



CULTURAL MATCH

Evaluation Report

July 2025

NE North East
Combined
Authority

**NORTH EAST
MUSEUMS**

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1. Executive Summary

Cultural Match is a school-based cultural engagement programme delivered by North East Museums on behalf of the North East Combined Authority (NORTH EAST CA), as part of NORTH EAST CA's Education Improvement programme. The programme provided £3,000 per school for 14 selected schools from the North of Tyne area (two secondary, one SEND, and 11 primary/first schools), to work with Creative Producers to address existing or emerging pupil needs through cultural and creative responses. The initiative focused on remote schools, those in areas of high deprivation, and schools experiencing poor transport links and barriers to cultural engagement. The programme aimed to increase Early Career Teachers' confidence in creating partnerships with cultural venues and connect children with cultural opportunities tailored to their specific needs, and included one-to-one support from a Creative Producer and peer learning sessions throughout the academic year.

Evaluation Methodology

The mixed-methods evaluation combined pre/post questionnaires, focus groups, observations, student surveys, and case studies. It examined impact across three stakeholder groups, ECTs, students, and cultural partners. The participatory design enabled teachers to contribute to shaping the process, enhancing both rigour and relevance.

Key Findings

For ECTs and Mentors: The programme significantly increased practical confidence in arts integration (e.g. lesson planning confidence rose from 2.8 to 4.2), developed leadership and project management skills, and created a community of practice through peer learning sessions. Mentors reported strengthened support networks and deepened understanding of cultural pedagogy.

For Students: Projects expanded cultural capital, particularly in disadvantaged communities. Students reported high enjoyment, pride, and increased aspirations, many engaging with cultural venues and creative professions for the first time.

For Cultural Partners: Creative practitioners found school collaborations creatively fulfilling and impactful, though highlighted the need for improved communication, continuity, and sustainability mechanisms.

Cultural Match catalysed systemic change by addressing regional inequalities in cultural education access. It bridged schools and cultural venues, empowered early-career educators as change agents, and enriched curriculum delivery with authentic, locally grounded creative experiences. Projects celebrated place-based learning, fostered intergenerational engagement, and built cultural confidence across entire school communities.

Cultural Match offers a replicable model for enriching teacher development and student learning through arts partnerships - demonstrating that cultural education, when embedded meaningfully, delivers wide-reaching and lasting educational impact.

2. Introduction

2.1. Programme background and context

The Cultural Match programme emerged in response to growing recognition of the challenges faced by Early Career Teachers (ECTs) when integrating arts and cultural learning into an increasingly pressured curriculum. Launched in autumn 2023 and having now completed two years across the North of Tyne area, this innovative initiative sought to address the documented decline in arts education provision while simultaneously supporting the professional development of newly qualified teachers. The programme was conceived during a period of significant educational recovery following the disruptions of previous years, where creative approaches to learning were identified as valuable tools for re-engagement and wellbeing.

The educational landscape in the North East presented both particular challenges and opportunities. The region's rich cultural heritage and vibrant arts scene offered exceptional resources for learning, yet many schools, particularly those in areas of socio-economic disadvantage, reported limited engagement with these assets. Cultural Match was designed to bridge this gap by creating sustainable partnerships between education and cultural sectors at a formative stage in teachers' careers.

2.1.1. Cultural Match aims and objectives

The programme was underpinned by three core priorities: to enhance ECTs' confidence and competence in delivering arts-infused curriculum; to increase students' engagement with and access to cultural learning; and to strengthen sustainable partnerships between schools and cultural venues.

- For ECTs, the programme sought to develop pedagogical skills in arts integration, build subject knowledge in creative disciplines, establish collaborative working practices with arts professionals, and embed reflective practice through peer learning networks.
- For students, objectives included increasing participation in high-quality cultural experiences, developing creative skills and cultural capital, enhancing cross-curricular learning through arts engagement, and fostering connections with local heritage and cultural venues.
- For arts and heritage partners, the programme aimed to deepen understanding of curriculum requirements and classroom contexts, develop effective educational outreach approaches, and establish enduring relationships with schools.

An overarching objective was to create an evidence-based model of teacher development through cultural partnerships that could potentially be scaled and replicated in other regions.

Seven key aims were therefore identified to address existing or emerging pupil needs through culture and creativity, with particular focus on remote schools, those in areas of high deprivation, and those with barriers to engagement with cultural activity. These aims were:

- To connect children and young people, schools and communities with art and cultural opportunities and experiences in response to their needs.
- To increase the participation of pupils in cultural activities, enable them to visit cultural venues, and increase cultural capital.
- To identify and develop creative responses to key issues faced by schools.

- To connect with ECTs (Early Career Teachers) and build their confidence in working in partnership with cultural venues.
- To include opportunities for ECTs to share the learning with their wider staff teams in school.
- To culminate in the sharing of learning as the key focus of Imagine If... Conference, NEM's annual cultural learning conference.
- To enable North East Combined Authority and NEM (North East Museums) to further identify and understand the current key issues faced by schools, support schools to respond to this, and roll out findings.

2.1.2. Partners involved

North East Museums (NEM) is a regional museum, art gallery and archives service, managing 12 venues across Tyneside and Northumberland and a range of partnership programmes across the North East. Their mission is to welcome and connect people to the past, present, and future of the North East through stories, shared spaces, and experiences. They have identified five priority local and global challenges based upon the needs of their audiences across the region: equality, wellbeing, social mobility, climate, and place.

From 2015 to 2023, NEM delivered the Culture Bridge North East (CBNE) programme, which was part of the England-wide Bridge framework funded by Arts Council England. The Bridge programme was designed to better connect the education and cultural sectors, with the goal of every young person having a rich cultural childhood. NEM's Regional Cultural Learning Team was established in 2023 to deliver the legacy of the CBNE programme, working across the region to establish and maintain cross-sector partnerships to meet the needs of children and young people.

In 2023 the North East Combined Authority funded the first iteration of Cultural Match as a programme that would help to boost pupils' Cultural Capital. The Regional Cultural Learning team at NEM responded to this brief with the offer of Cultural Match.

NEM designed the Cultural Match programme because they knew that cultural capital is a significant tool that young people can use to achieve success in life – broadening experiences and promoting character-building qualities and skills. Engaging in cultural activity increases confidence, encourages self-expression, and broadens understanding of the world. However, they realised that today's early career teachers began their careers at least partially during the restrictions of the pandemic, which NEM had noted had impacted on their confidence to work in partnership with the cultural sector to provide a wide range of opportunities for their pupils.

NEM wanted the programme to increase the confidence of ECTs in creating partnerships with cultural venues therefore creating a longer-term professional development legacy, rather than one of interventions such as one-off trips to venues. Therefore, the Cultural Match Programme was developed as a CPD programme.

Following the pilot year, increasing cultural capital became a strand of the new North East Combined Authority's Education Improvement plan. North East Museums became NORTH EAST CA's preferred provider to deliver this cultural capital intervention from September 2024

In the Cultural Match programme, early career teachers (ECTs or teachers in their first five years of teaching) identify an existing or emerging need within their school. They are given a £3,000 budget to work with a Creative Producer and their pupils, to address this need through a cultural

and creative response. The Creative Producer matches each school with a local cultural venue to develop a long-term partnership.

The teachers work with the Creative Producer to look at how they can meaningfully develop arts engagement in school, to address the current needs of their pupils. In 2024/5 NEM invited schools to submit proposals that identified a key issue faced by their school, and how arts and culture could be used to address this issue. They then selected 15 schools to work with the Creative Producer, who challenged them to develop their cultural provision, from wherever their starting point was, and supported them in building relationships with NEM and/or other cultural venues in the region.

NEM prioritised remote schools, those in areas of high deprivation, those experiencing poor transport links and those with barriers to engagement with cultural activity and allocated £3,000 per school for delivery of activity. This funding was used to pay for coaches and visits to cultural venues as well as other project costs such as creative practitioners' fees.

In addition to supporting the projects in each school, the Peer Network Facilitator developed and hosted 3 peer network sessions across the academic year for all the ECTs involved and their school mentors as well as an initial full day CPD session looking at brokering cultural partnerships and developing pupil's cultural capital.

2.1.3. How Cultural Match aligns with UK cultural policy and partnerships

The Cultural Match model aligns with broader UK policy initiatives aimed at strengthening partnerships between cultural venues and educational settings. Arts Council England's Cultural Education Challenge, launched in October 2015, established a national framework for collaborative partnerships between arts and cultural venues, educational institutions, and local authorities to develop more coordinated local cultural education offerings. This initiative has since inspired the development of over 140 Local Cultural Education Partnerships (LCEPs) across England, demonstrating the policy commitment to integrated approaches similar to Cultural Match's partnership model.

2.2. Aim of the Evaluation

This evaluation report has been written for multiple stakeholder audiences with complementary yet distinct interests in the Cultural Match programme's outcomes and implications. The primary audience comprises the North East Combined Authority (NORTH EAST CA) and North East Museums (NEM), who commissioned and delivered the programme respectively. For these organisations, the evaluation serves a strategic function in demonstrating impact, informing future programme development, and supporting evidence-based decision-making about scaling and replication.

The report addresses one of the programme's key aims: to enable NORTH EAST CA and NEM to further identify and understand the current key issues faced by schools, support schools to respond to this, and roll out findings. Through systematic documentation of both successes and challenges, the evaluation provides actionable insights for programme refinement and expansion across the wider North East region, reflecting NORTH EAST CA's broader geographical remit.

Secondary audiences include education and cultural sector professionals, policymakers, and researchers interested in effective models of arts education partnerships. The detailed methodology and findings offer valuable insights for those seeking to develop similar initiatives,

while the focus on Early Career Teacher development addresses a recognised gap in professional development provision. Additionally, the report serves participating schools, ECTs, and cultural partners by validating their contributions and providing evidence of impact that can support future funding applications and partnership development.

The evaluation's participatory design, which enabled teachers to contribute to shaping the evaluation process, ensures that findings are grounded in practitioner experience and remain relevant to the realities of contemporary educational practice. This approach strengthens the report's usefulness for both immediate programme stakeholders and the broader community of practice working at the intersection of cultural and educational provision.

3. Evaluation Design

The evaluation of the Cultural Match programme was designed to capture the multifaceted impact of the creative curriculum intervention across three key stakeholder groups: Early Career Teachers (ECTs), school students, and arts/heritage partners. The evaluation framework was grounded in transformative mixed-methods evaluation theory (Mertens, 2014), which emphasises the importance of addressing multiple perspectives and promoting social justice through research design. This approach recognises that educational interventions occur within complex social systems where outcomes are experienced differently by various stakeholders (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

The evaluation utilised a mixed methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection strategies to provide both breadth and depth of understanding. This methodological triangulation aligns with Patton's (2014) advocacy for multiple data sources in evaluation research, particularly when examining complex educational interventions. Mixed method approaches in arts education research are well-established as supporting the notion that engagement in the arts can contribute to positive outcomes such as academic achievement, attainment, social behaviour and social transformation alongside health benefits such as wellbeing (Deasy, 2002; Ewing, 2010). Mixed methods research intervention studies integrate quantitative evaluation approaches, such as randomized controlled trials and quasi-experimental designs, with qualitative research to evaluate the effectiveness, efficacy, or other results of an intervention or program, providing a comprehensive understanding of programme impact.

This comprehensive approach allowed us to document both the immediate outcomes of the programme and indications of its potential longer-term impact on teaching practice and student engagement with arts and heritage. The methodology was informed by Kirkpatrick's four-level evaluation model (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2016), examining reaction, learning, behaviour change, and results across the teacher professional development context.

3.1. Data Collection Methods

- **Questionnaires**

The evaluation used three different questionnaire instruments, each designed for a specific group of participants. Early Career Teachers (ECTs) completed a confidence assessment both at the start and end of the programme. This before-and-after approach is recognised as best practice when evaluating teacher professional development programmes. The questionnaire measured changes in teacher confidence across several key areas: integrating arts and heritage into the curriculum, using creative teaching methods, subject knowledge, and planning and delivering lessons collaboratively.

The confidence measurement was based on established research showing that teachers' beliefs about their own abilities strongly influence both their teaching practices and student outcomes. Teachers responded using rating scales and also provided written reflections about their experiences and development.

Students were asked to complete an engagement survey at the end of the project, and two schools were able to provide responses to these. The survey captured students' experiences, what they learned, and any changes in their attitudes towards arts and heritage subjects.

Questionnaires were also sent via a gatekeeper, the NEM CPD Project Learning Manager, to the Education team members at NEM venues who had been involved in the programme. Three responses were received.

- **Focus Groups**

Facilitated discussion sessions were conducted with ECTs at both the mid-point and end of the programme. These focus groups followed a semi-structured discussion format that explored several key areas: how partnerships and professional relationships developed, what implementation challenges arose and how they were resolved, the impact on teaching practice and professional development, and observed changes in student engagement and outcomes.

The timing of these sessions was designed to capture both ongoing feedback during the programme and final reflections afterwards. Some parts of the sessions were recorded and transcribed to enable thorough analysis of the discussions using systematic methods for identifying patterns and themes across the data.

- **Observations**

Throughout the programme, structured observations were conducted during ECT peer learning sessions, classroom activities where creative approaches were being implemented, and periods of student participation and engagement. The observation approach focused on naturally occurring interactions and authentic teaching situations.

Observations concentrated on teacher-creative practitioner interactions and collaborative working, teaching strategies used, student responses and participation, and evidence of curriculum integration. These observations provided valuable real-time insights into how the partnerships functioned in practice and how students engaged with creative learning opportunities.

- **Documentation Review**

The evaluation included observation of showcases, presentations and final products created through the partnerships. Student work samples and creative outputs were reviewed, along with photographic evidence of activities and exhibitions.

This documentation provided concrete evidence of what outcomes were achieved, complementing the perception-based data from questionnaires and discussions. This approach strengthened the evaluation by using multiple sources of evidence.

- **Case Study Development**

To provide detailed context and illustrate different implementation approaches, seven representative case studies were developed. The case study schools were selected to represent geographic diversity within the North East, a range of socioeconomic contexts, various types of arts/heritage partnerships, and different curriculum focus areas.

Each case study used multiple data sources to provide a comprehensive understanding of implementation and impact within specific contexts. This approach recognises that educational programmes are strongly influenced by context and that understanding 'what works' requires attention to the conditions under which programmes operate.

- **Analysis Approach**

The analytical approach combined quantitative analysis of survey data with qualitative analysis of focus group transcripts, observation notes, and written questionnaire responses. The quantitative analysis included descriptive statistics and comparison of before/after responses, whilst qualitative analysis identified recurring themes and patterns across the data.

Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected at the same time and analysed separately before being combined for interpretation. Regular discussion sessions among the project team enhanced the rigour of interpretation and ensured balanced consideration of all evidence.

This comprehensive methodology was designed to balance thorough evaluation with minimal disruption to participants' educational experiences. By gathering evidence from multiple perspectives and through different methods, the evaluation aimed to build a detailed understanding of how the Cultural Match programme influenced teaching practice, student engagement, and arts/heritage partnerships.

3.2. Evaluation framework

The evaluation of the Cultural Match programme was designed to explore the wide-ranging impact of an arts-based intervention across the education sector. A broad, inclusive framework was adopted to recognise the interconnected nature of teacher development, student engagement, and collaboration with the cultural sector—particularly within a regional context. This perspective draws from *ecological systems theory*, which suggests that learning is shaped by multiple layers of influence, from the classroom and school to the wider community and society.

Given the complexity of educational change, a mixed methods approach was employed to combine quantitative data with rich qualitative insights. This approach served multiple purposes: enabling triangulation (cross-checking findings), complementarity (offering different perspectives), development (using one method to inform another), initiation (identifying contradictions that spark new insights), and expansion (broadening the inquiry) (Greene et al., 1989). By integrating numerical data and lived experiences, a more complete understanding of the programme's impact was achieved.

The evaluation focused on three key areas:

1. **Pedagogical transformation** among Early Career Teachers (ECTs),
2. **Creative and cultural engagement** for students, and
3. **The development of sustainable partnerships** between schools and the cultural sector.

An ecological lens was applied to understand these domains, recognising that teacher confidence and practice are shaped by wider institutional conditions, which themselves are influenced by national educational policy. For instance, an increase in a teacher's confidence

with arts-based learning was viewed not as an isolated event, but as one influenced by school culture, leadership support, and systemic factors.

To ensure methodological rigour while remaining accessible to a broad range of stakeholders, elements from Kirkpatrick's evaluation model were adapted (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2006). This model examines four levels: participants' reactions, learning, behaviour changes, and outcomes. These layers made it possible to trace connections between professional development and changes in classroom practice. Principles from developmental evaluation were also incorporated, reflecting the evolving and adaptive nature of complex initiatives like cultural education partnerships—where traditional “before and after” models may be insufficient.

The evaluation was grounded in participatory principles, prioritising collaboration with those directly involved. Early Career Teachers were positioned not merely as subjects, but as co-researchers contributing to the design, interpretation, and refinement of the evaluation process. This shift from “researching on” to “researching with” aligns with the belief that those working closest to young people often hold the most relevant and actionable insights.

Regular reflective dialogue between the project team and participants informed the ongoing development of data collection tools and interpretive methods. This participatory approach enhanced contextual validity while also contributing to professional learning, as teachers engaged with inquiry-led practice. In practical terms, participants helped shape the questions being asked and brought essential context to their responses.

A notable feature of the evaluation framework was its emphasis on sustainability, not only measuring immediate outcomes, but also identifying the conditions that could support continued cultural education beyond the life of the funded programme. This included attention to capabilities, relationships, and institutional practices that might endure over time. The focus reflects insights from Harvard's Project Zero, which emphasises that successful arts education partnerships require the development of long-term capacity and adaptability, rather than simply aiming to maintain current efforts (Seidel et al., 2009). Accordingly, signs of long-term change, such as new ways of working, stronger cross-sector relationships, and embedded institutional support, were actively sought.

Through the integration of confidence metrics, qualitative insights, case study material, and supporting documentation, the evaluation aimed to produce both robust evidence and compelling narratives. This multi-strand design acknowledged that different audiences, whether policymakers, educators, or cultural practitioners, require different forms of evidence. While some may prioritise measurable outcomes, others are more strongly influenced by in-depth stories of change that resonate with their own contexts and experiences.

4. Key Findings

4	• Peer learning CPD days for ECTs and mentors
86	• 1-2-1 support sessions with the Cultural Match Creative Producer and ECTs
18	• School partnerships made with North East cultural organisations
45	• Visits to cultural venues
36	• North East cultural freelancers/artists commissioned by the ECTs
66	• North East creative practitioners/musicians workshops in schools
14	• Final exhibitions, performances and installations in schools and cultural venues

4.1. Impact on ECTs and Mentors

The Cultural Match programme created a comprehensive learning journey that transformed participants' confidence, capabilities, and practice in cultural education. Beginning with ECTs' initial enthusiasm tempered by practical uncertainties and mentors' strong beliefs constrained by familiar barriers, the programme combined structured support, hands-on project delivery, and collaborative peer learning to build both individual competence and collective knowledge. Through regular peer learning sessions, participants shared challenges, celebrated successes, and developed solutions together, creating a community of practice that extended learning beyond individual projects. The pre- and post-questionnaire findings reveal not only substantial improvements in confidence and practical skills, but also the development of leadership capabilities, professional networks, and sustainable approaches to cultural integration that participants are committed to continuing beyond the programme.

4.1.1. Pre-Programme Confidence Check: Early Career Teachers

Before the programme began, Early Career Teachers (ECTs) expressed a mix of enthusiasm and uncertainty about embedding cultural education in their teaching practice. The pre-programme survey results revealed moderate overall confidence levels, reflecting a willingness to engage but a need for support.

