

What Works to increase equality of access to culture for lower socio-economic groups:

Evidence review and scoping research

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Executive summary

Background and objectives

This research report acts as a synthesis to increase understanding of the evidence around equality of access to culture for lower socio-economic groups. The report summarises both the academic and grey literature, allowing decision-makers to understand different approaches used across the cultural sector which could be replicated or scaled up.

Engagement with arts and culture has been shown to support many positive outcomes, such as stronger critical thinking skills (e.g., improved observation, evaluation, and interpretation), better mental health and wellbeing, and increased cohesion between social groups (Greene et al., 2014; Fancourt and Steptoe, 2019; Zhong et al., 2022). Research suggests participation in arts and culture correlates with increased pro-social behaviour and civic engagement, alongside promoting learning and problem-solving skills (Crossick and Kaszynska, 2016; Fancourt et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2015).

However, quantitative studies have consistently found a link between the level of cultural engagement and socio-economic factors, with people from lower socio-economic groups consistently less likely to engage in arts and culture (Katz-Gerro and Sullivan, 2010; Jancovich and Bianchini, 2013; Veal, 2016), or to be part of the cultural and creative workforce (Brook et al., 2018; 2021).

Whilst issues around what drives low engagement are well established in the literature, less work exists on bringing together effective strategies to increase engagement with arts and culture despite the number of initiatives implemented in the UK as well as overseas to increase equality of access. Therefore, this project aims to learn from the evidence base to understand how best to design and deliver interventions that increase engagement with culture for lower socio-economic groups. Findings from this review will contribute to informing evidence-based decisions about what policy interventions could be piloted or scaled up to increase access to culture for those less likely to engage.

To this end, the research (i) summarises the reasons for low participation in arts and cultural activities for lower socio-economic groups identified in the literature and (ii) highlights what works to increase engagement by identifying successful interventions (at both national and local levels), lessons learned, and evidence gaps. This was done through a systematic search of academic and grey literature produced over the past 15 years in the UK and comparable countries, as well as interviews with experts from academia.

The last chapter presents ten case studies on recent interventions that succeeded in increasing engagement. Based on evidence collected through published evaluations and interviews with stakeholders involved in the design and implementation of the interventions, the case studies explore; the effectiveness of such interventions, the elements that produced the greatest impact, and the extent to which they could be scaled up nationally.

Key findings

The main reasons for low or non-engagement are found to be determined by:

- social factors including people's perception of themselves, social networks, parents' social status, and education,
- economic factors including the cost of attending cultural events,
- geographical and physical factors including lack of accessibility and distance, and
- cultural factors including language barriers or lack of representation and relevance.

Whilst these are limiting factors for sustained cultural engagement, the evidence and interviews with cultural sector stakeholders suggested that the (lack of) relevance of cultural products to many population segments is a cross-cutting determinant of willingness to engage with culture.

Based on the evidence reviewed both in the UK context and internationally, lessons learned from the case studies analysed, and interviews with experts, the following strategies and best practices were identified to be successful in increasing the engagement of people from lower socio-economic groups in arts and culture:

- **Co-creation and participatory practices** where communities define, shape, and have ownership over the cultural offerings in their local area.
- Using **community settings** to increase proximity, familiarity and promote opportunities for socialising.
- **Communication and outreach** strategies that ensure messaging is tailored to a target audience and distributed effectively.
- **Subsidising attendance costs** to alleviate financial barriers, for example, by reducing or removing ticket prices for cultural events.
- Using **digital technologies** to diversify cultural offerings and alleviate geographical barriers.
- Improving **workforce representation** and offering **training** for staff within cultural organisations to engage diverse audiences.
- Encouraging children and young people to engage in culture at an **early stage** to promote engagement in later life.

The figure below summarises the most successful interventions identified during the evidence review.

Interventions	
<p>Co-creation and participatory practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community groups engaged in activities such as curating cultural programmes and commissioning artwork. • Involve community members in management boards of cultural institutions. • Invite audiences to actively participate in professionally curated cultural activities. 	<p>Communication and outreach</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find out what audiences are interested in and tailor messaging around this. • Distribute messaging through word-of-mouth, community ambassadors, and partnerships with local organisations.
<p>Workforce and training</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train the workforce in supporting diverse audiences to engage fully. • Increase representation of diverse backgrounds within the workforce. • Target project grants and funding streams to projects led by marginalised communities. 	<p>Community settings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce hyperlocal cultural offers in familiar, community settings. • Tour cultural exhibitions or performances across the country. • Promote the idea that local cultural venues can be used for socialising.
<p>Subsidising attendance costs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Situate free admission policies within broader strategies. • Use targeted discounts for lower socio-economic groups. 	<p>Early engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide arts education in schools, such as music or dance classes. • Arts education hubs working locally with schools and cultural institutions to create joined-up cultural provision. • Provide after-school arts programmes.
<p>Digital engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital activities (e.g. online workshops) as a point of entry leading to future in-person engagement. • Use online platforms (e.g. social media) to promote online engagement. 	<p>Digital engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital activities (e.g. online workshops) as a point of entry leading to future in-person engagement. • Use online platforms (e.g. social media) to promote online engagement.

Recommendations

The key recommendations identified as part of this research include:

- Encouraging the implementation of co-creation approaches, for example, by ensuring that successful funding applications include explicit plans on how they intend to achieve co-creation.
- Promoting projects that make use of local settings, as they have been shown to be successful in increasing engagement in more disadvantaged areas.
- Providing stable and long-term funding to enable long-term vision, planning, and sustained engagement.
- Using a combination of strategies, as implementing interventions in isolation might not be enough to increase engagement with lower socio-economic groups.
- Replicating and scaling up the success factors identified. Despite the hyper-local nature of cultural offerings, the policy lessons emerging from the evidence suggest that funding decisions can be made to replicate successful structures and decision-making processes for local cultural products and services.
- Conducting research that can reliably estimate causal effects using adequate control groups and experimental, or quasi-experimental methods.
- Increasing focus on collecting longitudinal data as evaluations tend to focus on short-term impacts, while little is known about how to achieve sustained levels of engagement in the long-term.
- Improving data and knowledge transfer. Over the years there has been limited data and knowledge transfer across the sector, while improving the transfer of data and knowledge will lead to improved data-led decision-making.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Broadening attendance and participation to a wider audience is an opportunity for the arts and culture sector, but there is a challenge in how this can be achieved. Engaging more people in arts and culture has the benefit of engaging more individuals with activities with demonstrated positive outcomes, ranging from stronger critical thinking skills (such as paying more attention to detail and improved evaluation and interpretation skills) (Greene et al., 2014) to better mental health and wellbeing (Fancourt and Steptoe, 2019). Moreover, stimulating access to cultural activities for wider audiences can increase cohesion between social groups by encouraging social mixing (Zhong et al., 2022).

However, quantitative studies consistently demonstrate a link between the level of cultural engagement and socio-economic factors. Empirical evidence from the literature reveals a significant difference among adults in the higher socio-economic group compared to those in the lower socio-economic group in their participation and engagement in the culture sector, with the former more likely to participate in arts and cultural events. This trend has been shown to be consistent across different countries within the UK, Europe and the United States (Katz-Gerro and Sullivan, 2010; Jancovich and Bianchini, 2013; Department for Culture Media & Sport, 2015; Veal, 2016; Bone et al., 2021).

In the context of England, results from the DCMS [Participation Survey in 2021](#) show that physical engagement in the arts is lower for individuals who are living in deprived areas (with data showing that the higher the level of deprivation, the lower the level of engagement) or the Social Rented Sector, and those working in routine and manual occupations. Similar patterns were identified for digital engagement. Moreover, research shows that the Covid-19 pandemic may have affected engagement levels for some groups with potential consequences on long-term cultural behaviours (e.g., young or unemployed people who had decreased their cultural engagement during the first lockdown maintained lower engagement after subsequent lockdowns) (Mak et al., 2022).

In light of this, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) is seeking to undertake a review of the evidence base to inform potential interventions that could be used to promote the participation of individuals from lower socio-economic groups in the cultural sectors.

1.2 Objectives of the study

This review seeks to learn from the evidence base and understand how to best design and deliver interventions that increase participation and engagement with the cultural sectors for individuals from lower socio-economic groups.

To this end, the objective of the project is twofold:

- Identifying the **main barriers** to participation in arts and cultural activities for people from lower socio-economic backgrounds.
- Highlighting what works to increase participation in cultural activities for people from lower socio-economic groups by identifying **successful interventions** implemented at the national and local level, lessons learned, and evidence gaps.

This research will be used to understand what works to address and reduce barriers to accessibility and engagement, thus contributing to informing decisions about what evidence-based policy interventions could be piloted or scaled up to increase access to culture for individuals less likely to engage. The evidence base also includes, to a lesser extent, some coverage of what did not work in driving sustained engagement with culture among lower socio-economic groups.

This report summarises relevant evidence identified through:

- A systematic search of the academic and grey literature produced over the past 15 years in the UK and internationally¹.
- Interviews and a roundtable with academics studying barriers to engagement in arts and culture for traditionally less-engaged groups.
- Interviews with experts involved in the design, implementation, and evaluation of interventions aiming to increase engagement of individuals from lower socio-economic groups in arts and culture. The findings from the interviews fed into the development of ten case studies on successful interventions, presented in the final chapter of this report.

1.3 Methodology

1.3.1 Evidence review

For the evidence review, the research team developed a protocol that set out the research questions, a search strategy for academic and grey literature, and a list of inclusion criteria. The team compiled a long list of research papers based on a systematic search in academic search engines, and two members of the team screened titles and abstracts based on the list of inclusion criteria to obtain a final list of relevant evidence. There were additional pieces of evidence incorporated into this list identified through a snowballing approach,² expert recommendations, and grey literature.

The pool of evidence was narrowed down from an initial long list of 769 research papers to a final list of 138 titles. All reviewed papers were scored following a bespoke quality assessment framework considering the credibility, methodology, and relevance of the evidence. Further details on the research protocol, search strategy, inclusion and exclusion criteria, screening process, and case study selection can be found in Appendix A.

1.3.2 Case studies

The case studies selected focused on a wide range of art forms (e.g., arts, theatre, museums, etc.) to provide an overview of successful strategies and lessons learned that can be applied in different contexts within the art and cultural sector. The evidence on the case studies was collected through a review of available documentation (e.g., evaluations, reports, case studies etc.) as well as one-to-one interviews with stakeholders involved in the design, delivery, or evaluation of the programme.

Case studies were selected based on their replicability and scalability and the extent to which they can inform future policy decision-making. The list of case studies includes local initiatives across English regions, a representation of country-wide programmes in England, and two initiatives to increase cultural engagement in Scotland and Wales. Details on the geographical split of the evidence and case studies can be found in Appendix B.

Structure of the report

The rest of the report is organised into the following chapters:

- **Factors affecting cultural engagement:** the chapter expands on existing knowledge by providing an overview of the main factors limiting participation in arts and culture identified in the literature with a focus on factors affecting individuals from lower socio-economic groups.
- **What works to increase engagement:** the chapter presents the most successful factors to increase engagement in arts and culture for lower socio-economic groups and provides

¹ Details on the methodological approach are included in the Appendix.

² Track references and citations of a given publication to increase the evidence base in a review.

examples of successful interventions implemented both in the UK and internationally.

- **Case studies:** the chapter analyses ten case studies of interventions that were successful in increasing the engagement of individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Each case study discusses factors that made the interventions successful as well as lessons learned.
- **Appendix:** the appendix includes details of the methodological approach to the evidence review, including the search strategy implemented, selection criteria, and the quality assessment framework.

2. Factors affecting cultural engagement

Summary of key findings

The main factors affecting the participation of people from lower socio-economic backgrounds identified in the literature include:

- **Social factors:** these include people's perception of themselves (e.g., some people feel that arts and cultural events are 'not for them'), social networks, parents' socio-economic status, and level of education.
- **Economic factors:** the cost of attending an event, transportation costs, and the opportunity cost of work and family commitments can prevent individuals from lower socio-economic groups from participating in arts and cultural activities.
- **Geographical factors and physical location:** arts and cultural events may not be easily accessible for people from lower socio-economic groups due to their distance from the venue. Improving venues' accessibility would also reduce barriers to participation for people with disabilities.
- **Cultural factors:** these include language barriers, lack of relevance, or lack of representation (i.e., people feeling excluded, uninterested, or disconnected from exhibitions in which they do not see themselves reflected).

While these are limiting factors for sustained cultural engagement, the evidence and interviews with stakeholders suggested that the (lack of) relevance of cultural products to many population segments is a cross-cutting determinant of willingness to engage with the existing offerings.

2.1. Introduction

Engagement with arts and cultural activities is the result of a two-stage decision-making process: the decision to attend as well as the intensity and frequency of such attendance (Ateca-Amestoy, 2008; Buraimo et al., 2011). The outcome of this process, i.e. the consumption of cultural goods and services, is determined by supply and demand-side factors, which drive both consumer preferences and actual choices. Supply-side factors refer to the availability and accessibility of arts and cultural events and activities, as well as the quality and diversity of the cultural offer. On the demand side, factors such as individual preferences, attitudes, and beliefs play a key role in determining engagement with arts and cultural activities.

This chapter summarises the main factors, also referred to as barriers, limiting the participation of disadvantaged groups in cultural events. While we understand that the term barriers can be contentious and that other factors, such as preferences, can drive the decision to participate, some groups (e.g., people from lower socio-economic backgrounds) are consistently more likely to be affected by factors such as resource constraints, availability of information etc. that reduce the likelihood to participate in arts and culture.

2.1.1 Defining and measuring engagement

It is important to note that levels of attendance and participation in cultural activities depend on how culture is defined. One of the criticisms for how participation in arts and cultural activities is typically

defined and measured (e.g. when using DCMS Taking Part survey³ data) is that the focus is on traditional state-supported activities, for example, visiting museums, galleries, libraries, and heritage sites (Taylor, 2016). Culture can be interpreted more broadly and may have different meanings for different groups, thus affecting the way in which participation and attendance are measured.

For example, research conducted in the UK suggested that having multiple interests and being engaged is not unique to higher socio-economic groups, but something found across all social groups (Miles, 2016). However, the types of activities different groups are interested in may differ. For example, higher-status groups are generally engaged in cultural activities that Leguina and Miles (2017) define as rarer forms of arts participation and consumption (including performing arts and creative writing), whereas less affluent individuals are more likely to participate in what the authors define as free-time activities (including gardening, going to the pub, or watching TV).

Only a small proportion of the population (about 11%) is classified as not participating in cultural activities when additional activities (besides state-supported culture) are taken into account, including sports participation and volunteering among others (Taylor, 2016). Moreover, Bone et al. (2021) found that while socio-economic status is associated with participation in arts events (e.g., art museums or galleries, ballet, opera etc.), it is not the case for participation in art activities (e.g., taking part in music, dance, or theatrical performance) or creative groups (e.g., hobby or garden clubs and literary, art, discussion, or study groups).

2.1.2 Motivations

While the research explores the main factors affecting participation in arts and culture for lower socio-economic groups, it is worth noting that evidence highlights that lower participation in cultural initiatives can also be driven by preference as individuals. This is especially the case with less affluent groups, who may simply not be interested in the current cultural offer or perceive it as non-relevant to them (Bunting et al., 2007; Bennett et al., 2009; Newman et al., 2013).

Part of the evidence base did not support the existence of cultural deficits or barriers to engaging with legitimate culture (Miles and Sullivan, 2021; Jancovich, 2017; Jancovich and Bianchini, 2013). This literature, as well as interviews conducted with academics and cultural sector stakeholders, suggested that the lack of relevance of the current cultural offer to many population segments is a strong determinant of engagement with culture, and instead the type of arts and cultural activities being offered should be the focus of policy decisions (Jancovich, 2011).

Having said this, while the level of engagement in cultural activities is certainly affected by individual preferences and tastes, barriers such as financial constraints, have been shown to reduce the likelihood and frequency of participation (Ateca-Amestoy, 2008). Yaish and Katz-Gerro (2012), who studied the determinants of both cultural taste and participation, find that while tastes are shaped more by socialisation processes and less by financial resources, participation is indeed affected by economic factors and cultural resources (parental background, education, etc.). To this end, the objective of the present study is to identify how such limiting factors can be reduced to ensure that everyone interested in engaging in culture has the chance to do so, irrespective of their socio-economic background.

2.1.3 Factors affecting participation

Research has shown a wide range of factors that limit or possibly prevent attendance to arts and cultural events and activities across lower socio-economic groups, including (i) social factors, (ii) economic factors, (iii) geographical and physical factors, and (iv) cultural factors.

³ The [Taking Part survey](#) is a household survey in England which collects data on engagement in arts, museums and galleries, archives, libraries, heritage, and sport.

2.1.4 Social factors

There are a multitude of personal, perceptual, and experiential factors that can prevent people's cultural engagement. Among the perceptual drivers, social norms and peer group approval are identified as key barriers to access to cultural activities.

People's perception of themselves is an important factor in predicting engagement with arts and cultural events and activities. Evidence suggests that individuals from lower socio-economic or minority groups often feel that participating in arts and cultural activities 'is not for people like them' (Hull, 2013; Atkinson and Mason, 2014; Northern Ireland Assembly, 2016; McAndrew and Widdop, 2021). Similarly, a literature review by O'Brien and Oakley (2015) found that feeling out of place or fear of not fitting in could reduce people's attendance to arts and cultural activities. This issue is also emphasised by Bunting et al. (2008), whose research shows that inequalities in engagement are further widened by psychological influences such as lack of confidence and fear of not fitting in. These psychological barriers to engagement can also be exacerbated by mental health conditions, such as anxiety or depression (Fancourt et al., 2020).

Social circles and networks can also drive people's decisions to participate in cultural activities. When peers in the network show a lack of interest or disengagement in arts and cultural activities, one is less likely to develop an interest in that activity (Parkinson et al., 2015). Indeed, evidence shows that people's engagement and attitudes towards arts and culture are positively associated with their social network's level of engagement (Baxter et al., 2022; Fancourt et al., 2021; Luxton and Thomas, 2021). Similarly, O'Brien and Oakley (2015) found that people in more deprived areas might participate less in arts and cultural activities due to the increased likelihood of interacting with other non-participants living in the same area. Neelands et al. (2015) suggested that the most effective way to increase people's participation in arts and cultural activities is through their networks and peers. The authors suggested that people can be encouraged to try something new when they see other people who live close to them or work with them participating in creative activities.

People with higher socio-economic status tend to have more complex social networks (i.e., networks with many people from different backgrounds, including large numbers of non-family acquaintances) than lower socio-economic groups. According to Cebula (2015), people with extended and complex social networks are more likely to participate in a greater number of arts and cultural activities. In particular, the author proposes three possible mechanisms that could explain this finding. First, having more complex or extensive social networks increases the odds of exposure to diverse activities. Second, keeping in touch with a wide network of people can increase openness and tolerance to novel cultural experiences. Third, participating in a wide network and attending cultural activities can indicate the desire of people to build a 'cosmopolitan identity'.

