The Bridge Network (2012-2023)

Reflections on Strategic Work with Children and Young People in Education, Culture and the Arts, funded by Arts Council England.

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Executive Summary

This report summarises the development of the Bridge Network[1], a connected group of ten organisations with a focus on delivering better outcomes for young people through more integrated work between the arts, culture and education sectors.

The network was established in 2012 and has been funded throughout by Arts Council England (ACE). However, it has been known for some time that it would end after close to ten years of operation. Seven of the ten Bridges continue to receive funding as ACE National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs), but without a remit to fulfil the Bridge function.

The following pages reflect on the network's collective achievements and ways of working, as well as considering some of the nuanced spaces and roles it filled. The report also briefly situates the Bridge role in a historical context, making the point that, in many ways, these organisations represented an aggregation of thinking and policy more than half a century in the making. It ends by considering some of the questions arising from the absence of Bridge work going forward.

A key aspect of this summary has been understanding some of the tensions and paradoxes surrounding the Bridge role, largely arising from the wider economic and educational contexts in which it operated. The commodified era of market-driven policy-making in the public sector accelerated throughout the 1980s and has continued through to the present day. This has had the effect of shaping education in ways that have incrementally limited some of the opportunities for what we might call rounded or holistic education. The value that the arts and culture add here is a rebalancing of those forces and effects, in the form of new opportunities to explore, risk taking, being creative, expressing ideas and building a sense of identity and purpose. Young people relish the chance to develop in this way and Bridges were instrumental in constructing opportunities to make it possible, and to do it well.

1. See Appendix 1 for the full list of Bridge Organisations and their locations

How did they do this? Bridges utilised many strands of activity and strategic approaches to make change happen and these included:

- **Developing effective partnership-working between artists and schools**
  Bridges placed a premium on partnership-working, taking time to understand the best fit between the local needs of young people and the potential opportunities supplied by businesses, schools, arts venues and so forth. Understanding the best fit between local demand and supply allowed them to support better provision.
- **Fostering aspiration and ambition – the importance of choice and agency**
  It had been observed by ACE that local arts and cultural offers had become disconnected and hard to navigate. This was disempowering for young people. Bridges helped to rationalise local offers and worked with Local Cultural Education Partnerships (LCEPs) among others to make pathways to study and work more coherent for those young people who wanted to take their interests further.
- **Wellbeing and positive disposition to self**
  The near decade over which Bridges operated saw two significant and negative national challenges for children and young people – austerity and Covid. It became clear that part of the response to both required strategies for the promotion of robust mental health and a positive disposition to self-development and learning. Bridges have been effective advocates for this cause and have also developed strategies with arts and creative professionals in order for them to share good practice too.
- **Building local strategy and vision**
  Arts Council England's ambitions for prioritising place-based opportunities for young people rested heavily on Bridges' abilities to mobilise key stakeholders and build momentum to get LCEPs established. There were 64 LCEPs in 2015. There are now over 140, many of which are established and self-sustaining.
- **Extending and improving the quality of youth voice**
  Bridges have improved the quality and reach of practices supportive of youth voice and the representation of young people within their own learning journeys. From establishing youth presence on local advisory boards for LCEPs through to guiding schools participating in Artsmark in authentic ways of helping young people make decisions about their arts learning, Bridges have moved practice on in this area.

- **Developing the workforce – professional identity, discourse and skills**
  One of the key achievements of Bridges has been their consistent work to build a sharper understanding not just of what the arts can do for young people, but *how* they do it. And in real terms this means how the arts are mediated by teachers, artists, venues, policy-makers and so forth. Through conferences, symposia, publications, strategy meetings and critical friendship, Bridges have curated a space within which consideration of these questions could take place and give rise to better practice.

- **Recruitment to and support for Artsmark**
  Artsmark is a great ACE success story. Some 20% of schools across England are actively participating. It was made possible by the reach and receptivity of the Bridges, which advocated for the programme and built demand locally. Since 2015, when Artsmark became a prospective process of planning for arts-driven changes and improvements, there has been a greater need for dialogue, reflection and critical thinking within schools and on the part of arts and cultural providers working in partnership with them. Bridges have framed such reflection through development training and ongoing troubleshooting, helping schools make a success of Artsmark and fulfil their goals.

- **Insider/outsider dynamism and the capacity to 'make things happen'**
  An interesting facet of Bridge work was the network's ability to connect to national agendas, helping drive arts policy via ACE, while also effectively balancing that against various local needs and priorities. Similarly, within the context of schools, Bridges were able to interpret ambitions driven by performativity in tests, exams and inspections, while finding ways of balancing those against more exploratory forms of learning, driven by the curiosity and expression that are so strongly present within arts and creative practices. This was possible because Bridge Organisations had the requisite expertise to understand high-level policy discourse, and to frame that within narratives that respected local practice and ambition. Most Bridges constructed themselves as organisations with a high degree of 'native' intelligence – an ability to listen to local stakeholders, 'to know their way around', 'to understand what was possible' and to find balanced solutions.

This was a nuanced, complex suite of activities and required multiple ways of operating across a range of stakeholders. The Bridges were nothing if not versatile and adaptable. Replacing such skills is not easy. Nor are the linkages and connections such skills inevitably foster easy to replicate. There is important

learning to consider here about what needs to be maintained (and what stands to be lost) when national bodies work through locally constituted networks. Arts Council England's interest in achieving excellent art outcomes for all young people and reaching the hardest to reach groups implies an interest in and support for local knowledge and partnership-building. People who know places best are, inevitably, best positioned to help those places. This requires trust and a degree of 'product faith' in the facilitators of local networks to know their contexts and how best to operate within them. At the same time, knowledge and insight gained from successes when working in local arts and culture can usefully flow back to ACE to inform evolving policy for children, young people and arts education.

All the above were possible and achievable while the Bridge Network was in operation. It remains to be seen what new approach will effectively champion the benefits of arts and culture as an active force in the lives of young people. Taking the best of the Bridge Network will mean valuing and seeking continuity for forms of practice that establish strong local partnerships and good outcomes for young people, especially from disadvantaged backgrounds. Supporting such practice close to the ground is key; so too is managing local-to-national channels such that high level policy on the arts and young people can reflect grounded understanding of what works. This gives rise to the following questions:

- Is it reasonable to expect a network fulfilling a role that brings education and arts sectors closer together to feed into national strategic discussions and policy formation, and, if so, how best to achieve this?
- Is it anticipated that much of the interpretive work Bridges did to help one sector understand the other will be picked up by other stakeholders operating in this space or is the brokering of partnerships no longer an ambition?
- Professional development for artists and educators seeking to improve outcomes for young people was informed by Bridge knowledge: are there alternative outlets that have similar capacities to inspire and upskill?
- LCEPs have proliferated in number – doubling since 2018 from 70 to over 140. Yet we know there is a lag between constitution and full operation. Bridges filled a role in that phase, gestating ambition, strengthening partnerships and part funding pathfinder and knowledge-gathering activities. What are the risks to the nascent LCEPs without that additional support, and what can be done to mitigate them?
- Artsmark currently reaches 20% of schools in the country, in large part thanks to the efforts of Bridges who have been

active recruiters and inductors to the programme, also offering additional support to schools who run into difficulty. Can similar levels of local support still be offered without the Bridge Network?

- Regarding values and ethos, the Bridges have maintained a role for the arts in the lives of young people (and in the context of formal education) that is genuinely transformative and driven by critical engagement and curiosity. Is there a risk that, without the Bridge role, the arts come to serve forms of mainstream reproduction and aspects of work readiness that are coming to dominate education, and which are driven by more performative, economic factors? How can we ensure the mediation of arts, culture and creativity retains its transformative power?

Precisely what methods will sustain and grow the practice of professionals who work across the education and arts sectors also gives some pause for thought as the Bridge role comes to an end. But what can be in no doubt is that the legacy and learning of the network has much to offer all those who continue to work in this space.

Introduction

1. Introduction

In 2012, Arts Council England (ACE) established a network of ten organisations across the country (see Appendix 1). The network was co-funded by ACE and the Department for Education (DfE) at the cost of £10 million a year. It was to work with local schools, arts organisations, museums, libraries, music education hubs, local authorities, further and higher education institutions and many other partners to develop a network of cultural provision. At the heart of this idea was the notion of leading work that specifically strengthened the cultural offer for young people, especially for young people from more disadvantaged backgrounds. These organisations were typically known as 'Bridges' and were referred to collectively as the Bridge Network[2].

Bridge Organisations focused on the following provision:

Supporting emerging networks that would later become Local Cultural Education Partnerships (LCEPs) – these were collaborations between educational and cultural organisations which offered cultural enrichment opportunities to young people. They often took place in schools but also occurred in the wider community. Bridge Organisations brokered and supported these partnerships by acting as connectors, interpreters of practice, values and expectations, and as facilitators between local organisations.

Promoting and supporting Artsmark for schools – the Artsmark Award is a creative quality standard for schools and education settings. The award sets out a clear framework that schools need to follow to obtain a high standard of cultural learning. Bridge Organisations promoted Artsmark to schools and supported them in earning it. As such, they contributed to the improvement of cultural learning in schools at a national scale.

Connecting infrastructure – more broadly, Bridge Organisations provided information, connection, and fostered relationships between education and youth organisations in an area and their local cultural organisations and/or events, projects and other young-person-related offerings.

Partnership Investment (PI) – Bridges invested in innovative work with a broad range of partners involved in providing better outcomes for young people. They used PI funding from ACE to add momentum and/or focus to strategic initiatives, making local provision work harder and reach further. This included work with Virtual Schools, SEND settings, Alternative Provision, hospitals, the police, and so forth. Ultimately, the aim was to cultivate two things: 1) better quality supply of

2. Many organisations worked on more than Bridge activities and often referred to this area of work as their Bridge 'role' rather than wholly identify as Bridge Organisations. Within this report the terms Bridge organisation, Bridge 'role' and Bridge 'function' will all be used and to some extent overlap with one another, but it is important to note that despite ACE referring to Bridge Organisations, not all self-defined that way.

provision from the cultural sector in response to 2) more informed demand from agencies, such as schools, working regularly and directly with young people. During the latter phase of the Bridges' work – and at the request of ACE – PI became closely allied with LCEP development in many instances.

Over recent months, ACE had made it clear to the network that a change in direction was imminent. And in November 2022 a funding announcement effectively ended the Bridge role and network. It meant that from March 2023, for the first time in over 40 years, cultural learning has no form of infrastructural support that explicitly recognises the need for linkage between the cultural and education sectors.

This report briefly reviews the function and evolution of the Bridge role, how the organisations who fulfilled it made it work locally, and what legacies might remain, as well as what stands to be lost if replacements do not emerge.

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About this report

2. About this report: methods and approaches

This is not an academic or scholarly report, although it does engage briefly with the histories that feed into the practices the Bridge role encapsulated. Nor is it an exhaustive catalogue of Bridge projects and activities. Instead, it attempts to take an aggregate view and capture the nature of Bridge working, along with the main types of impact Bridge Organisations had.

Each Bridge submitted selected literature/operational documents from their own catalogue – plans, strategy documents, impact assessments and so forth – a list of which appears in the appendices. This pre-reading informed long-form interviews with key Bridge staff, which were undertaken online.

The report largely rests on these testimonies and reflections by staff from the Bridge Organisations. All CEOs participated in interviews and often were accompanied by other key staff to fill out important details as well as to add balance and perspective. The interviews were genuinely reflective; participants were not seeking to cherry pick best examples of practice, but instead were interested to look back over the development of their role, and to consider activities in the round, articulating their unique brief and the ways of working it gave rise to.

All interviews were transcribed and analysed for common themes, and these were fed into the structure for this report.

Background and context

3. Background and context

The Bridge role represents a culmination of over 70 years of arts education policy and is also connected to a parallel history of socially engaged arts and cultural practice.

It has some of its roots within the policies of ACE and others – which will be discussed later – in forms of socially engaged practice.