- **Aspirations to Broaden Horizons**

A unifying theme among ECTs was a strong desire to widen their pupils' experiences—especially for those from disadvantaged or culturally limited backgrounds. One teacher from Newsham Primary School spoke of “raising aspirations and broadening the horizon for children who come

from an area of deprivation,” while an ECT at Slaley First School highlighted the aim of “providing experiences of other cultures and faiths so they are more prepared for wider life.” Stakeford Primary School echoed this with a focus on enabling children “to see and experience things outside of where they live.”

This ambition was underpinned by high confidence scores in engaging students through cultural activities (4.8 out of 5) and collaborating on long-term projects (also 4.8), suggesting that ECTs are most confident when cultural work is student-centred and creative.

- **Barriers to Implementation**

Despite these high aspirations, ECTs identified persistent challenges. Time and workload emerged as major concerns: “Time and staffing” (Excelsior Academy); “Balancing the time needed... with being a new ECT” (Shiremoor Primary School); and “Lack of time and pressure already in schools” (Benfield High School). Budget limitations were another constraint, as captured simply by a teacher at Canning Street Primary School: “Budgeting.”

These obstacles may help explain lower average confidence scores in some practical areas, such as incorporating cultural activities into lesson plans (2.8) and identifying relevant opportunities (3.33).

- **Support Needs**

To address these gaps, ECTs called for structured, hands-on support. Access to “workshops with cultural partners; classroom resources... and examples of successful cultural integration projects” was widely requested (Whittingham C of E). Mentoring and coaching were also highlighted as key to building confidence, with calls from Slaley First and Hareside Primary Schools for more personalised development.

While only 50% of respondents said they received guidance on cultural integration during Initial Teacher Training (ITT), the usefulness of that training was rated modestly at 3.0. In contrast, school support was rated slightly higher at 3.6, although just 30% reported having access to specific cultural resources or training in their schools—indicating a clear gap between need and provision.

- **Excitement About Student Impact**

ECTs expressed particular excitement about the potential impact of cultural engagement on students’ personal development. A teacher at Slaley First School looked forward to “the impact that it will have on the children to develop them as people.” At Canning Street Primary School, the anticipated benefits went further: “I’m hoping it will help them with their self-actualisation and personal identity too.” The arts were frequently cited as vital for inclusion and wellbeing: “For some children, the arts is where they thrive!” (Ponteland Primary School).

Confidence in understanding the benefits of cultural education for student learning was relatively high at 4.2, aligning with this sense of optimism.

- **Professional Development and Sustainability**

Beyond student outcomes, many ECTs viewed cultural education as a vital part of their own professional growth. Teachers noted gains in confidence, creativity, and leadership. “Confidence to create projects like this and the connections to enable me to do it in the future,” shared a teacher from St John’s Primary School. Another from Shiremoor Primary School reflected on “developing my professional identity, confidence, and skills.”

The need to sustain these gains was also clear. Teachers at Ponteland and Slaley First Schools emphasised the importance of “networking with venues/specialists” and acquiring “skills to continue this after the programme has ended.” Preparedness to work with cultural partners scored strongly at 4.4, and the intention to continue using these approaches after the programme was one of the highest-rated items at 4.6.

4.1.2. Pre-Programme Confidence Check: Mentors

Mentors entered the programme with a high level of confidence in both the value and implementation of cultural education. Their average preparedness to work with cultural partners was rated at 4.4, and they strongly affirmed the importance of cultural experiences in student engagement, also rated at 4.6. These figures reflect an established belief in cultural learning as a core component of meaningful, inclusive education.

This belief was echoed in mentors’ own words. A mentor from Ponteland Primary School spoke of “making memories for children which will last long past their primary years”, suggesting that the programme provided cultural learning opportunities which could enrich the curriculum and foster deeper understanding.

Despite their enthusiasm, mentors identified familiar barriers. The most significant of these was time, with comments citing “time within an already busy curriculum” (Ovingham C of E School), “fitting everything around the school day and curriculum” (Benfield School), and the general “time commitment” required (Collingwood School and Media Arts College). Concerns about resource limitations also featured prominently, particularly regarding access to funding and cross-curricular integration time.

Mentors saw tailored support as crucial for overcoming these constraints. A strong desire emerged for practical tools such as “workshops with cultural partners” and “classroom resources for cultural projects” (Ovingham C of E and Benfield Schools). Importantly, the average confidence score in adapting cultural experiences to diverse learning needs was a reassuring 3.8, indicating a solid foundation for inclusive practice.

Several mentors also called for the chance to learn from experienced colleagues, recognising that sustainability depends not only on resources but on insights and established networks. As one mentor from Ponteland noted, they valued “experience from those who have been there before and help to develop longevity within the partnership.”

Above all, mentors were optimistic about the potential benefits—not only for pupils, but for school culture more broadly. “Developing a stronger sense of self, raising aspirations, enhancing the curriculum offer—the sky is the limit,” one mentor at Ponteland Primary School summarised. Many also noted the opportunity to increase whole-staff confidence and widen engagement with the cultural sector.

4.1.3. Peer learning sessions for ECTs and mentors

The peer learning sessions demonstrated a remarkable evolution in Early Career Teachers' professional confidence and capabilities throughout the Cultural Match programme. Beginning with initial apprehension about contacting cultural venues, ECTs progressed to independently managing budgets, negotiating with external partners, and leading whole-school initiatives. The sessions revealed how collaborative learning environments enabled teachers to overcome common challenges including time management, budget constraints, and geographic isolation of their pupils. Most significantly, the peer learning approach created a supportive framework where ECTs could share strategies, celebrate successes, and build lasting professional networks. The impact extended beyond individual development to transform pupils' cultural horizons, with children who had never ventured "beyond the train tracks" gaining pride in their regional identity and developing aspirations through authentic partnerships with professional creative practitioners and cultural venues.

Peer learning session January 2025: Evolving Perspectives and Overcoming Challenges

- **Growing Confidence in Cultural Partnerships**

The January peer learning session revealed a remarkable transformation in participants' confidence when working with cultural venues. Early Career Teachers consistently reported feeling more empowered to reach out and engage with cultural partners. "I'm very excited to work with cultural organisations and it feels less overwhelming/scary to reach out and find out about information now having started this project" (ECT, Shiremoor Primary). This sentiment was echoed by another participant who shared that "I'm definitely now feeling more confident working with cultural organisations and have booked a trip outside of the Cultural Match project - this is something I'd definitely have been less confident doing myself prior to this" (ECT, Stakeford).

The accessibility and generosity of cultural venues surprised many participants. "I didn't think that they would be as accessible as they have been or would have been as generous as they have been. I felt that maybe the Theatre Royal was out of reach but I went anyway and I'm really surprised and like really pleased about how helpful and how generous they've been" (ECT, Excelsior). Similarly, another participant noted being "pleasantly surprised at how enthusiastic and willing artists are to get involved. Especially how generous they are in terms of what they offer for a reasonable price" (ECT, Benfield High School).

This newfound confidence created a ripple effect, with one participant explaining: "From this I have felt confident enough to source my own writer for the creative writing workshop I wanted to host, I have now met with her on zoom and booked her. I felt confident on what questions to ask after my experience booking the artist with [the Creative Producer]" (ECT, Ovingham First School).

- **Time Management: The Universal Challenge**

The most pervasive challenge across all participants was managing time while balancing regular teaching responsibilities. This was particularly acute for Early Career Teachers who were still establishing their professional routines. "The most significant challenge is probably managing time and general teaching duties. As an ECT1, I am still getting the hang of being fully in charge of my class and the planning/resourcing/marketing etc" (ECT, Shiremoor Primary).

The complexity of coordinating multiple elements was highlighted by several participants: "The most significant challenge so far has been time and staff availability. Trips are great but finding the time to plan and do them is not easy. It is tricky to find time within the curriculum as well. It is also difficult finding staff members to help on school trips" (ECT, St John's Primary). Similarly, another participant noted that "being aware of all the different parts that are needed and making sure they are done by a deadline (evolve forms, risk assessments, staffing ratios for trips) is the biggest challenge so far as there's a lot of plates to spin" (ECT, Stakeford).

Mentors also recognised this challenge, with several suggesting structural improvements to support time management. "Having an hour of ring fenced time at the end of the session (1.30-2.30) to work with ECT to get some of the to do list done from that day's session would be very beneficial" (Mentor, Linton).

- **Budget Constraints and Creative Solutions**

Financial considerations emerged as another significant challenge, particularly for schools serving disadvantaged communities. "I think the most significant challenge I have faced so far has been wanting every child to have the experiences we have planned to offer, and trying to stretch the budget to accommodate this. Our children are so appreciative of every experience, and really only experience new things and things beyond their immediate environment through school" (ECT, Canning Street Primary).

Schools demonstrated creativity in addressing budget constraints. "We want every child in school to be included and this felt like a very challenging task at first with £3000, however with support from [the Creative Producer] this is now very achievable. We have broken the project down into small steps and adapted our ideas in order to achieve this" (Mentor, Canning Street). The school considered supplementing funding through "a £2 trip payment from each child" and exploring "other options such as staff having CPD to deliver the artists' knowledge and experience to the children if we can't afford additional days" (ECT, Canning Street Primary).

- **Quality Over Quantity: Strategic Project Management**

Several participants emphasised the importance of maintaining quality while managing scope. "The challenge I have faced is just ensuring my project is manageable, ensuring I use SMART targets to make sure I can do everything properly. I would rather do less things but a better quality than loads of poorly organised things that the children don't benefit from" (ECT, Ovingham First School).

- **Building Broader Educational Vision**

The project's impact extended beyond immediate practical skills to developing participants' understanding of cultural capital and educational opportunities. "I have gained knowledge about cultural capital and I am now more aware of what children within my school may benefit from/have gaps in. I am more interested in how we can expand and broaden their horizons" (ECT, Whittingham C of E Primary).

The transformative effect on participants was noted by mentors: "It's been amazing to watch my mentee grow in confidence as she's organised this project - it really has involved her in the wider

life of the school. I'm looking forward to the school working with artists and pupils and families broadening their horizons, which will hopefully aid with raising aspirations" (Mentor, Newsham Primary).

- **The Value of Collaborative Learning**

The peer learning sessions themselves proved invaluable for sharing strategies and building confidence. "Having the opportunity to sit with my mentee with the ideas and experiences of those around us has been invaluable. The combination of time to plan combined with the level of expertise in the room has enabled us to make great strides in planning next steps" (Mentor, Ponteland). This collaborative approach helped participants realise that their challenges were shared and manageable, with one participant noting that "it was beneficial to be able to speak to other schools and bounce ideas off each other in order to collaborate on further ideas" (ECT, Newsham Primary).

The feedback reveals a programme that successfully demystified cultural partnerships while acknowledging and addressing the real challenges of implementation within busy school environments.

Peer learning session March 2025: Skills Development and Impact

- **Professional Growth and Leadership Development**

The Cultural Match programme catalysed significant professional development among Early Career Teachers, particularly in areas they hadn't previously explored. Many ECTs found themselves managing complex logistics and budgets for the first time. "Now I know how to write contracts for artists and how to reach out to a potential venue and discuss budget and a project. I've also improved my confidence managing a budget" (ECT, Shiremoor Primary). This practical experience extended beyond administrative skills to encompass genuine leadership development: "It's given me more leadership skills as this project is one of the first times I have been in charge of organising and executing something rather than just participating" (ECT, Stakeford Primary).

The development of confidence in external communication emerged as a particularly valuable skill. "I have become more confident contacting external agencies. I am not from a creative background and I was concerned that my lack of knowledge would be a barrier, however all of the agencies have been incredibly supportive" (ECT, Linton Primary). This growing confidence extended to professional negotiations and boundary-setting: "The confidence to set clear boundaries or expectations and uphold them without feeling guilty or like I'm nagging the other person" (ECT, Canning Street).

- **Creative Confidence and Teaching Innovation**

The project significantly enhanced ECTs' confidence in embedding creativity across their teaching practice. "My confidence in art has grown massively as it is not my area of expertise. This will be due to seeking advice on different areas of art from experts and watching workshops being delivered" (ECT, Hareside Primary). This creative confidence translated into innovative curriculum integration: "I have given creativity more consideration and looked for opportunities

to use creative means or link creativity to learning across the curriculum. For example; linking singing with the topic of the Arctic and looking at traditional throat singing" (ECT, Canning Street).

The shift toward more practical, engaging teaching approaches was evident: "It has improved my confidence in using more practical and creative elements in teaching, for example for our persuasion unit we are going to the [Great North Museum] Hancock to do research and then coming back to school to draft and write a letter of persuasion to other schools" (ECT, Ovingham First School).

- **Impact on Student Engagement and Aspirations**

ECTs consistently observed heightened student engagement and expanded horizons. "Children are exceptionally engaged with the project, they can't wait to work with the artist as it's something that they won't have had the opportunity to do before" (ECT, Stakeford Primary). The authenticity of working with professional artists particularly resonated: "Children very excited by the concept of being an artist and that it is a real job, broadening their horizons to see this is possible" (ECT, Newsham Primary).

For many students, the projects provided crucial cultural capital, especially in disadvantaged areas. As one ECT reflected: "Some of them thought they needed a passport to go to Newcastle," highlighting how the project opened new worlds of possibility. The pride in providing these opportunities sustained ECTs through challenges: "The biggest motivator has been seeing how excited the children are to do something that is such a different experience to their day to day lives" (ECT, Stakeford Primary).

- **Mentor Perspectives on Professional Development**

Mentors observed their ECTs stepping confidently into substantial responsibilities that accelerated their professional growth. "Status-wise, they get to step up from being perceived as a junior member of staff and having real responsibilities... career-wise, I think it's great for them because they're managing budgets, in this case, doing whole school initiatives" (Mentor). The key to successful mentoring was providing scaffolded support while allowing independence: "encouraging my ECT and reassuring her that obviously we'll come up with problems along the way because it's such a massive scaled project, and that that's okay. So just being there every step of the way with her rather than her thinking she was on her own" (Mentor).

Mentors emphasised the importance of knowing when to step back: "it was knowing when to step back and observe, and I'll be there to help when you need it... but it was knowing when to step back and just watching her." This approach fostered genuine confidence and self-belief, with mentors noting that "my ECT's belief in what he will be able to do in the future and what he's planning for next year already has made a huge difference to him."

- **Reflections on Growth and Achievement**

During peer learning sessions, ECTs expressed deep satisfaction in their accomplishments, particularly the trust placed in them to lead meaningful initiatives. "You're not necessarily given opportunities like this just within the school, to think of a plan, work out the logistics, and actually see it through. That's something I'm really satisfied with." The sense of achievement was

palpable: "We started with a blank sheet of paper and made something real - that's not always something ECTs get to do."

Despite facing challenges with time management, budget constraints, and securing colleague buy-in, ECTs demonstrated remarkable resilience. The combination of professional challenge, creative exploration, and meaningful impact on students created a powerful catalyst for ECT development that extended far beyond traditional mentoring approaches.

Peer learning session June 2025: Reflecting on Community Connection and Professional Growth

The June peer learning session revealed a significant theme around expanding children's geographical and cultural horizons beyond their immediate communities. Several ECTs highlighted how their pupils had limited exposure to places beyond their local area, with one teacher noting that "Children don't go beyond the train tracks that border our community. When they came to Newcastle they thought they were coming abroad and cried because they didn't have their passports!" (ECT, Newsham). This geographic insularity was further evidenced by the observation that "The beach is five minutes away and half of them haven't even been to the beach" (ECT, Newsham). Transport access emerged as a critical barrier, yet the projects demonstrated how purposeful partnerships could overcome these challenges. The transformative power of these cultural experiences was particularly evident when children visited Newcastle's cultural venues, with teachers reporting profound shifts in pupils' understanding of their regional identity. As one teacher reflected, "They didn't understand what culture was but now they get how culturally diverse Newcastle is" (ECT, Excelsior), while another emphasised the importance of helping children "Create links between past and present and be proud of where they come from" (ECT, Collingwood). The projects celebrated North East cultural assets while providing crucial cultural capital not only to children but also to their families, with parents gaining new experiences alongside their children. Each project was carefully tailored to meet specific community needs, recognising that every school understood their children's unique circumstances and could design appropriate interventions.

● Building Confidence and Professional Growth Through Creative Partnerships

A second major theme emerged around the confidence-building benefits for both pupils and teachers through engagement with arts and cultural activities. Teachers consistently reported increased pupil confidence, with one noting "It's so nice to see their confidence shine through" (ECT, Slaley), while another described the pride children felt when "they saw their work displayed in a big hall and said 'that was mine, I did that'" (ECT, Newsham). The projects broadened horizons and provided new experiences that stepped children out of their comfort zones while building a stronger sense of belonging and historical context within the North East region. Career links and job modelling emerged as unexpected benefits, with children gaining insights into creative professions they had never considered. Significantly, these projects also fostered professional growth among teachers, with one teacher reflecting, "I've learnt so many skills and surprised myself with what I've been able to do as a first year ECT" (ECT, Shiremoor). The collaborative nature of these initiatives encouraged teachers to take creative risks, with several expressing initial uncertainty but ultimate satisfaction: "When I first came up with the idea I thought it was ambitious but it was great" and "I was a bit ambitious, I didn't think it was going to work but it did" (ECTs, Ponteland and Excelsior respectively). This professional development was complemented by a growing sense of agency, as one teacher discovered: "I just need to be that person who takes control" (ECT, Slaley). The value of creative practitioners accompanying

children on trips became particularly apparent, enabling deeper engagement and authentic learning experiences. The lasting impact of these partnerships was evident in teachers' forward planning, with sustainable connections established and one noting, "We have ideas of where to go and links already for next year that we wouldn't have had" (ECT, Ovingham). The sessions also highlighted practical insights for future implementation, particularly around funding strategies and the willingness of cultural venues to contribute time and expertise when approached with purposeful, well-planned proposals that brought communities together around meaningful end goals.

4.1.4. Post-Programme Confidence Check: Early Career Teachers

Following completion of the Cultural Match programme, Early Career Teachers (ECTs) demonstrated significantly enhanced confidence levels across all areas of cultural education integration. The post-programme survey results revealed substantial growth in both practical skills and strategic understanding, with participants expressing enthusiasm for continuing these approaches in their future practice.

Enhanced Practical Confidence

The most striking transformation was in ECTs' practical confidence scores. Areas that showed the lowest confidence pre-programme saw dramatic improvements:

- **Integrating cultural activities into lesson plans** increased from 2.8 to an average of 4.2
- **Identifying cultural opportunities** improved from 3.33 to 4.4
- **Collaborating with cultural partners** maintained strong performance at 4.7

This enhanced practical confidence was reflected in participants' reflections. The ECT from Shiremoor Primary School noted: "My confidence has increased exponentially in all areas as I had to speak to colleagues I was unfamiliar with, organise school trips and lead them and organise a whole school celebration event which parents were invited to."

Sustained High Engagement Scores

Areas where ECTs already showed strong confidence pre-programme maintained their high performance:

- **Engaging students through cultural activities** remained consistently high at 4.9
- **Understanding benefits for student learning** maintained at 4.8
- **Intention to continue using these approaches** achieved near-maximum scores at 4.8

Professional Growth and Leadership Development

ECTs consistently reported significant professional development gains. The ECT from Ovingham First School reflected: "Confidence that I can lead and 'pull off' big projects," while another from St Johns Primary School valued "the opportunity to independently complete a full project, including a budget."

The programme appears to have developed project management capabilities alongside cultural education skills. As the ECT from Shiremoor Primary noted: "I feel I've developed project management skills and improved my ability to multitask and prioritise."