Furthermore, parents' socio-economic status is another factor that can predict children's engagement with arts and cultural events and activities. According to Mak and Fancourt (2021), who used the DCMS Taking Part survey (2015-2018) to explore factors affecting children's participation in arts and cultural activities, parents from higher socio-economic groups are more likely to encourage and support their children to access learning opportunities outside of school, such as visiting a museum or going to the theatre. The authors found that children whose parents were in routine and manual work roles had 40% fewer chances to perform art activities (e.g., dancing, singing) and 36% fewer chances to visit a museum, archive, or heritage site compared to children whose parents were employed in higher managerial and administrative roles.

The authors suggested that this finding could be explained by the fact that parents from higher socio-economic groups were more likely to have participated in arts and cultural activities themselves when they were children, so they were more likely to value arts engagement during their adulthood. Thus, the authors concluded that parents from higher socio-economic groups are more likely to encourage

their children to participate in such activities. Similarly, a literature review by Arts Council England (2016) also found a positive correlation between children's engagement with culture and parental socio-economic background.

Lastly, education has been demonstrated to be another key factor that can influence the likelihood of engagement with culture. Evidence shows that education is strongly correlated with increased levels of all forms of arts and cultural engagement (Yaish and Katz-Gerro, 2012; Reeves, 2015; Bones et al., 2021). Bunting et al. (2007) found that in comparison to the overall cultural attendance rate of adults in the UK, those with A-Levels or higher education have a higher propensity to engage (74% and 83% respectively), while those with no educational qualification are less likely to engage with culture (44%).

2.1.5 Economic factors

Economic factors can also act as barriers preventing individuals from lower socio-economic groups from participating in arts and cultural activities (Yaish and Katz-Gerro, 2012). Costs of attending arts events, including travel costs and event ticket prices, are usually reported as a key factor in preventing individuals from lower socio-economic groups from attending arts and cultural events (Hull, 2013; Australia Council for the Arts, 2014). In a study by Potter (2015), which explored the barriers to accessing art opportunities for disabled and marginalised people (including individuals with mental health issues or long-term unemployment), research participants reported that admission and travel costs prevented them from engaging with art opportunities.

Living in social housing is a factor that can also help us to understand people's participation and engagement in arts and cultural events and activities. According to Mak and Fancourt (2021), children living in social housing in the UK had 42% lower odds of visiting a museum, archive, or heritage site than children whose parents owned or rented their house. As living in social housing is correlated with lower levels of wealth, families in social housing might be less able to cover venues' entry fees or travelling costs for their children.

Another limiting factor of engagement with arts and cultural events, particularly for young people from lower socio-economic groups, is a lack of access to digital content due to limited financial means. According to Atkinson and Mason (2014), having no or bad internet access could prevent young people from accessing information on cultural activities and events in their area. Therefore, a lack of information and awareness of the availability of such events, resulting from limited means to engage digitally, could pose significant barriers to engagement in arts and cultural activities (Hull, 2013; Parkinson et al., 2015).

Lack of time has also been identified as one of the most common factors constraining engagement with arts (Bouder-Pailler, 2008; Smiers, 2012; Hull, 2013). Previous studies have explored whether this reason is more common among lower socio-economic groups. According to Atkinson and Mason (2014), young people from lower socio-economic status families are more likely to spend time helping their families with domestic chores or at family businesses, meaning they have less leisure time than their wealthier peers. According to Buraimo et al. (2011), who analysed the DCMS Taking Part survey, visiting museums or galleries varied across groups with different employment statuses, reflecting differences in available leisure time. For instance, those working part-time have a 20% higher propensity to visit museums or galleries than other groups (e.g., full-time employed, those on long- and short-term sick leave, and those looking after family). Access to libraries reflects a similar pattern with full-time employees less likely to go to a library than other people working part-time, looking after their family or home, or being retired from paid work (Buraimo et al., 2011).

2.1.6 Geographical factors and physical location

Geographical barriers could adversely affect arts and cultural participation and engagement. Distance from the venue's location and travel time can act as disincentives for individuals to attend arts events

(Hull, 2013; Potter, 2015). Analysis of the DCMS Taking Part survey by Brook (2016) also showed that proximity to museums and galleries in London could significantly affect people's probability and frequency of attendance. Distance is a vitally important factor in determining engagement, but the effect of distance might differ across art forms, especially if some forms of cultural consumption, such as opera audiences, are particularly socially stratified (O'Brien and Oakley, 2015).

A lack of transport could also prevent people from attending arts and cultural events, irrespective of the venue's geographical proximity. Brook (2016) found that access to public transportation increases the likelihood of attending museums and galleries. Similarly, it was suggested that having a car may increase attendance to arts and cultural activities; a study conducted by Hull (2013) found that lower attendance to arts and cultural events in areas with high deprivation compared to the least deprived areas could be explained by the fact that car ownership in highly deprived areas is lower than in the least deprived areas.

The quantity and quality of the cultural offer is not homogenous, but instead varies across neighbourhoods and is often higher in less deprived areas. According to Mak and Fancourt (2021), living in a more affluent area is a factor that could predict children's engagement with arts and cultural activities. The authors found that children living in the 30% least deprived areas were two times more likely to perform arts outside of school compared to their peers living in the 30% most deprived areas. Similarly, O'Brien and Oakley (2015) found that people who live in deprived areas are less likely to visit museums than those living in more affluent areas, because of the presence (or not) of cultural venues, inequalities of funding across areas, and social environments that promote cultural lifestyles.

Finally, another barrier commonly cited by people with disabilities and health conditions is the lack of accessibility of venues (Turner et al., 2021). According to Potter (2015), one of the reported barriers to accessing arts activities by a sample of disabled people who participated in the research study was a 'lack of physical access at venues'. Indeed, when asked what would encourage and increase their participation in cultural events, study participants commented that improved physical access could increase their participation. Participants suggested, for example, reducing the amount of time needed to walk to the venue as many of them reported mobility issues, or ensuring that they do not travel alone (especially if the venue is hard to reach e.g. it requires taking a train or a bus).

2.1.7 Cultural factors

Personal and cultural identification with the site, the exhibition, or the performance play a role in attracting people from diverse backgrounds and ethnic minority groups. According to Buraimo et al. (2011), ethnicity accounts for a significant part of the variation in visits to heritage sites; Asian and black people were 60% less likely to visit a heritage site than white people, and ethnic minority groups highlighted that many cultural events have little or no relevance to them. Studying the cases of Sweden and Spain, Eleftherios et al. (2021) found that national integration policies do not target cultural participation among migrants, and they fail to increase attendance in cultural events, including live performances and historic sites.

Representation of identities within arts and culture can be a driver for engagement for ethnic minority individuals. For example, O'Brien and Oakley (2015) found within their literature review that people from ethnic minority backgrounds often feel that what is shown in museums has no relevance or connection to them as it is primarily a representation of British culture rather than their own culture. Atkinson and Mason (2014) stated that there are different ways to increase diversity and equality in museum visits. Such examples include developing exhibitions that are significant for different communities and groups, involving local communities in designing those activities, and increasing diversity in the museum workforce by supporting ethnic minorities to increase their skills and be competitive for jobs in this sector (for example, through traineeships and bursaries).

Besides lack of representation, language can also act as a barrier to cultural engagement (Atkinson and Mason, 2014). Parkinson et al. (2015) highlighted that one potential barrier preventing people who speak little or no English from engaging in cultural activities could be their inability to contact and communicate with the personnel. Dawson (2014) found that language was one of the barriers people from low-income, ethnic minority groups might face when visiting museums and science centres. Based on findings from interviews and focus groups with people from different ethnic minority groups, the author found that language barriers prevented people from engaging in museums' and science centres' exhibitions. The institutions that participants visited during the study provided information only in English. Therefore, people who did not speak or read English were not able to read the description of the exhibit items. Some research participants reported feeling anxious about asking for help from the staff, as they were not confident in their English speaking. Those participants who did interact with the institutions' personnel reported that they felt 'unwelcome' and 'uncomfortable'.

3. What works to increase participation

Summary of key findings

The most successful strategies adopted in the UK and internationally to reduce barriers to participation and to increase engagement in arts and culture for people from lower socio-economic backgrounds include:

- Using **co-creation** and **participatory practices** (such as community commissioning panels or management boards) through which communities come together to shape an inclusive cultural provision. This helps develop a sense of ownership of the cultural products and attracts groups that are historically less likely to engage in arts and culture.
- Organising events in **community settings**. This reduces geographical and cultural barriers as communities can access cultural events more easily when organised closer to their home and feel more comfortable and less intimidated in familiar settings.
- **Communication and outreach** strategies ensuring that the message is tailored to the targeted group and distributed using effective channels (e.g., utilising other members of the community, local partners, etc.).
- **Subsidising event costs**, thus reducing financial barriers experienced by some groups with limited financial resources.
- Using **digital technologies** to diversify the cultural offer (e.g., by creating digital content in addition to in-person engagement) and reduce geographical barriers.
- Improving **workforce representation** to develop a more inclusive cultural offer and offering **training** to ensure the workforce possesses the tools to engage and support diverse audiences.
- Encouraging children and young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds to **engage** in arts and culture at an **early stage** as early engagement is a predictor for engagement later in life.

3.1 Overview of successful strategies

Some drivers for cultural demand are largely universal, such as childhood exposure to culture, education, and opportunities for socialisation (Voase, 2013; Rudd, 2015; Reeves and de Vries, 2016). Research shows that socio-economic status is not a sufficient reason for not attending or engaging with arts and culture, with other reasons including disaffection for the offer or the institutions where it takes place (Bamford et al., 2012). This suggests that there is room for re-thinking contextual elements of the cultural offer, such as the location where events take place as well as the way in which cultural programmes are shaped, for example by enabling people to express their preferences on arts and culture and engage with the creative process.

This chapter presents strategies identified in the literature and in our discussions with experts as successful in driving engagement in arts and cultural events, with a focus on factors that reduce barriers to participation for individuals from lower socio-economic groups.

The main strategies identified and discussed in the sections below include:

- Co-creation practices
- Participatory practices
- Use of community settings
- Communication and outreach
- Subsidising attendance costs
- Digital engagement
- Workforce training and representation
- Early involvement in culture

Provided within this chapter is an overview of the main channels and mechanisms through which these strategies reduce barriers and increase engagement as well as examples of their implementation in the UK and internationally.

3.2 Co-creation practices

Rationale

- Increase the quality and relevance of the cultural offer.
- Increase the sense of ownership and representation.

Programmes and interventions

- Allowing the community to express their opinion on what the cultural offer should be as well as having community groups curate cultural programmes.
- Involve community members in the management boards of cultural institutions (e.g. PurpleDoor Theatre and Contact Theatre).
- Establish community panels to commission artists and hold consultation events with local people (e.g. Creative People and Places and Coventry UK City of Culture).

This section presents evidence on how co-creation helps to increase engagement among lower socio-economic groups. Co-creation practices can help increase the quality and relevance of the cultural offer by fostering dialogue with communities to understand what people are interested in, developing ownership of the cultural provision, and increasing awareness of what is available (Walmsley, 2018; Icarus, 2019; Robinson, 2022).

Co-creation includes a range of activities across art forms, scales, and budgets that involve audience members in the design and management of the cultural offer (Walmsley, 2013). Examples of co-creation practices include experts supporting community groups to curate programmes, or allowing the community to express their opinions on what the cultural offer should include and translating these into commissions or open calls for professionals (Jancovich, 2017).

Involving community members in the management boards of cultural organisations has proven a successful model to increase engagement in cultural activities through building a sense of ownership over the cultural output or programme, and diversifying the offer (Jancovich, 2011; Falconer et al., 2022). Two examples of involving local people in the management process are the PurpleDoor Theatre in Liverpool, and Contact Theatre in Manchester. PurpleDoor Theatre put together a community board to oversee the cultural direction of the organisation, instead of a standard top-down artistic director-led model (Falconer et al., 2022). Contact Theatre involved young people from different backgrounds in the development of the artistic programme. Evidence collected from staff

members shows that, as a result, the demographics of the audiences changed significantly, with 50% of those engaged being from ethnic minority or lower socio-economic groups (Jancovich, 2011).

Creative People and Places (CPP), funded by Arts Council England, aimed at increasing cultural engagement where it had been historically low by switching from a supply-driven cultural offer to a demand-driven one. Most of the CPP projects used community panels to commission artists where the majority of decision-makers were local people, and all of them involved residents in operational decision-making by co-commissioning or co-creating the programme (Icarus, 2019). In particular, working with local anchors (such as local businesses, community connectors, or organisations in cultural, voluntary, and social sectors) helped cultural organisations to establish relationships and trust within the community. Listening to communities generated significant engagement among groups less likely to participate in arts and culture with 53% of the CPP audience in 2020/2021 belonging to one of the low-engaged Audience Spectrum segments, and 30% to one of the medium-engaged segments (Cowley and Cooke, 2021).

Similarly, DCMS' Coventry UK City of Culture (UKCoC) supported local people to play an active role in governance and decision-making, including programme planning and production. They also employed professional artists to work with communities to co-create core elements of the programme (Neelands et al., 2021). Between 2017 and 2022, the UKCoC Trust carried out an estimated 16,300 hours of consultation and planning work across all 18 wards of the city, and with residents from all neighbourhoods (Neelands et al., 2022). Overall, 77% of the programme was co-created with communities, and events were attended by people financially stretched and facing urban adversity at a higher rate than the programme overall. For instance, 'Can You Hear Me, Now?', an outdoor immersive theatre created with refugees and migrants issued 35% of tickets to Coventry households in disadvantaged areas, whereas in Coventry this group only represents 24% of the population (Neelands et al., 2022).

Another example of how co-creation practices can be used to increase the engagement of marginalised groups was the HOME festival, organised as part of the UKCoC initiative to engage homeless people in cultural events. Based on a conversation carried out with an expert involved in the organisation of the festival, the event was successful in engaging people experiencing homelessness because it was built on pre-existing infrastructure (i.e., people and local organisations working with homeless people) and adopted co-creation practices. These included providing safe spaces for community members where they felt their ideas were valued and they could share failures, which flattened any hierarchy within the network of stakeholders involved. Moreover, the fact that co-creation practices were accepted and implemented by all stakeholders involved, including the steering group, delivery partners, and community members, was one of the main factors that made the festival successful in engaging people experiencing homelessness. Another successful example is the Manchester International Festival, a bi-yearly festival of arts and culture, that takes a co-creative approach by involving residents in all stages of the organisation. Residents create major artworks, co-curate events, inform the approach to access and transportation, and participate in public forums to ensure a wide range of perspectives are considered to organise the Festival.⁴ The 2021 evaluation report of the festival showed that audiences have diversified and expanded, with a growing presence of younger audiences, ethnic minorities, and lower socio-economic groups.⁵

⁴ Get involved, take the lead. [Factory International](#).

⁵ Report for Information. [Manchester City Council](#).

3.3. Participatory practices

Rationale

- Increase the quality and relevance of the cultural offer.
- Increase understanding of the cultural product, sense of ownership and representation

Programmes and interventions

- Invite people to participate at different stages of theatre plays, such as designing elements of the scene or the music.
- Invite people to participate in immersive and professionally curated performances or exhibitions (e.g. National Theatre Wales).

In this report, we draw a distinction between co-creation and participatory practices, where the latter refers to cases where individuals take part in curated activities but are not involved in designing what those curated activities will be. Involvement of people in the cultural activity can take place in a context in which professionals plan and organise the event and the public contribute to it by sharing experiences or participating in the performance. Previous research shows that participatory arts can improve participants' outcomes such as social connectedness and wellbeing (Dadswell et al., 2020; Daykin et al., 2021), and discusses their contribution to wider societal outcomes such as participation in public life by marginalised groups and social cohesion (Kohl-Arenas et al., 2014; Dewinter et al., 2021).

According to Walmsley (2019), participation and collaborative consumption are also effective ways to engage people with arts and culture and provide enriching experiences to audiences. Involving people in participating at some stage of the process (such as designing elements of the scene, music, or costumes of an opera or theatre play) increases their understanding of the cultural product, generates ownership over the cultural offer, and furthers their interest in the art (Bamford et al., 2012). Moreover, active participation in arts seems to be less driven by either social class or social status (Reeves, 2015), thus suggesting that participatory practices may be an effective way to attract a diverse audience.

In this context, National Theatre Wales developed a reputation for theatrical innovation. The Theatre Map of Wales programme was launched in 2009 and it involved the implementation of touring theatrical events across the country to bring performances to communities where engagement in arts and culture is low and involved the community in the performance using participatory practices and immersive theatre. Innovative strategies, such as fewer restrictions on people's mobility during performances and giving the chance to participate in the play, led to increased engagement (Sedgman, 2017).

Participatory practices can also be applied in other cultural settings, such as museums. In France, the Gallery of Gifts in the *Cité Nationale de l'Histoire de l'Immigration* (National City of the History of Immigration) created a new permanent collection in which each piece of the exhibition is presented alongside the story of its lender or donor – a local person explaining their experience of migration through personal objects or pictures, usually handed down from one generation to another (Innocenti, 2016). According to the author, establishing contact with citizens increases participation in and equitable access to heritage and cultural settings.

Sometimes, participatory practices are adopted alongside co-creation practices. One example is the Science Museum in London. Aiming to attract new visitors from ethnic minority groups as well as people from lower socio-economic backgrounds the museum created a new permanent gallery, the Information Age, alongside members of local communities. They invited specific groups to plan and

create an exhibition about population experiences with communication technology (Bunning et al., 2015). The aim was to create an experience that was relevant, engaging, accessible for new visitors, and appealing to people from ethnic minority groups and lower socio-economic backgrounds.

According to the authors of the research, some communities, such as the Cameroonian community, were particularly responsive when they were actively invited to participate by showcasing the impact that mobile phones and technologies had in their homeland. Participants emphasised an increased sense of ownership over the product and enjoyed the opportunity to understand the process of creating an exhibition (Bunning et al., 2015).

Similarly, Big hART, in Australia, combines co-creation and participatory practices. The programme brings together artists and participants, often marginalised young people, to co-create artistic work including music, theatre performances, and painting (Wright et al., 2022). The aim of Big hART is to widen engagement with the cultural provision by encouraging people to participate in the creation of cultural products. They do so through a process of consultation with the targeted groups, provision of training and workshops, and finally, a phase of expression in which participants use their new skills to produce something that will be presented to the community (Wright et al., 2017).

3.4 Use of community settings

Rationale

- Increase proximity to reduce geographical barriers.
- Increase familiarity to alleviate feelings of not belonging that are associated with attending traditional cultural venues.
- Offer opportunities to socialise as this is a key motivator for participation.

Programmes and interventions

- Produce hyperlocal cultural offerings in local settings near to lower socio-economic groups (e.g. Coventry UK City of Culture and Meet the Neighbours).
- Tour exhibitions across the country and host cultural offerings in, for example, community centres (e.g. Red Rose Theatre and the South West Wellbeing programme).
- Utilise cultural institutions as multi-use venues for socialising to attract local community members (e.g. PurpleDoor Theatre).

