CPDL Task and Finish group to convene partners to plan the development of the Cultural Learning CPDL Blueprint]
- Work with ACE on the direction and implementation and of the *Let’s Create Strategy*
- Plan and consult on the scaffolding/framework for the creation of a National Plan for Cultural Education

2. COVID – During the pandemic and beyond we will:

- Publicly **witness and record** changes due to Covid, gathering evidence and data as needed
- Advocate for cultural learning as a **strategic, policy and funding priority** in a Covid context
- Prepare the ground for **transformational planning for cultural learning** in a post-Covid-19 landscape

Work plan

In addition to the above we will:

- Advocate for effective Covid-response practice such as Blended Learning, and hyper-local cultural learning activity
- Share innovation and extraordinary practice as the pandemic unfolds
- Monitor and report on Covid-related job losses in the cultural learning sector

3. EQUITY – We will prioritise:

- Championing high-quality arts experiences that reflect the **lived experiences and heritage** of young people in our society
- Ensuring that the CLA is an anti-racist, anti-ableist alliance which **supports, platforms and empowers change** in the sector

Work plan

We will:

- Improve representation on our Advisory Panel, Strategy Group and our wider membership
- Review the CLA functions, systems, budgets, communications and outputs to identify areas of our practice which enable systemic inequality, and work with expert colleague to create sustainable change
- Support and empower leaders in the sector with lived-experience of racism to improve representation in the curriculum, by brokering partnerships, using our influence and actively sharing power

C. Delivery and accountability

Primary target audiences:	Teachers and headteachers; arts and cultural sector
Secondary target audiences:	Policy makers at local, regional and national level (including but not limited to government departments; ACE; Bridge Organisations; LCEPs)

The CLA is run by two Co-Directors, who report to a Strategy Group of six members from across the education and arts sectors. In addition to its wide membership, the CLA also has an Advisory Panel of 30+ members. All members of the CLA, Steering Group, and Advisory Panel and Membership are collectively responsible for contributing to the CLA priorities and objectives.

Time-limited Task & Finish Groups, consisting of representatives of the Co-Directors, Advisory Panel, Steering Group or the wider membership can be convened to advise on specific themes or issues. These groups do not directly deliver activity.

The CLA is funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and the Clore Duffield Foundation. We have agreed deliverables and objectives in place for this investment. There is a small paid team at the core of the CLA. The Co-Directors work a total of 3.5 days per week, with half a day per week of social media and communications support, and half a day a week of administrative support (currently recruiting).

The wider Alliance

The Alliance includes a range of organisations working across the cultural and education sectors, including teachers, schools, non-departmental public bodies, philanthropists, umbrella organisations, cultural and arts partners, creative industry leaders, and education specialists. We have more than 3,000 organisational members, 6,000 individual members and almost 12,000 Twitter followers.

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