

# Toolkit

## for Place-Based Partnerships

A practical guide to support arts organisations considering setting up Local x National partnerships

barbican

Front cover monoprint created by students from Heacham Junior School and Nelson Academy, and supplied by Rosy Prue.

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## About this Toolkit

This Toolkit is intended to offer **ideas, practical activities, discussion points** and **considerations** for arts, cultural and heritage organisations of all sizes and from all locations who are **considering place-based Local x National partnerships** with a participatory focus. The term Local x National is intended to reflect the potential for such partnerships to achieve more than organisations working alone.

It comes out of the learning experiences of all partners involved in the National Development Programme which ran between 2018 and 2022, and which was specifically directed towards the development and delivery of arts and cultural learning work with schools and young people.

The National Development Programme partners were: Barbican Creative Learning, Harlow Playhouse, HOME, and PEACH West Norfolk LCEP, via Creative Arts East.

This Toolkit is based on research documented in *Barbican Creative Learning's National Development Programme: A Bespoke Approach to Place-based Partnerships* by Dr Maia Mackney, 2021. Extracts from Dr Mackney's research have been reproduced in this toolkit, by kind permission of the author, the full version of which can be downloaded [here](#).



Zines created by students from Nelson Academy, image courtesy of Nelson Academy

# Starting out



# Identifying possible collaborators

The Barbican used a number of different criteria and sources of information to identify regions in which a partnership might add value. We looked for a balance of what we termed ‘**need**’ and ‘**opportunity**’. This process was carried out by the Barbican, but similar steps could be taken by local organisations to further understand local need, to identify and develop connections with relevant organisations, and to interrogate the key drivers and requirements of the partnership.

## Regional need

- We looked for places where levels of participation in arts and cultural activities were in the lower 50% of local authority areas nationally ([Active Lives Survey 2015 – 2017](#)), who might benefit from additional resource to support local people to access and co-create funded arts and cultural activities. We then initiated conversations with the Arts Council Bridge Organisations responsible for these areas.
- Following this, conversations with potential lead partners checked whether they recognised a need and felt that the partnership could help to meet it.
- Need was additionally defined by analysis of local populations with characteristics historically associated with being underrepresented within arts audiences and workforce – socio economic and progression to FE/HE ([Indices of Multiple Deprivation](#) website, Free School Meal figures and [HEFCE POLAR](#) measurements).
- Need was also connected to the lack of a local NPO, or limited NPO investment per head in comparison to other areas (ACE NPO investment in local government district divided by population – using data from the Arts Council England website and other desk research).

## Regional opportunity

- There needed to be a sense of local motivation and desire to enhance connection between arts and cultural organisations and local schools and young people, and a perception that the timing and circumstances might be right for this kind of partnership (e.g. increased local authority focus on arts and culture, more investment being sought etc).
- Opportunity was defined by a locally embedded organisation or group of organisations who were interested in the partnership and were in reasonable travelling distance of the area, in order to support sustainable local engagement, and with whom there was alignment in terms of strategic aims and ethos around learning work.
- Initially, the Barbican sought partnerships with multi-arts venues with at least one member of staff with a responsibility for learning work, but this was flexed (in the case of Harlow and West Norfolk) as we learned more about the different infrastructures in each region.
- We wanted there to be an opportunity for two-way learning, where the Barbican team could learn about the different needs, opportunity and approaches that were present in each region, in a way which might inform their own practice, and in return share their own knowledge and practice with partners. A key driver was that contrasting settings were included – one urban, one suburban and one rural – to provide an opportunity for learning from different contexts.
- Finally, and practically, there needed to be enough schools in the local area to make it feasible to run the projects.

## Approach to regions and partners

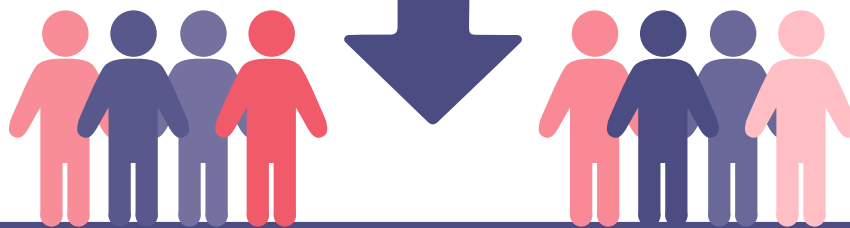
### Desk research

looking at geography, Active Lives ranking, NPO investment history, socio-economic characteristics



### Conversations

with relevant Bridge organisations and LCEPs about local context, need and likely interest in a partnership, possible partner organisations and whether the project proposal would be a good fit for the region



### In-person meetings

with potential lead partner organisations, local teachers and cultural leaders, to ensure they feel the partnership would be welcomed and could add value to the local cultural ecology

## Key learning points and recommendations

1. Online tools and data sources are extremely helpful in beginning to build a broad picture of access and infrastructure nationally, but delivery planning based solely on this information can lead to resources being funnelled exclusively into those areas which are seen to be the 'most deprived', thus creating a new imbalance. Speaking to people and organisations 'on the ground' will add much-needed nuance and will result in a more holistically informed decision.
2. Having a systematic process for selection provides a clear rationale for decision making, and a structure for objective cross-regional comparison, but there is also a strong relational element to productive partnership working. The answers to questions such as 'Do we have a similar ethos and values?' 'Do we have complementary communication styles?' 'Are there resonances between our artistic programmes?' are equally important.
3. For a Local x National partnership to work, local partners should feel confident that relationships in place locally will be valued and respected, and national partners must be able to authentically provide this guarantee.

"These organisations have a great deal of expertise, knowledge and resources, the larger funded bodies, not just London organisations. That can only be of benefit to the rest of the country if they are deployed where they are needed and where there is a good rationale for them to be working. The biggest challenge around the work we have in cultural education is, it is hard to define cultural education, where it's happening and not happening. We all default to sources of information that give us proxies for participation. That formal drive from national organisations who look at the same data and even locally we have a number of places which are overrun with initiatives."

*Bridge Organisation*

"I have to say when we had the initial scoping meeting, I was a bit dubious. I have been on the receiving end of too many non-partnership partnerships that are not reciprocal. I did go to great pains to scare [the Barbican] off and say that whilst we had a lot to gain from a Barbican partnership, the Barbican needed to be aware that they also could gain from this really tricky partnership, and that there is a lot to learn potentially. This is particularly because Creative Arts East has worked very hard to overcome that sense of not 'doing to' a community and we didn't want to be associated with a project that might undo that. [The Barbican] perfectly reassured me that was not going to be the deal and that has always been the case." *Creative Arts East*



# Place-based partnership models

During the Barbican’s involvement in the first phase of the East London Cultural Education Partnership (ELCEP), we developed and tested a range of partnership models that we thought could have a wider impact in other parts of the UK – the most effective being the ‘place-based’ model. Place-based working brings together partners across numerous sectors to engage in **geographically-focused** collaboration that responds to **local needs** and draws on **local assets**. Place-based working aims to be relevant, significant and situated within the context of that place and the people who live there.

The learning from testing this model in East London was that setting up relationships, genuinely understanding the needs and establishing partnerships to solve challenges together required patience and time, however, the impact and legacy of this work can be long lasting.

Through working in a place-based way beyond London, we hoped to support the development of knowledge and relationships which could sustain beyond the project cycle. Through the research and evaluation of the work, we set out to explore the different cultural ecologies present in urban, suburban and rural locations, and to identify what large-scale arts centres need to consider when working in different regional settings.

The National Development Programme embodied a place-based approach through the following elements:

- A medium term (three year) collaboration with an organisation embedded in the area and community where the work would take place, to allow for an iterative process of delivery and learning, in order to shape programmes according to the local experience.
- An intention to work with partners and other local stakeholders to understand local priorities, the types of programmes and activity we could develop together that would be of benefit, and what kind of local assets and resources we could draw on.

- A commitment to involve local artists and practitioners in delivery of the projects – supporting the development of the local cultural ecology through the strengthening of relationships between the arts and education sectors, and between individuals within these sectors.

## Characteristics of different place-based partnership models\*

Whilst each partnership was informed by a place-based approach, the structure and functioning of each was specific to the requirements and dynamics of the partners and the settings. Once developed, these structures didn’t necessarily remain static throughout the three-year period, but flexed organically according to changes in capacity, evolving relationships and of course, the impact of Covid-19.

Below are some diagrams and descriptions which attempt to represent some of the key structures that emerged.

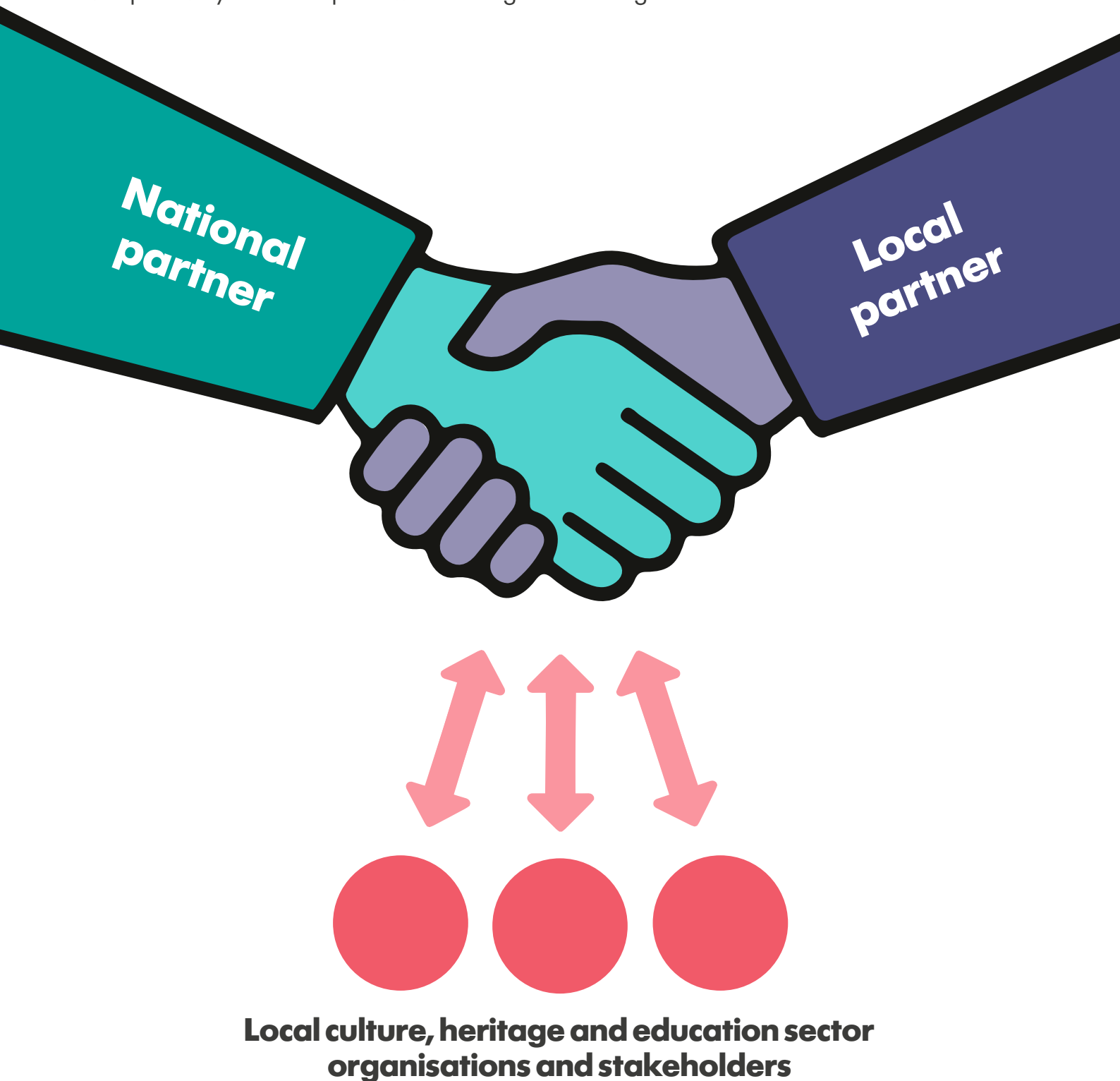
Perhaps more than verbal or written discussions, creating a visual representation of the partnership can help you to see what assumptions you’re making, and to explore how you each envision your role within it and your interaction with local stakeholders.