Addressing Implementation Challenges

While time and logistics remained challenges, ECTs developed practical solutions and resilience. Common challenges included:

- **Time management:** "Making time to work on the project, finding dates that worked for everyone" (Hareside Primary School)
- **Budget and transport logistics:** "Transport – a third of the funding went to coach companies" (Excelsior)
- **Communication:** "Communication on what our end goal of the project was" (Collingwood School)

Despite these challenges, ECTs demonstrated problem-solving capabilities and maintained their commitment to cultural integration.

Impact on Student Experience

ECTs reported transformative impacts on their students, often exceeding expectations:

- **Broadened horizons:** "Pupils have experienced public transport for the first time, had the opportunity to visit museums and historical sites that they would not normally get to experience" (Collingwood School)
- **Increased aspirations:** "It has made children realise they can be anything they want to be" (Newsham Primary School)
- **Enhanced engagement:** "The children loved every minute of being on stage... some have joined theatre clubs since!" (Ponteland Primary School)

Ongoing Support Needs

Despite increased confidence, ECTs identified continued support needs:

- **Financial support:** "Funding for trips" and "Some financial support would be beneficial" were common themes
- **Time allocation:** "Time for planning and searching for opportunities"
- **Practical resources:** Continued demand for workshops with cultural partners and examples of successful projects

4.1.5. Post-Programme Confidence Check: Mentors

Mentors completed the programme with enhanced confidence and a deepened understanding of cultural education's impact. Having entered with already high confidence levels (4.4 for working with cultural partners), mentors demonstrated growth in practical implementation and strategic insight.

Reinforced Beliefs and Enhanced Practice

Mentors' strong initial beliefs in cultural education were validated and strengthened through programme participation. Average scores remained consistently high:

- **Understanding benefits for student learning:** 4.8
- **Importance of cultural integration:** 4.8
- **Intention to continue approaches:** 4.6

A mentor from Ponteland Primary School reflected: "I believe that the promotion of the arts in school is vital for children's mental health and wellbeing, understanding of the world around them and opportunities to succeed when other academic subjects can feel out of reach."

Practical Implementation Gains

Mentors showed notable improvements in practical confidence areas:

- **Integrating cultural activities into lesson plans:** Average of 4.2
- **Identifying cultural opportunities:** Average of 4.0
- **Collaborating with cultural partners:** Strong performance at 4.8

Network Building and Sustainability

A key mentor outcome was the development of lasting professional networks. As one mentor from Canning Street Primary noted: "I have more of an awareness of local museums etc to work with." Another from Whittingham C of E Primary School valued how the programme "reminded me of my love for this area of learning and the joy and knowledge it can bring."

Student and Community Impact

Mentors reported significant impacts extending beyond individual students to families and communities:

- **Family engagement:** "Provided families and pupils with the opportunity to visit an art gallery" (Newsham Primary School)
- **Raised aspirations:** "High aspirations, awareness of more than our local community" (Canning Street Primary)
- **Broadened experiences:** "To broaden the experiences and knowledge of pupils within our school and to provide aspirations for young people" (Whittingham C of E Primary School)

Addressing Systemic Challenges

Mentors identified systemic solutions to common barriers:

- **Financial planning:** "Perhaps it comes down to finance and the schools ability to afford workshops, creative practitioners etc"

- **Communication systems:** Need for "clear and unambiguous lines of communication between all parties involved"
- **Resource allocation:** Importance of "ring fenced time to support planning and delivery"

Programme Learning and Future Applications

Mentors valued the collaborative learning aspects of the programme. A mentor from Ponteland Primary School noted: "Hearing from other delegates and supporting other schools has been a big part of what has made the programme a success."

The programme appears to have created a community of practice, with mentors gaining both practical skills and strategic insights for embedding cultural education sustainably within their schools.

4.1.6. Overall Feedback from ECTs and Mentors

The feedback from Early Career Teachers (ECTs) who participated in the Cultural Match programme reveals consistently positive experiences across multiple dimensions of the project. The responses demonstrate high levels of satisfaction with the programme's structure, support systems, and outcomes for both teachers and pupils.

Application Process and Initial Engagement

The application process was universally praised for its accessibility and clarity. ECTs found the process "straightforward" and "easy to complete," with one teacher noting that it was "really straightforward, advertised via ECT programme." The application form's focus on identifying areas of school need was particularly valued, with participants commenting that it "gave us an insight of areas to work on" and helped them have focused conversations with mentors about "what would make a successful application."

However, some practical considerations emerged, including word count limitations on certain questions and occasional confusion about funding sources, with one school noting they "couldn't find it in the bank at first" until the funding source was clarified.

Time Allocation and Programme Structure

The year-long timeframe was generally well-received, with participants describing it as "a good amount of time for this kind of project." The structured approach, including regular check-in meetings and peer learning sessions, was particularly appreciated. One ECT noted that it "helped to have check-in meetings and peer learning sessions," whilst another valued having "dedicated time" for planning outside of school hours.

Several participants suggested that starting earlier in the academic year would be beneficial, with one commenting that "starting earlier and finishing earlier would help with planning and fitting around school timetables." The period leading up to Christmas was identified as particularly challenging, with one teacher noting that "the run up to Christmas felt rushed with trying to book artists and venues and get responses from people."

Cultural Partnerships and Creative Practitioner Collaborations

The partnerships with cultural venues and creative practitioners received overwhelmingly positive feedback. ECTs rated their partnerships highly, with organisations such as St James' Park

receiving 10/10 ratings and most others scoring 7-9/10. The quality of support from cultural partners was consistently praised, with participants describing them as "fantastic," "very supportive," and "super helpful and accommodating."

The willingness of cultural partners to exceed expectations was a recurring theme. One ECT noted that creative practitioners were "willing to offer a lot more than expected and really willing to give things a go," whilst another appreciated that workshops were "engaging" and that they "made lots of new connections" and "learnt about what is available for next year."

Budget Management and Financial Considerations

The £3,000 budget received mixed feedback, with responses varying significantly based on school size and project ambition. Whilst one participant noted that "the budget was healthy and I was able to get the most out of it," others found it more restrictive. A teacher from a larger school commented that the budget was "restrained when accounting for the cost, particularly as a larger school," whilst another noted that whilst it "sounds like a lot but in reality doesn't go very far," it provided "an excellent starting point."

Transport costs emerged as a significant concern across multiple responses. Several ECTs noted that transport consumed a substantial portion of their budget, with one stating that transport required "a third of the budget!!" and another commenting that "lots of budget to work with – shame so much had to be taken up with transport." This led to suggestions for separate transport budgets or alternative transport solutions.

Creative Producer Support

The support provided by the Creative Producer received exceptional praise throughout the feedback. ECTs consistently described her support as "amazing," "fantastic," and "excellent." The responsiveness was particularly valued, with one teacher noting that the CP "was always at the drop of a hat" and "made us not panic!" Another appreciated that she "was great at responding to ideas/emails and had a great bank of partners to work with."

What emerged as particularly distinctive about the Creative Producer role was her unique position as a bridge between educational and creative sectors. ECTs frequently highlighted how the CP opened doors to creative practitioners and cultural organisations that would have remained completely unknown to them otherwise. This access to previously untapped networks proved invaluable, with teachers discovering collaborative opportunities they could never have identified through conventional educational channels.

The quality of introductions and connections facilitated by the Creative Producer was also highlighted, with one ECT commenting that the CP "supported finding and talking with artists and venues to find someone who fit our project aims." This matching process demonstrated the CP's deep understanding of both educational contexts and creative practice, enabling her to identify synergies that neither schools nor artists might have recognized independently.

Beyond simple introductions, the Creative Producer played a crucial role in developing the practical skills ECTs needed to engage effectively with creative practitioners. Teachers reported gaining confidence in initiating conversations with artists, understanding project timelines and expectations, and navigating the often unfamiliar territory of creative collaboration. The CP provided scaffolding that enabled educators to move from tentative first encounters to meaningful professional relationships with creative partners.

Perhaps most significantly, the Creative Producer facilitated the development of a "shared language" between schools and creative practitioners. ECTs described how the CP helped translate educational objectives into terms that resonated with artists, while simultaneously helping teachers understand creative processes and methodologies. This bridge-building proved essential in establishing productive working relationships, with both parties developing mutual understanding and respect for each other's expertise and constraints. The CP's bilingual fluency in both educational and creative vocabularies enabled genuine dialogue where previously there might have been miscommunication or missed opportunities for connection.

Peer Learning Sessions

The peer learning sessions were generally well-received, providing valuable opportunities for networking and project development. Participants appreciated the chance to see "what everyone else did with the project" and valued the "time dedicated to the project without background noise." The sessions were described as "brilliant way to network, gain ideas, keep purpose fresh and at the forefront."

However, some areas for improvement were identified. Several ECTs suggested that more planning time during these sessions would be beneficial, with one noting that "more free time to plan project outside school time would benefit future ECTs." The cost of cover for these sessions was also raised as a concern, particularly for smaller schools who found it "a bit of a struggle for smaller schools to afford/cover days out."

Communication and Overall Support

Communication throughout the programme was consistently praised as "very good and consistent," "positive, timely, efficient," and "great communication – always there to support, answer questions and just overall friendly." The team's approachability and responsiveness were particularly valued, with one ECT noting that "everyone from the project was/has been very open, approachable, helpful."

Programme Impact and Future Recommendations

The overall impact of the programme was overwhelmingly positive, with ECTs describing it as "a brilliant project and fantastic for our pupils" and expressing that their "confidence has increased so much." The professional development benefits were clear, with one teacher noting it was a "great project for my personal development and experiences for my class!"

Looking forward, participants suggested several improvements including earlier start dates, separate transport budgets, and follow-up sessions to share implementation strategies. One ECT proposed a "Zoom catch up next year to find out what people have implemented further in their school," whilst another suggested ensuring "ECTs have control of their project – not taken over by senior staff/mentor."

The programme's success is perhaps best summarised by one participant's comment: "There should be more cultural programmes like this," reflecting the high level of satisfaction and the perceived value of the Cultural Match initiative for both teacher development and pupil outcomes.

Mentor Perspectives

The feedback from mentors who supported ECTs through the Cultural Match programme provides valuable insights into the programme's effectiveness from a supervisory perspective.

Although the mentor cohort was smaller (5 participants), their responses complement and reinforce many of the themes identified in the ECT feedback.

Application Process and Programme Structure

Mentors found the application process straightforward, with one noting that their "ECT completed – said it was useful and manageable." However, there was some initial confusion about eligibility, with one mentor commenting: "I wasn't originally going to apply as I read the information as only applying to ECTs but then realised that it applied to teachers up to (not clear to read) which opened up the possibility."

The time allocation across the year was generally well-received, with mentors appreciating the structured check-ins. One mentor noted that "regular in school meetings with ECT were easy to arrange during directed time," whilst another found it "very useful – it has been great to check in throughout the year and share ideas." However, timing concerns were raised, particularly around the naturally busy periods, with one mentor asking "Could it start earlier?"

Cultural Partnerships and Support Systems

Mentors were positive about the cultural partnerships, describing them as "predominantly positive" and highlighting successful relationships established with venues such as The Great North Museum and Tyne Theatre. The Creative Producer support was particularly valued, with Sarah described as "brilliant at providing support throughout the year" and "an excellent go between for our school and various organisations and artists."

Budget and Practical Considerations

The budget was viewed as "reasonable" by mentors, though transport costs remained a concern. One mentor noted that "the most frustrating thing was the bus hire costs," echoing the ECT feedback. The flexibility to use existing resources was appreciated, with one mentor commenting that "being able to use me as a music teacher enabled budget to be spent in other areas."

Peer Learning and Professional Development

Mentors valued the peer learning sessions for their ECTs, describing them as "beneficial for ECT" and appreciating the opportunity to "meet others and get away from the class setting." However, they raised practical concerns about the format, with one mentor suggesting that "full days weren't necessary for mentors" and that sessions could be "condensed into half a day." The high supply costs were a recurring concern, with one mentor noting that "supply costs are almost equal to the budget."

Overall Programme Impact

The overall response from mentors was highly positive, with one summarising the experience: "The project has been fantastic – we have really enjoyed being involved." The professional development benefits were recognised, with mentors appreciating the opportunity to "learning to support them better" and gaining "perspectives from other schools."

The mentor feedback reinforces the programme's success whilst highlighting practical considerations around timing, costs, and session formats that could inform future programme development.

4.1.7. Cultural Match Programme Impact: Key Changes and Improvements

The Cultural Match programme created a comprehensive learning journey that transformed participants' confidence, capabilities, and practice in cultural education. Beginning with ECTs' initial enthusiasm tempered by practical uncertainties and mentors' strong beliefs constrained by familiar barriers, the programme combined structured support, hands-on project delivery, and collaborative peer learning to build both individual competence and collective knowledge. Through regular peer learning sessions, participants shared challenges, celebrated successes, and developed solutions together, creating a community of practice that extended learning beyond individual projects. The pre- and post-questionnaire findings reveal not only substantial improvements in confidence and practical skills, but also the development of leadership capabilities, professional networks, and sustainable approaches to cultural integration that participants are committed to continuing beyond the programme.

The Cultural Match programme delivered substantial improvements in confidence and capability across all participants, with the most significant gains observed in areas that were initially identified as barriers to implementation.

Transformative Growth in Practical Skills

The programme's most striking success was addressing ECTs' initial practical confidence gaps. Where ECTs previously scored lowest—integrating cultural activities into lesson plans (2.8) and identifying cultural opportunities (3.33)—post-programme scores showed dramatic improvements to 4.2 and 4.4 respectively. This 50% increase in practical confidence was accompanied by enhanced leadership capabilities, with one ECT from Shiremoor Primary School reflecting: "My confidence has increased exponentially in all areas as I had to speak to colleagues I was unfamiliar with, organise school trips and lead them and organise a whole school celebration event."

Sustained Commitment to Cultural Education

Pre-programme intentions to continue cultural approaches (4.6) were not only maintained but strengthened, with post-programme scores reaching 4.8 for ECTs and 4.6 for mentors. This commitment was underpinned by direct experience of student impact, as one ECT from Collingwood School observed: "Pupils have experienced public transport for the first time, had the opportunity to visit museums and historical sites that they would not normally get to experience."

Professional Development Beyond Cultural Education

The programme generated unexpected professional development gains, with participants developing project management skills and strategic thinking capabilities. An ECT from St Johns Primary School valued gaining experience to "independently complete a full project, including a budget," while another from Ovingham First School gained "confidence that I can lead and 'pull off' big projects."

Demonstrable Student Impact

The programme delivered on ECTs' initial aspirations to broaden student horizons, with evidence of lasting impact. A mentor from Newsham Primary School reported that "it has made children realise they can be anything they want to be," while an ECT from Ponteland Primary School noted

that students "made new friends that they will meet again in high school and their confidence grew" and "some have joined theatre clubs since!"

Building Sustainable Networks

The programme successfully addressed mentors' pre-programme calls for networking opportunities. A mentor from Canning Street Primary gained "more of an awareness of local museums etc to work with," while another from Ponteland Primary School valued "hearing from other delegates and supporting other schools" as a key programme success factor.

Despite these gains, participants identified ongoing support needs around funding, time allocation, and practical resources—indicating the programme's success in building capability while highlighting the systemic challenges that remain for sustainable cultural education integration.

4.2. Impact on Students

Student impact was measured throughout the programme through multiple methods including student observations during sessions and showcases, student interviews which are detailed in the case studies, and teacher reflections on the impact on their students. This particular section focuses on a post-programme questionnaire that was completed by just two of the schools involved, giving an interesting but limited insight into their experience.

Overview of Participants

The questionnaire captured responses from 31 students across two primary schools: St John's Primary School (Year 3 students) and Whittingham C of E Primary School (Years 5 and 6 students). All students worked with creative professionals and museums, with St John's students collaborating with musicians and museum staff on a song-writing and filmmaking, while Whittingham students worked with creative practitioners and gallery staff on visual arts projects.

Quantitative Findings: Overwhelmingly Positive Engagement

The numerical responses reveal exceptionally high levels of student satisfaction and engagement. On a scale of 1-5, the vast majority of responses clustered around 4 and 5, with particularly strong ratings for:

- **Enjoyment of participation:** Most students rated their enjoyment at 5/5, with very few responses below 3
- **Excitement about working with professionals:** Students consistently expressed high levels of excitement about collaborating with creative practitioners, musicians, and museum staff
- **Pride in their work:** Students demonstrated strong pride in their creative outputs, whether songs, videos, or artwork
- **Desire to repeat the experience:** Nearly all students indicated they would like to participate in similar projects again

The few lower ratings (1-2) appeared primarily in areas related to comfort sharing ideas or feeling confident about creative activities, suggesting that while most students thrived, a small minority may have found the creative exposure challenging initially.

Qualitative Themes: What Students Valued Most

The Power of Place and Experience

Students from both schools consistently highlighted visits as transformative experiences. St John's students frequently mentioned "going to the museum" and "the trip" as favourite aspects, with one student noting the Discovery Museum visit where they "saw [the musician] and then in the music video [the musician] was there again" - demonstrating how museum artifacts became integrated into their creative work.

Whittingham students emphasised the impact of working at the Laing Art Gallery and exploring Newcastle's architecture, with one student reflecting on "how different the buildings were" during their city walk. The Creative Producer commented that "the experience Whittingham had

at the Laing was made all the better with the relationship with the Learning team staff who delivered a workshop and also came on the walk with them.”

Creative Process and Ownership

The students' responses reveal deep engagement with the creative process itself. St John's students particularly valued:

- Song writing and lyric creation ("My favourite part was making the lyrics")
- The recording process ("The recording", "Making the video")
- Performance elements ("Singing the chorus", "the 'gimme a one, gimme a two' breakdown")

Whittingham students focused on:

- Hands-on artistic techniques ("Spray Painting", "3D Art at the Gallery")
- Working directly with professional creative practitioners ("Enjoyed working with the artist", "Working with [the artist] at the Laing Art Gallery")

Collaborative Learning and Social Connection

Many students highlighted the social aspects of their learning. Comments like "By singing the song with my partners and friends" and references to group work suggest that the collaborative nature of these projects enhanced their experience. The projects appeared to create opportunities for peer learning and shared creative expression.

Surprising Discoveries and New Learning

Students were asked what surprised them or what they learned, revealing insights into their expanded understanding:

- Historical and Cultural Awareness: St John's students discovered historical elements ("The shark bit", "About how so many people died", "Yes there are so so old") suggesting their museum visits opened up new historical perspectives.
- Artistic Techniques and Processes: Whittingham students noted discoveries about "Architecture and how it is used now", "The choice of colours used in the artwork", and "using photos in a calm way to explore."
- Personal Capabilities: Several students expressed surprise at their own abilities, with one noting "I learnt how to sing the song and I know it off by heart" and another discovering "it's not that hard."

Areas for Development and Student Suggestions

While overwhelmingly positive, students offered thoughtful suggestions for future projects:

- Thematic Variations: Students suggested exploring different themes ("I would love to change the theme to something about bees", "how about art", "about love and friendship"), indicating appetite for diverse creative exploration.
- Technical Improvements: Some students offered practical suggestions ("get the camera more fade away", "go in groups"), showing engagement with the production process.

- **Extended Experiences:** Comments like "I would just change that we get to play outside forever" suggest students wanted more time for exploration and discovery.

Impact on Creative Confidence and Future Engagement

The responses suggest the projects had significant impact on students' relationship with creative activities. High ratings for "feeling more confident about trying creative activities" and "would like to do something like this again" indicate lasting positive effects.

Student comments like "Yes it was really good and it was really creative", "I will remember it in the future", and "It was so good that we got to do activities" suggest the projects created memorable, transformative experiences that students associate with positive creative engagement.

Conclusion

The student voices reveal that the Cultural Match programme succeeded in creating engaging, memorable experiences that combined learning with creative expression. The high satisfaction ratings, coupled with specific, enthusiastic descriptions of favourite activities, suggest that working with creative practitioners and cultural venues provided students with unique opportunities for creative growth and cultural engagement.