First, the importance of ACE policies in delineating the spaces Bridges worked within. James Doeser's comprehensive report for Culture at Kings, *Step by Step: Arts Policy and Young People 1944-2014* covers this ground in some detail[3].

ACE has slowly but steadily grown its commitment to ensuring young people from all backgrounds can engage with the arts. From its formation in 1946, the Council began, albeit slowly, to postulate a clear role for itself with regard to young people.

It did not set up the first Arts Education Liaison Officer role until the 1970s. But once that role was established, it charted its own policies for young people always with one eye on shifts in the education sector. It reacted to the steady demise of local authority coordination in education, and to the establishment of the National Curriculum throughout the 1990s by investing in work which sought out the liminal spaces that remained. In such spaces it was envisaged that teachers and artists might work in ways that were genuinely transformative for learners. The creative education programme Creative Partnerships (CP)[4] in the early 2000s was an internationally significant intervention, and the cultural entitlement scheme Find Your Talent[5] which followed in the late 2000s added an explicit arts dimension to schools' engagement alongside CP's creative focus. Connections between arts, culture, education and life opportunities of young people have been a longstanding and developing feature within the cultural landscape and have been consistently engaged with productively by ACE.

However, as James Doeser notes, ACE's status has not always been high. And not every development during its history has been successful. Not every approach turned out to make strategic sense, nor did the rhetoric deployed always clearly and concisely define the practice. Yet, despite the vagaries of government policy, ACE has continued to engage with this area of work, experimenting with models of delivery and exploring different approaches to strategic planning and partnership-working.

Vital momentum for this area of work first built in the mid-1960s when a White Paper by the first Arts Minister, Jennie Lee, set out the importance of the arts in the lives of young people.

3. https://www.kcl.ac.uk/cultural/resources/reports/step-by-step.pdf
4. http://www.creative-partnerships.com/aboutcp/
5. https://www.findyourtalent.org/

It may seem in hindsight somewhat anachronistic, placing as it does, a premium on the arts as a 'civilising force'. But it was an important first step. When the Arts Council's Royal Charter was reviewed and renewed in 1967, it dropped references to fine arts, signalling a movement toward more inclusive definitions and the relevance of the arts to young people's lives and identities, a step-change which has persisted to the present day.

By the mid-1970s, a momentum for more radical work with young people was emerging. 1982 saw the publication of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation's report[6] '*The Arts in Schools: Principles, practice and provision*'. It harnessed much of the energy that had been building through the 70s and argued that ACE should push for a revolution in educational policy over the next ten years in order to bring the arts nearer the heart of the curriculum in British schools. The idea of wider access to arts and culture began to emerge and gain traction as a result. This concept of entitlement to the arts – along with the notion that they might act as an accelerant to effective learning – was probably the most enduring idea in shaping the Bridge role [7].

The mid-1980s saw ACE formulate its first discrete education policy. It borrowed from key factors that shaped the thinking of the day; it acknowledged the importance of core skills, tests and exams, keeping in step with the (then) Department of Education and Science. But it also emphasised the broader developmental benefits of the arts, valuing the experiential force they had in young people's lives. This was a significant new engagement with policy and signalled a will to test new ideas and approaches. Such commitment engendered a new era of possibility across the arts sector, which was given a further boost in the early 1990s by the advent of the National Lottery Act, a mechanism which allowed new money to flow to causes and activities that had not traditionally benefitted from government grant-in-aid.

ACE's ability to access Lottery capital in the 1990s and 2000s increased its reach and influence but also marked a shift in the culture of accountability and monitoring. With more money came greater scrutiny. And this scrutiny was an aspect of increasingly corporatist practices shaping modes of management within the public sector. A target of 200,000 extra arts education sessions was introduced in 1997 and in 2008 the regular 'Taking Part' survey was established, collecting a wealth of information on children's arts engagement. One of the lasting impacts of this was the emergence of an operational rhetoric describing forms of arts partnership and educational collaboration which were often managed by contracts focused on pre-determined targets,

6. https://gulbenkian.pt/uk-branch/publications/the-arts-in-schools/
7. The influence of the report is still felt today and recently formed the basis of a series of reflective blogs and roundtables, 40 years on. These reflections have been collected in a final report, revisiting the ideas of the original publication which is highly relevant to the Bridge network's legacy. Written by Sally Bacon and Pauline Tambling, this was published in March 2023 https://www.anewdirection.org.uk/research/the-arts-in-schools

deliverables and KPIs. Some of the paradoxes arising from this – the balance between co-working and partnership versus service delivery and contract fulfilment – would cast a shadow over the Bridge relationship with ACE further down the line. During this period the ambitious and far-reaching Creative Partnerships (CP) programme was launched (2002-2011). This flagship policy for ACE was jointly (but unequally) funded by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), it brokered partnerships between creative professionals, teachers and children to support more creative teaching and learning.

Following on from CP, the nature of the relationship between arts, culture and young people continued as a through line for ACE. It now had relationships with many schools across England which were predicated on the brokering role that shaped much of CP's work, connecting the values, practices and histories of education and culture for the benefit of children.

It was into this context that the Bridge role emerged in 2012.

Following on from Creative Partnerships, the nature of the relationship between arts, culture and young people continued as a through line for Arts Council England.

Early phase (2012-2015)

4. Early phase (2012-2015)

4.1 Change of government and impacts on education

The general election of 2010 ushered in a coalition Conservative-Liberal Democrat government and with it came a raft of austerity policies responding to the economic pressures arising from the banking crisis of 2008. The Coalition committed itself to sweeping school reforms, promising "a breaking open of the state monopoly"[8]. They also pledged to protect school spending and give extra money to the education of the poorest pupils.

By 2014, 57% of secondary schools and one in ten primary schools were academies.

The Coalition did indeed protect school spending. Total expenditure rose from £46.1bn in 2009/10 to £46.6bn in 2013/14 (in real terms in 2009/10 prices) – a rise of 1%. This allowed pupil-teacher and pupil-adult ratios to be maintained. But capital spending fell by 57%.

The pupil premium directed more money to schools with intakes from areas of deprivation. Secondary schools with the highest proportions of pupils from low-income families gained an extra 4.3% of funding in 2012/13 compared to 2009/10, while the least deprived schools lost 2.5%. All types of primary schools gained, especially the most deprived.

The Coalition finally broke up local authority oversight of the state school system. By 2014, 57% of secondary schools and one in ten primary schools were academies. There is no clear evidence to date that academies are either better or worse than the schools they replaced. Ways of managing the new fragmented system are still evolving and presented a key challenge for Bridges. Other reforms have included changes to curriculum and assessment to make them more demanding. Teacher training has been reformed to emphasise school-led, 'on-the-job' training. Results from primary school testing and GCSE exams continued to rise until 2013. However, in 2014 GCSE attainment fell, and socio-economic gaps widened for lower attainers.

4.2 Closure of programmes

In practice, austerity policies meant cutting many of the flagship national programmes that had been developed under New Labour. In the field of arts education this translated to the closure of Creative Partnerships.

Creative Partnerships (CP) was funded by the DCMS and the DfE. It was operated by ACE and via a network of local CP offices. It ran from 2002-2011 and was the biggest and longest running arts and education intervention in the world. The programme aimed to transform learners' experiences

8. Ruth Lupton and Stephanie Thomson's summary paper *"The Coalition's Record on Schools: Policy, Spending and Outcomes 2010-2015"* provides the best overview of education policy during this time, charting the shifts in rhetoric, funding and practice. https://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/CASE/_NEW/PUBLICATIONS/abstract/?index=4578

of schooling, develop practices among artist and creative workers that teachers could co-opt, and assist schools in building cultures that would sustain these creative approaches to support learning.

Creative Partnerships – like the Bridge Network that followed it – operated in England and worked intensively with 2,700 schools, 90,000 teachers and over 1 million young people.

Creative Partnerships made a learning offer for young people via schools which promoted the arts and creativity as forms of understanding which were effective in promoting knowledge, skills and confidence in transferable ways. Those who worked on the programme argued that the cultural offer leveraged methods of interpreting the world and expressing ideas that were the hallmark of artists' work, and which, it was believed, could be taken on by young people in ways that would improve their approach to learning in all subjects. Local CP offices (the majority of which morphed into Bridge Organisations) acted as interfaces between schools and the cultural and creative sector, training, briefing and developing creative professionals to help them better meet the needs of learners. Similarly, they worked with schools to identify and articulate their needs in ways the creative sector could interpret as a working brief.

4.3 Development of the Bridge role

With recent learning and experience of CP still fresh, the first phase of Bridge activity began.

It was characterised by a freedom to innovate and an ambition to be authentically local. There was also a sense of ACE initially trusting local stakeholders to know what was needed. Since many staff who had worked on CP transferred to most Bridge Organisations, it engendered a feeling that they had strong understanding of the task at hand, and therefore were well positioned to work where the energy was. However, with no programmes to deliver in the form of Creative Partnerships or Find Your Talent there was greater focus on Bridges offering Business-to-Business provision in the form of capacity building for artists and educators. Significant funding on direct delivery with children and young people was discouraged in this early phase. And although this situation persisted for some years, different Bridges may have interpreted these edicts more creatively than others, particularly regarding young people in the 18 to 25 age range, giving rise to interesting youth-led work, or major youth consultations influencing local policies or the distribution of PI funding.

Also noteworthy is that the Henley review (2012)[9] took a more inclusive view of arts and culture, which extended beyond

9. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cultural-education-in-england

the traditional ACE footprint. It argued for the incorporation of more diverse work with film, museums and design, for example. On p57, Henley recommended that:

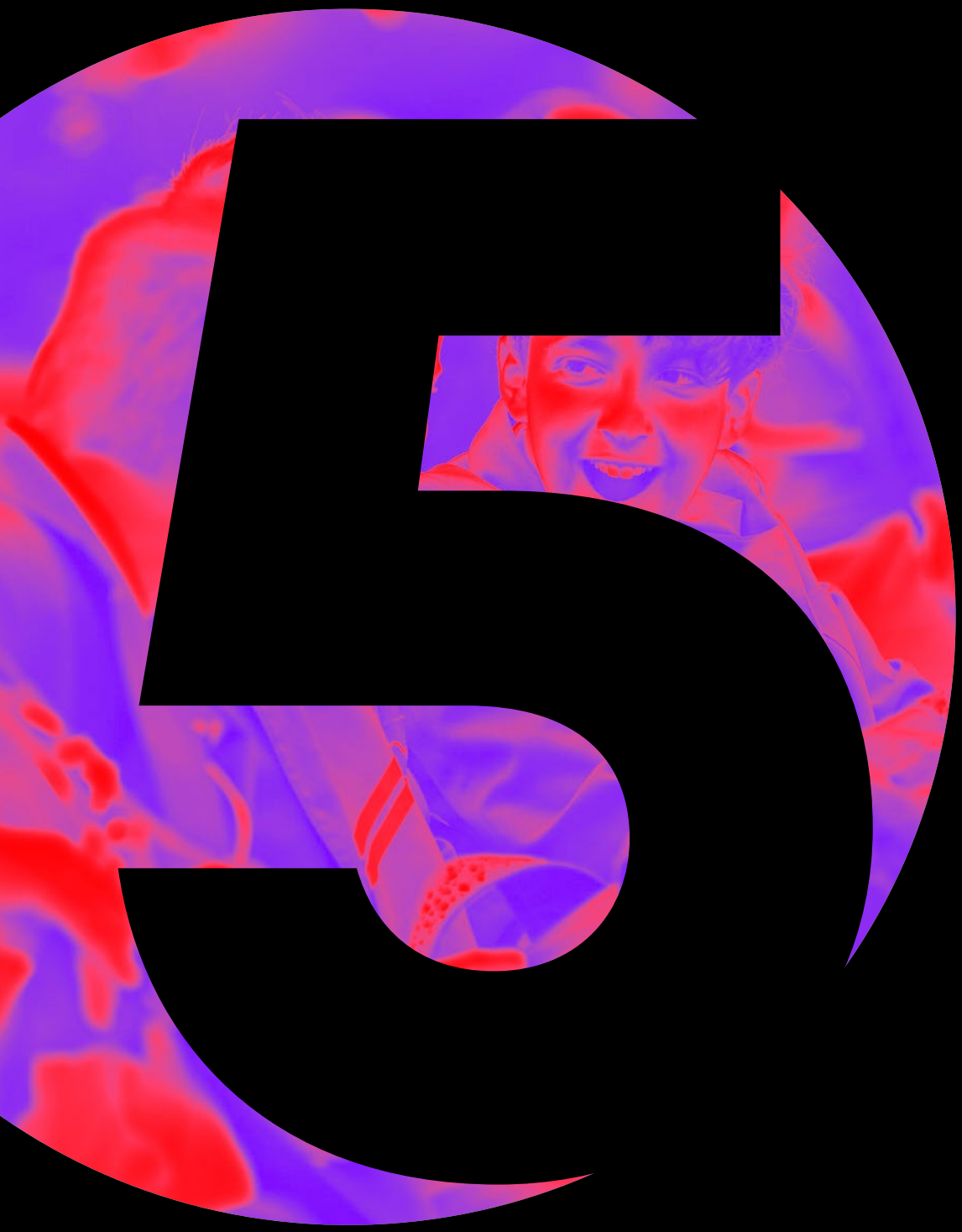
> *"Consideration should now be given to rolling a structure out across the rest of the Cultural Education spectrum, to enable meaningful partnerships on the ground across different art forms and using all of the expertise and venues that are available in a given area. This could be achieved through the further development of ACE's Bridge Organisations, which currently focus on the arts, to include other cultural areas."*

