

Early years arts and culture: current practice and options for future development

Report of consultative research and analysis, undertaken and written by Ben Sandbrook and Ruth Churchill Dower for Arts Council England, profiling arts and culture in early years settings and surveying the preferences for future development options

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About this report	4
Research participation	8
<i>Survey participants</i>	9
Early years arts and cultural landscape	12
Early years landscape overall	12
The priorities for early years settings	13
Arts, culture and creativity in the early years landscape	16
<i>Methodology</i>	16
<i>Overall arts and cultural profile of respondents' organisations</i>	17
<i>Aspects of provision: arts, culture and creativity in the setting</i>	20
<i>Visits to and from arts and cultural organisations, individuals and experiences</i>	29
<i>Key needs emerging for sector capacity building</i>	31
What would (and already does) help to develop arts and culture in early years settings?	32
1. <i>What would help develop practice in the setting?</i>	32
2. <i>What would help develop leadership understanding and buy-in?</i>	39
3. <i>What would help develop relationships with outside organisations?</i>	40
Six options for developing arts and culture in early years settings	42
<i>Analysis of findings related to six options</i>	45
<i>Quadrant analyses</i>	49
<i>Open-text responses to the six options</i>	51
Appendices	55
Appendix A : Participants	55
Appendix B : Semi-structured telephone interview questions	56
Appendix C : How the Arts and Cultural profile was calculated	57

Table of figures

Figure 1: Survey respondents - type of setting / organisations	9
Figure 2: Survey respondents' classification of their organisation	9
Figure 3: Responses by region	10
Figure 4: Ofsted ratings, where available, for survey respondents, compared to settings nationwide	10
Figure 5: Respondent IMD decile where available, by type of setting/organisation	11
Figure 6: Priorities as rated by survey respondents, ordered by order of overall priority for EY settings	14
Figure 7: High priorities for settings, by type of organisation	15
Figure 8: Arts and Culture 'profile' (total, for provision, and for visits) for survey participants' organisations, with standard deviations (bars)	17
Figure 9: Overall distribution of A&C profiles	18
Figure 10: A&C profiles, by Ofsted rating	18
Figure 11: Arts and Culture Profiles, by IMD Decile	18
Figure 12: EY settings A&C profiles by region	19
Figure 13: Management support for A&C in settings	20
Figure 14: Arts and culture are visibly integral to the setting	20
Figure 15: Adult-led and child-led approaches	23
Figure 16: Culturally sensitive provision	23
Figure 17: skills to develop arts and culture	24
Figure 18: skills to nurture creativity	24
Figure 19: CPD for arts, culture and creativity	24
Figure 20: Yorkshire and the Humber: organisation skills, specialisms and areas of need, from most to least confident	25
Figure 21: Using arts and culture across the EYFS curriculum	26
Figure 22: Partnerships	27
Figure 23: Parents/carers helping in settings	28
Figure 24: Parent/carer involvement, by IMD decile, for EY settings	28
Figure 25: Visits to and from arts and cultural organisations	29
Figure 26: Maintained settings frequency of visits	30
Figure 27: Non-maintained settings frequency of visits	30
Figure 28: Childminders frequency of visits	30
Figure 29: Interest in six options, by type of organisation	45
Figure 30: Interest in six options, by A&C profile	45
Figure 31: Preferred of six options, by type of organisation	45
Figure 32: Interest in six options by Ofsted profile	45
Figure 33: Preparedness to pay for each option, by type of organisation	47
Figure 34: Preparedness to pay for each option, by A&C profile	47
Figure 35: Preparedness to pay for each option, by deprivation decile	47
Figure 36: Preparedness to pay for each option, by Ofsted rating	47
Figure 37: Quadrant analysis of interest in and preparedness to pay for an Award	49
Figure 38: Quadrant analysis of interest in and preparedness to pay for Online learning	50

About this report

As part of the strategic framework *Great art and culture for everyone*, Arts Council England aims to support all children and young people to access high quality art and cultural experiences. Early years working is an important element of this work, and in 2017 Arts Council, in seeking to support the early years sector and its practitioners, commissioned Earlyarts and World Pencil, to undertake a feasibility study of developing an Artsmark for the early years sector. This report, written by Ben Sandbrook, summarises the findings of that four-month consultative research project.

Following discussion with the Arts Council the authors decided that to gauge the likely response to a potential early years Artsmark, we should ask stakeholders in the early years sector, not whether some kind of *Artsmark* would work but *what* interventions would work, including, potentially, an award, to achieve the objectives behind a potential early years Artsmark. We used the responses to questions related to respondents' existing arts and cultural practice and provision to segment the resulting insights and to form a picture of how different constituencies would likely respond to different options for arts and cultural development in early years.

Insights from the research are published here in order to support wider sector understanding of arts practice in early years. It is hoped that artists, arts organisations, early years practitioners, policy makers and funders will find this information useful in their own strategic planning.

Early years arts and cultural landscape

The early years sector is hugely diverse, encompassing school Reception years, independent pre-schools, private and state nurseries, individual childminders and many more. Arts and culture (A&C) are already an important part of the statutory EYFS curriculum although the practice and provision for fulfilling this varies considerably. Arts and culture are a high priority in just under 50% of settings according to our online survey and perhaps considerably less according to the general view presented by interviewees.

Methodology

The research was undertaken through a mixed-method consultative approach, comprising desk research, semi-structured telephone interviews, webinars, co-design sessions, online surveys and subsequent analysis.

The research involved 30 semi-structured telephone interviews, 2 webinars involving 67 people, 3 co-design sessions with 45 people from early years settings and an online survey completed by 230 people. In total, around 310 people have contributed from early years settings of different types (maintained, non-maintained, charitable, commercial etc.), early years umbrella organisations, early years networks and charitable organisations, arts and cultural organisations and individuals with an early years specialism, academics and publishers.

As part of the analysis there was a profiling process which formed a proxy of the strength of current practice and opportunity offered to young children in a respondent's setting by anonymously comparing survey responses against the current Artsmark self-evaluation tool.¹

¹ See Appendix C: How the Arts and Cultural profile was calculated, page 59.

Key needs emerging for sector capacity building

Emerging from this research, the three main areas of need for developing capacity around arts and culture in early years settings, are:

- Process and product: developing an understanding of artistic process and skills in developing children's artistic ideas, starting from the position of children being highly competent and creative;
- Arts-based confidence, experiences and skills for practitioners: helping practitioners to unearth and develop anew their abilities in the arts, and equip them with ideas and techniques to help children, including how arts can support the whole curriculum;
- High-quality opportunities from arts and cultural organisations, community and parents/carers to enrich and inspire young children and practitioners alike.

Six options for developing arts and cultural practice and provision in early years settings

Interviewees, co-design and webinar participants described what are the most effective approaches for developing arts, creative and cultural practice in early years settings: training, evidence sharing, expert advice, personal artistic/creative experiences, tools and frameworks, video, and potentially an award for settings. From this insight, we designed six potential, bespoke offers for early years professionals (online learning, an award for settings, co-learning, training, family projects, activity packs) and asked online survey participants which they would be most interested in and likely to pay for, and why.

Research findings related to the six options

The most favoured options, in order of interest, were online learning, an award and co-learning. Overall findings showed that there is a good level of interest in a potential early years Artsmark award but we forecast, based on interviewees' responses and analyses of the survey data, that in reality the take-up would principally be from settings where arts, creative and cultural provision and practice are already strong. This suggests that the net impact on children might be less than from an approach that is more likely to support settings where practice and provision are less strong.

Several components of the current Artsmark process will be familiar to early years settings, particularly those attached to schools, but the level of complexity and burden of time/cost will present a barrier to many. In particular for those settings where arts, creative and cultural practice and provision, and general levels of confidence, are lower.

A significant proportion of the interest in a potential early years Artsmark focusses on professional support activities (training, in-setting bespoke expert support, peer-to-peer networking) rather than the award itself, suggesting the relationship between package and award needs to be carefully considered, to maximise the opportunities for settings to pursue these activities.

Relatedly, many of the core needs for development across the sector (such as EY practitioners' lack of confidence in the arts, their knowledge of how to harness arts and culture across the curriculum, and a need to recognise and value the *process* of children's artistry rather than a sole focus on children (re)creating artistic *products*) are more likely to be met through personal, face-to-face experiences for practitioners. An award process might be an effective structure that incentivises settings to seek these experiences but in many cases it would be the experiences themselves that would have greater surety of impact than an award.

Research key findings in brief:

Common issues in early years settings

Challenges for arts, culture and creativity in early years

What works well, in developing arts, culture and creative practice in early years?

Many settings are so stretched (time, accountability & ££) that they can only pursue high priorities	Arts and culture is not a high priority for most settings, although creativity is important	Levels of practitioner qualification are often low, as are personal levels of experiences of the arts	EYFS = good framework for <i>developing</i> arts, culture and creativity, but not <i>assessing</i> them	Online learning is flexible & affordable	Arts & culture champions make it happen
High staff turnover in private / voluntary settings – skills migrate	Key priorities: speech and language, H&S, literacy, numeracy, ratios, staffing, ££, outdoor learning, mental health	Even with EYFS, in reality, ITE, skills and experience in arts are often low	Staff lack of ideas & knowledge of how, in practice, to use and develop arts	Empowering self-development tools are popular	Artistic experiences in setting popular, where feasible
Effective networking is patchy across country	Staff confidence in arts often very low, especially music and dance	Assumption of importance of artistic product, over creative process	Face-to-face training & artistic experiences often the only effective CPD	Action research effective and fits well, where feasible	High quality visiting specialists highly valued
Often settings need to discover the resources & experiences they already have access to	Early years sector often feels disconnected from the rest of the education landscape	Networking/P2P can be effective if well-supported	Many like awards but they might super-serve the already strong settings	Arts/culture visits great if relevance and quality can be trusted	Any arts development offer would need to 'fit in' – other wise why would settings bother with it?

Looking forward

We recommend that co-designed pilots of an Artsmark-type award for early years settings should be commissioned or otherwise developed by partnerships of early years settings, arts and cultural, and other organisations. We recommend that these pilots should accommodate the following:

- Levels, or other aspirational achievements, that are designed to reward different starting capacities equally, and through a graduated process that is easiest for the settings where A&C practice is less strong to embark on;
- A strong element of in-setting support where expert mentors observe practice in the setting and work with practitioners on strategies to move forward, as well as training and developing relationships with arts and cultural organisations and other EY settings;
- An emphasis on action research projects, and in some cases in place of the more high-level strategy emphasised in the current Artsmark for primary/secondary schools;
- Comprising a set of core professional development needs and practice standards, based on common identified needs (e.g. arts and creativity across the curriculum, arts-based confidence, process and product, child-led approaches to children's artistry).

We recommend the development of an online professional learning platform for early years arts and cultural practice:

- to support the award pilots, and to be a stand-alone offer/service for those not pursuing an award;
- to provide highly accessible learning for practitioners and managers to learn and develop skills;
- and to strengthen networking and awareness-raising amongst early years organisations, arts and cultural organisations, training providers and expert mentors and advisors.

We recommend, alongside the award pilots and online provision, the development and maintenance of local and thematic action learning networks, hosted largely in existing established networks, for early years arts and culture, that aim to:

- promote practice-sharing and relationship building between early years, arts/cultural and other related organisations and individuals;
- develop action research projects across the networks;
- encourage co-development between organisations, including 'stronger' settings supporting those where practice and provision are less strong.

Looking forward Arts Council will review this information as part of its overall strategy development for 2020-2030. We hope too that other individuals, organisation and networks will draw on the findings from this research in their work supporting early years, including around arts and culture.

Research participation

Interviewees

A list of interview invitees was developed with ACE, including early years settings of different types (maintained, non-maintained, charitable, commercial etc.), early years umbrella organisations, early years networks and charitable organisations, arts and cultural organisations and individuals with an early years specialism, academics and publishers.