The projects appear to have been particularly successful in making cultural learning tangible and personal - whether through seeing museum artifacts incorporated into their own creative work or through exploring their local urban environment with professional creative practitioners. Students' suggestions for future projects indicate not just satisfaction with their experience, but active thinking about how such creative learning might be extended and varied.

Most significantly, the responses suggest these brief but intensive creative collaborations had lasting impact, with students expressing both pride in their achievements and enthusiasm for future creative endeavours.

4.3. Impact on Creative Practitioners

The experiences of three creative practitioners, a musician, a filmmaker, and a visual artist, reveal both the transformative potential and structural challenges of arts-based educational partnerships in schools. Their collective insights illuminate the complex dynamics between creative practitioners, educators, and students in collaborative creative projects.

Transformative Impact on Students

All three practitioners witnessed significant student engagement and creative development through their projects. At St John's Primary School, the musician observed that children were "creatively fired up by the experience and enjoyed expressing themselves," noting how the project helped them "engage deeply with the concept of their histories and the heritage of the area." The filmmaker similarly highlighted the significance of hands-on creative exposure, explaining that "I think the young people got the most out of working with two artists and having hands-on experience of music and film production, something they wouldn't normally get a chance to do." This professional exposure proved inspirational, with the filmmaker reporting that during Q&A sessions, "a few mentioned they wanted to become filmmakers in the future."

The visual artist's work demonstrated the power of arts as a catalyst for learning and identity exploration. He observed how students engaged deeply with photographs of their local area,

making personal connections to familiar landmarks: "It gets children asking questions as well, like, 'Where's that? What's that?'" This localised approach helped pupils explore themes of place and belonging while encouraging narrative thinking. Despite logistical challenges, the visual artist noted that "the children really engaged well" and reported receiving "lots of really positive comments from the children."

Personal and Professional Rewards

The practitioners found their school-based work personally fulfilling and professionally meaningful. The musician expressed that she "loved this project" and felt "great satisfaction and joy" from working with enthusiastic children and supportive schools. The filmmaker's motivation stemmed from broader social justice concerns, reflecting: "I always like to give opportunities to younger people because I know how vital it is to have exposure to the arts at a young age, especially for people from a working class background as you don't always have the same opportunities as other people." His highlight was "watching the young people present their work back to the rest of their school and their parents, and to see the pride they had in their faces."

The visual artist remained positive about student engagement and creative outcomes despite facing some logistical challenges. The quality of final artworks, with one set prepared for exhibition and another developed into permanent playground displays, demonstrated the lasting impact of artist-led sessions within school communities.

Structural and Communication Challenges

However, the practitioners identified significant structural barriers that undermined project effectiveness and sustainability. The visual artist had clear communication with the ECT of one school when organising and planning the project, but found delivery more complicated when he wasn't able to work directly with the ECT, noting: "I had four different teachers and four different sets of teaching assistants," which made it difficult to maintain coherence as he found himself having to "start fresh again each time." This fragmented engagement prevented the building of rapport and momentum essential for deep creative work.

A recurring concern was the imbalance between valuing process and focusing on final products, with the visual artist expressing frustration that there were sometimes missed opportunities for schools to engage more deeply with the pedagogical value of creative practice.

Sustainability and Legacy Challenges

All three practitioners grappled with questions of project sustainability and long-term impact. The musician acknowledged that "the actual project required a high level of skill and experience (technical, creative and also, the equipment that we both brought in and used)" and concluded that successful replication would still require creative practitioner involvement rather than being something that could be done "in house."

The visual artist demonstrated the most developed approach to sustainability, providing schools with session plans, material lists, and easily replicable activities. He explained: "Once you've set up an activity like that, you can repeat it and repeat it and repeat it." However, he recognised that without consistent staff commitment, this legacy risked being lost.

Recommendations for Future Practice

The practitioners offered valuable insights for improving arts-education partnerships. The visual artist highlighted the untapped potential for meaningful teacher professional development,

suggesting a model where educators could observe artist-led sessions and then attempt delivery themselves with informal mentoring support. He noted that while supplying materials was helpful, "seeing someone do it... and just watch" had far greater impact. This approach could help teachers gain confidence with techniques that might otherwise seem inaccessible, as he acknowledged: "if you don't do it all the time," even finding appropriate materials could feel like "a needle in a haystack."

Both the musician and the filmmaker advocated for longer-term engagement, with the musician recommending "longer term work" and "whole school programmes, not just single classes." The filmmaker felt that "with more time the young people could have learned more about filmmaking and used more of the camera equipment." The visual artist's experiences underscored the need for clearer communication protocols and consistent teacher engagement to fully realise the potential of creative partnerships.

Conclusion

Through their diverse experiences, the musician, the filmmaker, and the visual artist demonstrated both the profound creative and educational impact possible through creative practitioner-school collaborations and the structural improvements needed to maximise their effectiveness. Their insights revealed that while students respond enthusiastically to professional creative engagement, sustainable impact requires addressing communication challenges, valuing process alongside product, and developing robust models for knowledge transfer and teacher development. Their collective experiences illustrate that investment in teacher understanding and consistent support structures has the potential to generate long-term educational value well beyond initial collaborations.

4.4. Impact on Cultural Venue Professionals

The Cultural Match programme brought together cultural venue professionals and schools to create meaningful cultural partnerships. This section of the analysis examines the experiences and reflections of three cultural venue practitioners (given the pseudonyms CVP1, CVP2 and CVP3) who worked with ECTs and their students across different cultural venues: CVP1 is from a history museum and worked with Collingwood and Ovingham schools, CVP2 is from a local Roman Fort and partnered with Stakeford Primary School, and CVP3 is from an art gallery which collaborated with Linton Primary, Whittingham Primary, and Hareside Primary.

Diverse Institutional Goals and Approaches

The cultural venue partners worked with schools that had varying objectives for their participation in the Cultural Match programme. CVP1 observed that "Collingwood - careers. Ovingham - experiences and furthering curriculum topics," highlighting how different schools approached the partnership with distinct priorities in mind.

CVP2's experience at the Roman Fort focused on curriculum enhancement, where students engaged with Roman history through hands-on activities that culminated in "Roman Myth artwork." This approach demonstrated how cultural venues can support specific curriculum areas while maintaining their unique educational identity.

CVP3's work with multiple primary schools through the art gallery revealed perhaps the most ambitious goals, centred on "raising cultural capital of their pupils, for their pupils to get a better

understanding of things outside of their immediate locality, and to raise aspirations." This broader social and educational mission reflects the transformative potential that cultural venues can have on young learners.

The Challenge of School-Museum Collaboration

A striking theme that emerged from the responses was the varied level of collaboration between schools and cultural venues. CVP1 noted a concerning trend: "more focus/collaboration with the museum. This occurred more naturally in year 1 of the program, but in year 2 the teachers have been more hands off/at a distance. More collaboration was nurtured in year 1."

This observation suggests that successful partnerships require active cultivation and that initial enthusiasm may wane without proper support structures. CVP1's recommendation for "working with the artist or being aware of the artist and their focus would be a great benefit as well" points to the need for better communication and shared understanding between all parties involved.

In contrast, CVP2 described a more balanced approach where "the teaching staff took a backseat during actively talking with students in sessions, handing over delivery to museum staff but they were approachable and present when needed." This model appears to have worked well, with teachers supporting students while allowing cultural venue professionals to lead the educational experience.

Student Engagement and Impact

The cultural venue practitioners observed remarkable changes in student engagement throughout their projects. CVP3 reported particularly striking feedback: "teachers from Linton voiced that they had not seen their pupils this engaged and focus for this length of time on a single task before." This observation underscores the unique power of cultural venues to captivate young learners in ways that traditional classroom settings might not achieve.

CVP2 focused on the emotional and social development she witnessed, noting her satisfaction in "seeing the children open up as they became more at ease in their surroundings - enjoying what they were doing and learning as they engaged." This transformation speaks to the importance of creating welcoming, accessible cultural spaces for young people.

The projects produced tangible outcomes that celebrated student achievement. CVP3's work with Linton Primary resulted in students having "their artwork displayed in a pop-up display at the gallery, with a self-led celebration/preview event," providing students with a genuine sense of accomplishment and ownership over their cultural participation.

Professional Development for Museum Staff

The Cultural Match programme also provided valuable learning opportunities for the museum professionals themselves. CVP3 reflected on "being able to be a part of the planning process of the school projects, to ensure that the teachers were getting as much out of their visit as possible to support work back in the classroom." This collaborative planning process enhanced her understanding of how museums can better serve educational needs.

CVP2 gained insights into how cultural venues can support curriculum delivery, recognising that her experience would help schools "know that cultural venues are available to support them in their curriculum and that they can comfortably liaise with museum professionals in order to create bespoke sessions suited to their needs."

Building Long-term Relationships and Legacy

The museum partners demonstrated a clear vision for the lasting impact of their work. CVP3 articulated comprehensive hopes for the project's legacy: "That pupils would feel more comfortable venturing out of their immediate locality, and even stepping foot into an art gallery and exploring with their families. They have been exposed to a range of new experiences, including seeing people in job roles they may not have realised existed before."

CVP2 emphasised the broader cultural confidence that the project could instill: "That they will all feel more comfortable coming to cultural venues - both schools in booking and engaging with museum professionals and for students to feel more comfortable in cultural settings, knowing that they are places for them too."

The sustainability of these partnerships appears to be a key consideration. CVP3 noted that "we have seen schools on the previous Cultural Match round become part of some of our other learning programmes, and I would hope that this is the case going forwards for these schools too."

Recommendations for Future Practice

The museum partners offered thoughtful suggestions for improving future iterations of the Cultural Match programme. CVP2 advocated for more ambitious programming: "That schools go beyond wanting to do workshops that are run-of-the mill bookable by any school workshops. The project should go beyond this; opening up new horizons."

CVP3 proposed structural improvements that would deepen the partnership experience: "To be able to further embed the museum or gallery in the development and facilitation of the programme. It would be great to have more than one visit with the group, and if that included an in-school visit, this might help to break down some of the barriers facing the pupils' engagement at their first visit onsite."

She also emphasised the importance of celebration and recognition: "It would also be wonderful to see the final product for each project, and be involved in celebrating the pupils' achievements with them at the end."

4.5. Development of Sustainable Partnerships

4.5.1. Building Relationships with Cultural Venues

The partnership programme has been successful in fostering meaningful relationships between ECTs and cultural venues. Feedback collected during the final peer learning session revealed that teachers have developed substantial connections with their partner organisations, with the majority of ECTs rating their relationship strength between 6-9 on a ten-point scale. Notably, no ECT rated their relationship below 4, indicating that even the weaker connections established still had some substance.

The distribution of relationship strength showed that three ECTs achieved the highest levels of partnership (rating 9), whilst two ECTs each rated their relationships at levels 6 and 8. This suggests that most participants were able to move beyond superficial engagement to develop working relationships with genuine potential for future collaboration.

Mentors demonstrated even stronger relationship development, with one mentor achieving the maximum rating of 10, and others clustering around the higher end of the scale (7-8). This pattern suggests that mentors, with their additional experience and school leadership responsibilities, may be better positioned to establish and maintain institutional partnerships with cultural venues.

4.5.2. Sustaining Partnerships Beyond the Programme

The Central Role of Funding

The most significant barrier to sustaining partnerships emerged clearly from both ECT and mentor responses: funding. Multiple participants highlighted this challenge, with one ECT noting the need for "more funding to be able to continue working with the venue" and another requesting "more, ongoing funding" whilst asking organisers to "make finding pockets easier to find as I found this project by accident."

This funding challenge extends beyond simple programme costs to encompass the practical realities of school budgets. As one mentor explained, sustainability requires "ongoing funding" and "long term financial support," whilst another emphasised the need for "ring fenced funding to build succession."

Transport as a Persistent Challenge

The geographical realities of accessing cultural venues consistently emerged as a practical barrier. ECTs repeatedly mentioned transport as a key requirement for sustaining relationships, with one noting they needed "transport for future visits" and another specifically requesting "transport" alongside "new ideas." The high proportion of budgets allocated to transport, as noted in the summary themes, clearly impacts schools' ability to maintain regular engagement with cultural venues.

Institutional Support and Leadership Buy-in

Beyond funding, the sustainability of partnerships depends heavily on institutional support within schools. One mentor highlighted the importance of "support from SLT" and "buy in from all stakeholders," whilst another noted the need to develop "culture within school" and "parental expectation of these types of partnerships."

This institutional dimension was echoed by an ECT who recognised that success required their "head teacher/SLT/governors" to support continued engagement. The challenge appears to be embedding cultural partnerships within school strategic planning rather than treating them as one-off projects.

4.5.3. The Role of Personal Relationships

Building Trust with Cultural Venue Staff

The feedback reveals that personal relationships can be crucial to partnership development. One mentor specifically highlighted how "the relationship we've developed with [the Creative Producer] is more beneficial. She will definitely be our 'go to person' for future cultural projects."

This personalisation of partnerships suggests that sustainable relationships depend not just on institutional agreements but on trust and familiarity between individuals. ECTs recognised this, with one noting that "the venues were amazing at accommodating what was needed" and expressing confidence that "they would be the same when contacting outside of the programme."

Venue Responsiveness and Flexibility

The cultural venues appear to have made strong impressions on participating schools through their accommodating approach. One ECT enthusiastically described their venue as "absolutely amazing and would want to work with them again," whilst another noted that venues were "very accommodating and happy to help."

This responsiveness seems to have been particularly important in building confidence for future engagement. The venues' willingness to adapt to school needs has clearly contributed to teachers' sense that partnerships could be sustained beyond the formal programme structure.

Working with North East Museums

The feedback provides some insight into partnerships with North East Museums venues, particularly through one ECT's experience with the Great North Museum: Hancock. This teacher highlighted the quality of the "curator session really good" and appreciated the "themed sessions" approach, suggesting that the museum's educational programming made a strong impression.

The mention of the Great North Museum: Hancock in the context of wanting "new ideas" indicates that this partnership stimulated creative thinking about curriculum possibilities. However, even this positive experience was tempered by the persistent challenge of "transport," reinforcing how geographical accessibility remains a barrier to sustaining relationships with cultural venues across the North East.

The brief but positive reference to this museum suggests that North East Museums venues are well-positioned to develop meaningful educational partnerships, with their curator-led sessions and thematic programming approaches proving particularly valuable to teachers.

4.5.4. Strategies for Partnership Continuation

Communication and Planning

ECTs identified proactive communication as essential for sustaining relationships. Suggestions included the need to "continue to communicate" and "organise trips in advance for 25/26," showing forward-thinking approaches to partnership maintenance.

The importance of relevant, targeted communication was emphasised by one ECT who stressed the need to "make sure it's relevant communication" when engaging with senior leadership. This suggests an understanding that sustained partnerships require strategic communication tailored to different stakeholder groups.

Diverse Engagement Opportunities

Participants identified various ways to maintain engagement beyond traditional school visits. These included "special events for our school," access to "guest artists," and "online events" featuring "familiar faces from the gallery/organisation to keep ideas and relationships going."

One ECT suggested exploring what venues might offer that schools could "access for free," indicating an understanding that sustainable partnerships might require different financial models from the intensive programme approach.

Collaborative Programming

The feedback shows that teachers are thinking beyond simple service provision to genuine collaboration. One ECT spoke of planning "what events we could put on there to continue our relationship," suggesting a move towards partnerships where schools contribute to venue programming rather than simply consuming it.

This collaborative approach was reinforced by another ECT who wanted to "plan another project to continue to develop relationships," indicating that sustainability depends on ongoing creative collaboration rather than repeated delivery of the same programmes.

4.6. Conclusion

The Cultural Match programme demonstrates the significant potential for meaningful partnerships between museums and schools, particularly in supporting early career teachers and enhancing student engagement with cultural venues. The experiences of CVP1, CVP2, and CVP3 reveal both the challenges and rewards of such collaborations.

While issues around collaboration levels and communication between partners need addressing, the positive impacts on student engagement, cultural confidence, and educational outcomes are clear. The museum professionals' reflections provide valuable insights for developing more effective, sustainable partnerships that can truly transform how young people engage with cultural venues and how schools can use these resources to enrich their educational provision.

5. Discussion

The Transformative Journey: From Uncertainty to Confidence

The Cultural Match programme fundamentally transformed Early Career Teachers' relationship with cultural education, creating a remarkable shift from initial uncertainty to confident, independent practice. This transformation was most evident in the dramatic improvements observed in practical skills that initially presented the greatest barriers to implementation.

The programme's most striking success lay in addressing ECTs' practical confidence gaps. Where participants initially scored lowest - integrating cultural activities into lesson plans (2.8) and identifying cultural opportunities (3.33) - post-programme scores showed remarkable improvements to 4.2 and 4.4 respectively. This 50% increase in practical confidence represents far more than statistical improvement; it reflects a fundamental shift in professional identity and capability.

The journey from uncertainty to confidence was particularly evident in ECTs' evolving relationship with cultural venues. As one teacher from Shiremoor Primary School reflected: "I'm very excited to work with cultural organisations and it feels less overwhelming/scary to reach out and find out about information now having started this project." This sentiment was echoed by a colleague from Stakeford who noted: "I'm definitely now feeling more confident working with cultural organisations and have booked a trip outside of the cultural match project - this is something I'd definitely have been less confident doing myself prior to this."

The programme's success in demystifying cultural partnerships was particularly significant given ECTs' initial apprehensions. The discovery that cultural venues were "as accessible as they have been" and "as generous as they have been" (ECT, Excelsior Academy) challenged preconceptions and opened new possibilities for ongoing collaboration. This revelation created a ripple effect, with one participant explaining: "From this I have felt confident enough to source my own writer for the creative writing workshop I wanted to host... I felt confident on what questions to ask after my experience booking the artist" (ECT, Ovingham First School).

Beyond Cultural Education: Unexpected Professional Development

The programme generated significant professional development gains that extended far beyond cultural education into broader leadership and project management capabilities. ECTs found themselves managing complex logistics, budgets, and stakeholder relationships - experiences that accelerated their professional growth in ways that traditional mentoring approaches might not have achieved.

The scope of professional development was captured by one ECT from Shiremoor Primary School: "My confidence has increased exponentially in all areas as I had to speak to colleagues I was unfamiliar with, organise school trips and lead them and organise a whole school celebration event which parents were invited to." This comprehensive skill development was echoed by another participant who valued gaining experience to "independently complete a full project, including a budget" (ECT, St John's Primary School).

Mentors observed how the programme enabled ECTs to "step up from being perceived as a junior member of staff and having real responsibilities... career-wise, I think it's great for them because they're managing budgets, in this case, doing whole school initiatives." This elevation in status and responsibility appeared to be crucial for ECTs' professional development, providing

opportunities for leadership that might not otherwise have been available in their early career stage.

The development of creative confidence proved particularly valuable for ECTs who had not previously considered themselves creative arts practitioners. As one teacher from Hareside Primary School noted: "My confidence in art has grown massively as it is not my area of expertise. This will be due to seeking advice on different areas of art from experts and watching workshops being delivered." This enhanced creative confidence translated into innovative curriculum integration, with teachers looking for "opportunities to use creative means or link creativity to learning across the curriculum" (ECT, Canning Street Primary).

Student Impact: Expanding Horizons and Building Cultural Capital

The programme's impact on students was perhaps its most profound achievement, particularly in addressing educational inequalities and expanding cultural capital for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The geographic and cultural isolation experienced by many pupils was starkly illustrated by one teacher's observation that "Children don't go beyond the train tracks that border our community. When they came to Newcastle they thought they were coming abroad and cried because they didn't have their passports!" (ECT, Newsham Primary School).

