

# Where ideas are growing

*Early years arts and culture in Yorkshire and the Humber*

Written by Ben Sandbrook with Ruth Churchill Dower

Where ideas are growing: Early Years Arts and Culture in Yorkshire and the Humber  
Written by Ben Sandbrook (World Pencil Ltd) with Ruth Churchill Dower (Earlyarts Ltd)

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# Where ideas are growing

*Early years arts and culture in Yorkshire and the Humber  
State of the region report for CapeUK, March 2017*

<b>Introduction and brief</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Summary</b>	<b>4</b>
Research findings: regional overview	5
Overall observations	5
Recommendations	6
<b>Approach to the research</b>	<b>7</b>
Research participation	7
<b>Early years arts and culture – a national overview</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Early years arts and culture in Yorkshire and the Humber</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Current know-how and capacity</b>	<b>16</b>
Early years settings: in-house capacity for arts and culture	18
Early years settings: visits to and from outside organisations	20
Arts and cultural organisations: early years activity	24
<b>Developing skills and know-how</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Needs</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Barriers</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Networking know-how and resources</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Strategic focus</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Appendix: Sankey charts</b>	<b>39</b>

## Introduction and brief

CapeUK, the Arts Council Bridge Organisation for Yorkshire and the Humber, commissioned Ben Sandbrook (World Pencil) and Ruth Churchill Dower (Earlyarts) to research and produce a 'State of the Region' report on arts and culture in the early years. This report looks broadly at the arts and cultural opportunities for young children, aged 0-5, their families and communities, as take place in and through early years settings and arts and cultural organisations. Both of these categories are broad, encompassing Primary schools, nurseries and grandparents in the former – libraries, arts venues, museums and freelance artists in the latter – and many more.

# Summary

## *Research findings: regional overview*

Looking at the region in terms of national statistics (e.g. Ofsted Early Years performance data, arts funding levels) it sits, on average, in the middle in a national picture. Of course, taking a broad, regional perspective will average out extremes and, on a more local level, 'hidden deprivation' is common in places such as Sheffield, Hull, York and Harrogate.

Looking specifically at early years arts and culture, there is some truly innovative, excellent and effective practice and opportunity being developed across the region.

The funding landscape (particularly from local authority funding) for early years arts and culture is not as strong as it was 10 years ago, and early years provision has suffered perhaps disproportionately within the education, or children's services, sector.

But the legacy of these more generous times (e.g. of the Creative Partnerships programme) can still be seen, as can the outcomes of more recent developments: where there is understanding, skills, capacity, commitment and supportive leadership, early years settings and arts and cultural organisations are finding ways to continue and develop their creative practice and opportunities for young children and families.

Yet, as research projects such as this so often find, this strength of practice is, it seems, patchy and inconsistent. But it is difficult to quantify this patchiness: in the absence of something akin to an Arts Award for early years settings, or dedicated Ofsted/DfE/local authority data, it's not possible to build a data-driven picture of strong or weak practice and provision of opportunities; it's difficult not to end up hearing from the locations of strong practice that their practice is strong, and not really to hear as much from other areas.

As nobody has a clear regional or sub-regional remit to understand strengths and weaknesses of practice in early years arts and culture, there aren't clear solutions to this problem, although Arts Council England are now asking Bridge Organisations to build this picture to a degree, hence this report. In the past, where local authorities' early years/children's services and cultural departments have been well connected they have handled this remit collectively. But in most cases these authorities have had their resources heavily reduced, staff re-positioned, and agendas narrowed, so that this can no longer be the case.

Across the region, however, we have encountered organisations, such as NYMAZ and Leeds Artforms with their early years networks, who have built up a more comprehensive picture of parts of the region, giving a sense of shape to the extent of patchiness and challenge.

## *Overall observations*

Looking across the region, we would make the following underlying observations:

- In arts and cultural organisations, there is strong practice and continued development around creating arts and cultural experiences for EY children. But this isn't the case everywhere. Better regional networking of know-how, people, and reasons why EY is significant could reap great dividends.
- Despite the difficulties of funding, early years, arts and cultural leaders who believe in and understand early years arts and culture seem to find a way to make it happen. So influencing leaders and instigators by helping them to experience first-hand the impacts should precipitate action at scale.
- There is a need to support early years, arts and cultural organisations to develop their understanding of young children's creative development, their ideas, their own experiences of arts and culture and how these can be developed and supported.
- There appears to be a strong need to work more closely *with* particular communities who are less engaged in arts and culture, particularly in more deprived and challenged communities. This work should aim to be long-term and sustained and needs to consider carefully whether it is rooted in trying to bring communities 'in' to arts and cultural experiences or to co-create such experiences 'with' them.

## Recommendations

Based on our analysis of the findings from this research, existing knowledge of this and other UK regions, and built on research participants' recommendations, as outlined in the final section (Strategic focus, page 38), we would make the following recommendations:

1. **Championing:** Arts/cultural and early years organisations across the region who are already committed to early years arts and culture should take it upon themselves to work together to champion this most powerful of agendas: reaching organisations who don't understand the potential of arts and culture on young children's life and learning, or how they could practically realize it. The Bridge Organisation could have a central role in facilitating this. An emphasis on 'seeing is believing' would be recommended: often evidence-based argument is effective only after the initial, personal, seed of persuasion has been sown.
2. **Self-profiling tool:** The Bridge Organisation should work with early years settings, arts/cultural organisations, Arts Council England, universities, early years standard setting bodies and others to develop a tool for early years settings to evaluate, celebrate and profile their practice relating to early years arts and culture, perhaps akin to an Artsmark for early years. This tool should also help to signpost and raise awareness of local strengths and opportunities.
3. **Celebratory networking:** The Bridge Organisation should work with early years settings, arts/cultural organisations and others to test and develop a regular programme of celebratory networking events around early years arts and culture, such as family arts festivals and professional sharing days, carefully considering the needs and aspirations of target audiences, and partnering with existing initiatives and festivals.
4. **Professional co-learning:** Arts/cultural organisations and early years settings should work together in co-learning partnerships to share and develop their skills and understanding of children's creativity and how most effectively to nurture it. The Bridge Organisation could convene a partnership bid to develop and roll this out as a CPD programme, based on action research and co-working, across the region. This CPD should incorporate the body of expertise that is being built up across the region in understanding and **curating creative spaces and experiences for young children**, and also in how arts and cultural work can work towards **Early Years Pupil Premium** agendas. Initial teacher education (ITE) providers should be included in the partnership.
5. **Engaging with local need:** Arts/cultural organisations working in early years should work with settings, and specialist agencies, to develop a strong understanding of the needs and opportunities in their localities and how their work could have greatest impact. The in-depth know-how about engaging with families and communities that has been developed by a few organisations in the region should be very widely promoted.
6. **Purposeful local partnerships:** Arts/cultural organisations, early years settings, local authorities and others, with the facilitative support of the Bridge Organisation, should continue to be open-minded and resourceful about realizing opportunities for win—win local partnerships as a way to make the most of scarce resources and specialist expertise, centered around a common shared purpose, both in addition to and as part of the Cultural Education Partnerships.

# Approach to the research

Our approach, as requested by CapeUK, included three strands:

1. An online survey, distributed to a wide variety of organisations and individuals in early years and primary education, and arts and culture. 76 responses were received with a roughly 60:40 split between arts and cultural organisations and early years settings;
2. A focus group, which took place in Leeds, attended by seven participants from Leeds and Wakefield, the majority of whom were from arts and cultural organisations;
3. Semi-structured telephone interviews with 16 organisations across the region

The findings of the three strands are presented and interpreted together through the remainder of the report below.

## Research participation

### Online survey participants

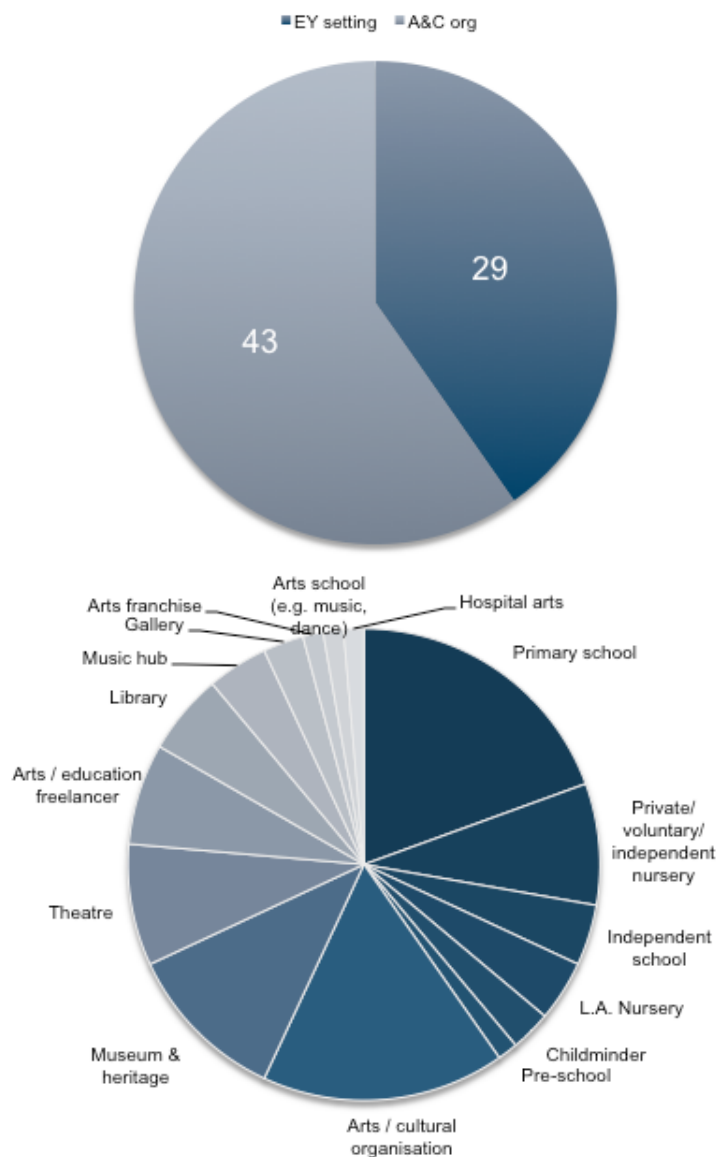
The online survey<sup>1</sup> was completed by 76 people.<sup>2</sup> This is a relatively low response rate, given the circulation of the survey to well over 1,000 people, but we have reason to believe that this is in line with, if not above, the response rate received for similar research work being undertaken in other English regions.<sup>3</sup> Survey participants identified their organisations as corresponding most closely to the categories indicated in Figure 1. Figure 1 shows that of the EY settings, roughly half are primary schools with reception years and half are early-years-specific settings.

At various points in our analysis, we have grouped survey participants into Early Years Settings (covering primary schools, private/voluntary/independent nurseries, independent schools, local authority nurseries, childminders, pre-schools) and Arts and Cultural Organisations (covering arts/cultural organisations, museums & heritage, theatre, arts/education freelancers, libraries, Music Hubs, galleries, arts franchises, arts schools and hospital arts).

<sup>1</sup> <https://goo.gl/forms/D5SuCx3YdHd9e6q83>

<sup>2</sup> The invitation to contribute to the research through the survey and focus groups was sent to an extensive mailing list of education establishments covering 0-5 in the region and to CapeUK's mailing list of arts and cultural organisations, individuals and others. It was also circulated to Earlyyears' members in the region, to the NYMAZ Music Network and widely via social media.

<sup>3</sup> Jessica Pitt, personal communication.



**Figure 1** Survey participants' organisation types

Figure 2, overleaf, shows a map of the location of survey participants, with early years settings marked in blue and arts and cultural organisations in red. The map shows a reasonable spread of participants from across the region. (All participants indicated their location.)

### Focus group participants

The Leeds focus group was attended by seven people: Jess Witkowska (The Hepworth, Wakefield), Leanne Kirkham (Northern Ballet), Hannah Draper (Harrogate Theatre), Jane Zanzottera (Leeds Artforms), Lou Sumray (Artist in Residence at St Edmond's Nursery School, Bradford), Kate Fellows (Leeds Museums and Galleries) and Alex Bradshaw (Opera North). Originally two focus groups were advertised to everyone who was notified about the online survey.



**Figure 2** Location of survey participants (EY settings in blue, A&C organisations in red)

### Semi-structured interviews

Interviews were conducted with the following: Amanda Phillips (Leeds City Art Gallery), Sharon Hogan (Midland Road Nursery School, Bradford), Andrew Shimmin (McMillan Nursery School, Hull), Jess Pitt (Early Years researcher), Julian Ollive (Education and Young Actors Associate, York Theatre Royal), Supriya Nagarajan (Manasamitra, Dewsbury), Heidi Johnson (NYMAZ, York), Michaela O’Sullivan (Square Chapel Centre for the Arts), Carol Reid (Youth Music), Lisa Howarth (North Lincolnshire Museum, Scunthorpe), Emma Spencer (Yorkshire Sculpture Park), Phil Lowde (Forest school and outdoor learning specialist), Abi Hackett (Early Years researcher, Manchester Metropolitan University), Christine Evans (Heritage Services, Rotherham Council), Fraser Wilson (Music in the Round, Sheffield), Rebecca Oberg (Eureka National Children’s Museum, Halifax).

### Profile of research participants overall

The research has included consultation with just short of 100 people, with a reasonable representation of arts and cultural organisations and early years settings. We suspect, based on various data, that the make-up of the participants as a whole reflects the following biases:

- arts and cultural organisations with at least a reasonably strong interest in the early years
- early years settings with at least a reasonably strong interest in arts and culture

A more targeted research process that focused concertedly on participants who did not reflect these biases has unfortunately been beyond the scope of this research, and, inevitably, the findings from the research, and the survey in particular, will reflect this.



# Early years arts and culture – a national overview

This section of the report, painting a picture of the landscape of early years generally in England, and of early years, arts, culture and creativity specifically, draws on the authors' research and the input of interviewees.<sup>4</sup>

## **Early Years Sector**

The early years sector is quite complex, complicated and multifarious. Unlike in post-5 education, where just about all children are in the same place (i.e. school or home education settings), early years 'settings' include Local Authority-run nurseries, PVI nurseries (private, voluntary and independent), childminders, private nursery chains and franchises, playgroups, Children's Centres, school-based nurseries, health visitor centres, libraries, community centres, Forest Schools, Steiner and Montessori settings, and, of course, the home environment.

There's a huge range in the different training practitioners will have had – some accredited, some not – and there is generally a very high turnover rate in early years staff, particularly in private/voluntary/independent settings, compared to staff in schools.