Lower socio-economic groups are less likely to travel to engage with culture and give greater importance to local interests and content than any other group (FreshMinds, 2007). A lack of trust in traditional cultural institutions is also apparent for lower socio-economic groups meaning that alternative channels for delivering culture, such as through existing social networks or familiar locations, are key to engaging this group (FreshMinds, 2007). In particular, the evidence presented below suggests that the aspects of proximity, familiarity, and opportunities to socialise are important aspects of using community settings to engage lower socio-economic groups.

3.4.1 Proximity to cultural offerings

Those living in less affluent areas are less likely to engage with culture, resulting from a lack of cultural opportunities in these areas (O'Brien and Oakley, 2015; Mak et al., 2020; 2021). Therefore, Arts Council England (2011) suggested that for those with lower educational attainment and limited financial means, cultural opportunities should be available in less affluent areas to bring culture closer to where lower socio-economic groups typically reside. International evidence shows that cultural opportunities are often still concentrated in inner cities (Australia Council for the Arts, 2020). Similarly,

Audience Finder data from the Audience Agency has also shown a disproportionate supply in wealthier areas of South England (Hanquinet et al., 2019). Therefore, the suggestion from Bunting et al. (2008) of providing a breadth and diversity of cultural opportunities outside of London is still valuable today. This theme of creating cultural opportunities nearer to where lower socio-economic groups are was also found in qualitative findings from the Creative People and Places project (Jancovich, 2017). Programme deliverers commented that participants simply wanted things to do in their local area and were less preoccupied with the art form itself.

A reason for this is that reducing the distance between those from lower socio-economic groups and cultural opportunities alleviates geographical barriers and some financial barriers, such as public transport costs (Hull, 2013; Potter, 2015). According to Evans (2016) increasing the proximity of local cultural activities, and therefore improving access, is important in sustaining long-term engagement with culture. For example, Boyle (2011, cited in Evans, 2016) found that over a 5-year period following the opening of a new cultural venue, the number of households attending from the local area increased from 1,101 to 2,704.

Brook and Scott (2021) also identified the Coventry UK City of Culture programme as having offered a wide range of hyper-local cultural activities that took place in neighbourhoods across the city. Their analysis of ticketing data showed that audiences were local to the events, living in or next to the area in which they took place. An international example of a similar hyper-local intervention is the Centre Pompidou in France where between 2011-2012 pieces from modern art collections were selected to be transported and displayed in tents within areas without access to art galleries (Pasikowska-Schnass, 2017). A subsequent survey found that 18% of visitors to the 'Mobile Pompidou' had never been to a museum or art gallery before, compared to 2% for the main, permanent site.

A particularly interesting example of where increasing proximity to cultural opportunities was utilised is the Meet the Neighbours project (Dunn and Gilmore, 2020). This programme had artists take up residencies within European cities, for example in Manchester where artist residencies led activities such as photography, exhibitions, performances, and knowledge sharing. Dunn and Gilmore (2020) found that the project supported access to cultural opportunities for excluded groups and led to ongoing strategies for audience development and widening participation.

3.4.2 Familiarity of cultural settings

Another reason for the success of community settings in increasing engagement with culture is that cultural events occurring in non-arts spaces are inherently more likely to reach non-arts audiences (Icarus, 2019). For those with limited financial means and lower educational attainment, who often feel that culture isn't for them, Arts Council England (2011) suggested that these settings should be venues they already frequent (for example, shopping malls, pubs, and other community venues).

Cheetham Hill charity in Manchester demonstrates where lower socio-economic groups have naturally used a familiar, local space to engage in culture (Edwards and Gibson, 2017). These groups used a charity shop that they already frequented as a means to borrow and swap books as well as to buy craft materials and second-hand fashion pieces that would otherwise be inaccessible to them. This case study demonstrates the potential for success that formal interventions could have when using community settings to engage lower socio-economic groups, as it may be something these groups are already interested in.

Taking cultural activities from their traditional settings and locating them in local, familiar spaces helps to alleviate the fear and 'risk' that lower socio-economic groups might associate with accessing traditional venues, especially for the first time (Pearce, 2017). Examples of where this has been done include the Curiosity Shop, a travelling exhibit that set up in empty retail spaces, and the Red Rose Theatre's performances of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', which took place in a forest near Ipswich and succeeded in attracting an unconventional theatre audience (Pearce, 2017). The South West

Wellbeing programme also successfully engaged those with low incomes and physical and mental health conditions with arts and crafts (among other activities) when using a community centre (Jones et al., 2013). As did the Inner-City Muslim Action Network in a disadvantaged Chicago neighbourhood where community cafés were held monthly to showcase local arts and culture (Ali, 2017).

An OECD (2018) report also stated that this strategy can make culture more visible to typically non-engaged audiences as well as provide a neutral space to prepare the stage for then inviting them into more traditional cultural institutions. The report suggests that, for example, to increase their visibility, artistic exhibitions could be relocated to railway stations and subways. As well as this, using iconic spaces within a community can also draw in local people through the pre-existing history and memories associated with the venue (Icarus, 2019).

3.4.3 Opportunity to socialise

The opportunity to socialise has also been identified as a key driver for lower socio-economic groups to engage with culture (Parkinson et al., 2015). Through analysis of HEartS survey⁶ data, Perkins et al. (2021) found that the activities most linked with social connectedness were attending a live music performance, watching a live theatre performance, and watching a film or drama. Hosting these cultural activities within familiar, community settings can attract residents towards cultural engagement as it increases the opportunities to socialise within their local area.

This strategy was demonstrated within Murray and Crummett's (2010) interviews with older people residing in disadvantaged neighbourhoods who were participating in creative art activities at their local community centre. They found that participants cited the opportunity for social interaction as the main reason for their participation, and they also expressed the desire to continue engaging with arts in community settings in the future.

Falconer et al. (2022) also identified PurpleDoor Theatre in Liverpool as a recent initiative aiming to rectify the exclusion of lower socio-economic groups from accessing theatre. It does so through the reimagination of the traditional theatre venue into a multi-use performance and community area, promoting opportunities to socialise (for example, through locating a bar within the venue). In doing so, it is said to have removed the distinction between social and performance space, though no robust evaluation of this initiative exists yet.

For museums specifically, Jafari et al. (2013) conducted interviews, group discussions, and observations of visitors to a UK museum. They concluded that the role of museums in providing opportunities for socialising should be leveraged to enhance the overall value of visiting, for example, by organising socially interactive events such as charity competitions, auctions, or quizzes. They went on to recommend that the space within a museum that hosts social interactions is also important, suggesting that coffee shops can be enhanced through the use of décor, statues, and artworks to generate greater engagement.

⁶ The HEartS survey is a major public health study, funded by the AHRC, striving to advance understanding of how arts and cultural engagement in the UK can support people's lives.

3.5 Communication and outreach

Rationale

- Understanding what people want and define as culture is the basis for relevant cultural offerings.
- Tailoring the message to target audiences increases interest in attending.
- Ensuring the message is distributed effectively.

Programmes and interventions

- Utilising community spaces (e.g. community centres, schools, elderly homes) to obtain feedback on cultural offerings and understand what audiences are interested in seeing.
- Using non-cultural interests to drive engagement (e.g. exhibitions about climate change).
- Tailoring the message to target audiences (e.g. marketing cultural offerings as opportunities to socialise and cultural venues as welcoming for those from lower socio-economic groups).
- Distributing the message through word-of-mouth, community ambassadors, and partnerships with local organisations.

The basis of successful communication strategies is to promote a positive image of cultural activities that resonate with the interests of audiences, especially from lower socio-economic groups (Parkinson et al., 2015). The following section outlines various strategies to tailor and distribute messaging around cultural activities and institutions to engage lower socio-economic groups.

3.5.1 Understanding what people want

To create effective communication around cultural offerings it is crucial to understand what the target audience is interested in and expects from their engagement. Saha (2017) identified Rifco Theatre as having done this effectively, as evidenced by interviews with theatre producers and playwrights regarding increasing engagement of lower socio-economic, ethnic minorities. Rifco Theatre utilised community centres, elderly homes, and schools to obtain feedback on their performances to gain a better understanding of what audiences were interested in seeing. The theatre then adapted its marketing and productions to reflect this and has effectively attracted its target audience (lower socio-economic, ethnic minorities) in doing so.

Wolverhampton's Art Gallery launched a communication campaign in 2004 to increase engagement of lower socio-economic groups which began with a study on audiences' motivations and expectations (FreshMinds, 2007). This revealed differences in interests between social groups that pointed to attitudes towards art galleries and museums being developed at an early age through family values and education. Therefore, the gallery's communication was adapted to be family-focused and emphasised the entertainment value for children. It was successful in that 27% of surveyed families from lower socio-economic groups reported seeing the campaign, 71% of which said they would likely visit the gallery with their family.

Audiences' non-cultural interests can also be utilised to drive engagement in cultural activities and institutions. Bunten and Arvizu (2013) present an example of this occurring in the New England Aquarium, the American Zoological Association, and the Woods Hole Oceanographic. These institutions utilised educational programming to engage visitors with museums through exhibitions about climate change. This successfully grabbed the public's attention through the use of their non-cultural interests (in this case climate change) and led to engagement with the museums. It is important to note, however, that this strategy did require museum staff to have additional training, resources, and ongoing support to understand and communicate non-cultural topics.

3.5.1 Tailoring the message

After gaining an understanding of the interests of different target audiences, it is important to use this information to tailor the messaging around the cultural opportunity for each of these groups. A generic message which is the same for all groups may not be sufficiently relevant for lower socio-economic groups and so will not work to increase their engagement.

Arts Council England (2011) categorised different groups of least-engaged people based on DCMS' Taking Part survey data. These include (i) 'time-poor dreamers', who do not engage due to lack of time and prefer instead to listen to music and watch TV, (ii) 'a quiet pint with the match', who have limited financial means and feel that cultural events are not for them, (iii) 'older and home-bound', who are retired individuals with limited financial means and do not engage due to poor health or lack of transport, and (iv) 'limited means nothing fancy', who have lower educational attainment and whose participation is constrained by lack of transport, lack of information, and limited financial means.

Different strategies to tailor cultural messaging to these four groups were suggested: (i) for 'time-poor dreamers' arts should be linked to fashion and advertised as fun and entertaining rather than intellectual or educational, (ii) for the 'a quiet pint with the match' group arts should be communicated as a way to make use of skills or learn new skills to aid employment, (iii) for the 'older and home-bound' group messaging should focus on opportunities to socialise and promote mental alertness and wellbeing, and (iv) for the 'limited means nothing fancy' group arts should be promoted as part of a broader leisure opportunity, a way to contribute to the community, or a way to build work-related skills (Arts Council England, 2011).

Other suggestions for tailoring communication include ensuring that cultural institutions come across as welcoming rather than intimidating (Bunting et al., 2008). This was reflected in Baxter et al. (2022) interviews with people with mild-to-moderate mental health conditions who wanted to know that activities would be structured and welcoming as this would address their psychological barriers to attending. This welcoming communication style can be achieved by avoiding 'highbrow' language and featuring images and people that appeal to individuals from lower socio-economic groups (Parkinson et al., 2015). In addition, communicating information about the practicalities of attendance ahead of the event (for example, the dress code, the content, and the etiquette expected) would help those not used to attending feel comfortable with what to expect (Bunting et al., 2008).

3.5.2 Distributing the message

Finally, it is not just the messaging itself but the means of distribution that needs to be considered when increasing engagement with lower socio-economic groups. Arts Council England (2011) suggested that strategies for distribution that would best reach less engaged, lower socio-economic groups include informing them about the availability of cultural activities through TV and press, and using competitions, prize draws, and talent shows.

More recently, the Audience Agency updated their Audience Spectrum,⁷ which segments the UK population by their attitudes towards culture. Categories of less engaged individuals includes 'supported communities' who are a typically health-impaired, socially inactive group living on modest incomes, and often in state-supported accommodation with accessibility issues often deterring them from engaging. 'Frontline families' are usually living on low incomes or unemployment, with young children, and in social housing and do not consider culture to be of importance to them. Finally, individuals within the 'kaleidoscope creativity' group are often ethnically diverse, council housed, and with low levels of education, and their income restricts leisure opportunities.

⁷ Audience Agency Spectrum.

For these less engaged groups the Audience Agency suggested cultural opportunities to be advertised within newspapers and magazines (specifically for the 'supported communities' group who are largely 'unplugged'), as well as pushed to smartphones through relevant apps and social media networks, such as Instagram and TikTok (specifically for the 'kaleidoscope creativity' group).

An interesting example of where a cultural institution has distributed its messaging to local communities comes from Slung Low's 'Holbeck priority week' for the Cultural Community College programme.⁸ Slung Low delivered flyers by hand to houses in the local area of Holbeck; this was done before any information appeared online to give priority to Holbeck residents. Initially, this strategy was met with some hesitation by residents, but by the last term of the College 33% of tickets were booked during the Holbeck priority week with the majority of participants coming from local postcodes.

Bunting et al. (2008) analysed DCMS Taking Part survey data and suggested that local community members from less engaged groups should be invited to be ambassadors for cultural organisations as a means of effectively engaging these groups. For example, Whitworth Art Gallery in Manchester engaged with community representatives, elders, churches, and businesses to make connections with their target audiences and encourage attendance (Aldridge et al., 2022). Similarly, the Creative People and Places programme utilised 'community connectors' who engaged with the community and captured feedback on proposals and projects (Icarus, 2019). Another example of where this strategy has been successfully employed is the Lawrence Batley Theatre in Huddersfield which used twelve ambassadors to spread the word of their performances throughout local communities which led to both of their evening performances selling out (FreshMinds, 2007).

A literature review by FreshMinds (2007) found that word-of-mouth (such as personal recommendations from trusted sources) has often been cited as the most effective means of establishing links and generating demand for culture within typically less engaged communities, particularly so for ethnic minority groups. One survey within their literature review found that for museums, libraries, and archives word-of-mouth recommendations were mentioned as the 'one outstanding influencing factor' by 30% of visitors (all other factors were cited by 7% or less of visitors).

Partnerships between cultural institutions and voluntary, charity, and other organisations were also seen to be a key feature of distributing messaging within the literature. FreshMinds' (2007) literature review led to recommendations of partnering with community organisations in the delivery of cultural services through trusted and familiar channels. This was said to remove the barriers of lack of trust and lack of confidence seen within less engaged groups. An example of partnerships being used to distribute positive messaging around a cultural institution comes from a case study by White-Campbell et al. (2016). The authors describe how a Canadian art gallery had partnered with a mental health and substance misuse programme to relocate their meetings to the gallery, usually considered less accessible by programme attendees. The success of the partnership was demonstrated by the participants' evaluations indicating that they had felt welcome and comfortable, which established the art gallery as a non-stigmatising place that participants felt safe to visit independently.

⁸ [Slung Low's Cultural Community College overview](#)

3.6 Subsidising attendance costs

Rationale

- Reducing some financial barriers of attending.

Programmes and interventions

- Free admission policies (e.g. DCMS-sponsored museums) or the distribution of subsidised tickets.
- Targeted schemes (e.g. targeting young people with a dedicated free admission evening each week).
- **Note:** these types of interventions should be used within a wider strategy and not in isolation.

Most cultural engagement involves monetary resources and as documented in the previous chapter, the cost of attending cultural events (such as travel costs and ticket prices) has been reported as a factor preventing lower socio-economic groups from engaging with culture (Mak et al., 2020; Hull, 2013; Australia Council for the Arts, 2014). As a result, Arts Council England (2011) suggested that cultural activities should be made affordable or free to encourage the participation of those who do not currently engage with culture. This idea is seen again in studies where individuals with limited means and/or in receipt of benefits, or those with mild-to-moderate health conditions commented that barriers to their attendance at cultural institutions included the expense (Potter, 2015; Baxter et al., 2022). These individuals noted the importance of subsidised attendance, transport, or equipment costs (for example, through free admissions and travel concessions) in increasing their engagement.

The following section outlines interventions that have aimed to reduce this financial barrier to engagement, though it is worth noting that evidence suggests this strategy should not be used in isolation, as will be discussed in detail in the below ‘considerations when using this intervention’ section. However, this intervention is included within this report because although evidence demonstrates that ticket price is often not the main barrier to engagement, it is still reported as a barrier for some groups. For example, where Arts Council England (2016) found that whilst cost of attendance wasn’t the main barrier to engagement for children and young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, interviewees still considered the reduction in this cost, as well as free events or travel support, as helpful to increasing engagement of young people. With this in mind, the below initiatives demonstrate where this strategy has been employed.

An example of where free admission was used to increase engagement is the 2001 policy of free admission for DCMS-sponsored museums (Cowell, 2007). The policy led to increases in the number of visitors from lower socio-economic groups (from 4.9 million in 2002/3 to 5.7 million in 2004/5) though performance varies across institutions and from year to year. The most significant increases in visitors from this group were seen in the museums that had previously charged for entry including, but not limited to, the Imperial War Museum, the National Maritime Museum, and the Museum of Science and Industry. Interestingly, recent findings in England show that an important share of potential museum attendees use vouchers or money-saving platforms to look for and book leisure activities. These platforms also operate as information and advertising sites, from which free entry institutions (such as national museums) are notably absent. Hence, free entry museums might fall under the radar of audience cohorts who seek leisure opportunities on these sites (MHM, 2020).

Whilst international examples of subsidising attendance costs often have different contexts compared to the UK (such as differing free admission policies within EU countries in particular) there are still valuable lessons to be learned that can be applied to the UK context. These international examples

include the Article 27 programme within Belgium (Bamford et al., 2012). Collaborating with organisations supporting people living in poverty, the programme involved partner cultural institutions distributing tickets at subsidised costs (for example, ranging from 1.25 Euros to 6.25 Euros), and was successful in alleviating the financial barrier of engagement for participants. Bamford et al. (2012) also reported that Italy's pricing policies for state-owned museums aiming to remove financial barriers to engagement had been partially used to support this aim. Italy's Ministry of Culture suggested that the use of discount cards, loyalty cards, and targeted opportunities for free entrance on given days would generate further increased engagement with lower socio-economic groups. Lastly, in France, the Louvre Museum found that young people largely appreciated a targeted pricing policy, within a dedicated time rather than a permanent free entry. The museum opened in the evening, once per week, and young people had free entrance, with optional guided tours held by local students. The initiative had partial success whereby visiting the museum became part of people's night life and 60% of evening visitors were young people, but changes in the economic background of visitors were modest (Bamford et al., 2012).

Considerations when using this intervention

It is important to note for the initiatives outlined above that whilst financial barriers were alleviated, other barriers to access remained such as; lack of information, lack of interest or relevance, and lack of time. This suggests that subsidised ticket costs might be unsuccessful if not situated within a wider strategy that also targets other barriers (Bamford et al., 2012).

The above example of DCMS-sponsored museums is one such intervention that positioned free admission within a wider strategy, combining this with cultural education and outreach programmes (Cowell, 2007). Free admission had been viewed as the foundation for which other programmes can be based, rather than being a standalone intervention, and this is why it was successful in increasing the engagement of lower socio-economic groups.