\*These models refer to ‘national’ and ‘local’ partners. For clarity, ‘national partner’ refers to any large arts organisation from any metropolitan or non-metropolitan area in the UK working in partnership in other regions in the UK. In the case of the NDP, it was the Barbican (the national partner) who initiated the relationships and sought the funding, but these partnership models would remain relevant if the roles were reversed.

## Networked Partnership

(closest example PEACH West Norfolk Partnership, via Creative Arts East – see Nelson Academy case study p.42)

The Networked Partnership model exists between a national partner and a lead local partner to develop delivery relationships between a range of local organisations and stakeholders.



## Characteristics of a Networked Partnership

### Development

- Initially brokered with guidance from Bridge Organisation or Local Borough Council on local needs and whether a good fit for the region.
- Relationship-based and firmly embedded in wider cultural ecology (LCEPs, other arts organisations/cultural leaders' groups).

### Engagement with place

- Partnership is contextualised and directly consultative of a range of local cultural leaders and representatives from education sector.
- May involve community stakeholders or youth advisory groups in order to be rooted deeply in place and responding to local need.
- May involve cross sector stakeholders.
- Possible for multiple organisations to host or be involved with project delivery.

### Features

- Adopts an approach to place-based partnerships which most heavily draws on expertise of broad range of partners, stakeholders and communities resulting in bespoke, tailored and 'hyper local' projects.
- A 'place' focussed partnership, and an approach to working which responds to specificities of place.
- An asset-based approach through which community development is facilitated by joining up the varied assets and strengths.
- By adopting a joined-up approach to engagement with local stakeholders, the conditions for collaborative conversations between the lead partners, in response to their shared learning, are enhanced.
- Potential to pursue joint funding applications to support shared project delivery.
- Aims for co-creation, with partners developing work collaboratively in response to local need.

### Requirements

- A lead local partner with a funded convening role in local cultural sector, who is embedded in local cultural landscape, and who is keen to work collaboratively with other local and national partners.
- Funded local partner staff time to bring expertise to strategic planning and project design, to broker, hold (and lead on where appropriate) relationships with schools, artists and other local stakeholders, and to lead on elements of project delivery.
- Funded capacity within national partner to engage in strategic planning and project design, to co-hold relationships with local stakeholders and to share delivery responsibility.
- Local advisory group or steering group useful to this partnership but requires investment.
- Buy-in from wider cultural organisations and networks locally.
- Capacity within the national partner to attend local cultural groups and meetings and cultivate relationships.
- May be most appropriate for areas with a number of small to medium arts and cultural organisations, where capacity within a single organisation is limited, and a relationship with a geographically based collective rather than a large single 'hub' organisation, allows ownership and workload to be distributed.

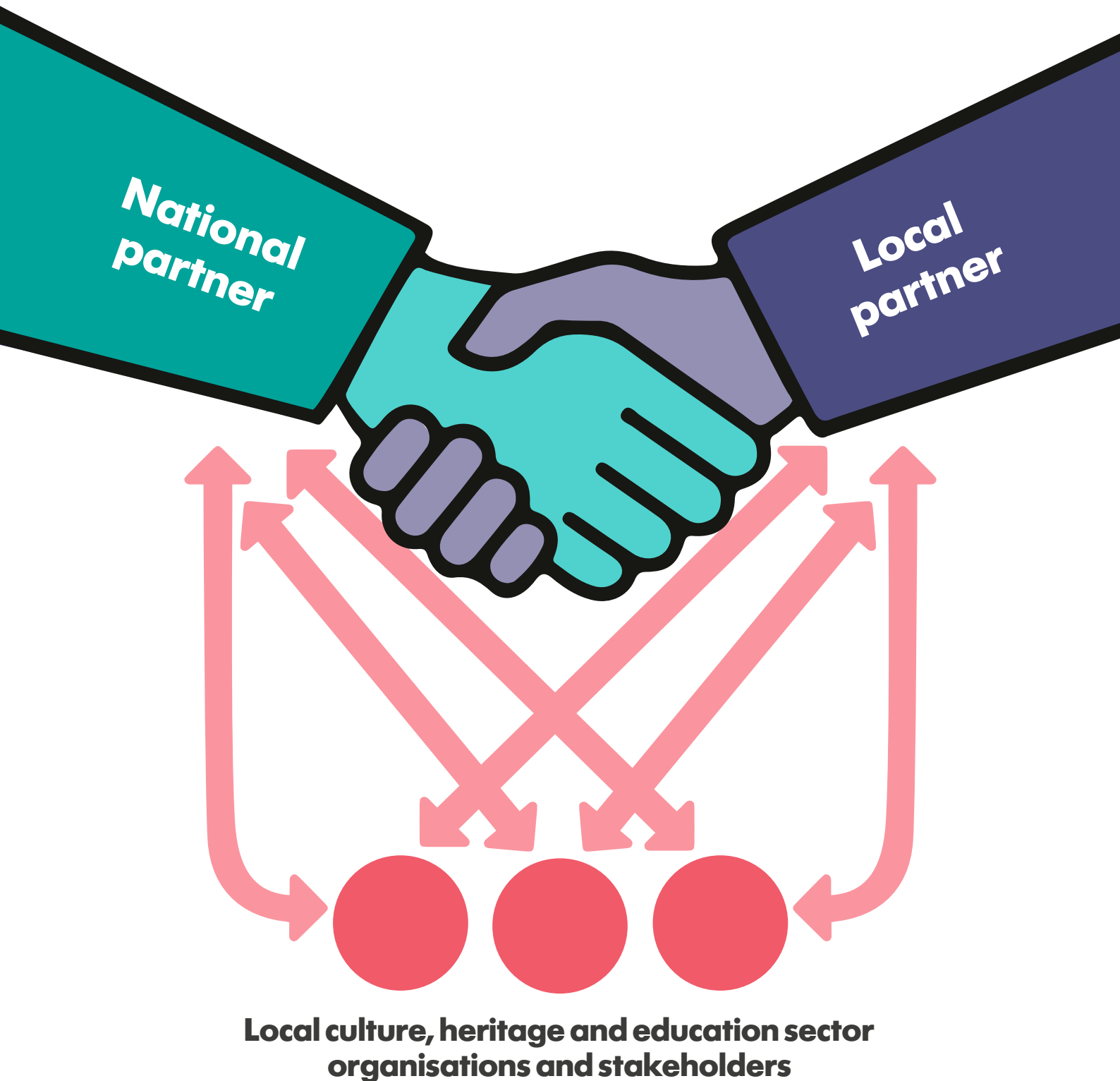
*For an example of a Networked Partnership, read the Nelson Academy case study on p.42.*



## Hive Mind Partnership

(closest example Harlow Playhouse Partnership – see Passmores Academy case study on p.45)

The Hive Mind Partnership model has a direct connection to the wider cultural ecology or ambition to connect to the wider cultural ecology, but with project delivery sitting with a single local partner.



## Characteristics of a Hive Mind Partnership

### Development

- Initially brokered with guidance from Bridge organisation or Local Borough Council on local needs and whether a good fit for the region, or whether moving towards Hive Mind from Single Point of Entry Partnership (see below) by branching out to embed in wider cultural context.

### Engagement with place

- Partnership is contextualised and directly consultative of a range of local cultural leaders and representatives from education sector.
- Connects with local knowledge sharing opportunities, for instance Cultural Leaders Groups.
- The local partner gathers and shares knowledge, and brokers and holds relationships with local stakeholders, but for capacity and resourcing reasons the national partner may at times (upon consultation with the regional partner) take the lead on these relationships on behalf of the partnership in order to inform delivery.

### Features

- A 'place' focussed partnership, and an approach to working which responds to specificities of place.
- An approach to place-based partnerships which learns from expertise of broad range of partners, stakeholders and communities resulting in bespoke, tailored and 'hyper local' projects.
- Aims for co-creation, with partners developing work collaboratively in response to local need.
- Potential to pursue joint funding applications to support shared project delivery.

### Requirements

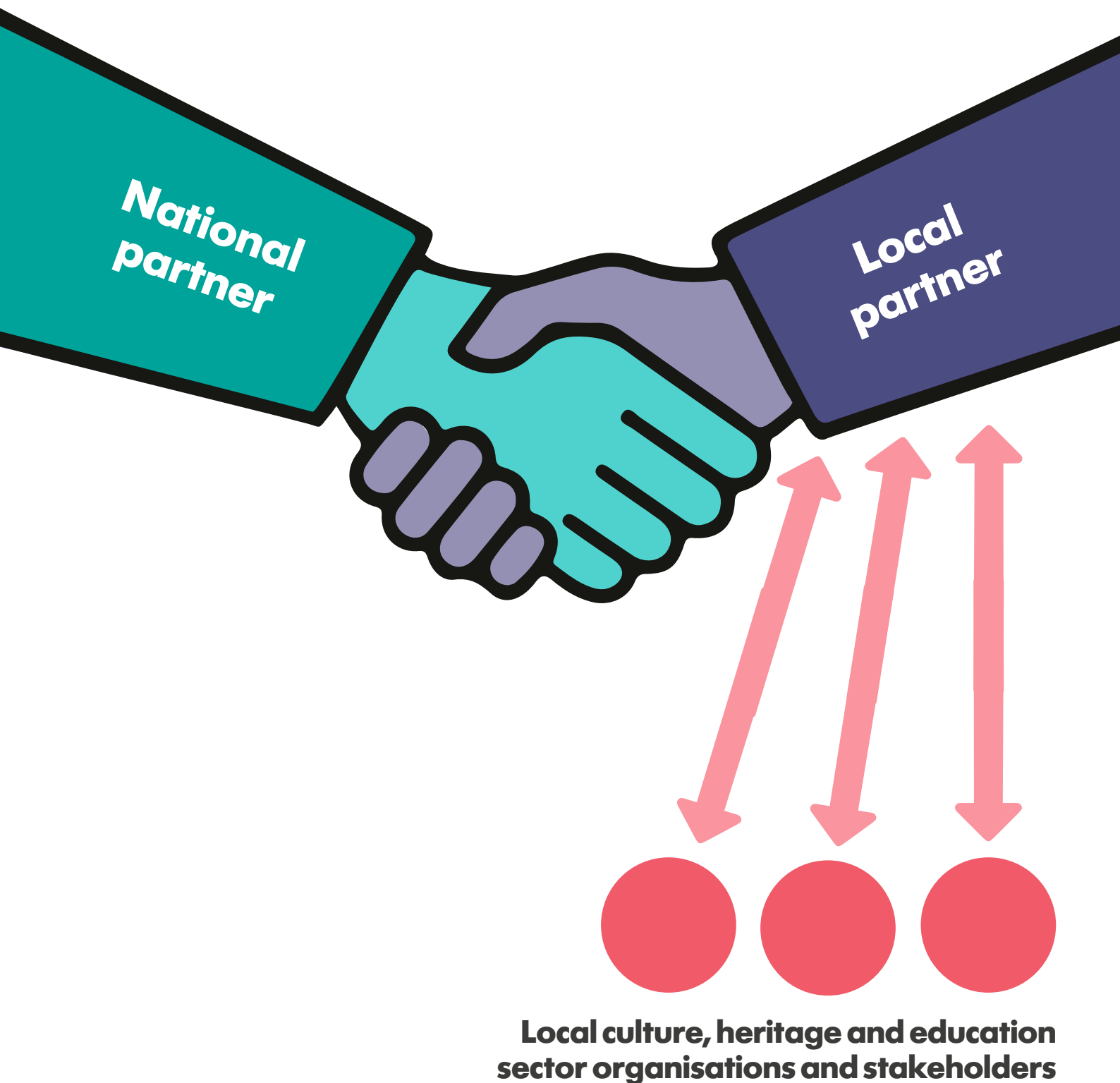
- A local partner who is embedded in local cultural landscape, who is keen to work collaboratively with other local and national partners.
- A national partner with capacity to engage in strategic planning and project design, to co-hold relationships with local stakeholders (leading on these when required) and to share delivery responsibility.
- Funded local partner staff time in order to bring expertise to strategic planning, broker and share relationships with schools, artists and other local stakeholders (perhaps less extensively than Networked Partnership), and manage elements of project delivery.
- Interest in and support for project from wider cultural organisations and networks.
- Capacity within national partner to attend local cultural groups and meetings and cultivate relationships.
- May be most appropriate when one partner has more capacity than the other, or when capacity fluctuates during the life of the partnership.

