

Action for Children's Arts (ACA)

Arts Backpack Pilot Programmes – How to get involved

In December 2018 ACA published their commissioned feasibility study examining the idea of an Arts Backpack programme for every primary school child in the UK. An Arts Backpack would serve as a digital collection point for Arts, Cultural, Heritage and Library engagements – aiming to ensure that every child had access to at least five quality participatory experiences throughout the school year. You can find the report here:

<https://www.childrensarts.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Arts-BackPack-Feasibility-Study-FINAL-compressed-1-1.pdf>

We are now focussing on delivering the report's recommendations and would like to invite professionals with an interest in this UK wide programme to get in touch, and to get involved. The recommendations from the report are as follows:

1. Fill the Gap – We have found there is a gap in strategic thinking and cultural provision for primary-aged children. We recommend that the Arts Backpack idea focuses on the 5-12 age-range and draws together emerging research (The Fabian Society and Children & the Arts) and other interested parties to develop further evidence and thinking. To limit the costs of developing a bespoke delivery mechanism, further research into the digital needs of an online Arts Backpack will benefit from working with partners who have established digital infrastructure to develop possible digital implementation resources.

2. Co-design to reach all children – Any pilot project needs to be locally specific rather than one-size fits all. It should include children, families and teachers in co- designing the project. It should specifically target those children who do not currently access arts and culture thereby making case for the Arts BackPack to be a means of levelling an unequal cultural playing field. The BackPack may thereby be a cultural survival kit in a fast-changing Brexit-era landscape where children can be vulnerable.

3. Advocate for the intrinsic value of culture – It is recommended that the Back Pack prioritises the intrinsic value of culture, and that other extrinsic outcomes such as education, health and employability are part of the equation but only foregrounded when needed.

4. Build partnerships and support around a pilot project – A Pilot Project or a number of different pilots is recommended to build evidence, and a model of success, before any wider UK-wide roll-out of the idea. In the first instance it should look more like the Nuremberg Cultural Rucksack than the Norwegian version. A pilot needs to be locally led and supported by multiple partners. These may include a national funder, who may be interested in a dissemination of the idea, and local cultural partners, including schools, who will understand local need. Any pilot(s) should make timely use of the latest research that supports the case for a targeted initiative of this kind and devise a comprehensive communications strategy to advocate to schools, children, parents, cultural partners and policy makers.

To deliver these recommendations ACA is seeking support and in the following sections we outline how to get involved in both action and advocacy for this project.

Arts Backpack ACTIONS

ACA would like to hear from any organisations or individuals interested in being part of a 2019/20 pilot for the Arts Backpack. We would like to work with partners to support the delivery of 3, or 4, pilot programmes in areas identified as having a lack of provision and access to the arts for primary aged children. Each pilot will be managed by an Arts Backpack Team and will run over 2 terms. This is how we think each pilot team might look:

Local lead organisation – supported by ACA to co-ordinate the project, covering tasks that will include:

- Identifying and engaging with primary schools in your area who meet project targets,
- launching the Arts Backpack idea in their area
- linking the participating schools with existing arts and cultural offers,
- supporting schools to develop in-house Arts Backpack Councils (ABCs) led by children, to decide on the choice of experiences and the shape of their project,
- supporting the schools to manage the uploading and saving of each child's record and reflections on their experiences to their digital Arts Backpack.

Local/Regional arts and cultural organisation partners – supported by the local lead organisation and ACA to join with other local arts and cultural organisations to create an Arts Backpack Hub for their area, sharing resources and offering a menu of activities for the ABCs to choose to engage with across the year 2019-2020. We envisage up to 5 engagements being supported as part of a full year's programme, but we hope the pilots will be able to run over 2 terms and offer 2 or 3 engagements. Schools will then book their experiences and events directly with the providers.

National digital partner – ACA currently envision the digital aspect of the Arts Backpack as a series of individual blogs where each child can save, and upload written, photo and video content. That content can be shared with the class teachers and/or parents and targeted feedback can be shared with the arts and cultural providers and with the Arts Backpack team. We would like to work with an organisation who could help guide this aspect for all of the pilot programmes.