This geographic insularity was not merely physical but represented broader limitations in cultural capital and life experience. The revelation that "The beach is five minutes away and half of them haven't even been to the beach" (ECT, Newsham Primary School) highlighted how proximity to cultural and natural resources did not guarantee access or experience. The programme's success in overcoming these barriers was evidenced by transformative student responses, with children developing new understanding of their regional identity and cultural heritage.

The impact on student aspirations was particularly significant. Teachers reported that participation "has made children realise they can be anything they want to be" (Newsham Primary School), whilst others noted how "Children were very excited by the concept of being an artist and that it is a real job, broadening their horizons to see this is possible" (ECT, Newsham Primary School). This expansion of career possibilities was particularly important for children from less advantaged backgrounds who might otherwise have limited exposure to creative professions.

The programme's emphasis on authentic partnerships with professional creative practitioners proved crucial for student engagement. The filmmaker working with Cultural Match schools observed: "I think the young people got the most out of working with two artists and having hands-on experience of music and film production, something they wouldn't normally get a chance to do." This professional exposure was inspirational, with several students expressing interest in creative careers following their participation.

The Power of Place-Based Learning

The programme's success in connecting students with their local cultural heritage whilst expanding their horizons represents a sophisticated approach to place-based learning. Rather than simply exposing children to distant cultural experiences, the projects helped students develop pride in their regional identity whilst building connections to broader cultural narratives.

This approach was particularly evident in the creative practitioner's photography-based work, where students engaged deeply with images of their local area, making personal connections to familiar landmarks. As the creative practitioner observed: "It gets children asking questions as

well, like, 'Where's that? What's that?'" This localised approach helped pupils explore themes of place and belonging while encouraging narrative thinking about their community's history and development.

The programme's success in celebrating North East cultural assets whilst providing crucial cultural capital was captured by one teacher's reflection that children now "Create links between past and present and be proud of where they come from" (ECT, Collingwood School). This approach avoided the deficit model that might characterise disadvantaged communities as lacking cultural resources, instead celebrating local assets whilst expanding access to regional cultural venues.

Addressing Systemic Barriers Through Creative Solutions

Despite the programme's successes, participants consistently identified time, budget, and logistical constraints as ongoing challenges. However, the programme's approach to these barriers was notably creative and collaborative, with participants developing practical solutions rather than simply accepting limitations.

The time management challenge was universal, with one ECT noting: "The most significant challenge is probably managing time and general teaching duties. As an ECT1, I am still getting the hang of being fully in charge of my class and the planning/resourcing/marketing etc" (ECT, Shiremoor Primary School). However, the peer learning sessions provided crucial support for sharing strategies and normalising these challenges.

Budget constraints were addressed through creative resource allocation and collaborative funding approaches. Schools demonstrated ingenuity in maximising their £3,000 allocation, with one school explaining: "We want every child in school to be included and this felt like a very challenging task at first with £3000, however with support from [the Creative Producer] this is now very achievable. We have broken the project down into small steps and adapted our ideas in order to achieve this" (Mentor, Canning Street Primary).

The programme's emphasis on quality over quantity proved crucial for managing scope and resources. As one ECT reflected: "The challenge I have faced is just ensuring my project is manageable, ensuring I use SMART targets to make sure I can do everything properly. I would rather do less things but a better quality than loads of poorly organised things that the children don't benefit from" (ECT, Ovingham First School).

The Role of Mentorship in Cultural Education

The programme revealed important insights about effective mentorship in cultural education contexts. The mentors' role proved crucial not only in providing practical support but in modelling confidence and belief in cultural education's value. However, the mentoring relationship required careful calibration between support and independence.

Successful mentoring involved "encouraging my ECT and reassuring her that obviously we'll come up with problems along the way because it's such a massive scaled project, and that that's okay. So just being there every step of the way with her rather than her thinking she was on her own" (Mentor). This scaffolded approach provided security whilst enabling independence.

Equally important was mentors' ability to recognise when to step back: "it was knowing when to step back and observe, and I'll be there to help when you need it... but it was knowing when to

step back and just watching her." This balance between support and autonomy appeared crucial for developing genuine confidence and self-efficacy.

The programme also highlighted how mentors' own learning was enhanced through participation. As one mentor noted: "Hearing from other delegates and supporting other schools has been a big part of what has made the programme a success" (Mentor, Ponteland Primary School). This peer learning amongst mentors created a community of practice that extended beyond individual school contexts.

Creative Practitioner Perspectives: Rewards and Challenges

The experiences of creative practitioners revealed both the transformative potential and structural challenges of arts-based educational partnerships. Creative practitioners consistently reported high levels of student engagement and creative development, with the musician observing that children were "creatively fired up by the experience and enjoyed expressing themselves" whilst helping them "engage deeply with the concept of their histories and the heritage of the area."

However, creative practitioners also identified significant structural barriers that could undermine project effectiveness. The visual artist who collaborated with two schools noted his experience of working with "four different teachers and four different sets of teaching assistants" highlighted how fragmented engagement prevented the building of rapport and momentum essential for deep creative work. This structural challenge was particularly significant given creative practitioners' emphasis on process-based learning rather than purely product-focused outcomes.

The question of sustainability emerged as a key concern for creative practitioners. One musician acknowledged that successful replication would require ongoing creative practitioner involvement rather than being something that could be done "in house," given the "high level of skill and experience (technical, creative and also, the equipment that we both brought in and used)" required for effective delivery.

The visual artist's approach to sustainability was particularly thoughtful, providing schools with session plans, material lists, and easily replicable activities whilst recognising that "seeing someone do it... and just watch" had far greater impact than simply supplying materials. This insight points toward models of creative practitioner-teacher collaboration that prioritise knowledge transfer and professional development alongside creative outcomes.

Building Sustainable Networks and Communities of Practice

One of the programme's most significant achievements was the development of a community of practice that enhanced individual projects. The peer learning sessions proved crucial for sharing strategies, normalising challenges, and building collective knowledge about cultural education implementation.

The collaborative learning environment enabled teachers to overcome common challenges through shared problem-solving. As one mentor noted: "Having the opportunity to sit with my mentee with the ideas and experiences of those around us has been invaluable. The combination of time to plan combined with the level of expertise in the room has enabled us to make great strides in planning next steps" (Mentor, Ponteland Primary School).

This collaborative approach was particularly valuable for addressing the isolation that many teachers feel when attempting to implement innovative practices. The discovery that their challenges were shared and manageable was crucial for maintaining momentum and confidence. As one ECT reflected: "it was beneficial to be able to speak to other schools and bounce ideas off each other in order to collaborate on further ideas" (ECT, Newsham Primary School).

Implications for Educational Policy and Practice

The Cultural Match programme's success offers important insights for educational policy and practice, particularly regarding the integration of cultural education into mainstream curriculum delivery. The programme demonstrated that with appropriate support structures, Early Career Teachers can successfully lead complex cultural initiatives that deliver significant educational and social outcomes.

The programme's emphasis on authentic partnerships with cultural venues challenges traditional models of educational delivery that rely primarily on in-house expertise. The success of these partnerships suggests that investment in cultural education infrastructure - including support for teacher development, partnership coordination, and resource allocation - could yield significant returns in terms of educational outcomes and social impact.

However, the programme also highlighted the need for systemic changes to address time, budget, and logistical barriers that constrain cultural education implementation. The creative solutions developed by participants suggest that these barriers are not insurmountable but require strategic support and flexible approaches to curriculum delivery.

Future Directions and Recommendations

The programme's success in building both individual competence and collective knowledge suggests that future cultural education initiatives should prioritise community-building and peer learning alongside practical skill development. The creation of sustainable networks and communities of practice appears crucial for maintaining momentum and supporting ongoing innovation.

The insights from creative partners suggest that future programmes should invest more heavily in models of knowledge transfer and professional development that enable teachers to develop sustainable creative capabilities. This might involve longer-term partnerships that prioritise teacher learning alongside student outcomes, with creative practitioners perhaps providing some collaborative opportunities for teachers in addition to their creative facilitation.

The programme's success in addressing educational inequalities through cultural capital development suggests that cultural education should be recognised as a crucial component of social justice initiatives in education. The expansion of students' horizons and aspirations through authentic cultural engagement appears to offer particular benefits for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Finally, the programme's demonstration that cultural education can serve as a vehicle for broader professional development suggests that it should be integrated into teacher training and continuing professional development frameworks. The leadership, project management, and creative capabilities developed through cultural education appear to have value far beyond the cultural domain, contributing to teachers' overall professional competence and confidence.

7. Recommendations

The Cultural Match programme's demonstrated success in transforming Early Career Teachers' confidence and capabilities, whilst delivering significant benefits for students and cultural partners, provides a robust foundation for expanding and refining this model of cultural education. The following recommendations synthesise the key learnings from the programme to offer practical guidance for different stakeholders, policy implications, and strategies for scaling and adapting the approach.

Target Audiences for These Recommendations

These recommendations are designed for multiple stakeholders across the education and cultural sectors, including: **NEM (North East Museums)** and **NORTH EAST CA (North East Combined Authority)** as primary audiences; **Senior Leadership Teams (SLT) in schools and Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs)** who are responsible for strategic planning and resource allocation; **Local Cultural Education Partnerships (LCEPs)** who coordinate cultural education at regional level; **teacher training institutions** including universities and School-Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) providers; **local authorities** with responsibility for educational coordination; **cultural venues** seeking to develop educational partnerships; and **policy makers** at national and regional levels who shape educational and cultural policy frameworks.

7.1. Guidance for Stakeholders

7.1.1. *Embedding Cultural Education in School Strategy*

School leaders should consider integrating cultural education as a core component of their school improvement plans, recognising its potential to address multiple educational priorities simultaneously. The programme demonstrated that cultural education can enhance curriculum delivery, support disadvantaged pupils, develop teacher capabilities, and strengthen community engagement. As one mentor observed: "I believe that the promotion of the arts in school is vital for children's mental health and well being, understanding of the world around them and opportunities to succeed when other academic subjects can feel out of reach."

Practical recommendations:

- Allocate ring-fenced time for cultural education planning and delivery, addressing the universal challenge of time management identified by participants
- Develop strategic partnerships with local cultural venues, building on the programme's success in demystifying these relationships
- Create internal mentoring structures that replicate the programme's successful ECT-mentor collaboration model
- Establish annual cultural education budgets that enable sustainable programming rather than relying on external funding

7.1.2. *Supporting Early Career Teachers*

The programme's success in accelerating ECTs' professional development suggests that schools should view cultural education as a vehicle for broader teacher development. The opportunity for ECTs to lead whole-school initiatives, manage budgets, and develop external partnerships proved transformative for their professional confidence and capabilities.

Practical recommendations:

- Provide ECTs with leadership opportunities through cultural education projects, recognising their potential for professional development
- Establish clear support structures that balance independence with scaffolded guidance
- Create opportunities for ECTs to share their cultural education experiences with colleagues, building internal capacity
- Recognise and celebrate ECTs' achievements in cultural education within performance management and career development frameworks

7.1.3. *Integrating Cultural Education into Teacher Training*

The programme revealed that only 50% of ECTs had received guidance on cultural integration during their Initial Teacher Training, with this training rated modestly at 3.0 for usefulness. This represents a significant gap given the programme's demonstration of cultural education's potential for enhancing teaching practice and student outcomes.

Practical recommendations:

- Develop mandatory modules on cultural education integration that combine theoretical understanding with practical experience
- Establish partnerships with cultural venues to provide trainee teachers with authentic collaborative experiences
- Create assessment frameworks that recognise and value cultural education capabilities alongside traditional teaching competencies
- Provide specific training on working with cultural partners, project management, and creative pedagogy

7.1.5. *Building Mentoring Capacity*

The programme highlighted the crucial role of effective mentoring in supporting cultural education implementation. Teacher training providers should consider how to develop mentoring skills that support creative and collaborative approaches to education.

Practical recommendations:

- Offer Continuing Professional Development for experienced teachers who will mentor ECTs in cultural education
- Develop resources and frameworks that support effective mentoring of cultural education initiatives
- Create networks of practice that enable mentors to share experiences and strategies
- Establish partnerships with cultural venues to provide mentoring support for both ECTs and their mentors

7.1.6. *Developing Educational Partnerships*

The ECTs demonstrated surprise that the cultural venues were "as accessible as they have been" and "as generous as they have been" (ECT, Excelsior Academy), challenging preconceptions about the difficulty of establishing partnerships. However, creative practitioner partners

identified structural challenges that need addressing to maximise the effectiveness of these collaborations.

Practical recommendations:

- Develop clear communication protocols and partnership frameworks that ensure consistent engagement with school staff
- Create educational resource packages that enable schools to continue creative work beyond initial creative practitioner involvement
- Establish longer-term partnership models that prioritise knowledge transfer and teacher development alongside creative outcomes
- Provide training for creative practitioners in educational contexts, focusing on pedagogy and collaboration with teachers

7.1.7. Sustainability and Knowledge Transfer

Creative practitioners consistently identified sustainability as a key challenge, with the musician noting that effective replication would require ongoing creative practitioner involvement given the "high level of skill and experience" required. However, the visual artist's approach of providing "session plans, material lists, and easily replicable activities" whilst recognising that "seeing someone do it... and just watch" had greater impact, suggests models for effective knowledge transfer.

Practical recommendations:

- Develop tiered partnership models that move from creative practitioner-led delivery to teacher-led delivery with creative practitioner support
- Create comprehensive resource packages that include materials, session plans, and ongoing support mechanisms
- Establish mentoring relationships between creative practitioners and teachers that extend beyond individual projects
- Develop evaluation frameworks that capture both creative outcomes and pedagogical learning

7.1.8. Coordinating Cultural Education Infrastructure

The programme's success in creating networks and communities of practice suggests that local authorities have a crucial role in coordinating cultural education infrastructure. The peer learning sessions were identified as particularly valuable, with participants noting that "hearing from other delegates and supporting other schools has been a big part of what has made the programme a success."

Practical recommendations:

- Establish regular networks and communities of practice that enable schools to share experiences and strategies
- Coordinate partnerships between schools and cultural venues to maximise efficiency and impact
- Develop shared resources and expertise that individual schools can access

- Create evaluation frameworks that capture collective learning and impact across multiple schools

7.1.10. Addressing Educational Inequalities

The programme's particular success in expanding cultural capital for disadvantaged pupils suggests that local authorities should prioritise cultural education as a strategy for addressing educational inequalities. The transformation of students who "don't go beyond the train tracks that border our community" demonstrates cultural education's potential for social impact.

Practical recommendations:

- Prioritise cultural education funding for schools serving disadvantaged communities
- Develop transport and access solutions that enable all pupils to engage with cultural resources
- Create targeted programmes that address specific barriers faced by disadvantaged pupils
- Establish partnerships with cultural venues that prioritise social impact and community engagement

7.2. Policy Implications

7.2.1. Recognising Cultural Education as Core Educational Practice

The programme's demonstration that cultural education can simultaneously enhance curriculum delivery, support disadvantaged pupils, develop teacher capabilities, and strengthen community engagement suggests that it should be recognised as core educational practice rather than an optional enhancement. The improvement in ECTs' practical confidence, combined with evidence of significant student impact, provides a strong case for policy development.

Policy recommendations:

- Include cultural education as a core component of teacher training standards and continuing professional development requirements
- Establish specific funding streams that support cultural education partnerships and infrastructure
- Develop accountability frameworks that recognise and value cultural education outcomes alongside traditional academic measures
- Create national standards and guidance for cultural education that support quality and consistency

7.2.2. Supporting Early Career Teachers

The programme's success in accelerating ECTs' professional development through cultural education suggests that policy should recognise this as a valuable approach to teacher development. The opportunity for ECTs to develop leadership, project management, and partnership skills proved transformative for their professional confidence and capabilities.

Policy recommendations:

- Integrate cultural education leadership opportunities into ECT development programmes
- Establish funding mechanisms that support ECT-led cultural education initiatives
- Create recognition and progression pathways that value cultural education expertise
- Develop partnerships between education and cultural sectors that specifically support ECT development

7.2.3. Education as Cultural Policy Priority

The programme demonstrated that authentic partnerships between schools and cultural venues can deliver significant benefits for both sectors. Creative Practitioners reported high levels of professional satisfaction and noted the inspirational impact of working with young people, whilst schools gained access to expertise and resources that enhanced their educational offer.

Policy recommendations:

- Establish education partnerships as a core priority within cultural funding frameworks
- Develop specific funding streams that support long-term educational partnerships rather than one-off projects
- Create professional development opportunities for cultural practitioners working in educational contexts
- Establish evaluation frameworks that capture both cultural and educational outcomes

7.2.4. Addressing Cultural Access and Equity

The programme's particular success in expanding cultural capital for disadvantaged pupils highlights the potential for cultural policy to address social inequalities. The transformation of students' aspirations and understanding of cultural careers suggests that strategic investment in educational partnerships could deliver significant social impact.

Policy recommendations:

- Prioritise educational partnerships in cultural venues' social impact strategies
- Develop specific programmes that address cultural access barriers for disadvantaged communities
- Create funding mechanisms that support transport, resources, and other practical barriers to cultural engagement
- Establish partnerships that celebrate local cultural assets whilst expanding access to wider cultural experiences

7.3. Priority Recommendations for NEM and NORTH EAST CA

7.3.1. NEM (North East Museums)

For NEM, the programme's evidence of cultural education's transformative impact on both ECTs and students presents specific opportunities to leverage museums' unique educational resources. The programme demonstrated that place-based learning and authentic partnerships with cultural venues can significantly enhance student engagement and ECT professional development. NEM should prioritise: developing tiered partnership models that transition from

museum educator-led to teacher-led delivery with ongoing support; creating comprehensive resource packages that include artefacts, digital resources, and curriculum-linked activities; establishing mentoring relationships between museum professionals and ECTs that extend beyond individual projects; and advocating for museum-based cultural education as a vehicle for ECT professional development within policy frameworks. The programme's success in expanding cultural capital for disadvantaged pupils particularly aligns with museums' potential to provide authentic historical and cultural experiences that might otherwise be inaccessible.

7.3.2. NORTH EAST CA (North East Combined Authority)

For NORTH EAST CA, the programme's demonstration that cultural education can deliver significant educational and social impact whilst supporting regional development priorities provides a compelling case for strategic investment. As a regional authority with responsibilities for economic development, skills, and strategic planning, NORTH EAST CA should focus on: incorporating cultural education partnerships into regional skills and education strategies; developing funding mechanisms that support school- cultural venues partnerships across the North East; creating recognition frameworks that value cultural education as a pathway for addressing educational inequalities and social mobility; and establishing regional networks that connect schools, cultural venues, and local authorities to maximise collective impact. The programme's particular success in expanding cultural capital for disadvantaged pupils aligns with NORTH EAST CA's potential role in addressing regional inequalities through strategic cultural and educational investment.

7.4. Dissemination Strategy and Implementation Priorities

7.4.1. Dissemination Planning Requirements

Developing a realistic dissemination plan for this report requires coordination between multiple stakeholders, each bringing different capacities and priorities. NEM (North East Museums) should lead on dissemination to their regional museum networks and partner schools, leveraging their existing relationships and understanding of local cultural assets. Teacher training institutions need to be engaged early to integrate findings into curriculum development and partnership strategies. LCEPs should coordinate regional dissemination activities, connecting schools with local cultural partners and facilitating peer learning networks. SLT in schools and MATs require targeted briefings that emphasise strategic benefits and practical implementation pathways, whilst cultural venues need support to understand educational contexts and develop appropriate partnership models.