Very young children are special creatures. They've not yet been so painted and tainted with the brushes of societal conformity that the rest of us have experienced, nor have they been shaped with what can be the regimented environment of mainstream schooling. In many ways (for example their experiences, their view on the world and their developing brains), young children are profoundly different to older children and adults. So it's no surprise that there is significant expertise involved in working with young children well, effectively and sensitively.

This can all present a significant challenge for artists and arts organisations working in early years. There are very few, if any, examples of high quality effective practice in early years arts, culture and creativity that don't build on a solid understanding of early childhood development.

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<sup>4</sup> This section of the report, 'Early years arts and culture – a national overview' is adapted from previous work on a similar research project undertaken by the authors for A New Direction in London, reproduced with permission from the authors and A New Direction.

## Early years infrastructure

The following charts depict the various stakeholders involved in Early years.

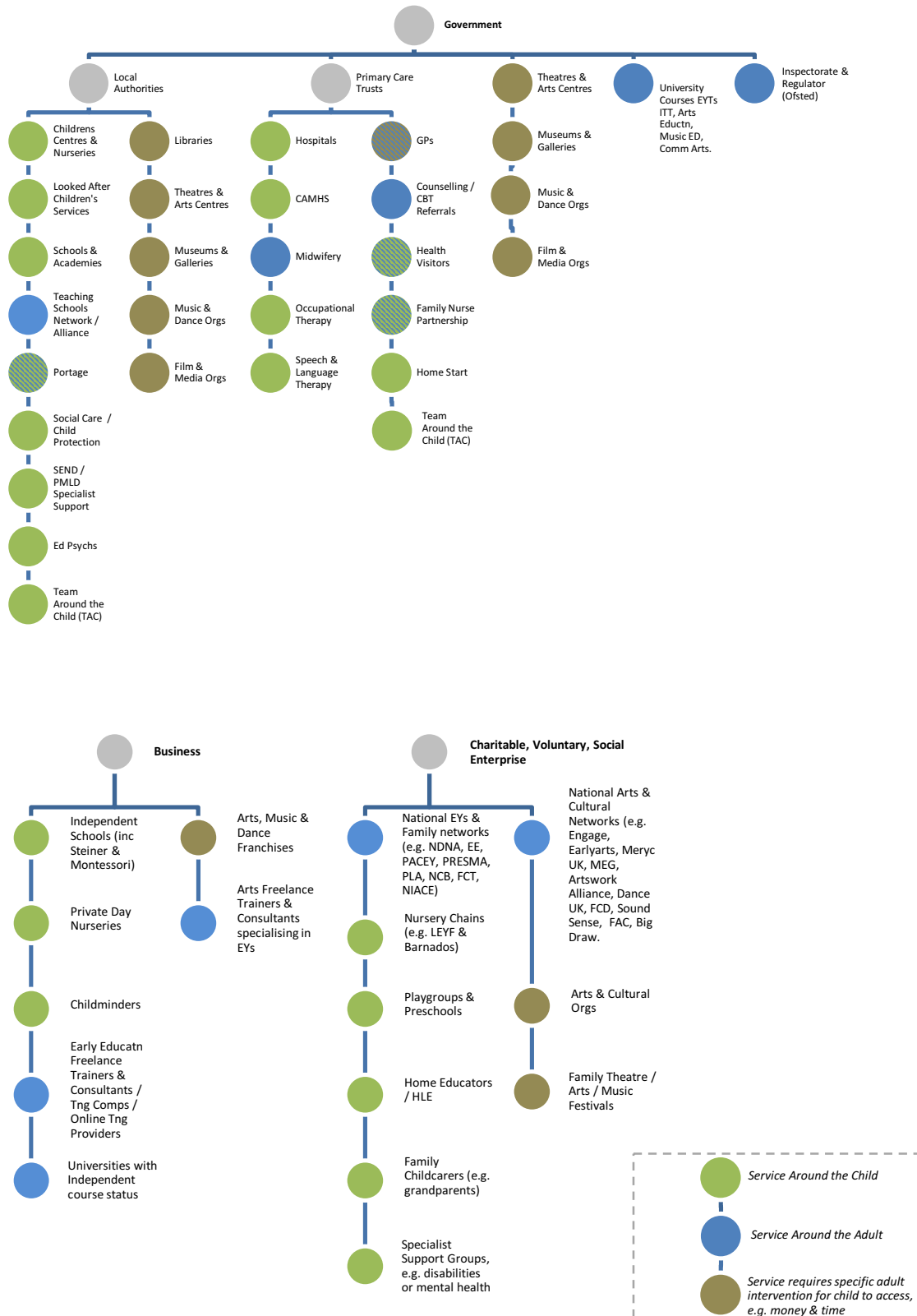
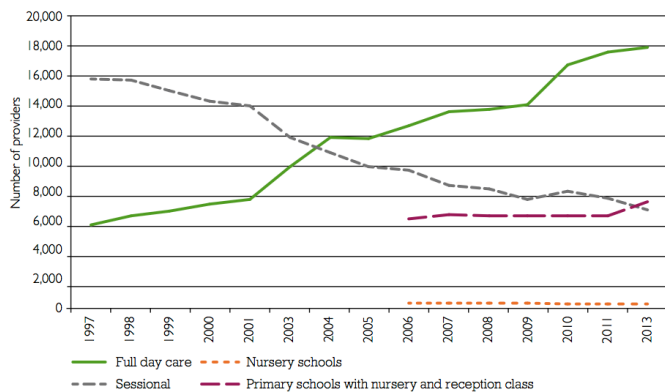


Figure 3 Organisations and stakeholders in early years<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Prepared by Ruth Churchill Dower/Earlyarts for Arts Council England

## Early years settings and funding

Figure 4 shows the numbers of different types of EY settings across England:



**Figure 4 Early years education and childcare provider types in England between 1997 and 2013<sup>6</sup>**

The graph clearly shows how uneconomical it has become to provide sessional (half-day) care for young children, with the structuring of childcare funding being designed to enable parents to go back to work. It also shows the recent increase in schools with nursery and reception classes. n.b. these data show the numbers of settings, not the numbers of children.

The Department for Education produced in 2014 a *Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents*, which lists the following figures estimating the use of different EY settings and other childcare:

Use of childcare	Number of families	Number of children
<b>Any childcare</b>	<b>4,194,000</b>	<b>6,090,000</b>
<b>Formal providers</b>	<b>3,432,000</b>	<b>4,699,000</b>
Nursery school	277,000	279,000
Nursery class attached to a primary or infants' school	267,000	290,000
Day nursery	516,000	532,000
Playgroup or pre-school	270,000	273,000
Breakfast club or activity	302,000	361,000
After-school club or activity	1,922,000	2,544,000
Childminder	261,000	320,000
<b>Informal providers</b>	<b>2,157,000</b>	<b>2,760,000</b>
Ex-partner	322,000	403,000
Grandparent	1,447,000	1,819,000
Older sibling	228,000	210,000
Another relative	305,000	334,000
Friend or neighbour	325,000	390,000

Note: all figures are rounded to the nearest 1,000

**Figure 5 National estimates of use of childcare<sup>7</sup>**

These figures, which relate to children aged 0-14, clearly show the huge contribution that grandparents make to childcare. Indeed, if you exclude after-school clubs (which will relate mainly to older children), grandparents account for 50% of all formal and informal childcare! It's also interesting to note that

<sup>6</sup> *Early Years Education and Childcare*, Nuffield Foundation, 2015, pages 21-22.

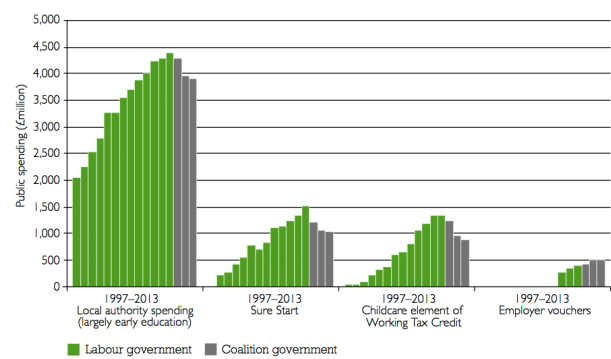
<sup>7</sup> *Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents 2012-13*, DfE, 2014, page 46

the main formal providers for daytime childcare and education (nursery schools, school nursery classes, day nurseries, playgroups and childminders) each have a roughly equal proportion of childcare (around 300,000 children) with the exception of day nurseries (around 530,000 children). This is largely due to the longer hours offered by day nurseries which is much better suited to families working full time.

This is a clear indication of the diversity of provision within the early years landscape. Music Hubs and Bridge Organisations can develop strategies for schools, albeit to work with them individually but there is no single target institution type for supporting early years children in the arts and cultural sector. There is, however, a clear opportunity to reach a huge number of children (principally from Reception year – the last year in the EYFS – and above) in after school clubs.

With recent budget announcements, this opportunity may flourish as funding is set to increase significantly for after-school clubs and breakfast clubs in the future. The concern for educators and parents is that this appears to be where the government wants to position the 'arts and sports', and that it seems to envisage this as a programme of activities that fill a need for childcare, rather than expert-led, skills-based approaches that can be honed and developed over time to extend children's complex creative potential. This is an enormous opportunity for the arts and cultural sector to harness and possibly for it to professionalise further.

The next graph shows the changes in state expenditure for early education and childcare



**Figure 6 Annual public expenditure on Sure Start, early education and childcare in England 1997-98 and 2012-13 (£million, 2009-10 prices)**

With the exception of Employer Vouchers (i.e. salary sacrifice scheme for childcare vouchers), each of these funding streams lost around £500m with the arrival of the previous coalition government – Sure Start lost a third of its funding. This is the landscape of funding challenge that interviewees (early years settings and those who work with them) described.

## Early Years Policy Environment

The Early Years Foundation Stage, currently in its second iteration having been revised in 2011 through an extensive review conducted by Dame Clare Tickell, is a well respected curriculum with considerable scope and potential for arts, culture and creativity. One of its seven areas for learning is Expressive Arts and Design, and play and creativity are emphasized strongly at the core of the curriculum.

Under the current government there has been a discernible shift away from the emphasis on the more creative aspects of the curriculum as a whole. Some interviewees from settings report that Ofsted is really most interested in school-readiness, behaviour, reading, writing and maths, and less interested in play, creativity and culture. Although this may change as the revised Ofsted regime (Nov 2014) includes a new focus on '[Fundamental British Values](#)', and creativity will be considered within the revised judgement of children's '[Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development](#)'. Other settings interviewees were more positive about Ofsted's role in supporting early years arts and culture.

The EYFS Profile (EYFSP) scores, based on formative assessments and observations, which were previously mandatory at the end of EYFS (reception year, when most children are 5) were made non-compulsory at the end of the 2016 summer term. In their place, the Reception-year Baseline had been proposed for introduction in 2016/17 but, three weeks before the beginning of the autumn term, a [u-turn was announced](#), maintaining the EYFSP for the 16/17 academic year, following significant pressure, and calls from the sector for the EYFSP to be reinstated as a more holistic and accurate measure of both social and educational progress.<sup>8</sup>

So, it is currently unknown as to whether or not the Baseline Assessment will continue. Also, in an international development that will cause alarm for some,<sup>9</sup> the OECD is planning to introduce a cross-national assessment of learning outcomes for 5-year-olds akin to the PISA rankings.

With the recent 2-year-old funding offer, there is an increasing number of Primary schools who are extending their provision into nurseries. This can work well, but only if schools understand the needs of two-year-olds! This development, though, has had a big impact on small and voluntary early years settings (including many, anecdotally, who offer higher staff-ratios) because increasingly parents are putting their young children into schools earlier. It is having less of an impact on many larger group nurseries and childcare providers because typically these offer longer hours, which still appeals to working parents.

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<sup>8</sup> The Baseline is an assessment that takes place within a few weeks of children starting Reception year (generally at Primary school). Unlike the EYFSP, the Government out-sourced this Baseline Assessment as a decentralized service and three providers were commissioned. The vast majority of schools had opted for the same one of the three on offer: the [Early Excellence Baseline](#). The Early Excellence Baseline has more emphasis on the more creative and holistic aspects of the EYFS curriculum than the two alternatives, based on the highly respected [Experiential Education \(EXE\) framework](#) developed by early childhood theorist, Ferre Laevres. The Government cited a lack of comparability between the three baselines as the main reason behind the u-turn.

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<sup>9</sup> See, for example, <https://ioelondonblog.wordpress.com/2016/08/08/is-a-preschool-pisa-what-we-want-for-our-young-children/>.

## Children at risk

There is a strong emphasis in current policy on supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged children, for whom the need and impact are irrefutable and significant.

But the appropriate approach for doing so is not always respected. Many argue that the relentless focus on 'narrowing the gap' between boys and girls, and on their overall outcomes by the age of 4, results in a short-term view of how to 'fix' the problem. It also increases the sector's dependency on fixed structures and programmes, force fits a funding formula that doesn't encourage holistic approaches, and exerts a pressure to do specific interventions for mainly vulnerable children where previously there might have been more creative interventions from outside parties that could support all children, including those most at risk.

In some cases Local Authorities are drawing on the new 2-year-old offer to provide children with a service in early years settings that is much less specialised and supported than previously, where there had been more emphasis on social work and rounded care.

There is also considerable debate in the early years sector at the moment, about the proposals to include Early Years Pupil

Premium (EYPP) funding in the Standard Funding Formula and thus, potentially, to jeopardise specific support being targeted towards disadvantaged children. Currently Ofsted inspect against EYPP funding to monitor its expenditure, as with Primary and Secondary schools. As with 5+ Pupil Premium, the funding is targeted at the child and their needs but settings are relatively free in how they choose to spend it. For instance it can be spent on staff CPD, which clearly stands to benefit other children as well.

We suggest that there may be significant potential to develop arts, culture and creativity in support of early years children in receipt of EYPP. This has only been introduced in 2015 but there were already experiences articulated from arts organisation interviewees about working with, or harnessing, the EYPP.

We suspect that there may be little EYPP knowledge amongst arts, culture and creativity specialists outside of early years settings: what the premium is or how arts, culture and creativity can specifically support the issues that the premium is there to address. There is a growing body of evidence, of varying robustness, around the impacts of arts, culture and creative experiences for young children.