Another factor playing into the way Bridges evolved in this early stage was the outfall of fiscal cuts within the Arts Council itself. It lost 21% of its own workforce and halved the number of executive directors as part of a restructure in response to government demands to cut administrative costs by half. This meant that artform expertise was spread more thinly and played into the feeling that Bridges, at a time when central resources were scarcer, could be left to find their way without too many targets or an overarching strategy [10]. This period also saw the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council merge with ACE (which had the effect of broadening the brief for Bridges around a wider sectoral footprint).

4.4 Growing ACE perceptions of incoherence and too much variety

Towards the end of 2014, there was a growing sense from ACE which circulated among the Bridge Network, one often implied rather than stated, that the initial freedoms and accent on localism had led to perceptions of incoherence overall. The ACE response to this perception would set the tone for much of the middle phase of Bridge work.

10. ACE's 2012 summary of cutbacks was as follows: *"An overall reduction in staff numbers across the organisation of 21 % from 559.5 full time posts to 442 (117.5 posts). Four Executive Directors, reducing from eight, accountable for delivering the Arts Council's overall strategy, with the Chief Executive. Leadership of art form and cultural policy expertise distributed geographically across the organisation. Everyone will have a local and national focus. Property costs will come down by 50 % through reductions in the size of offices. Major offices will be located in London, Birmingham, Manchester and Bristol, plus some smaller local offices to keep the Arts Council close to the arts and cultural sector, and to local government Five areas covering London, the South East, the South West, the Midlands and the North replace the Arts Council's current regions and areas A reduction in the number and size of offices to reduce property costs. Major offices in London, Birmingham, Manchester and Bristol, plus some smaller local offices, such as a Nottingham base in the Midlands, to keep the Arts Council close to the arts and cultural sector."*



Middle phase (2015-2019)

5. Middle phase (2015-2019)

It was determined that Bridges should have more focus. Arts Council England would cement this principally by the introduction of three new elements.

5.1 More detailed role descriptors for Bridges

ACE developed the view that Bridge roles should facilitate other elements within ACE's offer to children and young people, interweaving these national interventions and programmes with the more bespoke localised provision Bridges had hitherto been designing. At the heart of this was the nature of the relationship with schools.

For ACE, schools were key to introducing young people to culture, to driving progression and engagement and to ensuring level access to cultural opportunities. Bridge Organisations would, therefore, be expected to support schools by:

- encouraging engagement in local networks and partnerships targeting Local Cultural Education Partnerships
- encouraging engagement with Music Education Hubs
- supporting schools' engagement with Artsmark and Arts Award
- signposting cultural partners
- providing opportunities to develop and share good practice
- encouraging schools to champion cultural learning, and
- advocating for increases in high quality engagement opportunities.

For ACE, schools were key to introducing young people to culture, to driving progression and engagement and to ensuring level access to cultural opportunities.

Arts Council England's ambition, during this middle phase, was to establish a universal offer to schools but with finite resources. Bridge support would be divided between a universal offer – mainly information sharing/signposting – and a targeted offer – participation and engagement in LCEPs, work with Music Education Hubs, and strategic leadership and engagement. Bridge support for work with schools would focus on LCEPs but not exclusively so, and, where appropriate, could focus on work outside a current Cultural Education Partnership. Artsmark was key in terms of reach and scale – the stretch target at this stage was to reach 50% of all schools in England. The role descriptors comprised the following:

- Encourage school engagement through detailed briefing sessions/surgeries/one-to-one sessions.
- Support cultural organisations, understanding of the education sector and needs of schools, and how Artsmark

can support a quality cultural education offer in schools through briefings and one-to-one support.

- Support cultural organisations to develop a clearly articulated Artsmark offer.
- Delivery of development days (later known as development training) for registered schools.
- Support schools to develop and submit their Statement of Commitment.
- Delivery of peer learning surgeries for Artsmark schools.
- Signpost and connect schools to cultural organisations that could offer support.
- Work with cultural organisations to develop case studies for the Artsmark website showing how they can support schools at the planning stage of their Artsmark journey.
- Link Artsmark to the Cultural Education Challenge.

5.2 Cultural Education Challenge and LCEPs

By 2015, ACE had articulated its view that, within the context of austerity, 'smarter' working nationally, regionally and locally, could foster a nationwide cultural offer made possible by local stakeholders pooling resources and expertise, and which would be sustainable, with little or no additional financial investment.

The Bridge Network was tasked with supporting the Cultural Education Challenge through general advocacy and partnership-building with key local stakeholders. This tied the network to a national campaign (led by ACE in collaboration with DfE) to integrate local capacity and expertise within a long-term nationwide ambition for arts, culture and young people. At the heart of the Cultural Education Challenge were LCEPs. These strategic bodies comprised key local stakeholders drawn from a range of sectors – arts and culture, education and the wider landscape of services and provision for children and young people. The partnerships also represented ACE wrestling with the perennial challenge of bringing strategies of DfE and DCMS closer together. Bridges worked with stakeholders to develop a shared purpose around outcomes for young people and the role arts and culture could play in that process. The aim of LCEPs is to support children and young people to fulfil their creative potential and access high-quality cultural experiences where they live, where they go to school, and where they spend their free time. Partners come together from across sectors, responding to local needs and interests, to drive a more joined-up cultural education offer, share resources, and improve the visibility of cultural education in their local area.

5.3 Artsmark relaunched

Artsmark was relaunched in 2015 after a period of updates and revisions. These revisions played to the strengths of Bridges in many ways. Prior to this Artsmark had primarily been an audit of the volume of provision within a setting, with some attention paid to quality of delivery too. By and large, though, it was almost a census of arts within school, making visible what otherwise might have been hidden and undervalued. To bring Artsmark closer to questions of learning and pedagogy, it was decided that the programme should be more future-facing and revolve around planning for school change. How could the arts contribute to schools' improvement plans? This required some assessment of partnerships with external providers, an understanding of effective commissioning of arts projects, planning for visits and evaluating impact. In all these areas, Bridges had a lot to offer. It was a requirement of ACE that the Bridge Network should form part of the strategy to recruit and support schools wishing to participate, briefing about the potential benefits, but also assisting schools to formulate plans specific to their contexts and needs.

This equated to Bridges allocating staff to run a series of local development days which briefed schools on timelines and processes related to Artsmark, and acting as a critical friend, offering advice and guidance on written submissions drafted by schools.

Late phase (2019-2022)

6. Late phase (2019-2022)

6.1 Revisions to LCEPs' conditions in a time of austerity

By 2019 the LCEPs had been evaluated (by BOP Consulting)[11] and it became clear that without the effective subsidy of Bridge input, to help administrate and hold them together, they would not be able to survive.

> *"Despite this initial intention to complement existing work, the strongest reported barrier for sustained growth and upscaling of LCEP work was future funding – nationally or locally. There was a strong recognition that in time additional funding will be needed to pay for the resources required for this sort of programming, as well as budgets for putting on events. It was suggested that ACE should consider what its future role may be in terms of providing funding or helping to generate further income for the work."*
> *Research into LCEPs, BOP Consulting, 2019 p.18*

It was therefore decided by ACE that Bridge PI funding might be used to facilitate ongoing support for LCEPs. Less emphasis had been placed on this previously, in the belief it would undermine the aim of making existing resources work more effectively. This further imbricated the Bridge Network within the proliferating number of LCEPs across England, but now wearing two hats – as both supporters and funders. This was a challenging balance to strike.

The additional stipulations surrounding PI were designed to discourage project funding and to build sustainable groups with a clear strategy. It was suggested that initiatives should be led by an LCEP in the same region the Bridge was situated within. LCEPs would apply for at least £25,000. And LCEPs were required, initially, to have at least 100% matched funding from non-arts, non-lottery sources[12].

ACE agreed to accept full applications without matched funding being in place. However, acceptable forms of matched funding generally did have to be in place prior to drawing down PI. Since PI was funded using ACE money, LCEP initiatives were required by Bridges to make use of Artsmark, Arts Award and ACE's Quality Principles as appropriate. LCEP initiatives also needed to run for more than one year, encouraging a longer-term view and sustainable outcomes.

With this additional guidance and direction in place, there was still some leeway for local needs to determine modified funding rubrics. For example, in the case of the south west of England and the Real Ideas Organisation (RiO), PI had always been run in a more socially enterprising way. The Real Ideas

11. https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/BOP_LCEP_Research_190717_0.pdf
12. Some latitude around match funding did emerge, depending on the uses PI was put to, e.g. transition or resilience funding didn't require it.

Organisation had invested in new models and partnerships that had longer-term potential to be self-sustaining, using PI as leverage rather than match. The Real Ideas Organisation partnered with ACE in the South-West, which felt the model was right for local needs. When the guideline to focus more directly on LCEPs (with PI) appeared, RiO continued to use their social enterprise framing but simply introduced additional scrutiny/emphasis on the work and models emerging, connecting those to established local partnerships with sustainable futures. Some LCEPs in south-west England received investment via this route (where their work or model fitted) but many others did not and RiO worked with them in other ways.

6.2 Covid and the rapid response of Bridges

The final phase of Bridge work also coincided with the arrival of the Covid pandemic and the various public health responses to it. The most impactful were several school lockdowns which limited school attendance for the majority of (although not all) young people. Being unable to directly access school and its resources had a limiting effect on arts and cultural opportunities for young people, which was offset by actions the Bridge Network took.

Bridge Organisations contributed to the development of appropriate resources. Many Bridges were engaged in local-level activity linked to urgent direct support and these ways of working and forms of provision were rapidly consolidated because of the way Bridges were networked. ACE quickly saw the value in this and were supportive, allocating further resources which led to further development and grew into the nationally recognised Let's Create packs. The Crafts Council and other partners also extended this work too (with Let's Craft packs). This represented a genuinely collective push where all players contributed depending on how and where they sat in the system and what they were able to bring to the table.

> ***Bridges helped ensure that more children, regardless of their background, had the resources for creativity and exploration of the arts to continue at home.***

The final version of the Let's Create packs provided art materials and accessible activities that didn't need specialist equipment or teaching at a time when schools were closed to most pupils. By circulating these packs to children and families across England, Bridges helped ensure that more children, regardless of their background, had the resources for creativity and exploration of the arts to continue at home.

The evaluation of Let's Create suggested that Bridges achieved significant impacts for children and families. Children described themselves as "happy" using the packs and thinking of what they could do with them. There were few suggestions for improvements. Packs had given children

and families something to do during lockdowns, and were a good, alternative activity when children found schoolwork challenging. There was variation across the families in the research between those who usually had arts materials at home and others who did not. However, the varied contents of the packs suggests that they did extend the experience and opportunities for young people and children, including those who already had access to creative materials. The packs played a wider role in helping parents and carers manage family life during lockdown.