7.4.2. Priority Recommendations for Early Implementation

Given varying organisational capacities and existing priorities, certain recommendations should be prioritised for early implementation. **Immediate priorities** include: establishing peer learning networks through existing LCEP structures (building on the programme's demonstrated success in this area); developing mentoring frameworks that support ECT-led cultural education initiatives (leveraging existing ECT support structures); and creating partnership protocols that facilitate school-cultural venue collaboration (addressing the accessibility challenges identified by participants). **Medium-term priorities** should focus on: integrating cultural education components into teacher training programmes (requiring curriculum development time); establishing sustainable funding mechanisms for cultural education partnerships (requiring policy development); and developing evaluation frameworks that capture both cultural and educational outcomes (requiring research expertise and coordination).

The emphasis should be placed on recommendations that: build upon existing successful structures and relationships; address immediate practical barriers identified by participants; leverage current policy priorities around ECT development and educational recovery; and create foundations for longer-term systemic change. This approach ensures that implementation efforts are realistic, sustainable, and aligned with stakeholder capacities whilst maintaining the programme's core principles of authentic partnerships, peer learning, and place-based engagement.

7.5. Potential for Scaling and Adapting the Programme

7.5.1. *Replicating the Core Model*

The programme's success across diverse school contexts - from primary to secondary, urban to rural - suggests that the core model has broad applicability. The combination of structured support, hands-on project delivery, and collaborative peer learning proved effective across different settings and challenges.

Scaling recommendations:

- Develop a standardised framework that maintains core elements whilst allowing local adaptation
- Create training programmes that enable local coordinators to replicate the programme model
- Establish quality assurance mechanisms that ensure consistency whilst supporting innovation
- Develop evaluation frameworks that enable comparison and learning across different contexts

7.5.2. *Adapting for Different Contexts*

The programme's flexibility in accommodating different school contexts, student needs, and cultural partnerships suggests that adaptation is possible whilst maintaining core principles. The emphasis on place-based learning and local cultural assets provides a framework that can be applied in any geographic context.

Adaptation recommendations:

- Develop guidance that helps local coordinators identify and engage appropriate cultural partners
- Create resources that support place-based learning approaches in different geographic contexts
- Establish networks that enable sharing of successful adaptations and innovations
- Develop evaluation frameworks that capture local impact whilst contributing to broader learning

7.5.3. *Secondary Education*

While the programme primarily focused on primary education due to the schools who applied and were successful, the principles and approaches could be adapted for secondary contexts.

The emphasis on authentic partnerships and real-world project experience might be particularly valuable for older students considering career pathways.

Secondary recommendations:

- Develop age-appropriate projects that provide authentic career exploration opportunities
- Create partnerships that enable students to engage with professional cultural practitioners
- Establish projects that combine cultural engagement with academic study
- Develop evaluation frameworks that capture both cultural and academic learning outcomes

7.5.4. Special Educational Needs

The programme's emphasis on creative engagement and alternative approaches to learning suggests potential applications for students with special educational needs (SEND). The focus on hands-on, collaborative learning could address diverse learning requirements whilst providing cultural access.

SEND recommendations:

- Develop specific adaptations that address different learning needs and requirements
- Create partnerships with cultural venues that have expertise in inclusive practice
- Establish evaluation frameworks that capture diverse learning outcomes and impacts
- Develop resources that support teachers in adapting cultural education approaches for SEND contexts

7.6. Professional Development Infrastructure

7.6.1. Building Capacity

The programme's success in developing both ECT and mentor capabilities suggests that scaling requires significant investment in professional development infrastructure. The peer learning sessions were identified as particularly valuable, requiring coordination and facilitation expertise.

Infrastructure recommendations:

- Establish regional centres of expertise that can coordinate local programmes
- Develop professional development pathways that create specialist cultural education practitioners
- Create online resources and networks that support ongoing professional development
- Establish partnerships between universities, cultural venues, and schools that provide research and evaluation support

7.7. Conclusion

The Cultural Match programme provides a compelling model for cultural education that addresses multiple educational priorities whilst delivering significant benefits for all stakeholders. The recommendations outlined above offer practical pathways for scaling and adapting this approach, recognising both the demonstrated successes and the challenges that need addressing.

The programme's success in transforming ECTs' confidence and capabilities, expanding students' cultural capital and aspirations, and creating sustainable partnerships between schools and cultural venues demonstrates that strategic investment in cultural education can deliver significant social and educational returns. The key to success lies in maintaining the programme's core principles - authentic partnerships, peer learning, and place-based engagement - whilst adapting approaches to local contexts and needs.

Implementation of these recommendations requires commitment from multiple stakeholders and recognition that cultural education represents a long-term investment in educational quality and social equity. However, the programme's demonstrated impact suggests that such investment would yield significant returns in terms of teacher development, student outcomes, and community engagement. The transformation captured by one teacher - "I've learnt so many skills and surprised myself with what I've been able to do as a first year ECT" - illustrates the potential for cultural education to unlock capabilities and aspirations that extend far beyond traditional educational boundaries.

8. Case Studies

The following seven case studies showcase the diverse ways in which Cultural Match partnerships have transformed educational experiences across different school contexts in the North East. From Excelsior Academy's multi-layered theatre partnership with Newcastle's Theatre Royal to Shiremoor Primary's whole-school celebration of regional heritage, these examples demonstrate how cultural collaborations can be tailored to meet specific educational objectives while maintaining authentic connections to professional practice.

The case studies span primary and secondary settings, individual classes and multi-school collaborations, highlighting approaches ranging from Collingwood School's media-focused exploration of local history to St. John's Primary's cross-curricular heritage project combining history, music, and filmmaking. Each case study reveals how partnerships between schools and cultural practitioners create opportunities for students to develop creative skills, build confidence, and form meaningful connections with their local communities, while simultaneously supporting teacher development and establishing sustainable frameworks for ongoing cultural engagement.

Together, these examples illustrate the transformative potential of cultural education when schools and creative professionals work collaboratively to design experiences that extend beyond traditional classroom boundaries.

Case Study 1: Excelsior Academy

Opening New Worlds Through Theatre Partnership

School Background

Excelsior Academy in Newcastle serves as an all-through educational establishment for pupils aged 3-19, situated in the west end of Newcastle upon Tyne. The academy operates through a distinctive 'schools within a school' model comprising Rainbird Primary, along with four secondary schools and a sixth form college, each maintaining their own identity whilst sharing the academy's overarching values and vision.

Excelsior Academy places strong emphasis on inclusive education, catering to a highly diverse pupil population with over 40 languages spoken and a significant proportion of students eligible for pupil premium funding. The academy's curriculum aims to balance academic achievement with practical skills and personal development, providing pathways designed to meet the varied needs of its community.

As a cornerstone of its local area, Excelsior Academy actively cultivates partnerships with Newcastle's cultural venues, businesses, and community groups to enrich pupils' educational experiences. The academy's commitment to cultural education is evident through regular engagement with arts practitioners, heritage specialists, and creative professionals who bring real-world context to classroom learning. These collaborations seek to raise aspirations, challenge perceptions, and broaden horizons for pupils who may have limited access to cultural experiences outside of school. Excelsior Academy's approach recognises the transformative potential of arts and culture in supporting wellbeing, building confidence, and developing the cultural capital essential for pupils' future success in education and beyond.

Project Overview

The Theatre Royal Cultural Match project emerged from a clear vision to enrich Year 10 students' understanding of live performance whilst simultaneously addressing careers education objectives. The initiative represented a comprehensive approach to cultural education, combining immersive theatre experiences with practical skills development and professional networking opportunities.

The project's scope was ambitious yet carefully structured. Initial planning involved direct collaboration with Mark Calvert at the Theatre Royal, beginning with email correspondence to establish the partnership framework, followed by face-to-face meetings to develop the programme structure. This collaborative approach ensured that the project would meet both the academy's educational objectives and the Theatre Royal's community engagement goals.

The experiential learning component comprised three carefully curated visits to the Theatre Royal. Students attended a performance of Matthew Bourne's acclaimed *Swan Lake*, providing them with exposure to high-quality contemporary dance theatre. Two separate backstage tours offered unprecedented access to the working environment of a professional theatre, allowing students to witness the technical and operational aspects that bring productions to life. The logistics of these visits required careful coordination between the lead facilitator at the Theatre Royal's education team, and Excelsior Academy's administrative staff, demonstrating the collaborative nature of successful cultural partnerships.

Practical Skills Development Through Professional Workshops

The project's workshop programme brought professional theatre practitioners directly into the academy, creating an authentic learning environment that bridged the gap between classroom theory and professional practice. Four specialist workshops were delivered, each focusing on a distinct aspect of theatre production: acting, sound design, costume design, and theatrical makeup application.

These two-hour intensive sessions were designed to be both practical and informative, providing students with hands-on experience of professional techniques and industry insights. The workshops were structured to accommodate varying skill levels whilst maintaining professional standards, ensuring that all participants could engage meaningfully with the content. As the ECT noted, "they were practical and informative, with some fantastic engagement from the students," highlighting the success of this approach in capturing student interest and maintaining high levels of participation.

The workshops served multiple educational purposes beyond skills development. They provided authentic contexts for learning about creative industries, exposed students to potential career pathways, and offered opportunities for direct interaction with working professionals. This approach to careers education proved particularly effective, as students could observe and question practitioners about their professional journeys, daily responsibilities, and the realities of working in the theatre industry.



Student Experience and Outcomes

The project's impact on student experience was both immediate and far-reaching. For many participants, the Theatre Royal visits represented their first exposure to professional theatre, fundamentally expanding their cultural horizons and challenging preconceptions about the arts.

As the ECT observed, "most students have been to the theatre for the first time ever!" This simple statement encapsulates the profound significance of the project in addressing cultural capital gaps and providing access to experiences that might otherwise remain unavailable to these young people.

The workshops generated tangible outcomes in the form of student work and demonstrated learning, though time constraints affected the planned final product launch. As the ECT candidly reflected, "output was work from the workshops, careers interest and ongoing networking for future workshops for the students. Possible work experience. If I am honest, we ran out of time for a final product launch due to logistics with booking." This honest assessment highlights both the project's successes and the practical challenges of managing complex cultural partnerships within school timetables.

Individual student journeys illustrate the project's transformative potential. One particularly notable example emerged from the sound design workshop, where a student's exceptional engagement caught the attention of the professional practitioner. The ECT reported that "one student now wants to go to college and do sound engineering - the workshop practitioners mentioned how engaged he was and how they would be happy to support him once he is at college with work experience etc." This outcome demonstrates how targeted cultural experiences can ignite genuine passion and create pathways to further education and career development.

The project also had unexpected benefits for student engagement and attendance. The ECT noted that "one student has improved their attendance so they could go on the visits," illustrating how cultural opportunities can serve as powerful motivators for broader educational engagement. This finding suggests that cultural programmes may have wider benefits for student wellbeing and academic participation beyond their immediate educational content.



Teacher Development and Professional Growth

The Cultural Match programme provided significant professional development opportunities for the participating ECT, extending beyond traditional classroom management and curriculum delivery. The teacher's role evolved to encompass facilitation, behaviour support, and partnership coordination, though notably, intensive behaviour management was not required

due to the high levels of student engagement. As the ECT noted, "I facilitated and supported behaviour/focus (not that it was really needed!)" - a testament to the project's ability to naturally engage and motivate students.

The most significant impact on the ECT was the development of cultural partnership skills and network building. The teacher identified "being able to make links with cultural venues and bring them into school" as the project's greatest personal benefit. This capability represents a crucial professional skill in contemporary education, where teachers are increasingly expected to forge community connections and provide authentic learning experiences that extend beyond traditional classroom boundaries.

The experience of managing a complex cultural partnership project also provided valuable insights into the logistics of coordinating external visits, managing professional relationships, and balancing educational objectives with practical constraints. These skills are directly transferable to future cultural education initiatives and contribute to the ECT's developing expertise in enrichment programme delivery.

Legacy and Future Development

The Theatre Royal Cultural Match project established foundations for sustained cultural education at Excelsior Academy, creating ongoing relationships and frameworks for future collaboration. The ECT emphasised the project's continuing impact: "Ongoing work with Theatre Royal, continuing links with them into the future. More performances, workshops and work experience." This commitment to long-term partnership demonstrates how successful cultural programmes can evolve beyond one-off projects to become embedded elements of a school's educational offer.

The project's legacy is evident in multiple dimensions. At the student level, there is clear evidence of maintained interest and engagement: "Students interested in going to the theatre; working in performance arts; all the careers involved in a theatre." This sustained enthusiasm suggests that the project successfully achieved its aim of broadening cultural horizons and developing ongoing interest in the arts.

From an institutional perspective, the project has created a template for cultural partnership that can be expanded and replicated. The ECT noted the potential for "ongoing work with the theatre for more students," indicating that the academy views the partnership as a scalable model for enriching the educational experience of its diverse student body.

The establishment of professional networks and potential work experience opportunities represents perhaps the most significant long-term benefit. The connections formed between students, practitioners, and the theatre create pathways for future development that extend well beyond the original project timeframe. These relationships may prove instrumental in supporting students' transitions to further education and employment, particularly for those who have discovered genuine passion for theatre-related careers.

Reflections on Best Practice

The Excelsior Academy Cultural Match project demonstrates several key principles of effective cultural education partnerships. The importance of direct professional contact and face-to-face relationship building proved crucial in establishing trust and shared understanding between the academy and the Theatre Royal. The project's success in engaging students stemmed largely from its authenticity - students worked with genuine professionals in real theatre environments, creating meaningful learning experiences that transcended traditional classroom boundaries.

The project also highlights the value of honest reflection and continuous improvement. The ECT's frank assessment of timing challenges and logistical difficulties provides valuable insights for future programme development. This willingness to acknowledge both successes and areas for improvement demonstrates the kind of reflective practice that enables cultural partnerships to evolve and strengthen over time.

Most significantly, the project illustrates how cultural education can serve multiple educational objectives simultaneously. By combining experiential learning, careers education, skills development, and cultural access, the programme created a rich, multi-layered educational experience that addressed various aspects of student development. This integrated approach maximises the impact of limited resources whilst providing students with comprehensive exposure to professional creative practice.

The success of the Theatre Royal Cultural Match project at Excelsior Academy offers a compelling model for cultural education partnerships that prioritise authentic professional engagement, sustained relationship building, and genuine student empowerment through expanded cultural access and career pathway development.

"One student now wants to go to college and do sound engineering - the workshop practitioners mentioned how engaged he was and how they would be happy to support him once he is at college with work experience."

Case Study 2: Collingwood School and Media Arts College

Stepping Out of Comfort Zones: Mixing media and heritage

School Background

Collingwood School and Media Arts College is located in Morpeth, Northumberland, serving as a special school with a distinctive focus on media arts education. The school aims to provide a caring, supportive and inclusive environment, which has high expectations and values all members within the school community, encouraging all children to be enthusiastic and committed learners who develop their confidence and capacity to learn independently and collaboratively. The school's media arts specialism is supported by professional-standard facilities including Collingwood Media production services, outdoor learning facilities known as 'The Woodlands', and innovative provisions such as Collingwood Connect for community teaching. The school demonstrates its commitment to excellence through high-profile cultural events, providing students with professional-standard creative opportunities.

Project Overview

The Collingwood Cultural Match project provided Year 7, 8, and 9 students from Collingwood School and Media Arts College with an immersive learning experience that combined local history exploration with practical media skills development. The school built up relationships with NEM venues such as Arbeia, Great North Museum, South Shields Museum and Gallery, Stephenson Railway Museum and St James Park, visiting many of these. One visit which stood out to the students was the historic Victoria Tunnels in Newcastle, where they discovered fascinating aspects of wartime history and were surprised by historical facts such as children having to drink beer due to lack of fresh water. The project integrated substantial media work, with students learning filming and interviewing techniques using professional equipment, working collaboratively in teams with roles including camera operators, sound technicians, and interviewers. This included a “chat show” style interview with the researcher, where three students were interviewed on their involvement, but also interviewed the researcher in return. Another student assisted with the filming, showcasing a range of skills learnt through the project.

Student Experience

The Collingwood project offered students from across different year groups the opportunity to develop new skills, build confidence, and connect with local history in ways that traditional classroom learning could not facilitate. Three students - Jacob (Year 9), Oliver (Year 8), and Amelia (Year 7) (*all pseudonyms*) - shared their experiences of visiting the Victoria Tunnels in Newcastle and taking part in media interviews as part of the project.

"I felt quite excited and quite fascinated about exploring everything that's happened in Northumberland in past history." (Jacob)

Initial Reactions and Expectations

From the outset, students approached the project with a mixture of excitement and apprehension. Jacob (Year 9) was immediately engaged by the historical aspects of the project, while the prospect of using unfamiliar media equipment presented challenges for others.

Amelia (Year 7) admitted concerns about "Especially filming because it looked hard," while Oliver (Year 8) expressed particular worries about interviewing: "I was unsure about doing interviews because I've got tics so I was nervous in case I'd do random tics and they wouldn't understand what I was saying."

The Victoria Tunnels Visit

The visit to Victoria Tunnels proved to be the highlight of the project for many students. Jacob was particularly impressed by the historical site: "I enjoyed the Victoria tunnels the most for me. I find it so interesting especially where it is... everything that was told there and how deep it is, how long it is, it's just really interesting."

"It has made it a bit more real for me - experiencing it, feeling it, imagining it, almost being really there." (Jacob)

The immersive nature of the experience made history tangible for the students. Jacob reflected on this, noting "Obviously what we live in now and the difference from back then is just crazy." The students were surprised by the location of the tunnels, with Oliver commenting, "I thought it was going to be in a forest kind of thing then it was going to be in the city."

The historical details left a strong impression. Jacob shared a surprising historical fact he'd learned: "I learned that children would have to drink beer because they couldn't get fresh water." Amelia found this particularly memorable, noting "I found it a little bit funny how the children had to drink beer."



Developing Media Skills

The project incorporated substantial media work, introducing students to filming and interviewing techniques. Amelia reflected, "Didn't realise how hard it was to work one simple camera but it was really fun at the end."

"I thought it was just a mic and a piece of paper and it's much more than that." (Jacob)

Jacob was similarly impressed by the technical aspects: "I learned that people used headphones to check the audio, different camera filters and it's crazy how much technology goes into one little interview."

Teamwork and Collaboration

Working collaboratively was a crucial element of the project. Amelia explained the team structure: "We all had to go into groups... we had people who were holding the microphone, holding the cameras, and I was interviewing the people so basically we just had to work as a team."

For Jacob, working with friends provided necessary support when trying new activities: "I worked doing interviews with some of my close friends and I found it really good that I was doing something that I don't normally do with some of my good friends. It made me more comfortable to do it and I'm happy that I stepped out of my comfort zone."



Cultural Match Student Views

Personal Growth and New Confidence

Perhaps the most significant outcome for all students was increased self-confidence. Oliver learned "that I shouldn't be ashamed or shy about the tics and I can just do my breathing exercises." When faced with the challenge of interviewing, he explained, "I felt a bit nervous but I just taught myself to just do it and then I did my breathing exercises."

"That I shouldn't be ashamed or shy about the tics and I can just do my breathing exercises."
(Oliver)

Jacob similarly reflected on his personal growth: "I've learned that I shouldn't be too nervous about speaking to people. I'm not really good at that but I've learned that I can do it if I really try my hardest and I'm proud of myself."

For Amelia, overcoming initial fears led to pride in her accomplishment: "At first I was really worried about interviewing people in case I made a mistake but once it was over I was really proud of myself."

Long-term Impact

All three students recognized how the skills developed during the project might benefit them in the future. Jacob made a direct connection to future employment: "When I go on to leave school and maybe do interviews to get a job I think it'll give me a bit more confidence to actually do that." "I want to be a police officer... I'm just going to keep trying and not be shy about my tics and all my needs." (Oliver)

Oliver reflected on how the experience supported his career aspirations despite previous discouragement, while Amelia echoed this sentiment: "It'll definitely help with interviewing

people so they can get practice for a job and then if you go and get a job you don't have any worries because you've already done it in school."