*For an example of a Hive Mind Partnership, read the Passmores Academy case study on p.45.*

## Single Point of Entry Partnership

(closest example HOME, Manchester Partnership – see Melland High School case study on p.40)

The Single Point of Entry Partnership exists between a single national partner and a single local partner, who manages local sector relationships.





## Characteristics of Single Point of Entry Partnership

### Development

- Not necessarily developed with the Bridge or local council involved but developed through similarities in artistic and/or strategic scope, vision and intentions.

### Engagement with place

- Less direct interaction between local stakeholders and the national partner, with the regional partner holding relationships with wider organisations in the area (for instance LCEPs, Borough Councils, other arts organisations) and bringing knowledge from these to shape project delivery for the context.
- Community groups could be involved as consultees, but the regional partner would likely lead on the involvement of these.

### Features

- An approach to place-based partnerships which harnesses the local knowledge and expertise of the regional partner to create bespoke, tailored and 'hyper local' projects.
- Existing similarities between partner scale, scope and programming, as well as the structure of the partnership, may mean that it is more focussed on effective delivery and enhanced reach than it is on capacity building and knowledge exchange.
- Where this is the case, it may be that it is most suited to supporting a national franchise or locally tailored approach to a pre-existing project model.
- Given suitable project delivery set up, has the capacity to provide more focussed prominence for the local partner, as the national partner is less visible locally.
- National partner more likely to drive centralised funding applications but local partner inputs expertise around tailoring project to local need.

### Requirements

- A local partner who is embedded in local cultural landscape, who is keen to work collaboratively with other local and national partners.
- A national partner with capacity to engage in strategic planning, project design and to support elements of delivery.
- Funded local partner staff time to bring expertise to strategic planning and project design, and to manage elements of project delivery.
- In addition, this model more than the others requires the local partner to have a school's engagement or creative learning manager or similar, who can take responsibility for gathering and sharing all info on the needs and priorities of local schools and artists, in order to shape the project.
- May be most appropriate when the partnership is between cultural organisations which are similar in scale, and in a more densely populated urban area with a highly developed commercial cultural ecology. In this instance, it may feel impractical (and, depending on the scale of the project, unwarranted) for a national partner to connect directly with local networks beyond the local partner organisation, particularly if the partner already undertakes similar engagement work of their own.

*For an example of a Single Point of Entry Partnership, read the Melland High School case study on p.40.*

## Key learning points and recommendations

1. There is no 'one size fits all' or 'right' way of approaching a place-based partnership. It is important to enter into a partnership knowing that it will be bespoke and that this requires time to be flexible. Within this, it is necessary to examine and state honestly the assumptions, requirements and values which each organisation is bringing and to define the level of partnership needed. The Give and Take activity in the following section (p.21) can support this.
2. Local partners should ideally be engaged with and embedded in the local cultural landscape (LCEPs, Bridge Organisations, local councils, etc) or have a desire to be so, in order for work to be 'place-based' rather than 'partner-based'.
3. Not all partnerships must be complex, nuanced and involve extensive co-creation but this might be needed in certain contexts. Which partnership model will best deliver the aspired for place-based outcomes in this region? What capacity and investment are needed to support this partnership model both in the immediate and longer term, and is it in place?
4. The research suggested that funded partner time was essential to the delivery of all three of our identified place-based partnership models – Networked, Hive Mind and Single Point of Entry. In areas with sufficient infrastructure and capacity, this may be a case of planning the work of the partnership into the portfolios of existing staff teams, whilst in other areas it may be necessary to include money in the budget to recruit additional staff for the programme.



# Delivery

## Activities to get you started

This section contains activities and approaches that may help partners to begin to set objectives by **sharing understanding, developing a knowledge of context, and exploring the differences and commonalities between their settings**. They offer a range of ways of capturing and presenting ideas and information gathered through meetings, informal conversations and research.

These activities support an ecological understanding of culture by focusing on the significance of local and national systems, connections, relationships and interdependencies.

### Question mapping

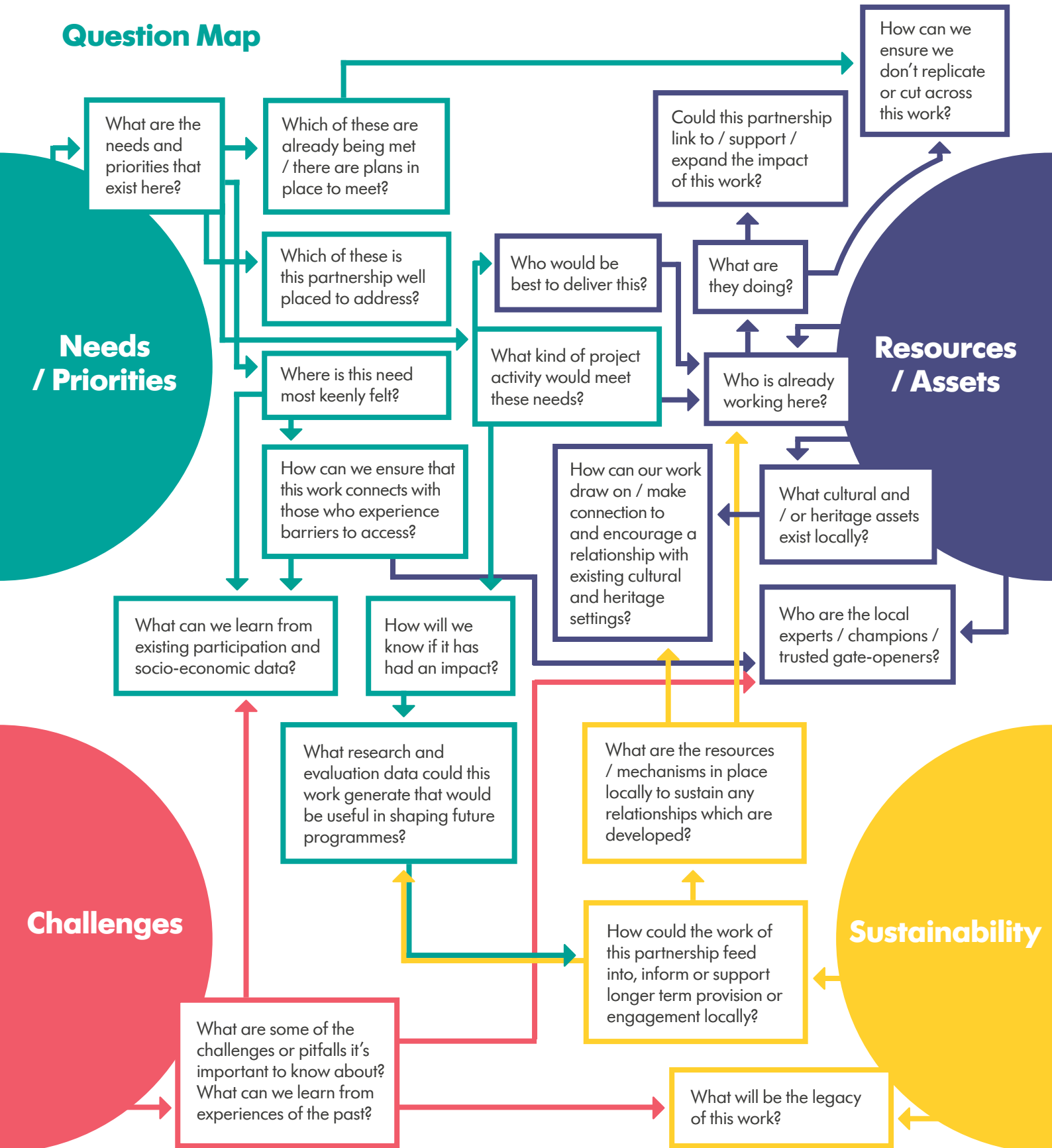
The question map on the next page reflects some of the questions and conversations which arose during the National Development Programme. As this shows, the process of developing understanding wasn't always linear, with conversations flowing in numerous directions, and from different starting points.



The Coney Barbican Box, image courtesy of Welland High School



## Question Map



**Challenges** could be infrastructural, financial, economic, relational and systemic.

**Resources and Assets** could be physical, attitudinal, human, financial, knowledge or skills based, relational or informational.

## Venn diagram activity: overlapping Challenges and Opportunities

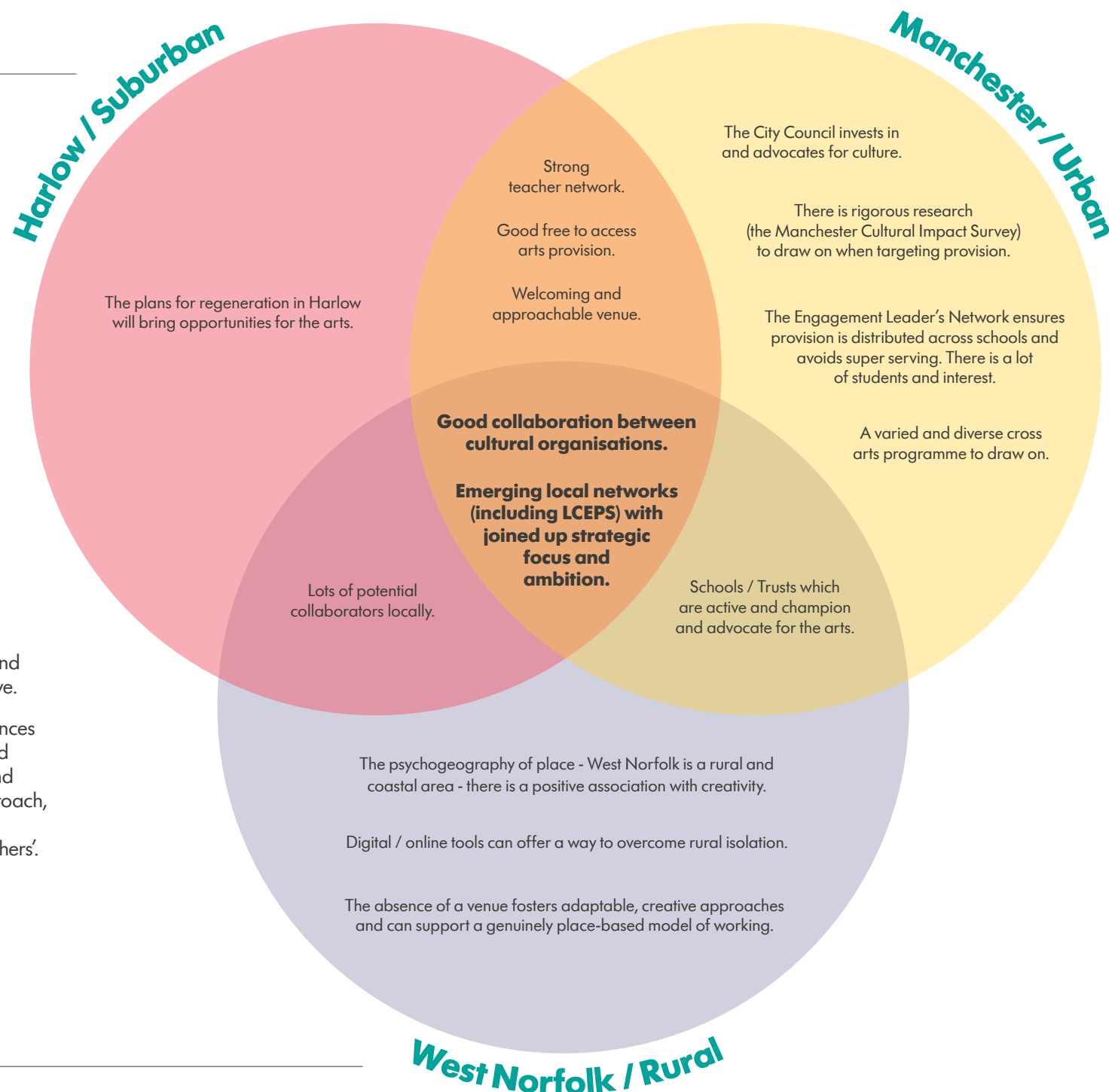
This activity was run at the first National Advisory Board (NAB) meeting. The NAB was made up of the partners, teachers, and Bridge organisations involved in the National Development Programme. Attendees were asked about the challenges and opportunities which impacted their ability to provide a high-quality cultural offer for schools and young people, and schools' and young people's desire or ability to access this.

The exercise revealed that many of the challenges were shared by all three partners, despite their contrasting settings.

Having a programme comprising multiple (potentially contrasting) partners and partnership regions, each undertaking a different programme of delivery, may be challenging in terms of identifying the most productive and cross-regional relevant conversations for partners to have.