48 people were invited, of which interviews were conducted with 30. A list of those interviewed is given in Appendix A. The authors are satisfied that we conducted interviews with a good cross-spectrum of organisations in the sector, although we regret not to have been able to include Ofsted.

Webinars

Online webinars were designed to give an opportunity for stakeholders to contribute to the research in an open forum with other professionals from across the country, without requiring travel or staff cover costs to be found. The webinars took the form of a scaffolded discussion with two experts from different sector positions, each putting their own perspective on the benefits of working creatively and the feasibility of some kind of award scheme in their setting. Participants were invited to ask questions of the experts and contribute to the discussion with their own ideas.

Two webinars, described in Appendix A, were undertaken with 67 participants, following a widely circulated open invitation.

Co-design sessions

Co-design sessions were coordinated for practitioners and managers of early years settings to give their perspectives on arts and cultural practice and provision, and to develop their own ideas about how they would most like to develop the practice and provision in their settings.

Three co-design sessions were undertaken, in:

- A maintained nursery and children's centre in Bradford, Yorkshire (St Edmunds Nursery and Children's Centre);
- An independent nursery operating as part of a social enterprise group in Soho, London (Soho Family Centre, part of London Early Years Foundation)
- A charitable independent pre-school in Bath, Somerset (Widcombe Acorns Pre-school)

All three settings could be described as having strong arts and cultural practice, and a keen interest in developing it further, and also having a broad range of practitioner backgrounds and qualification levels.

Survey participants

The invitation to the survey was very widely distributed across networks on social media and membership networks with a potential reach of several hundred thousand. From this, 230 completed survey responses were received. .

The survey was open between 17th July and 21st September 2017 (9 weeks, including the summer holiday period). An analysis of the survey sample follows.

Analysis by type of setting / organisation

We achieved a good representation across early years settings and arts and cultural organisations.

The type of organisation designation (Figure 1) was attributed based on respondents' selection of classifications that describe their organisation (Figure 2).

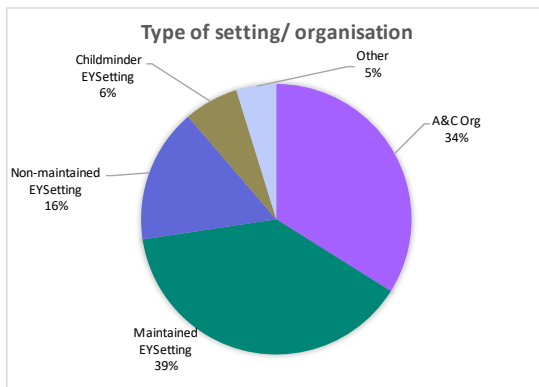


Figure 1: Survey respondents - type of setting / organisations

Organisation type was designated by the authors according to the classifications respondents gave for their organisation

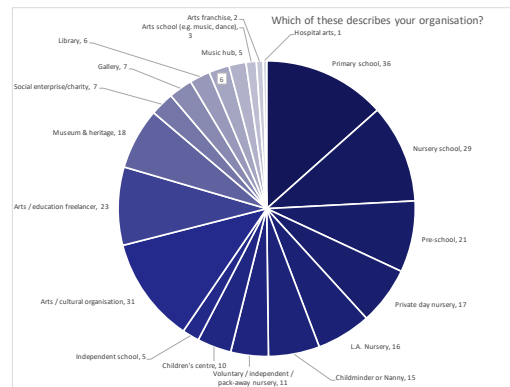


Figure 2: Survey respondents' classification of their organisation

(n.b. respondents could select as many as they wanted)

The 'Other' category includes academics and universities, colleges, local authorities, early years and arts/cultural consultants.

Analysis by geographic region

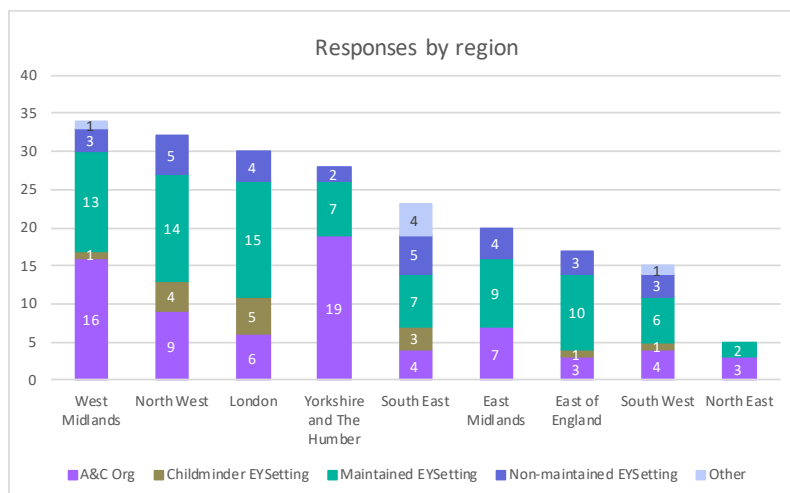


Figure 3: Responses by region

(Based on respondents post codes, available for 91% of respondents)

The sample represents a reasonably strong geographic spread across England.

Analysis by Ofsted rating

Using respondents’ post codes, where provided, we were able look up Ofsted inspection data for their organisations.²

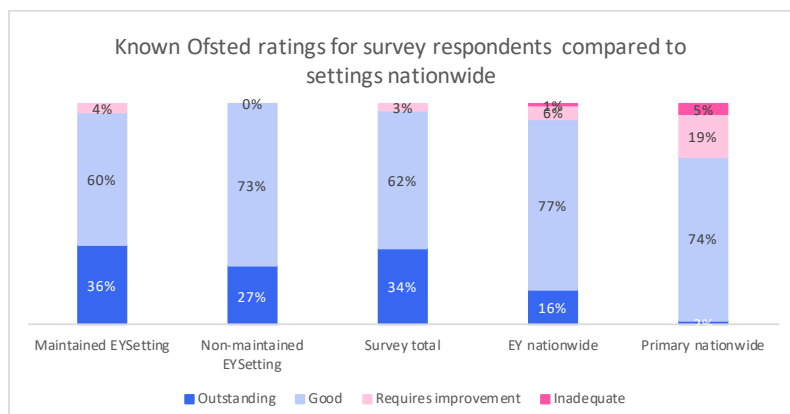


Figure 4: Ofsted ratings, where available, for survey respondents, compared to settings nationwide

Settings responding to the survey were roughly twice as likely to be judged ‘Outstanding’ by Ofsted than the national average, and none were judged ‘Inadequate’. Figure 4 also shows how much greater a proportion of all early years settings (not just those responding to this survey) are judged Outstanding by Ofsted (16%) compared to Primary schools (2%).³

Ofsted data were available, via the postcode route, for 80% of maintained settings, 40% of non-maintained settings and 0% of childminders.

² We cannot guarantee the accuracy of these data (they were not based, for instance, on institution URNs, nor on respondents’ own reporting) but in most cases we anticipate they are accurate. Where there is no post code match there will be no cross-referenced Ofsted result so what data there are should be correct. In cases where Primary Schools have Ofsted results for the Primary School and the EYFS provision, we have included the latter result.

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/early-years-and-childcare-statistics>

Analysis by indices of multiple deprivation

We were also able to look up Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) data. The IMD data will likely be most meaningful for EY settings as they are likely most accurately to reflect the location of the setting and locality of its children. As Arts/Cultural organisations and ‘Other’s (academics, local authorities, consultants) will tend to operate over a wider locality than EY settings, their individual IMD data will be less informative of the kinds of early years contexts in which they work.

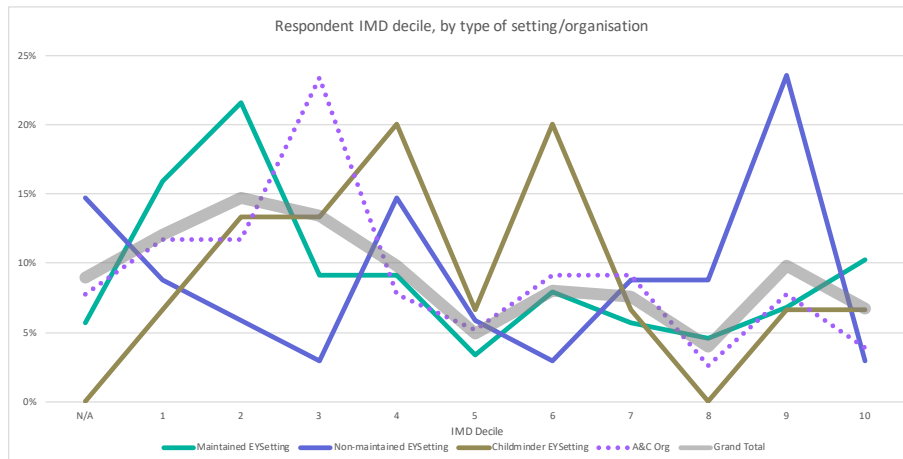


Figure 5: Respondent IMD decile where available, by type of setting/organisation

(Decile 10 being the least deprived)

Observations:

- There are generally more respondents in the lower deciles (grey line)
- There are more childminders respondents in the middle deciles (brown) (nationally, there are more childminders in more affluent areas, responding to levels of parental income)
- There are more maintained settings in the lower deciles (green)
- And more non-maintained settings in the lowest and highest deciles (blue)

Early years arts and cultural landscape

Early years landscape overall

As is often pointed out, the early years sector is a complex landscape, with less of the consistency that is more characteristic of Primary and Secondary phases. What follows is not an extensive or comprehensive analysis of the early years sector but a summary of some of the key issues and realities as they have emerged from the consultation.

Highly varied EY workforce level of qualification

Several interviews mentioned the divergent levels of qualification and experience in the early years workforce. Broadly speaking, every class in a Primary School is led by a qualified teacher who will normally have a first degree and PGCE or equivalent. The same structural uniformity is not the case in the early years sector. For instance, childminders are required to have DBS check, first aid certificate, Ofsted registration and to have completed an introductory childcare course.⁴ In most state-funded Nursery Schools there will be at least one qualified Early Years Teacher. Generally speaking, the level of staff qualification is higher in state-sector settings than PVI settings.⁵

Interviewees often describe young women with low levels of formal qualification, coming to work in early years. Several interviewees report low levels of aspiration amongst many early years staff. (Of course, lack of qualification does not mean that someone can't be highly able at working with young children.)

High staff turnover – staff morale

Beyond qualification and skills, a very widely cited issue in early years, including by interview participants, is very high staff turn-over, particularly in private and voluntary settings. This presents a particular challenge for the development of provision and skills in EY settings, as very commonly cited: effort is spent on up-skilling the staff in a setting but then many of them move on after a short time and their skills (and the setting's investment) move with them. One interviewee described many of the settings she worked in having around 40% usage of bank staff (agency/supply cover) with, for example, staff working in a shop in the morning and the EY setting in the afternoon.

Staff turn-over is often closely related to low levels of pay in the EY workforce. Low levels of morale generally are widely reported in the sector by interviewees and elsewhere.

Financial challenges

Several interviewees described the huge financial pressures that many EY settings are under, particularly non-maintained settings. Many settings report existential financial concerns: lack of ability to pay next month's salaries and the threat of the setting having to close. One interviewee described how childminders are working hard and squeezing finances just to comply with basic legal requirements, particularly around health and safety, to avoid being closed down. (This is not necessarily to say that the health and safety requirements are unreasonably expensive but that finances are very tight and they are a legal necessity, and are therefore prioritised above all other spending.)