# Early years arts and culture in Yorkshire and the Humber

## Regional data overview

Yorkshire and the Humber, as a whole region, in headline summaries:

- The region straddles broad diversities: some of the most deprived wards in Europe and some of the UK's most affluent; large built-up areas and connected conurbations and cities in the South and West, huge rural remoteness in the North, and (often deprived) coastal regions in the East.
- The Ofsted performance data for early years put the region in the middle of the aggregated national picture: 12% settings are rated outstanding (15% nationally), 79% are good (76% nationally), 8% require improvement (8% nationally), 1% inadequate (1% nationally). Looking at the most deprived areas, the region is also very similar to the national averages and there has been a 66% reduction in the number of settings in the most deprived areas requiring improvement over 2012-16 but an increase of 9 providers (1%) judged inadequate.<sup>10</sup>
- Arts funding information related specifically to early years is not easy to identify. An analysis of Arts Council England (ACE) Grants for the Arts grants, 2012-15, showed 14 projects for pre-school age, of which 2 were in Yorkshire, and 44 projects for pre-school and primary, of which none were in Yorkshire. (50% in both categories were in London).<sup>11</sup> There are 69 ACE National Portfolio Organisations in the region and 4 Major Partner Museums, of which 56 and 4, respectively, are working towards ACE's Goal 5 around children and young people. 2 of them detailed early-years specific work in their proposals to ACE, and 61 detailed proposals for all ages, of which at least 10 are known to the authors to do early years-specific work.
- Yorkshire and the Humber is a priority region for Youth Music, as they receive relatively few funding applications from the region.<sup>12</sup>

## Landscape for developing early years arts and culture

### EYFS and Ofsted

Interviewees were broadly supportive of the early years Foundation Stage curriculum and Ofsted's role in supporting early years arts and culture in the settings that they are responsible for inspecting.

<sup>10</sup>

<https://public.tableau.com/profile/ofsted#!/vizhome/Dataview/Viewregionalperformancevertime>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding/grants-arts/2015/grants-arts/awards-made-area-and-artform/>

<sup>12</sup> ACE, personal communication.

They felt that the inspection framework is conducive to recognizing and (therefore) developing early years arts and culture well. On the whole, outstanding schools seem to hold a high value for the arts and the majority of EY settings judged outstanding have a strong provision and ethos around arts and culture. But it was felt that Ofsted guidance can be misinterpreted by setting staff and, specifically, that schools and settings judged 'requires improvement' may feel they need to focus on Ofsted priorities, often around literacy and numeracy, instead of developing arts and culture, whereas in fact the arts could have a significant role in addressing those priorities.

In the country as a whole some 40% of nursery schools are outstanding, compared to only 15% of primary schools.<sup>13</sup>

### Arts funding and the early years

Despite the evidence of the impact that can be achieved, early years has not been a priority in much of arts and cultural funding over recent years. For example, the brief for Music Education Hubs starts at age 5. A minority of Arts Council National Portfolio Organisations include early years in their programmes of work.

The Arts Council made moves over the last year to improve their national strategic support for early years although it is perhaps too early to see precisely what shape this will take.

### Local authority cuts

It's difficult to have many conversations with stakeholders working in early years without hearing about cuts to local authority funding and services. Many interviewees reported reductions in the numbers of state-sponsored early years providers, consolidation of nursery schools and closure of children's centres. Also, as mentioned above, much of the central coordinating function that could have overseen and supported early years arts and culture in local authorities has been lost. There have been examples of excellent local authority funded arts programmes run by early years advisory teams, such as in Calderdale and Kirklees, which have since been cut completely, mainly due to redundancies. But at the same time, interviewees and survey participants cited individual local authorities whose early years teams paid little attention to arts and culture in the past or present.

<sup>13</sup> For more on the qualities of outstanding early years provision from Ofsted, see their latest inspection report for Early Years at [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/445730/Early\\_years\\_report\\_2015.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/445730/Early_years_report_2015.pdf)

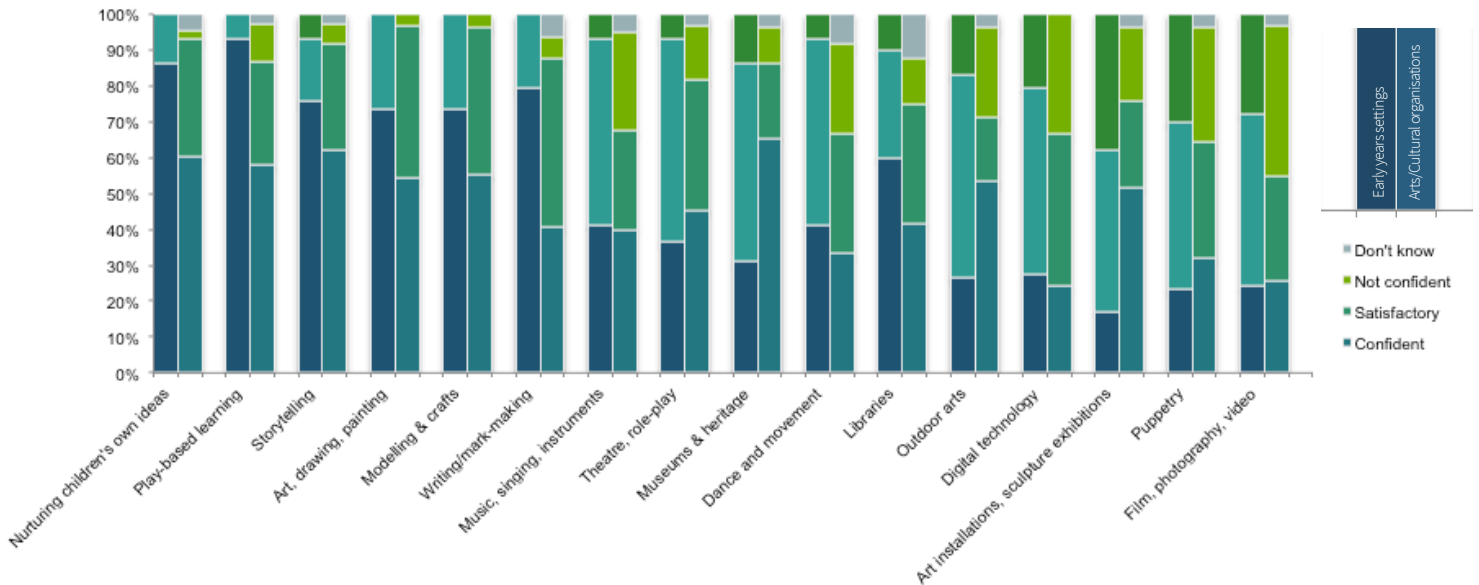
### ***Socio demographics***

We have not, in this report, gone into comprehensive depth in reporting the socio-demographic profile of the region. Some of the issues that have been raised, either in connection with successful arts and cultural interventions or the potential for them to be developed, are:

- challenges of community cohesion in areas with large white working class populations alongside BAME and new, migrant communities, such as in Calderdale and Leeds;
- ‘hidden deprivation’ – areas of economic deprivation that are close by to more affluent areas and, therefore, hidden in larger-area statistics, such as in York and Harrogate;
- rural isolation, particularly across the large distances in North Yorkshire;
- coastal deprivation, where former economic activity is depressed and towns are ‘at the end of the line’ and so receive little attention unless they are the focus of attention, such as Scarborough.

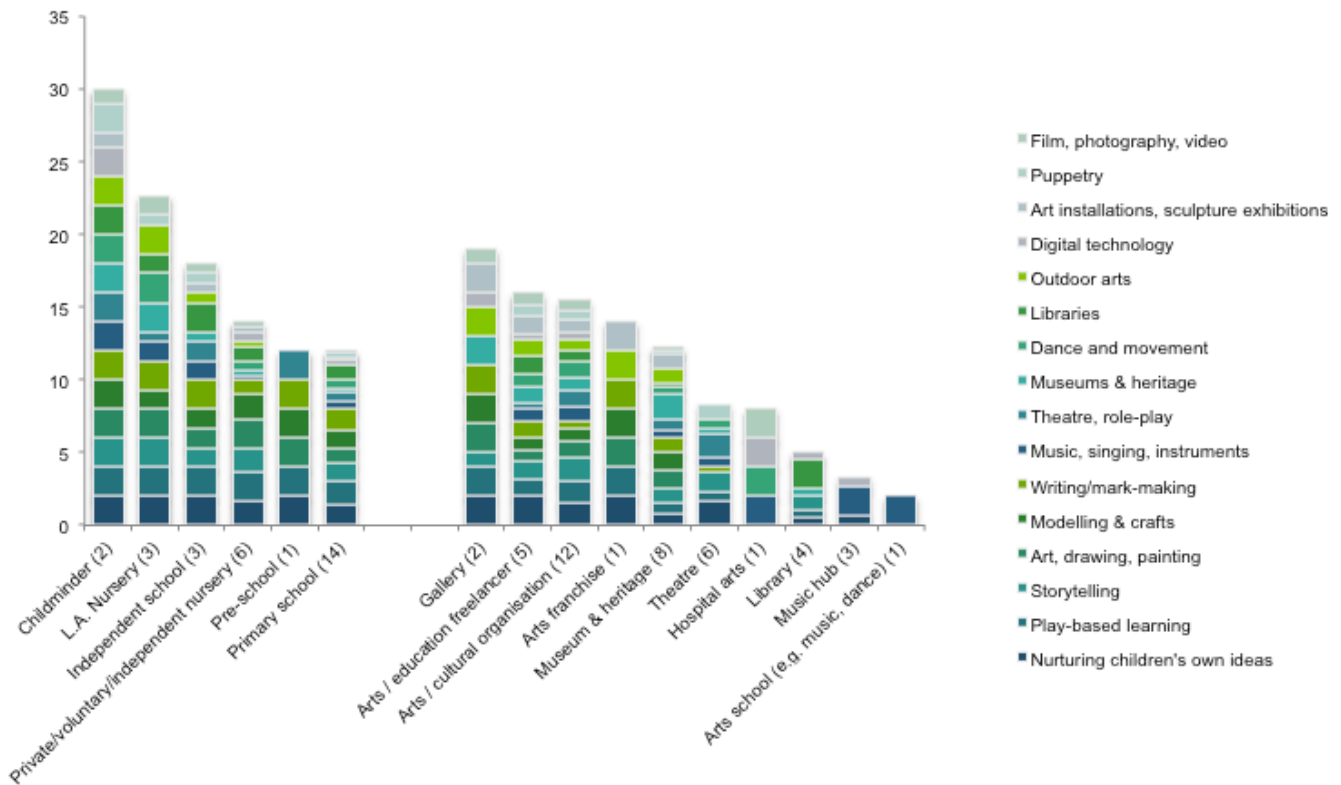
# Current know-how and capacity

Areas of strength, confidence and expertise in EY settings and arts and cultural organisations



**Figure 7 Organisation skills, specialisms and areas of need, from most to least confident**

(In each of the following artforms and activities, where are you confident and less confident of your organisation's skills and expertise in helping early years children?)



**Figure 8 Organisation skills, specialisms and areas of need segmented by organisation type**



## Confidence with children's ideas

Figure 7 shows how confident participants think their organisations are at developing young children's abilities in a range of arts and culture-related activities. The general levels of confidence across the board, in this sample, are fairly high.

EY settings report particularly confidence with nurturing children's own ideas, with play-based learning, story-telling and writing/mark-making, and these are also areas where they show the most marked increase in confidence over arts and cultural organisations.

An understanding of how to recognize and develop children's artistic ideas is critical to early years arts and culture: several interviewees from both early years and arts and cultural organisations reported that in many of the settings they worked in, one of the main areas of development with settings practitioners was around helping them to understand children's creative and artistic ideas and enquiries.

## Settings' confidence with arts and cultural subjects

Figure 7 also shows that EY settings are fairly confident with arts and cultural subjects (visual art, craft, music, dance, drama, puppetry, film, digital), although they are more likely to be 'satisfactory' here than confident. Of the artforms, EY settings appear most confident in visual art and modeling/crafts, followed by dance, music and then theatre/role-play.

Overall, the anecdotal impression from interviewees about early years capacity around arts and creativity was more mixed. Some interviewees reported working in early years settings where there was very little skill and understanding in developing children's creative ideas, understanding their experiences in arts and culture, or developing the arts. As mentioned above, in other EY settings, interviewees reported a willingness to develop arts and culture being held back by a lack of confidence, a focus on core skills, and/or needing to dedicate extensive time and effort to basic skills such as getting dressed and eating.

## Arts indoors

Settings collectively are around twice as confident with indoor arts than outdoor arts. This was corroborated by some interviewees, who reported working occasionally in settings where staff had been reluctant to use outdoor spaces and develop outdoor activities, particularly for arts and cultural purposes.

## Health and fitness

Relatedly, a few interviewees described prohibitively low levels of physical fitness with the children they'd encountered in EY

settings, such as children who'd have run out of energy to run around once they'd made the short walk to a park. This was thought to be relatively widespread and not limited to any particular socio-economic grouping, although the NCB has published research showing that inequality between rich and poor children's health is still a major issue undermining children's outcomes.<sup>14</sup>

## Confidence levels in different organisation types

Figure 8 breaks these confidence levels down by type of organisation. It's possible to see here that summary confidence levels are higher across the board in EY settings than arts/cultural organisations, which is partly to be expected as many cultural organisations will have just one or two specialisms where they are most confident.

Notably it is Primary schools that report the least overall confidence in arts-related subjects of the EY settings.