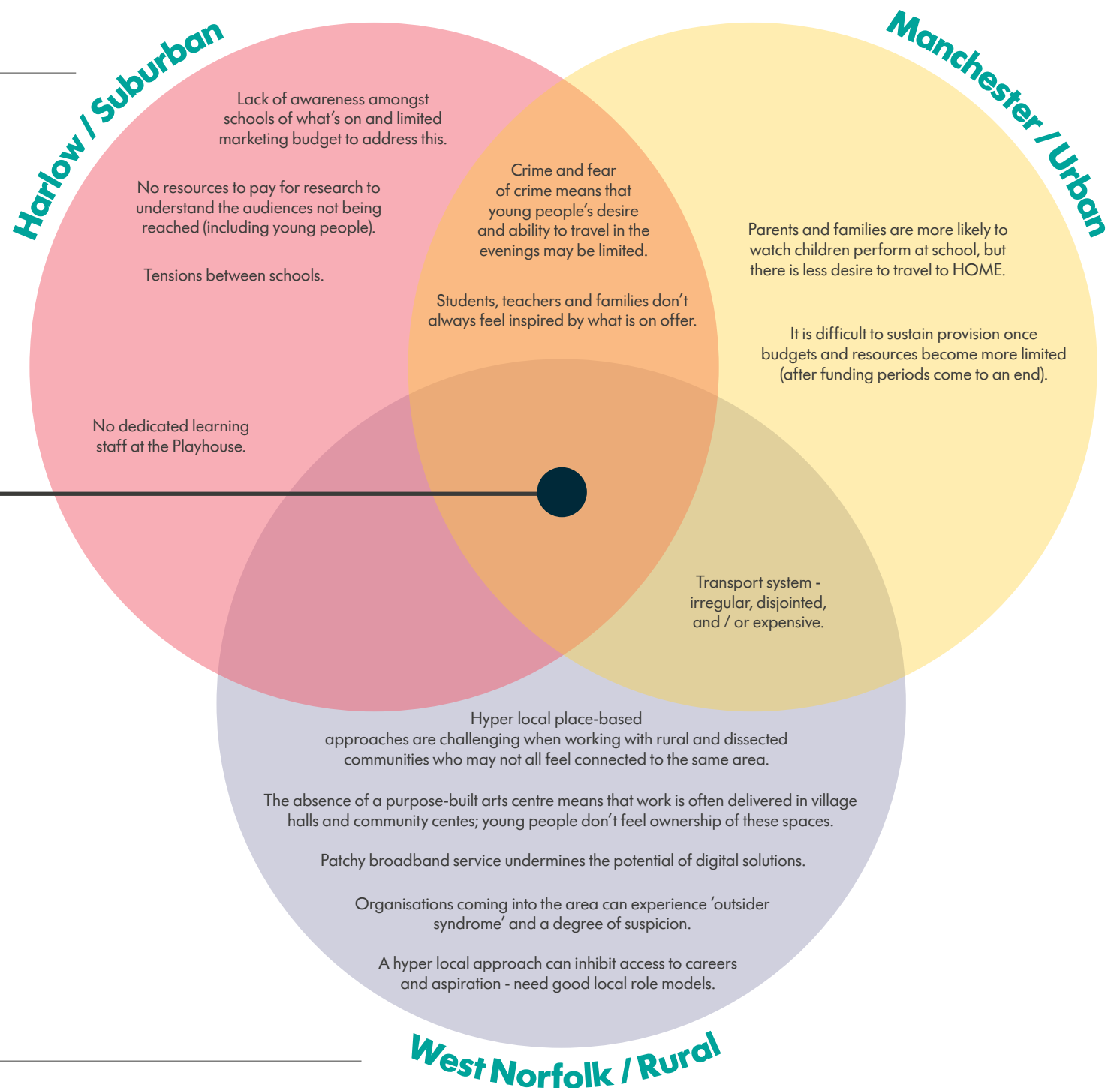
The advantage of identifying commonalities and differences between settings is that this can point you towards shared challenges which the partnerships might come across and which might benefit from being tackled by a group approach, or identify where partners have implemented successful strategies in their own context which could be applied in others'.

## Example of Venn diagram of Opportunities





## Example of Venn diagram of Challenges



School engagement with external organisations is often led by an 'inspirational figurehead' at the school, rather than being embedded across the school, so this relationship is precarious.

Projects not linked to the curriculum or resulting in a qualification impacts SLT buy-in.

High levels of Pupil Premium can suggest that finance might be a barrier for some families (although Pupil Premium does allow for external provision to be bought in by schools).

Local communities with lower socio-economic background and complex lives - engagement in formal culture not a priority.

Expectations around the etiquette of arts buildings can be off putting.

Possible assumptions around the arts being inaccessible. Young people and their families unable or unwilling to travel outside their immediate geography.

Little tradition of participation in formal, publicly funded arts within home life, the arts not seen as a lifelong choice. A sense that it is 'not for us'.

Careers in the arts seen as unreliable or unsustainable, so not encouraged.

Limited resource and capacity within arts organisations to deliver learning programmes.

## Give and Take exercise

This asset-focused activity can be used as a starting point to explore expectations and assumptions, and identify the expertise that exists in the group, in order to match it to the needs of other partners or use it to enhance programme delivery.

The exercise asks all partners to complete the statements: 'We can offer / we would like to bring...' and 'It's important for us to get...', in relation to their hopes for the partnership.

### We can offer / would like to bring ...



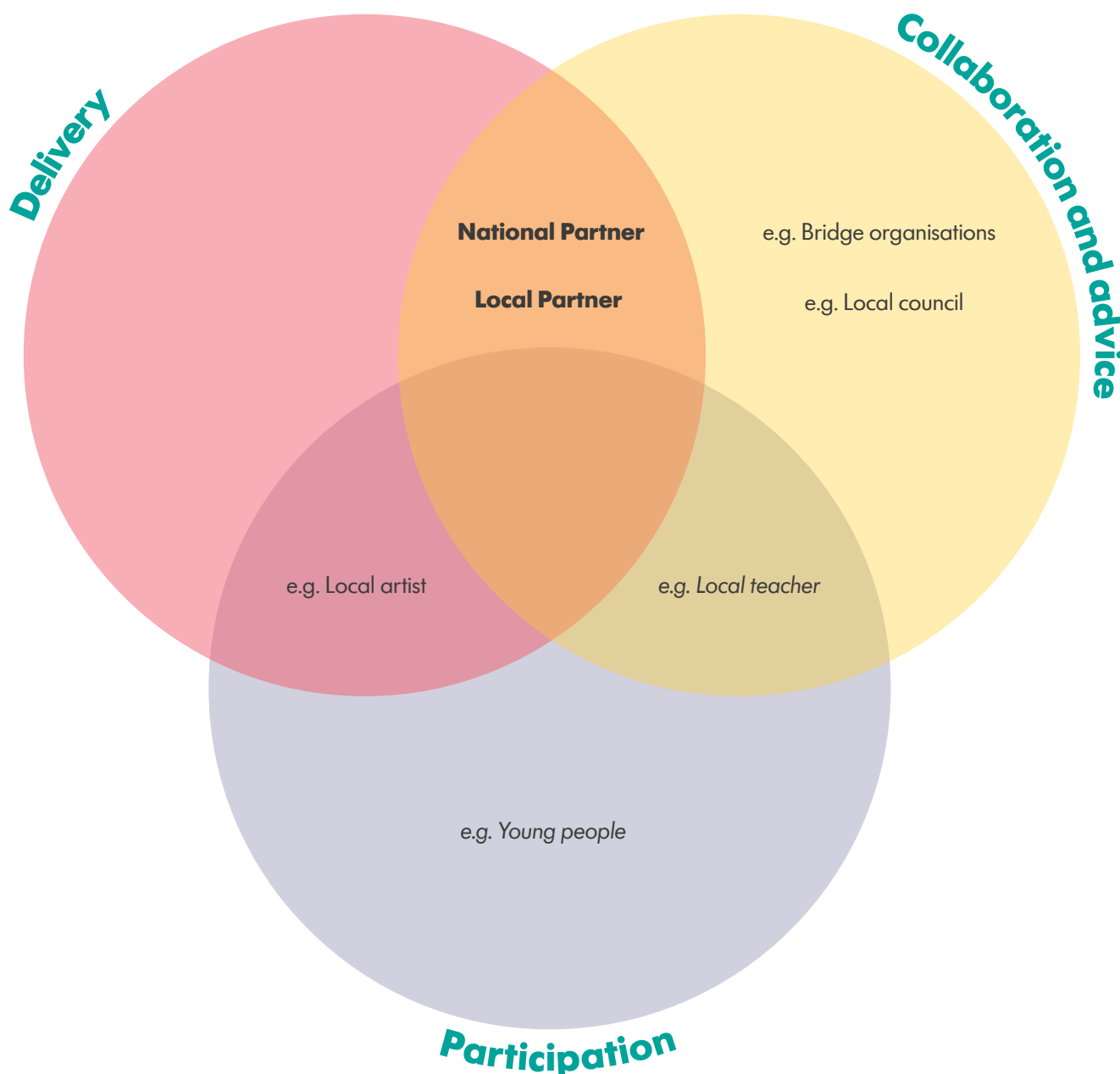
*Example responses to the Give and Take activity*

## Venn diagram activity: Who's here?

This is another Venn diagram approach, this time looking at the groups, individuals and organisations present in a place, and who might play a role within the partnership. It creates space to reflect that different stakeholders may take on multiple roles, and can suggest a greater or lesser emphasis on these different roles depending on the placement of them within the diagram. This activity can be used to share a hoped for or possible formation at the start of a

partnership, or to reflect on the reality once partnerships are underway.

It is of course important to note that you can't control whether people will choose to be involved, to offer you their support or to contribute their expertise – you have to find the partners who want to work with you, and use this as the framework on which to base activity.



*Italics* = not yet actively involved in the partnerships, but have been involved in scoping conversations

**Bold** = Artistic Delivery partner

# Project models

Project delivery should be informed by the local needs and contexts that are explored and discovered through activities and conversations like those outlined in the previous section. With this intention in mind, there are still numerous different models and approaches which could be adopted. This section outlines some of the discussion points which arose during the National Development Programme, and which are likely to be important for any new Local x National programme of delivery.

## Capacity building or service providing?

The question of whether a project is capacity building or supply based impacts what happens to an area after free project provision finishes.

Providing free services to an area has the potential to destabilise the local arts scene which works with limited funding. There is a need for sensitivity around this from national organisations in general. Whilst Barbican Box is heavily subsidised it was described by partners to be a capacity-building project (it contains CPD for teachers and artists, as well as opportunities for networking and relationship building across the arts and education sectors), and so avoided the potential pitfall of being viewed as a ‘parachute’ engagement model.

Striking a balance between not creating problems for local providers, and providing a bridging opportunity for those schools which are struggling to access external provision is potentially complex, particularly as cost is frequently mentioned by teachers as a barrier to school participation in cultural trips and projects. One project partner told us that £300 (the fee for participation in Barbican Box) was beyond the reach of some schools who were in ‘cold spot’ areas for participation, and that without the bursary scheme which reduced the cost by 50%, there was a strong possibility that only those schools already committed to engaging with external provision would take part. In 2020 / 21, 8 of 14 participating schools applied for the bursary on Barbican Box, citing financial pressures, limited budgets which had been directed elsewhere (in part due to Covid-19) and cohorts who experienced barriers to accessing cultural provision.

“People are coming in and not building capacity whilst here and then moving on. The national organisation needs to really consider what it is offering, whether a programme is about building capacity or whether it is a supply programme. If it is supply that is entirely fine, but then you need to have a sensitivity to the local market, because a lot of the free stuff can completely skew [it] and can be problematic to providers working locally.” *Bridge Organisation*

### Pre-existing or co-created?

The National Development Programme used the Barbican's flagship schools programme, Barbican Box, as the initial framework within which we would collaborate with the regional partners. Combining CPD for teachers, training and employment for local artists, visits to local arts and cultural settings, and an opportunity to showcase students' work locally, it felt like a good fit for a place-based approach. The well-established and proven structure of Barbican Box was intended to be the basis from which to actively co-deliver work, while also developing a more collaborative approach that incorporated the partner's own experiences and identified needs in each local area, and could lead on to the design and delivery of more bespoke co-created projects.