⁴ <https://childmindinguk.com/becoming-a-childminder/>

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/early-years-and-childcare-statistics>

Pressures on time

Several interviewees reported the considerable time pressures in EY settings:

- within the day (e.g. with much time spent changing nappies and cleaning up)
- within the week (e.g. many childminders working 50-60 hours/week to maintain an income and having little subsequent time for development/training opportunities)
- within the year (e.g. 'cleaning and chemicals' - several interviewees described the administration, bureaucracy and cost requirements around health and safety legislation taking up the majority of what little time and budget there exists for development, capacity-building etc.)

Importance of leadership buy-in

It is true that a particular direction of development is difficult in any organisation without endorsement from the top, and certainly it is widely reported that such endorsement is a requirement for school-based change and arts organisation-based change. But management/leadership buy-in is perhaps particularly important in early years settings:

- in many cases where the manager/leader is also the only qualified teacher they will often have particular influence over more junior, often little qualified or trained staff;
- particularly in private and voluntary settings the staff turnover rate is high and managers can be the most sustained staff presence;
- managers themselves are often the only governance tier in small independent settings.

The priorities for early years settings

We asked survey respondents to indicate the significance to their setting of a list of possible priorities, which are shown in Figure 6. The chart orders the different priorities (clockwise from the top) according to the overall order expressed by EY settings respondents (i.e. the sort order excludes responses from arts and cultural organisations and others). In virtually all settings, speech and language development, outdoor learning and play-based learning are a high priority, followed closely by nurturing creativity. Arts and culture are between medium and high priority for EY settings on average, and roughly half way down the list. (As mentioned elsewhere, it's reasonable to assume that our survey respondents are more interested in arts and culture than might be the national average.)

Figure 7 shows the proportions of each type of settings that said each issue was a high priority for them. Arts and Culture is a high priority for just under half of early years settings in our sample. (We suggest that this is significantly higher than would be the national average, based on reports from interviewees.) Nurturing creativity is a high priority for around 70% of group settings and 60% of childminders.

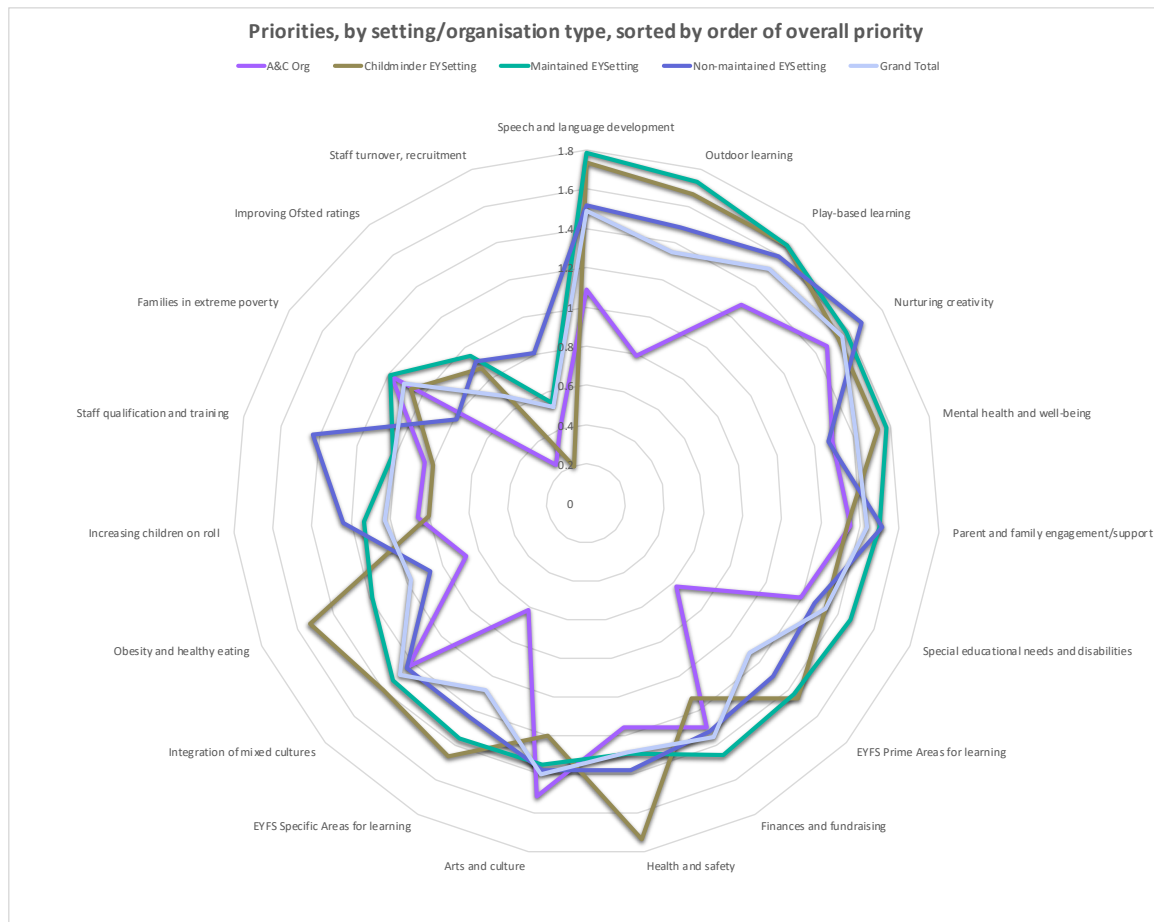


Figure 6: Priorities as rated by survey respondents, ordered by order of overall priority for EY settings

(2=high priority; 0=low priority)

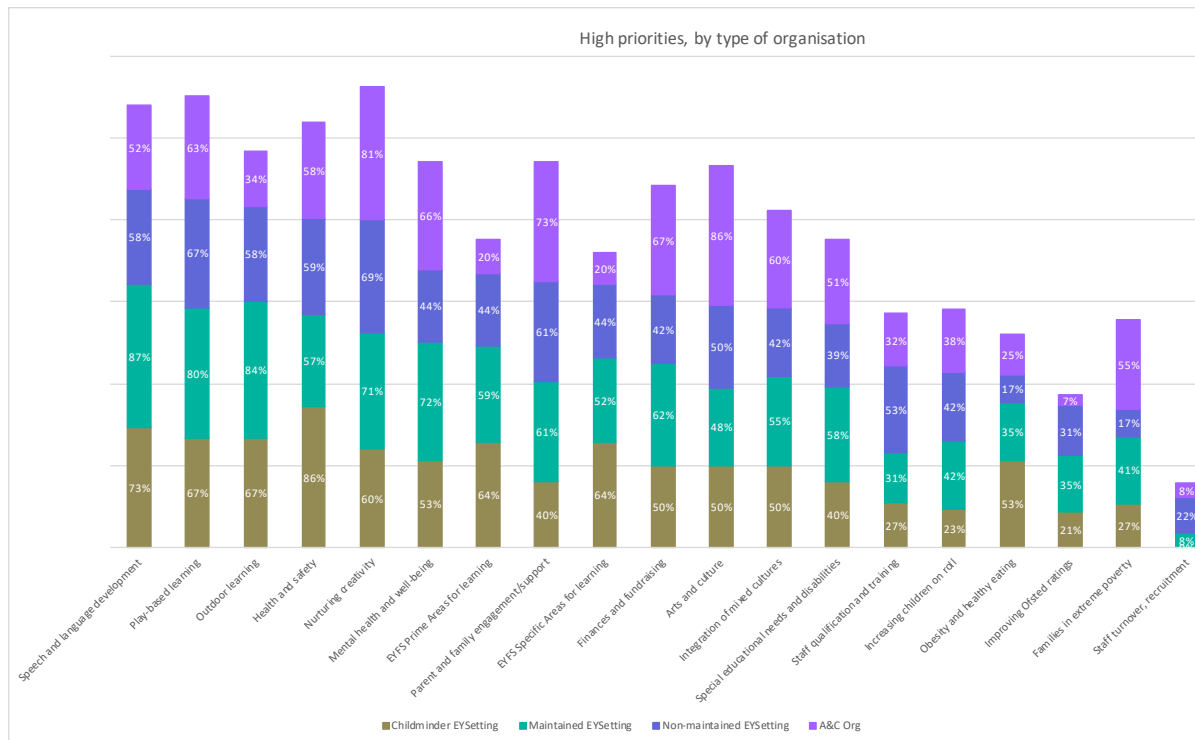


Figure 7: High priorities for settings, by type of organisation

(Shows the percentage of each type of setting that said an issue was a high priority, ordered by the total percentage of high priorities for early years settings)

Arts, culture and creativity in the early years landscape

In this section, we compile the findings from our research specifically around arts, culture and creativity in the early years.

Methodology

Our analysis draws upon the following:

- Overviews of arts, culture and creativity in the early sector that have been volunteered by interviewees (we did not routinely ask for such an overview);
- Discussion of needs and aspirations of the three sets of settings (Central London, Bath, Bradford) in the co-design sessions;
- Webinar presenters' descriptions of work in their settings and their understanding of the picture elsewhere;
- Survey questions asking specifically about various aspects of arts and cultural provision in settings.

The focus of this research was not to undertake a comprehensive needs analysis of arts, culture and creativity in the early years sector. Nonetheless, the research has yielded significant and useful findings in this regard, in some cases, giving more of a thorough national picture than has been gathered in some time, to the authors' knowledge.

Survey questions on arts and cultural provision

So as to be able to understand 'who said what' in the online survey, we asked participants a series of questions about their current practice and provision, related to arts, culture and creativity, in their setting. These questions were in two groups:

- Likert⁶ response statements related to the arts and cultural strategy, provision, skills and partnerships in and around the setting
- Questions related to visits to and from arts and cultural organisations / providers.

The questions, particularly those in the first group, were constructed based on the current Artsmark self-assessment tool for Primary/Secondary schools,⁷ which looks at leadership, curriculum design, continued professional development, children and young people engagement, range of offer, partnerships, equality and diversity, and values and ethos. We devised the questions in this way so as to explore how the current Artsmark self-assessment might be re-drafted for an early years audience and also to build up a data picture of the early years sector based on the current Artsmark priority framework.

⁶ A Likert scale offers respondents an opportunity to specify their level of agreement or disagreement on a symmetric agree-disagree scale for a series of statements. Thus, the range captures the intensity of their feelings for a given item.

⁷ <https://www.artsmark.org.uk/about/artsmark-award-document-downloads>

Overall arts and cultural profile of respondents' organisations

Using the data from these questions, we formulated for each respondent an indicative 'arts and culture profile', calculated based on questions from each of the two groups above (arts and cultural *provision* in the setting and *visits* to and from outside organisations/individuals).⁸

Stronger profiles correspond to responses favourable to arts and culture. So, for example, a respondent who said their setting's manager is highly convinced of the value of the arts and that the setting has regular visits from an artist in residence would have a stronger profile than one where the manager is less convinced and which has no more than a yearly visit from an arts/cultural practitioner.

We should note, of course, that these profiles can be only indicative – for instance, we have not attempted to gauge the quality of the visits, nor how the manager's convictions are borne out in the experiences for children – but we believe that on aggregate they should give a good overall indication of practice and provision in settings, through which we can scrutinize other data.

Figure 8 shows the average strength of A&C profile for each type of setting.