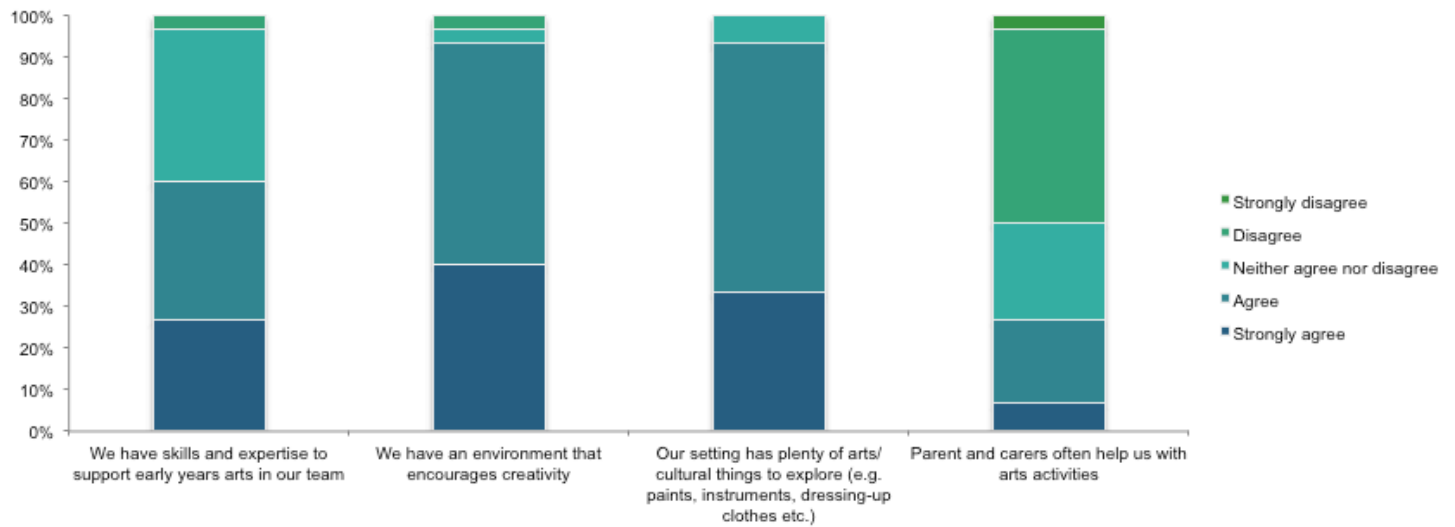
The sample sizes are of course small but Figure 8 also suggests, for instance, that arts/education freelancers on average have a wide range of subject confidences and that music hubs report little confidence outside music (where, arguably, their strengths *should* be concentrated), excepting some digital expertise. Museums, libraries and Music hubs report the lowest levels of confidence in nurturing children's own ideas.

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.ncb.org.uk/news-opinion/news-highlights/pre-school-age-children-their-health-and-development-risk>

## Early years settings: in-house capacity for arts and culture

The survey questions on this page were answered by participants whose organisations were considered early years settings.



**Figure 9 Environment, skills and family support**

(See also the Sankey chart for these data, Figure 18, page 39.)

### **Creative settings needing creative skills development**

The survey data (Figure 9 and Figure 18) show that participating EY settings feel they have good capacity (staff skills, creative environment, objects and resources) to support arts and culture within their settings. Of the three they are slightly less confident in their staff skills.

This finding was corroborated by several interviewees, about the need to help EY settings with understanding how to recognize and develop children's artistic ideas. Interviewees reported that many EY settings have a willingness to engage in creativity and creative learning approaches but are held back by a focus on core skills (numeracy, literacy, language) without seeing how arts and culture could support these agendas. In general, interviewees reported, early years staff have a lack of confidence with creativity and culture. There are also practical barriers, for example in one PVI nursery setting which always preferred to use playdough rather than clay because clay is messier.

### **Engaging families and communities**

Settings report, however that parental engagement is relatively low – 28% agree that parents and carers often help out.

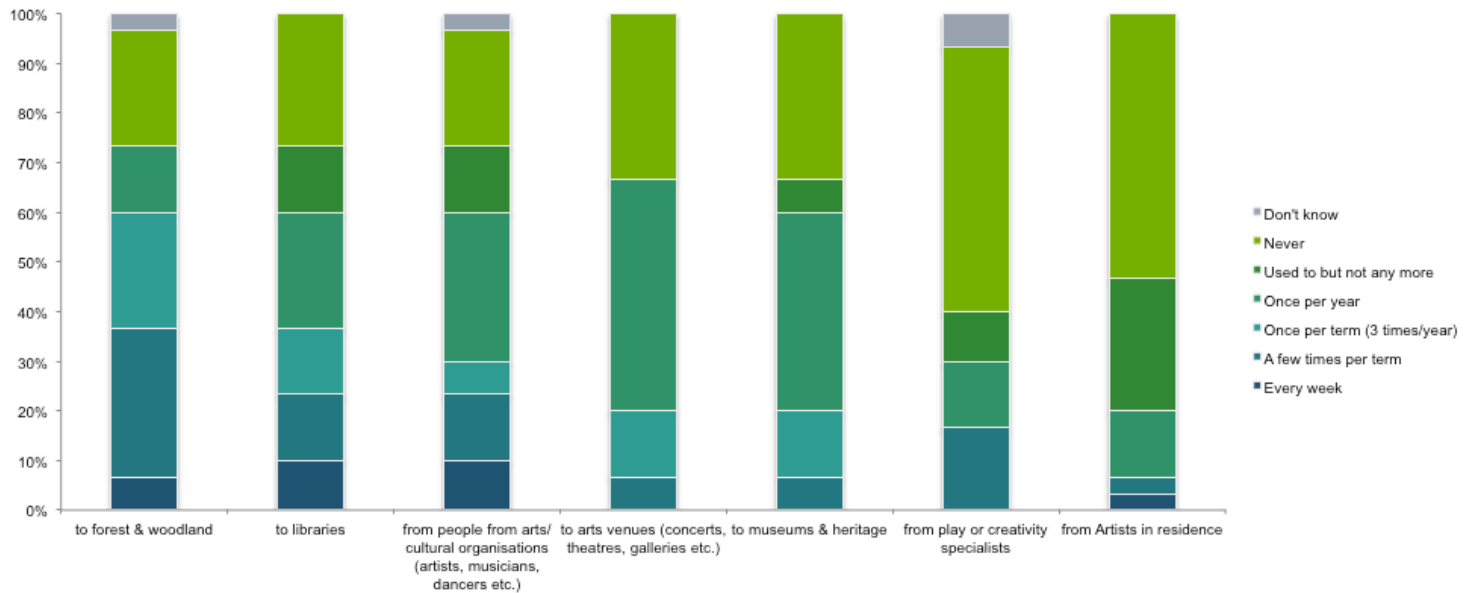
This isn't unusually low, given that most early years settings will be caring for the child while the parents are at work/off-site, but it raises the point made by several interviewees about the significance of engaging families as a whole in arts and cultural work.

### **What about the settings that are struggling?**

As mentioned above, some interviewees reported that some of the settings that they work with are struggling in general, and around arts and culture in particular, with little meaningful arts and cultural activity, or engagement with arts and culture at home. These settings may not be well represented amongst the present survey participants.

## Early years settings: visits to and from outside organisations

The survey questions on this page were answered by participants whose organisations were considered early years settings.



**Figure 10 Early years settings: how often do you take early years children to visit arts and culture venues and experiences, and how often do external people come into your setting?**

(Chart ordered from most to least frequently made visits: forests and woodland are the most visited; artists in residence the least visited. See also the Sankey chart for these data, Figure 19, page 40.)

## Early years settings interacting with arts and cultural organisations: a divided picture

Figure 10 and Figure 19 show the responses of survey participants from early years settings related to visits to and from arts, cultural and other outside organisations. They present a divided picture: around 25% of early years settings participating in this research never take children out to arts and cultural experiences (although some used to) whereas a similar proportion do so regularly.

Figure 19 shows a strong correlation of visit frequency between museums and arts organisations. (e.g. Most of those who visit museums once/year also visit arts organisations once/year.)

Accepting that forest and woodland visits are more common, there is generally a clearly discernible pattern of settings who do visits and those that don't: some settings get involved regularly in various activities, including forests, woodlands, museums, libraries and arts organisations whereas others are much less likely to go out on visits to any listed destination.

The reasons cited for this by interviewees include:

- Settings don't see the value in visiting arts and cultural venues, to the curriculum or to their children
- Settings staff and parents may not have previously had personal positive experiences of arts and culture – experiencing the excitement and interest of visiting arts and cultural settings and will not then consider it as an option for their children – it may simply not be on their mental menu.
- Lack of knowledge of the opportunities, and lack of suitable opportunities at all
- Transport and other logistical issues
- Where settings feel confident in their own arts and cultural offer (which may indeed be excellent) they don't see a sufficient value in paying for outside organisations to complement it.

## Forests, woodlands and libraries are a popular destination

Early years settings do take children out on visits and trips though – particularly to forests and woodlands, which may also include local parks. Over 75% of settings visit forests and woodlands in a year.

Libraries appear to buck the general visiting trend – settings are just as likely to visit libraries (or not) regardless of arts visits, although again, settings that don't go to other destinations often don't go to libraries either.

## The imprint of artists in residence

A reasonable proportion (28%) of settings reported having had an artist in residence previously but not any more – more than those who have one currently. Just under half (48%) have had an artist in residence in the past or present.

## Do settings need outside support or can they develop arts and culture on their own?

Given some of the barriers and obstacles cited in this research around arts and cultural organisations visiting early years settings, and the fact that from the survey and interviews it's clear that many arts and cultural organisations prefer to bring people in to their venues rather than going out to settings, the question of whether settings *need* this outside intervention is a critical one. Below are some of the considerations raised by interviewees:

- In many settings, there are staff, leaders, parents and surrounding communities who provide a highly stimulating and high quality creative, artistic and cultural environment for children without the input of 'specialist' arts and cultural organisations. (Sometimes this will be the legacy of previous arts and cultural interventions.)
- It is often in precisely these settings, where the 'need' is perhaps relatively less, where you find the committed individuals that find a way continually to have the additional support of outside organisations and individuals – i.e. whether 'necessary' or not, it is seen as an integral part of the high quality offer that children deserve.
- In certain cases, sensitive and long-term interventions from arts and cultural organisations, generally working with specialist agencies, can be particularly effective at tackling social and educational challenges (e.g. parenting skills, community cohesion and integration, communication, language, literacy development, behavioural challenges, ADHD, and dyslexia etc.) where other approaches have struggled.
- In many of the settings where arts and culture is not strong, it appears to be chiefly because the staff and leadership lack positive personal experiences of arts and culture of their own, and the confidence and skill to develop it with young children. In these cases, appropriate and high quality face-to-face experiences with outside organisations can be very effective at bringing about change.
- There are certainly approaches to outside interventions that have longer-term sustained post-project impact than others, i.e. that better equip settings to develop arts and culture on their own. Among those cited are: embedding artists in residence within settings for a long period of time; developing settings' staff confidence and skills around arts and culture; developing creative reflection techniques; and giving settings staff arts and cultural experiences themselves.

Overall, then, the answer would be: yes, outside support from arts and cultural organisations is required in cases where it can add significant educational, social, emotional or cultural value to what staff are already providing, and where appropriate, high quality support can be provided, with a view to the long-term sustainability, but also that outside support is considered in many cases the entitlement of the children and the mainstay of high quality early years experiences.

#### **Case study: Visits to Midland Road Nursery School, Bradford**

Midland Road Nursery, and their headteacher Sharon Hogan, have a deep belief in the importance of young children's creativity and cultural experiences. They haven't the funds for a permanent artist in residence so run through the year a series of projects, and pay for the support of artists and creative practitioners with each project. For example, they've had a cello player (who introduced many of the children and staff to the cello for the first time), visits from authors, a Qawwali music group, and visits to art galleries. Their Early Years Pupil Premium-funded dance work was praised by Ofsted.

One recent project involved working with two artists focusing on the local area. The result was a series on metal sculptures on display not far from the City's Football Ground. The project was funded by the Local Authority and was in response to concerns about rubbish left after match days

Sharon, a National Leader for Education, says that central to the quality of their provision for young children is staff understanding the unique nature of children's development, and that any arts activity ought to be about children using media and materials to develop their own ideas and developing skills around them.

[www.midlandroadnursery.org.uk/category/projects-and-events](http://www.midlandroadnursery.org.uk/category/projects-and-events)

#### **Case study: Artists in residence at St Edmunds Nursery School and Children's Centre, Bradford**

St Edmund's is a National Teaching School, inspired by Reggio Emilia practice. They have an artist-in-residence – visual artist and illustrator Lou Sumray – who spends a day per week working with two of the classes, developing the children's ideas in the arts.

As a teaching school, St Edmund's provide paid-for training and consultancy to other schools and nurseries, including visits to their setting and working with Lou.

<http://stedmundsnsc.com/lous-blog/>

#### **Case study: Artists in residence turned governor at McMillan Nursery School, Hull**

McMillan is now the last remaining nursery school in Hull after the other two were closed 3 years ago, and they work in one of Hull's most deprived areas. They have a long-standing interest in arts and culture, having been one of the first early years settings involved in the Creative Partnerships programme from 2002.

They have worked for many years with two artists, initially supported through Creative Partnerships, one of whom, Alex Hallows, is now their Chair of Governors, placing arts and creativity at the center of their governance. They have always embedded artists working in the setting – like artists in residence – working closely with children and staff, each learning from the other's experience to make something relevant for the children. In particular, they have long been interested in drawing, alongside story-telling, but found they had to work hard to develop the confidence of staff to draw in public.

### **Case study: Outdoor cave painting with creative outdoor practitioner Phil Lowde**

Phil Lowde has worked as a creative outdoor practitioner for 12 years (having previously worked in a bank for 27!) working with early years and primary settings on a wide variety of outdoor activities.

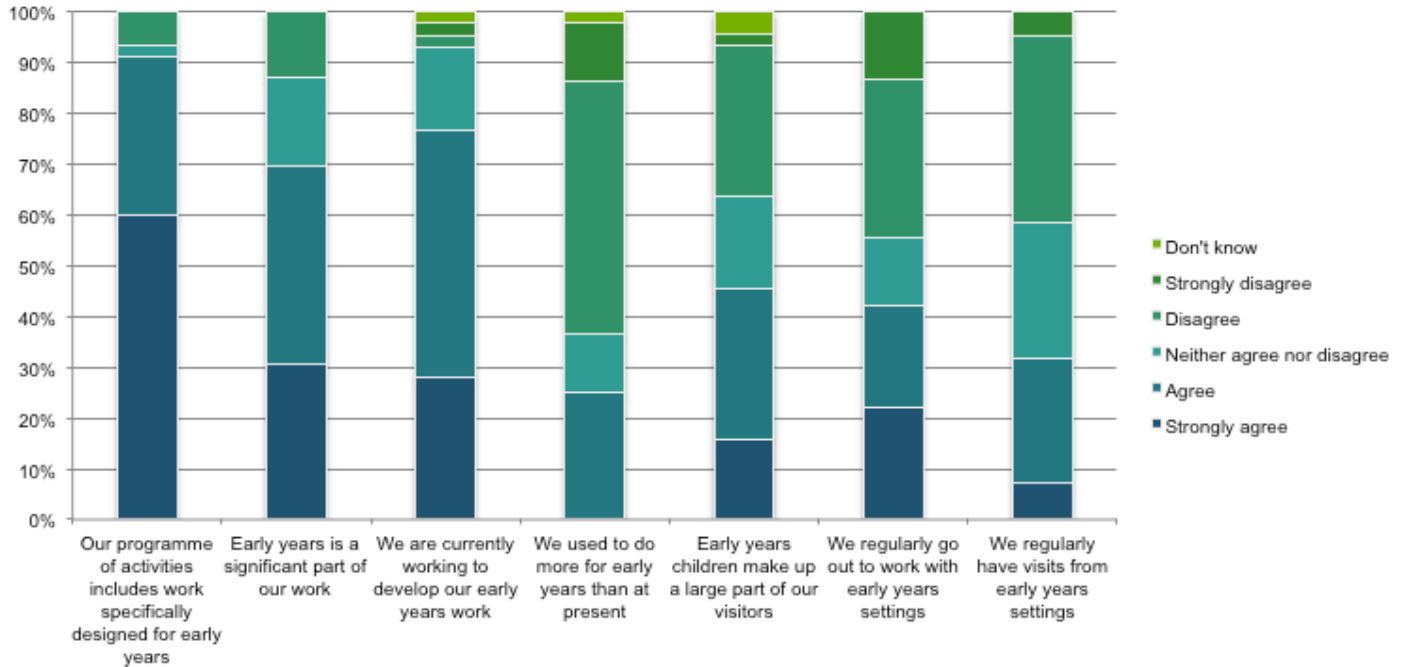
He has recently supported a group of boys in an early years setting who were struggling to focus indoors. They have created an outdoor cave from a willow dome, related to a story about cave painting. The cave is covered in a tarpaulin, keeping it safe from the rain and also dark inside (like a cave). The inside has been lined with a sheet so the boys, dressed up in painting overalls and hoods, can paint on the sheets, and then the sheets can be taken inside and hung on a wall to create a permanent art work.