However, using a Barbican devised and branded programme also made collaborative working and shared ownership more complex. Local partners worked with the Barbican Creative Learning Team to shape the Boxes and their contents, to identify and recruit schools and artist mentors, to plan schools' visits to local cultural venues or visits to schools from artistic companies, to co-develop local showcases (although sadly due to Covid-19 many of these had to be cancelled) and to signpost participating teachers and students to other relevant local provision. However, the Barbican team led on the day-to-day logistics, including delivering the Boxes to schools, liaising with teachers, setting up CPD events and arranging artist mentor visits.

As a result, a large proportion of participating teachers associated the Box project more with the Barbican rather than the local partner – with 45% associating the project mostly with the Barbican and 55% associating the project with both organisations equally. In addition, 67% of Artist Mentors associated the project mostly with the Barbican, with only 33% associating it with both organisations equally. It is also likely that the branding of the project 'Barbican Box' exacerbated this, and there was some uncertainty amongst partners about the extent to which they could influence the Box

"The beauty of Barbican Box is that it offers a complete package. Support for teachers, an excellent resource, an opportunity for local artists and (when Covid permits) a chance to perform/display work in our building, creating a lasting bond with the students who participate."

*HOME, Manchester*



## Key learning points and recommendations

- 1.** To both enhance local provision and make projects accessible for schools, without destabilising the local cultural ecology or superseding existing programmes, it was suggested that it was important that the **lead partners were embedded within the local LCEP or local council**, made use of the Bridge Organisation to better understand the local context, and listened to local partners about how best to respond to local need.
- 2.** Whether a project is supply based or capacity building, we would recommend that national and local organisations work together to explore any concerns around the economic impact of funded activity, and co-develop solutions. These could include benchmarking against local fees, transparency for schools around the financial model for the project, and training for local teachers to support them to apply for funds to engage in less subsidised activity in the future.
- 3.** The time-limited nature of the funding and the delivery component within the project design meant that the legacy of the partnerships was often framed in terms of the outcomes of project delivery (skills development for teachers and artists, new relationships developed between arts organisations, schools and artists), rather than enhanced organisational capacity in the longer term.
- 4.** Ideally, Theory of Change documents should be collaboratively designed with all partners, and be useful, living documents, which can be used and referred to throughout.
- 5.** In the early stages of delivery in a new location, a sizeable and established project, with a recognisable brand, may be useful to support local profile and momentum, encourage school participation, and provide a platform for the promotion of other local arts and cultural programmes. This needs to be balanced against the extent to which it may profile the national partner over the local partner.
- 6.** When discussing how best to build an equal and balanced partnership, the co-created strand was considered to be essential to reciprocity and equality between partners. However, the comparatively smaller budget allocated to co-created work meant that, in practice, it was less visible than Barbican Box. Drawing on a pre-existing project model was a very useful way of developing a working relationship and building the profile of the partnership, but it's important to consider this against the objectives of the partnership, and what scale of project will best help to achieve these. It may be more helpful to deliver smaller, low-risk projects together initially, allowing more budget and time for co-created work later on, if this is where you feel the most strategic value is.
- 7.** Given the lack of resources in some regions, a pre-existing model or franchise model which can be fairly swiftly rolled out may be the most appropriate. In this instance, there should be clarity and agreement at the outset around the extent to which this model can be adapted to the local context.

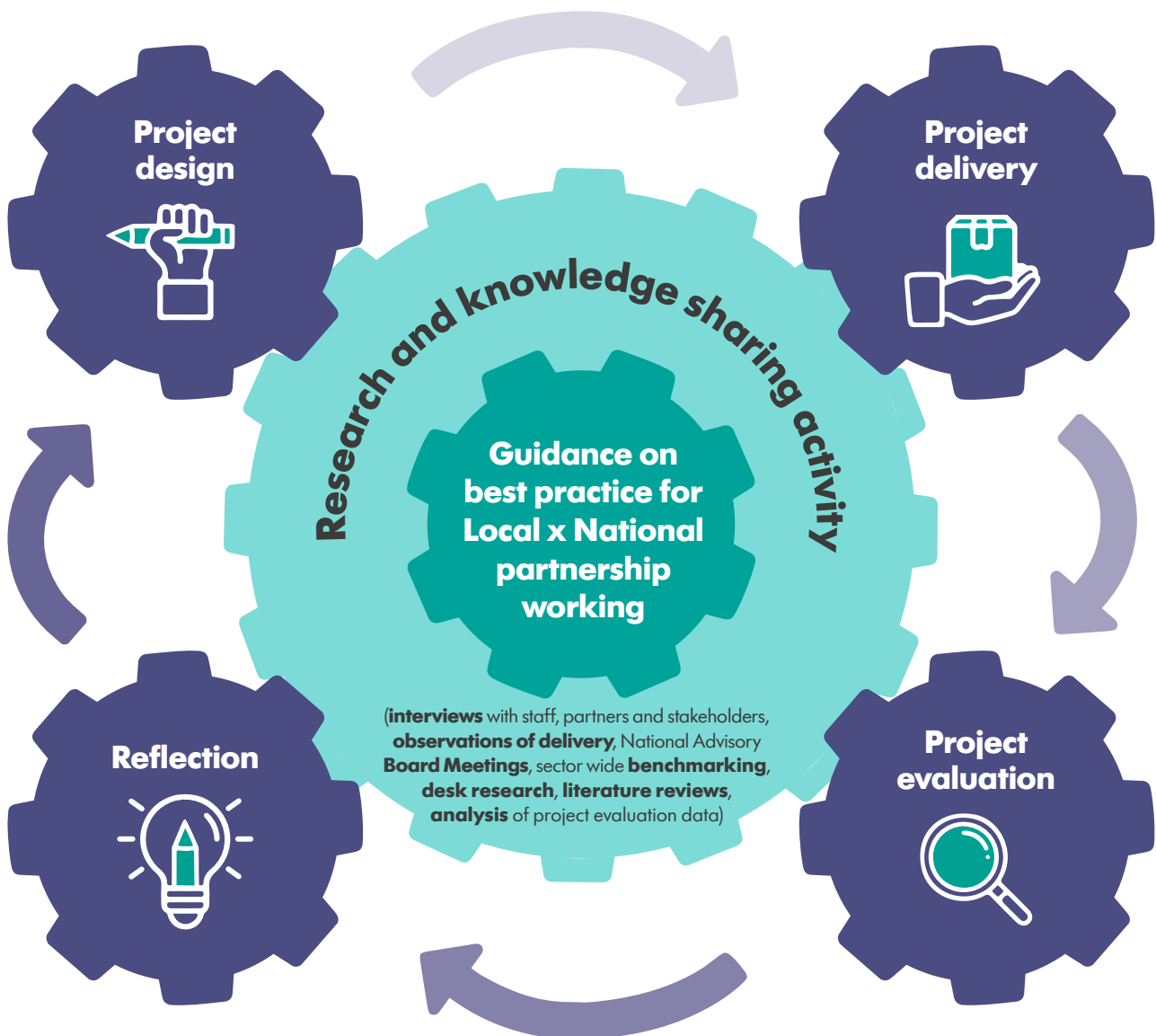


## Knowledge sharing

The National Development Programme planned for a **cyclical structure of delivery and reflection**, whereby shared delivery would lead to shared learning, which could then be used to shape the next round of delivery. Within the structure of the partnerships there were opportunities for formal and informal knowledge sharing between partners, via partnership meetings, meetings of the National Advisory Board and end of year project evaluation reports.

In addition to learning from delivery, an embedded researcher and evaluator carried out their own related research enquiries, to understand the wider context of cultural access and participation across the different regions, and capture learning and recommendations for partnership working structures and approaches.

This structure meant that research and evaluation activity could feed into project delivery in real time, and vice versa, as well as at the end of each cycle of delivery. In Manchester, conversations between the researcher and Manchester City Council about school engagement directly influenced the recruitment process for Barbican Box. In addition to informing project delivery, the research was also able to offer useful insight for those who participated in it, with a research activity for students in Norfolk revealing to the class teacher a gap in students' awareness of the provision available to them locally.



“ [I could see that the students] were all very enthusiastic about the art we do in school. Our annual exhibition was really the only art they knew that they could visit in our area, otherwise it was Norwich, Cambridge and London they had been to. This raised my desire to make more links with PEACH and other local arts venues.” *Teacher, West Norfolk*

## Key learning points and recommendations

1. In-depth knowledge sharing activity can be hugely valuable and informative during the development phase of new Local x National partnerships, but also requires significant capacity. Be realistic about the capacity available, and only collect information you will have the time to analyse.
2. Try to find out what pre-existing research and evaluation data exists that might be useful to the partnership. You don't need to re-invent the wheel. We found that LCEPs, Bridge Organisations and Local Councils had carried out relevant research previously and were happy to share the results of this.
3. Project research and evaluation must be managed sensitively and ethically, since it can have an impact on project design and delivery. It is essential that research activity supports the partnership first and foremost. It should complement and build on the research and evaluation activity of the partner organisations and research parameters must not undermine the relationship between partners.
4. Space and time to learn from and act on research findings is crucial, and should be factored into delivery timelines. Be realistic – how much will you be able to change your plans based on what you learn?
5. If knowledge sharing is a key component of your partnership, protect the time set aside for it, either through standalone meetings, or strict agenda management. Without this, when the pressure is on and time is short, it is all too easy for project delivery to take over. Depending on the objectives of the partnership, it may be more beneficial in the longer term that project delivery takes a back seat to knowledge sharing activity which may be more effective in terms of increasing local capacity.
6. Knowledge sharing may be greater when responsibility for it is distributed across different stakeholders within the partnership(s). Partners stated that they would like to see facilitated sessions led by teachers, curriculum leads and Senior Leadership Teams at National Advisory Board meetings. They felt that these teacher-led sessions would help the group to better understand the education sector's needs and how to support them post pandemic. Partners also suggested that reciprocal learning could be better embedded if partners could host/chair an NAB session, and share strategies or project models for engaging with teachers so that other regions could learn from national approaches.

# Reflections

# Examining the benefits of Local x National Partnerships

This section of the Toolkit outlines some of the benefits that, through the experience of the National Development Programme, we feel Local x National Partnerships are able to bring, and highlights some of the conditions and considerations we believe are necessary for these to be achieved whilst maintaining an ethical, ecological and sustainable approach.

Ultimately, in terms of cultural sustainability, when considering the Levelling Up/Place-based agenda it may be preferable that regions receive investment directly, without the need for a 'national' partner. However, not all organisations currently have the capacity, connections and/or infrastructure to develop and deliver long-term engagement work with schools and communities. Where this is the case, sudden and large investment without support may not be the best solution. In these instances, we believe **that national partners can be beneficial bridges, able to support cultural organisations to develop infrastructure, networks and capacity locally.**

Where infrastructure and capacity are developed, Local x National partnerships can still offer possibilities for creative collaboration, peer networking and sharing of best practice.



## Place-based Local x National Partnerships can:

### Achieve larger scope and scale than working alone

Achieving scale is partially a case of finance, but also of having staff teams who have experience of delivering programmes of this kind, and the structures in place to support them – these are often found in larger organisations.

These resources, combined with the networking and relational capital of the local partner, can result in projects which are able to connect and engage with a greater number of participants.

“With Barbican Box recruiting eight schools, there was enough of a critical mass, not to just be another project because projects are brought down by arts organisations all the time. But this was one which was long enough and with enough people that it really had more of a legacy.”

*Bridge Organisation*

“Our young people get a good breadth of art experiences, but Barbican Box has been bigger and with more scope for stretching out and embedding across the school than anything else we have done. We have had standalone arts days where artists come in for a workshop but I feel this is going to have a longevity to it that other provision hasn’t.”

*Teacher, West Norfolk*

### Provide schools with access to high-profile artists

Large national organisations may be able to engage higher profile artists than smaller local organisations due to existing connections. This can provide an inspirational and aspirational moment for young people and adults alike.

Whilst acknowledging the value and quality that well-known artists can bring to a project, it’s crucial to be alert to (consciously or unconsciously) making hierarchical value judgements which may exclude or devalue popular and commercial art forms or a local community’s acts of everyday creativity, or seek to impose a particular aesthetic on an area. The tastes and interests of participants and audiences may vary across different settings, and it’s vital to take this into account in order to design projects to be relevant and accessible.

“They absolutely LOVED seeing the video of THEIR zines!!! I loved watching their faces as their work appeared. Huge smiles and gasps as they saw their work being valued ... AND talked about by THE Michael Rosen!!!”