It's also important to keep in mind how unlike much of the sector Bridges were during the peak of Covid disruptions. In contrast to a largely furloughed cultural sector, Bridges were active, working rapidly and very effectively as a national network. They rose to new challenges and went over and above to support schools, particularly as they navigated ways to keep a broad and balanced curriculum offer on the go through digital means.

Bridges also assisted cultural sector organisations during Covid, offering an array of business and governance advice, digital connection and content, running webinars and support sessions for arts organisations, many of which were small and often isolated. This enabled children and young people in real need to have continued access to the capacity to make and create which increasingly came to be acknowledged as vital for wellbeing and positive mental health.

In addition to this, Bridges ran awareness-raising, solution-focused sessions that were attended by many hundreds of people from the education and cultural sectors across the country. These covered a range of timely topics, including conversion to digital forms of working, and connecting teachers still working in schools to share practice and to provide peer support. Throughout the pandemic, Bridges continued to act as a focal point for support and connection, serving as a waypoint for other professionals working with young people and the arts. For example, Royal Opera House undertook a rapid survey[13] of 529 teachers during July 2020, and this provided the cultural sector with insights to help their planning for engagement with schools during lockdowns.

Covid may have been disruptive and damaging for the country in many ways, but at the same time it illustrated some of the advantages of a national network focused on arts, culture and education. It shed light on the ways such a network can fill gaps and get into spaces that would otherwise lie dormant. And it enabled national remits to be fulfilled in a time of real crisis via a whole host of diverse local connections appropriate to each place (from food banks to school dinner services, community organisations to businesses etc). This

13. https://static.roh.org.uk/learning/bridge/National-Schools-Survey-Summary-of-findings.pdf?

reminded us just how rapidly Bridges could work to bring benefits directly to young people in short order.

What might have happened without a national network during that time is impossible to say in a definitive sense but we can speculate that it would very likely have been more piecemeal, with less pace, sporadic focus, and consequently offered less amplification and connection overall.

Bridge ways of working

7. Bridge ways of working

As we have already seen, the Bridge role emerged out of prior policies, working histories and the phases of work outlined above. Many of the CEOs and directors delivering Bridge functions were products of this interconnected history, developing an ethos and skills rooted in varied forms of socially engaged practice.

7.1 Histories of socially engaged practice

The linking of education to art and broader notions of culture is not new. The concept of education has been intertwined with cultural processes of transmission and the establishment of a citizenry for millennia.

States began to 'own' public education through a variety of means in pursuit of this formative role, championing the transmission of values and desired skills, which primarily took the form of nationwide schooling systems. In this way, the education system became a player in processes of socialisation that previously may have been more associated more with family and community.

Alongside this emphasis on socialisation into wider norms, the contrasting idea of education as a process of cultural, social and self-transformation has also grown. This is a fault-line well known to academics and policymakers. Education is as much a potential driver for change and emancipation as it is for inculcation of societal norms and expectations. Paulo Freire's work is perhaps the best example of this notion of education as an emancipatory force for change.

This contestation at the heart of state education, as both a process of formation and transformation, has been fraught with tensions as to its core purpose:

- the tension between educating young people to maintain social order and creating an informed public citizenry with the capacity to reform;
- the tension between education's role in conserving accepted traditions and its role in promoting radical thinking and new paradigms;
- the tension between education's task in fulfilling private interests – such as the skills needed by a modern economy – and its place in serving the common good, including promoting public health, reduction of inequality and the provision of basic services;
- the tension between high quality education being available for all and the reality of exclusions, variability and more

limited accessibility for disadvantaged communities.

During the years the Bridge role was enacted, many of these tensions have become heightened, largely due to educational reform during a period of increasingly globalised economic interests. Consequently, the idea that education – even creative and arts education – should serve a mainly economic function has come to dominate policy and discourse.

Bridges were led by often charismatic and very committed operators who had developed values and beliefs around education that had a good deal of sympathy for its more transformative potential. Post 2010, when state education through the arts was being challenged by shifts to policy, and with more overt emphasis on education serving the needs of the marketplace and labour force, it is no surprise that Bridge work was often characterised by forms of push back.

If communities do not have a voice in public education, then there is a danger that the people served by public education will only include those that fit narrow images of the citizen and ethnic minorities, refugees, economically disadvantaged or disabled people will be further marginalised.

Another challenge concerns the *scope* of public education within these current global trends. That is, *who* is served by state education? and to what degree is education truly public? If communities do not have a voice in public education, then there is a danger that the people served by public education will only include those that fit narrow images of the citizen and ethnic minorities, refugees, economically disadvantaged or disabled people will be further marginalised. It is the voice of the marginalised that is most at risk of not being heard within dominant claims to public education, particularly when those claims are being governed by an *instrumental* value of education: a cultural transmission model narrowly defined by its usefulness to the economy. Again, the Bridge ethos operated in ways that challenged this tendency and worked to support community involvement wherever possible.

Thus, the Bridge Network, during a time when state education was being divested of its cultural aim of *transformation*, acted to uphold that element, enabling the more generative, creative side of renewal, ambition and self-actualisation.

What the Bridge role was undoubtedly contributing to is a thorough rethinking of education as a *cultural* claim that is both inclusive of diverse communities and transformative in its practices.

It developed out of a history that was located within the Bridge Network itself, a combination of the personal working histories and philosophies of experienced Bridge staff and wrestled with many of the issues described above. Socially engaged art and cultural practices are forms of contemporary practice that play a significant role in the realignment of educational spaces and artistic projects. They invite a new category of collaboration, which retain a feel of being experimental pedagogies. These collaborative projects work with, against

and within various educational spaces, challenging and revitalising the pedagogical traditions upon which they rest.

Such projects often unintentionally privilege art over education: the idea that art is given to be seen by others, while education has no image or agency. Bridges helped push against this tendency by keeping an eye on the 'dual horizon'. They reminded us that it is important, in exploring the cultural and aesthetical dimensions of education, not to turn education into art, or art into education. We should instead engage in the imaginative spaces that can be created in bringing socially engaged art practice into conversation with educational practice— specifically with the task of renewal of and creativity with tradition and conventional ways of being in the world." With "emphasising that learning is an active process young people engage in rather than a set of reductive facts, knowledge and outputs to be delivered".

7.2 How Bridges developed new capacity among partners rooted in socially engaged practice

There were significant similarities between the ten organisations and the way they interpreted the Bridge role.

All developed a strong, clear narrative that described the Bridge approach, which over time grew into 'theories of change' in relation to their work. The extent to which these were formalised and set down for public interpretation did vary – but in interviews and discussion the nature and type of change sought was coherent and focused.

- A commitment to education as transformation, making specific change and targeted development happen that supported such aims.
- A commitment to equity and social justice through their ways of working and consultation with young people.
- A commitment to quality of practice made tangible and describable through the narratives and theories of change mentioned above.

All had independent-minded leaders, who were experienced in the arts and cultural sector, but also brought expertise from education, social policy, local regeneration and wider industry. As a group they were effective navigators of policy, often finding the most productive spaces to make things happen.

They worked in and through strong, mutually compatible local, regional and national networks (arts, education, regeneration, etc), although these networks were mobilised in a range of different ways to achieve different ends, depending on local contexts and Bridge staff expertise.

All ten organisations conceived of the Bridge role as a contract that supported all of the above.

This allowed Bridges to both deliver high-level objectives related to LCEPs and Artsmark, while also working in pockets and spaces that were out of the ordinary, and often difficult to reach.

Bridges were particularly adept at understanding their locality and best methodologies for working with children and young people. They knew the agencies to co-create with, the activities that would reach the hardest to reach, and the venues to stage events and engagement opportunities.

Bridges also understood the tension between work in this field as reproduction, versus transformation. This awareness helped them find solutions and workarounds, but never eradicated the issue entirely. For example, LCEPs often came to be used as a shorthand for Bridge work. Arts Council England set agendas through LCEPs, driving national aims through the network. Sometimes these risked abstracted forms of policy-speak dominating planning and goal-setting. Local stakeholders would often be left wondering 'what's in it for me?' Bridges rebalanced this, operating with a deeper understanding of partners' priorities and reinterpreting national policy into local practice.

What Bridges had in common, therefore, was the capacity for work at scale and reach fused with depth, innovation, authenticity, quality and cost-effectiveness. They were also able to translate large-scale ambitions into smaller, relatable process with clear benefits for local participants – probably the best examples being their local mediation of big national interventions such as LCEPs, Artsmark and Arts Award.

From ACE's perspective there persisted an impression that the Bridges were varied and, in many ways, dissimilar; differently constituted, some with a range of work additional to Bridge, others focusing largely on Bridge work alone.

Key differences across the Bridges can be summarised as follows:

- Bridges' specific motivations and operations were driven by local need and therefore not always the same. All places and locations had differences and so Bridges reflected that.
- All were people-centred and place-centred and therefore, were heterogeneous. The closer to the ground Bridge work got, the more unique it could appear to be. Since all people and places were different, all Bridges worked to honour that specificity in their approaches and ethos.
- Bridges worked through existing infrastructure in different ways – Bridge staff, particularly senior leaders, brought with them a range of different strategic connections, they also had their own specific takes on the system, which led

to different jumping on and jumping off points for projects and partnerships, plus a more nuanced feel for their local contexts. On balance, most partnered with stakeholders from local education or community or economy, or a mix of all three, but their starting points, and key partners often differed.

- The extent to which Bridge functions were integrated within organisations varied. For some Bridges the role was core to their identity and function. For others it was a stream of work, or discrete contract. As a result the extent to which Bridge 'business plans' overlapped with wider organisational schemes and strategies also varied.
- It is also worth noting that – perhaps as a by-product of the variations already mentioned above – there were noticeable differences of approach to questions of sectoral politics, branding and general public positioning. This led to some differences in communications and positions adopted which depicted what Bridges were seeking to achieve through their activities. All of which may have been necessary and authentic to local contexts, while simultaneously reinforcing the ACE perception of variegation.

Implications of varied practice

8. Implications of varied practice on clarity of roles and effective local delivery

We noted above that a set of Bridge role descriptors was devised by ACE in 2015 and that these were updated in 2018. This was an attempt by ACE to manage the perceived vagaries that existed between Bridges, to build a sense of common purpose (although arguably one was developing then anyway), and to extend the reach of significant ACE agendas by way of a more coordinated 'push' through the network. However, the balance to be struck with this form of centralisation is the extent to which it is conducive to, or works against, the level of localism the ten organisations delivering Bridge functions were aiming for. Unsurprisingly, despite the core elements of Artsmark, Arts Award and LCEPs providing a common spine to Bridge work, there continued to be significant variety. This was evident in terms of organisational governance, business models, characteristics of local need, and diversity of additional work portfolios (beyond Bridge), so there remained questions about the relationship between Bridges and ACE over the entire near decade they existed.

This speaks to several recurring tensions that sometimes resolved productively, and at other times continued to foment doubts and confusion between ACE and the Bridges.

For example, it was not clear to Bridges how close they were to the centre in terms of shaping policy and the ACE agenda for children and young people – as opposed to being service providers – tasked with straightforwardly delivering third-party priorities through processes they had little or no role in developing.

This is significant because we know from other evaluations – such as the recent Great Place Programme (also funded by ACE)[14] – that embracing local context is the essential start point for effective local partnerships and practice.

Therefore, if it is a national ambition for arts and culture to be more fully embedded in local policies and to be a feature of local places, it needs to be in the reckoning of relevant processes and initiatives from the very start. And since contexts vary according to place, flexibility for organisations operating in the Bridge space – e.g., to fund different activities using different models – would probably be advantageous. Where the arts are not on the inside of local strategies for place-making, realising impact takes much longer and is more difficult to achieve. Conversely, where local organisations are

14. https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/great-place-programme-evaluation-final-report

empowered to build relationships and networks across local government and businesses, putting culture at the heart of strategies has been much more easily achieved.