Outdoor spaces are central to Phil's work, where children are free to move around and not so physically restricted as indoors. Also central, though, is a sense of purpose. The cave work had a purpose – to build a cave, to decorate a cave, to explore a story, to recreate the experience of the cave. He sees this purposefulness as key to the success of getting children to explore their creativity.

[www.bearandlapor.co.uk](http://www.bearandlapor.co.uk)

## Arts and cultural organisations: early years activity

The survey questions on this page were answered by participants whose organisations were considered arts and cultural organisations.



**Figure 11 Early years, family visits and outreach in arts and cultural organisations**

(Ordered in approximate order, left to right, of how frequently participants agree with statement 'in favour' of current early years work. See also the Sankey chart for these data, Figure 20, page 40.)



## Arts and cultural organisations are committed to early years

As Figure 11 shows, the Arts and Cultural organisations participating in this research are committed to early years: the majority of participants' programmes of activity included early years-specific work; they are doing more EY work at present than they have in the past; and are currently developing their EY work. Those who used to do more EY work previously than they do now are still developing EY work. A significant number (18 out of 45) have nominated early years staff (Figure 12).

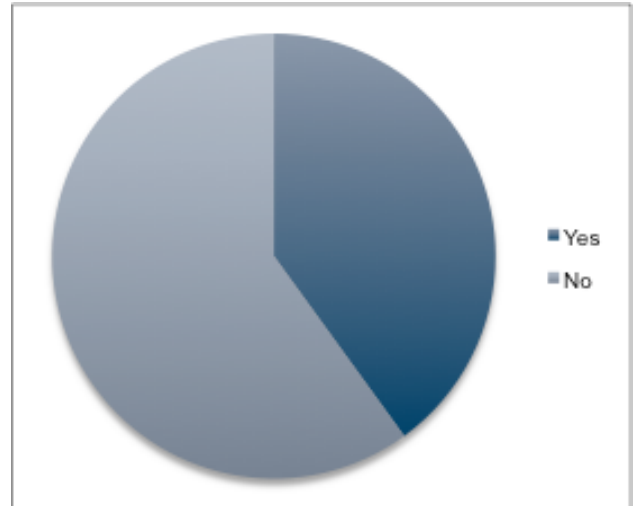
Whilst the majority of participating organisations are committed to EY, the interaction with EY settings – both visits to settings and visits from settings – is more varied. This may be an indication of organisations who either don't know about their EY visitors' provenance or who have mainly family visits, rather than formal early years settings visits.

Figure 20 shows that there is also a reasonable proportion (14%) of respondents for whom EY is a significant part of their work but for whom early years children and families are not currently a significant part of their visitors or outreach. This may be an indication of where arts and cultural organisations could be more responsive to the needs of the early years 'market' whilst still retaining the opportunity and focus on children's rights for arts and culture.

### Case study: Leeds Museums and Galleries taking exhibits to early years settings

Leeds Gallery is running a new project to take full-scale artworks from well-known artists into schools and nurseries. The project includes CPD for settings staff and workshops with parents, children and their communities. The artworks are in the setting for one day (there are plenty of logistics and security issues to consider with often very valuable artworks).

This is an innovative approach to taking gallery work out to communities who would otherwise be unlikely to experience them. They have had some very positive new 'magical' experiences with parents and children alike.



**Figure 12** 'Does your organisation have nominated staff for early years?'

As outlined above, it is reasonable to assume that the participants in this research do not constitute a representative sample of arts and cultural organisations as a whole – i.e. we are probably missing much of the voice of those arts and cultural organisations who are not involved in early years, for whatever reason that may be. (As one possible indicator, the number of participants in the survey from arts and cultural organisations is a small percentage of the total number of arts and cultural organisations who were invited to participate.)

### Case study: Hull City of Culture 16,000 project

As part of Hull's UK City of Culture programme, they are developing the '16,000' project, led by the McMillan Nursery, which will work with every one of 16,000 early years children in the city.

They ran a survey around cultural engagement with parents in the city which revealed that the majority didn't engage with cultural venues at all. So, to take cultural experiences out to communities and early years settings, they are developing a city-wide clay project. There will be training for at least 1 staff member in each of the 200 early years settings in the city, on how to use clay and ideas for supporting children with clay. They are sourcing 1,000s of tonnes of local clay and delivering it to each setting over a 2-week period, during which each child will be asked to come up with some kind of brick that bears the imprint of their ideas and imaginations. These 16,000 bricks will then be used to build installations and structures across the city.

## Aspects of effective practice

The following aspects and characteristics of effective practice in arts and cultural organisations supporting early years were raised by focus group and interview participants.

### **Creating the right spaces**

For museums, galleries and cultural venues, it is important to create the right spaces and environments conducive to young children and their families. Even 'don't touch' can be handled well!

For example, Leeds Gallery have a dedicated Artspace, with a programme of installations and experiences where children and families can interact and explore, often related to exhibitions in the main part of the Gallery.

Eureka! The National Children's Museum, have always involved children themselves in the design of their exhibitions and spaces, and have continued to seek children's opinions and critiques of galleries and spaces over time.

Yorkshire Sculpture Park have worked carefully alongside families from a wide variety of backgrounds, including those traditionally unlikely to visit the park, to design, to designate and to signpost spaces and places that will be appropriate, appealing and safe for young children and their families.

### **Understanding children's own experiences**

Several interviewees cited observational research work looking carefully at the nature of children's experiences in museums, galleries and venues, from the perspective of the child, as distinct from adults' assumptions of children's experiences, or adults' hopes about what those experiences might be. (See case study below.)

### **Don't dumb down: build up from children's ideas**

Interviewees described the importance of making arts and cultural experiences appropriate for young children (carefully considering their experiences, as above) and of not dumbing them down. Interviewees also cited the value in pedagogical approaches, such as Reggio Emilia,<sup>15</sup> that are rooted in understanding and developing children's own ideas in arts and culture, as opposed to using arts and cultural experiences principally to 'educate' young children about existing objects, ideas and artforms.

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.reggiochildren.it/identita/reggio-emilia-approach/?lang=en>

## Case study: Humber Museums observation toolkit for museums practitioners'

As part of their Major Partner Museums funding, the Humber Museums Partnership recognized the potential to develop their work in early years and made this a core part of the funding programme.

In the first year of the programme they undertook extensive research with families and communities to understand better how those communities did, or didn't, engage with museums and other cultural activities.

They worked with early years researcher Abigail Hackett from the University of Sheffield (now at Manchester Metropolitan University) to develop a framework to help museums staff observe, understand and evaluate museum practices and experiences from the perspective of young children: The APSE framework (Abstract, Physical, Social, Embodied).

The framework looks at young children's experiences from a wide variety of angles. For example, in looking at touch, Hull's Deep Aquarium found that for young children the sensation of touching aquarium glass was very significant, even though they weren't touching the sea creatures. In looking at spaces and movement, the framework considers whether a space invokes fast or slow movement, or dwelling and keeping still. In looking at social experiences, it considers how young children interact with each other, and with adults, in a particular space, as distinct from how they interact with the space itself, or the objects in a museum.

In developing and deploying the framework, a growing collection of museums and cultural venues are better understanding, and then enhancing, their spaces, collections and experiences for young children and families.

<https://northlincslearning.wordpress.com/>

### **Value for money**

Several participants talked about the importance of value for money. Experiences don't have to be free to audiences/participants (although for some audiences and communities they do, at least at first, and funding is a very common barrier for arts and cultural work) but they do have to be considered good value for money. For example:

- a drama offer to early years settings might need to be clear on the potential outcomes across the curriculum;
- if parents aren't familiar with a gallery, museum or arts venue and what it offers, the organisation will have to consider carefully how they can communicate value.

Equally, there are many different ways in which arts and cultural organisations can bring value to new audiences,

including some unusual ones, such as York Theatre Royal using its marketing department staff to help Primary children with persuasive writing and communicating with an audience.

### **Preparatory engagement for performances and exhibits**

Many interviewees described the importance of preparatory work with audiences and participants prior to a performance. This might include toolkits, video training, co-design and participatory workshops etc. They also described the difficulty experienced in persuading settings to pay for this preparatory work, whereas they are more happy to pay for the performance itself. Others have suggested this might be more of a marketing challenge: packaging workshops as an integral part of the performance experience.

### **Research-based practice**

Several interviewees cited the significance in rooting early years arts and cultural practice in research:

- having a research focus and a research question can help focus arts and cultural work and ensure it meets an identified need or purpose related to its stakeholders;
- research processes, such as action research, can be highly effective, if not critical, in developing quality of practice;
- it can be a requirement of funders and funding;
- it can help to generate evidence of the impact of work that can be used to leverage subsequent funding and partnership development.

For example, Manasamitra, a South Asian music development organisation, has worked with several universities to understand and evaluate the impact of their work with lullabies. And Yorkshire Sculpture Park has worked for several years with evaluator Annabel Jackson on a critical assessment of their engagement with families in areas of economic deprivation. (See case studies below.)

### **Working with families and communities**

Engaging with families and communities is one of the core issues and challenges emerging throughout this research. It can be a complicated issue, encompassing:

- The fact that early years children don't tend to go anywhere without their parents and carers, including early years settings and arts and cultural venues. They adults are, by and large, the client; depending on the context, they are also sometimes half of the participants.
- This means that working with early years is often as much about working with parents and families – getting to know them, supporting, listening, empowering, entertaining them etc. – as it is the children. This is a particular feature of early years work.
- Where there are issues between parent and child (e.g. a parent with particular aspirations for their child, or a parent with very little positive parenting skill) these issues can

become the direct focus, or preoccupation, of an arts/cultural intervention.

Judging by responses from research participants, working successfully with parents can be a very common challenge of early years arts and culture but also, invariably, a powerful one if managed successfully. SoundCastle, a music social enterprise working nationally, have written a series of blog posts on engaging parents.<sup>16</sup>

### **Case study: York Theatre Royal – how do you create a 50-foot Rapunzel's tower?**

Alongside work with young children that focused on drama, acting and role-play, York Theatre Royal wanted to include in their workshop programme a focus on other elements of putting on a play, including set and stage design: as well as the narrative within a drama, the narrative of theatre making.

For example, in a young children's theatre piece around the Rapunzel story, they worked with children on how you could create the impression of a 50-foot tower (without actually having one!). They helped children to explore critically and practically their own ideas about how they could make a tower, and the impression of height.

After the workshops, children had a much greater empathy with the theatre piece when they saw the show – 'Oh, we did that too!' – which made it more engaging and exciting. They also developed an understanding of how physically you can transpose ideas into tangible reality, without 'literal' representations.

<sup>16</sup> <http://network.youthmusic.org.uk/groups/early-years-music-making/discussions/multi-agency-working-engage-parents>

### **Case study: Music in the Round commissioning programme**

Around 60% of Music in the Round's learning and participation work is with early years and Key Stage 1 pupils. They have run for a number of years a young children's commissioning programme where they commission a new piece of music aimed at 3–7-year-olds, working with children's composer-in-residence Paul Rissmann. With the commission at the centre, the approach is to support early years settings to develop their own music-making capacity and to provide participatory experiences for the children, ultimately ending, in many cases, with a participatory performance of the work.

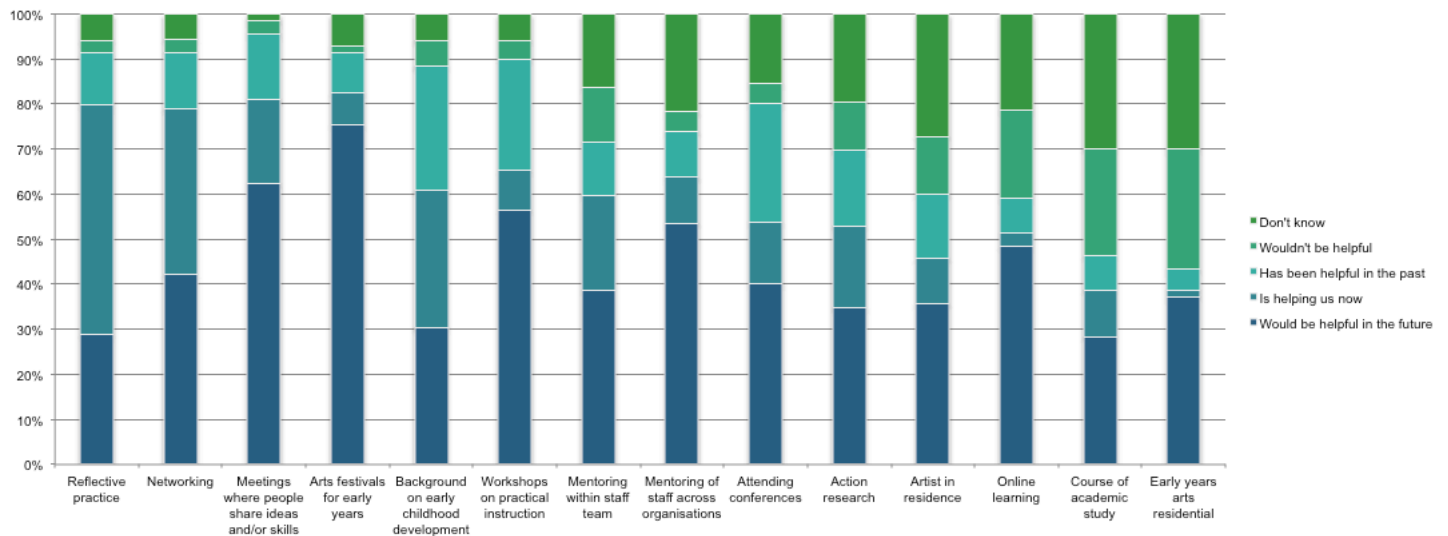
Through Youth Music and other funding, they support early years and school practitioners through a programme of immersive face-to-face training, downloadable pdf resources, audio tracks, YouTube how-to videos, and the option of paid-for workshops. The programme has run for a number of years and now reaches 10,000s of young children.