Jacob also noted how the experience enhanced his understanding of other subjects: "When I'm doing history, I'm doing a topic about the war and since I went to Victoria Tunnels I can understand the sheltering and what's happening in England a bit more."

For Oliver, the project sparked new interests: "It's changed my perspective of media. I used to be into media because of the cameras but now I'm into media because of how interesting it can be - using music and cameras and all that equipment."

Teacher experience

For the ECT, the Cultural Match programme opened up new dimensions of learning that traditional classroom teaching simply cannot provide. As a history teacher, he discovered the vital importance of cultural experiences for his students, explaining that the programme "broadened their horizons and they're finding out more about themselves and where they come from." The initiative allowed his students to engage with learning "in a way that's not possible in the classroom," creating educational opportunities that transcended conventional teaching methods.

The collaboration with his school's media team proved instrumental to the project's success, as the ECT acknowledged: "the media team's been on every single visit with her, as camera and video, they've helped the children with that as well." His mentor praised the initiative's alignment with their school's Artsmark goals and appreciated how the project gave focus to their identity as a media arts college, noting it was "really nice to hand over responsibility to my ECT, who managed the budget himself, and organised all the visits."

"[This project] broadened their horizons and they're finding out more about themselves and where they come from."

Case study 3: Hareside Primary School

Connecting to the Local Community Through Visual Arts

School background

Hareside Primary School is a co-educational community school located in Cramlington. The school caters to children aged 3 to 11 years, offering places for approximately 420 pupils, along with a 104-place nursery.

The school's mission is to create and continually develop an active, safe, and enjoyable learning environment that educates the whole child. This approach aims to provide the right setting to encourage each individual to reach their full potential and become responsible members of society.

Hareside Primary School actively engages in various community and cultural initiatives to enrich its students' educational experiences. The school has collaborated with local creative practitioners and former miners to explore and document the cultural heritage of Cramlington, providing students with a deeper understanding of their community's history.

In addition to these partnerships, Hareside Primary integrates creative arts into its curriculum. The school emphasises art and design education, aiming to stimulate creativity and imagination among pupils. This approach includes teaching various techniques and introducing students to both contemporary and historic artists.

The school also offers a Forest School programme, providing hands-on learning experiences in a natural environment. This initiative fosters confidence, independence, and creativity among students through regular outdoor sessions.

These activities and partnerships reflect Hareside Primary School's commitment to providing a holistic education that extends beyond the classroom, fostering strong connections with the local community and promoting cultural awareness among its students.

Project overview

The school visited the Laing Art Gallery in Newcastle, providing the children with the opportunity to see artwork in a gallery, before creating their own. The creative practitioner, a visual artist and graphic designer, was introduced to Hareside Primary School through the creative producer as part of a cultural engagement initiative. Working closely with the ECT, the creative practitioner delivered a series of creative workshops focusing on photomontage, aerosol art, and typography. The project was designed with accessibility in mind, requiring minimal materials and specialist

equipment while creating meaningful connections to the local area, and it offered pupils a rich, arts-focused experience exploring identity and place.

Year 3 and Year 4 students took part in creative workshops inspired by themes of self, surroundings, and personal inspirations. On 8th April, Year 3 took part in photomontage and collage sessions at The Laing Art Gallery, split into four groups throughout the day. This was followed by Year 4 sessions on 10th April, where pupils explored Pop Art illustration in the morning and experimented with aerosol art in the afternoon. The project encouraged students to express their individuality and sense of place through visual art, culminating in an upcoming school-based exhibition to showcase their creative outcomes. The school hoped to come full circle with their project by exhibiting the work in the Laing Art Gallery, where students could bring family and friends and feel a sense of pride in their work being on public display.



Student experience

The project captivated students from the start, with many expressing excitement about the contemporary approach to art-making. "Really fun," the children repeatedly emphasised when asked about working with the creative practitioner. When prompted to explain why, one student shared, "Because we get to do a lot of exciting things," while another added, "Because I love art and I like meeting new people."

Unlike traditional expectations of "the art man" arriving with a bowl of fruit for still life drawing, the creative practitioner's work challenged their preconceptions about what constitutes art. The ECT noted that students would often exclaim with surprise, "This isn't art!" as they encountered The creative practitioner's contemporary approach.

The novelty of having a visiting creative practitioner actively engaged in creating with them, rather than merely observing or talking to them, was particularly special for the students. As one child explained, "Sometimes people come in to see how we work," but with The creative practitioner, the experience was different. "They don't make things that way," another student observed about typical visitors. "They just help us." This distinction marked the creative practitioner's sessions as unique in the students' educational experience.

Students were particularly drawn to the photomontage activities, where they selected images either with personal significance or at random. The process sparked creativity and storytelling, with some students developing narratives about their villages, enhancing both their artistic expression and oral communication skills. One student proudly described their work, saying, "I'm trying to make mine a theme - I think it's a blue theme."

When the creative practitioner presented examples of his work featuring local landmarks, students immediately formed personal connections. The Gateshead Quays sign, for instance, prompted one student to share: "This reminds me of something - it reminds me of my family's workplace." This local connection proved valuable, with students recognizing and responding to familiar locations throughout the sessions. Each place mentioned resonated with at least one student who knew someone from there, creating a web of geographical and personal connections.

The Creative Process

Students embraced the photomontage technique with enthusiasm and their own interpretations. "I think it's when you scatter photos everywhere, upside down - it doesn't matter," offered one student, while another suggested, "I think it's when it looks natural."

The workshops were structured to allow students to create individual pieces that would later be combined into a collective artwork. When asked how this experience differed from their usual classroom activities, one student explained, "Because the other visitors, they don't stay for this long and they don't do activities with us." Another added with evident enthusiasm, "Because we've actually got to make our own stuff and at the end we're going to put it all together but we haven't actually done that. And then we can make a masterpiece out of all of it."

Working with smaller groups, half of Year 3 at a time, enabled high-quality engagement and allowed the creative practitioner and the ECT to invest attention in each student's creative process. This personalised approach contributed to the students' sense of ownership and pride in their work.



Student Reflections

Throughout the project, students found different aspects to enjoy and appreciate. When asked about their favourite parts of the process, the responses varied: "The cutting out," said one student simply, while another preferred "Putting it all together to see how it looks at the end." A third student enjoyed the communal aspect most: "Looking at other people's artwork. That's my favourite part, that's really nice."

During their creative work, students appreciated the supportive environment. "It's good and you can like, you know, if you like, if you struggle, there's someone to help you," one student explained. "It's good. There are cool pictures."

Many expressed particular excitement about seeing their individual contributions come together as part of a larger whole. When asked what they were most looking forward to about the rest of the project, they spoke enthusiastically about the collective aspect: "I think all put together. All put together," said one student, while another added, "All of them mixed together to make a complete artist." A third voiced anticipation: "I'm excited to see when they're all put together to make something great."

The project also inspired students to consider how they might continue similar creative practices at home. One student shared, "I have a camera and it prints out the pictures, but I don't know how, but it's not one of those things where it's like plastic, it's like paper. And I've got a notebook and I stick them in my notebook, so it's like a journal."

When asked whether they were more excited about seeing their individual artwork or the class collaboration, a student replied thoughtfully, "The whole class. Because I think it'll look really good." Another built on this idea: "You can see your own as well. So you're part of the whole class masterpiece. It's going to be lovely."

Their enthusiasm extended to future participation as well. When asked if they would do this kind of project again, the response was overwhelmingly positive. "Yeah," said one student simply, while another declared with conviction, "Of course we would, it's going to look amazing when it's done."

Teacher experience

The ECT's experience with the Cultural Match programme has been transformative for her professional confidence and classroom practice. "I think the main thing I've taken away is my confidence in myself to like approach a project and kind of take it on and apply for something that I probably, it's like stepping out, put myself out there, which I probably wouldn't have done a few years ago," she reflects. The programme's impact extended beyond her personal growth, as she witnessed firsthand how it enriched her students' learning experiences. Working alongside creative practitioners and building new professional networks became a highlight of her journey, with the ECT noting that "seeing the effect it's had on the children has been great, seeing how much they've enjoyed it, and working with artists, working with different people." The

collaborative support she received made all the difference, as she enthusiastically shared: "everyone that we've come across that we've worked with, the programme has been super helpful, and yeah, it's been great, loved it."

Legacy

The project created a strong sense of pride among students, with the ECT noting, "Recognition for them - it's okay, that's there for everyone to see." The creative practitioner's plan to scan and make minor adjustments to the students' creations demonstrated how raw artistic work can be developed into polished pieces - providing students with insight into professional artistic processes.

The ECT emphasised the importance of sustainability in the project, noting that "Somebody else having the chance to do something would be good." This focus on legacy ensures that the impact of the project extends beyond the immediate workshops, potentially influencing future arts engagement at Hareside Primary School.

"I think the main thing I've taken away is my confidence in myself to approach a project and kind of take it on and apply for something... it's like stepping out, putting myself out there, which I probably wouldn't have done a few years ago."

Case Study 4: Ponteland Primary

Collaboration within a Multi Academy Trust

School Background

Ponteland Primary was the lead on this Cultural Match project, and brought in the other four primary schools which are part of the Pele Trust to collaborate on the programme's only Trust-wide project.

1. Ponteland Primary School Located in the heart of Ponteland, this modern, purpose-built school shares a campus with Ponteland High School, promoting smooth transitions and strong collaboration across key stages. Ponteland Primary has a reputation for fostering creativity, inclusion, and excellence across the curriculum. Its students played a central role in the Cultural Match project, showcasing their talents in performance and leadership.

2. Darras Hall Primary School Serving the Darras Hall and Ponteland area, Darras Hall Primary is one of the largest primaries in Northumberland. It combines high academic standards with a wide range of enrichment activities. Known for its well-established music and performing arts provision, the school encourages pupils to take part in Trust-wide events like Cultural Match to develop confidence and team spirit.

3. Belsay Primary School Situated in the rural village of Belsay, this small school is deeply rooted in its local community. It offers a warm, family-like environment with a strong emphasis on outdoor learning and personal development. Pupils from Belsay embraced the opportunity to collaborate with other schools and expressed enthusiasm for extending links with the wider Trust.

4. Richard Coates Primary School Formerly a middle school, Richard Coates became a primary as part of the educational reorganisation in Ponteland. It has a strong heritage in the area and continues to deliver a broad, engaging curriculum. Students from Richard Coates relished the creative freedom of the Cultural Match project and valued the chance to explore different aspects of performance.

5. Heddton-on-the-Wall St. Andrew's CE Primary School A Church of England school located in the historic village of Heddton-on-the-Wall, this school blends a caring Christian ethos with a commitment to academic and creative development. With a backdrop of Roman history and a close-knit school community, Heddton pupils brought enthusiasm and musical talent to the project, enjoying the chance to perform alongside peers from across the Trust.

Project Overview

The ECT at Ponteland Primary conceived and executed an ambitious Cultural Match project titled "Kaleidoscope" centred around planning and directing a theatrical show at the prestigious Tyne Theatre. The project's core mission was to provide children with a meaningful platform to

celebrate their unique differences while demonstrating how these differences can be harnessed to create positive change in their communities.

Working collaboratively with professional partners, the ECT engaged a videographer to document both the live performance and the creative process, producing a documentary-style film that will be showcased at the school's Kaleidoscope exhibition in July. Additionally, the project incorporated specialized dance workshops led by a qualified dance instructor from Dance City and school parent, who worked specifically with reception classes to develop movement sequences. These sessions were filmed by the videographer in the school's forest area, creating an additional short film component for the Kaleidoscope project.

The scale and logistics of the project were substantial, involving direct coordination with the Tyne Theatre management. Despite initial nervousness about organizing such a large-scale event, the ECT found the theatre staff to be exceptionally supportive throughout the booking and planning process. The ECT successfully orchestrated collaboration across five primary schools within their trust, ultimately involving 122 students in the final performance. The comprehensive project management included delivering inter-school meetings across the trust, creating detailed risk assessments, developing performance schedules, and hosting a collaborative rehearsal day at Ponteland Primary the week prior to the main event, ensuring all participating schools were fully prepared for the theatrical showcase.



Student Experience

The students involved in the Cultural Match project across Ponteland Primary and its partner schools shared an overwhelmingly positive and transformative experience that extended far beyond traditional performance opportunities. The project provided a unique platform for children to showcase talents they would normally never have the chance to display on such a grand scale, creating moments of personal breakthrough and growth.

Many appreciated the diverse creative opportunities the project offered, with one Richard Coates student noting, "It's good, we've been doing art, not just singing and dancing." The experience consistently exceeded expectations: "Very different to what I thought it was going to be, in a good way" (Ponteland Primary student).

For Year 6 students, the project held particular significance as a final celebration: "It's the last time we'll be singing and dancing as Year 6s" (Darras Hall, Year 6). The collaborative aspect proved especially valuable in building confidence and social connections: "It's helped to make friends from other schools and meet new people for high school" (Darras Hall, Year 6), and "We get to know where stuff is and meet new people" (Darras Hall, Year 5). Students felt recognized for their abilities, with participants noting, "We were picked for being good at music and performing" (Heddon-on-the-Wall, Year 6) and "It's more fun now that we get to practice with other schools, chat to them and see how they do it" (Darras Hall, Year 5).

The programme's impact proved particularly significant for students who might otherwise struggle socially. One particularly poignant example involved a Year 6 student who is naturally very shy and was nervous about transitioning to high school. Despite being an excellent singer, his talents had never been showcased on such a grand scale. After performing in the dress rehearsal, his confidence grew enormously when on stage, and children from other schools came to sit and talk to him. When he came off the stage, he was beaming with pride and had made friends from the other schools involved across the trust. This transformation demonstrated how the stage environment provided a unique boost: "most children on stage, they didn't know anyone was there, because you can't see the audience. So it gave them that extra bit of confidence that they didn't have before."

Despite initial nerves before performing - "really nervewracking" (Ponteland Primary) - many students felt encouraged by family support: "Parents being there makes me want to perform better" (Ponteland Primary). As one Belsay student wisely advised future participants: "Enjoy it, make the most of it." These moments of watching children realise their potential and overcome personal barriers made the entire project incredibly meaningful and rewarding.

Teacher Experience

The ECT's involvement in the Cultural Match programme led to an unexpected personal revelation about her capabilities in theatrical production, discovering that despite her background in performance, she excelled in leadership roles behind the scenes. "My biggest takeaway or achievement would be that I can be a stage manager! I don't know, I just loved doing it," she reflected, noting how the experience gave her "a more holistic view of the theatre" that expanded her understanding beyond her previous performer perspective.

Most significantly, the programme helped her realize her potential impact as an educator: "I realised that I can make a difference and that I can provide children with amazing opportunities if I'm brave enough to do them!" This realization was reinforced by witnessing the transformative effect on her students, particularly seeing them realize their potential, which filled her with incredible pride.

Throughout the project, The ECT worked closely with external partners, taking on an organizational and supportive role. When dance teacher Molly Procter delivered workshops with the reception classes, The ECT helped organize the children and provided support as needed. Her role evolved from traditional classroom teaching to project management, coordination, and creative direction.

Reflecting on the transformative experience, she declared: "It was the best thing I've ever done. I'd definitely do it again."

Legacy and Future Impact

The programme's impact has been so profound that plans are already underway for another show, with parents, senior leadership teams, and the press reaching out following the performance that saw children bravely taking the stage before an audience of 350 people. The overwhelming response has amazed everyone involved, demonstrating the far-reaching impact of providing children with such extraordinary opportunities.

The experience highlighted the transformative power of bravery at every level - from the children who courageously performed in front of such a large crowd, to the educators who had the bravery to plan and deliver a dream project while facing and overcoming the inevitable challenges along the way. As The ECT reflected, the legacy is fundamentally about "Bravery. Bravery for the children to perform in front of such a large crowd. Bravery to plan and deliver the project which I have always dreamt of doing. Bravery to face the challenges it posed along the way and not give up."

This legacy of courage has created ripple effects throughout the community, demonstrating that when we dare to pursue ambitious educational opportunities, the results can exceed all expectations and inspire everyone involved to reach new heights. The project has proven to be replicable, with the skills and learning transferable to future teaching endeavours, establishing a foundation for continued ambitious cultural programming within the trust.

"I realised that I can make a difference and that I can provide children with amazing opportunities if I'm brave enough to do them!"

Case study 5: Shiremoor Primary

Developing a whole school culture of support and mentorship

School background

Shiremoor Primary School is situated in North Tyneside and provides education for children aged 3-11 years, encompassing both nursery and primary provision under one roof. The school prides itself on fostering an inclusive ethos where every child matters and can thrive. Its curriculum balances academic achievement with personal development, aiming to nurture well-rounded individuals prepared for the challenges of secondary education and beyond. Shiremoor Primary places particular emphasis on literacy, numeracy and creative subjects, whilst maintaining a commitment to outdoor learning and physical activity.

Community engagement forms a cornerstone of the school's philosophy, with regular events bringing together pupils, parents, staff and local residents. The school building itself serves as more than just an educational facility, often functioning as a hub for various community activities and programmes.

Like many schools in the North East, Shiremoor Primary operates within a region with distinct social and economic characteristics. The school works diligently to address any barriers to learning, ensuring all pupils, regardless of background, have equal opportunities to succeed. Leadership at the school promotes a positive working culture amongst staff, encouraging professional development and innovative teaching approaches.

Project overview

In the first iteration of Cultural Match during 2023-2024, Shiremoor Primary collaborated extensively with Great North Museum: Hancock, which resulted in a pop-up exhibition as the end product of the project. The school therefore had an excellent connection with NEM, and this supported them through their second year with the programme.

This year, the Cultural Match programme at Shiremoor Primary School focused on celebrating and exploring North East regional heritage through music, dance, and creative arts. The project was designed as a whole-school initiative that would bring together all year groups in a collaborative celebration of local culture and history. The programme centred around the theme of North East identity, incorporating elements of the region's rich maritime heritage, industrial history, and folk traditions. Students engaged with various aspects of local culture including traditional folk songs such as "Keel Row" and "Will You Buy My Fresh Fish," historical exploration of shipbuilding and mining, and traditional dance forms like ceilidh.

A key component of the project involved cultural venue visits, such as NEM venue Woodhorn Museum. It also included trips to locations such as Cullercoats Beach, providing students with a rich variety of authentic experiences of their local heritage. These visits were documented through film and photography, creating a visual record of the students' learning journey.

The programme was structured to allow each year group to contribute their own unique perspective on North East culture while working towards a unified showcase performance. Year 1 and 2 focused on traditional folk songs with live musical accompaniment, Year 3 and 4 explored historical themes through music and dance, while Year 5 and 6 delved into the industrial heritage of mining communities. Additionally, Year 6 created digital fusion art pieces that blended traditional and contemporary artistic approaches.

The project culminated in a major showcase event at The Exchange in North Shields on Monday 16th June, where the entire school community came together to celebrate their collective learning. The event was designed to be inclusive and engaging, encouraging audience participation and demonstrating the power of creative learning to bring communities together.

Throughout the programme, there was a strong emphasis on mentorship and professional development, with an Early Career Teacher (ECT) working closely with experienced staff to develop confidence and skills in creative education. This mentoring relationship became a model for collaborative practice within the school, demonstrating how ambitious creative projects can support both student learning and staff development.

Teacher experience

The Cultural Match programme proved to be a transformative experience that exceeded both participants' initial expectations. For the ECT, the impact was profound and personal: "The biggest impact was having actually, like, done it like that wouldn't have been something that I would have kind of necessarily thought that I could do beforehand." The significance of achieving such an ambitious project during their first year of teaching was not lost on them, as they reflected on how they had "not just impacted my class, but the whole school as a whole, and all the teachers, like, made such a big impact on what can be done and widened things." The programme allowed both educators to share their passion for music, with the ECT noting how rewarding it was "to kind of get to pass on a bit of that passion and enjoyment and get to see it in the students and the parents who came to the performance, how much they enjoyed it as well."