Another consideration is that reduced ticket prices can drive greater demand, but this may be true across all socio-economic groups (Borgonovi, 2008). This means that whilst this strategy has worked to increase lower socio-economic groups' engagement, it has also increased middle and higher socio-economic groups' engagement. Thus, cultural institutions aiming to solely increase engagement with lower socio-economic groups might find this intervention to be unsuccessful unless it is specifically targeted at this group.

Furthermore, findings from a literature review by Parkinson et al. (2015) suggested that introducing reduced attendance costs alone may act to reinforce the 'elite audience'. This is because free entry schemes have been shown in some cases to increase the frequency of attending in existing, traditional audiences rather than increasing engagement in less engaged, non-traditional audiences (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre, 2007).

It should also be noted that for attendance costs to be subsidised cultural organisations first need to access funding, which can present challenges. Yildirim (2021) commented that the budgets allocated to culture by local and regional governments are often small (typically less than 3%). Short funding cycles can also make the development of projects with long-lasting legacies difficult to achieve (Northern Ireland Assembly, 2016).

Some cultural organisations are also pushed by governments to become self-funded despite this often being unsustainable (Stolte, 2012). Where funding has been allocated it is typically done so based on cultural organisations' relationships with the funder, and less so on merit (Belfiore, 2022). It is also shown that cultural organisations connected to London receive more funds than those located elsewhere in the UK (O'Brien et al., 2022).

Finally, cultural organisations led by marginalised, underrepresented groups are less likely to receive large grants and often struggle with the application process, citing its complexity and bureaucracy as reasons for this (Potter, 2015; RSM, 2021; The Social Investment Consultancy, 2021; 2022).

3.7 Digital engagement

Rationale

- Increasing access to information.
- Reducing geographical barriers and some financial barriers (e.g. transport costs).
- Promoting interaction between audience members and artists.

Programmes and interventions

- Using online workshops to provide a point of entry that leads to subsequent in-person engagement (e.g. the National Gallery in London).
- Using online platforms (e.g. social media) for people to interact with artists and with other audience members.
- Using online platforms that allow people to become cultural producers themselves (e.g. the INSITE project).
- **Note:** must consider the current 'digital divide' when utilising this intervention and use in combination with other strategies.

Digital technologies (e.g., social media platforms, online methods of content distribution, and virtual activities such as workshops) provide ways in which people can experience culture and connect with cultural organisations (Crossick and Kaszynska, 2021). They can also be used where traditional cultural offerings have lost their appeal, for example to a younger audience, and where demand for virtual offerings has increased (Pasikowska-Schnass, 2017; Frenneaux and Bennett, 2021). Bamford et al. (2012) suggested that digital engagement provides the opportunity to boost participation levels and increase access to culture in various ways. Firstly, through increasing access to information, secondly, through making consumption of culture easier (for example, where operas have established agreements with cinemas for live broadcasting); and thirdly, by enabling people to become creators of culture more easily. These three features are corroborated within the wider literature on digital engagement and form the basis of the following sub-sections.

Moreover, while exploring engagement with international film, Huffer (2017) found that online methods are democratic at the point of access and are already used more frequently by those on low incomes, young people and Asian, Māori, and Pacific ethnicities. This suggests that digital engagement could be an effective way to engage specifically lower socio-economic groups in culture.

3.7.1 Reducing barriers to engaging in culture both online and offline

Some audiences may encounter difficulties in obtaining information on cultural offers and this can be a barrier to engagement. Digital engagement can dramatically boost access to information, leading to a greater reach of audiences for cultural institutions and increased opportunity for cultural education (Bamford et al., 2012). This can occur in the form of digital technologies being used to enhance access to physical cultural offers or where the cultural offer itself is digitalised, both of these approaches to increasing engagement with culture are discussed below.

Corsato and Devine (2021) developed a case study of The National Gallery in London and its move online following the Covid-19 pandemic. The Gallery hosted a live online workshop that was seen to have been particularly successful in attracting students from typically underrepresented backgrounds to the heritage and culture sector. One of the reasons for the workshop's success was that it overcame economic barriers to accessing public transport for its audience and made it possible for half of all participants to be based outside of London. The success was evidenced through a post-workshop evaluation survey through which participants confirmed their intention to visit the Gallery as soon as travelling was deemed safe. This suggests that digital technologies could provide an effective point of entry for new audiences which could then lead to greater in-person engagement in the future. To capitalise on this, Lister (2022) put forward that displaying information online such as entry prices, opening hours, and accessibility requirements can support new audiences to engage in-person.

Another example of where barriers to accessing culture have been removed by digital technologies include Usiskin and Lloyd's (2020) case study where Art Refuge's art therapy activities for refugees and asylum seekers moved online due to the Covid-19 pandemic. They have continued some of their online practices due to the ability to reach audiences from many different places and across borders, as well as enabling skills sharing with other organisations, despite geographical barriers. Kelly and Leventhal (2020) also identified Dance for PD (Parkinson's Disease) by Mark Morris Dance Group as having demonstrated success in removing barriers to access through their online programming which reached 38 countries, including audiences who do not speak English. They also developed 'Dance by Phone' to maintain accessibility for those without internet or computer skills.

3.7.2 Promoting interaction in online spaces

Corsato and Devine's (2021) case study of The National Gallery presented above can also be used to demonstrate where cultural institutions have utilised digital technologies to create meaningful engagement as, despite workshop participants not sharing the same physical space, interaction using polling, in-meeting chat, and live Q&As was possible.

In some cases, this interaction can foster deeper and more meaningful engagement with culture as demonstrated in Walmsley's (2016) research. The author created an online platform that would enable participants to interact directly online with artists and each other. It was found that the platform was particularly attractive to new audiences and those currently less engaged. Findings showed that the online platform had the potential to serve as an effective audience development tool as well as to encourage audience engagement.

Another example of where interaction and meaningful engagement were fostered online comes from a Polish survey of 1,021 consumers of culture, which found that cultural institutions had used social media effectively to; increase awareness of cultural institutions, understand consumer preferences, and monitor trends in the market (Wróblewski et al., 2018). This use of social media led to audiences not only playing a passive role as recipients of culture, but also being active participants in creating content through discussions and feedback.

In a similar way, Streten et al. (2006) identified the INSITE project as having successfully engaged ethnic minorities and hard-to-reach groups using digital technologies by providing the opportunity for them to create websites to communicate their cultural heritage. In this way, participants were able to become producers of culture and add their own stories to those provided by museums, galleries, and libraries. The project partnered with a museum which led to the museum receiving 105 visitors, 68 of whom were from ethnic minorities.

Considerations when using this intervention

One challenge of digital engagement, both through digitalising cultural offers, and as a means to encourage engagement with physical culture is that, whilst it might increase engagement generally, there is less evidence of it engaging specifically lower socio-economic groups, and thus can mirror inequalities seen offline. Feder et al. (2021) completed analyses of two nationally representative surveys in England that asked about engagement in cultural activities following the Covid-19 pandemic and the move to digital modes of delivery. They concluded that the pandemic had not disrupted the arts audience and that digital engagement alone would not be enough to rectify inequalities within cultural engagement.

A reason for this could be that despite being evidenced to alleviate some economic and geographical barriers, digital engagement poses its own types of barriers. A 'digital divide' is present between socio-economic groups regarding their opportunities to access digital technologies due to financial and infrastructural factors, such as the availability of broadband (Pasikowska-Schnass, 2017; Bamford et al., 2012). A literature review by Atkinson and Mason (2014) evidenced that young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds are particularly at risk of exclusion due to inadequate internet access.

As well as this, Pasikowska-Schnass' (2017) report revealed that 20% of cultural content had been digitised between 2003 and 2013 but only a third of this digitised content had been made publicly available. This demonstrates a further challenge of digital engagement as, even when an audience has financial and infrastructural access to digital technologies, access might still be limited in other ways.

Moreover, while digital technologies can be used effectively to increase engagement, caution must be taken to ensure that online engagement is as meaningful as in-person engagement (Smiers, 2012). For example, challenges have been identified in encouraging interaction when using digital platforms for engagement. This is seen within Corsato and Devine's (2021) case study of The National Gallery in London where, despite the overall success, the online discussion within the workshop initially proved more challenging. For example, the researchers observed hesitance in participants and a lack of being able to quietly tell the facilitator when they needed assistance. This was said to negatively impact the social aspect of engagement, which is a key driver of cultural participation among lower socio-economic groups in particular (FreshMinds, 2007; Parkinson et al., 2015).

3.8 Workforce training and representation

Rationale

- Building the skills of the workforce to accommodate a range of diverse needs.
- Increasing diversity in the workforce can increase engagement of diverse audiences.

Programmes and interventions

- Training staff in cultural venues to support diverse audiences and help them to feel comfortable.
- Producing exhibits in different languages or hire staff that can speak multiple languages.
- Increasing the representation of lower socio-economic backgrounds and other marginalised groups within the workforce through inclusive recruitment practices.
- Creating schemes (e.g. traineeships and bursaries) to enable marginalised groups to participate in cultural industries.
- Targeting project grants and funding streams to cultural projects led by marginalised communities.

It is important to consider that when inviting less engaged and often marginalised groups into cultural institutions, the staff there will need to be able to support them to interact and engage fully. This means that effective training is an important aspect of welcoming lower socio-economic groups (among other marginalised groups) into cultural spaces (Dawson, 2014). As well as this, the previously discussed importance of relevance and identity can be linked to having diverse and representative workforces within the cultural sector, as this allows a broader range of audiences to see themselves reflected within cultural activities and institutions which can lead to greater engagement.

3.8.1 Training for diverse audiences

Training cultural institutions' workforces in receiving and guiding diverse audiences is key to ensuring marginalised groups feel comfortable engaging with culture (Dawson, 2014). Cultural programme deliverers may require skills and knowledge outside of their previous experience to engage with the diverse needs of marginalised audiences (Potter, 2015). This is because, even if a wide range of high-quality cultural activities and institutions are available to these groups, without knowledgeable and trained staff to inform and guide them, they will not be able to engage fully.

However, specialist professional training available for frontline staff is limited, with the majority being directed toward managerial roles. Potter (2015) therefore recommended a review of current training provisions so that all cultural professionals have access to adequate training to accommodate a range of individual needs. It was also stated that consultation and collaboration with specialist service providers should be at the heart of this training.

For low income, ethnic minority groups who speak English as a second language, Dawson (2014) suggested training staff to create exhibits in different languages and provide language support for visitors. The author drew on a real-life example of a facilitator within a science museum who struggled to adapt their facilitation style to suit low-income, ethnic minorities as they were only familiar with guiding young, English-speaking participants. Some Somali participants expressed their confusion following the facilitators' instructions on how to engage with an interactive exhibit. If adequately trained facilitators can help all participants to engage fully with cultural activities.

3.8.2 Increasing representation in the workforce

Another approach to increasing engagement of target groups is to reflect on how cultural organisations' workforces could be more representative of the audiences they want to engage (Heritage Fund, 2019). O'Brien and Ianni (2022) found that out of 202 cultural workers interviewed only 27% came from working-class origins, and Brook et al. (2018) identified this same under-representation within almost every subsector of the cultural sector. Similar under-representation was found among other marginalised groups such as ethnic minorities, disabled people, and the LGBTQ+ community (Arts Council England, 2020).

Crossick and Kaszynska (2021) stated that marginalised groups use cultural engagement to express their identity. A report by FreshMinds (2007) similarly found that increasing the representation of these groups in cultural provisions and organisations can create a greater sense of relevance and therefore drive demand. For example, the same report revealed that when Leicester Libraries increased the ethnic minority representation within their workforce (from 20.7% to 31.7%) memberships of people from ethnic minority backgrounds increased from 42% to 50% within three years.

However, Jerwood Arts (2019) commented that representation of individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds within a cultural workforce can be difficult to achieve because this group will often opt out of arts and cultural careers for fear of not belonging, rather than lack of ambition or awareness. Similarly, Taylor and O'Brien (2017) identified structural barriers within the cultural sector for those who are not the 'default' affluent, white, male. This could be due to management boards reflecting and reinforcing social inequalities in accessing culture as they are often selected from a narrow pool of those already working within the sector, which is typically middle to upper-class individuals (Brook et al., 2021, 2022).

Atkinson and Mason's (2014) literature review identified that some museums had been actively addressing a lack of diversity and equality in their visitor profiles by first addressing diversity within their workforce. This was done by creating schemes to enable marginalised groups, such as ethnic minorities, to compete at an even level for jobs in the sector through the use of traineeships or bursaries.

Grants can also be a useful tool in creating a more representative workforce within the cultural sector, for example, in the form of the National Lottery Project Grants and Developing Your Creative Practice funding streams (Arts Council England, 2020). Arts Council England (2020) analysed the success rates of being awarded these funds for different demographic groups. They reported that for black, Asian, and ethnically diverse applicants the success rate was 40% at the time of the study, for disabled applicants it was 36%, for female applicants it was 30%, and for LGBTQ+ applicants it was 58%, all of which were compared to a success rate of 38% across all applications (Arts Council England, 2020). Increasing the representation of marginalised groups in successful grant applications leads to a more diverse pool of producers and this can lead to increased engagement with these groups through the creation of more relevant cultural offerings.

3.9 Early involvement in culture

Rationale

- Early engagement with culture has a positive impact on engagement in later life.
- Programmes can be targeted, for example, to schools within disadvantaged areas or with a large share of pupils eligible for free meals.

Programmes and interventions

- Arts education (such as music or dance classes) within schools (e.g. arts being part of the curriculum at all Key Stages).
- Education Hubs working locally (e.g. with schools and professional organisations) to create joined up music education.
- After-school programmes focused on young people from disadvantaged areas that encourage participation in culture (e.g. through workshops, art activities, opportunities to become cultural ambassadors etc.).

Evidence shows that it is important to ensure children's and young people's access to engaging in arts and culture as early involvement is also a predictor of and effective means to increase engagement in culture later in life (Laaksonen, 2010).

Miles and Sullivan (2012) analysed DCMS Taking Part survey data and found that family holds a powerful role in transmitting tastes and engagement in culture during childhood, with the child's community settings reinforcing this further. Within their literature review, Atkinson and Mason (2014) emphasise the role of parental support in accessing cultural opportunities outside of school, such as visiting museums and theatres. They also found that engaging in writing stories, poems, plays, or music when growing up increases the probability of going to the library by 14%. Similarly, Buraimo et al. (2011) found that reading books for pleasure, going to museums or art galleries, writing stories, poems, plays, or music, and visiting historic sites in childhood all have a positive impact on the likelihood of engaging with museums and art galleries as an adult.

A literature review by Arts Council England (2016) consistently found that the strongest positive correlation for children's engagement with culture (and subsequently their engagement as adults) is parental socio-economic background. The literature review showed that parents from higher socio-economic groups are more likely to encourage participation in arts activities compared to parents from lower socio-economic groups. It also found that parents from ethnic minority groups are less likely to take their children to arts events or encourage engagement. In this way, parents are a key driver of cultural engagement and so should be involved in arts and cultural activities, and support in helping their children to make the most out of these opportunities.

However, it is not only parents that have a key role to play in encouraging cultural engagement in children, schools can also do so. Art education, such as music or dance classes, was shown within Borgonovi's (2004) research to be more important in determining attendance at performing arts events (e.g., theatre, music, opera, ballet, and dance) than other socio-demographic characteristics. A case study focusing on lower socio-economic pupils also found that music and theatre provisions in schools were particularly beneficial to children with limited English proficiency as a means to practice their language skills (Conkling and Conkling, 2018).

For these reasons, the Northern Ireland Assembly (2016) suggested that arts and cultural activities and events should be part of the curriculum at all Key Stages. Reducing arts subjects in schools can have a significant impact on children and young people who cannot afford to engage in cultural activities outside of school or who are not encouraged to do so (Arts Council England, 2016). Despite

this, arts subjects are often forgotten in the school curriculum, and are therefore reliant on the goodwill of teachers and school leaders (Bamford et al., 2012). Other potential barriers to providing cultural opportunities within schools include budget cuts with NESF (2007) identifying that at the time of the study no additional funding was available for disadvantaged schools to provide art materials which put an extra burden on families living on low incomes.

Interventions engaging children and young people with culture outside of school are therefore necessary where schools cannot offer this. For example, Music Education Hubs involve institutions ranging from primary schools to professional music and arts organisations that work locally to create joined-up music education provision (Arts Council England, 2016). In locating some of these Hubs within disadvantaged areas of the UK, the programme has successfully engaged pupils eligible for free school meals who have been in local authority care, and from ethnic minority backgrounds. Among other programmes funded by Arts Council England, Arts Award is a national qualification supporting those aged 5-25 years to engage with culture. Between 2013 and 2016, 112,558 children and young people completed the award, 11% of which were living in the 10% most deprived local authority areas.

International examples of interventions encouraging the early involvement of young people in culture include Germany's Culture Agents programme (Bamford et al., 2012). Over a period of four years, Culture Agents were sent to schools to collaborate with pupils, teachers, parents, artists, and cultural institutions to teach young people more about art and culture. A total of 50 agents partnering with three schools each meant that the programme reached 150 schools. Bamford et al. (2012) also identified Les Portes du Temps in France as having been a successful strategy in engaging young people. The after-school programme focused on young people in disadvantaged neighbourhoods to increase interest in cultural heritage and encourage direct participation in artistic creation through; workshops, art activities, and the opportunity for participating young people to become ambassadors of heritage. In 2012, 35,000 disadvantaged young people engaged with the programme across 56 cultural sites.

3.10 Limitations and gaps

The evidence presented in this chapter contributes to identifying success factors to reduce barriers and increase the engagement of people from lower socio-economic groups in arts and culture. However, it is important to note some key limitations and gaps identified in the literature that should be considered when interpreting the findings presented above.

First, some of the successful strategies and interventions discussed in the chapter may not have been implemented in isolation, thus making it challenging to identify their individual impact. Moreover, when strategies are implemented in isolation, they sometimes proved not enough to increase engagement. For example, some evidence on strategies utilising digital engagement or subsidised attendance costs revealed that while these strategies can remove barriers to engagement (such as geographical and financial) others remain. They have also both been shown to increase engagement with culture generally, but not specifically for lower socio-economic groups and so would need to be used in combination with other interventions to achieve this aim (Feder et al., 2021; Pasikowska-Schnass, 2017; Bamford et al., 2012; Borgonovi, 2008). This suggests that interventions tackling different barriers may need to be implemented simultaneously to have a positive impact on engagement.

Second, in some cases, studies discussing successful interventions were not supported by robust evaluations. In particular, some of the limitations identified in the evidence reviewed include: (i) a focus on small samples, (ii) a reliance exclusively on qualitative evidence (e.g., interviews or case studies), and (iii) a lack of implementation of robust methodologies to estimate the impact of the intervention, such as measuring participation before and after the intervention or identifying a control group to account for participation trends in the absence of the intervention.