A central aspect of their mission is to make musical experiences accessible to people for whom it is not otherwise. To achieve this, they work with a range of partner organisations to go to meet, understand, align with and support particular communities, groups and early years settings. These partners include the Every Sheffield Child Articulate and Literate (ESCAL) programme in the local authority, the Sheffield Music Hub, the early years teams in Children and Young People's Services departments, particularly in Rotherham and Doncaster. They have also worked closely alongside a similar programme in the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham.

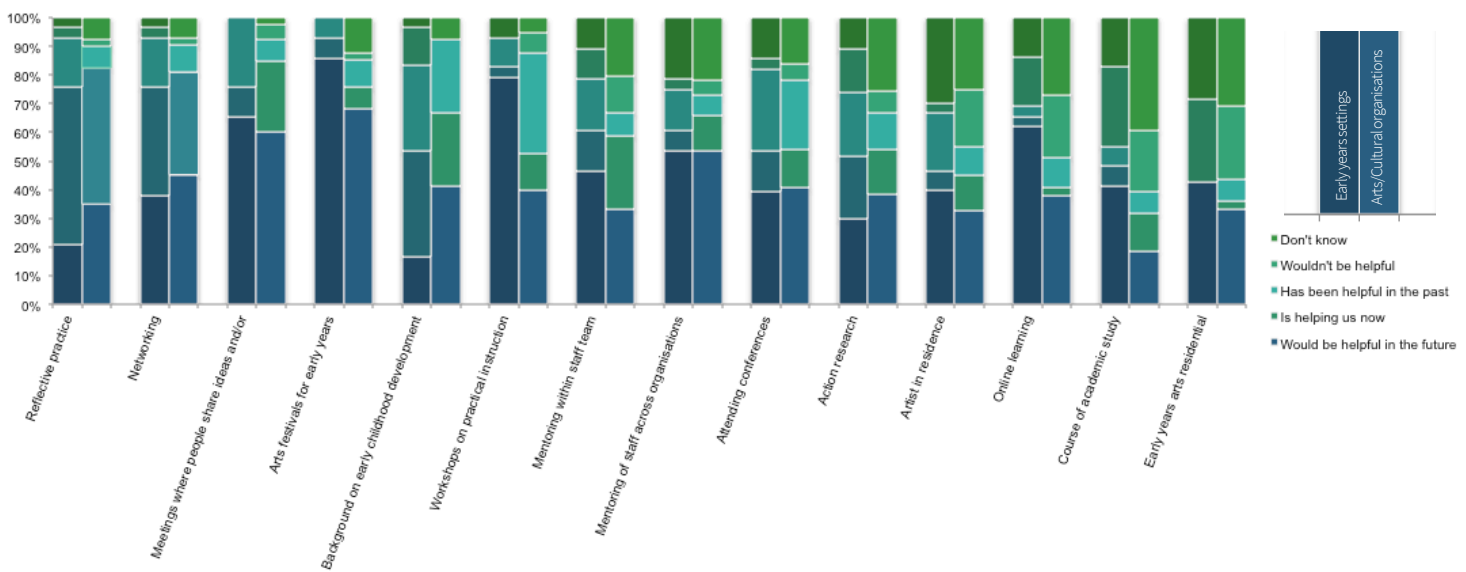
Evaluations of their work have found that it greatly increases early years practitioners' confidence and skills in music and that that their contribution to enriching arts and culture in early years settings increases levels of aspiration, creativity, emotional health and well-being, and shared experiences across the setting and communities.

# Developing skills and know-how

## CPD for early years arts and culture



**Figure 13** 'CPD for early years arts and culture – what's helpful for you?' (ordered left to right by overall helpfulness)



**Figure 14** CPD helpfulness segmented by EY setting/Arts and Culture organisations

## What CPD is helpful?

We asked survey participants what forms of CPD they found helpful (past, present and potential future) around early years arts and culture, with the findings shown in Figure 13 and Figure 14.

The most popular was developing reflective practice, which is more widely used, according to the survey data, in early years settings than arts and cultural organisations. Developing skills in, and making time for, reflective practice is widely seen as central and critical to effective practice in developing young children's artistic and cultural abilities and opportunities. It's worth adding that 'reflective practice' may be interpreted differently by early years and arts and cultural organisations. Reflective practice is required by Ofsted in settings so there's plenty of training on how to 'do' it – proper observations, assessment and regulatory paperwork – although, anecdotally, there is still little sharing of insights between professionals. Whereas in arts and cultural organisations, reflective practice is often more akin to action research and sharing ideas in response to children's actions.

The second most commonly requested CPD was around networking and sharing ideas, something backed up in the focus group and interviews. The focus group also rounded on networking as a solution to many of the challenges in developing early years arts and culture but also on the importance of networking opportunities being focused, targeted and appealing. Networking is discussed more fully below.

In this light, both the focus group and the survey participants were strongly behind the idea of arts festivals for early years, which could double up as opportunities for networking and practice-sharing.<sup>17</sup>

## Co-learning

Many interviewees flagged the success of co-working and co-learning arrangements, for example, artists in residence are seen as being very effective for developing practitioners' practice sustainably over time, when the artists and settings practitioners are working closely together.

## Immersive, creative, artistic CPD experiences

Asked about what made CPD for early years arts and culture successful, a majority of interviewees said that getting practitioners to experience doing things themselves, and being in the position of the child, was very effective, including for getting over the 'I can't draw, I can't sing, I'm not creative' hurdle.

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<sup>17</sup> Earlyarts have a calendar of theatre festivals for early years, some of which are broader arts festivals as well: <http://earlyarts.co.uk/free-resources/festivals-for-children-and-families/>

After these initial experiences, soundLINCS and Opera North gave a framework for consolidation and development:

- encourage participants to reflect on what they've done and learnt in the initial, practical experience
- then work out how they could deploy and apply it in their work, in their setting, in their context
- then get them to track progress and impact over time.

Yorkshire Sculpture park also described the importance of 'bookending' CPD with an introduction day at the beginning, to open minds to the possibilities, and a sharing day at the end, to help people reflect on what they'd learnt and focus on what they could do next.

## Working with EY ITE

Interviewees suggested the potential value in working with Initial Teacher Education (ITE) for early years, because it can be hard for ITE students to get good quality creative experiences as part of some courses, and these early-career experiences can have a formative influence. It's worth clarifying that 'ITE' in early years is very different from Primary, where it is more consistent and regulated, around PGCE and QTS. There is not the same standardised ITE for early years and over recent years there have been various approaches to develop one, including Early Years Teacher Status, Early Years Professional status, and Early Years Educator. Many universities are struggling to fill places for EYTS – most settings do not have the funding to employ a qualified teacher (unless they're a primary school).

## Offering out your CPD

Several organisations, both early years settings and arts/cultural organisations, run CPD with their staff (e.g. around children's ideas, child development, understanding of social issues, and creative pedagogies) but do not offer this training for external people.

In many cases, offering out such training could provide a relatively straightforward opportunity, not least because several research participants raised the issue of insufficient high-quality CPD, although it will not be straightforward for many early years settings to fund course fees or staff cover.

## Workforce issues

Interviewees cited issues around workforce retention, including high staff turnover (especially in PVI early years settings and museum/gallery floor staff). Staff retention, lack of professional status and movement of expert qualified practitioners into other areas of education (e.g. Primary) are all common issues in early years work nationally.

### Case study: Manasamitra's research-based practice

Manasamitra, based in Dewsbury, develop a range of South Asian arts experiences in Yorkshire and internationally. All of their projects are research-led – with a research question and often a university or other research partnership in each case.

For example, they have been running for several years music, theatre and dance work with early years families and settings around bees – exploring bees and the environment. As part of this programme, they've worked with neuroscientists and anthropologists at the University of Brisbane, Australia, to look at how the brain reacts to lullabies, and an obstetrics researcher at a university in Sweden on the impact of lullabies with neonates. They're looking at which parts of the brain are activated and how long the memory lasts, looking also at the impact for a child of the mother's voice. (For instance, is it that actual mother's voice that is significant, or the lilting nature of lullaby singing that has particular effects?)

For Manasamitra artists, these research partnerships are central to how they develop their practice, how they learn about effective ways of working with families and communities, how they find out new things about the impacts of their work and how, therefore, they find new purposes to which they can apply arts and culture for positive societal outcomes.

[www.manasamitra.com](http://www.manasamitra.com)

### Case study: NYMAZ network

NYMAZ have been running their early years music network in North Yorkshire for five years. Working across the huge expanses of the area (a three-hour drive from East to West), the network supports over 300 individuals and organisations representing freelance musicians, early years settings, childminders, arts organisations, franchises and others. The network is operated by four partner organisations in York, Catterick, Whitby and Harrogate. There is a small charge for membership of the network. They consult frequently with members on what is needed, and the network programme includes online resources, printed resource packs, face-to-face training, conferences, networking events and an offer for observation and mentoring sessions.

They've had particularly favourable responses to their mentoring programme, in which the network members go to early years settings to mentor the setting around their music and related work. Many settings find this very empowering: they've never before had someone with expertise coming to help them understand the strengths and weakness of their practice.

[www.nymaz.org.uk/for-professionals/earlyyears](http://www.nymaz.org.uk/for-professionals/earlyyears)

# Needs

This distillation of needs for the region around the development of early years arts and culture is a combination of needs cited by research participants and our overall analysis of the findings from the research.

## Young children's artistic and cultural experiences

Of course, the most fundamental need is around the development of more, better, and more meaningful artistic and cultural experiences and opportunities for young children.

Related to this, and often cited by interviewees, is the need to look deeply and openly at the nature of children's own artistic and cultural experiences, for example:

- to examine how they play out their artistic curiosity with the objects and sensations around them
- to communicate with them about their artistic ideas and cultural understandings
- to explore with them how they perceive things, how they play and how they experience things (artistic, cultural or otherwise)
- to move away from deficit models – 'these children don't get any culture or have any artistic ideas and so need some' – towards valuing and developing what they do have and looking at how other, existing, artistic and cultural opportunities can enrich their lives.

## Networking of people, know-how and developing an on-going understanding of effective practice

The value of and need for better networking was often cited during this research. As an indication, through the research process itself we were able to put several different organisations in contact with each other where their work was of relevance.

A few interviewees also expressed a need for a means of valuing, measuring and meaningfully understanding quality of practice in developing early years arts and culture, such as an Artsmark-equivalent for early years. Such a tool would also enable the formation of a more accurate picture of strengths and challenges across the region, as we have noted as being difficult otherwise to establish

## Understanding needs of communities

There is a need and an opportunity, perhaps for arts and cultural organisations in particular, to understand better the audiences, participants and communities with which they hope to engage. Several interviewees described the positive

outcomes that had been achieved once they worked strategically and communicatively to understand community needs better, including:

- better and more sustained participation of families, children and settings in arts and cultural work,
- better quality of work, more engaging for participants,
- better understanding of the impact of arts and cultural work on its participants and beneficiaries,
- better understanding of their own work,
- access to funding, commissioning and other resources,
- fuller appreciation of the role of arts and culture not just as performance of art and presentation of knowledge or heritage, but also as the medium of cultural discourse and artistic / social development.

This need won't be met by isolated organisations – it is likely to need concerted effort. As an indication of this, several research participants were very open that their knowledge of the landscape and community around them was nothing like as extensive as their knowledge of their own work directly. This is often the case: it is not often an organisation's, or a staff member's responsibility to know about other organisations and who they work for, and this can become increasingly the case when financial pressures increase.

There is a role for umbrella bodies, such as teaching schools, ACE Bridge Organisations, Ofsted, Local Authorities, Academy chains and arts/cultural funders to support early years settings and arts/cultural organisations with needs analysis:

- either through the provision of data and information
- or with tools for gathering this themselves and incentives to do so

In addition, interviewees suggested the following for building a better understanding of community needs:

- starting up conversations with the communities you want to understand better, and keeping it going;
- working with specialist agencies and universities/researchers;
- going out to the communities you wish to engage, rather than finding ways to get them to come to you;
- developing your work within communities, rather than for communities.

## Reaching the unusual suspects

Related to the need better to understand communities, is the often cited need for arts and cultural activities to reach new



audiences – the ‘unusual suspects’ – and various findings in this research reflect this need.

Research participants offered several insights and experiences, including:

- New engagement can be a long and slow process. For example, Opera North took three years to reach a tipping point in developing musical skills in early years settings when settings really ‘got it’ and began to spread practice themselves.
- Seeing is believing – you have to find a way to get people through the door. For example, Northern Ballet take a lot of dance work out into schools and EY settings, where they’ve successfully engaged new BAME communities.
- Word of mouth is key – in lifting barriers and also in developing relationships – don’t bother emailing people – you have to speak to them personally.
- Find the warm connections and develop them but make sure you make a mark on the organisation / setting as a whole quite quickly because individuals, particularly the more driven ones, move on regularly and take their contacts with them.
- Be careful how you market your opportunities: various organisations reported being careful about promoting certain targeted opportunities so as not to be overwhelmed with ‘usual suspects’ who participate widely.
- Be innovative and respectful. For example, Manasamitra used bees to develop relationships in muslim communities reluctant to be involved in music-making. Bees hum – now they have a bee choir!

