

ROYAL
OPERA
HOUSE
BRIDGE

Schools and Cultural Engagement *Executive summary*

A review of school and cultural engagement across Essex, Hertfordshire,
Bedfordshire and North Kent

Royal Opera House Bridge
April 2013



ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND

Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

Bridge Organisation
Working with Arts Council England
to connect young people with great
art and culture

Executive Summary

The Royal Opera House (ROH) Bridge is one of ten bridges funded for three years by Arts Council England. Based in Purfleet, Essex, ROH Bridge works across Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Essex and North Kent to help connect children and young people to great art and culture.

In 2012, A New Direction (the bridge for London), working in partnership with the Mayor of London and Arts Council England, commissioned the NFER to investigate cultural education in London schools. This report draws on intelligence gathered during the first year of ROH Bridge's operation and aims to build on the NFER study and provide regional and local contrast for the region.

The education landscape is constantly shifting. Recent changes that might affect cultural education include:

- the English Baccalaureate
- new performance measures for secondary schools including one that assesses progress across a broad range of subjects, including the arts
- revisions to the National Curriculum programmes of study
- an expansion of the academies programme with associated loss of funding and support from local authorities
- new school groupings including academy chains, federations and teaching school alliances
- varied learning pathways for 14-19 years olds including a greater number of vocational options.

Schools in the ROH Bridge region fall into three broad categories: cultural champions - passionate about the arts and culture; committed but compromised - value cultural learning but experience barriers; and low or non-engagers - who have other priorities. It is principally schools in the first two groups that have engaged with ROH Bridge (through research, dialogue and joint ventures) and it is largely views from these schools that are represented in this report.

Schools clearly value cultural engagement but fewer than half those consulted indicated that visits were regular or planned into the curriculum. Many had an opportunistic approach and an over-reliance on the motivation of individual teachers. In terms of destinations, national museums and galleries in London were most frequently mentioned. The proximity to London is both a strength and a weakness in the region, giving ease of access to the capital's cultural offer but often at the expense of local provision. Other findings include:

- even the most enthusiastic schools are predominantly reactive in terms of cultural engagement
- primary schools visit local, regional and London-based venues and use visits to support arts teaching but also a wide range of subjects and cross-curricular themes
- secondary schools make fewer visits, are less likely to engage with local cultural providers and tend to focus on more subject-specific provision
- awareness of Artsmark is patchy across the region and schools are often discouraged from applying through outdated perceptions of the application process
- 77% of Arts Awards in the region over the last year have come from schools. Lack of time and funding for the arts in schools however, is making it increasingly difficult for schools to offer the programme.

Key barriers to schools' cultural engagement include lack of time to arrange activities, lack of funding for activities and transport, and lack of specialist expertise (particularly in primary schools). Low subject status was cited as a barrier to securing the time and funding required to improve cultural engagement. Lack of information about what is on offer and the pressure of Ofsted were also raised. School staff are looking for a clearly communicated, bespoke offer with overt curriculum relevance. Judgements about value for money are linked to perceptions of quality: schools look for long-term impact, secured through professional development for teachers and ideas for follow-up work.

The ROH Bridge has identified a range of opportunities to expand the market for cultural engagement, improve the quality of provision, maximise the

potential of local partnerships and ultimately improve the cultural experiences and life chances of children and young people in the region. Current and future opportunities include:

- new structures emerging to combat the fragmentation brought about through the academy programme; facilitating school-to-school support and dialogue
- utilising the passion of cultural champion schools to inspire and support other schools
- new networks to improve communications and joint planning between local cultural providers and schools
- sharing expertise and best practice across arts, film, heritage, libraries and museums
- investing in young people to act as cultural ambassadors
- supporting schools to gain Artsmark status and to offer Arts Award programmes
- engaging as an industry sector with vocational education for 14-19 year olds