From the Bridge perspective, it can be argued that the balance between ACE strategising and creating conditions necessary for effective local delivery was not always perfectly struck. The Bridges wanted to see their local understanding of what worked feed into higher-level policy-making. ACE would probably assert that the forum for an exchange of ideas was always open in the form of regularly recurring meetings for Bridge CEOs or for staff assigned to specific programmes, such as Artsmark. Yet often these gatherings felt to Bridges to be heavily procedural and transactional rather than generative and truly collaborative. Also, as a national body, ACE were perhaps caught in a dynamic of push-me-pull-you as it sought to balance the interests of important national alliances formed with, for example, the DfE and the more 'family' ethos underpinning Bridge Organisations that helped turn strategy into practice closer to the ground.

For all these challenges, there were identifiable shared characteristics to work that developed across the Bridge Network. This is evident in the evaluation reports and operational documents (appendix 4) submitted prior to interviews. As a primer they helped shape the type of discussion points covered in interviews, but they also give a good flavour of how through local partnerships and important 'business-to-business' advice, guidance, connectivity and capacity-building, the Bridges built repertoires of practice that had some common features:

Bridges worked in ways which were always rooted in authenticity.

1) The first thing to make clear is that Bridges worked in ways which were always rooted in authenticity. In this respect their work – whether with arts organisations, in school or in the wider community – was always identifiably part of the world its participants were navigating and orienting themselves within, and focused on providing improvements to it, or solutions to real issues they faced. In keeping with this, Bridges were also committed to understanding and sharing among project/partnership participants the key features of domains that often merged through their work. A key part of their role was to act as interpreter and translator, and to build a shared discourse that allowed partners to find common ground.

2) Bridges worked in ways that valued the social aspects of the arts. That is, they sought to build capacity to work with and through the arts and culture by prioritising the ways in which people live together and find their place within a community. Partners who worked with Bridges often commented in evaluations about the ways in which the Bridge work had supported participants to gain confidence. However, the

prevalence of this observation and its reoccurrence across all Bridges suggests it is more than mere coincidence. Bridges promoted dispositions through types of action – events, meetings, activities, associations, peer conversations, group reflection – which allowed adults, children and young people to gain a new embodied understanding of who they were, what they could do now and into the future – what amounted to a step change, or culture shift for some.

3) Bridges intervened in ways that enabled inclusion. One of the most notable things within the Bridges pre-reading and interview data, was that inclusion was defined widely and taken seriously. Bridges brought the view to partnership-building that all participants could have ideas and participate fully. For example, their varied work with Special Schools, Virtual Schools and Alternative Provision helped ACE expand the Artsmark offer significantly. Bridges pursued open-ended and exploratory modes of working, and because they made explicit that there would be a range of ways in which educators, arts professionals and young people could participate, nothing was either right or wrong. There was no one way better than another and doing the very best that you could was all that was required.

4) Bridges emphasised the importance of choice and agency. Most of the activities that Bridges invested in directly or indirectly created more opportunities for young people to make meaningful choices in and through the arts. They encouraged teachers and young people to negotiate and co-design activities, to prioritise 'voice' and a consideration of alternatives, preferences and needs. This was a direct 'take' from their own Bridge practices and prior histories, where a common working practice was to explore the possibilities of a multitude of ideas before one or a small number were chosen to develop further.

5) Bridges built capacity by embracing the challenge of scale and ambition. Bridge interventions fostered a sense of lasting ambition among young people and the professionals who worked with them. Through partnerships the Bridges supported, young people were encouraged to aim high on aspirational projects, often culminating in public performances or sharing work in commercial exhibition spaces. The importance of enabling ambition, to be centre stage, and to develop the necessary skills and knowledge to achieve this, was the foundation for many young people to shape a new sense of what was possible and what might come next.

6) Bridges understood that an important part of their role was to act directly as advocates for the potential of arts, culture and creative ways of working or to facilitate others to do so.

For example, some Bridges created spaces for policy-level conversations where teachers could speak truth to power. These included, for example, events convened by Royal Opera House where Amanda Spielman discussed the power of cultural capital with senior education leaders. Or The Thriving Child conference which filled the Royal Opera House Linbury Theatre with an audience comprising education and cultural sector colleagues, livestreamed to many other venues across the country.

While the content of programmes run by Bridges often varied from region to region – the obvious common deliverables of LCEPs, Arts Award and Artsmark notwithstanding – there was a core set of shared values and common features to their practice that helped balance national interests, local demands and programme coherence very effectively. However local needs were met, however bespoke the offer, or however centralised, the ethos and values that underpinned the work were both coherent and fulfilled a remit that had not easily been covered by others working in this space in the past (nor, arguably, will it be in the future).

Bridge impacts and effects

9. Bridge impacts and effects

9.1 Developing effective partnership-working between artists and schools

Interviews with Bridge CEOs and staff suggested that the spaces they feel they influenced most were those intersections between formal education or training and cultural events and arts experiences. One of the key differences Bridges made in this space was to help educators and artists understand their respective talents and affordances, and how to get the best from each through partnership-working.

Bridges understood that differences between artists and teachers stem from their respective positions and the values, philosophies, expectations and roles associated with these.

For example, teachers, because of their position within the institutional context of school, work in line with national policy, and wider institutional interpretations of policy and educational purposes, such as those of Ofsted for example. They have ongoing responsibilities for ensuring that children meet mandated curriculum outcomes. This necessarily defines and limits what they can do (or feel they can do). While it is easy to suggest, for example, that no rule forbids teachers from adopting a creative approach to learning (as artists often do instinctively), it is difficult to see how this might happen in a context where national and international policy frames learning in ways that prioritise transmission and transferal of facts over processes of exploration, trial and error, self-direction and so forth. Bridges helped educators more fully exploit the potential of creative pedagogy, often in ways that maintained interest in other pressing agendas too (attainment, expertise, mastery etc).

Artists and creative professionals operate in education settings as interlopers (at least initially). Even where they work in residency, they do so as transitory change-makers that offer something different to the norm. For this reason, there will always be a role for artists to play in schools, as their positions is not the same as that of a teacher.

The work of Bridges has been to remind educators and artists that while their practices differ and their framing and purpose might vary too, they can work productively together with shared goals in the interests of children and young people. This leads to better planning and inception for projects. As well as improved understanding of both the limits and potential of available resources within schools and other settings, and more sustainable professional learning from co-teaching and joint reflection.

9.2 Fostering aspiration and ambition – the importance of choice and agency

Bridges negotiated activities and framed the context for good partnership-working. This meant that artists and creative practitioners were enabled to work with educators in ways that developed the 'empowerment' of young people. Learners were invited to be active and expected to exercise their agency, stretch their idea of their own capacities and purposes.

There are many examples of wider provision from Bridge Organisations which illustrate this fostering of ambition and choice, including Real Ideas Organisation's programmes of youth support in the South West. Compass, for example, is aimed at 15- to 24-year-olds living in Cornwall who are unemployed. The programme gives individuals the opportunity to engage in experiences where the focus is on skills development and linked to the themes of digital, creative, food or environment. Another example is the work by the Mighty Creatives in the East Midlands, focused on Creative Futures. It includes The Mighty Employers Network, a group of like-minded organisations committed to helping young people aged 16 to 25 years old in vulnerable circumstances to find productive work and careers best suited to their individual talents.

Artists and creative practitioners were enabled to work with educators in ways that developed the 'empowerment' of young people.

9.3 Wellbeing and positive disposition to self

Linked to the idea of empowerment, but distinct from it, is the concept of wellbeing and in particular the process of developing a positive disposition to oneself in the context of learning and school. In the current parlance of education and child development the best shorthand theory to describe this is probably Carol Dweck's thinking on the 'growth mindset'. Considering the body of projects and interventions Bridges worked on over their near decade in operation, the importance of wellbeing and encouraging a 'can do' attitude is a recurring feature. This element especially came to the fore during the pandemic. Amplify[15], a youth voice collaboration between the Bridge Organisations, took place in 2021 and is a particularly strong example. It demonstrated the practice and power of youth voice in creative, cultural, youth and educational settings, becoming a resource for organisations looking to develop their knowledge of how youth voice can be embedded into their work and the creative and cultural industries. Amplify released bi-weekly film and audio content, showing the impact of youth voice in organisations across the country. For example, the first film focused on wellbeing, showcasing how organisations in Leicester and Kent support the mental health and wellbeing of the young people they work with, alongside using youth voice to create positive

15. https://www.amplify-voice.uk/about

change. Similarly, IVE's recent practitioner 'labs' which were focused on mental health and wellbeing, assisted creative and cultural professional to reorient their approach to young people and schools in terms of mental health. The labs equipped participants with a practical understanding to embed within creative practice and a sharper discourse with which to articulate how your practice nurtures good mental health and better outcomes for young people. The labs explored:

- **What is 'wellbeing' anyway?** A clear definition of the competencies and skills that children need to thrive, so you can respond meaningfully to the wider context and agenda around young mental health.
- **'Therapeutic impact' vs 'therapy.'** How to maximise your impact in terms of wellbeing outcomes, while not working (or trying to work) therapeutically.
- **Your own emotional states.** Understanding your own wellbeing and the interactive nature of emotions.
- **Planning for and measuring outcomes.** The basics of behavioural and attitudinal change, managing expectations and introducing simple tools to evaluate the impact of your practice.
- **Developing your practice.** Time to reflect on your own practice and ways in which you can support children and young people's wellbeing.

9.4 Building local strategy and vision

Bridges made significant contributions to shaping local cultural strategy, particularly within the context of education. They served as critical friends in important exploratory conversations that involved healthcare professionals, educators, councillors, artists, local business leaders, and many others. Perhaps the best example of this was their involvement at the heart of LCEPs, which have proliferated in number over the last eight years. For example, through PI, Artswork supported the development of innovative models of delivery, including:

Clinical Commissioning Groups.
Partnership Investment with the NHS Hastings and Rother Clinical Commissioning Group 'Reducing Health Inequalities Fund'. Artswork investment significantly raised the profile of high-quality arts and culture as an effective driver for meeting the outcomes of this scheme for children and young people. It led to the first-time involvement in the fund of 22 schools and further education providers, the majority of which are situated in the DfE Opportunity Area of Hastings.

Child adolescent and mental health services (CAMHS).
The ICE programme was developed and led by Hampshire Cultural Trust's Better Life Chances team and Hampshire CAMHS. ICE: Inspire // Create // Exchange is addressing and exploring important mental health issues with young people using high-quality arts and culture. The programme will measure impact, share positive outcomes and, in doing so, seek to influence organisational change.

Housing trusts.
Partnership Investment with Thames Valley Housing Association to support the Slough Cultural Education Partnership priorities to address:

- lack of support to find career paths into the creative sector
- lack of opportunities to support children and young people that suffer from mental health issues.

Additionally, and prompted by an existing PI between Norfolk and Norwich Festival and Clarion Housing (CH), a number of Bridges explored a potential national PI. It would look to deliver a national arts/culture-orientated version of Clarion's Community Ambassador Programme, which would be aligned to LCEP areas in which CH has a strong presence.

Police and crime commissioners.
The Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) for Hampshire and Isle of Wight developed a new strategic relationship with Artswork through a co-investment programme in the arts and youth justice. The programme aimed to realise a number of OPCC objectives, including reducing antisocial behaviour and youth offending rates through sustainable high-quality arts and cultural programmes.

9.5 Extending and improving the quality of youth voice

With the example of Amplify above, we see how Bridges effectively mobilised youth voice as a means of achieving better wellbeing for young people. However, there is an important element to youth voice work which is straightforwardly about access and representation (aside from any specific outcomes that may lead to). And here too, Bridges have made a significant contribution.

There was a shared understanding across Bridges that children and young people need to be involved, not just as passive recipients of work, but also within initial planning and operating models. This was particularly evident within the context of LCEPs.