### **Case study: Yorkshire Sculpture Park working with families**

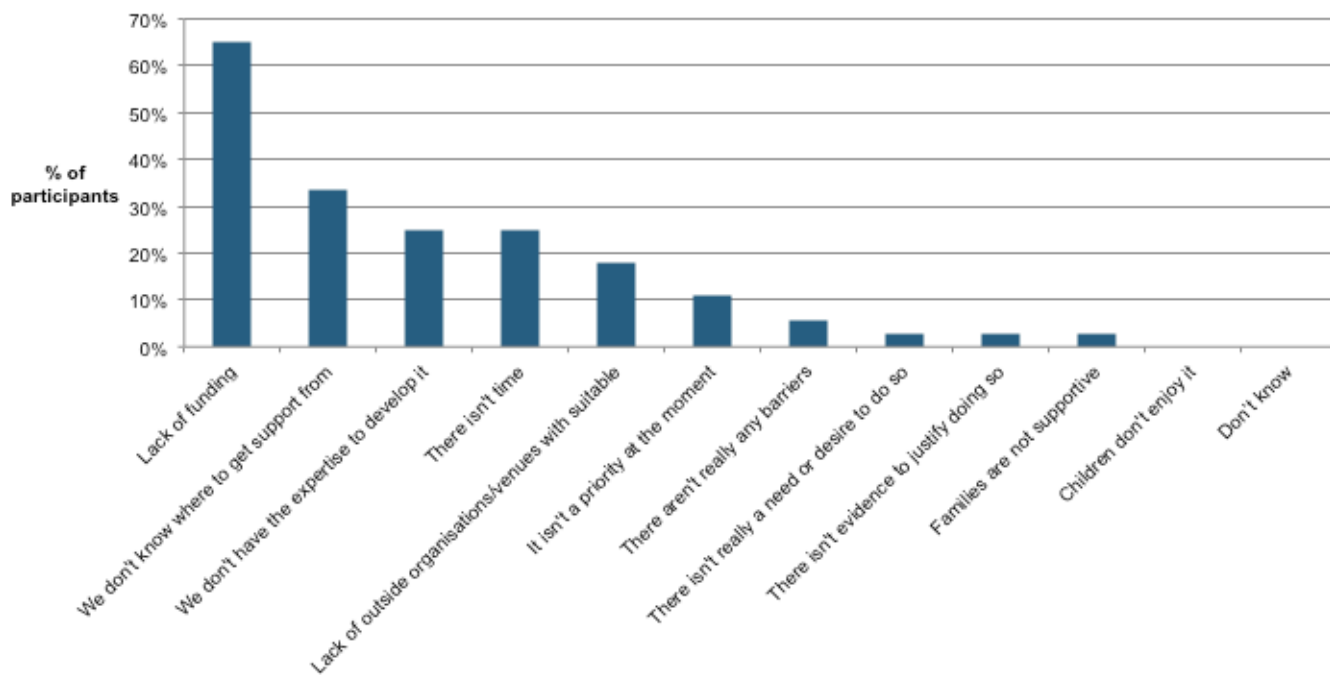
Yorkshire Sculpture Park recognized that they had potential to develop significantly their work around early years and were successful in getting funding from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation to run a three-year action research project on early years and family learning.

The project is looking at what the park can do to help families in challenging circumstances, particularly working with those at risk of having children taken into social care, with children who are very under-developed, sometimes with only very minimal communication between parent and child. It has involved working closely with local authority departments, a professional evaluator, and with 6 nurseries in Wakefield and 8 families over an extended period of time. For each family, YSP work with 1 parent/carer and 1 child, 1 local authority representative and 1 member of a staff from the early years setting.

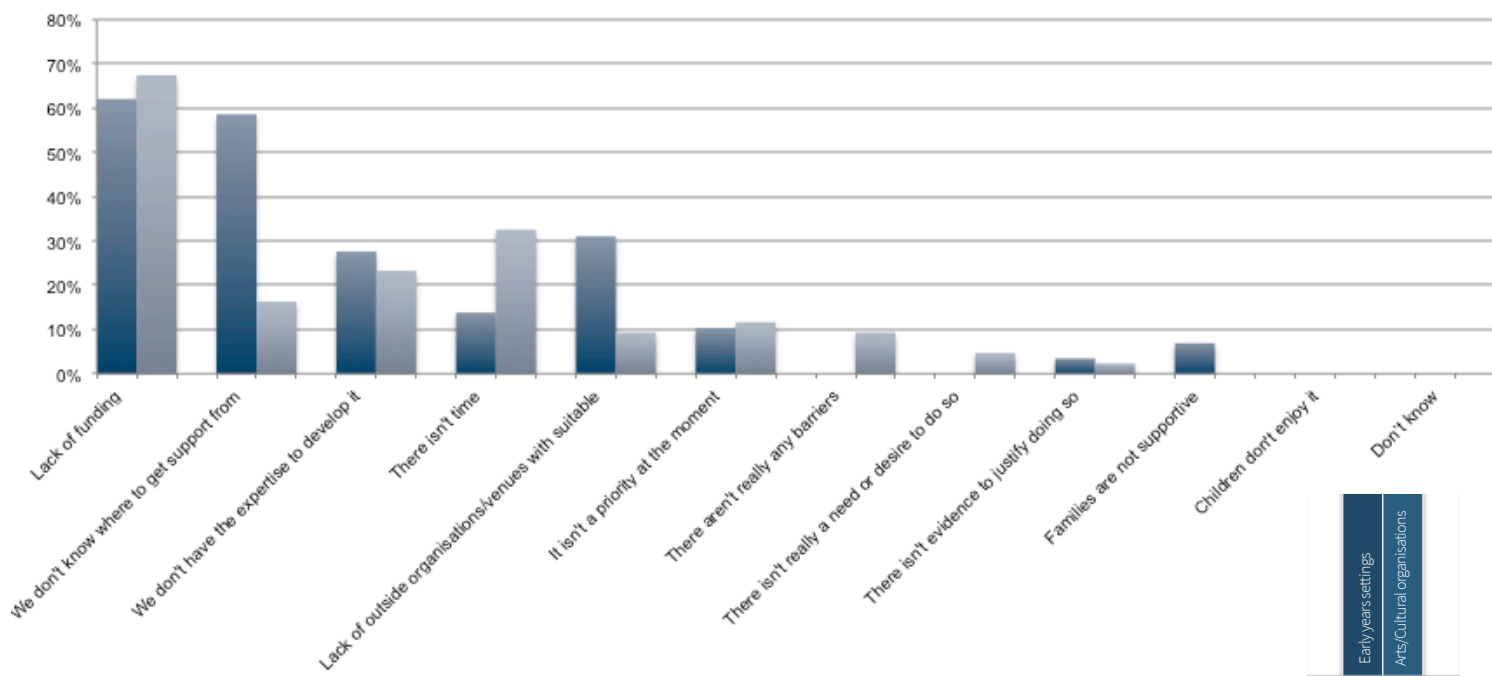
The work with families is very responsive, experimental, respectful and attentive, working very carefully with parents/carers and their children with the resources and experiences of the park, and in local settings. Through gentle creative approaches, they have worked with families on parenting techniques, understanding and developing children’s play, on parent—child understanding and parent—child communication and other issues.

What might be special about working a setting like YSP, as distinct from other social and community approaches? They have found that the strength lies in their ability to work with and in the park, to use careful non-intrusive and respectful creative practice, and to work alongside the families with early years specialists. Through this combination, they have, sometimes after long periods, developed very positive relationships with the families, providing a positive praise-oriented, non-judgmental place of sanctuary and safety. Families have not felt that the project team were ‘coming to *work* with them’, as they might have done around social services, for instance. They have provided a safe outdoor space, helping parents to connect with their children and rediscover their play. At times, the project has effectively been teaching parenting skills but never in a classroom environment, which many parents might have rejected or felt was putting them back to school.

# Barriers



**Figure 15** 'What would you say are the main barriers to developing early years arts and culture?'



**Figure 16** Funding barriers segmented by early years setting / arts and cultural organisation

## Money, contacts, priorities

Figure 15 and Figure 16 present survey findings on the most commonly cited barriers to developing early years arts and culture.

For early years settings, these are funding (although slightly less a barrier than for arts/cultural organisations) and not being able to identify opportunities and expertise.

For arts and cultural organisations, the main barriers are lack of funding, expertise and time/priority.

Below are some of the ways research participants have encountered, and solved, these and other barriers

## Funding, and sustained funding

Funding is a central challenge in early years arts and culture, and particularly when working with communities and audiences who will not, or cannot, pay for it themselves. Funding is also a particular challenge in developing the long-term interventions that, in many cases, have the greatest impact and also research-based approaches.

Funding can sometimes be a barrier to arts and cultural organisations working in early years settings, where funding requirements, or other departments in the organisation, wish to prioritise increasing visitor numbers to a venue over taking the venue's work outside.

Many organisations have found solutions to resource scarcity by working with others and pooling resources:

- McMillan Nursery School, Hull, has been working alongside a local secondary school both to use their theatre facilities and also acting as a client for the creative media students, who are making film resources for the nursery.
- Rotherham cultural services are developing relationships with other council services to share resources and expertise.
- Manasamitra's experiences in Dewsbury have been that where a school or EY setting tries to do a project on their own with artists, it is funding dependent, but where they work with other contributors, including in-kind, there can be less reliance on a single source and greater sustainability.

Various early years settings across the country have used Early Years Pupil Premium funding to cover costs of arts and cultural work that helps Pupil Premium children, and other children at the same time.

- For example, Midland Road Nursery School Bradford were recently praised by their Ofsted HMI about their EYPP-funded dance work, which has also been promoted by the local authority for its impacts on the children. The inspector wrote, "you and the Governing body have ensured that those children eligible for the EY pupil premium funding

received the teaching and support they needed to catch up quickly. You have used this EYPP funding innovatively through dance and outdoor play."

Some early years settings have been successful in getting local business funding:

- For example, primary and nursery head teachers are looking to local businesses and parents, instead of funders, to support music and dance work with Manasamitra. They note that it can be hard work getting commercial support.

## Lack of experience of the arts

Several research participants suggested that where early years settings are not supportive of arts and culture, in many cases it is because the leaders and staff have themselves not had positive experiences in the arts. It's important in these cases not to be judgmental of people who 'don't get it', but, in one interviewee's words, 'instead it's a quest to awaken that passion and knowledge.'

## Lack of know-how and connectivity

Lack of awareness of opportunities, signposting, effective communications and networking of people and know-how are all commonly cited barriers.

- One potential solution is the Cultural Education Partnerships approach, which is being developed in 10 locations across the region. In some locations, where dedicated individuals have ensured early years has a presence, these are developing effectively. In other locations, the potential is seen but the partnerships are still at an early stage.
- Successful networks in the region are described below.

## Cultural offer not appropriate or appealing to families and communities

This is a barrier cited frequently by focus group and interview participants. As part of this barrier:

- arts/cultural organisations have found that communities' pre-conceptions of what arts and culture (performances, galleries, museums etc.) entails are a first and final hurdle: families, in particular, don't get as far as finding out what the offer is or why they'd want it.
- Families report feeling that arts and cultural experiences are alien and unfamiliar to them, and that they don't feel comfortable. Organisations such as Eureka and Square Chapel, Halifax, work very carefully on the initial welcome, as well as subsequent interactions, to address this.

We've described some of the needs and challenges above and some of the proposed solutions at the end of the report.

### **Conducive places and spaces for young children**

Many interviewees described the significance of getting the place and space right especially for young children and their families. Examples of particular approaches to this challenge are given on page 26.

### **Complexities of working in early years**

Various barriers are cited that are associated particularly with early years.

The complexity of the early years sector as a whole (see page 9) is sometimes seen as a hurdle for arts and cultural organisations, compared, for instance, to the relative uniformity of primary and secondary schools.

Interviewees cited challenges in long-term programmes around the irregular attendance of, for example, families at drop-in events and young children regularly changing their minds about what they want to do.

### **Lack of understanding of young children and children's ideas, behaviours and experiences**

This is cited commonly by early years and arts/cultural interviewees as being a barrier to the development of high quality work in both early years settings and arts and cultural organisations. It is discussed elsewhere in this report, including in the recommendations.

### **Lack of time – other priorities**

This was cited as a barrier for local authorities, early years settings and arts/cultural organisations.

### **Uncommitted leadership**

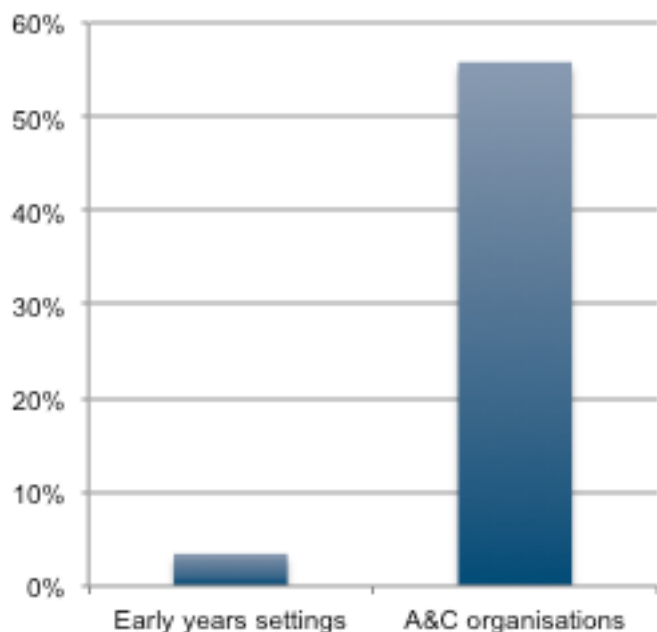
In this research and comparable research in other regions we have heard repeatedly that where leaders and instigators believe in early years arts and culture, they will generally find a way to make it happen. The flip side is also true and several research participants said that getting work off the ground, and sustaining it, is very difficult unless the leaders and decision-makers can be brought along with the process and see its benefits. (If Ofsted were to identify 'creative and cultural approaches to delivering the curriculum' in its requirements, leaders would be immediately on board and all this would dramatically change.)

### **Rural isolation**

In particular areas, such as North Yorkshire and North Lincolnshire, rural isolation is a primary barrier:

- often people in rural areas are particularly unaccustomed to travelling long distances to arts/cultural experiences
- there are often few facilities/venues within easy distances
- transportation costs and logistics for families and children can be high and demanding.

# Networking know-how and resources



**Figure 17 % survey participants citing membership of a network for arts and culture / early years**

56% (24) of survey participants from arts and cultural organisations said they were involved in networks related to early years.

3% (1) of survey participants from early years settings said they were involved in networks related to arts and culture.

(This should not be read as meaning that early years staff are not involved in networking, but that they're not involved in arts and culture-specific networking. There are several support networks for early years professionals, including PACEY regional networks, the NDNA, TACTYC and many local authorities run early years professional networks.)