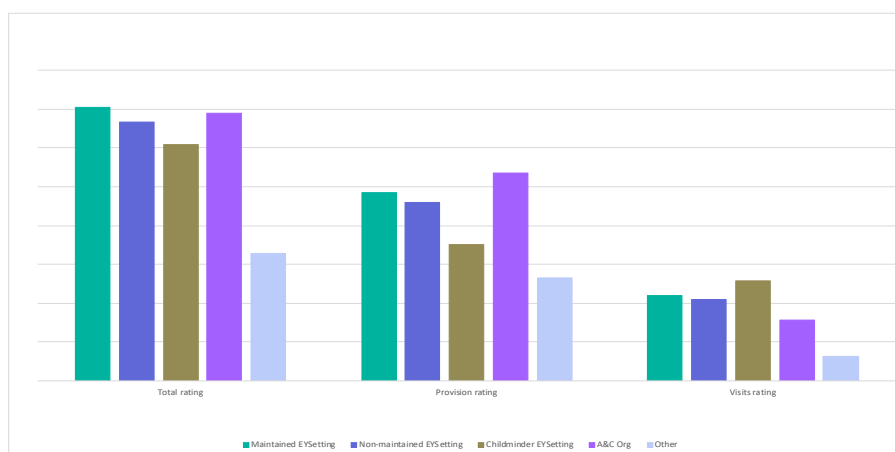


Figure 8: Arts and Culture 'profile' (total, for provision, and for visits) for survey participants' organisations, with standard deviations (bars)

Observations:

- Maintained EY settings have the strongest A&C profiles overall, compared to other types of organisation.
- A&C organisations have stronger profiles for their provision, as might be expected from arts and cultural specialists,
- But it is childminders who have the strongest profiles for visits – it's often easiest for childminders to go out on visits, without such extensive risk-assessment and health/safety procedures, and often most appealing for them as a social activity and to have a change of scene from the home.

⁸ See Appendix C for an explanation of how this profile was calculated.

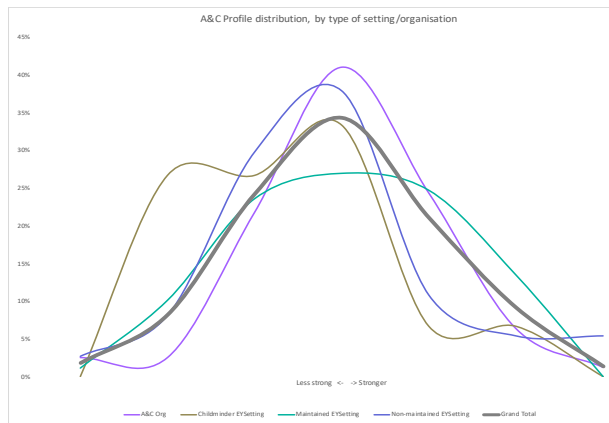


Figure 9: Overall distribution of A&C profiles

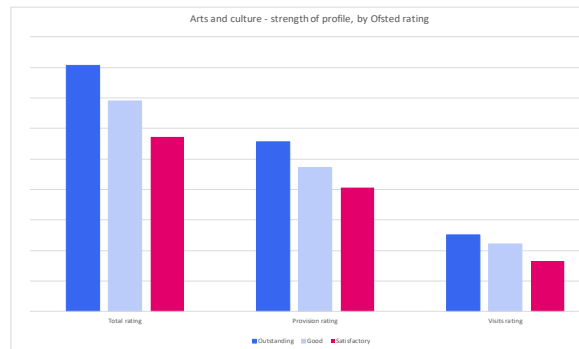


Figure 10: A&C profiles, by Ofsted rating

Figure 9 shows a general bell-curve distribution for settings’ A&C profiles, noting the following:

- Maintained EY settings have a flatter distribution, with more stronger profiles than other settings
- Non-maintained settings and childminders are more likely to have less strong profiles

Figure 10 breaks down respondents’ A&C profiles by their Ofsted ratings (only available for Maintained EY settings and a minority of Non-maintained settings), showing a close correlation between the A&C profile and Ofsted’s overall rating.

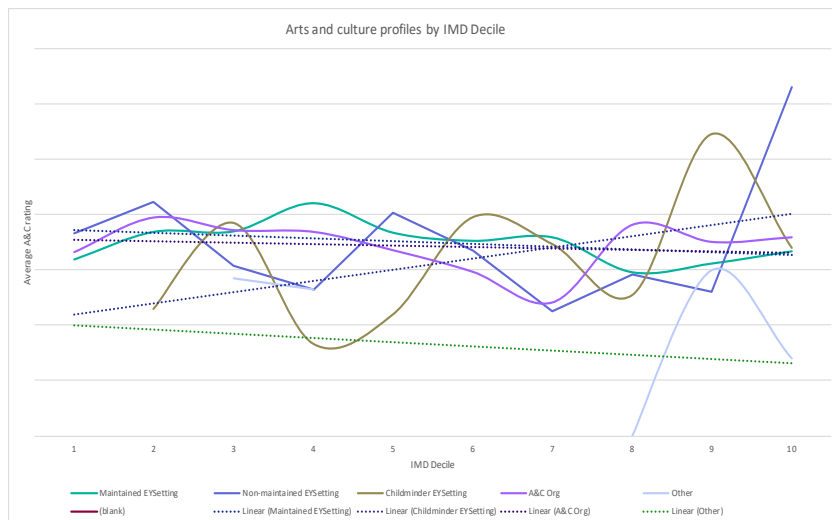


Figure 11: Arts and Culture Profiles, by IMD Decile

(Decile 10 being the least deprived)

An analysis of A&C profiles by deprivation index (Figure 11) was largely inconclusive – deprivation index is a poor predictor of A&C profile in our sample.

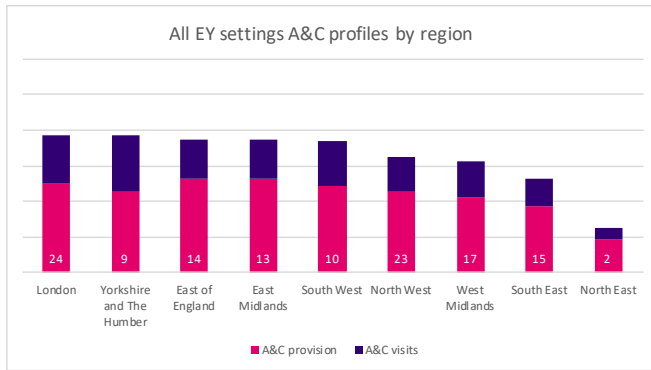


Figure 12: EY settings A&C profiles by region
 (numbers indicate total number of responses in each region)

Figure 12 shows the breakdown of A&C profiles, for EY settings only, by English region. (n.b. there are very few responses (n=2) for the North East. A further breakdown according to type of setting had very few responses in each category and yielded little insight.)

Observations

- The overall profiles are strongest in London, followed very closely by Yorkshire and the Humber, East of England, East Midlands and South West.
- London has the strongest profiles over all but Yorkshire and the Humber has the strongest profiles for visits⁹
- The least strong profiles are in the South East and North East but the sample numbers, particularly in the North East (n=2), are too small to be significant

⁹ For further information on these regions, the authors have produced research analyses for A New Direction (London), Cape UK (now IVE, Yorkshire and the Humber) and Artswork (South East).

Aspects of provision: arts, culture and creativity in the setting

The analyses below present the picture of arts and cultural provision in more detail, including analysis of the survey Likert statements about practice and provision in settings and responses from interviewees and other participants.

Arts, culture and creativity leadership, strategy and ethos in early years settings

Several interviewees, and participants in previous scoping research undertaken by the authors, have emphasised that where managers value, believe in and understand the power and potential of arts and culture for young children they will very often find a way to develop it in their setting, working with available resources and opportunities. Conversely, where this management buy-in does not exist, arts and culture are unlikely to flourish beyond what is recommended by the EYFS.

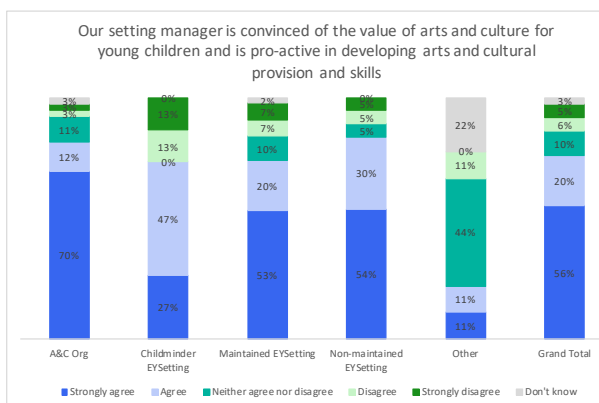


Figure 13: Management support for A&C in settings

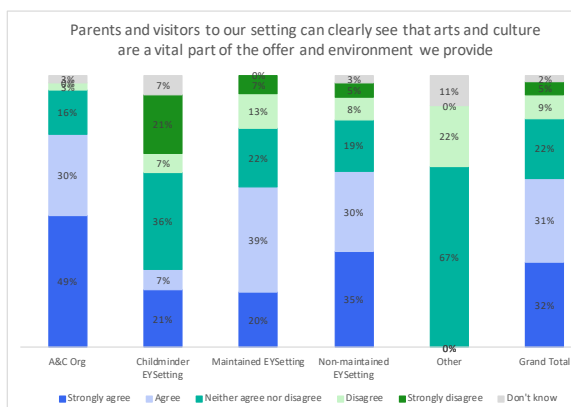


Figure 14: Arts and culture are visibly integral to the setting

The survey questions reported in Figure 13 and Figure 14 attempt to ask, respectively, about leadership commitment to arts and culture and about the extent to which arts and culture are visibly central to the environment and ethos in a setting.

Observations:

- Management commitment to arts and culture is high across the board in our sample.
- Arts and culture are visibly integral to the setting, other than with childminder respondents.
- This may be an indication, for EY settings respondents, that is the respondents who are the managers, and it is the settings who are interested in A&C who have taken the time to complete the survey. Anecdotally, responses from interviewees, webinar participants and co-design participants would suggest that, nationally, such strong management commitment is not as common as in our sample. Indeed in these, and the other charts in this section, the most divergent responses are in our 'Other' category, which comprises local authority representatives, consultants and university departments, i.e. those people who may be more likely to see practice in a wider variety of different settings.

Where are the gaps in skills and experience for developing arts and culture in the early years?

From the interviews, webinars and co-design sessions, participants consistently reported a common set of needs in the skills and understanding of people working in early years arts and culture, as follows.

Process and product

The most commonly cited need amongst interviewees was for early years professionals to have a better understanding of the importance of process in arts and creativity, as well as the product that is the output of that process. It was seen as particularly important to encourage young children to develop their own ideas and artistry, and reduce the often-overt focus on working towards creating an adult-defined, artistic output. Product was recognised as important in terms of developing mastery, perseverance, cause and effect, realisation of children's ideas, and so on, but interviewees felt that the focus and valuing of the process needed to change. Several interviewees described going in to settings where there were near-identical Mother's Day cards with paintings of daffodils, or paintings on the wall of near-identical snowmen. Others described the assumption held by many early years practitioners that arts needs to culminate in a show or performance, such as an end-of-term show for parents, without recognising the artistry that goes on elsewhere in young children's activity and thinking.

Of course it is true that shows and performances can have huge value, as can developing arts-related skills through creating pictures. But the general perception from our research participants was that children's experiences are almost polarised between those where the children develop their artistic ideas and nurture their artfulness and those where they are learning almost to recreate existing artistic works of others, towards an 'artistic' output.

The emphasis on product over process is by no means limited to early years settings. Several interviewees noted that many arts and cultural organisations (who often have strong emphases on being performers, on artistic canon and excellence) when working with young children bring with them an expectation that they need to perform or produce something to enrich the children, rather than using their artistry and skill to develop the children's own ideas.

We saw this very directly in one co-design session where, the setting manager reported, on hearing that an 'arts person' was coming, the early years practitioners had rehearsed and directed the children to perform a drama based on a children's story. But in a group discussion about really interesting artistic moments in the setting, all practitioners described occasions when the children had come up with artistic provocations, improvisations or ideas, which the staff had then helped them to develop. So the child-led, process-based moments *were* evident in the setting, but they had to be drawn out and given a language with which to articulate what was happening. Without a facilitator drawing them out, the default 'arts' position was seen as directing children to create a drama from an existing text. The setting manager described the difficulty in persuading early years staff to focus more on the children's artistic ideas and to see this as valid artistic practice.