*Teacher, West Norfolk*

## Provide supported opportunities for local organisations to develop their relationships with schools and communities

For local organisations without the resources to run a learning programme independently, partnering with a national organisation could plug an immediate gap, and be a stepping-stone towards something more sustainable in the future, provided suitable funding can be obtained.

However, when working in an urban setting, it is important to consider how saturated the market is and what the implications of this will be on your partnership's capacity to enhance the cultural landscape in the area, if this is your intention. The scale of the work of the partnership in relation to existing provision and local populace is important and this may necessitate a larger scale and reach of the project in regions with a more extensive cultural infrastructure, in order to have an impact on relationships between schools and arts organisations. The dynamics and objectives of partnerships between organisations with similar programmes, of similar scope, and from areas of high levels of arts provision may need to be different from those between a larger organisation and a smaller one (see footnote).

“Engagement with schools is the top issue which we wouldn't be able to achieve without this partnership, not just in-depth engagement but being able to do a project at all. We don't have the funding to have a key person to run that or resources to deliver something even with a minor project. Even getting a school in for a tour of our building is resource intensive for us... We are absolutely keen on having a dedicated person, we have just done our three-year business plan. It is not actually in that, but we are looking at how we can develop that from what happens with this project to a year-round thing.” *Harlow Playhouse*

## Impact of National Development Programme on relationships between schools and local organisations\*

**threefold increase**  
in sense of connection  
between schools & local  
partner

**two-fold increase**  
in sense of connection  
between partners & local  
schools

**80% of teachers**  
more likely to engage  
students with local arts  
organisations in the future

**57% of students**  
more interested in visiting or  
taking part in cultural  
activities in their area

\*It is interesting to note that, when the feedback disaggregated, the impact was much less in Manchester, both in terms of the connection schools felt to the partner (HOME), and HOME felt to the schools. We're not able to say why this was, but for schools it may relate to the geographical distance and difficulty of travel to HOME, with some schools considerably further away than schools in Harlow are to Harlow Playhouse and indeed even rural schools to some of the areas Creative Arts East/PEACH West Norfolk deliver work. As areas with a smaller cultural infrastructure than Manchester, personal relationships and connections are potentially more at the heart of the cultural landscapes of West Norfolk and Harlow. There are fewer schools and a smaller pool of arts organisations working in both these regions and so it may feel more possible to imagine how the interpersonal and interorganisational connections created through participation in a project such as Barbican Box could result in ongoing relationships in these contexts. Finally, HOME already has a developed learning programme, and had pre-existing connections with some of the participating schools – the level of engagement involved in Barbican Box may not have been significant enough to shift already meaningful relationships.



### Raise the profile of arts and culture locally

“It is totally brilliant that West Norfolk has the opportunity to engage in a national partnership programme in this way – bringing the name of the Barbican and practitioners such as Michael Rosen into the mix gives a real weight and value to it all which serves to raise aspirations and appreciation of the arts.”

Artist Mentor, West Norfolk

A networked approach to place necessitates paying close attention to the informal relationships developed in a place and the impact this has on the cultural ecology. The presence of large-scale arts organisations and high-profile artists may bring cachet which can be helpful in enhancing the profile of local arts and culture more generally.

This presence can also help to galvanise local relationships – the attendance of Barbican staff at Harlow Cultural Leaders Group meetings was cited by the Royal Opera House Bridge and Harlow Playhouse as having played a role in moving the group closer to becoming an LCEP. In the Venn diagram activity early on in the partnership, Natalie Jode from Creative Arts East mentioned the challenge of limited infrastructure experienced in West Norfolk meaning that there is no ‘bringer-inner’ for work to coalesce around; it may be possible for national organisations to act as a proxy ‘bringer-inner’ whilst other infrastructure is developed.

### Deliver programmes with sustainability in mind

Relationships between schools and young people and local venues, organisations and artists can be continued beyond the life of the project in a way which would be difficult if not impossible to do with an organisation further afield, but a project like Barbican Box can be a good catalyst for establishing these relationships in the first instance.

The research indicates that **the presence of a funded ‘local broker’ role is essential to the legacy and sustainability of work** which aims to strengthen relationships between local arts organisations and schools. Resourcing this role accordingly is important in order that a local broker is able to manage and maintain relationships with schools after the project finishes.

Ideally these local brokers would come from within the local partner staff teams, although they could also be a local freelancer with a relationship with the partner organisation if there isn’t capacity within the partner. This person would then manage communications and relationships with schools and artists to ensure sustainability and a networked local cultural ecology. The ‘national’ partner should step back from organising the logistics of the project in the regional venue, in order to encourage a legacy of local connections.

In terms of the sustainability of partnerships themselves, time-limited funding streams often lead to partners identifying project-based outcomes as their approach to sustainability. Given that the project funding was limited to three years, project-specific outcomes (initiation of engagement between schools and local partners, upskilling for teachers and artists) were often identified as the most likely long-term impacts over a continued capacity to partner in the long term.

**Funders and all partners should consider at the start of an ambitious project with multiple partners what legacy they plan to leave at the end and how this might be sustained.** This might involve embedding changes and learning in local systems, handing over the management of local relationships to local brokers, or indeed embedding activity in local institutions to build enhanced community capacity. This may also require a tapered funding approach.

## Support local aspiration and the perceived accessibility of the arts

The majority of interaction with arts professionals that students had was with their Artist Mentor. As part of their sessions with schools, Artist Mentors introduced their practice, explained what their journey to being an artist had been and what a career in the arts can consist of. In Norfolk, some of the artists gave virtual tours of their studio space to students.

Interaction with a professional artist in and of itself can be an inspiring experience, with the fact that they are local providing an opportunity for increased connection and relevance, as well as challenging any potentially limiting ideas about the career pathways available to young people locally.

“Pupils now see the arts as a viable career and have even seen a real artist’s studio!” Teacher, West Norfolk

“It made a huge impact on the confidence of my students and made them aware of other career paths that they could follow and skills that they can transfer into their everyday life.” Teacher, Harlow

## Support local cultural economies

Through working with local artists rather than using a centralised team, the partnerships were able to support local cultural economies, both through the provision of employment for local artists, as well as supporting the development of networks and skills which could support this on a longer-term basis.

“[This project] has given me ideas on creative play and inspiring and engaging young people in other ways. It has allowed me to have new connections with schools and organisations.” Artist Mentor, Manchester

The Box project was also a chance to strengthen relationships between local partners and artists. Some Artist Mentors were already known to the partner, with Barbican Box providing an opportunity to work with them in a new way, while others had never engaged with the partner venue before. Similar to teachers, Artist Mentors also expressed that their contact with local partners was less than with the Barbican team, and they would have welcomed more opportunities to strengthen these connections.

### 57% of students

‘strongly agreed’ or ‘agreed’ they were more interested in visiting or taking part in arts and cultural activities

### 70% of students

more aware of different and diverse careers in the arts

### 60% of students

more interested in pursuing either future study or a career in the arts

### 91% of teachers

said project had ‘definitely’ (55%) or ‘somewhat’ (36%) increased awareness of careers in the arts

## Impact of NDP on local artist communities

### 78% of artist mentors

had a better understanding of educational contexts locally

### 78% of artist mentors

more confident in their ability to facilitate sessions with young people

### 100% of artist mentors

felt they were better connected to local networks and partners in the arts education sector

**80% of teachers** more likely to bring local artists into the classroom in the future

### **Learn and benefit from on-the-ground local expertise and relationships, rather than arm's length measures and approaches**

As mentioned in 'Identifying possible collaborators', top-line quantitative statistics provide a useful starting point, but to really be able to get to know an area, it is necessary to talk to the people who live and work there. Working in partnership opened doors to the local cultural and education sectors, and we found that people were very generous with their time and knowledge. This included offering guidance on local priorities, putting the project team in touch with schools or recommending the project to them, sharing recruitment opportunities with artists, finding specialist teachers, providing information about school needs, and even offering spaces from which to run the projects.

Collaborating with local partners meant that the project was strengthened by the incredible knowledge and experience of the people already there. For the Barbican, taking a collaborative and ecological approach meant:

- not believing ourselves to be the experts in the room when going into a new region;
- researching what was already happening and consciously trying to avoid cutting across or undermining existing delivery;
- being mindful of the impact our actions could have on the local relationships held by our partners;
- treating these relationships with care.

### **Support peer exchange, critical friendship and best practice**

The number of overlapping challenges identified in the Venn diagram activity at the start of the partnerships highlighted the fact that many of these are shared by arts organisations around the country, whether in urban, suburban or rural locations, and in areas experiencing high levels or limited arts provision. Organisations of contrasting size, resource, capacity and structure, with venue spaces and without, working across different geographies, will have, of necessity, adopted diverse strategies for tackling these challenges. Some of these strategies may be usefully applied in other settings as well, and this is an area which Local x National partnerships would be well placed to explore further.

This sharing of expertise could be extended to include staff exchanges between organisations, to gain experience of working in other contexts, and bring knowledge back into their home organisations.

National organisations in particular may benefit from delivering work in areas where their brand and programme are less well known, and as a result where their traditional approaches to engagement may be less successful. Working with audiences who are less or not at all familiar with the work, and for whom the name may not be a lure, requires organisations to scrutinise the accessibility and relevance of their programme in more detail.

This could have useful applications for accessibility more broadly, and help to gain a more holistic understanding of barriers to access.

# Conclusion

One of the foremost aims of the National Development Programme was to leave in place, after project completion, a sustainable network of connections between local arts and cultural organisations, local artists and education providers. The place-based approach aimed to avoid destabilising the existing cultural ecology in each region through the provision of unsustainable ad hoc projects, and rather to support and enhance existing networks and partnerships which may continue long after the lead partner leaves the area.

Place-based delivery requires a deep understanding of the place and context where the work is to take place. We learnt that there isn't a shortcut for this, and it shouldn't be a one-off exercise, as contexts and ecologies will change over time. Ongoing conversations are crucial, particularly if your intention is for co-creation and genuinely locally shaped delivery.

Whilst the bulk of project delivery undertaken by these partnerships may occur in 'local' partner areas, the dynamic of a successful Local x National Partnership is one of equity and reciprocal benefit. For national partners looking to improve and enrich their own programme and practice, access to the range of skill and expertise which exists within partner regions presents a hugely valuable learning opportunity.

If approached with care and consideration, Local x National partnerships like the ones outlined in this Toolkit have the ability to support all partners to **address barriers to participation** across their different regions, **increase aspiration and interest** in the arts, and **strengthen connections between schools, artists and partner organisations**.





# Glossary of terms

**ACE:** Arts Council England – A government-funded body set up in 1946 to champion and develop art and culture across the country. Governed by an Executive Board and National and Area Councils.

**Active Lives Survey:** Survey measuring participation in leisure and recreational activities, including sport, physical activity and culture. Specifically, this report references the 2017 survey, carried out with the involvement of Arts Council England.

**Bridge Organisations:** Ten organisations across the country, funded by the Arts Council to connect the cultural sector and the education sector so that children & young people can have access to great arts and cultural opportunities. Each organisation has a particular geographical focus.

**Levelling Up for Culture Places:** 109 Local Authority Areas outside of London, identified by the Arts Council and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, that will be the focus for additional Arts Council England engagement and investment.

**LCEP:** Local Cultural Education Partnership – Cross sector partnerships which respond to local needs and interests, with the aim of improving access to cultural experiences for young people in their locality.

**NAB:** National Advisory Board, a working group made up of partners, teachers and Bridge Organisation representatives involved in the National Development Programme.

**NDP:** The Barbican's National Development Programme.

**NPO:** National Portfolio Organisation – these are cultural organisations which receive substantial funding from Arts Council England.



# Acknowledgements

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This research used a combination of surveys, one-on-one interviews, meeting notes and creative investigation activities to capture the perspectives and experiences of the cultural sector workers, teachers, young people and artists involved in the programme.