The Croydon Cultural Education Partnership was formally established in 2016 following extensive consultation with

children and young people. This research and development phase was integral to the establishment of this LCEP, laying the groundwork upon which important work could develop.

The first stage of the consultation began with a call-out across the borough, working with over 100 young people, both in person and online, to find out about their views on Croydon's youth arts provision and what they wanted. A report was produced based on these findings and a group of 10 young people self-selected themselves to continue this work and be a mechanism through which youth voice could be represented in decision-making. This group formalised themselves as the Croydon Youth Arts Collective (CYAC) with support from Croydon Council, and began a second stage of consultation: to design and deliver youth focus groups in seven very different settings to explore barriers to youth arts participation. From this, a second report was produced.

This research phase enabled an evidence base that an adult strategy group could begin finding solutions to, and so the LCEP was brought together. With the formation of CYAC, this also meant that youth voice could be present both around the table at meetings and in the themes and findings that were being reviewed and responded to.

Cheshire West and Chester LCEP avoided 'token roles' for children and young people on their steering group. Instead, they took a place-based approach. Rather than one person representing all children and young people, they went to the areas and spoke with them there. This helped ensure local cultural organisations within the LCEP engaged children and young people in the decision-making process – i.e. it was devolved to organisations and members but strongly supported by the LCEP.

Young people wanted a decent salary and a clear trajectory.

Nonsuch Studios and Nottingham LCEP commissioned youth engagement trends research which involved listening to young people about what they considered was cultural engagement. The top ten activities did not include music or reading, but did include drama, dance, YouTubing and other traditionally 'cultural' things. Most activity was aligned to opportunities already available to schools and non-formal settings. Young people also seemed to place great emphasis on skills. They wanted products and platforms, the process side was less visible to them. There was also a big emphasis on careers. Young people wanted a decent salary and a clear trajectory. In this sense they questioned whether art is a nice thing to do or good job to have. There was also a recognition of the likelihood of portfolio careers and their needs in this regard – they were aware of the fracturing job market and the threats of automation. Bridges helped to consider how a local cultural offer could be made in relation to this feedback.

Artswork ran a programme of youth engagement across six LCEPs, called Future Views. They worked with Norfolk and Norwich Festival and Royal Opera House Bridges to develop the programme which was run by Flow Associates. Future Views was a forward-thinking research project imagining the future of cultural learning.

Young people were invited to work alongside local cultural leaders to draw out shared concerns, insights and dreams. The collaboration encouraged adults to be more open-minded and playful, while young participants were supported to explore positive and constructive paths. Imagination is an essential skill for thinking about the future, so the collaboration between young people and cultural sector partners drew on techniques developed in the design world to open up ideas, focus on impact, develop future scenarios, and define possible actions. It took the form of a game, with three levels that go forward in time, based on the questions of the Future Views enquiry. The workshops ended with the participants re-arranging themselves into two groups with shared concerns, most often adults vs young people. Each group wrote a message to send back through time to the other, with a request for action towards a positive future.

In the summer of 2017, Grimm & Co – lead partner in Rotherham LCEP – launched the Embassy for Reimagining Rotherham (ERR). This project involved 30 local children and young people creating a manifesto that outlined their vision for Rotherham – the town, the culture, and education. As part of Rotherham LCEP's desire to consult with local young people about their cultural education – and inspired by the Ministry of Stories' Children's Republic of Shoreditch project – Grimm & Co ran an intensive three weeks of participatory, child-led workshops. These workshops saw young people drafting, debating and refining their vision for Rotherham's future, focusing on children's needs with regards to arts and culture, education, personal growth, and place and space. They created a model town that illustrated their ideas for Rotherham, designing the brand and identity of ERR in collaboration with design studio Side By Side.

Side By Side then transformed a vacant shop in Rotherham town centre into the Embassy – a base from which the young participants consulted with local people about their views on the town, before presenting their finalised manifesto to an invited group of VIPs, including town councillors, members of RCEP, and other key change-makers from Rotherham and beyond. The ERR manifesto was published as a high-quality booklet at the end of September 2017, when it was debuted at a special evening event. At this event the young people who

participated in the project introduced both the manifesto and a short film about the project, before answering questions from invited VIPs. The manifesto fed into RCEP's plans – and it is hoped it will continue to have an impact on the town councillors, architects, key local retail figures, and others who attended ERR events.

9.6 Developing the workforce – professional identity, discourse and skills

Bridges have also been active in helping teachers and artists reflect on their respective ways of working and sharpening their own practice. Much of this work is driven by deep conversations about the process of learning and how creating ideas or products might be a strong enabler of learning.

Culture Bridge North East and the Newcastle University Educational Leadership Centre offer the Cultural Leadership in Education programme, which is designed to develop the knowledge and skills educators will need to lead the cultural offer in their schools. The programme – led by a cultural arts practitioner and a facilitator with school leadership expertise – features six online modules (4pm to 5.30pm). Alongside the sessions, a small-scale project in school is run and used as a focus for reflection and discussion. Elements include:

- understanding yourself as leader within your context
- what is culture?
- vision and values
- myself as a leader
- current state of practice in my school
- evaluating the appetite for change and innovation
- the leadership landscape and context
- comparing lenses (education and cultural sector)
- national policy
- Quality Principles
- research and theory
- regional opportunities
- cultural capital
- Ofsted framework
- curriculum leverage
- effective partnership and networking
- exploring effective partnership-working
- making the most of networks
- working with cultural partners

- working with schools, developing strategic partnerships, an understanding of arts and culture across the region
- a focus on outcomes
- support and guidance and opportunity to share progress so far and ideas for 'creative outcome'.
- expertise in digital communication and in creating and engaging digital content
- participants also give clear intended outcomes but choice of format E.g. powerful practice posters, VLOG, blog options
- leading change part 1
- building resilience and trust
- dealing with resistance
- managing up
- strategies for leading change
- leading change part 2
- having difficult conversations
- leading *diverse* teams.

Such professional development programmes have proliferated through Bridges, some in collaboration with universities, others in the form of summer schools at cultural venues. They have been very successful in carving out space for teachers to critically engage with questions of cultural value and educational ethos, as well as day-to-day practice and pedagogy.

Other Bridges operated through slightly different means and approaches. For example, Arts Connect deployed bursaries which gave nascent arts organisations the support to manage their growth and develop new practice. This approach led Linden Dance Company to grow their eight-year ad hoc collaboration into an actual company and firm up loose aspirations for the local dance sector into a more robust vision and mission with associated longer-term goals. As a consequence, Linden developed its own youth company which continues to run successfully. Linden was also invited to apply for the Arts Connect leadership course, which further inspired them to keep driving for change within the sector. It provided key staff with understanding and training to support aspirations to grow and reshape the dance sector, offering young people ways to better take care of themselves in a competitive industry. This led to deeper participation in the Dance Development Leaders Group Steering Group.

9.7 Recruitment to and support for Artsmark

After its relaunch in 2015, Artsmark became an integral part of Bridge responsibilities. Bridge Organisations offered a means of recruiting schools locally and hosting important development days (later referred to as development training), which enabled schools to organise their thoughts, plan for their Artsmark journey and draft their route map: the statement of commitment.

Development days usually comprised a session which focused on:

- clarity around motivation for becoming an Artsmark school
- mapping current arts and cultural provision
- identifying key priorities in school improvement plans which Artsmark could support
- using the self-assessment framework to identify current strengths and areas for development.

Feedback from teachers across the Bridge Network was overwhelmingly positive:

> *"...we were guided through the Artsmark process and encouraged to think critically about our aims for the arts in our school. By the end of the day, we had built up a clear picture of what we needed to do to improve our arts provision and compiled a bank of resources that I was able to draw upon when writing our 'Statement of Commitment." Class teacher, London.*

The number of settings actively enrolled with Artsmark since 2015 has been a very healthy 19-20% of all schools in England. Arguably a more realistic target than the 50% of schools ACE was keen to pursue originally.

9.8 Insider/outsider dynamism and the capacity to 'make things happen'.

A notable feature of Bridge Organisations and the network overall was its ability to think and speak strategically, but also pivot into a more active mode, working closely with partners to get new work going and with the clarity required to sustain that early momentum.

This is vitally important when working at the interface between education and arts. Building conditions under which these sectors can work together productively is complex, but Bridges built capacity through their core staff and associate workforces that helped them to hit the ground running.

One of the most of important elements of Bridge work was change management, helping schools, young people, cultural organisations and communities engage with processes,

driven by arts and culture, that would lead to new ways of working and learning. Part of this capacity was a professed understanding of how to make things happen in schools. Most Bridges constructed themselves as organisations with a high degree of 'native' intelligence – an ability to listen to teachers 'to know their way around', 'to understand what was possible'.

Bridges understood how to reach schools, to mobilise the key decision-makers and then let the schools own the project themselves. Bridges were usually in a good position to make a judgment call on cajoling or advising schools, and timing such interventions based on the immediate context. They classically claimed an 'insider' position or at least aimed to engineer one in order to be able to make things happen. This was of course part of a strategic intent to build up trust, to find a connection with key people. Such forms of sympathetic understanding are mobilised as part of the range of tacit and interpersonal skills that Bridges have developed over time and which will be difficult to replace.

Making Artsmark flow as a process or bringing a local cultural organisation into the orbit of a school or curious headteacher involves more than issues of organisation, persuasion and administrative management. It is also very much about marrying local knowledge with a high degree of strategic judgment. This quality was also evident in how Bridges and their associate staff worked as interpreters, translating the formal demands of programme structure and compliance with its work on the ground.

To do this, Bridges also developed a knack of positioning themselves above or beyond the programmes they managed – as outsiders – while championing them too (Artsmark is a good example of this). It is interesting because it implies that Bridges existed beyond the way that their funded activities intersected with the education sector and young people's lives – which of course on another level they may not as the role largely existed as a result of ACE programme funding. It may also be that in the case of Bridge staff and associates who worked on similar forms of work prior to its current shape and delivery structure that it is also a mechanism to do things the way they were 'used to'.

'Making it happen' derives from a view that the *work that matters most* situates itself in some ways as being removed from the programme at hand, whatever it may be, and as serving its presumed larger goals, using native and tacit knowledge as a way of enabling this. The Bridges were filled with enormously experienced staff who wrestled sometimes within the limits of national interventions to position themselves as trusted professionals, as the touchstone or engine of the activity that made most sense locally.

Legacies and learning

10. Legacies and learning

Understanding the legacy of Bridges is complex and will be something that continues to develop as ACE develops new strategies to deliver its priorities for children and young people.

Some of the areas where Bridges leave strong foundations that can be built on into the future include:

10.1 Local Cultural Education Partnerships (LCEPs)

Local Cultural Education Partnerships began with a pilot project which involved innovative forms of collaboration in Barking and Dagenham, Bristol and Great Yarmouth[16]. However, the initial definition and purpose of the pilot areas differed somewhat from the ways LCEPs came to later be envisaged as part of the Cultural Education Challenge. The initial notion of an LCEP grew from the fact that government departments, principally DCMS and DfE, were managing a wide range of programmes and initiatives, all essentially aiming at the same outcomes (more and better culture for children and young people). Seen from a young person's perspective in a local area, provision could often seem disconnected, incoherent and overly complex. Initiatives were fed via different channels and processes, making engagement difficult and progression less likely. Therefore, the main goal of the pilot LCEPs was for funders and stakeholder bodies to appreciate what demand looked like from a young person's perspective and consequently be better organised, with more aligned priorities and activities, working together more of the time to offer easy access and better signposted cultural offerings to young people, offerings which more overtly signalled progression pathways for those who wanted to engage more deeply.

By the time the Cultural Education Challenge emerged in 2014/15, the emphasis had shifted somewhat. Austerity policies were probably a major factor. The Cultural Education Challenge seemed to be more a holding to account of local organisations, willing them to deliver more for less, against a background of diminishing resources and fewer initiatives. The scope to innovate or be fully cognisant of the needs of young people seemed lower down in the mix of priorities than had been the case in the pilot. Instead, there was a drive to better coordinate existing provision with little or no scope to offer additional funding. This proved to be a problem.