Evaluations that combine good quality quantitative and qualitative data are also scarce. However, when evaluating an intervention it is important to (i) collect quantitative evidence to understand the impact of the intervention, for example measuring changes in the level of engagement of specific groups compared to a control group (e.g., a similar group of individuals not targeted by the intervention) and (ii) compliment the quantitative analysis with qualitative evidence to understand the mechanisms through which the intervention was successful in reducing barriers and encouraging participation.

Third, most of the studies identified focused on short-term impacts, such as immediate changes in engagement after a specific change was made to a cultural activity or event. However, increasing engagement, especially for groups that face significant barriers and are traditionally less likely to engage, may require time. Therefore, longitudinal data should be collected to analyse what strategies and interventions are more likely to reduce barriers in the long run, thus leading to a sustained increase in the level of engagement.

Finally, the studies discussed in this research do not equally cover the different sectors within the cultural industry, but instead focus mostly on more traditional cultural settings such as theatres, galleries, and museums. However, barriers may vary depending on the context, with some interventions being more successful in some settings than in others. Therefore, results may not be generalised across sectors.

4. Case studies

Summary of key findings

Ten case studies were investigated to identify key success factors, best practices, and lessons learned to increase engagement in culture for lower socio-economic groups.

It was found that several of these success factors were the same as those identified through the evidence review (presented in the previous chapter). These include (i) **co-creation practices** to enable moving away from a supply-driven model to a demand-driven model to develop more inclusive and relevant cultural offerings with the local community, (ii) **developing partnerships with local organisations** to build trust with the community and reach out to less engaged groups, and (iii) **subsidising attendance costs** so that cultural programmes can be offered for free or at lower costs to allow for a broader audience to engage (particularly those with limited financial resources).

Other success factors identified within the case studies include:

- Building **safe** and **collaborative environments** in which stakeholders and communities feel comfortable sharing failures and successes is important to develop best practices that can be shared within the network.
- Allowing for **prototyping** and testing different approaches to ensure projects learn from mistakes and identify best practices, and funding is not all spent at the beginning of the programme.
- **Long-term funding** allows stakeholders to build a long-term vision and implement strategies that ensure sustained levels of engagement beyond the implementation of a specific programme or intervention.

The importance of **replicability** also came through strongly within the case studies. Almost all of the following projects and initiatives provided evidence for the ability to scale up and replicate the key success factors across different locations and sectors.

Selection of the case studies

This chapter discusses case studies identified through the evidence review as well as interviews with sector experts and agreed upon with DCMS. The case studies provide examples of interventions that were successful in encouraging the participation of individuals from lower socio-economic groups in arts and culture. The case studies selected focused on a wide range of art forms (e.g., arts, theatre, museums, etc.) to provide an overview of successful strategies and lessons learned that can be applied in different contexts within the art and cultural sector. Additional criteria used to select the interventions include:

- Location of the intervention: we focused mostly on interventions and programmes implemented in England, with a couple of case studies focusing on the UK more widely.
- Availability of evidence: we selected case studies for which evidence of success was available. This includes both quantitative evidence (e.g., analysis of ticketing and audience data) and qualitative evidence (e.g., evidence based on interviews with stakeholders involved in the design and implementation of the programme).
- Scalability and replicability: we focused on interventions that can be replicated or scaled up over context-specific interventions.

The evidence on the case studies presented in this chapter was collected through a review of available documentation (e.g., evaluations, reports, case studies etc.) as well as one-to-one interviews with stakeholders involved in the design, delivery, or evaluation of the programme.

Figure 1. Selected case studies



The table below shows a summary of the findings of the case studies presented within this chapter.

Table 1. Summary of case studies

Context	Activities	Outcomes
<p>1. UK Coventry City of Culture 2021</p> <p>DCMS-run competition providing funding to develop inclusive cultural activities to a wide audience that promotes social cohesion and drives economic growth.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-creation: having conversations with local groups and ensuring they are heard and adopting an inclusive, non-discriminatory approach. • Hyperlocal programming: distributing activities across 42 neighbourhoods to ensure proximity and increase sense of ownership. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural activity took place across all 42 neighbourhoods in the city, helping to achieve high attendance from local residents and those from neighbouring Middle Layer Super Output Areas. • High attendance by lower socio-economic groups (making up 43% of tickets issued to Coventry postcodes in the first months of the programme) from areas with low levels of cultural participation.
<p>2. Creative People and Places</p> <p>National project funded by Arts Council England to increase cultural engagement in areas of historically low levels of engagement.</p> <p>This case study utilises data from the past 10 years of CPP as well as 2020/21 data on 31 participating locations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopting an asset-based model to focus on community demand for culture and utilising local assets. • Co-creation: communities taking the lead on shaping local cultural provision (e.g. through community panels). • Expanding networks and long-term relationships through consortium working of place-based organisations. 	<p>Data from 2020/21 shows that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 53% of participants come from low engagement groups (based on Audience Spectrum segments). • 77% of participants lived in the same area as where the cultural activities took place.
<p>3. Great Place Scheme</p> <p>Joint national initiative by Arts Council England and Heritage Lottery Fund to increase arts and culture in deprived areas with low levels of cultural activity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivering events with local partners and in underserved places to reach new audiences. • Diversifying the cultural offering to increase identification and employing participatory practices. • Improving websites and employing enhanced marketing strategies. 	<p>In the Great Place Tees Valley:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50% of participants came from the 30% most deprived areas, with 40% being first-time attendees. • Five Local Authorities were brought together alongside local organisations such as Teesside University and Theatre Hullabaloo.

Context	Activities	Outcomes
<p>4. Slung Low Theatre Company</p> <p>Well established theatre company and mission-driven organisation with the aim to provide an accessible and relevant cultural experience in Holbeck, Leeds.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community engagement: there is a community advisory group that provides local people with full curatorial power, 'saying yes' to all ideas, and hosting cultural events that are relevant to people. • Tickets are priced at pay-what-you-decide. • Personalised outreach strategies such as door-knocking and word-of-mouth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 14% of audiences are from least engaged groups in the UK. • 74% of attendees for a show programmed by children in a partner school were first-time bookers. • 33% of tickets for their Cultural Community College were booked during a Holbeck resident priority week.
<p>5. Museum of Making</p> <p>One of three sites owned by Derby Museums, this programme aimed to re-think the future of the Silk Mill to create a museum relevant to local people.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-creation: having an 'open door' approach to the community and making the Museum relevant to people's wider lives. • Prototyping projects to allow for experimentation and more balanced resource allocation. • Partnerships with the private sector to create engaging, co-designed exhibitions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme deliverers felt that there have been increases in engagement of lower socio-economic groups. • The future of the Museum was secured and embedded into local people's lives.
<p>6 & 7. National Theatre England and National Theatre Wales</p> <p>Large-scale institutions with reputations for cultural excellence touring and opening their doors to typically less engaged and new audiences.</p>	<p>National Theatre England:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theatre Nation Partnerships (TNP) with cultural organisations to provide touring, working with schools, and creating theatre with local communities in 'priority areas' of low engagement. Within this initiative the Public Acts project involved community members playing an active role in inclusive, large-scale productions. <p>National Theatre Wales:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of immersive and participatory performances often in non-traditional settings, with local people being part of the play, for example The Passion at Port Talbot. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both National Theatres have engaged people who had never been to the theatre before. For example, a partner theatre hosted an audience of 55% first-time bookers at one of their shows as part of the TNP project. • National Theatre England met their target of engaging 200,000 people living in low engagement areas and pupils in high priority schools through TNP. • National Theatre Wales' The Passion had around 1,000 local volunteers and an audience of over 25,000 over three days.

Context	Activities	Outcomes
<p>8. Contact Theatre A local theatre in Manchester looking to expand audiences, with a focus on engaging with young people and other less engaged groups.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Including diverse groups within governance and decision-making to organically diversify their audience, for example trusting young people to make decisions and come up with innovative ideas. • Subsidisation allows their cultural offerings to be free of charge. • Long-term strategies that allow new ways of working to become embedded and to sustain engagement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audiences have diversified e.g. for 2017/18 71% were under 35, 30% were from ethnic minority groups, and 32% were from least engaged groups.
<p>9. Manchester International Festival High-profile festival in a city with a strong identity featuring local and international artists across cultural sectors and producing events.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth and community advisory groups as well as public forums allow local residents to shape cultural programming. • Neighbourhood Organisers and the Community Partnership Programme increase opportunities for engagement and spread awareness of events. • Tickets are often free, low cost, or pay-what-you-decide reducing financial barriers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 2019, the festival saw an increase of 27% in ethnic minority participants, with a further 9% increase in 2021. • In 2021, the festival saw a large presence of lower socio-economic groups (42% of attendees).
<p>10. Culture Collective Scotland Emergency fund for cultural organisations during the Covid-19 pandemic to support freelance artists. Funded by the Scottish Government and distributed by Creative Scotland.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of a network of cultural practitioners and organisations working collectively to share lessons learned and best practice. • Being flexible to respond to the changing needs of individual initiatives • Having a large-scale budget showed recognition that community-led activities are a pillar of the cultural sector. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culture Collective is relatively new but those involved are confident it will have long-term impacts. • Audiences are enjoying the cultural offerings being produced and the workforce has diversified.

Lessons learned from the case studies

- Building trust with communities and partners takes time and **long-term approaches** are needed to develop **strong relationships**.
 - **Funding should be provided over the long-term**, moving away from the current tendencies of short-term funding, to allow for new ways of working to become embedded within cultural organisations, **develop long-term visions, and sustain cultural engagement** into the future.
 - **Co-creation with the community** is effective in creating cultural offerings that are relevant to local people through understanding their wants, needs, and values.
 - Building **strong networks** of partners and stakeholders that **closely collaborate** to share best practice as well as failures is beneficial for the wider cultural sector.
 - There is a need for **rigorous data collection** for comprehensive evaluations of initiatives to be carried out as well as the collection of **baseline data** ahead of programme delivery to inform **data-led approaches**.
 - Cultural organisations have reflected on the Covid-19 pandemic and the disruption it caused, with lessons learned including how **online modes of engagement** can continue to be used.
 - Almost all initiatives outlined above were said to be **replicable** as principles such as co-creation, partnerships, and building trust within communities can be applied to other contexts. One potential **challenge of scaling up networks** of cultural organisations is the potential for more shallow relationships between members and less opportunity for close collaboration.
 - Other considerations included: the fact that experimental and participatory activities can, at times, be disorganised with a need to **manage participant expectations**, and how **marketing can be a challenge** when a cultural organisation mostly focuses on one target audience (e.g. how to engage older people when a brand is concentrated on young people).
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Coventry UK City of Culture

(Coventry, England)

Overview

- A **data-led approach** informed programme implementation and **collecting baseline data** ahead of delivery led to an understanding of Coventry and its residents' characteristics before tailoring events and moving towards place-based outcomes. The full evaluation of the programme has now been published.⁹
- The Coventry City of Culture showed a strong commitment to **co-creation** to build trust within the community and widen cultural engagement by:
 - relying on local infrastructure and local partners, which enabled the organisers to identify and reduce barriers to participation for less-engaged groups.
 - limiting the involvement of external partners and organisations not familiar with the local context.
 - discussing with members of the community the development of the cultural offer factors preventing some groups from participating in cultural events through regular meetings.
- Building networks and trust within the community is a long-term process that required developing a **long-term vision**.
- **Hyper-local programming** and organising events across the city, especially in neighbourhoods without cultural venues and facilities, increased access in areas with historically low levels of engagement.

The Coventry UK City of Culture project

Coventry is a previous winner of the UK City of Culture 2021 competition run by DCMS which provides funding to selected areas to develop cultural activities that are inclusive and target a wide audience to drive economic growth and promote social cohesion. In 2017, Coventry secured more than £172 million to organise and support cultural events across the city, including visual arts, theatre, museums, dance etc.

The objective of the Coventry UK City of Culture project was to involve a wide range of audiences in cultural events and activities, with a focus on more marginalised communities (e.g., people experiencing homelessness, people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, or people living in more disadvantaged areas). Extensive data collection ahead of programme implementation allowed for greater understanding of Coventry and its residents' characteristics and needs. The [Coventry Cultural Place Profiler](#) was created through combining non-cultural, Household Survey data with arts and cultural data to tailor cultural events to each community and target cultural activity towards place-based outcomes.

Using a combination of qualitative and quantitative data, early analysis conducted by the Core Monitoring and Evaluation Team led by the University of Warwick and Coventry University shows that; in its first year, Coventry UK City of Culture successfully increased engagement and participation in cultural activities in areas where the level of participation is traditionally low. In the first months of the programme 43% of the tickets were issued to low-income residents (Neelands et al., 2021).

Investing in co-creation and local infrastructures

Wider engagement was achieved through the implementation of co-creation practices to ensure that

⁹ Coventry UK City of Culture Final Evaluation Report: <https://coventry21evaluation.info/strategy-reports/final-evaluation-report/>

programming reflects and represents local communities through consultations and planning work with residents. Examples of co-creation practices include:

- Identifying people's barriers to engagement through conversations with members of the community representing local groups (e.g., discussing (i) why do some groups feel that culture is not for them (ii) what prevents some groups from participating in cultural activities, and (iii) what people are interested in).
- Ensuring that people's experiences are heard, and everyone's contribution is valued (e.g., creating safe spaces where communities have the chance to express their views openly).
- Adopting an inclusive approach and ensuring that nobody feels discriminated against based on their ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation etc. (e.g., ensuring that groups within the community are represented among stakeholders or not tolerating discriminatory language).

Based on interviews with professionals involved in the organisation and delivery of the programme, forming strong networks and relationships with local organisations was also a crucial factor in determining the success of this programme. Coventry UK City of Culture relied on the local infrastructure (i.e., individuals and organisations operating within the community) to shape the initial engagement with local residents and networks, understand people's needs and tailor the cultural offer. To this end, interviewees mentioned the importance of having the right balance between involving professionals and organisations external to the community and local organisations. Indeed, relying too much on external partners may lead to developing a cultural offer that is not in line with the demand of the local community. Instead, using existing networks of local organisations proved particularly effective in building trust in the community, especially among harder-to-reach groups, and using community spaces increased the sense of cultural capital within each ward.

Hyperlocal programming

During the public consultation before the festival, people in Coventry stated that they wanted programming to reflect their stories, as well as to take place in their neighbourhoods at a hyperlocal, neighbourhood-level (as opposed to town- or city-level). Before Coventry UK City of Culture 2021, areas with higher indices of deprivation in Coventry had significantly lower levels of cultural engagement, and the festival sought to address this imbalance by organising activities taking place across all 42 neighbourhoods.

According to Brook and Scott (2021), hyper-local offerings secured local proximity and increased sense of ownership of the cultural products, especially for people who do not attend traditional cultural venues. In Coventry, parks where many events took place were chosen because neighbouring areas lacked cultural facilities, and 60% of community centres that hosted theatre performances were in Middle Layer Super Output Areas with higher deprivation levels.

Analysis of ticketing data showed that hyper-local programming was successful in attracting local audiences, especially in areas of deprivation and low cultural participation. For instance, almost half of all tickets issued to Coventry postcodes (43%) went to citizens from lower socio-economic groups, and most of the audience for free family-friendly events were living in or next to the area where the event took place (Brook and Scott, 2021).

Lessons learned

The Coventry UK City of Culture project is an example of how co-creation can reach traditionally less engaged audiences in arts and culture. Lessons learned from this project that could be useful for the implementation of similar programmes include:

- New engagement modes resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic (e.g., online meetings) increased the engagement and involvement of community groups in the conversation.
- Conversations should involve organisations representing communities. Relying heavily on

outside partners (i.e., partners that have no community ties) reduces the contribution and inputs that communities can provide, thus limiting the success of the interventions.

- To be effective, everyone within the network must be fully committed to co-creation, irrespective of their role, including the steering group, delivery partners, curators, community groups etc.
- Build flexible and horizontal networks across partners and stakeholders involved in the delivery of the intervention. Hierarchical structures are rigid and unable to adapt and respond quickly to communities' needs.
- Building strong relationships and building community trust takes time. Often the short-term nature of the funding doesn't allow for the development of a long-term vision.
- Utilising a data-led approach can be effective in building an understanding of a place and its residents' cultural needs in order to tailor offerings and move towards place-based outcomes.
- More needs to be done in terms of evaluation. In particular, people within the communities should be involved in the evaluation process. This could be achieved by carrying out a robust process evaluation of the programme that involves engaging communities.

Bringing theatre in community spaces: the Theatre Next Door

Among the wide range of cultural activities offered as part of Coventry UK City of Culture, the Theatre Next Door represents a successful example of how co-creation and the use of local assets can widen engagement and participation in arts and culture.

The idea of the Theatre Next Door is the result of a co-creation process involving residents and Coventry UK City of Culture producers. From conversations between these two groups emerged the idea of using local community centres as theatres and bringing high-quality performances across Coventry. A professional theatre company was commissioned to provide training to centres' volunteers on event management, marketing, staging etc.

The programme proved successful in attracting a wide audience, especially citizens that had never attended a staged play performance before (Kaszynska et al., 2022). The main factors of success included:

- Creation element – residents were able to participate in cultural programming and the decision-making process on what forms of culture were to be produced and how.
- Proximity and use of community settings – the shows were organised across the city and reached different areas and neighbourhoods, thus reducing accessibility barriers.
- Pay-what-you-wish model – before buying the ticket, audiences were given a suggested amount and showed what most people pay; based on this they choose how much to pay for the ticket. This model proved financially viable (i.e. the events still produced revenue) and reduced financial constraints, making the event accessible to low-income individuals, but also producing revenue for community centres (Kaszynska et al., 2022).

Creative People and Places

(variety of locations across England)

Overview

- Creative People and Places encouraged partnerships between stakeholders through the creation of **consortia** that represented art and cultural organisations as well as local communities.
- The programme focused on shifting from a cultural deficit model to an **asset-based approach** centred around community demand for arts and culture.
- Lessons learned from Creative People and Places on the formation of consortia and best practices are **transferable** and can be applied to other contexts and programmes.

Ten years of Creative People and Places

With a total investment of £108 million by 2025, Creative People and Places (CPP) is a programme funded by Arts Council England aiming at increasing cultural engagement in areas where engagement levels have been historically low. The objective of the CPP programme was to shift from a supply-driven cultural offer to a demand-driven offer i.e. What do people want to see? What aspects of arts and culture are people most interested in?

Currently the CPP funds 39 projects funding cultural activities across England including festivals, art workshops, dance, and theatrical performances. After 10 years since its first implementation and several evaluations conducted, a recent report was published in Spring 2022 to collect lessons learned from the CPP, based on the experience of people involved in the programme and the results achieved (Robinson, 2022).