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### Lead Partner

- Barbican Creative Learning

### Local Partner Organisations

- Creative Arts East and PEACH West Norfolk
- Harlow Playhouse
- HOME

### Research and Evaluation

- Dr Maia Mackney, Guildhall School of Music & Drama

### Local Networks and Brokers

- Festival Bridge
- Harlow Cultural Leaders Group
- Royal Opera House Bridge

### Barbican Box Artists and Curators

- Complicité
- Coney
- Hunt & Darton
- Michael Rosen
- Tina Bicât

### Barbican Box Artist Mentors

#### Harlow

- Becky Gentry
- Cherie Coleman
- Janisè Sadik
- Nikki Watson
- Oliver Scott
- Rhianna Compton
- Sally Hardcastle
- Sam Ashford
- Tom Heyes

#### Manchester

- Amy Lawrence
- Ayesha Gwilt
- Hannah Calascione
- Jade Williams
- Jennifer Gaskell
- Kayleigh Hawkins
- Laurence Young
- Léonie Higgins
- Michael Beigel
- Sam Berril
- Samantha Edwards

#### King's Lynn and West Norfolk

- Becky Demmen
- Kaitlin Ferguson
- Rachel Kurdynowska
- Rosy Prue

### Schools

#### Harlow

- Burnt Mill Academy
- Katherines Primary Academy
- Mark Hall Academy
- Passmores Academy
- Sir Frederick Gibberd College
- Stewards Academy
- William Martin Primary School

#### King's Lynn and West Norfolk

- Greenpark Academy
- Heacham Junior School
- Nelson Academy
- Snettisham Primary School
- St Martha's Catholic Primary School
- Walpole Cross Keys Primary School

#### Manchester and Greater Manchester

- Altrincham College
- Buile Hill Academy
- Carmel College
- Chorlton High School
- Hathershaw College
- Hopwood Hall College
- Levenshulme High School
- Manchester Communication Academy
- Manchester Enterprise Academy
- Melland High School
- Oasis Academy Leesbrook
- Reddish Vale High School
- St Mary's Catholic High School

### Toolkit

- Written by Emily Williams, using research written by Dr Maia Mackney
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# Appendix

## School case studies

### **Making a case for creativity**

The following case studies give a flavour of the type of projects the Barbican has been running with schools across the country in partnership with local arts organisations. They provide examples of the different types of place-based partnerships outlined on p.8.

# Barbican Box at Melland High School, City of Manchester

Partnership with **HOME, Manchester** –  
example of a **Single Point of Entry Partnership**

## Context

Melland High School is a SEN school, providing for students with a range of disabilities and learning difficulties aged 11 to 19. The school has a 57.1% pupil premium, which is well over the 27.7% national average. It has received an Outstanding Ofsted.

## Background

Melland has a thriving cultural offer. Arts and creative learning are deeply ingrained in the culture of the school and are embedded in the wider school ethos and across curriculum subjects. Unlike a mainstream secondary offering GCSEs and A Levels, Melland offers OCR qualifications. This allows for a certain freedom to embed and prioritise arts across the curriculum, since there is less pressure on traditional routes to attainment and fewer requirements to prioritise core curriculum subjects.

## The project

**Melland has worked with Barbican Box at HOME for the last two years, visiting and performing at HOME each year. Although Box is not specifically tailored to meet the needs of a SEN school, its sensory and tactile approach to working is suited to a SEN context and was adapted to meet the needs of pupils at Melland.**

The school's drama and media teacher, Dan Hughes, described the freedom this created for his students, stating that Barbican Box reduced the pressure on students to learn lines, an issue which he said was often prevalent in some of the other external provision offered by arts organisations. Barbican Box was described by Hughes as an excellent model for supporting his students' learning and developing their confidence. In particular he highly valued the fact that students could develop their own work and respond to the stimulus themselves.

In 2021, as part of the Coney Barbican Box project, Melland was paired with artist Kayleigh Hawkins, a Manchester-based theatre director and facilitator. Hawkins worked collaboratively with Hughes



to deliver the sessions which, due to Covid restrictions, were facilitated online. The students were inspired by the idea of being 'agents' and together they created a film 'gift' for the school, something which positively impacted on the students' wellbeing. In the film the young people were secret agents saving the school from an alien invasion (which more than one person interpreted to be a metaphor for Covid!). Due to the compressed time period given to the project, Hughes opened the project up to other creative lessons. In drama lessons they created performance content and scripts, in art they designed the aliens that were to feature in the film and in media they animated and edited the filmed material. Hughes described how the idea of creating a 'gift for the school' meant the project filtered out to the wider school community, with other form tutors recording TikTok videos with their students which were then edited into the final film. Hughes described how working in this highly visible way encouraged other teachers to think creatively and encouraged SLT buy-in.

"The project has had a massive impact on the students' wellbeing. Once they saw the finished product, you could see a massive change. When we showed it to the whole school, you could see everyone on the webcams up dancing and singing and getting really excited." *Dan Hughes*

## Legacy

Melland has a strong relationship with HOME, solidified through ongoing participation in Barbican Box and the fact that HOME provided both a platform for a deeper level of engagement and a model which was flexible enough to suit the needs of Melland students.

Facilitating site visits and showcases were challenging during Covid restrictions, with Manchester particularly badly affected. However, Hughes was able to suggest other ways in which connection to local arts organisations might be strengthened by partnerships such as the National Development Programme. One idea was to offer more opportunities for student work experience placements. Melland High School often holds careers fairs but the cultural sector is very underrepresented in terms of both careers talks and work experience placements compared to hospitality and the service industry. This careers component could be facilitated by HOME and/or the Barbican in future. Hughes commented that having local professional artists visiting the school was a major success of the project, one that enabled potentially longer-lasting networks between schools and the local arts ecology to be made. Formalising the careers talk and industry knowledge sharing opportunities would be one way the project could be improved.

## Recommendations

Hughes felt that due to the compressed time given to the project which came about as a result of Covid-19, he wasn't able to take as many risks with his approach as he would have done otherwise. In previous Barbican Box projects, which have been longer and face to face, Hughes was able to experiment more and integrate the lead artist's practice into the school's teaching. However, he found Coney's Barbican Box exciting in terms of its capacity to encourage play and risk taking and described their digital approach as essential to schools during the pandemic.

# Barbican Box at Nelson Academy, West Norfolk

Partnership with **PEACH West Norfolk** via Creative Arts East – example of a **Networked Partnership model**

## Context

Nelson Academy is a larger than average primary school in West Norfolk, with a two-form entry and 417 pupils. Downham Market is a regional hub town with a population of 10,000, but a number of pupils also attend from the surrounding villages. The number of young people who have a SEN statement and/or an education, health and care plan is above national average. 34% receive pupil premium, and 34% are eligible for free school meals, well above the national average of 17.7%. It has been rated Good by Ofsted.



## Background

Nelson Academy was given Silver Arts Mark status in 2019 and is working towards Gold. The school has a thriving arts scene, with a former ballerina on the TA team running dance classes and an ambitious drama lead who puts on productions each year. Students are taken to West End productions and benefit from peripatetic music lessons run by Norfolk Music Hub. Art subject lead Gill Sekatawa has coordinated several arts projects with the Sainsbury Centre and Norfolk and Norwich Open Studio exhibitions. However, Sekatawa believes that one of the reasons the school did not achieve Gold Arts Mark status was because they couldn't demonstrate that they had worked with enough outside agencies and arts organisations. She is hopeful that starting to make those connections with the wider arts ecology in West Norfolk, through Barbican Box, might put them in a better position at their next Arts Mark review.

“Our young people get a good breadth of art experiences, but Barbican Box has been bigger and with more scope for stretching out and embedding across the school than anything else we have done. We have had standalone arts days where artists come in for a workshop but I feel this is going to have a longevity to it that other provision hasn't.” *Gill Sekatawa*

## The project

**Nelson Academy worked on the Michael Rosen Barbican Box project in 2021. Due to Covid restrictions, the sessions were delivered online.**

One of the benefits of digital delivery was that teachers from both year groups were able to sit in on sessions, enabling more pupils to engage in the project. Pupils created zines based around Michael Rosen's poetry, they explored the contents of the box, reading the poems and discussing them in class. They

watched Michael Rosen's YouTube channel and in one session made cakes responding to Rosen's poem Chocolate Cake. The year groups were paired with local Artist Mentors and Sekatawa praised the dedicated planning time between artist and teacher which is an integral component of Barbican Box. She stated that not only did this create a reciprocity and equality between artist and teacher which enabled co-delivery but also that it enabled the school to create a network of artists they can now call upon for future work.

One of the main impacts on the students was an increased feeling of confidence in accessing and enjoying poetry. Additionally, Sekatawa commented on the project impacting positively on student wellbeing following prolonged absences from school during the Covid-19 lockdowns.

"We had the sessions to plan with the artists and I feel that we got to know each other beforehand to talk through ideas. So we knew more, and we were invested in it more before it even started."

*Gill Sekatawa*

"The poems just let you escape. And the way that Michael tells them and performs them meant the children were just in hysterics watching these videos, and they just needed to laugh. They would look with anticipation to Tuesday, saying 'Is Kaitlin [the Artist Mentor] coming today?' and they talked about her like she was actually coming. Even through the screen they felt like they knew her and had met her." *Gill Sekatawa*

There have also been opportunities to embed learning across the wider school. Sekatawa has since run an internal whole-school teacher training session where she introduced activities suggested by the Artist Mentors that she had worked with on the project.

"There are lots of people who are very interested in what we're doing in the school. I've already shared two of the activities at a staff meeting, and I illustrated how those activities might be adapted to support the curriculum from reception right through to Year 6. I think the art and learning will spread quite happily through the school." *Gill Sekatawa*



## Legacy

Nelson Academy is now a member of the PEACH West Norfolk LCEP, a direct result of their participation in Barbican Box. Engaging with PEACH West Norfolk and Creative Arts East was identified by the school as a major component which could improve their current Arts Mark status.

Nelson Academy worked on the project with Artist Mentors who are local to West Norfolk, and are planning to work with them again. This highlights how important it is that place-based partnerships engage with a rich and diverse group of local artists to ensure a legacy is left after the project is completed.

“Our Artist Mentors have both said that they’re happy to be involved with our school. This is a link we are not going to let go. I know that if we had a CPD art day, I could get them in to lead a workshop, so I know that that’s going to have a big impact.” *Gill Sekatawa*

## Recommendations

Sekatawa felt that, given the issue with travel presented by families living very rurally, it would be beneficial if arts organisations were able to visit schools for longer projects. Continued signposting to events happening locally and ongoing communication, particularly from the regional partner, would enable the school to disseminate offers to their families. Nelson’s ability to make connections with other local primary schools highlights how Barbican Box and other National Development Programme projects might better facilitate and formalise connections between schools in addition to aligning with Arts Mark criteria. Sekatawa discussed how using digital technologies, including those which exist within the school, can allow staff across the school access and insight into the project. Finally, the journey Nelson Academy went on with its Artist Mentors reveals the benefits of prioritising time and budget for teachers and artists to get to know each other before project delivery starts.

# Barbican Box at Passmores Academy, Harlow

Partnership with **Harlow Playhouse** –  
example of a **Hive Mind Partnership**

## Context

Passmores Academy is a large comprehensive secondary school in Harlow, Essex. It was featured on the 2011 TV series *Educating Essex*. Pupil premium is above national average at 32.5% and 16.8% of students are eligible for free school meals. Passmores was rated Good by OFSTED in 2018.

“Barbican Box has allowed us to have specialist practitioners in to work with KS4 students, this has benefitted both their engagement and attainment in practical drama skills”

*Karen Warncken*

## Background

Passmores has a thriving arts scene and ambitious advocates of the arts on its Senior Leadership Team. Whilst it is currently not an Arts Mark School, it offers a broad and balanced arts curriculum including drama, art, music and photography at KS4. It also has strong extracurricular arts provision, with a year 7 and 8 Drama Club as well as a KS4 Drama Club which works on the National Theatre Connections project.

## The project

**Passmores has engaged with Barbican Box for two years running with the Barbican and Harlow Playhouse: the Complicité Barbican Box in 2020 and the Coney Barbican Box in 2021, both of which were heavily impacted by Covid-19.**

The school's drama teacher Karen Warncken described the positive impacts of the Complicité Barbican Box in two ways, firstly the impact it had on both her and her colleagues' teaching practice and secondly on her students' skills in devising.

## Legacy

Passmores already had strong links with Harlow Playhouse prior to the start of the project, since Artistic Director Rory Davies is a former student of the school and has maintained good links with the drama department. However, Barbican Box was the first time the school had been able to engage in the long term with Harlow Playhouse on a project.

“The Barbican Box project has allowed us to widen Harlow Playhouse staff awareness of our enthusiasm for the arts and our willingness to work more collaboratively and visit more often.” *Karen Warncken*

Warncken described how better communication with Harlow Playhouse would increase the chance of the school being able to organise visits and trips, therefore strengthening the school’s and the students’ connection to the venue. Increased marketing from Harlow Playhouse since Barbican Box has been one of the legacies Warncken has noticed from the project.