Lack of confidence and perceived personal knowledge of arts and culture

Very closely related to the above is the widely reported lack of confidence and knowledge in the arts of practitioners themselves. Many interviewees gave examples of early years practitioners who had perhaps never been to a theatre show or concert, or played an instrument etc. In these cases, interviewees report, where there isn't the mental repository of arts experiences and ideas for adults to draw on when working with children, and it is perhaps more understandable that they might think of 'arts' as getting children to recreate, or work towards emulating, the artistic outputs that they do know – famous paintings, stories in books, nursery rhymes etc. Added to this, a 're-creating' process is also ingrained into very many

worksheets, toolkits, EYFS guidance notes, that effectively tell practitioners that the arts is about a certain set of activities that will tell them how skilled or creative a child is.

But, as interviewees noted, this can be a patronising perspective(!), likely to come from arts ‘experts’ and which itself may serve to alienate practitioners further. When we pushed them, for example, in co-design sessions, practitioners came to realise that in fact they did have a broad range of artistic experiences to draw on, and indeed arts and cultural opportunities within the setting and outside it that they could harness, and that often bringing children great artistic experiences might be more about resourcefulness than resources. But we did have to push them, and, moreover, when pushed the personal artistic experiences they had might not be the same as what they perceived as being ‘arts’, for instance they might be more popular, or more family or community-based, or less Western, or less ‘high art’.

Hence why there is such a strong relationship between confidence in the arts and knowledge/skills in the arts and why, for instance, so much arts-based early years training focusses on experiential processes and practitioners discovering their own artistic creativity as much as, if not more than, teaching them skills or knowledge about arts for themselves or for children.

‘What do we actually do?’ Lack of arts techniques and ideas to use with young children

A third common need was around ideas of activities to do with young children and the arts. For example, interviewees reported that practitioners ask ‘What can we do with clay?’ ‘If children make up songs, what do we do to help develop them?’ ‘How can we use painting to develop mark-making skills?’ ‘I can’t sing – how can I help the children sing?’ And so on.

This category of needs – artform-based skills and approaches to develop children’s arts – is of course extremely broad and it was not the focus of this research to identify particular gaps and areas of need, although we have included some specific reported needs below.

But there were three particular observations from interviewees and webinar presenters to note here:

- Firstly, that practitioners are often keen for ideas and techniques to use with children but unless they also have some underpinning understanding of the theory behind them, and a meaningful, local context for them to be deployed, there is a risk that ‘ideas on a plate’ are just used time and time again – delivering activities, rather than developing pedagogy.
- Practitioners often want (and need) to see what approaches and practices actually look like and to be given confidence to try things out for themselves, often through stepped guidance, but the steps themselves may be less transferable without an understanding of the reasoning behind them.
- The hunger for ideas can distract practitioners away from the realisation that they are often already very capable of developing arts-based skills themselves. This is one of the reasons why action research-based approaches, rich in reflection and personalised enquiry, are cited as effective. If practitioners in settings work together on their own enquiries – specific, relevant, owned challenges – they will often be able to source techniques along the way, given the need to do so from the curiosity inspired by their own underlying enquiry questions.

Working with individual children’s ideas

In the survey, we asked two questions related to process and product, and to developing children’s own ideas, drawing on their cultural backgrounds:

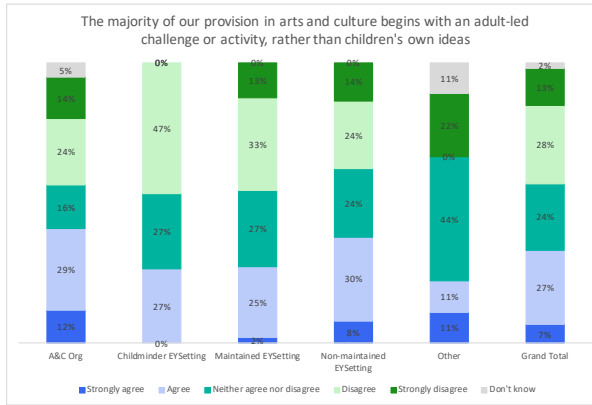


Figure 15: Adult-led and child-led approaches

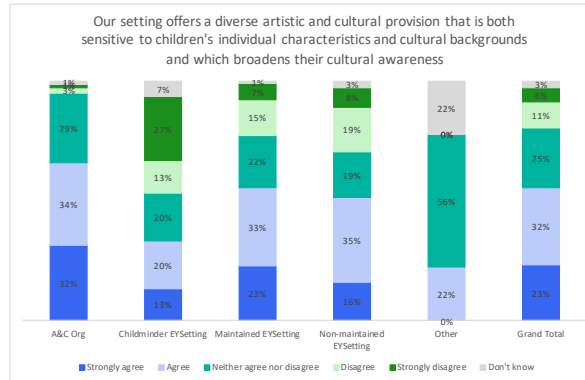


Figure 16: Culturally sensitive provision

Observations:

- Roughly a third of respondents agreed that the *majority* of their arts and cultural activities are adult-led, reinforcing the observations made above.
- Adult-led activities are most common in non-maintained EY settings, followed by arts and cultural organisations.
- Of course they are not mutually exclusive, but it’s interesting that whilst 96% of arts and cultural organisations agreed that their provision was culturally sensitive and broadening to children, 41% agreed that the artistic activities were led from adults’ ideas.
- Plenty of childminders and non-maintained settings appear to be those that offer the least diversity and cultural breadth to children.

Do settings have the confidence and skills to support arts, culture and creativity?

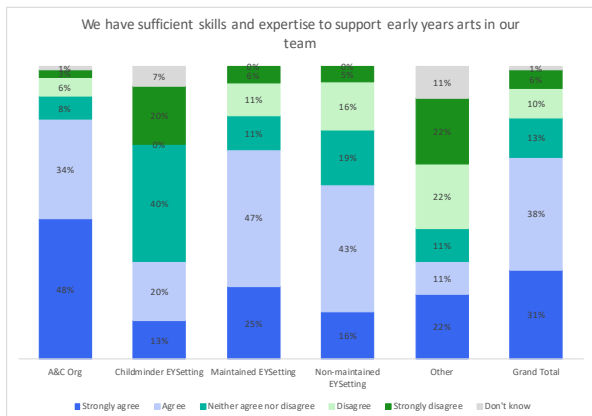


Figure 17: skills to develop arts and culture

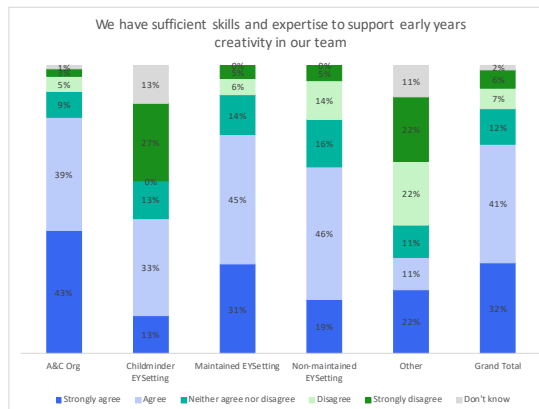


Figure 18: skills to nurture creativity

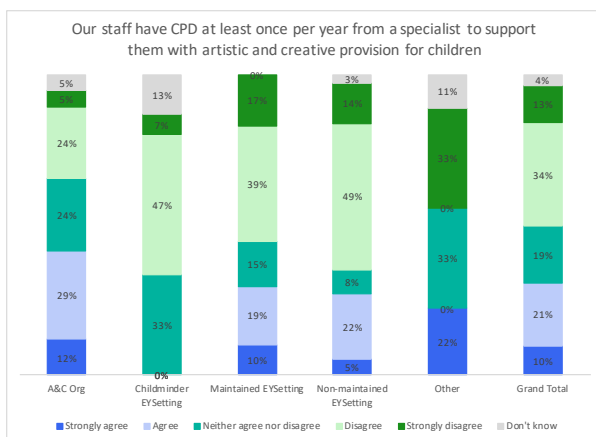


Figure 19: CPD for arts, culture and creativity

Figure 17-Figure 19 report questions relating to staff skills and experiences:

- The reported skill levels are highest in arts and cultural organisations and, in the EY settings, in maintained settings, as might be expected (see above notes above about levels of qualification in maintained vs non-maintained settings).
- The frequency of arts and culture-related CPD arguably does not match the reported level of management commitment in settings (Figure 19 cf. Figure 13) but for 29% and 27% of maintained and non-maintained settings to be having annual arts and culture CPD is not an extremely low amount.
- Arts and culture is not a CPD priority for childminders in this sample at all. This matches several comments from interviews, including the pressures on childminders’ time, the priority accorded to legislative requirements and also the perception amongst many childminders that they are already pretty strong with regards to arts and culture, in which case why would they devote particular attention to developing it?

The skills picture painted by the above data suggests an early years workforce generally confident and skilled in arts and culture, which is different from the picture outlined above from the interviewees and

webinars participants (which may suggest again that we have a more artistic/cultural survey sample than the national average).

We didn't ask survey respondents about strengths/challenges in particular artforms and related disciplines but Figure 20 shows the responses to that question from the research the authors undertook for CapeUK (now IVE) in Yorkshire and the Humber

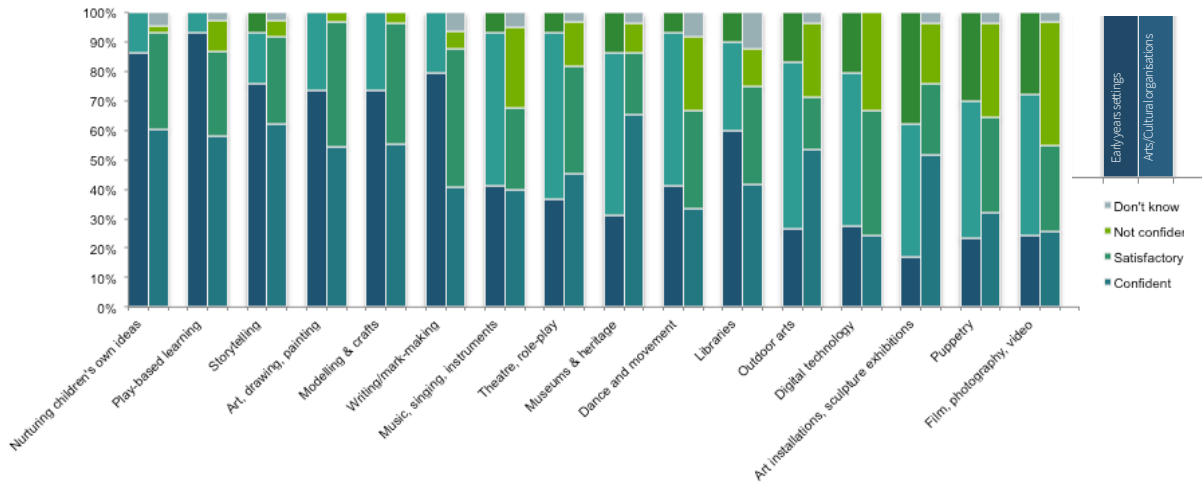


Figure 20: Yorkshire and the Humber: respondents' confidence levels in A&C and related skills in their organisation, from most to least confident

“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?” Source: CapeUK (now IVE)¹⁰

Our interview and co-design participants reported particular aspirations and need in EY settings to develop skills around music, theatre and dance, which is broadly corroborated by the figures in Figure 20 from Yorkshire and the Humber.

A lack of practitioner confidence around using music with young children is very widely reported: practitioners are very often, it seems, uncomfortable about leading singing work with children, or about using instruments where they perceive they have little skill themselves, whereas they are stereotypically much more comfortable with arts and many crafts activities.