Some of the key factors identified as central in the success of this programme include:

- **Shifting from a cultural deficit model to an asset-based approach centred around community demand for culture.** Deficit models are based on the idea that some forms of cultural consumption are deficient, or the result of a lack of adequate education or cultural taste. An asset-based approach, instead, is centred around community demand for culture and focuses on how to use local assets (e.g., associations and places, but also relationships and community intangible wealth) to shape an inclusive cultural offer and widen engagement.
- **Communities taking a leadership role in shaping local provision.** This was achieved by ensuring that communities contribute to shaping local provision by collecting their views and preferences on what they are most interested in, using different techniques such as community panels, recruiting cultural ambassadors, and working with local non-art groups to understand issues relevant to the community.
- **Encouraging partnerships through consortia by bringing together place-based organisations operating in different sectors and with different skills.** Consortium working is the core of the CPP programme. The application specified that the funding was available only for '*organisations which will lead a consortium...representing the public, artists and arts organisations, presenting and promoting the arts in new and inspiring ways*' (Bunting and Fleming, 2015).

Data collected over the course of the implementation of the CPP shows that the programme has been successful in widening the audience, with 53% of participants in the events coming from one of the lower engaged Audience Spectrum¹⁰ segments (i.e., segments of the population less likely to engage in cultural activities). Moreover, 77% of participants to arts and cultural events organised as part of the

¹⁰ Audience Spectrum is a profiling tool that segments the population based on attitudes and engagement with arts and culture.

CPP lived in the same area where the activity took place, thus suggesting that proximity helped to increase participation (Cowley and Cooke, 2021).

Some of the most successful techniques to increase participation implemented to reduce barriers to participation that could be replicated in other contexts include (Robinson, 2022):

- Engaging with non-arts groups and using simple language.
- Sense-checking marketing language with groups that usually do not engage in cultural activities.
- Ensuring that cultural activities are inclusive of the different groups within the community (e.g., different faiths, ethnic groups, age etc.).
- Adopting 'pay-what-you-decide' models to encourage engagement.
- Finding alternatives to traditional spaces (e.g., theatres, galleries etc.) to attract non-traditional audiences.

Further considerations

Below are further considerations and key learnings from the programme:

- Building trust in the community requires a long-term vision and approach, including taking the time to resource programmes and teams, avoiding focusing on short-term results etc. However, the CPP requirement for projects of having a long-term vision (i.e., 10 years) while developing business based on short-term funding (i.e., 3-4 years) has proven challenging. Securing long-term funding since the beginning would help with developing a clear long-term vision.
- It is important to understand how networks and relationships between stakeholders at each level of the consortia form (e.g., conducting a comprehensive network theory evaluation), and how they can survive and possibly evolve after the funding expires to continue ensuring a high-quality demand-driven cultural offer in areas of low engagement and more deprived areas of the country.
- The rigorous data collection process allowed carrying out comprehensive evaluations that proved the success of the CPP in engaging a wider audience, particularly less engaged communities. However, it was highlighted that (i) future evaluations should focus more on the process evaluation element, particularly collecting evidence on the lived experiences of members of the community involved in the CPP and (ii) longitudinal data should also be collected after the end of the programme to identify whether the programme has any long-lasting impacts.
- CPP was a large-scale programme that involved many professionals in the design, implementation, and delivery of the programme who developed best practices to engage with local communities. Such practices, while developed in the context of CPP, could be adapted and used in other contexts. More research could be conducted to explore whether any of the best practices developed as part of the CPP are currently applied in other contexts and, if so, how these have been adapted and how successful they are.
- The experience of consortia can be shared and benefit the cultural sectors more widely. Areas of knowledge that have been identified as transferable include how to establish governance structures, what governance structure options are available, factors that enable/prevent the formation of consortia, how to manage conflicts within consortia etc. (Alchemy Research and Consultancy, 2021).

Some of these key learnings from the CPP consortia include:

- Consortia are context-specific and there is not a one-size-fits-all structure.
- As each organisation within the consortia will have different values and priorities, building trust within the consortia is crucial.

- Proximity (geographical, organisational, and technological) between members allows consortia to function more effectively.
- Discussing failures is as beneficial as highlighting success. It is important that consortia create an environment and culture in which people feel comfortable to share failures and other members can learn from them.
- Consortia go through a number of transition phases (e.g., formation, adaptation etc.) that should be supported by adequate resources.

Creative People and Places – Appetite

Appetite is one of the projects funded by Arts Council England as part of the CPP programme. Appetite was launched in 2013 in Stoke-on-Trent, an area characterised by low engagement in arts, with the aim to increase participation in arts and cultural activities.

Appetite is led by a consortium of local organisations, including New Vic Theatre, Partners in Creative Learning (PICL), 6Towns Radio, and Staffordshire University. The activities funded as part of the Appetite programme included theatrical performances, art festivals, museums etc.

The evaluation report published in 2019 shows that in that year, 35% of participants were people that had attended three or fewer events in the previous year (Gratton and Washington, 2019). At the heart of the success of this programme were the following strategies:

- **Co-production** – Appetite created a community board, which brings together a broad range of local residents in monthly meetings to design and plan the programme, as well as a stable volunteer base, with explicit targeting of under-represented groups in their outreach activities. Initially, the board acted as an informal cultural information point, updating local groups and helping to publicise events. It now plays a more strategic function, making active decisions, although it retains a useful role in spreading awareness.
- **Expanding networks and long-term relationships** – keeping existing relationships and forming new ones with skilled and experienced partners to ensure the co-production of high-quality events and an approach that is sustainable in the long term.
- **Ability to attract external visitors** – Stoke-on-Trent became recognised as a centre of culture, and a cultural destination thus making use of heritage and promoting the city. Since 2013, Appetite intended to inspire non-regular arts attenders through, among other approaches, taster sessions and large-scale outdoor activities. As a result of the strong Appetite cultural brand, they have recently closed new strategic partnerships with public and private organisations.

Despite this success, some groups are still under-represented and more can be done to engage a wider audience. Strategies for further engagement recommended by the audience include:

- Spreading events across the town and organising complementary activities during events.
- Taking advantage of the city's unique heritage to strengthen sense of belonging and utilise unused buildings to hold events.
- Better information (e.g., across different communication channels ahead of events).

Great Place Scheme

(variety of locations across the UK)

Overview

- The Great Place Scheme embedded arts and culture in **local decision-making planning** and increased **awareness** of the value of arts and culture among local stakeholders.
- **Engagement across under-represented groups** was achieved through (i) targeted marketing strategies, (ii) a diversified cultural offer, and (iii) moving events to under-served areas.
- Lessons from Great Place Tees Valley show that **identification** with the cultural offer and **participatory practices** were key factors to increase engagement among under-represented groups.

Bringing culture into local decision-making planning

The Great Place Scheme is a 2016 joint initiative between Arts Council England and the Heritage Lottery Fund that provided grants for investment in art and culture in local contexts, with a focus on deprived areas characterised by low levels of cultural activity across the country.

The objective of the Great Place Scheme was to boost economic development and support the health and wellbeing of communities, as well as improve the availability of cultural opportunities. As part of the programme 16 grants (between £500,000 and £1.5 million) were awarded to fund cultural activities that included a range of arts, heritage, and cultural engagement activities (e.g., theatrical performances, festivals, pop-up galleries etc.).

The main feature of the Great Place Scheme was to focus on embedding culture in local decision-making planning, increasing understanding of the value of culture among councils and local public sector bodies, and creating partnerships between the cultural sector and local stakeholders, including engagement with local communities.

Widening engagement

Since its implementation, the Great Place Scheme managed to engage and reach out to a wider audience, especially people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, who generally underrepresented among cultural events' attendees. Findings from the final evaluation of the Great Place Scheme published in 2022 show that overall, the Scheme has been successful in engaging people living in deprived areas as well as audiences from ethnically diverse groups; in year 3 of the Scheme a fifth of participants came from the most deprived areas, almost 40% more than in year 2 (Arts Council England and The National Lottery Heritage Fund, 2022).

The evaluation report highlights a number of different ways in which the funded projects managed to increase engagement including:

- Delivering events with new partners (e.g., creating relationships with local actors, both inside and outside the cultural sector, to ensure that culture is a top priority).
- Delivering events in new places (e.g., areas with low cultural engagement and offerings).
- Develop content that has relevance for a wider audience (e.g., based on initial research and consultations with the local community).
- Improved websites and enhanced/new marketing techniques (e.g., by employing multi-skilled cultural managers able to advocate and raise awareness and engage the diverse audience).

Moreover, the evaluation reports that projects that were able to diversify their offer and the ways in which cultural activities are delivered were most successful in engaging a wider audience (including lower socio-economic groups), thus increasing fair access and creating new opportunities to access arts and cultural events for everyone.

Lessons learned

There were a number of lessons learned from the Great Place Scheme which include:

- It takes a long time to build trust and understand the needs of communities and partners.
- Programme deliverers should prepare communities for the withdrawal of funding that occurs at the end of a project by building confidence, skills, and knowledge for the community to continue the cultural work on their own.
- Policymakers from non-cultural sectors (for example, ministers from education and business sectors) must also be committed to the aim of increasing engagement in culture to ensure significant and long-term impacts.
- There must be investment into sustaining cultural organisations' infrastructure (such as their facilities and buildings, communication networks, and transportation to and from) as this provides the foundation for any initiative to be successful.

Great Place Tees Valley

Some projects funded by the Great Place Scheme, such as the Great Place Tees Valley programme, were particularly successful in increasing engagement. So far, the programme has [supported more than 12,000 people](#) to engage in cultural activities.

In Tees Valley, the engagement of people living in deprived areas reached participation levels above national trends of participation for lower socio-economic groups in arts and cultural activities, with almost 50% of the participants coming from the 30% most deprived areas and 40% being first-time attendees of a cultural venue or event (Vall, 2020).

The programme was designed to create networks and improve opportunities for Local Authorities to work together to promote the cultural sector at the regional level. This project brought together the five Local Authorities in Tees Valley alongside local organisations, including Teesside University, Theatre Hullabaloo, and large-scale arts organisations such as the Stockton International Riverside Festival.

One of the core objectives of the programme was to increase audience participation, especially in harder-to-reach communities. Some of the initiatives that succeeded the most in engaging harder-to-reach and underrepresented communities included:

- The theatre production 'The Glass Ceiling' toured several towns within the region and focused on specific aspects of the town visited. The identification element was successful in increasing engagement. Moreover, thanks to marketing strategies that involved organising workshops and open days hosted by local community centres, the project managed to target disadvantaged communities.
- The Heritage on Truck project ran by Tees Valley Arts and Groundwork North East. As part of the project, visitors were asked to share the stories of their rail heritage. The participatory element of this project was key in engaging local communities.

Slung Low Theatre Company

(Leeds, England)

Overview

- Slung Low developed an **accessible and relevant cultural offer** to people in Holbeck by delivering what people asked for, recruiting local people to engage in large-scale spectacles, and supporting residents in creating new cultural activities.
- Tickets for theatre plays and bookings for rehearsal are always priced at **pay-what-you-decide**, alleviating the financial barrier to engagement.
- **Earning people's trust** was key before encouraging them to attend the performances and be actively engaged.

Community engagement

Holbeck, in South Leeds, is among the 10% of most deprived areas in the UK, and it contains wards in the most deprived 1%. Slung Low Theatre Company (hereafter 'Slung Low') is a mission-driven cultural organisation that aims to ensure that people in Holbeck have access to cultural provision (Bartley, 2021). Community engagement is a core principle of the company. The company realised that when people were asked to actively engage with the theatre (beyond simply being customers) they began to view Slung Low as less of a traditional theatre, alleviating barriers associated with the fear of not fitting in (Perry, 2019).

In particular, Slung Low is currently managing two cultural venues in which:

- They have an advisory board comprised exclusively by local people, and they host events based on what people from Holbeck want to see.
- People in Holbeck have been given full curatorial power. For instance, by partnering with local schools, Slung Low gave pupils the capacity to decide the topics represented and resources invested in the theatre plays.
- Besides putting plays on stage, people are encouraged to use the venues for rehearsing new pieces and creating new activities, regardless of their previous experience in the cultural sector.
- A community advisory group supports local people's autonomy to organise and curate cultural activities.

Slung Low's aim is to provide spaces where people who think cultural venues are not for them feel comfortable and welcomed (Perry, 2019). The venues are about more than just enjoying the programming, but about the social experience with local people as well. For some people in Holbeck, being in Slung Low's venues felt like "being in your dining room" (Bell and Orozco, 2021).

Arts professionals working at Slung Low still retain a role in shaping the cultural programme. Slung Low hosts a range of touring theatre companies to increase the cultural offer in Holbeck, always priced at pay-what-you-decide, and they specialise in large-scale outdoor theatre productions. Slung Low's productions, commissioned by national and high-profile organisations, are known for pioneering participatory work (Perry, 2019). In these cases, people are invited to participate in a professionally curated production which, in turn, increases their knowledge and confidence in making decisions to organise their own productions and events. Hence, Slung Low combines supporting bottom-up initiatives with professional productions to provide new opportunities for cultural engagement.

Building trust

Earning people's trust is, to a large extent, the cornerstone of Slung Low's success in engaging new people with a cultural venue. According to Bartley (2021), those who are not typically engaged will not come to a new venue or participate in a play just because there is an offer to do so, people need to be encouraged and reassured to attend in order to feel comfortable, participate, and be creative. Slung Low invested time and resources into building visibility and trust in the company and its staff by:

- Reaching out to people in Holbeck and encouraging them to take part in their events. Outreach strategies included word-of-mouth as well as sending follow-up messages to first-time attendees via e-mail or phone.
- Welcoming people personally within their venues and talking to passers-by and attendees to show commitment towards the community and create a sense of shared ownership over the venue.
- 'Saying yes' to every request, idea, and proposal that people might come up with. Slung Low actively encourages people to organise new activities within their venues, which has resulted in them hosting events that are not commonly seen in other cultural venues, such as family-friendly circus workshops or sports. 'Saying yes' to these requests and providing resources and support is proof of commitment and trust towards the people, and it sets up a stable relationship for the future.

Measures of success

According to the Audience Agency Show Stats tool, Frontline Families make up to 6% of audiences in the UK, and 12% of the UK population. This group is defined as households, typically with young children, living on low incomes or unemployment, in council rented housing, and spending most of their free time enjoying at-home entertainment.¹¹ For Slung Low, Frontline Families made up to 14% of their audiences in 2021/2022.

As mentioned above, Holbeck, in South Leeds, is an area with multiple indices of deprivation, and Slung Low's marketing strategy explicitly targets local people. For instance, during their 4-year Cultural Community College, Slung Low hand-delivered a flyer to every home in Holbeck to launch new courses. Booking was initially open to Holbeck residents only for the first week, before being opened out to the wider Leeds area. Their final evaluation showed that 33% of all tickets were booked during the Holbeck priority week.¹²

After the Covid-19 pandemic, Slung Low established a partnership with a local school, and they created a self-named pupil steering group, the Imaginative Intelligence Warriors, through which children and young people direct company resources in creating events and activities. By working with and for the children, Slung Low is able to reach parts of the community that would have remained out of their reach, such as parents with English as a second language or isolated families. The audience of the first children-programmed show had a 74% proportion of first-time bookers.¹³

Lessons learned

Slung Low Theatre Company has several key lessons that have been learned throughout their time serving the Holbeck community. These include:

- One large, cultural institution serving a whole city or large area experiencing wide-spread inequalities is not always the most effective approach. Funding for culture can be used to set up many varied, smaller cultural venues or activities. This will ultimately assist cultural venues in adapting to the needs of individual communities.

¹¹ See [the Audience Agency](#).

¹² Cultural Community College evaluation.

¹³ Slung Low. Intelligence Warriors Summary.

- Cultural venues and their producers or artistic directors should be careful not to impose pre-determined definitions of culture onto the local community and should instead be guided by what the community is interested in engaging with.
- There should also be patience when building trust with people as they may be apprehensive to attend at first. Using varied outreach strategies including word-of-mouth can be effective, though messaging should not be patronising to the audience.

Museum of Making

(Derby, England)

Overview

- The Museum of Making implemented **co-creation practices** by asking communities about their needs, wants, and values in broader life, not just what they expected a museum should be.
- Different approaches were **initially prototyped** to ensure that the budget was spent most effectively and that the project was successful in the long-term.
- **Partnering with organisations** with shared values and objectives was crucial to deliver cultural offerings (such as innovative exhibitions) that engaged the community.

The Museum of Making project

Derby Museums was formed in 2012 after moving to trust status and currently manages three sites in Derby: Derby Museum and Art Gallery, The Silk Mill (which houses the Museum of Making), and Pickford's House Museum (Robinson, 2015). The aim of the Museum of Making project was to re-think the future of the Silk Mill and create a museum that was relevant and useful to people.

The Museum of Making invited audiences to become co-producers through co-designing and refurbishing the museum, moving away from the typical approach of employing a designer and retaining control (The Happy Museum, 2016). 'Makers in residence' (i.e., artists producing artworks at the museum for a few days a week over 6-month periods) were recruited and commissioned to facilitate co-design and co-making workshops for the public and members of staff. Local people were involved in designing and making furniture, object displays, and fittings. Through this, participants made new friends, learned new skills, and ultimately made decisions about the future of the Silk Mill.

The Programme and Participation Manager for the Silk Mill at the time commented that visitors' and local people's perceptions of what museums were and could be had been changed by the project (The Happy Museum, 2016). Ongoing connections with the people involved were created and new audiences engaged with the museum following social media activity around the project.

How to engage with the community

The Museum of Making has employed a number of strategies to engage with the local community in order to co-create with them, these include:

- Involving community leaders in outreach strategies to gain the trust of the community.
- Opening the doors to the community, for example through the 'Shaping the Vision' event which involved a pop-up café, and the opportunity for members of the community to brainstorm the future of the Museum together.
- Continuous iterations involving the community each time to allow the project to grow and adapt whilst maintaining the principle of co-creation.
- Offering the community a mutually beneficial relationship through asking how the Museum could benefit their lives more widely than simply being a traditional cultural institution.

Success factors

Three key success factors were identified within the Museum of Making project when exploring this case study:

- Co-creation with the community. The Museum of Making has an 'open door' approach to the community, asking not what they expect from a museum but what needs, wants, and values they have in their wider lives, what challenges they are facing, and what they want from the future. This allows the Museum to be most relevant and useful to the community rather than simply providing what people *think* a museum should be.
- Prototyping and delivering many iterations within the project. Experimenting with new approaches and involving the community each time was deemed an important aspect of the success of the Museum of Making. Prototyping allowed the Museum to make mistakes and learn from them, collecting data to ensure a data-driven approach. Prototyping in this way meant that resources were balanced and funding was not all spent at once.
- Partnerships with the private sector. For example, partnerships with Toyota and Rolls Royce (to name a couple) have led to engaging, co-designed exhibitions for the museum which have proved popular with audiences. However, caution must be taken to manage the expectations of partner organisations and to ensure co-creation with the community continues to be present throughout the partnership.