The mentor observed varying levels of engagement across the school, describing it as "a slow burn with other people" as colleagues gradually became involved. While some teachers were naturally more engaged than others due to scheduling constraints, the mentor appreciated that even reluctant participants stepped up when needed. During the performance, when a teacher expressed uncertainty about helping with an unfamiliar song, the mentor's simple advice - "just speak the words" - demonstrated how the programme encouraged staff to push beyond their comfort zones, even when "from her perspective, it was horrific, because she wasn't involved in it, but she still did it."

The ECT acknowledged the uneven participation between key stages, noting that while Key Stage One teachers "were very involved with it, and we all kind of knew, and we were practicing the songs," Key Stage Two's engagement was "maybe less" despite being provided with all necessary resources. However, both educators were struck by the collective spirit that emerged, particularly during the final performance. As the ECT observed, unlike typical Christmas productions where "you do a year group at a time, and you don't see anything of the others," this event brought everyone together with a powerful sense of unity: "This is Shiremoor primary school. This is us. This is what we can do. And I think that was a real sense of community from parents, teachers, staff."

Student experience

On Monday 16th June, Shiremoor Primary School proudly took part in a vibrant showcase at The Exchange in North Shields as part of the Cultural Match Programme. Despite some families arriving unsure of what to expect, the event drew a large and enthusiastic audience, with over 100 RSVPs and more attending spontaneously. The evening opened with a film montage highlighting the students' creative journey, featuring rehearsal footage and clips from cultural site visits such as Cullercoats Beach. Each year group presented their learning through music and dance, beginning with Year 1 and 2's spirited renditions of North East folk songs like "Keel Row" and "Will You Buy My Fresh Fish," accompanied by live musicians and audience participation. Year 3 and 4 students brought history to life with insights into shipbuilding, followed by a lively ceilidh dance led by Year 4, where even some parents joined in. Year 5 and Year 6 concluded by delivering moving songs inspired by the lives of miners. A preview video was planned of Year 6's digital fusion art pieces, but unfortunately time didn't allow for this so the video will be sent to parents before the end of term. The showcase not only celebrated regional heritage but also demonstrated the power of creative learning, with children confidently sharing their knowledge and skills, supported by an invested school community.



Legacy

The Cultural Match programme at Shiremoor Primary School has established a lasting foundation that continues to influence the school's approach to creative education and community engagement. The project's success in bringing together all year groups under a unified theme of North East heritage has become a template for future whole-school initiatives, demonstrating that ambitious creative projects can be both achievable and transformative.

The mentoring relationship developed during the programme has evolved into an ongoing model of collaborative practice within the school. The Early Career Teacher's growth in confidence and capability through this experience has inspired other staff members to embrace creative challenges, fostering a culture where innovative teaching approaches are valued and supported. The project proved that creative education can serve dual purposes - enriching student learning while simultaneously providing powerful professional development opportunities for educators.

Perhaps most significantly, the programme strengthened the school's connection to its local community and regional identity. The celebration of North East culture through music, dance, and creative arts has become embedded in the school's identity, with elements of the project continuing to feature in subsequent performances and learning activities. The success of the showcase event at The Exchange has elevated the school's profile within the local community, establishing Shiremoor Primary as a place where creativity and cultural heritage are celebrated and preserved.

The programme's impact extends beyond the immediate participants to influence the broader school culture. The sense of collective achievement and community pride generated by the project continues to resonate, with both staff and families referencing the experience as a defining moment that showcased what the school community could accomplish together. This legacy of collaborative creativity and cultural celebration ensures that the Cultural Match programme's influence will continue to shape teaching and learning at Shiremoor Primary School for years to come.

"This is Shiremoor primary school. This is us. This is what we can do. And I think that was a real sense of community from parents, teachers, staff."

Case study 6: St. John's Primary School

Connecting Past and Present: A Cross-Curricular Journey Through Newcastle's Heritage

School background

St John's is a school at the heart of the community of South Benwell, Newcastle serving 227 pupils aged 3-11 years in a vibrant, diverse learning environment. The school community reflects significant diversity, with 42.3% of pupils having English as an additional language (EAL) and children from varied ethnic backgrounds including 43.7% White British, 13.4% African, and 10.4% from other ethnic groups.

The school serves a community facing economic challenges, with 151 pupils (66.5%) eligible for free school meals. Notably, 33.9% of pupils have Special Educational Needs (SEN) support, indicating the school's commitment to inclusive education and supporting children with additional learning needs. Despite these challenges, the school describes itself as "a happy, vibrant place to learn" where they "aim to give children the skills for life and a wealth of memorable experiences"

Project overview

The Year 3 class at St. John's Primary School undertook an ambitious cross-curricular project that blended historical learning with creative arts to explore Newcastle's rich heritage. Running from January to May 2025, the project combined three key components: a foundational visit to the Discovery Museum, collaborative songwriting and recording sessions with a professional musician, and video production work with a filmmaker.

The project aimed to connect students with their local history while developing creative skills and confidence. Students embarked on an immersive exploration of Newcastle's rich past and vibrant present at the Discovery Museum, where they encountered fascinating artifacts and stories that brought their local heritage to life. This inspiring museum visit ignited genuine curiosity and wonder among the pupils, who were captivated by discovering the layers of history beneath their feet. The hands-on experience provided not only a solid historical foundation for their subsequent creative work, but also fostered a deeper sense of connection to their community and pride in their local identity that would resonate throughout the entire project.

They then worked with the musician to compose and record an original song called "Bright Futures," transforming their classroom into a recording studio. The filmmaker collaborated with the class to create a music video that incorporated their museum visit and musical work.

The project culminated in a school assembly presentation where students performed their song live and premiered their music video to an audience of parents and school community members. This multimedia approach allowed students to engage with history through multiple creative lenses while developing performance skills, teamwork abilities, and a deeper connection to their Newcastle heritage.

Student experience

The Year 3 class at St. John's Primary School embarked on an innovative cross-curricular project that connected them with Newcastle's rich history through creative exploration and artistic expression. Beginning with their visit to the Discovery Museum in January 2025, the students were immersed in a learning journey that culminated in a memorable school assembly presentation in May 2025, complete with a record number of parent attendees.

Discovery and Exploration

The visit to the Discovery Museum served as the foundation for the project, sparking curiosity and establishing meaningful connections with local heritage. Students were particularly captivated by comparing past and present Newcastle.

"When we were at the museum we looked at things from olden times and compared them to modern times," explained one student during the post-assembly discussion. Another reflected, "I didn't know much about fossils and how they were formed."

For many students, this was their first meaningful encounter with local history. As one child shared, "One thing that was new for me was when we went to museum I didn't actually know the past because I wasn't born then."

The museum's diverse exhibits left lasting impressions, with different children connecting to various aspects of the experience. "My favourite thing was when we went to the Discovery Museum and looked at the different exhibits," commented one student, while another was particularly drawn to "the animal part" and specifically remembered seeing a lion.

Creative Expression Through Music

Working with the musician in March brought a new dimension to the children's historical learning. Over several sessions, the class brainstormed ideas for an original song called "Bright Futures," which connected their understanding of Newcastle's past with their own identities as young citizens. The whole experience sparked imaginative thinking amongst the class.

The transformation of their classroom into a recording studio proved especially memorable. "We got to turn our classroom into a recording studio!" exclaimed one student with evident pride. The recording process evoked a range of emotions, with one child admitting, "I was nervous about the recording," while others cited it as their proudest achievement: "I was most proud of the recording that we did and I was a bit nervous because I thought it was going to be scary."

Working with the Filmmaker

The collaboration with the filmmaker added another creative layer to the project. Students participated in creating a music video to accompany their song, an experience many highlighted as a favourite aspect of the project. "Recording the video" was frequently mentioned when students discussed what they enjoyed most.

The filmmaking process also opened students' eyes to new career possibilities, evidenced by the thoughtful questions they posed to the filmmaker during the Q&A session.

Collaborative Learning

Throughout the project, teamwork emerged as both a valuable skill and occasional challenge. "We went altogether to the museum," noted one student, emphasising the collective nature of their experience. Another reflected on the collaborative aspects: "We had to work together to estimate and work out ways of showing," while honestly acknowledging that "It was a bit difficult to work with others as sometimes people did the actions."

Public Presentation and Pride

The assembly presentation represented the culmination of months of learning and creative work. Each student had a speaking part, delivering their lines with what the headteacher later praised as impressive confidence. The students performed their song live before premiering the music video they had created with the filmmaker.

The assembly was particularly significant as it drew unprecedented parent engagement, with over 20 families attending from the class of 30 children - the largest parent turnout the teacher had witnessed. This public sharing of their work instilled a sense of accomplishment and pride among the students, particularly regarding their performances and recordings.

Lasting Impact and Future Aspirations

Perhaps most telling was the students' enthusiasm for similar projects in the future. When asked what they would like to do again, their responses revealed both specific interests and a broader appetite for creative, cross-curricular learning:

"If we could learn how to play an instrument..." "The same thing but modern day..." "School and all the different subjects..."

One student had already envisioned a new historical focus: "I'm going to do this again, the same stuff just a different topic, I want to do ancient Greeks."

The project also appeared to spark interest in creative career pathways, with many students expressing newfound curiosity about music and filmmaking when directly asked about these fields.

Feedback from the Creative Practitioners

Two creative practitioners were involved in the Cultural Match project at St John's Primary: a songwriter and music producer, and a filmmaker. Both practitioners worked collaboratively with Year 4 students to create a comprehensive multimedia project. The musician described how the school "wanted the children to have a rich and empowering creative experience, engage with their heritage through creativity" while also providing insight into sustaining a career in the arts. She ran sessions that were "a mix of songwriting, rehearsing and then actually recording the children singing the song in a makeshift studio we created in a spare classroom." The filmmaker complemented this work by filming the music-making process, noting that his role was to give young people "experiences and skills they hadn't had before." The collaboration resulted in both a recorded song co-written by the students and a music video that incorporated footage from their visit to the Discovery Museum. Both practitioners emphasised the importance of exposing working-class children to arts opportunities, with the filmmaker reflecting that "I always like to give opportunities to younger people because I know how vital it is to have exposure to the arts at a young age, especially for people from a working class background as you don't always have the same opportunities as other people." The project culminated in a class assembly where the final multimedia product was shared with parents and the school community.

Legacy

This experience demonstrates how connecting historical learning with creative expression can transform students' engagement with local heritage. By linking Newcastle's past with their present identities through music, film, and public presentation, the Year 3 students at St. John's developed not only historical knowledge but also confidence, collaborative skills, and pride in their community connections.

"I'm going to do this again, the same stuff just a different topic, I want to do ancient Greeks"

Case study 7: Linton Primary School

Inside Out: Getting emotional about art.

School background

Linton Primary School sits in the rural village of Linton in Northumberland, serving as a small community school with a distinctly intimate character. With approximately 16-26 students aged 3-11 years, it operates with a remarkably low student-teacher ratio of 4:1, reflecting the personalised attention possible in such a small setting.

The school's demographic profile is particularly notable for its specialised provision. A high proportion of the children have additional needs, with many having moved to the school specifically due to its smaller size, bespoke approach and commitment to individual support. This has shaped the school's identity as a haven for vulnerable learners who may struggle in larger mainstream environments.

The provision reflects this demographic reality through its "Intentionally Inclusive" philosophy. The school operates as a mainstream school with a SEN unit that has a capacity of six and currently has four pupils on roll, demonstrating its commitment to supporting children with Education, Health and Care Plans alongside those in mainstream provision.

Project Overview

Linton Primary School's Cultural Match project centred on an ambitious collaborative art initiative with The Laing Art Gallery, working with creative practitioner a to develop tactile, interactive artworks that would culminate in a professional gallery exhibition. The project was built around the school's commitment to accessibility, confidence-building, and collaborative learning.

The ECT partnered with her mentor to lead a whole-school project that spanned the academic year, featuring three intensive workshop sessions: screen printing on 27th January 2025, textiles work on 31st March 2025, and a final session on 19th May 2025. The project's ambitious scope included two visits to The Laing Art Gallery - an initial inspirational visit and a culminating exhibition viewing where the children's collaborative artwork was displayed in the main gallery.

The project's central creative output was an innovative interchangeable jigsaw featuring different textured animals, designed to be both viewed and used by the children. This reflected the school's inclusive philosophy and commitment to creating art that was accessible to all learners, particularly those with additional needs.

The ECT's Professional Journey: Early Confidence Challenges

At the project's outset, the ECT faced some personal and professional challenges. "I am not from a creative background and I was concerned that my lack of knowledge would be a barrier," she initially reflected. This initial apprehension was compounded by the practical challenges of coordinating external partnerships and managing ambitious timelines.

By March, the ECT's confidence had transformed significantly. "I have become more confident contacting external agencies... however all of the agencies have been incredibly supporting and understanding that this is not my area of expertise and I was out of my comfort zone!" This growth in professional confidence was matched by an expanding skill set: "Being the lead and having the freedom to engage directly with the artist. Gathering contacts and resources for the future."

The ECT's role evolved to encompass multiple responsibilities, as she later described: "Organiser, staff management, facilitator, helper, behaviour management." This expansion of duties reflected her growing confidence in managing complex, multi-faceted projects.



Culminating Professional Growth

By the June presentation, the ECT's transformation was evident. "Finding my confidence in art, creating a project, the organisation, the space for it, managing the time, creating the infrastructure... It's definitely raised my cultural capital." Her reflection revealed not just professional growth, but personal development: "I need to take my own children to the Laing Art Gallery now, too. It's given me the confidence to love art, and I definitely need to do more in the classroom."



Student Experience and Impact: Gallery Visits and Inspiration

The project began with a transformative visit to The Laing Art Gallery that set the tone for the entire initiative. "We started off our experience with actually going to the Laing Art Gallery. And it had a really positive impact on the children and staff. We really got the staff engaged and involved in the project," the ECT reported.

The gallery visit was particularly significant for the school's diverse learners: "We started off with actually seeing how much the children enjoyed the art and the colours. And everybody was fully engaged." The inclusive nature of the experience was crucial: "Some children were motivated, and that was okay. Some children just wanted to play in the sand. It was really inclusive."

Creative Process and Collaboration

The hands-on creative work proved transformative for student collaboration and emotional engagement. "The children really thought about how they felt when they were doing the artwork," the ECT observed. The project's emphasis on tactile experiences was particularly meaningful: "Inspired by what we saw at the Laing, there were things that you can actually feel and touch. And we really wanted that for our children."

The collaborative nature of the work was central to the project's success: "We were able to add different emotions. We were able to do different textures. We were able to have a feel of what that looks like in different colours. We were able to do some of that collaboration and what the children produced was absolutely fantastic."

Exhibition Impact

The culminating exhibition viewing represented a profound moment for the students. "We went to the Laing last week, and the children saw all of their artwork displayed in the main gallery, which we just could not get over," the ECT recounted. The emotional impact was unmistakable: "Watching them all walking into the Laing to see their art put together was just amazing -- their faces!"

The significance of seeing their collaborative work in a professional context was transformative: "For the children to see all of their artwork together, was just awesome. And we did this together. And it was just brilliant."



Creative Practitioner Experience

The creative practitioner worked intensively with the students across all stages of the project. Her approach balanced professional execution with genuine student participation and ownership.



"The students worked on every stage apart from painting the jigsaw but they drew the faces on paper in groups designing the features and they sanded and painted the flesh colour on the pieces of wood," she explained. The collaborative process was carefully structured to ensure authentic student input: "Then I transferred their drawings directly with carbon paper and went over it with paint pens so it's 100 percent their designs just rendered by me."

The practitioner's approach ensured that all students could participate meaningfully: "They did their prints and they chose all the fabrics for the animals and stuck them on made the noses did the gold leaf did loads of painting. We just kept moving the tasks round the different children." This rotational approach was particularly suited to the school's inclusive ethos and diverse learning needs.

The professional presentation of student work was crucial: "Their drawings have been used on the animals' backgrounds. It was all framed to go in the exhibition." This attention to professional standards helped elevate the students' work and contributed to the project's ultimate success.

Learning and Development Outcomes

Cultural Capital and Broader Learning

The project succeeded in raising cultural capital across the school community. The ECT noted: "In class, we had lessons dedicated to exploring what culture means to them and played a game which helped raise the cultural capital... And the children were going to play the same game with their parents when their artwork comes back to school."

The project's impact extended beyond traditional art education: "We even explored things like food, thinking about those textures." This cross-curricular approach aligned with the school's holistic educational philosophy.

Skills Development and Confidence Building

For the students, the project yielded significant developmental benefits: "They have learned new skills; it has built their confidence; they have become more aware of different ways that they can increase their knowledge of the world and culture; working with others can be a positive experience; having their artwork displayed in a gallery."



The ECT identified specific areas of growth: "The children are more focused on arts linked with emotion and have more resilience... Children being part of something positive and inclusivity. Seeing children working together positively."

Organisational and Leadership Skills

The ECT's professional development included significant organisational capabilities: "Organising whole school timetables, arranging whole school carousel and activities, liaising with external agencies." These skills represented substantial professional growth from her initial concerns about managing external partnerships.

Community and Family Engagement

The project's impact extended well beyond the school walls. "Our parents have also been to see it now," the ECT reported, indicating the broader community engagement the project generated. The involvement of families in viewing the professional exhibition helped cement the project's significance within the wider community.

The ECT's personal reflection on taking her own children to the gallery suggested the project's influence on her own family life and values: "I need to take my own children to the Laing Art Gallery now, too."

Sustainability and Future Practice

The project created lasting resources for the school: "Our art wasn't just to look at, it was something they could use." The functional nature of the artworks ensured ongoing educational value: "Next steps, we've created five different animals, which we're going to put on display in our school, so that the children can play with it."

The ECT's expanded network and confidence suggested sustainable future practice: "Gathering contacts and resources for the future... It's given me the confidence to love art, and I definitely need to do more in the classroom."

Long-term Impact on School Culture

The project's influence on school culture was evident in the ECT's reflection on motivation: "I am giving the children something they would not experience otherwise, and giving the children a bigger idea of the world and something they can be proud of."

The emphasis on providing opportunities that would otherwise be unavailable was central to the project's lasting value: "[I wanted] to provide opportunities to children that would never have this experience, and to allow children to work together and see how collaboration be a positive thing."



Conclusion

Linton Primary School's Cultural Match project demonstrated how ambitious cultural partnerships can be successfully adapted to serve vulnerable learners in small, specialised settings. The project's success lay in its authentic commitment to inclusion, its emphasis on tactile and collaborative experiences, and its culmination in professional recognition through gallery exhibition.

The ECT's journey from initial apprehension to confident cultural leadership exemplified the programme's potential for professional development. Her growth in managing complex partnerships, coordinating whole-school activities, and developing cultural programming skills represented significant professional advancement.



For the students, the project provided transformative experiences that would have been impossible within conventional school resources. The combination of professional gallery visits, hands-on creative work with a skilled practitioner, and the pride of seeing their collaborative work professionally displayed created lasting memories and expanded cultural horizons.

The project's emphasis on creating functional, tactile artworks that could be used within the school environment ensured lasting educational value while respecting the diverse learning needs of the school's student population. This approach demonstrated how cultural projects can be both ambitious and inclusive, providing meaningful experiences for all learners regardless of their individual needs or capabilities.

"For the children to see all of their artwork together, was just awesome. And we did this together. And it was just brilliant."

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10. Acknowledgements and Credits

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All information contained within this report was accurate at the time of writing in July 2025.

Authorship

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