¹⁰ Where ideas come from: early years arts, culture and creativity in Yorkshire and the Humber, World Pencil with Earlyarts (CapeUK/IVE, 2016), p16

Arts and culture across the curriculum

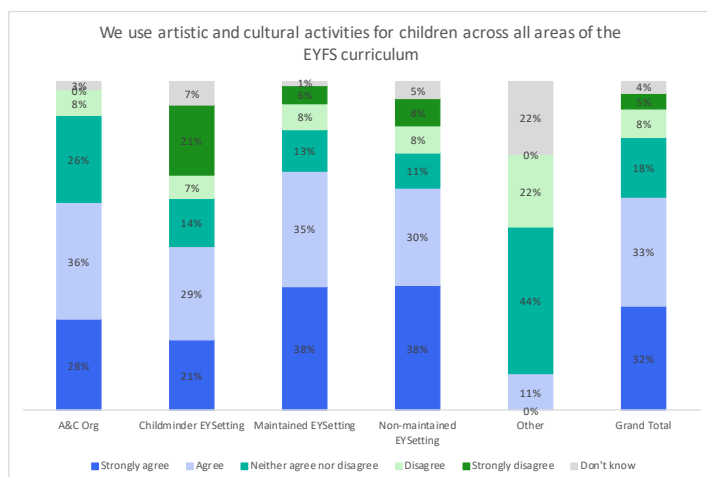


Figure 21: Using arts and culture across the EYFS curriculum

Figure 21 presents a positive picture of arts across the curriculum from survey participants: on average two thirds agree that they use arts and culture across the curriculum.

Again, it may be that those in the ‘Other’ category have an understanding of provision in a broader range of settings than those in the EY settings categories. Several interviewees reported that in some settings, particularly where confidence is low, arts and culture is fairly restricted to the ‘Tuesday afternoon arts session’ or the ‘Friday morning sing’. Anecdotally, arts and culture appear in early years to be more integrated both cross-artform and across the curriculum, certainly compared to anecdotal accounts of the Primary school timetable. But several interviewees describe settings where arts are ‘everywhere’ and those where they definitely are not.

An interviewee from PACEY, the professional association for 30,000 early years professionals, mostly childminders, noted that many of their membership perceive arts and culture as an area of strength in their practice – ‘the paints and craft activities are often out every day’ – and it’s often a preference for creative, messy activities that brings people to childminding in the first place.

Other interviewees cited several examples of practitioners not enjoying the messiness of arts and culture, meaning that arts and crafts in particular can be focused on discrete parts of the weekly timetable.

Several interviewees reported the need for and value in training for early years professionals around using the arts for particular areas of the EYFS curriculum, such as speech and language development, mark-making and literacy, dance for physical development – in other words helping practitioners to harness the arts with skill and background research.

One of the webinar presenters pointed out that the EYFS curriculum is flexible enough that you really could deliver it through anything you wanted – arts and culture, sports, outdoor activity, strict lessons etc.

Related to this, and lying beneath this question of arts across the curriculum, is the issue around arts as process and product: if arts and culture are about making a piece of art or learning a song or rehearsing a play it will tend more towards being a discrete activity; alternatively, if arts and culture are a medium for children to explore their ideas, to develop writing and numeracy skills, to understand aspects of the world etc., then it more naturally permeates the whole setting’s environment and ethos.

Partnerships and parents

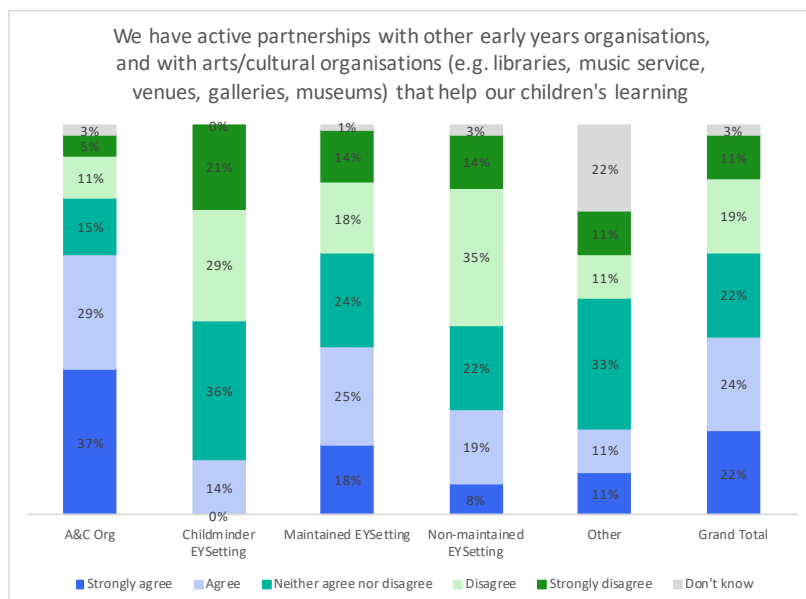


Figure 22: Partnerships

Figure 22 shows results from the survey question about partnerships with outside organisations. The results were as might be expected, based on interviewee observations:

- Arts and cultural organisations have the most partnerships – most would struggle to fund or deliver early years programmes without them.
- Of the early years settings, maintained settings, many of whom are schools, have the highest level of partnerships, but given the extent of partnership building (teaching school alliances, local authority-based networking, libraries and arts organisation outreach etc.) targeted at maintained settings, the proportions are not high.
- Non-maintained settings have fewer partnerships – indeed more non-maintained settings than childminders disagreed that they had strong active partnerships.
- Childminders, who generally work independently, albeit often in informal local networks, have the fewest partnerships.

For most settings, the partners closest to home are parents and carers. Several interviewees, webinar and co-design participants describe the value of involving parents and carers:

- It has a hugely important value in children's learning and development, strengthening connections between setting and home for coherent learning experiences for children.
- Many settings find that their parents can bring opportunities for children in the setting (e.g. around arts and culture) which the practitioners have neither skills, confidence or finances to provide themselves.
- And parent/carer involvement can have significant positive outcomes around community cohesion, cultural exchange and understanding, self-esteem and other social issues.

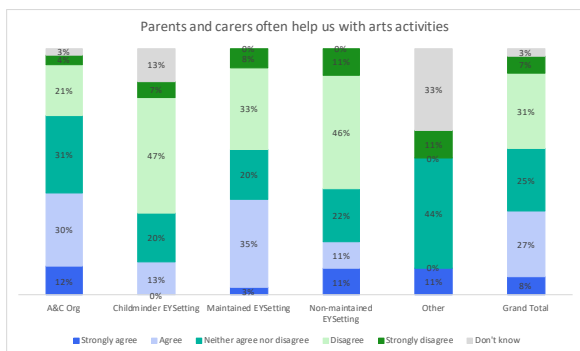


Figure 23: Parents/carers involvement helping with arts/cultural activities in settings

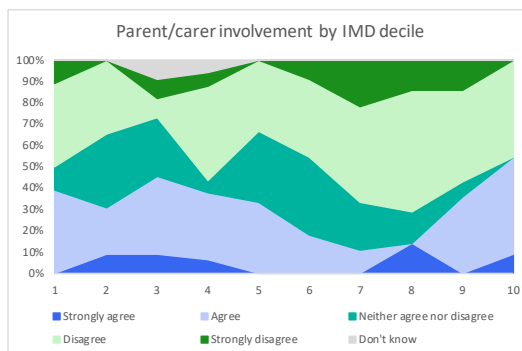


Figure 24: Parent/carer involvement, by IMD decile, for EY settings only (Childminders, maintained and non-maintained EY settings)

Figure 23 and Figure 24 show results from the survey question about involvement of parents/carers in arts and cultural activities:

- Childminders have very little in-setting support from parents/carers, which would be expected as they are almost always enabling parents to work.
- Non-maintained settings, most of which will also be providing care whilst parents are at work, also have little parent/carer participation in-setting although there is a notable group within non-maintained settings (12%) who strongly agreed that parents/carers often help, three times more than in maintained settings.
- An analysis of parent/carer involvement in EY settings broken down by deprivation level (IMD decile, Figure 24) shows a fairly consistent level of involvement other than a dip in deciles 6-8 (reasonably affluent)
- Maintained settings, many of whom are schools where there may be less of a childcare consideration as education becomes statutory, have a relatively high parent/carer involvement
- Arts and cultural organisations report the highest parent/carer involvement which may be largely due to parents/carers taking their children to arts and cultural venues, as well as involvement in outreach and project activity.

Visits to and from arts and cultural organisations, individuals and experiences

The second group of questions around arts and culture in settings related to the frequency with which settings had visits to and from different arts and cultural providers.

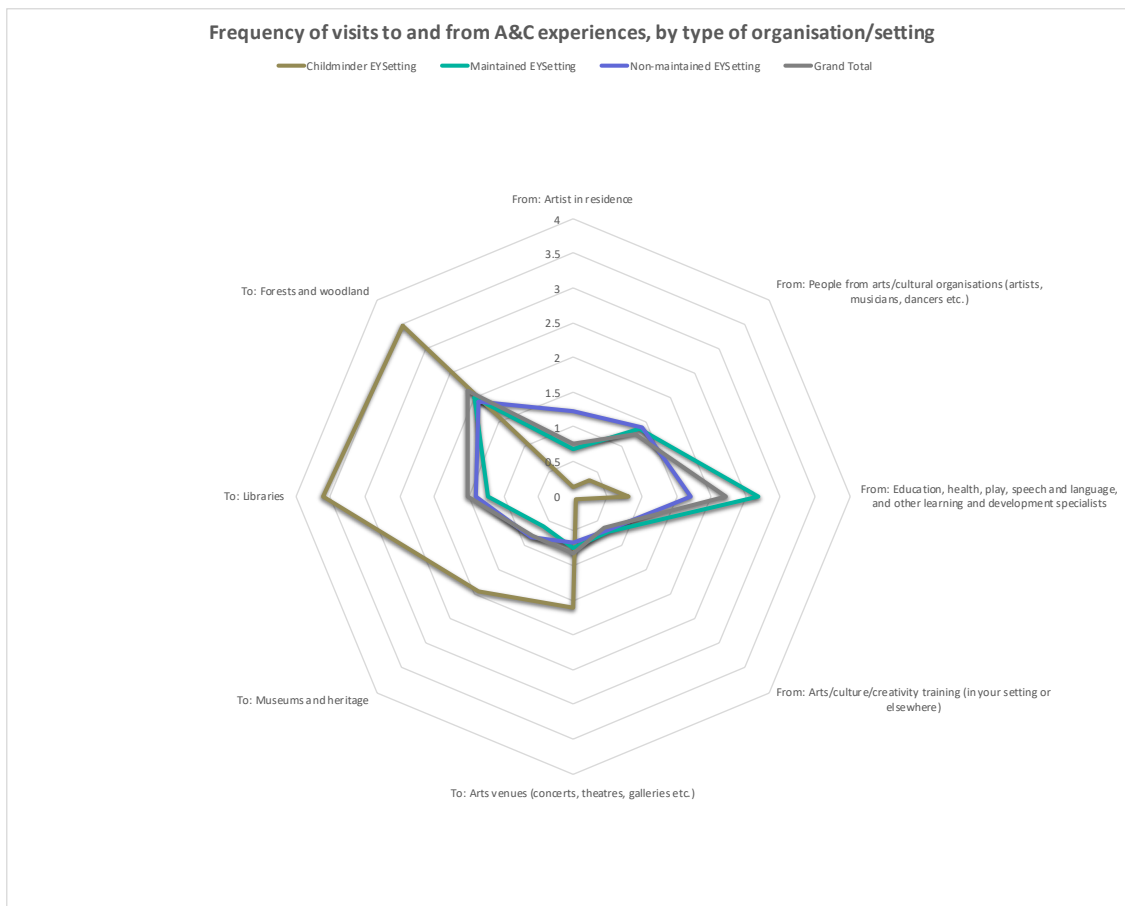


Figure 25: Visits to and from arts and cultural organisations

Frequency of visits were given a value from 5 (once/week) to 1 (once/year) and 0 (never). Chart shows average values for each type of setting

Figure 25 shows the results from these questions collectively.