## Recommendations

Of the two Barbican Box projects that the school was involved with, Warncken felt the Coney Box had less of an impact on both teaching practice and student experience. This partly related to the fact that the Complicité Box aligned well with the GCSE Drama curriculum and supported students’ need to learn devising, whilst the Coney Box was firmly situated in the Covid era and related more strongly to improving wellbeing rather than a specific part of the arts curriculum. The intention behind this was to create a freedom and flexibility of artistic output, which could allow each school to create something in an artform of their choice, regardless of the Covid restrictions in place. This worked well for Melland High School in Manchester, while for Passmores, a more specific artform focus would have been preferable.

Teachers working on the project at Passmores felt that they would have preferred a less guided framework, and that whilst the interactive element and box itself was exciting, the objects inside didn’t inspire the devising process in the same way as the Complicité Box. These challenges were exacerbated by the fact that Passmores was unable to finish the project due to local lockdowns, and one teacher commented that the impact may have been increased if they had been able to continue with the project into the summer term.

Whilst the Coney Barbican Box did not appeal to Passmores in the same way as the Complicité Box, Warncken is keen to continue their involvement in the project. She suggested that a refresher training on Complicité’s techniques would solidify their learning. One of the main benefits of both boxes was the fact that it helped students make connections to their local arts ecology.

“The Complicité Box was a very physical and high energy approach to creating theatre. It was directly linked to creating theatre and drama and furnished staff with skills to use during their own teaching of GCSE and KS3 drama.”

*Teacher, November 2021*

# Appendix

## Artist Mentor case studies

**Artist Mentors involved in Barbican Box projects share their strategies, challenges and recommendations for successful delivery of place-based partnership projects**

# Jade Williams, Manchester

**multidisciplinary artist  
and creative facilitator**

**Jade was Artist Mentor on the Coney Barbican Box project with Hathershaw College, Oldham, Greater Manchester in partnership with HOME, Manchester**

## **The project**

Jade described how the Coney Barbican Box enabled the young people to 'play' through the concept of the 'secret agent', something which not only created a great deal of excitement in her group but also a sense of agency and ownership. This element of young person-led co-creation and play was the major component of the project which she feels will influence her work in the future.

In her three sessions Jade worked face to face alongside the teacher and students to use movement, drama and creative writing to create a gift for their school. The final output was wellbeing maps with directions for places to go to get support and included inspirational quotes. The students also created a song which they performed at a final online showcase.

## **Successful delivery strategies**

Jade particularly appreciated how collaborative her relationship was with the teachers at Hathershaw College, commenting that each brought their respective skills to the pre-project planning meetings and discussed what might work well with the group. She said there was a flexibility to the project which meant that they didn't need to approach delivery with any fixed idea of outcomes or activity in mind. This meant they were able to let the young people guide the process. Jade found this an unusual and rewarding way to work, in a cultural context which often calls for quite fixed objectives and delivery targets.



photo © Kujit/Koof Chuchan

## Legacy

Jade commented on how important it was that the project worked with local artists. She felt this was significant in terms of building sustainable relationships between schools and the local arts ecology. Additionally, she felt this would have an impact on raising the young people's aspirations by introducing them to artists from their area who work in the creative industries, helping them to see a career in the arts as a possibility. Jade hopes to develop her relationships with Hathershaw in the future and sees this as one of the biggest successes of the project.

## Recommendations

Jade felt that if the project was designed to strengthen relationships between schools, artists and HOME, more work needed to be done to make HOME visible within the project. She associated the project more with the Barbican and Coney, since most input and communications were with those organisations. She felt that this might have been different had Covid-19 not necessitated transferring sharing and performances from onsite at HOME to online platforms.

Jade commented that the collaborative relationship between artist and teacher was one of the successes of the project. Developing self-sustaining relationships between local Artist Mentors and the education sector is likely to be one of the main legacies of the project in the regions.



# Rosy Prue, West Norfolk

artist, educator, project manager and consultant working in the cultural education sector

**Rosy was Artist Mentor on the Michael Rosen Barbican Box project with Nelson Academy and Heacham Junior School in partnership with Creative Arts East through the PEACH West Norfolk LCEP**



## The project

Rosy praised Barbican Box’s capacity to facilitate connectivity and partnership between different sectors. This process of creation and collaboration she described as ‘alchemy’. There were several outcomes she identified through her involvement with Barbican Box; in particular she felt that the project responded to a local need in bringing high quality art experiences to rural schools. One of the challenges she noted in terms of young people’s capacity to engage in the arts locally is rural exclusion and a lack of accessible venues for young people to call ‘their own’ or see as a space that is ‘theirs to visit’. She believes this rural exclusion has had an impact on young people over a number of years, creating a ‘poverty of aspiration’ in some young people locally. This is why the work of Creative Arts East, through their rural touring programmes and engagement with projects like Barbican Box are particularly important in rural areas. The positive impact on the aspirations of young people of seeing Michael Rosen live on screen and being able to meet, ask questions and share work with professional artists was potentially profound.

“The Box provides a fantastic, structured format from which to link to and explore the work of other artists whilst also unearthing and developing further ideas and connections. A lovely, inspiring combination of both ‘open-ended’ and ‘contained’.”

## Successful delivery strategies

All of Rosy's sessions with her schools were delivered digitally/online. This initially caused some challenges, with technical glitches occurring during her first session which made her realise she couldn't facilitate an art session online the way she would face to face by simply streaming live activity. Instead she decided to pre-record 'how to' content for the class teacher to share during the sessions. This gave some protection against further tech issues that might arise during live streamed sessions, as well as providing the school with a bank of re-usable digital resources beyond the session/project. Alongside these pre-prepared resources, Rosy Zoomed with the class to introduce each session and the new creative activities and respond to the artistic content they had created – for example, drawing tasks she had set, or poems they had written and adapted. The class teacher would then take the lead in showing the students the pre-recorded content and supporting them to start their creative activities, while Rosy would stay 'in the background' of the Zoom call (with video off and microphone muted – but available should the teacher need to get in touch) before 'popping up again' towards the end of the session to see what progress had been made. Students explored mark-making and drawing, gel-plate printmaking, stamp-making, collage and 'found poetry'. They were also introduced to the concept of making a simple gif out of photographed imagery. Rosy sent individual collage packs into school, containing materials such as sequin-waste, stickers, bubble wrap and painted papers, that the students could use for their collages and printmaking. At the end of the run of sessions Rosy asked students to select one piece of artwork that they had created. These chosen pieces were then scanned to create a digital image that could be printed professionally as a postcard (two of each were printed – one for the school and one for the child to keep). This meant that students had potentially three different expressions of their work: their hard copies, a digitally printed postcard of their chosen artwork and an animated gif.

## Legacy

Rosy felt the greatest impact of Barbican Box was in terms of its ability to strengthen the infrastructure and networks in the local area. Building a relationship with her two schools has been one of the main impacts of the project on Rosy's own professional practice. This finding is echoed in the school case study where Nelson's Year 5 teacher Gill Sekatawa commented that the school is committed to getting Rosy back to run sessions in the future.

"Barbican Box is the opportunity for me as a creative practitioner, as an artist myself, to make those connections. I've got something tangible now I can put in front of a school. I am a bit more known locally. The potential feels much stronger now since Box."

Rosy also commented on the impact the project had on her own practice, describing how rare it is to have the opportunity for CPD as a freelancer.

“Up until this year I have felt very unnourished in terms of CPD. Being a freelancer often means not having that input, either not having the money or time to afford to go to it. I could listen to Michael Rosen all day and you can make connections with his practice and so many other people’s so easily. It was great to meet the other artists involved too and explore the ways in which you might use Zoom.”

## Recommendations

Rosy felt some teachers didn’t primarily associate the project with PEACH and Creative Arts East, but rather with the Barbican and Michael Rosen. Although likely exacerbated by Covid-19 and an inability for onsite visits from CAE, this ‘association issue’ creates a challenge for a capacity building project which aims to strengthen relationships between local arts organisations and schools.

A Barbican conceived and branded project is problematic when combined with the current structure of roles with most communications around the project coming directly from the Barbican. The Barbican could step back at certain key stages of the project and be replaced with sufficiently funded partner time and a ‘local broker’ role able to manage most school communications and ‘hold’ relationships with schools.

This ‘association’ challenge is more complex when partnering with rural arts organisations without fixed ‘bricks and mortar’ spaces that young people can visit, showcase work and subsequently feel a sense of ownership over the space.

This case study highlights that an increased capacity to lead on key project elements by the partner is important in this context. Additionally, more emphasis on co-created work where collaboration between partners leads to increased visibility of the regional partner may be particularly important to non- ‘bricks and mortar’ partnerships.

In order to develop innovative classroom practice, additional time for relationships to develop and for teachers and artists to bring their respective skillsets to the working relationship is needed. This is particularly important since Barbican Box is a capacity building project primarily concerned with facilitating teacher CPD, not just with artists delivering high quality participatory work to students.

# Sally Hardcastle, Harlow

performance designer



**Sally was Artist Mentor on the Coney Barbican Box with Katherines Primary Academy in partnership with Harlow Playhouse**

## The project

Sally worked with Year 6 at Katherines Primary Academy in Harlow to deliver three face to face sessions. The format for the project was that the first two of the five sessions were teacher led. The first session involved the students exploring the Box and the second was about the students conducting investigation and reconnaissance around their school, discovering how different areas made them feel. Sally and the class teacher chose to split their allotted 1.5-hour planning meeting into two shorter 45 mins sessions, one before and one after the first two teacher-led sessions. In Sally's first face-to-face session she learned what the students had discovered during their 'reconnaissance' of the school and set them a mission of 'giving a gift to the school'. During this session she discussed with the class ideas for what their gift might be and how they might respond to the reconnaissance phase of the project. During the final session, Sally supported them to create their gift to the headteacher and the whole school, which was a mural painting on the side of a shipping container in the playground. The mural included their handprints marking out '2021', their names and some words and pictures which represented 'happiness'.

"In the reconnaissance stage [of the project] the students told me how tough the last 18 months had been for everybody [during the pandemic] and how it had impacted their well-being. In the end the gift was about brightening up an area of the playground and bringing a bit of cheer. It was also about them leaving something to remember them by because they were Year 6 and about to leave."

## Successful delivery strategies

Aside from making a new connection to a local Harlow school, one of the main benefits of the project for Sally was the CPD sessions with Coney. She particularly appreciated the fact the CPD was on Zoom, since it was more convenient to fit in around her other work and it facilitated a broader and more diverse group of people to network with and share ideas.

Sally commented on the fact that the project had already influenced her own practice. Specifically, she plans to experiment with the performative play-based nature of Coney's work.

"I am always on the lookout for things to improve my own practice, and I've done various sorts of Mental Health First Aid courses or working with children with trauma but no subject-specific CPD which is relevant to my practice. The Barbican Box CPD was useful and positive. Having it on Zoom was very convenient and it was nice to have the Manchester people in the same CPD, it meant there were more ideas and more people to meet."

"Coney are quite a performative and a play-based company. We're looking at putting some of it into the work that we're doing with Matipo Arts [CIC in Harlow]."

## Legacy

Since running the Barbican Box sessions, Sally sent Katherines Primary information about free workshops which Matipo Arts ran during the summer at Parndon Mill. She is hopeful that her relationship with the school will develop as a result of her connection with them during the project. One of the benefits to the Barbican of working with a regional partner within commuting distance of London is that it broadens the Barbican Centre's own pool of artists for future work. Sally is one such artist, who would be keen to work more with the Barbican and has an excellent knowledge of working in London and good relationships with London schools.

Sally commented that one area the project might have been improved was in its capacity to build partnerships and connections local in Harlow, increased contact from Harlow Playhouse and signposting to other opportunities at Harlow Playhouse.

## Recommendations

Sally commented that she felt that the CPD could have been longer and/or more spread out to give time to digest the information the Artist Mentors received and think about the implications on their practice.

Mirroring the comments from some of the mentors and teachers in the other regions, Sally stated that communication with the Barbican about Barbican Box was excellent but that she didn't feel any increased sense of connection with Harlow Playhouse as a result of the project.

Given that a number of people have independently commented on this lack of association of Barbican Box with the partner venue or organisation, it indicates an issue with the project design. This is most likely due to the uneven weighting of communication from partners with those involved in the project.

This has likely been exacerbated by Covid restrictions, which removed the opportunity for schools to visit venues and showcase their work. It is essential that if the project continues to be funded that the partner theatre/organisation is considerably more prominent in the project delivery.

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