Further considerations

There are several considerations to note when exploring the Museum of Making project, these include:

- The community had been promised many times that there would be a future for the Silk Mill but had been let down. Therefore, it was difficult for the Museum of Making project team to start from a place of hurt within the community and to build trust. To do so it was important that transparency and delivering on promises were sustained throughout the project.
- The Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns brought about more challenges for the Museum of Making. For example, Derby Museums' (2021) annual review for 2020/21 revealed that the Museum had encountered having to operate at half capacity, suppliers going out of business, furloughing skilled workers etc.
- The Museum of Making concept, based on principles of co-production, prototyping, and partnering with organisations, could be replicated elsewhere. In order to replicate and scale-up this project it was suggested that factors such as (i) cross-disciplinary teams, (ii) a human centred design (such as spending time with audiences in 'real' environments and following their lead and needs.¹⁴), (iii) co-production with the community, (iv) sharing of publicly owned assets, and (v) courage to try new things are key to ensure long-term sustainability.

¹⁴ Human-centred design principles. Available at [Design Council \(2017\)](#).

Lessons from National Theatres

(variety of locations across England and Wales)

Overview

- People felt less intimidated and more likely to engage when theatrical performances were carried out in **settings that communities are familiar with** rather than traditional settings, such as National Theatres.
 - Innovative practices such as participatory performances attracted new audiences. However, they require a significant **organisational effort** to ensure that participants are guided through the performance.
 - Through the implementation of participatory practices, professionals working in the cultural industry were exposed to new **inclusive approaches** that can be replicated in different contexts.
 - National Theatres' **reputation** was crucial to attracting new audiences, thus promoting equal access to artistic excellence.
-

National Theatre England

The Theatre Nation Partnership

The [Theatre Nation Partnership](#) is a multi-year partnership between the National Theatre England and theatres and cultural organisations in priority areas of traditionally low engagement in culture. The aim of the partnership is to broaden the audience for drama through touring, working with schools, and creating theatre with local communities. The [initial target](#) of engaging with 200,000 people living in low-engagement areas and pupils in high-priority schools in the first three years was met and the programme had great success in widening the audience. [Data collected](#) on participants throughout the programme shows that 55% of the audience for Macbeth (one of the productions that was part of the project) were first-time bookers.

The Theatre Nation Partnership is based on strong collaborations between partners, including local organisations, directors, marketing teams etc. The programme has supported local theatres and cultural organisations to understand their audience; this approach provided valuable insights for all partners into the audience's expectations and needs and supported the development of a tailored cultural offer.

Recently, it was announced that following the implementation of the first three years of the programme, the [Theatre Nation Partnership will be extended](#) to every region in the country, with 14 partner organisations aiming to engage more than 500,000 people (including audience, artists, and participants) over the next three years, more than double the initial target set in 2017. While it started as a collaboration between the National Theatre England and a few local theatres, the programme showed that the same approach can be replicated in other priority areas.

Increasing engagement through participatory practices – the Public Acts

The [Public Acts](#) programme was launched in September 2017 to bring large-scale productions to priority areas in Greater London, Hornchurch, and Doncaster. Public Acts involves community members taking an active role and coming together to make large-scale productions. In particular, the programme produces works of participatory theatre through the development of collaborations and partnerships between theatres and community organisations. Through workshops, community groups learn new skills and perform alongside professional actors.

While the evaluation of the Public Acts programme published in 2019 did not conduct audience

research, the authors stress that the productions were successful in engaging a wider audience, especially those who have never been to the theatre before (Nicholson, 2021). The report focused on the partnership between the National Theatre England and the Queen's Theatre Hornchurch in London and highlights that Public Acts inspired people usually not attending theatres to attend more regularly besides taking part in the performance themselves.

Some of the success factors identified in the evaluation that supported the theatres in engaging with communities outside their usual audiences include:

- Building long-lasting relationships with community organisations to shape a new and inclusive agenda.
- Fostering conversations about inclusivity - during workshops and rehearsal, theatre professionals learned about inclusive practices, thus recognising the limits of their theatres in promoting wide engagement.
- Artistic excellence - The National Theatre's reputation was a crucial factor in attracting participants in the Public Acts and promoting equal access to excellence.

National Theatre Wales

The adoption of participatory practices to increase engagement

The Theatre Map of Wales programme was launched in 2009 by the National Theatre Wales and took place between 2010 and 2011. The programme involved the organisation of theatrical events staged across the country with the aim to bring theatrical performances to communities where engagement in arts and culture is low. The objective of the programme was to create a cultural offer that was relevant for the people of Wales, but not Welsh people only. The performances were thought to be about places and lots of work went into gathering stories from the community that feed into the production.

Participatory practices and immersive performances were at the heart of the programme, with audiences guided to be active participants during the events. The idea behind the programme was to organise events that were itinerant both in terms of location as well as in terms of the performance itself. For example, one play (*For Mountain Sand and Sea*) took place in the form of an excursion across the town. Innovative strategies, such as those described above that increase the audience's ability to be active and mobile during performances, led to increased participation and community engagement, especially in areas where engagement is typically low and the cultural offer scarce (Sedgman, 2017).

The most successful performance, both in terms of attendance and media coverage, was *The Passion* organised at Port Talbot. The production involved about one thousand local volunteers and [more than 25,000 people attended](#). *The Passion* took place over three days during which the audience was involved in numerous performances that took place across the town.

As mentioned by the community director of *The Passion*, it was an immersive event that aimed to involve a large number of community members using participatory practices to re-think how to use theatre as a space for communities and how participation can be democratised (Kemp, 2011).

Some of the factors that made *The Passion* such a big success and able to engage a wide audience include:

- Community participation – people were given agency and power to develop performances that were meaningful to them. Productions in which communities were not involved in the development of the performances were less likely to engage wider audiences.
- The fact that the performance was not in a traditional venue (i.e., in a theatre) increased the engagement of groups traditionally less likely to attend theatrical performances.
- Sharing booking opportunities with communities before advertising the performance in the

national press increases the chances to engage a wider audience. Usually theatrical performances, especially when organised by the National Theatre, are sold out quickly.

Considerations and challenges

Sedgman (2017) conducted analysis of a questionnaire (available both online and in-person where the author was present at performances) and qualitative interviews involving people participating in the 13 launch-year events. The aim of this was to understand how participatory performances were perceived by audiences and their experience. While the programme was undoubtedly successful in engaging a wide audience, a few considerations that should be taken into account emerged:

- Some residents showed resistance and scepticism toward experimental work, especially those more likely to attend theatrical performances. Non-traditional audiences, instead, showed interest in participating in such work.
- Involving a large number of community members may affect the overall organisation and effectiveness of the event. Some people participating in *The Passion* highlighted that their experience was disorganised, and they didn't manage to enjoy much of the performance.
- There is a trade-off between letting people be free to participate in the performance and at the same time guiding them through it. It was highlighted by some participants that they didn't feel they were guided enough during the performance, thus having the feeling they were not understanding what was happening. This can put off audiences, especially people less likely to engage with arts and culture in general, and therefore impact their willingness to participate in the future.
- Chances of success can increase through managing expectations. When audiences are told clearly what to expect from the performance they are more likely to engage and less likely to be disappointed, especially when they engage with experimental work.

Contact Theatre

(Manchester, England)

Overview

- Lessons from the Contact Theatre show that including **diverse groups** within **governance and decision-making** roles was a successful way to organically broaden audiences.
- Funding is key: being **almost entirely subsidised** allows Contact Theatre to provide cultural products free of charge, alleviating financial barriers to access for some groups.
- The long-term success of Contact Theatre is based on the development of **long-term strategies** as it takes time to develop and embed new ways of working in cultural organisations.

A participatory decision-making approach

The [Contact Theatre](#) (hereafter 'Contact') in Manchester is another example of community involvement in the decision-making process of the cultural agenda. In particular, this programme involves young people aged 13-30 in the development of the artistic programming as well as in managerial decisions, such as appointing staff and budgeting, with young people making up 50% of Board members. Contact has a number of successful programmes, such as Contact Young Company, The Agency, and Future Fires (Contact Theatre, 2018).

Contact engages a range of young people from different backgrounds that help shape cultural programming in a way that is inclusive and reflects the values and experiences of the community. Of particular relevance, the location of Contact within Manchester is such that it engages those from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Contact has made part of its mission to ensure that barriers to cultural engagement are eliminated and that everyone in the community has equal opportunities to participate. [Contact's Manifesto](#), which was produced in collaboration with staff, artists, and audiences, describes one of the six guiding principles as "Equity is key to reaching equality". This principle demonstrates Contact's commitment to ensure that everyone within the community feels that Contact is 'for them' and accessible. In particular, the guiding principle recognises that "...*some people wouldn't even step through Contact's doors, because they don't see it as their space. Equity means exploring what individual people and groups need to be able to access opportunities at Contact, and putting specific measures in place to achieve equal outcomes*".

Broadening and diversifying audiences

Research based on interviews with practitioners involved in the implementation and delivery of the programme by Jancovich (2011) suggests that participatory decision-making approaches implemented at Contact helped to broaden audiences. Contact's staff members claim that the demographics of the audience have changed significantly since the involvement of young people in the decision-making process and reshaping the cultural offer based on the community's values, with 50% of attendees coming from ethnic minority groups or lower socio-economic groups.

The success of Contact in broadening and diversifying its audiences is apparent within their annual report for 2017/18 (Contact Theatre, 2018). The report found that 71% of audiences were aged under 35, 30% were from ethnic minority backgrounds, and 32% came from segments traditionally characterised by low engagement.

Success factors

Three factors key to the success of Contact in engaging the local community (including lower socio-economic groups) and diversifying their audiences were identified:

- Trusting young people to make decisions, come up with innovative new ideas, and lead the creative direction of Contact. These new ideas and ways of working might not have been suggested without young people's involvement in decisions, which demonstrates that young people are willing and able to take on responsibility within cultural organisations.
- Being almost entirely subsidised and therefore able to offer programmes free of charge. This alleviated some barriers to attendance for members of Contact's typically low-income local community. For example, Contact providing food free of charge during events has helped members of the community who rely on foodbanks.
- Allowing enough time for new ways of working to develop and become embedded within the organisation. It is important for programmes to be long-term in order to sustain engagement. This includes where participants who engage with Contact firstly as an audience member can move through the organisation to become members of the Board in a self-sustaining cycle.

Lessons learned

Several lessons learned were also identified by Contact when executing their objectives:

- Engaging diverse people in governance and decision-making is exponentially more effective in diversifying and broadening audiences than starting with, for example, marketing strategies. This means that having a diverse Board will 'trickle down' into programming, hiring decisions etc. and organically diversify audiences.
- It can often be difficult to gain funding from corporate sponsorships or private donations as those involved are not people who engage with Contact in their spare time, nor do their children. Therefore, their funding will often go towards more traditional cultural venues that they frequent. Contact is also aware that funders are typically looking for the next new programme or brand name to get behind and so long-term projects that require many iterations of funding might not be viewed as innovative anymore, despite doing good work.
- Marketing can also be a challenge for Contact. Contact's brand centres around young people, but there is much that other age groups would be interested in if Contact can engage them effectively through marketing. This was done successfully during a 2-year period when Contact was undergoing refurbishment. With no access to the usual venue Contact took programming out to more traditional cultural venues (e.g., the Lowry, the Royal Exchange etc.) to engage audiences that would not typically engage with Contact. Unfortunately, the Covid-19 pandemic occurring almost immediately after meant the possible positive effects of this outreach could not materialise.
- The concept of Contact Theatre could be easily replicated and scaled across the country; it was noted that audiences coming from other cities have said that they wished they had a Contact Theatre in their local area.

Manchester International Festival

(Greater Manchester, England)

Overview

- Manchester International Festival is a **high-profile festival** featuring local and international artists across sectors and producing events in a **wide range of ‘unusual spaces’**.
- Local **residents shape the design and commission** of artistic and cultural events. There are also public forums in place in which people can contribute to broader elements of the festival, such as accessibility concerns.
- The festival utilises many strategies to **reach out to the community**. This includes **Neighbourhood Organisers** who raise awareness of the festival’s events in their local areas and encourage participation, as well as the **Community Partnerships Programme** which seeks to build relationships with the community ahead of co-creating cultural offerings.

Co-creation with the community

The Manchester International Festival is a high-profile biennial festival, envisaged in the aftermath of the success of the Commonwealth Games 2002 which showcased Manchester’s ability to deliver major, international events. The festival commissions original pieces of work to local and international artists across fields – including music, dance, and arts exhibitions. The festival is known for producing events across formal, informal, and ‘unusual’ settings, including people’s homes, railway stations, or tunnels. Factory International, the leading organisation, is committed to providing a wide range of opportunities for people to engage with the development of this festival:

- Local residents have helped to select artists and themes for the festival’s events, and to design major artworks.¹⁵ Since the 2019 edition, new youth and community advisory groups have been established to help shape programmes.
- Public forums have been put in place where local people can discuss wider elements of the festival, such as public transportation and accessibility.
- A year-round programme of creative activity focuses on partnerships with libraries, neighbourhood centres, and schools.

This all leads to Manchester International Festival offering cultural programming that is ‘of’ the place, inspired by the place, and connected to the people in the place.

How the community is engaged

Besides active participation, Manchester International Festival has several policies in place to encourage attendance from wider audiences in the events of the festival.

- They have several **Neighbourhood Organisers**. This is a paid role for which local people are hired to link Factory International with local communities in Greater Manchester. Neighbourhood Organisers are recruited to amplify marketing activities, tell residents about shows and events, encourage people living in the area to get involved, and distribute free tickets and price reduction schemes to local community groups.^{16&17}
- With a similar aim, the **Community Partnerships Programme** funds four charities and non-profit organisations in Greater Manchester. This programme aims at building skills in co-

¹⁵ Get involved, take the lead. Available at [Factory International](#).

¹⁶ Neighbourhood Organisers. Available at [Factory International](#).

¹⁷ [Manchester City Council Report for Information](#).

designing arts provision, increasing opportunities for engagement locally, and reflects people's views in the programming of Manchester International Festival.¹⁸

- Manchester International Festival consciously included a **wide representation** of different identities in their visuals, leaflets were translated to Urdu, and advertising of relevant events were targeted into communities with a majority of ethnic minority audiences.

Ticketing and costs

In Manchester International Festival 2019, 2,531 free tickets were distributed to over 100 local youth and community groups that would not usually be able to get involved.

In 2021, 57% of the programme was free, 10% of all tickets were available at £10 for residents on a lower wage, and a further 10% of all tickets were free for community groups across Greater Manchester, or at a discounted price for young people aged 16 to 26. Online ticketed events were also priced at 'pay-what-you-decide'. Despite the need for Covid-19 safety measures (e.g., social distancing) the festival reached a record number of audiences locally, nationally, and internationally through a combination of co-created events, free tickets, and online engagement opportunities.

Audience widening

In the 2019 edition of the festival, there was an increase of up to 27% in participants from ethnic minority backgrounds and an increase in young audiences under 20 years old. According to the evaluation report, targeted activities to increase engagement in certain areas saw significant success in participation rates in their priority wards.¹⁹

In the 2021 edition, the evaluation of the festival showed an increasingly diversified audience. There was an additional increase of 9% in the ethnic diversity of audiences, a 10% increase in audiences aged 16 to 29, and 42% of the audiences were from lower socio-economic groups, state pensioners, or unemployed people. In the next edition, the Manchester International Festival will work with larger numbers of Neighbourhood Organisers to further increase engagement among lower socio-economic groups.

Further considerations

In order to replicate the Manchester International Festival approach there are key points to consider.

- Cultural programming needs to be inspired by and connected to the community and be relevant to them in order to be of interest. There also needs to be a fundamental commitment to increasing engagement and diversifying audiences at all levels of practice, built into the core of cultural organisations.
- The way in which cultural programming is informed and created can be changed through the development of new recruitment processes, such as trainee producer and talent programmes. For example, Factory Academy has reconsidered where its jobs are advertised, moved away from written applications to recorded applications, and hosted large-scale open days (among other strategies) in order to find talent beyond those who naturally apply to the creative industry.

¹⁸ Community Partnerships Programme. Available at [Factory International](#).

¹⁹ [Manchester City Council Report for Resolution](#).

Culture Collective

(variety of locations across Scotland)

Overview

- Culture Collective has **created a network** of cultural practitioners, organisations, and communities **working collectively**.
- **Being flexible** in funding and implementation is needed in order to respond to the needs of individual initiatives.
- **Trusting in communities** and showing this trust through **showing up in person** to build relationships, **saying yes** as much as possible, and **reducing the number of bureaucratic processes** where possible.
- Having a **large-scale budget** demonstrates funders' commitment to programme objectives and changes the conversation about which initiatives matter and who 'deserves' funding.

The Culture Collective programme

In Scotland, Culture Collective began as an emergency fund for cultural organisations as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic to support freelance artists. The programme has evolved from this initial objective and now also aims to establish a network of creative practitioners, organisations, and communities focusing on community engagement in culture and supporting participatory approaches and projects (Creative Scotland, 2020). Some of [Culture Collective's](#) projects engage older community members, young women, and non-binary people (to name a few) addressing disconnection, loneliness, and mental health in a post-lockdown world.

Funded by the Scottish Government and distributed by Creative Scotland, in 2020/21 a total of 26 awards totalling £5.9 million were made to cultural organisations across Scotland. An extension to the Fund was agreed in 2021/22, with an additional £4.2 million of funding granted to the 26 projects to continue for another year (Creative Scotland, 2022).

Measures of success

Emerging evidence from Creative Scotland's interim reports (received from projects in November 2021) indicates that Culture Collective projects have actively facilitated the participation of people from all age groups. It is also noted that this programme is at an early stage. Those involved in its implementation see this as a long process but are confident that it will have long-term positive impacts. So far communities involved have had an enjoyable experience and audiences have been appreciating the cultural offerings produced. The workforce is also more diverse now, with increases in representation of disabled people, parents, and those from ethnic minority groups.

Success factors

Key success factors of the Cultural Collective programme were identified:

- **Working collectively** is central to the programme at local and national levels with each supported organisation and practitioner being required to collaborate with local communities and each other as a national collective. The programme provides the opportunity for cultural organisations to test new ways of working and learn from each other (Creative Scotland, 2020).
- Being **flexible** and **responsive** to the needs of individual initiatives has been important to the programme's success. This was achieved through funding being flexible and listening to communities.

- **Trusting in communities** and how they want to spend the funding as well as the communities trusting Culture Collective. This two-way trust was built through programme leads showing up consistently to get to know stakeholders personally and building ‘human relationships’. Also, saying yes as much as possible and not having too many bureaucratic processes or requirements to report certain information or documentation in the grant application form.
- The **large scale of the budget** meant that cultural organisations used to having very little support could be included which has changed the conversation about which initiatives matter and who deserves funding. The amount of money devoted to Culture Collective projects shows recognition that community-led activities are a pillar of the cultural sector.

Lessons learned

Some of the lessons learned from the implementation of the Culture Collective programme include:

- Having the Scottish Government’s full support with the programme was seen as important to its success, demonstrating the need for governments to show their commitment to cultural initiatives.
- It took a long time for the Culture Collective programme to be implemented, mostly due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Long-term funding is vital to successfully sustain engagement. For example, those involved in Culture Collective’s implementation felt that incremental funding, such as every 2 years, is not equivalent to 5+ years of guaranteed funding. The latter helps cultural organisations to have certainty about their future income and build a long-term vision.
- The principles of Culture Collective are replicable but scaling up could potentially lead to some additional challenges. In particular, the current network of 26 projects has allowed for personal relationships to form, but scaling this network up could lead to more shallow relationships that might not foster the same levels of close collaboration.

