**UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM: barriers to sustained high-quality engagement between schools, the youth sector and arts organisations**

**Risks to equitable provision for schools**

The function of the school offer from arts organisations is to enhance what happens in schools, and contribute to improving outcomes for children and young people. A great deal of good practice in the learning teams of professional arts organisations has developed over the years but provision since 2020 has suffered due to Covid and financial pressures, and there is a danger that in some cases it is easier for arts-rich or independent schools to access it. There are increasing …

**Barriers to schools accessing arts organisation learning programmes**

Increased school **accountability** has focused on a narrow range of subject areas, which has led to a systemic downgrading or exclusion of arts subjects and experiences. This has meant that there is less time and resources for arts subjects, and fewer skilled arts teachers with the capacity to work with arts organisations in their communities and more widely. The cost of living crisis has also led to **acute funding pressures** for schools. The proportion of headteachers reporting cuts to school trips due to funding issues has more than doubled since 2022, with schools in the most disadvantaged areas being most likely to be impacted by cuts to trips – 68% of leaders in the most deprived schools report a reduction, compared to 44% in the least deprived. Schools have less funding to pay for travel, for arts experiences or for working with artists. The effects of this are hardest felt by pupils from low-income families, who have less scope to pay for access to cultural enrichment opportunities. Barriers to school trips mean that …

**It is vital organisations invest in online and in-school provision**

High-quality online provision for schools is particularly important when school trips are less viable. Cultural sector online delivery for schools was expanded during the pandemic and in some cases significantly broadened reach. There are some excellent examples, but this now requires continued investment, expertise and resource. There is a need for cultural professionals to bring their expertise into schools when schools cannot easily come to them. One major concern now is the …

**Loss of infrastructure of brokerage**

The cessation of England’s Bridge network has ended decades of professional well-resourced brokerage at the intersection of arts organisations, artists and schools. There is no longer a national brokerage structure and the likelihood of schools establishing partnerships with arts organisations and artists has been reduced. This also impacts upon …

**Cultural learning workforce professionalisation**

Professional development for the arts education workforce (including artists) is patchy at best, and was informed in part by Bridge organisation knowledge and expertise, so up-skilling the workforce in a context of financial retrenchment and without a national network of support is challenging. An effective and valued cultural education workforce requires status and training (including CPD). A further issue for the workforce is …

**The challenge of working with young people in a time of crisis**

Mental health issues have been exacerbated by Covid. One in five pupils are experiencing mental health problems. The challenges of working with children and young people experiencing mental health problems means that learning teams can require funding for specialist youth worker expertise or mental health first aid training and experience. This is not helped by …

**Youth service decimation**

The decimation of the youth service since 2010 has had an impact on young people’s lives outside school, and has led to arts organisations playing an increasing role in youth provision. There needs to be more of a joined up approach to create an arts-rich youth service which can play a key role in young people’s lives. It is also vital for the sector to create …

**Career progression routes**

The downgrading of the arts in schools is damaging the health and diversity of the creative industries. The sector needs to be relevant to national skills policies and industrial strategies, and to work with school careers programmes, connecting with post-16 education, offering work experience and entry-level jobs through apprenticeships, and employing non-graduates. There is one final risk to work between schools, the youth sector and cultural organisations …

**The risk of an emerging ‘value/action gap’ in the face of financial pressures**

In spite of Arts Council England having increased the number of National Portfolio Organisations working with children and young people by 20%, funding and time/capacity pressures in schools are mirrored by the pressures on learning teams within arts organisations. Learning teams are diminished post-pandemic, with many operating with reduced capacity, experience, scale of provision and budgets, and having to fundraise for learning programmes. Arts organisations are enduring the same financial pressures schools are confronting. Unless work with and for children and/or young people is core to an organisation’s mission, and resourced accordingly, there is a risk that organisations profess to valuing and supporting learning activity *in principle*, whilst failing to resource it properly in terms of staff expertise or budget allocations *in reality*. This places quality and equity at risk.

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