The evaluation of the pilot (and subsequent milestone evaluations for LCEPs post-pilot) all identified the fundamental challenge of resourcing. The pilot evaluation suggested on p45 that to secure sufficient resources, LCEPs may need to:

16. https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Cultural%20Education%20Partnerships%20Pilot%20Study%20final%20report.pdf

- "obtain seed-funding to support partnership set up because as partnerships deliver against their objectives they become more self-sustaining
- identify and access funding for collaborative activities which enable some resources to be used for sustaining partnership-working."

At present, LCEPs are coalescing into differentiated sub-groups. For example, a group for more established LCEPs is keen to look at branding, reviewing a theory of change and managing transitions to established, self-sustaining futures. Many other LCEPs are now in the process of revisiting strategy, coming to the end of funding or starting to apply so support for these areas will continue to be important.

There is a growing emphasis on practical take-aways and problem-solving. LCEPs are keen to understand more of how things work not just what has been done.

Local Cultural Education Partnerships are ready to buddy up with like-minded peers and pairing of LCEPs with common interests or challenges, or with mentors, is viable and would be productive.

Bridges have also facilitated LCEPs to work towards 'life beyond Bridges' and they are more ready now to explore new funding sources and will update advocacy and communications strategies accordingly.

Bridges have helped create a strong network of LCEPs for ACE to continue to work with, and there is unanimity around the importance of the network going forward. But the question of resourcing remains. The ability for Bridges to use PI radically changed the sense of momentum around LCEPs and the initial National Foundation for Educational Research evaluation made clear how important some funding would be, to hold the centre in a conceptual sense, and retain coherence across a multi-agency collaboration with national aspirations.

10.2 Professional practice

Earlier in this report, the subtle nature of the Bridge role and the requisite skills needed to represent national programmes while taking a bespoke approach to meeting local needs was highlighted. The fact the ten organisations managed this so well opened spaces for dialogue with local leaders, educators, community workers and many others about the role of arts and culture in the lives of young people and this, in turn, facilitated conversations about effective practice in maximising their benefits.

There is no doubt that the work of Bridges – especially during a time the arts and culture in education were generally

undervalued by the DfE – bolstered the confidence of teachers to be creative and draw on the affordances of cultural organisations and individual artists to enrich their pedagogy.

There are numerous evaluations, blog posts and testimonies which point to the value Bridge continuing professional development (CPD) has had for teachers and school leaders and these materials are shared via the organisations' websites (details in Appendix 1). Perhaps chief among these would be the Specialist Leaders in Cultural Education (SLiCE) fellowship. This is a one-year professional development programme for school leaders and was authored and managed by the North West Bridge Curious Minds. It is designed to equip influential education professionals with the requisite skills, knowledge and connections to become powerful advocates and expert commissioners for cultural education within their own school, and across a wider group of schools, such as a multi-academy trust or local area network. On completion of the fellowship programme, SLiCE designates are deployed to support curriculum development and improve commissioning practice across the education and cultural sectors, including playing an influential role within place-based partnerships (including LCEPs).

Since 2012, over 120 middle and senior school leaders have completed the SLiCE Fellowship Programme. They are drawn from a range of settings: early years, primary, secondary, special education and sixth-form colleges.

The key learning to take away from such professional development is the following:

The Bridge role, because it was dual-facing and connected with the education and cultural sectors in equal measure, allowed events and publications to be designed which appealed to both constituencies. This was crucially important because the set-up of dialogue was framed in ways conducive to equal – and therefore strong – partnership.

Bridges worked with CPD in two important ways for educators. They first used developmental discussions, presentations and workshops to restate the importance of the arts and culture as an entitlement for young people. This often had a motivating effect for teachers who reconnected with principles they instinctively felt were conducive to learning, but which were often stifled by a prevalent test-heavy, performative culture. And secondly, they were able to manifest the principles of the arts and creative work in ways that would have practical appeal for teachers. They did not provide 'off-the-shelf' ready-made answers, but nor did they limit themselves to principles and theory alone. Teachers were given a curated developmental space within which to find their own solutions

and mark their own pathways. This is high-quality CPD which formerly may have been the preserve of higher education partners or Local Authority advisory teachers, but now, as provision has become expensive or simply cut back, the Bridges stepped into this space and created important scaffolds for participants.

Similarly, Bridges worked effectively to develop partners in the cultural sector, too. The range of provision tailored to cultural sector partners which helped them gain a better understanding of young people's priorities and schools' needs were wide ranging. Bridges hosted teacher meets, published insights and briefings into how the schools system was evolving, and helped to work effectively within the Arts Award programme, where a lot of innovation with cultural organisations was possible. Bridges used their understanding of the education and broader landscape of children's services to help the arts sector deliver innovatively and better than before.

10.3 National agendas with local relevancy

Bridges were the main route that ACE used to ensure their national strategy for children and young people would make sense locally. And it is widely accepted – by schools, local partners and LCEP stakeholders – that Bridges delivered strongly on this front. For many, the Bridges remained a vital touchstone connecting ACE to a gateway that opened up understanding of local variances and viewpoints.

The challenge of national non-departmental bodies getting a feel for how policies will play out in different localities is a perennial one. But it is additionally complex when the triumvirate of children's futures, the purpose of education and the role of arts and culture are combined. Bridges navigated this complexity with aplomb. Some of the examples above illustrated the wide range of stakeholders involved with LCEPs, for example, a challenge managed by Bridges locally and met through partnership with multiple agencies. From Police Commissioners to health providers, social workers, carers and educators, the Bridges articulated a common purpose through the arts and culture that these inter-disciplinary groups could get behind.

10.4 Young people's capacities and confidence

Better arts opportunities leading to better outcomes for children and young people was right at the heart of the Bridge role and a huge part of ACE's ambition. So, impacts for children and young people should also be of interest when reflecting on the achievements of the past near decade. There are a host of challenges surrounding this. Typically, strategic

developments such as LCEPs and Artsmark leave their lasting impressions on organisational infrastructure; school cultures that look, feel and operate differently, local networks that coordinate and plan better to get more arts happening more of the time, an arts and cultural sector that connects with and delivers for education more sharply and more effectively than before. Throughout these changes, young people are living their lives, passing through, moving on and – it is hoped – beginning to benefit from them. It is difficult to track and follow up young people to see what difference initiatives might have made over the longer term. If arts and cultural offers were more stabilised and embedded, research that attempted to take a more time-series approach in relation to young people would undoubtedly be of benefit. For now, we rely on summative testimonies from young people – their views on the projects they have participated in, or local arts and cultural services they would like to see more of.

Bridges have undoubtedly contributed to better outcomes for young people. Principally through developmental work with educators and artists, investing in taxonomies, reflection on practice, sharing what is effective and funding more of what works. Also, by understanding the needs of schools and how arts and culture can help address them. We see through Artsmark an array of significant outcomes on this front – from better attainment, more uptake of arts subjects at KS3/4, to improved wellbeing and confidence. Many of the schools that have attended Artsmark development days are sharper at isolating evidence to support their assertions and they tell a much stronger story thanks to Bridge support and guidance.

The elements that come through most strongly are twofold.

First, children and young people find that opportunities to engage with the arts and work alongside artists improves their wellbeing and general disposition to learning. More work is needed to understand the dynamics underpinning these effects, but it seems that the philosophy of approach by artists and creative professionals is an important factor. Artists and other creative workers are demonstrably not teachers and, although they work in schools to a clear educational brief, they do so in ways that are importantly different. Bridges enabled them to build a role in ways that showcased their day-to-day working practices and gave young people an insight into a working life, rather than just a lesson. This seems to be absorbing and fulfilling to young people principally because it models values and behaviours that affirm work and identity developing in a unified way, one with a richer sense of purpose and meaning and helps them project in positive ways what may be possible for them in an imagined future. It is the antithesis of the performative idea of merely learning for 'work readiness' in an economic sense alone.

Second, young people are encouraged to learn differently through the arts. This is partly about the creative method, where trial and error, risk and reward are the principal means of discovering whether things will work. Adopting this approach places young people at the heart of their own learning and invites them to take more chances. This is empowering and provides a sense of autonomy that young people tend to welcome. It changes their outlook on learning, and we see in materials – from Artsmark Statements of Impact through to independent Bridge evaluations – the clear sense that children enjoy this form of active education much more. Their disposition to learning is more positive, attendance tends to improve, levels of engagement are more sustained and, although it may not be manifest in all subjects all of the time, it seems to be the case that when learning activities are framed by those same philosophies adopted by artist partners, young people switch on and fully participate.

Bridges – by acting as the intermediary between schools and arts organisations – contributed to the important condition-setting that made this quality of work possible. It is subtle, but demonstrably vital, work.

10.5 The Importance of schools

We previously touched on some of the history behind the Bridge concept and know that from the 1960s onwards ACE understood that schools and curricula were a powerful route to achieve arts entitlement for young people. Therefore, the quality of the relationship between schools and the wider culture infrastructure is acknowledged as being vitally important. When managed well, it not only makes access to opportunity easier for young people, but also raises the bar on the quality of such opportunities. Bridges were unique in the sense that an explicit part of their remit was to manage this relationship. The exact configuration of what organisation or network will replace this role is not yet known but will undoubtedly have a different emphasis. It should be noted that some current Bridges that are continuing as NPOs are planning to fold this kind of work into broader learning and participation programmes (so there is scope for continuity to a degree), but for others their bid for NPO status was structured with plans for work quite different from the Bridge role. In such cases it is likely schools-focused work will not be anywhere near so involved and comprehensive. This risks patchier provision. It will not be resourced or happening in the same way, and we know that will potentially leave significant gaps.

Reflections, conclusions and questions

11. Reflections, conclusions and questions

The public sector is currently under immense pressure. The post-2010 focus on holding down public sector pay, effectively pushing staff to work harder for less, has been sustained for considerable time but now seems to no longer be politically or practically viable, particularly given the current high inflation rate. The social contract in all its forms is being tested. The NHS and schools already face the prospect of widespread pay strikes throughout 2023, while issues with retention and recruitment have meant a shortage of 50,000 nurses and 12,000 hospital doctors. The number of graduates training to be teachers has slumped to dangerously low levels. As of December 2022, the government had missed its recruitment target by more than 80% in shortage subjects and is also moving ahead with plans to cut funding for art and design courses by 50% across higher education institutions in England. The Office for Students (OfS) – the independent regulator of higher education – confirmed that the subsidy for each full-time student on an arts course would be cut from £243 to £121.50 from the academic year 2021/22 onwards. Opportunities and outcomes for children and young people across a range of fronts are worsening as a result.

In virtually all cases, quick cuts to funding result in worse services and the need to provide emergency funding later down the line – which is exactly what has happened in adult social care and prisons over the past decade, where spending fell by 10% and 20% respectively by the middle of the decade, before increasing again via emergency cash injection.

Against this backdrop, ACE, itself facing financial pressures from DCMS, has made significant cuts to its portfolio. Its total £446 million budget will be more thinly spread across 990 organisations and, crucially, there will be no more Bridge Network.

Of the ten organisations that did fulfil the Bridge role, seven go forward as National Portfolio Organisations, while three (Arts Connect, The Mighty Creatives and IVE) will receive no ACE NPO funding.

Therefore, while there will be some residual legacy and/or organisational memory among the seven former Bridges now operating under different auspices, there is no network that can claim to aggregate and organise a national young person-focused offer. Moreover, those important, subtle ways of working within the liminal spaces between education and cultural sectors will likely be lost as a coherent national offer.

Consequently, there is a greater risk of patchier arts provision and more variable coverage for young people as well as less consistent quality of delivery.

Similarly, with LCEPs, good progress has been made with some, and the overall number has grown considerably since the original partnership with DfE in 2015, with over 140 now constituted across England. There has been no single formula that brought successful LCEPs to maturation, such is the variability of influencing factors locally. Bridge Organisations were well placed to manage such variability and assisted each LCEP to make progress at optimal – but manageable – pace. Given the LCEPs are still a growing network and not fully established, it begs the question who will fill the role Bridges have until now, bringing as they did a unique mixture of national policy knowledge, familiarity with best practice and strong local connections.