National evaluation and research Partner – To fully understand the outcomes, outputs and impact of the pilot programmes we would like to establish an evaluation pathway to be implemented at the launch of each pilot programme. The pathway will be made up of four evaluation stages:

- setting outcomes
- collecting evidence
- analysing & reporting
- acting on your learning

We are keen to link with any organisations or individuals interested in working with us on this aspect of the work.

Funding Mix – With each pilot area ACA will help to secure a mix of local and national funding to deliver the pilot. Each pilot programme will need a mixture of statutory, grant, sponsorship and donation funding support. The range of partners involved will offer a secure funding base to launch applications from and ACA will offer leadership and/or support as needed to develop, submit and manage applications.

Pilot Timeline:

- March 2019 - Arts Backpack partnerships Launch event at the DCMS in March 2019
- May 2019 - Partnerships agreed by May 2019
- June - October 2019 - Funding application made
- January – May 2020 - Pilot Programmes
- June 2020 - Evaluation Feedback
- September 2020 – Arts Backpack Phase 2 begins

If you are interested in learning more about our partnership opportunities as a Local Lead Organisation, a Local/Regional Arts and Cultural Organisation, a National Digital Partner, a National Research or Evaluation Partner or to support any aspect of the Funding Mix for this project please get in touch.

Arts Backpack ADVOCACY

ACA has been active in raising awareness of the Arts Backpack initiative as a deliverable option to address the imbalance in the curriculum delivered in UK schools identified by many current commentators and highlighted in recent reports:

- Primary Colours: <https://fabians.org.uk/publication/primary-colours/>
- ISM State of the Nation: <https://www.ism.org/news/new-music-education-report-state-of-the-nation-released>
- Learning about Culture, the RSA: <https://www.thersa.org/action-and-research/rsa-projects/creative-learning-and-development-folder/learning-about-culture>

We have presented the Arts Backpack to the What’s Next? Group at the Young Vic, in London. We have met with, and will continue working with, the Fabian Society and Ben Cooper (author of Primary Colours). We have met with and will continue working with the DCMS to develop the Arts Backpack across England and Wales.

The funding for the Arts Backpack Feasibility Study included support from Arts Council Northern Ireland, ASSITEJ UK, Belfast City Council, Cambridgeshire Music, and Fife Council; and the Steering Group who advised on the Feasibility Study continue to advocate for its implementation:

- Chris Abbott, Trustee – Action for Children’s Arts
- Steve Ball, Associate Director – Birmingham Repertory Theatre
- Eibhlin de Barra, Director – Young at Art
- Kate Cross, Chair – Theatre for Young Audiences, UK
- Mimi Doulton, Development Officer – Action for Children’s Arts

- Matthew Gunn, Head – Cambridgeshire Music
- Vicky Ireland, Chair – Action for Children’s Arts
- Christopher Jarvis, Trustee – Action for Children’s Arts
- Kevin Lewis, Artistic Director – Theatre Iolo
- Mark Powell, Artistic Director – Prime Theatre
- Janet Robertson, Trustee – Action for Children’s Arts
- Jane Sillis, Director – Engage
- Thomas Small, Artistic Director – Shaper/Caper

We are represented at the All-Party Parliamentary Groups on Music Education; Early Years; Children’s Media and the Arts. We are part of the Bacc to the Future Campaign and the Big Arts and Education Debate.

We aim to present the Arts Backpack idea to as many groups as possible. If you have a local or regional group who you think would like to hear more, please connect us or better still, invite us along.

Connecting and Campaigning

In April 2019 Lord Black of Brentwood will host an event in Westminster to present the Arts Backpack to an invited group of arts and culture practitioners and policymakers. This event aims to use the opportunity to bring resources together, to unify the voices of arts and cultural professionals, and begin to identify and clarify channels of communications with policy makers.

Please get in touch if you would like to be part of this event and we will add you to our mailing list.

Please consider supporting ACA: **We are the National Voice of Children’s Arts in the UK.**

We campaign. We connect. We celebrate.
Valuing Children. Valuing Childhood. Valuing the Arts.

Individuals can support our work for as little as £2.50/month:

<https://www.childrensarts.org.uk/join/individual/>