- Childminders are the most frequent visitors, which is perhaps to be expected as it is often easiest for them to take children out on visits. Childminders reported visiting forests and libraries a few times per term and museums and arts venues around once per term.
- Group settings (maintained and non-maintained) have visits *from* A&C people and organisations around twice per year, and about twice as often as they go out *to* arts organisations, or have arts-based training. They are much more likely to visit forests/woodlands or libraries (around once/term) than arts and cultural organisations (less than once/year).
- Maintained EY settings have regular visits, a few times per term, from other education/health specialists, and are more likely to do so in areas of increasing deprivation.
- An analysis of EY settings visits broken down by Ofsted rating was inconclusive.
- Group settings (maintained and non-maintained) receive visitors around as often as they make visits, whereas childminders receive virtually no visitors and make many visits.

Figure 26-Figure 28 present the responses to the questions about visits in more detail.

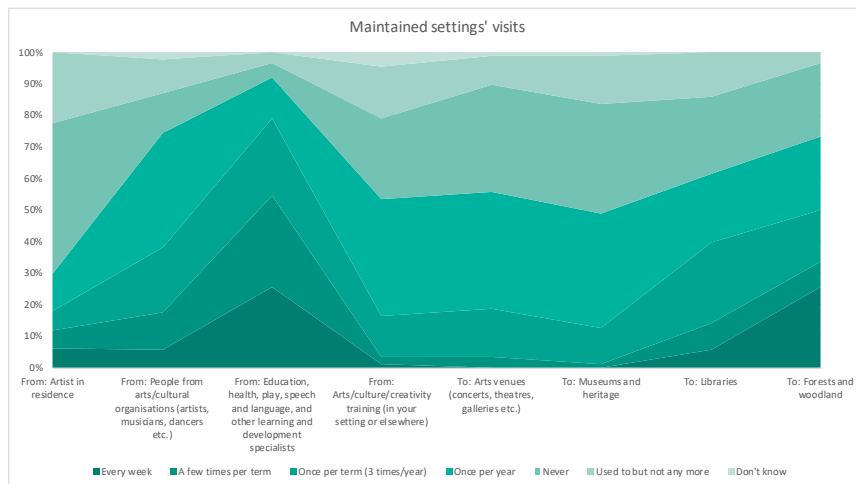


Figure 26: Maintained settings frequency of visits

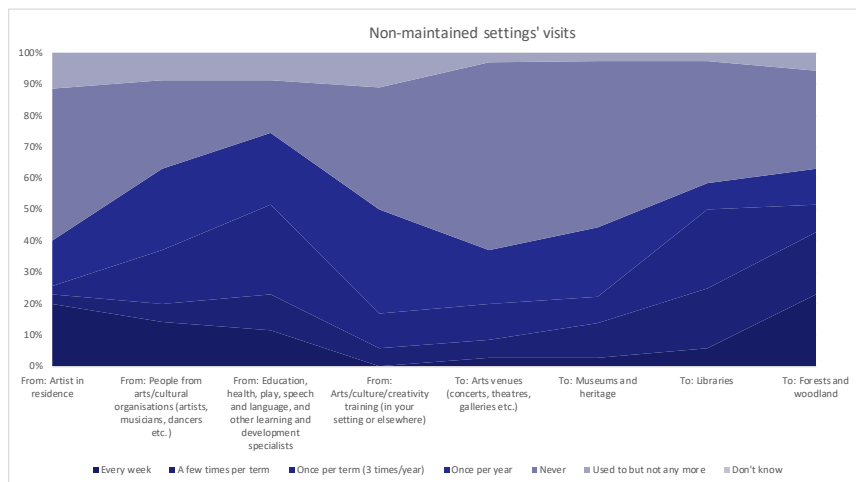


Figure 27: Non-maintained settings frequency of visits

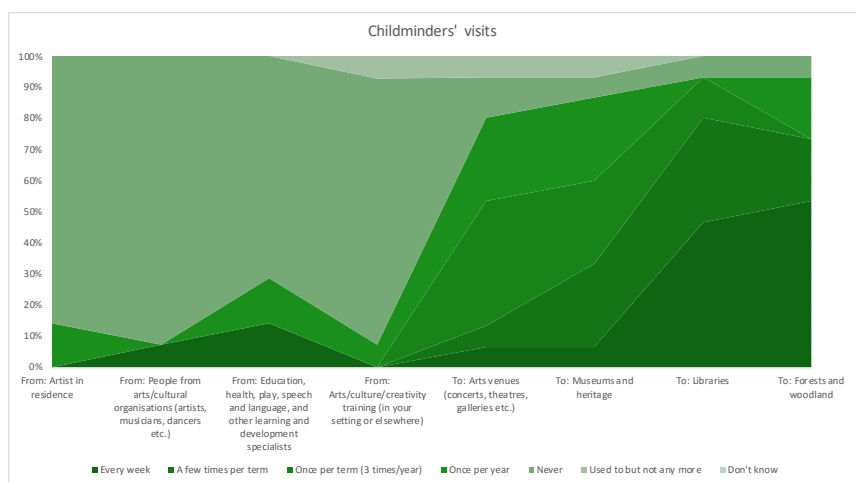


Figure 28: Childminders frequency of visits

Key needs emerging for sector capacity building

Emerging from the interviews, co-design sessions and survey responses, we summarise that the three main areas of need for developing capacity around arts and culture in early years settings, are:

- Process and product: understanding of artistic process and skills in developing children's artistic ideas, starting from the position of children being highly competent and creative
- Arts-based confidence, experiences and skills for practitioners: helping practitioners to unearth and develop anew their abilities in the arts, and equip them with ideas and techniques to help children, including how arts can support the whole curriculum
- High-quality opportunities from arts and cultural organisations, community and parents/carers to enrich and inspire young children and practitioners alike

What would (and already does) help to develop arts and culture in early years settings?

In the telephone interviews and co-design sessions, before asking participants about their potential interest in an award for arts and culture, we asked more broadly about what *would* work in and around early years settings to develop the provision and opportunities for children.

The analyses of these discussions follows. Semi-structured interviews loosely followed questions in three areas:

- What would help develop practice, environment, understanding in the setting?
- What would help to develop management/leadership understanding and buy-in?
- What would help to develop meaningful relationships with outside individuals and organisations, including arts and cultural organisations, and parents and communities?

1. What would help develop practice in the setting?

Questions included:

- What would help increase early years practitioners' confidence and pedagogies/ experience/skills to develop children's abilities in, and experiences of, the arts?
- What would increase EY practitioners' confidence and pedagogies/experience/skills to use the arts across children's learning and development, throughout the EYFS?
- What would help assess children's attainment and progression related to arts, culture and creativity?

Face-to-face training

“Practitioners developing their own artistry and creative confidence is the main barrier in early years, not the curricular framework”¹¹

In terms of developing practice, just about every single interviewee cited the singular most effective source of professional learning for early years practitioners as being training, by-and-large face-to-face.

The nature of the needs outlined above (around understanding process and product, children's ideas, and confidence in developing the arts) is such that they will often be developed through personal, experiential training and personalised feedback.

¹¹ Interviewee

What would (and already does) help to develop arts and culture in early years settings?

Several interviewees highlighted the reality of many early years professionals' lives and backgrounds, with practitioners often feeling that they have virtually no knowledge of, or confidence in the arts, of the arts as being alien to them, with maybe no personal experiences of enjoying the arts. Interviewees talked about the importance of asset-based training, starting with early years professionals' own ideas, and of participatory experiences and experiential training, learning by doing, reflecting, co-critiquing and planning.

Interviewees described the importance of seeing high quality practice – seeing is believing – hence one interviewee described the importance of arts and cultural visits to a setting, or from a setting, not so much for the children's benefits but for early years professionals' to see for themselves the impacts that these experiences can have on children. Another described the importance of trainers modelling the behaviours and techniques that they wish to develop in practitioners, to work effectively and creatively with children.

As above, several interviewees described the vital importance of developing practitioners' confidence through carefully considered experiences that build on their existing knowledge. One interviewee, for example, described a training process that focusses exclusively in the first instance on practitioners' well-being, relaxation and feeling special before embarking on any kind of 'learning'. Others described the importance of 'overcoming fear', for example around practical music-making, in group activities, such as through sharing group singing ideas, and singing together as a group.

A few interviewees referred to peer-to-peer training or mentoring as being hugely effective in levelling the playing field and changing practice. In these instances, training was being offered by professionals from both arts and culture, and early years sectors to each other in a nursery or school environment, with an expectation for equal accountability in implementing and assessing practice on both sides. In one case, the ambition for the project is that teaching schools and nursery schools will take the lead in cascading learning to support their local settings through local cluster networks, and the national sector body, People Dancing, has recognised and supported this through its 'associate artist' programme. The staff involved are experiencing artistic practice being deeply embedded into these settings because of the joint early years / arts and cultural languages, skills and confidence being developed between them.

Particular emphasis was placed by a handful of interviewees on residential training for early years arts, culture and creativity. They describe how these more intense and immersive experiences are highly effective at giving practitioners, leaders and artists deep insights into arts and culture, into children's learning and development, and time to learn with each other, in many cases establishing what become fruitful long-term relationships. Of course residential training is more expensive than other forms of training, in terms of accommodation, travel, trainers' fees, delegates' time and, in some cases, teacher cover. But one interviewee noted that the total cost of a weekend residential might be roughly comparable to the cost of doing an Artsmark award, in which case it would be worth considering the net impact of both alongside each other, not least because this is the kind of consideration a setting would make.

Online training

Several interviewees described the current extensive use of, and potential for, online training and across the consultation there was widespread recommendation, for early years arts, culture and creative training using an online learning platform or tool.

In particular, video was described as a hugely powerful tool for professional learning about early years arts, culture and creativity both in terms of being able to see videos of other people's practice, to receive more interactive forms of training and also to reflect back on their own practice. One interviewee described how video is 'inarguable' and hence a great way to usher in reflective observation of children and professional practice.

What would (and already does) help to develop arts and culture in early years settings?

Use of video in many early years settings now is commonplace, not least because of the widespread use of online learning journals as observation and assessment tools for children's learning, particularly [Tapestry](#). Some interviewees noted, though, that online learning journals can be very individuating, focusing as they tend to do, on individual children.

The National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA) have now moved all of their training online and report very positive feedback from practitioners who appreciate the convenience of online learning in particular. It means that settings don't have to pay for and organise cover to send practitioners on already expensive training courses. PACEY, the early years professional association, principally for childminders but also practitioners in settings, also described the preference of private and voluntary settings and of childminders for bite-sized, time-flexible online training, techniques and ideas: when working 60-hour weeks, many childminders have little time left for training.

Other interviewees talked about the significance of online, and particularly smartphone-based, learning for a younger audience of early years practitioners who "will never read the excellent collection of books and manuals we have in the office but are constantly on their phones."

Others, though, were more cautious about online learning, highlighting, as above, the importance of personal experiences: "people need these eye-opening, mind-opening experiences – you can't just tell people things – they have to experience it for themselves."

Tools, frameworks, development scales

Self-assessment tools, development frameworks and other toolkits are popular in the early years sector. Several interviewees suggested that such a toolkit or framework for arts and culture would work well. Others pointed out that, other than for settings that already have a known aspiration to develop their arts and cultural provision, most settings might feel they had no need for another framework when several (e.g. ECERS, EYFS, LoTC etc.) already cover arts and culture well.