There is a greater risk of patchier arts provision and more variable coverage for young people as well as less consistent quality of delivery.

Another key success for Bridges has been in the area of capacity building through professional development, wider networking and alliance formation. These overlapping activities rested on the Bridges' ability to promote a coherent discourse around the needs of young people, the benefits of arts and culture, and the practices that effectively match supply to demand. Developing a shared language with partners not only forged a common purpose linking schools, artists, youth services, social services, health and so forth, it also began to draw a boundary around some identifiable practices for those working in formal and informal education settings, demystifying the arts and their benefits and putting workshop leaders, artists, teachers and other key workers in a position where their mediation of the arts was decisive and the quality of the offer made the difference. This is significant because it moves away from the arts being thought of as a 'black box' experience, where the artform itself is a sort of 'magic that happens' and exposure to it is enough. Instead, thinking about the way the arts are applied in the context of education, youth work, place-making etc becomes a more targeted enterprise and one that participants are more in control of. Bridges served to shape such discourses with partners and kept these ways of planning, discussing and reflecting alive. Without their custodianship there is a risk arts development with and for young people may become more tokenistic, and the capacity of teachers and the like to identify what is needed, to mediate the arts well and commission work of sufficient quality may dissipate.

There is also important learning to consider when national bodies work through locally constituted networks, which relates to the balance between partnership development and contract delivery. ACE's interest in achieving excellent

art outcomes for all young people and reaching the hardest to reach groups implies an interest in and support for local knowledge and partnership-building. This required trust and a degree of 'product faith' in the Bridge Network to know their contexts and how best to operate within them. Similarly, knowledge from that work where it succeeds could usefully flow back to ACE to inform evolving policy. There was a contention from Bridges that the flow was largely one way over the life course of the Bridge Network. While rhetorically there was a notion of partnership and a feeling of there being a Bridge 'family', the operation of the network was largely transactional and elided the more collegiate discourse. That isn't to say such discourse was not genuine, but more that the best way of managing the network was not fully realised and therefore the learning and opportunities for more accelerated policy developments, rooted in local understanding of what worked, were, arguably, under-exploited. A good example of this was the structure of the Bridge monitoring report which – in common with many monitoring procedures – places a premium on knowing how much activity is happening, where and with whom, but leaves less space and no outlet for deeper learning about forms of practice that work most effectively. In the future it may be worth reflecting on the mechanisms that might better support learning and knowledge to flow from local networks in ways that can genuinely inform national policy.

Just as the volume of work and partners worked with only partially represented Bridge activities, so descriptions of arts and cultural projects often stood as a proxy for the ways Bridges worked. Here the learning is about the need for a shared discourse to make the impactful, subtle ways Bridges worked more visible and valued. Often the projects themselves will not directly describe what Bridges did or how they did it. There is an emphasis more on project activity, artforms and outcomes. Preparing the ground, pre-planning, briefing artists, clarifying goals – all the valuable condition-setting is often lost. Over the near decade in which they operated, and increasingly in network meetings, Bridges developed plausible, plain language articulations of their function and added value. However, such descriptions lacked penetration with ACE and insufficiently influenced deliverables set out in contracts or processes of monitoring Bridge activity.

Although this report attempts to characterise how a group of local organisations worked in a range of changing contexts it also raises several questions about the best ways to structure and support the future work that will flow from it. The following questions are offered as prompts to stimulate discussion about the lessons (and legacy) of the Bridge role.

- ACE has been active and visionary at the intersection of arts and education for over 40 years; does it still seek to work where these two sectors meet, and who will be tasked with the local delivery of such ambitions?
- Is it reasonable to expect a network fulfilling a role that brings education and arts sectors closer together to feed into national strategic discussions and policy formation, and if yes, how best to achieve this?
- Is it anticipated that much of the interpretive work Bridges did to help one sector understand the other will be picked up by other stakeholders operating in this space or is the brokering of partnerships no longer an ambition?
- Professional development for artists and educators seeking to improve outcomes for young people was informed by Bridge knowledge: are there alternative outlets that have similar capacities to inspire and upskill?
- LCEPs have proliferated in number – doubling since 2018 from 70 to over 140. Yet we know there is a lag between constitution and operation. Bridges filled a role in that phase, gestating ambition, strengthening partnerships and part funding pathfinder and knowledge-gathering activities. What are the risks to the nascent LCEPs without that additional support and what can be done to mitigate them?
- Artsmark currently reaches 20% of schools in the country, in large part thanks to the efforts of Bridges, which have been active recruiters and inductors to the programme, also offering additional support to schools that run into difficulty. Can similar levels of local support still be offered without the Bridge Network?
- Regarding values and ethos, the Bridges have maintained a role for the arts in the lives of young people (and in the context of formal education) that is genuinely transformative and driven by critical engagement and curiosity. Is there a risk that, without the Bridge role, the arts come to serve forms of mainstream reproduction and aspects of work readiness that are coming to dominate education, and which are driven by more performative, economic factors? How can we ensure the mediation of arts, culture and creativity retains its transformative power?

David Parker, March 2023

Appendix 1 – Arts Council webpage text for Bridge Organisations

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Bridge Organisations

We fund a network of 10 Bridge Organisations to connect the cultural sector and the education sector so that children & young people can have access to great arts and cultural opportunities.

They work with local schools, art organisations, museums, libraries, music education hubs, local authorities, Further Education and Higher Education Institutions and many other partners to develop a network of cultural provision.

They also support schools to achieve Artsmark and organisations to deliver Arts Award.

We invest £10 million a year in Bridge Organisations which are working in at least 100 places across the country to galvanize Local Cultural Education Partnerships.

Bridge Organisations are co-funded with the Department for Education.

Contact details for our Bridge Organisations

Tyne & Wear Archives and Museums (Culture Bridge North East) – North East

Discovery Museum, Blandford Square, Newcastle, NE1 4JA

bridge@twmuseums.org.uk
culturebridgenortheast.org.uk

We are IVE – Yorkshire and the Humber

31 The Calls, Leeds, LS2 7EY

hello@weareIVE.org
weareive.org/bridge

Curious Minds – North West

Studio 15 The Old Courts, Gerrard Winstanley House, Crawford Street, Wigan, WN1 1NA

info@curiousminds.org.uk
curiousminds.org.uk

Arts Connect – West Midlands

mac Birmingham, Cannon Hill Park, Birmingham, B12 9QH

artsconnectwm@wlv.ac.uk
artsconnectwm.co.uk

The Mighty Creatives – East Midlands

LCB Depot, 31 Rutland Street, Leicester, LE1 1RE

bridge@themightycreatives.com
themightycreatives.com

A New Direction – London

50 Worship Street, London, EC2A 2EA

info@anewdirection.org.uk
anewdirection.org.uk

Royal Opera House Bridge – East

(Covering Essex, Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and North Kent)

High House Production Park, Purfleet, Essex, RM19 1AF

bridge@roh.org.uk
roh.org.uk/learning/royal-opera-house-bridge

Festival Bridge – East

(Covering Cambridgeshire, Norfolk, Peterborough and Suffolk)

Norfolk and Norwich Festival, Augustine Stewart House, 14 Tombland, Norwich, Norfolk, NR3 1HF

bridge@nnfestival.org.uk
www.nnfestival.org.uk/festival-bridge

Artswork – South East

Latimer House, 5-7 Cumberland Place, Southampton, SO15 2BH

info@artswork.org.uk
artswork.org.uk/our-work-with-arts-and-cultural-organisations/south-east-bridge/

Real Ideas Organisation – South West

Devonport Guildhall, Ker Street, Plymouth, Devon, Pl1 4EL

bridge@realideas.org
realideas.org/bridge

Appendix 2 – Cultural Education Challenge graphic (2015)

Arts Council England

Cultural Education Challenge

▶ **WHAT** is the Cultural Education Challenge?

We believe that **all children and young people should be able to experience great art and culture**. Cultural education fosters creativity and innovation, unlocking vital skills that drive the creative industries.

Every child should have the chance to:

- CREATE
- COMPOSE
- PERFORM
- VISIT
- EXPERIENCE
- PARTICIPATE
- KNOW
- UNDERSTAND
- REVIEW

FROM EARLY YEARS

TO SCHOOL 69

AND EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

WORKING WITH PROFESSIONAL ARTISTS AND TUTORS

EARNING QUALIFICATIONS

AND ENTERING THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

GCSEs
A-levels
arts award
Apprenticeships
Degree

▶ **HOW** do I get involved?

Our **challenge** is to all arts, culture and education organisations: come together to form **Cultural Education Partnerships**.

Our Bridge organisations will lead the Challenge, sparking relationships between schools, local authorities, Higher Education institutions, National Portfolio Organisations, Music Education Hubs, museums, theatres, galleries, libraries, community centres and more.

By coming together, we can provide inspiring opportunities for every child, giving them a **brighter future.**

Yes, I want to meet the challenge!

Find out how at artscouncil.org.uk/culturaleducationchallenge

Images (top to bottom): Jubilee Library Bounce, photo by Matthew Andrews; In Harmony Nottingham, photo by Alan Fletcher; Art Breaks, photo by Tim Corrigan; 'Bubbles' playing the pan with Catherine Coeshott, photo by Alan Fletcher; Young Creatives at the Roundhouse, photo by Ellie Pinney; Danceroom Spectroscopy at the Watershed Bristol, photo by Paul Blakemore.

Appendix 3 – List of pre-interview reading

Appendix 3 – List of Pre-Interview Reading

Artswork

- What have we learned from Bridge delivery?
- Artswork initial answers to interview questions
- Artswork Business Plan 22-23

ROH

- Masterpieces and processes
- LFI Impact Assessment
- Amplify
- The Thriving Child
- Blog for Head's Symposia (Lizzie Crump)

IVE

- Evaluation – State of the Region
- LCEP Evaluation 2021
- Bags of Creativity Evaluation

Arts Connect

- Bridge Business Plan
- The draft Bridge narrative 2018
- Bridge session notes
- National Bridge Report
- Bridge Network research

TMC

- The Mighty Creatives – The Headlines
- TMC Annual Accounts
- TMC Quarterly Report

Curious Minds

- 2019/20 Impact Report (external)
- Curious in Recovery [Bridge Covid Response] Report (internal)
- SLiCE British Values Publication

Festival Bridge

- Festival Bridge Report
- Festival Bridge Programme Plan 21-23

RiO

- ACE Bridge Business plan SW
- Bridge Reflections 2017-18

CBNE

- CBNE Evaluation
- Quality Principles Toolkit
- Creative Classrooms Website Hub

AND

- Principles into Practice
- Listening Projects
- Draft Theory of Change

Appendix 4 – List of interview topics

Appendix 4 – List of interview topics

- In broad terms how Bridge functions were originally conceived and the initial mandate from ACE as compared to now.
- How the working relationship with ACE evolved as organisations matured.
- Areas of greatest convergence across the network.
- Areas of greatest differentiation across the network.
- Types of leadership and varieties of partnership that led to good outcomes (with examples).
- Blends of income – forms of funding and the implications this can have on vision, ambition and mode of operation.
- The importance of balancing delivery of national agendas with sensitivity to local needs and ways you effectively managed this.
- Forks in the road – what were the waypoints you might identify where you became markedly better at having a positive impact, or where a different approach might have been taken for potentially greater impact/benefit?
- The biggest wins – how would you describe your most impactful work over the past near decade and what aspects of your Bridge function made it possible?
- The risk of sectoral amnesia – what may be lost when there is no funded Bridge Network?
- What lessons and practice will you take forward into new work now the Bridge function for ACE has ended?
- Upsides – are there gains in having a less close relationship with ACE?
- What ongoing legacies might encapsulate some of the above? What key learning would you pass on to others? What aspects (if any) of Bridge functions might continue through other means?
- Will it be more of the same for your organisation in terms of your mission, purpose and ways of working or does the end of the Bridge function take you in a different direction?

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