A map for organisational change

This section maps the different strategies analysed as part of this review in the context of the behavioural change framework (BCF) developed by Michie et al (2011). The BCF is a framework to identify interventions that are successful in changing behavioural patterns and how they do so. The three categories of enablers identified by the BCF leading to behavioural changes are (i) capabilities, (ii) opportunity, and (iii) motivation. In the context of this research, key influences on engagement in cultural activities for lower socio-economic groups include:

- **Capability:** people from lower socio-economic backgrounds may feel that culture is not for them or may feel intimidated by traditional cultural venues.
- **Motivation:** lower socioeconomic groups may not be interested in the current cultural offer, or they do not identify with it
- **Opportunity:** people from lower socio-economic backgrounds may have peers that do not engage in cultural activities or face time, financial, and accessibility constraints.

Table 3 maps the strategies identified in the previous chapter and provides an overview of how each of them targets particular mixtures of capability, opportunity and/or motivation to engage in the behaviour (i.e., participating in arts and culture).

Table 2. Behavioural Change Framework

Strategy	Capability	Opportunity	Motivation
Co-creation and participatory practices	X	✓ Engages community groups in curating programmes, management boards, and participatory arts to generate familiar and supportive environments in cultural venues.	✓ Engage community groups in curating programmes, commissioning panels, and management boards of cultural institutions to increase sense of ownership, quality, and relevance of the cultural offer.
Community settings	X	✓ Events should be organised at hyperlocal scale to increase ease of access. Hosting cultural activities within familiar, community settings can attract residents as it increases the opportunities to socialise within their local area.	✓ Socialising is a common driver for engagement with culture. Organising activities in local settings can help increase opportunities for socialisation and therefore willingness to participate or attend.
Early engagement	✓ Early exposure to arts and culture increases long-term capability to engage in cultural offerings.	✓ Increasing arts subjects in schools provides cultural engagement opportunities to children and young people who cannot afford to engage outside of school or who are not encouraged to do so.	✓ Early exposure increases interest in participating in cultural offerings in later life.

Workforce and training	<p>✓ Staff can be trained in guiding and supporting diverse audiences to feel comfortable and fully engage with cultural offerings.</p>	<p>✓ Increase the representation of lower socio-economic groups and people from ethnic minority backgrounds among the cultural workforce through updating recruitment practices to be inclusive and creating targeted grants and funding streams.</p>	<p>✓ Increasing representation of lower socio-economic groups and ethnic minorities in cultural provisions and organisation to generate a greater sense of identification and relevance.</p>
Communication and outreach	<p>✓ Community ambassadors or connectors can be recruited to link organisations to local residents, increase awareness, and reduce feelings of not belonging associated with traditional cultural venues.</p>	X	X
Subsidising attendance costs	X	<p>✓ Reduced price schemes can raise interest in cultural offerings if they are targeted towards specific groups.</p>	X
Digital Engagement	X	<p>✓ Digital modes of access can increase opportunities and reduce travel costs, and they can be used to set up introductory online workshops or taster sessions.</p>	X

5. Conclusions

Summary of key findings

This research discussed interventions that proved successful in broadening audiences and engaging groups traditionally less likely to engage in arts and culture, with a particular focus on people from lower socio-economic groups.

The implementation of co-creation practices is one of the factors of success that was identified most often across all interventions. Co-creation practices consist of collaborating with communities to develop the cultural offer, thus moving from supply-driven models (in which the cultural product is designed and developed by professionals) to a demand-driven model (in which communities and non-experts shape the cultural offer). This can be done in different ways, for example, by consulting communities on what they are interested in, involving communities in management boards or commissioning original and new artworks, and combining co-creation with participatory practices (e.g., involving non-professional actors such as members of the community in theatrical performances alongside professional actors). In particular, from the case studies it emerged that involving communities in the decision-making process is crucial to (i) ensure that the cultural offer truly reflects and represents different identities and groups within the community, thus leading to wider engagement and (ii) build trust in the community to show that when making important decisions the opinions of community members are trusted and valued.

Ensuring the cultural offer reflects and represents the local community can be done by asking not what they expect of a cultural offer, but instead what needs, wants, and values they have in their broader lives, what challenges they are facing, and what they want from the future. Starting from this place and producing a cultural offer based on the answers to these questions allows for the cultural offer to provide the local community with what is relevant and needed, not what they think the cultural offer should be based on preconceptions. Building trust with the community is crucial to implementing co-creation practices. The case studies analysed show that a successful way to build such trust is through developing relationships with local organisations that are already working within the community. However, building trust as well as relationships with local networks requires time. Often the short-term nature of funding prevents the stakeholders involved from developing a long-term vision that employs strategies that will ensure sustained levels of engagement beyond a specific programme or intervention.

Another successful approach that emerged from the case studies is the importance of building a safe environment in which stakeholders (including local organisations, cultural and non-cultural organisations, communities, partners etc.) can come together to share ideas and knowledge. Such safe environments can come in the form of moving away from traditional cultural venues and instead using local, community spaces that those from lower socio-economic groups find more familiar and therefore are less intimidated to engage with. It is particularly important that stakeholders feel comfortable in sharing not only successful approaches but also failures and lessons learned from them. Often successful programmes are those that were able to experiment and prototype different approaches and were able to discuss failures. In this context, using funding carefully especially at the beginning of the project to try and prototype different approaches before making big investment decisions has been found to be a successful approach when designing interventions.

Furthermore, several programmes within the case studies offered cultural events and activities that were affordable or free, sometimes being based on a pay-what-you-decide approach. This can be achieved through subsidies and grants for cultural organisations and was seen to be an important feature of success for some case studies. This strategy to charging, or not charging, shows where

financial barriers to attending can be alleviated for lower socio-economic groups and provides a good foundation for subsequent work to alleviate additional barriers to access. Indeed, the evidence is clear in how some strategies used in isolation have been unsuccessful in driving increased engagement, for example when solely using free tickets or digital modes of access. Successful case studies and policy developments, such as the Manchester International Festival, Slung Low Theatre, or Creative People and Places, have shifted towards a suite of combined organisational changes (e.g., reduced price schemes, hyper-localism, and community governance) to increase engagement among different groups and tackle different reasons for non-engagement.

Despite local specificities many of the approaches described in the case studies have been demonstrated to be scalable and replicable in different contexts, as well as across different sectors and have proven successful in broadening audiences and increasing engagement. The best practices and lessons learned within these case studies can be transferred to future policy interventions to move forward with the most effective strategies to engage lower socio-economic groups with culture.

Recommendations

This research produced the following recommendations for future research and policy interventions aiming to explore approaches for increasing engagement in arts and culture for lower socio-economic groups.

Policy recommendations

- **Encourage the implementation of co-creation approaches.** Given the success of these strategies, funders should ensure that successful applications include explicit plans on how they intend to achieve co-creation (e.g., through consultation with the public, engaging members of the community in the decision-making process, involving communities in management boards, collaborating closely with local organisations, etc.).
- **Promote projects that make use of local settings.** Using settings that communities are familiar with (e.g., community centres, local theatres, pubs etc.) has shown to be successful in increasing engagement in more disadvantaged areas. Local settings are less intimidating than traditional cultural venues, such as theatres and museums, especially for groups that are typically less likely to engage in arts and culture.
- **Provide stable and long-term funding.** The tendency for short-term cultural funding in the sector is not suitable for enabling long-term visions to be implemented and sustain engagement. One-off events and short funding cycles make the development of projects with long-lasting legacies difficult to achieve. Stable and long-term funding for cultural organisations working in deprived areas enables initiatives to be piloted and long-term solutions to be designed.
- **Facilitate collaborations between local and established cultural organisations.** Encouraging established organisations to collaborate with local organisations has proved to be a successful strategy to engage local communities from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. When the perceived quality of the cultural offer is high (for example because a famous organisation is involved) people are more likely to engage.
- **Use a combination of strategies.** Implementing interventions in isolation might not be enough to increase engagement with lower socio-economic groups. For example, subsidising attendance costs can effectively alleviate financial barriers but often leaves other barriers (such as distance, lack of time, lack of interest etc.) that limit access to culture in other ways. Therefore, future policy interventions should consider which combinations of strategies are likely to work well together to produce the most positive outcomes.

- **Replicate and scale-up the success factors identified.** The success factors identified within the analysis of the case studies (such as co-creation of cultural offers, using community settings as venues, or designing outreach strategies to reach local residents) are shown to be likely to be replicable and scalable. Where success is driven by hyper-localism, naturally these cases can't be naively scaled but it would still be possible to have a national policy intervention that leads to a large number of hyper-local offerings, and this is the sense in which we refer to this type of policy as scalable.

Improve evidence base to support data-led decisions

- **Increase focus on producing quality, mixed-methods research.** The lack of robust methodologies in the current evidence base can make it difficult to gain an understanding of the impact of the interventions. There should be an increased focus on producing research to fill this gap which combines quantitative and qualitative evidence to identify both how and to what extent interventions have been successful in reducing barriers to participation as well as their value for money. This would allow policymakers to prioritise programmes based on their effectiveness and given the available resources.
- **Conduct research that can reliably estimate causal effects.** Quantitative evidence in most of the evidence base is limited to before and after or cross-sectional comparisons. It is necessary to conduct research in which causal effects in cultural engagement can be reliably estimated using adequate control groups, experimental, or quasi-experimental methods.
- **Increase focus on collecting longitudinal data.** Evaluations tend to focus on short-term impacts, while little is known about how to achieve sustained levels of engagement in the long-term. Longitudinal data should be collected to conduct follow-up evaluations, estimate long-term impacts, and analyse life-long patterns of cultural engagement. Having said this, we recognise that this type of data collection can require substantial monetary resources that smaller scale cultural interventions might not have access to. Therefore, existing datasets (for example the DCMS Taking Part survey) should be better utilised for this purpose.
- **Improve data and knowledge transfer.** Over the years there has been limited data and knowledge transfer across the sector. Recent initiatives have built-in analysis of local needs and have collected evidence of effective strategies, but there is no sector infrastructure in place to collate and share such evaluations or best and bad practices. Improving this transfer of data and knowledge will lead to improved data-led decision-making among DCMS' arm's length bodies, private agents in cultural industries, and third sector organisations.

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7. Appendix A – Methodology

Research questions

To ensure that the REA is comprehensive in its coverage of existing research, we developed a protocol agreed on with the DCMS project team for collecting the evidence. The protocol set out the research questions, inclusion criteria, and search strategy. The sections below provide details on the research questions, information sources, search strategy, and selection process.

1. What are the barriers to participation in, and engagement with cultural activities for lower socio-economic groups?
 - What are the main barriers (e.g., social, cultural, economic etc.) identified in the literature?
 - How do barriers vary across different socio-economic groups?
 - How do barriers vary across different cultural sectors?
 - What cultural activities are LSEG most interested in?
2. What works in encouraging the participation and engagement of lower socio-economic groups in cultural activities?
 - What are the most successful interventions implemented both at the national, regional, and local level to drive participation in engagement with cultural activities?
 - What makes interventions successful? How does this differ across sectors and groups of people?
 - What are the main challenges to driving engagement with cultural activities? How do these vary across different sectors and groups?
 - What are the gaps in the evidence and the literature?

Search strategy

Databases

We retrieved evidence from academic literature. We focused on databases of published and unpublished academic literature. Namely, ABI/Inform, JSTOR, Science Direct, SAGE, IDEAS, Taylor and Francis.

In addition to our systematic search and approach to the literature, we included studies obtained through backward snowballing (i.e., considering the literature cited on the references of a start set paper) and forward snowballing (i.e., tracking the literature that cites a paper that is reviewed) as well as evidence suggested by stakeholders during the interviews.

Search strategy

We designed the search strategy to ensure it is targeted at thoroughly answering the key research questions. Table 1 provides an illustrative example of keywords that were used to identify relevant sources of evidence. During the scoping review, we tested different combinations of keywords to arrive at this list of keywords. These keywords were combined into search strings, using Boolean operators (AND/OR/NOT) and other database-specific search operators, to arrive at a long list of materials, which were then screened to see if they meet the inclusion criteria.

Table 1. List of keywords

List of keywords for the search strategy

Keyword 1 – Access and synonyms: Access*, engage*, attend*, particip*, consum*, activ*

Keyword 2 – Cultural sector: Cultur*, art*, heritage, creative, historic*

Keyword 3 – Target population: Vulnerab*, socio*, social, economic*, depriv*, disadvantage*, inequal*

Keyword 4 – Policy approach: Intervention*, behaviour*, support*, incentive*, inform*, aware*, provision*, barrier*, challeng*, review*, fund, grant, programme

Search strategy for the grey literature

In addition to academic literature, the review included, when appropriate, evidence from grey literature. A separate strategy was implemented for grey literature, which consisted of a targeted internet search using keywords and manually searching websites of institutions, research centres, organisations, and DCMS’ arm’s length bodies, including European Union, OECD, World Bank, Local Government Association, Art Councils England, British Council, British Film Institute, Art Fund, UK FILM Council, What Next?, The Arts Council of Wales, The Arts Council of Northern Ireland, Museums Association, National Lottery Heritage Fund, Heritage Fund, Historic England.

Selection process

We first compiled a “long list” of relevant research papers and reports. Two members of our interdisciplinary team screened the titles and removed duplicates. They next screened the abstracts to decide which to include in the short list. The screening process to shortlist papers was carried out according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria listed in the Table below.

Table 2. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Theme	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Population characteristics or context	Lower socio-economic groups	Studies that do not focus on the population of interest.
Country of the study	England, rest of the UK, comparable countries (USA, Australia, New Zealand). Canada, and comparable EU and EEA countries will also be considered.	Non-comparable countries in Africa, Asia, and South America.
Cultural sector	Culture, arts, museums, galleries, dance, exhibitions, theatres, heritage, film, television, music.	Studies focusing on cultural sectors not in scope
Methods	All methods, including qualitative studies (e.g., focus groups, interviews, and questionnaires to practitioners, students, parents, policymakers, or any other stakeholder), descriptive and observational studies on interventions or programmes, quantitative analysis and evaluation of relevant programmes and interventions, evidence reviews and meta-analyses.	

Areas of impact/outcomes	<p>Studies that investigate barriers to participation to cultural activities for lower socio-economic groups.</p> <p>Studies that focus on successful (and less successful) interventions to encourage the participation of lower socio-economic groups to cultural activities.</p>	<p>Studies not focusing on barriers or interventions targeting lower socio-economic groups will be considered out of scope.</p>
Date of research	Published between 2008-2022.	Published earlier than 2008.
Language	English	Any other language
Type of studies	<p>Peer-reviewed journal articles, non-peer-reviewed academic outputs, government-commissioned research, publications by research organisations, evidence by providers of interventions/support, government publications, and book chapters.</p>	<p>Newspaper articles and editorials/opinion pieces, magazine articles.</p> <p>Theses and dissertations.</p> <p>Books or other work of equivalent length.</p>

The screening process resulted in a final short list of papers to include in the review, which were read in full.

Quality Assessment Framework

It is important that quality is implicitly considered for research forming an evidence base for policy making. We recognised that the assessment framework needs to be flexible to accommodate a varied evidence base which includes observational studies, qualitative research, and empirical research (including evaluations). We therefore developed a bespoke quality assessment framework that is fit-for-purpose and tailored to the specific characteristics of the literature.

The quality assessment of the evidence is based on (i) credibility, (ii) methodology, and (iii) relevance of the study. For each category, we assigned score 1-3 (where 1 is the lowest score and 3 is the highest). The methodology criteria applied are based on the [Maryland Scientific Methods Scale](#) (SMS). However, for the scope of this project (i) we have included qualitative studies, literature reviews, and meta-analysis (while the SMS is used to evaluate only quantitative studies), and (ii) quasi-experimental designs are considered top-scoring methodologies, together with RCTs (while in the SMS quasi-experimental designs would score less than RCTs).

Table 3. Quality Assessment Framework

Category	Description	Score
Credibility	<p>Is the study coherent? Can findings be trusted? Does the author consider study limitations or alternative interpretations of the analysis? Has the study been peer-reviewed?</p> <p>1 = Study has not been peer-reviewed, with conclusions drawn from limited data or theoretical discussion. Lack of transparency around data and no discussion of data quality. Study focuses on an ongoing intervention with no discussion around assumptions made.</p>	1-3

2 = Study is unpublished, or study is informally published as a working paper/research report by a reliable source. Limited discussion around sources, information and data quality, or alternative interpretations of research findings. Study focuses on an ongoing intervention with adequate discussion around assumptions made.

3= Study is published in a peer-reviewed academic journal. Study discusses information quality, sampling decisions and other aspects of the methodology. Study focuses on a completed initiative.

Methodology How robust is the evidence to contribute to our review? **1-3**

1 = Methodology is weak and relies on uninformed opinions or unreliable data. In particular, the Methodology is not fit-for-purpose and relies on cross-sectional comparisons with no use of control variables. This also includes qualitative studies with unclear/inadequate sampling strategies. No discussion of why the chosen design and method are well-suited to answering the research question.

2 = Methodology is fit-for-purpose and relies on adequate control variables, though important unobserved differences may be remaining. This also includes high-quality qualitative studies (surveys, focus groups, case studies) with robust sampling strategies. Some discussion of why the chosen design and method are well-suited to answering the research question.

3 = The study is a literature review, meta-analysis or discussion of more than one completed intervention.

Methodology exploits quasi-experimental designs as well as explicit randomisation into treatment and control groups. The study provides clear evidence on comparability of treatment and control groups. Extensive discussion of why the chosen design and method are well-suited to answering the research question.

Relevance Does the study help to answer the research question? **1-3**

1 = The research question or hypothesis is not directly related to the proposed research questions. Alternatively, the external validity of the study is not guaranteed, albeit the country would be comparable.

2 = Study addresses an intervention from a comparable territory, including USA, Australia and New Zealand, Canada or a comparable EU or EEA country. The research question or hypothesis is only somewhat related to the proposed research questions.

3 = Study addresses an intervention within the UK. The research question or hypothesis is directly related to the proposed research questions.

Overall Judgement Considering the above categories, what is the overall judgment? **3-9**

8. Appendix B

This report provides a systematic review to identify what works to increase engagement in arts and culture among lower socio-economic groups. The review intended to identify policies and interventions which can be replicable and scalable in England. For this reason, the review assessed the external validity of the literature, including a limited geographical scope to comparable countries. The following table provides a geographical breakdown of the evidence included in this report.

Table 4. Geographical breakdown of the evidence

Countries	Number of papers
United Kingdom	99
Other countries in the European Union, Europe, or OECD	15
United States	8
Australia	6
Canada	2
Ireland	1
New Zealand	1



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