

Written evidence submitted by Engage, National Association for Gallery Education

Engage is the lead body for gallery and visual arts education in the UK and internationally with c700 members, both organisations and individuals. We provide advocacy and training, share practice and carry out research and activities with the sector. We aim to support the sector to provide high quality experiences with art and artists for communities, particularly the most vulnerable and those in areas of low cultural engagement. We do this through programmes such as Children's Art Week, repurposed this year to support children and young people to experience the visual arts through physical and remote resources, many designed by artists.

Reason for submitting evidence

Engage is the lead advocate for gallery education in the UK with advocacy as a key function.

Summary of evidence

- The cultural sector has been well supported by the Government's Job Retention Scheme and by arms length bodies such as Arts Council England, Creative Scotland and Arts Council of Wales.
- Arts and education organisations including teachers' networks and funders have worked really effectively together throughout the pandemic supporting the sector.
- There is a concern that arts education will not be included as part of a broad and balanced curriculum given the pressures on schools and a strong desire amongst the cultural sector including artists to support teachers.
- There are concerns that with reduced resource for cultural organisations education continues to be a priority in particular new and vulnerable audiences and those with protected characteristics.
- The arts education sector has worked effectively in partnership during the pandemic, this is a very positive foundation for future work
- Arts education organisations and artists have adapted quickly and are developing new hybrid models for working with participants.
- There will be a need for resources, both capital and revenue, to support education and participation work as lock down is relaxed.

Immediate impact of Covid on the sector?

- Engage's experience has been an immediate drop in earned income. The impact of funders repurposing resources had a very serious impact on Engage, resulting in grant applications not being assessed or submitted as expected with uncertainty of when these funders will be open for business again. However, we have also experienced great flexibility and generosity from trusts and foundations we have long standing relationships with, which has been enormously appreciated. Engage's experience mirrors the impact of the pandemic on the economic health of the sector.
- Engage, in common with other cultural organisations cancelled activities and has now repurposed programmes adopting hybrid models including digital platforms to

adapt to the environment. We have focused on training and networking for arts and education sector colleagues who are working and on furlough and sharing best practice on adapting education and learning work in response to the pandemic.

How effective has support been from DCMS, Government and arms length bodies?

- The support of arms length organisations such as Arts Council England, Arts Council of Wales and Creative Scotland, all of whom fund Engage, has been excellent. By relaxing reporting requirements, these funders have given Engage enough flexibility to work strategically in a very changed and challenging landscape. The Government Job Retention Scheme has been enormously valuable and well used by cultural organisations to protect staff roles. In the UK we have not experienced the redundancies to education post reported in museums in the US and Portugal for example.
- The work of artists groups such as the Contemporary Visual Arts Network and a-n the Artists Information Company demonstrates however that freelance artists have both lost work and found it difficult to access government support for self employed people.

Long term impact of Covid and support needed

- Engage is working with education and learning organisations in the cultural sector including the Clore Duffield Foundation and the Group for Education in Museums to source and share guidance on good practice for cultural education and learning work as lock down is relaxed. We are looking at the practicalities of working with audiences in person and remotely and how hybrid learning can be developed.
- We are also speaking to teaching groups and unions to understand how best to support teachers and students to engage in the arts in person and remotely. There is a strong sense that the arts have a critical role in the 'recovery curriculum' not least because of their role in supporting wellbeing.
- We are concerned initiatives to Close the Gap for students who have fallen behind academically due to lockdown do not prevent those same students from accessing arts subjects.
- We are concerned that cultural organisations under pressure financially continue to value and invest in education and learning.
- We have particular concerns that the excellent work undertaken by the cultural sector to engage with audiences new to the arts, those with protected characteristics and vulnerable groups is not lost as a result the pressure on resources.
- We are working with arts, education and funding organisations to advocate for the value of education and learning and to ensure this is understood by decision makers in cultural organisations.
- We are concerned that environmental issues continued to be a priority as we adapt to audience work as the lock down is relaxed.

What lessons might be learnt?

- It is important for the arts and cultural sector to have models which are flexible and responsive enough to adapt to rapid change.

- Some parts of the arts education sector are precarious, in particular freelance artists and small arts organisations. Support will be needed to ensure that freelance artists and small arts organisation can continue to be part of the arts ecology.

How might the sector evolve?

- There is an opportunity to build on the very positive partnership work which has developed across arts and education organisations.

Jane Sillis, Director,
Engage, National Association for Gallery Education