

Introduction

The Wiltshire & Swindon Cultural Education Partnership (W&SCEP) aims to improve educational, cultural and social outcomes for children and young people in places where it is most needed. It is managed by a core Steering Group, and supported by a p/t project manager. From January 2019 to July 2021 the W&SCEP managed and ran a Challenge Fund project awarded by Real Ideas, and this is a summary of the Final Evaluation Report for this work.

Essentially, this Challenge Fund project set out to improve the interaction between schools and cultural providers and to enable schools to unlock new funds to develop bespoke, cultural learning partnership activity that met the needs of their pupils and staff. It aimed to create a legacy of increased skills, understanding and capacity in schools, and cause a sustainable culture shift of how schools value cultural learning and how they work with cultural providers.

The Challenge Fund project also sought to explore new approaches to this work, through match funding projects through the 'Open Fund', engaging senior colleagues in a small number of schools as 'Cultural Champions', and them in turn inspiring 'Young Champions' in their settings, and through the provision of relevant CPD, resources & signposting.

Finally, the development of a sustainable model for the W&SCEP was a focus of this period, with the Steering Group continuing to explore how to move sustainably into the future.

Headline achievements

- The Challenge Fund brought £65k of funding to Wiltshire & Swindon
- Then, the Open Fund levered a total of £52,170 in match funding within schools
- 110 expressions of interest from schools in Round 1 & 2 of the Open Fund
- 15 Open Fund projects awarded, reaching 43 schools and 5155 young people
- 2265 indirect beneficiaries involved such as parents and community members
- 27 different cultural organisations and practitioners were involved in the projects
- 499 school staff have taken part in CPD/events through the Open Fund projects
- 678 young people have achieved their Arts Awards through Open Fund projects
- 450 young people took part in BSL supported online creative workshops
- 24 Deaf young people achieved their Discover Arts Award
- 4 online twilight CPD sessions have run, inc. Arts Award training for 24 teachers
- The W&SCEP website launched in July 2020, with a growing selection of resources

Key learning

A great quote that sums this up from one of the Open Fund school teachers, was:

'One of the key things learnt is that even though plans fell apart, they were put back together using different people and different ideas than were in the original plan. This teaches us all to be resourceful, creative and to persevere.'

What we set out to achieve (the five original proposed outcomes):

1. More schools engaging in sustainable cultural activity
2. Legacy of skills, understanding and capacity within schools to continue engagement in the longer term
3. Capacity and levels of quality within cultural organisations to meet schools' and pupils' needs
4. Schools enabled to make more informed choices about which cultural providers to engage with and on what basis
5. Improved understanding and interaction between cultural providers and schools

Key findings responding to these aims, particularly from the Open Fund school projects:

- Schools have found and allocated new funds for cultural activity, particularly when they are encouraged to shape the project to their needs & priorities
- Projects with cultural providers have increased the value placed on cultural education and partnership working, by pupils and staff across the school
- Schools were more open to working with new cultural partners, however in practice they still seemed to struggle to find appropriate/suitable organisations or practitioners
- There has been a shift in the thinking of schools and cultural providers when working together, in seeing the benefit of the school leading based on need
- Arts and cultural activity can improve the mental health & wellbeing of young people, staff and increase cohesion across the whole school community - especially in challenging times such as this past pandemic year!

Legacy & next steps

Awareness of the W&SCEP amongst schools has grown, through the Open Fund, CPD sessions, and our website and marketing, but more needs to be done to reach those schools not already engaging and in need. This will be a key aim for the future membership model and fundraising efforts, which are key focuses for the W&SCEP over the next few months.

Instead of an end of project celebration event or conference, which just wasn't possible in these times, we commissioned a short 'celebration film' of the Open Fund projects and work of the W&SCEP which can be viewed on the 'Projects' page of our website. As well as a record of these projects, the film aims to inspire and encourage new schools to develop cultural learning.

We will also focus on building connections and partnerships between schools and cultural organisations through a new cultural providers directory on the website coming in the autumn, along with associated CPD and cluster networking events to support these collaborations.

Overall, during the Challenge Fund, the W&SCEP has continued to solidify and strengthen a joined-up voice for cultural education in Wiltshire & Swindon. The Exec group is working well, with a recent change in Chairship and the addition of two vice chairs, all on rotation. The Project Manager will be continuing until the end of the year, and we will work with the Cultural Champions and a fundraiser to help bring in funding for future development and delivery.

For further details of the work of the Wiltshire & Swindon Cultural Education Partnership, please visit our website; www.wiltshireandswindoncep.org.uk