## What networks exist (and who uses them)?

The following networks were cited by research participants.

- Book Trust
- Breeze Leeds
- Early years teams in local authorities
- Earlyarts
- Festivals relevant to early years arts and culture:
  - Little Feet, York
  - Child-Friendly Leeds initiative
  - Family Arts Festival
  - National Play Day
  - Hull city of culture
- Forest Schools networks in various sub-regional areas
- GEM and Engage networks in Yorkshire for museums
- Include network
- Leeds Artsforms Early Years network, Leeds (participation varies; cited by 9 survey participants)
- Leeds EYFS practitioners
- Local Children's Centre Council Services
- Local Cultural Education partnerships being developed in 10 areas across the region by CapeUK
- Major Portfolio Museums network (national network of MPM institutions)
- Manchester Museums and Galleries Early Years partnership
- NYMAZ Early Years Music Network (running for 5 years, supporting 300 individuals and organisations)
- Regional Dance Development network – Yorkshire Dance
- SNAP Sheffield for arts and cultural organisations working with children and young people
- South Yorkshire Early Years Music network, being set up by Music in the Round
- The Arts Barge
- West Yorkshire Family Arts Network
- Yorkshire Federation of Museums and Galleries
- Youth Music Network (online)

# Strategic focus

We asked focus group and interview participants, if organisations and individuals committed to developing early years arts and culture were to come together across the region, to work together for sustained change at scale, what three things should they focus on for maximum impact?

Below is a distillation of the results.

## **Festivals and targeted networking**

There was a convergence on the need for better networking: not necessarily for a new network (there are plenty listed above) but for something that would be a bit different, which would be fun, which would aim to communicate to the 'unconverted' the value of early years arts and culture. A common suggestion was around a festival, or festivals, of early years arts and culture. The list of networks above includes potential existing festivals that could be joined.

Big family festivals are not the same thing as professional networking opportunities, and there is a perceived need for the latter as well, but the suggestion around fun, focus, celebration, and artistry remains! The very low statistics presented in Figure 17 around early years settings' involvement in arts/cultural networks suggest that careful consideration and consultation should be devoted to how best to be useful to early years settings, working with their needs and aspirations.

## **Action learning, co-working and understanding children's creativity**

Professional development was a core part of most people's recommendations. There is of course a huge range of subjects, skills and practices around early years arts and culture but central to them is really understanding child development, the nature of children's experiences, and their creative ideas and how to develop them.

The professional learning itself should, in most cases, be immersive, creative and participatory for the participants. It should help participants to be able to understand and support children's progress and attainment. It should build carefully on the individual strengths of early years practitioners, artists, families and children, and it should include initial teacher education in its scope.

To maximize the sustained impact, it is also suggested that this professional development should be based on co-working between arts/cultural and early years practitioners, and that it should be based on action learning and action research processes.

## **Developing places and spaces**

A great deal of research and experience has now been built up, much of it in Yorkshire and the Humber, around conducive and effective spaces and places for early years cultural learning. Spreading this know-how more widely is partly a question of practice-sharing and, possibly, consultancy but there is also potential for a set of joint funding applications from venues and settings, in partnership with local businesses and suppliers, to renovate and refine existing cultural spaces and places, fit for the 21<sup>st</sup>-century creative young learner.

## **Engaging with families and communities**

It was widely suggested that there needs to be support for arts, cultural and early years organisations in engaging and working with families and communities. There is a variety of forms this could take, including:

- tools for early years settings to use to share and develop their children's creative work and an understanding of it;
- practice-sharing about effective ways to co-design effective approaches and projects with families and communities, including building up long-term relationships, and pragmatic ways of taking the work of institutions and venues into early years settings;
- data and intelligence for arts/cultural and early years organisations about the communities with which they hope to engage, and research tools for gathering this information themselves;
- help for organisations, possibly peer-to-peer mentoring, to critically reflect on how their programmes of activity are designed for, with and by the communities with whom they wish to engage, and who stand to benefit.

## **Partnership development**

On a more local level, there should be support for the development of well-built, well-run, well-focused cross-sectoral partnerships, such as the Local Cultural Education Partnerships, with specific attention paid to early years.

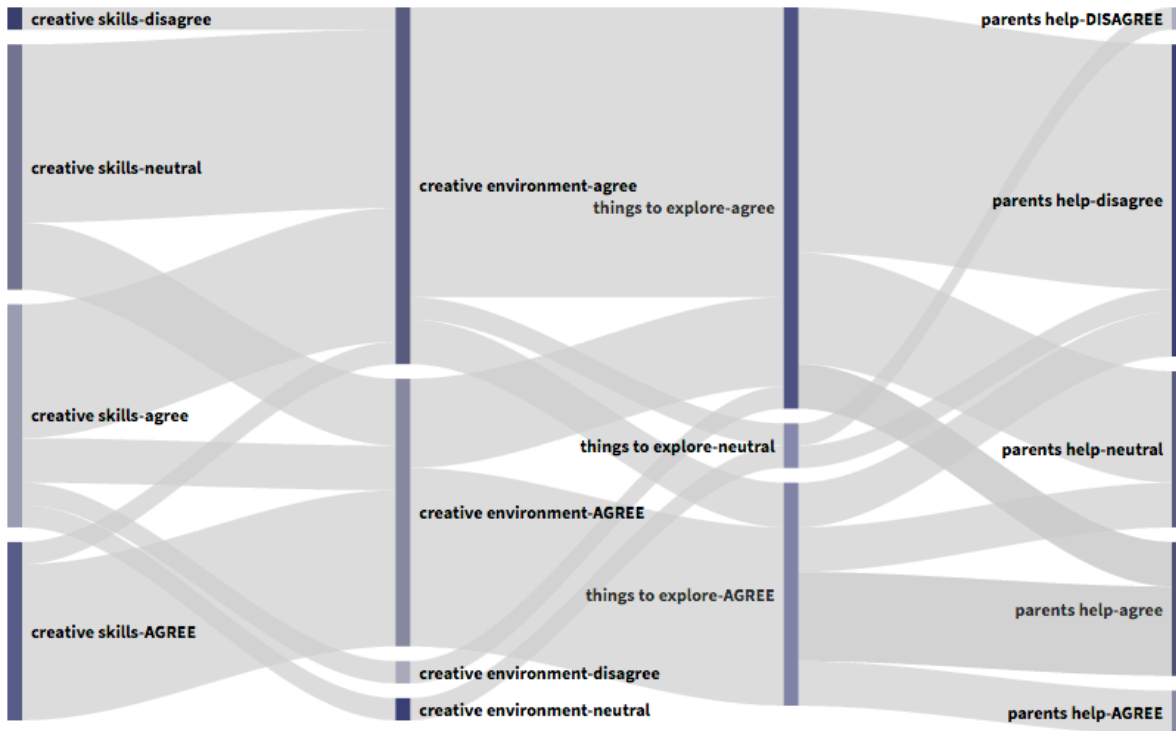
## **Strategic coordination**

Finally, effective network-based programmes and strategies do not tend to work without sufficient resource to drive and implement them. So a core resource to facilitate a wide-partnership and maintain impetus and momentum could leverage considerable impact across the region.

# Appendix: Sankey charts

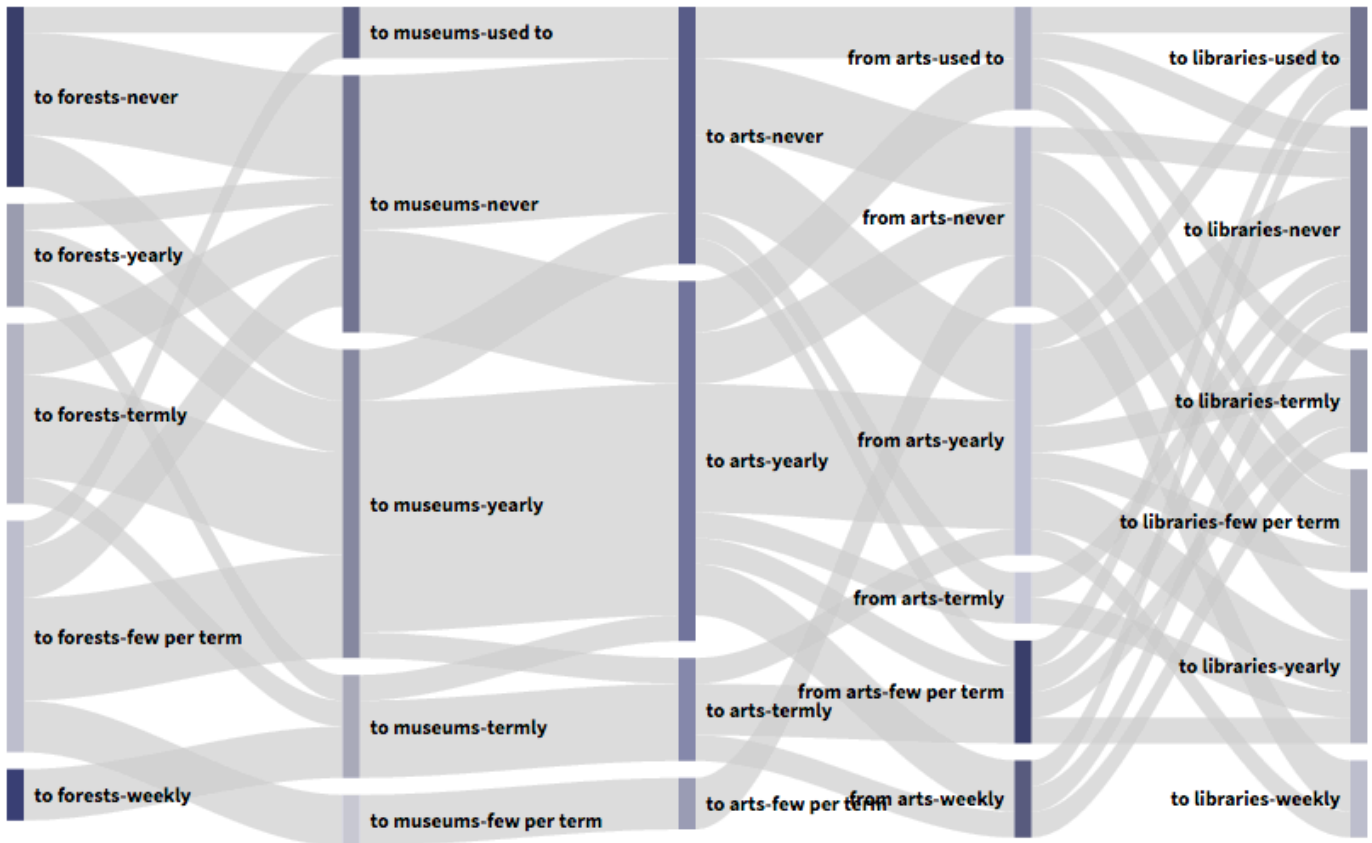
The Sankey charts below provide additional insight into some of the research data.

Sankey charts show how individual respondents respond to subsequent questions, as in, ‘people who said X then went on to say Y’. The height of the bars indicates the number of people who gave each response. The thickness of the lines indicates how many people giving one response all went on to give the same response as each other in a different question. n.b. the horizontal flow lines do not necessarily follow the responses of individual people from one question to the next – the horizontal lines between successive pairs of question are independent of neighbouring pairs. i.e. it not possible to interpret from the chart the people who answered A, then B, then C – only the people answered A then B, and the people who answered B then C.



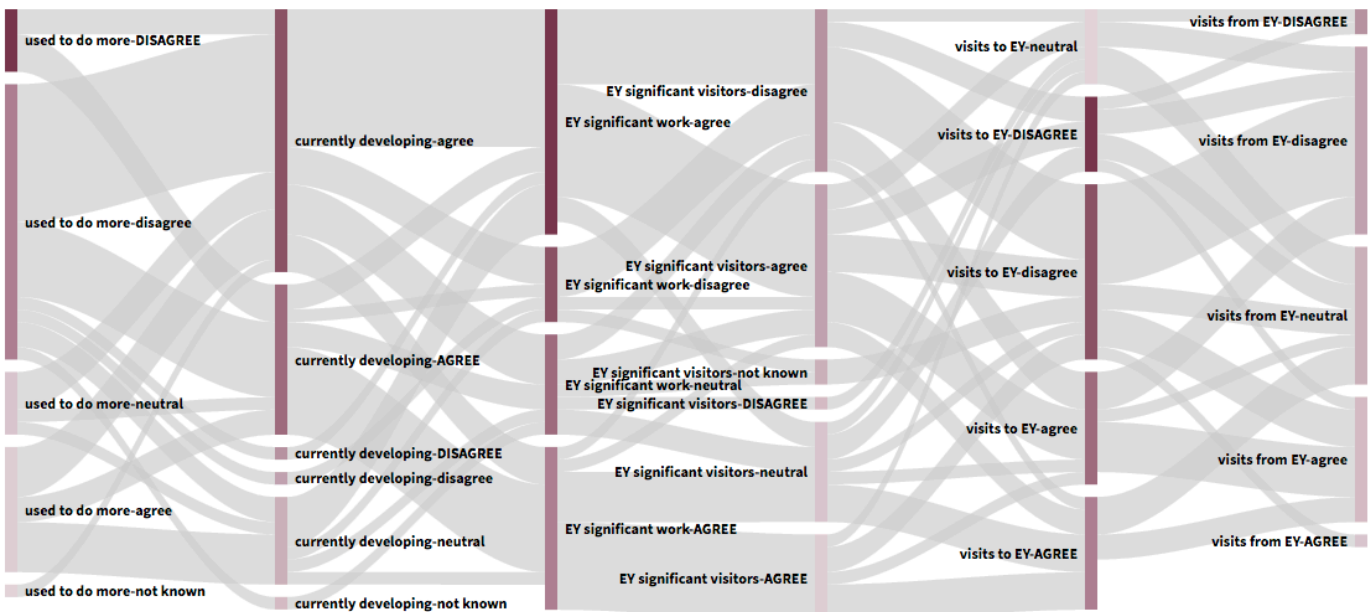
**Figure 18** Early Years settings’ self-assessment regarding environment, skills and family support (Sankey chart)

(To be read in conjunction with Figure 9 on page 18.)



**Figure 19 Early years settings: how often do you take early years children to visit arts and culture venues and experiences, and how often do external people come into your setting? (Sankey chart of select questions)**

(To be read in conjunction with Figure 10 on page 20.)



**Figure 20 Early years, family visits and outreach in arts and cultural organisations (Sankey chart)**

(To be read in conjunction with Figure 11 on page 24.)