Book Trust suggested that, drawing on their experience, what would improve the quality of practice in EY settings is providing practitioners with tools to improve their own practice rooted in the EYFS, including:

- best practice case studies, possibly collected as part of local authority monitoring visits
- tools for practitioners to engage with local arts and cultural organisations, with an outline of what a good theatre / dance / visual arts / museum / library session (for instance) might include and how it could relate to the EYFS

Several interviewees talked about the potential for an equivalent to [Development Matters](#)¹² specifically for arts and culture. This would set out, what children's abilities might look like at different stages across a range of artform-related skills and competencies. Alternatively, instead of describing the phases of development of children's abilities, as Development Matters does, it might give examples of what children do at different stages of development together with potential explanations of why, and what might be motivating them. A third approach would look not at phased examples of what children do but at what adults might be doing, although this is difficult to understand fully unless the adults are working in response to children's own stages of development. It was suggested that 'development scales' don't necessarily have to be written as incremental scales.

¹² See <https://www.foundationyears.org.uk/files/2012/03/Development-Matters-FINAL-PRINT-AMENDED.pdf>. Since the completion of this research, such a framework has been produced for music and early years, published in September 2018: *Musical Development Matters*, Nicola Burke (Early Education, 2018), developed alongside the Tri-Music Together project and Youth Music. <https://www.early-education.org.uk/musical-development-matters>

What would (and already does) help to develop arts and culture in early years settings?

Interviewees agreed that having an illustrated / video-based framework, a ‘go-to excellence framework for arts, culture and creativity’ could be very useful in settings. Others cautioned that as soon as you write down with authority what children’s artistry, creativity and culture look like, many practitioners will treat it as textbook truth and may then fail to recognise (or know how to extend and offer support) when children do something differently.

Potentially such a framework could be part of an online learning platform, enabling practitioners to add their own ideas, experiences, techniques, etc., to a growing communal resource, if effective means of quality control can also be incorporated, and if users can also select to see ‘professional developed’ content.

Action research

Several participants in the interviews, co-design sessions and webinars advocated the power of action research and settings’ own research enquiries for developing high quality practice with young children. Much practice with young children, as advocated for instance by the EYFS, is based on observation of children’s play – formative observation and assessment are encouraged in order to understand how best to support young children’s patterns of behaviour (schema) and learning progress, as distinct from more didactic, instructive pedagogies.

Early childhood psychologist Jerome Bruner proposed the process of ‘scaffolding’ young children’s thinking, and thereby enabling children’s competence to be extended beyond what they were capable of doing on their own.¹³ This process is an important part of building independent thought, self-regulation, critical awareness, creativity and imagination, and starts with daily observation by practitioners and teachers whose role is to help extend, rather than dictate, children’s ideas. So longer-running research processes are a natural next step from existing observation-based practice.

Several participants described how settings-based action research forms part of the work of their setting or organisation. For example, Early Excellence described the effectiveness of the nine-month, cluster-based, action research projects they have recently run.¹⁴ St Paul’s Nursery School, Bristol, and several others described their approach as “co-researchers in children’s learning”. The National Children’s Bureau’s highly successful Making it REAL¹⁵ (Raising Early Achievement in Literacy) projects for developing early literacy are all built on practice-based action research with practitioners. This is now being rolled out in the South East as REAL Creative, bringing partnerships of arts, cultural and early years providers together.

Research-based approaches work well because they enable practitioners and settings to address questions that are completely relevant to their settings, children, community and staff and to own the research and learning process themselves. Two of our three co-design sessions, when asked to design the processes they would most like to use to develop arts and cultural practice, designed research-based approaches where they pursued answers to their own questions, learning and experimenting along with the children.

One interviewee questioned whether all practitioners in settings would be able to undertake a research process satisfactorily (for themselves and for research integrity) given that many have had little or no experience in any kind of formal research process. Another interviewee described the value of starting with practitioners’ own research questions and having a teacher/educator/researcher to help them with the research process. On similar lines, another interviewee suggested bringing in university researchers to

¹³ Bruner was building on Lev Vygotsky’s theory of the Zone of Proximal Development which remained unfinished after his untimely death.

¹⁴ <http://earlyexcellence.com/national-services/join-a-transformational-cluster-project/>

¹⁵ <https://www.ncb.org.uk/what-we-do/our-priorities/early-years/projects-programmes/making-it-real>

support settings and practitioners with the research elements of action research, or to sit research clusters within teaching school alliances, as the National Literacy Trust have done, and would recommend to others. This approach has been successfully pioneered by [5x5x5=creativity](#), and continued in early years projects as part of the Creative Partnerships programme.

Having an action research central focus to an early years arts award could effectively flip a conventional award trajectory on its head. Instead of 'here is a way to show how you can do x, y, and z', which practitioners try to achieve in linear fashion, the starting point becomes 'here is a way to articulate what you *can* do and the impact it has' based on a set of principles about what is possible through creative learning in early years. This alternative trajectory was one that was widely supported throughout this consultation.

Arts and culture champions

Several interviewees talked about the importance of champions for arts and culture: if there's someone who "really gets it" – the experience and power of arts, culture and creativity for and with young children – they can be pivotal to empowering practice change in the setting. The champion might be a setting manager or practitioner, it might be someone based in local organisation or community with strong connections into the setting, it might be a parent, it might in some cases be a local authority early years advisor. When this person is positioned inside, or in connection with, a setting, they often find a way of developing practice, of developing opportunities with outside agencies, or helping others to understand children's creative ideas and potential.

There are several ways in which these champions might emerge: e.g. following a life-long participation with the arts; following an inspirational training experience, particularly a residential course perhaps; or following a shadowing internship in another setting. But what is perhaps equally significant is how they are retained. Interviewees' responses to this challenge revolved around giving champions on-going training to develop their creative practice, and supportive peer-to-peer networks, either online or face-to-face, or through get-togethers at conferences and training days.

Visiting specialists

A majority of our research conversations (interviews, co-design, webinars, survey text responses) included discussion of the value of having a specialist come into the setting to support and guide practitioners and managers – bespoke, observation-based advice in the place where it will be used. There are several reasons for this:

- As one interviewee put it, "if there isn't someone in the setting, especially small independent settings, who gets it – the importance of arts, ideas and process – then you really need to bring someone in who does."
- Many settings reported the perceived value of having someone come in to look openly at what they are doing and then give constructive advice – i.e. building on what they are doing. In the case of kitemarks and awards, settings appreciate the awarding body having actually seen their work first hand, as opposed to through paperwork and forms.
- Self-assessment frameworks can be abused/misused where users form an inaccurate picture of their practice, in which case an expert observer is needed. As one interviewee put it, "there's so much reflection and observation already in EYFS – no point asking for more: you need someone to come in and help"
- In many cases, settings may really only need to be given a nudge in the right direction: e.g. both our London and Bath co-design sessions started with practitioners expressing needs for different

What would (and already does) help to develop arts and culture in early years settings?

specialisms and ended with them realising they could meet these needs themselves with the right resourceful behaviours, although they would appreciate some external input along the way.

It is also notable that many of the awards and frameworks used in early years do feature an external visitor coming into the setting, for example to validate an award. Tower Hamlets Arts and Music Education Service (THAMES) include this in their arts kitemark: firstly the school or setting evaluates itself and then an observer comes in and gives a view.

Networking and peer-to-peer

The majority of interviewees, co-design participants and webinar participants described the benefits of practice-sharing networking, peer-to-peer sharing, shadowing and professional co-learning.

For example, in Devon and Somerset there is clearly widespread and very effective networking and practice sharing around arts and culture in the early years which is both developing practice in settings and also spreading awareness to new settings. As part of this, early years professionals shadow each other and local artists mentor early years professionals. Leeds Artforms run well-attended termly early years networking meetings. Book Trust run biannual regional stakeholder meetings which they report as being very effective means for sharing and developing practice. National bodies such as PACEY, NDNA, NEYTCO, Early Education and Early Excellence also run regional and local networks. The Family Arts Campaign has around 23 regional networks, which vary in effectiveness, with perhaps the most dynamic based at the Watershed in Bristol. A Bridge Organisation interviewee described academy groups and nursery chains as perfect vehicles for network-based sharing and development, and potentially a good vehicle for settings working towards an early years arts mark together. Others added that teaching schools alliances were a strong source of local networking.

However several interviewees noted that effective networks rarely run themselves: they need commitment and resource. Several interviewees reported that maybe ten years ago there had been effective and proactive early years practice networking in most local authorities in England, when the human resource was there to maintain it, but one national commentator suggested that such effective networking only exists now in maybe 10-20% of local authorities – the Devon and Somerset experience appears exceptional. Most of the maintained settings are now part of locality-based cluster groupings, usually headed up by the largest setting in the cluster, so, in terms of maintained early years settings, the networks are strong. Nursery schools not so much except that the teaching settings are now part of the Teaching School Alliances. There is local-authority-led early years networking in other places but, interviewees report, with dwindling resources, it now tends to focus on legal requirements such as accountability, health and safety. One London borough interviewee described how early years clustering was constantly promoted by the local authority but unless proactively facilitated, it hasn't happened.

Another frequently made observation in interviews was that it is quite common, although by no means universal, for early years settings, perhaps particularly in the private sector, not to be inclined to share practice with each other, at least on a local level. The main reason suggested was that many settings feel (rightly or wrongly, accurately or inaccurately) in competition with other local settings, and indeed in many cases they are competing for parents and places. For example the NDNA offered all their 200 maths champions the idea of local clusters, with minimal response, although they were much more keen to participate in a national group. Many interviewees suggested this was a widespread phenomenon.

An award for settings

When asked what would help improve practice and opportunities in settings, the majority of interviewees, co-design and webinar participants were cautious about the impact of an award:

- Many interviewees expressed the opening opinion that an early years Artsmark was a good idea in theory but in practice it might have little net impact as and of itself.
- Of course, it would depend on the award process and many felt that if it included training, peer-to-peer networking, action research, settings specialisms, and expert input, it could be effective.
- But that process need not necessarily lead to an award and many expressed reservations that an award like the existing Artsmark would work well for the strong settings, who'd have to do little to get it, and other settings would try to “jump through the hoops” as expediently as possible so as to get the badge on the wall to impress parents.
- Several settings said that they weren't particularly interested in getting an award to validate what they were already doing, but that they would be interested in approaches and processes to help them develop their capacity and provision in and around arts and culture, which might lead to an award. This was the case in all three co-design sessions, where we asked settings to design the process that would work for them.

Other interviewees and survey respondents were much more supportive of an award, principally for the following reasons:

- It would be powerfully affirming for many settings, validating with authority the high quality practice that they have already developed.
- It would be aspirational – something for settings to aim for and work towards.
- The current Artsmark process, appropriately translated for an early years audience, could provide the vehicle to carry many of the other suggested processes (training, external visits, peer support, etc.) described here.
- Several EY settings have already requested an early years Artsmark, and see the fact that one doesn't already exist as an indication of how early years is considered less significant or not taken as seriously as other areas of education.

These would suggest a careful assessment of the balance between the process and the award, between formative and summative, between development and validation, which we discuss further below.

2. What would help develop leadership understanding and buy-in?

Questions included:

- What would develop EY settings leadership for (or through) arts, culture and creativity
- What would help to embed arts and culture in the environment, planning and development of EY settings - raising the profile of, prioritising and developing the arts

Research participants had less to add specifically to these questions than for the question of developing practice (1.) above, although many of the above responses are also relevant to leadership and management.

The value of leadership buy-in

The significance of having the leaders of settings understanding and committing to arts, culture and creativity was reiterated by almost all research participants and, as described above, this may be particularly important in an early years context where many settings are smaller and less formal than school contexts.

Even in cases where a setting has a very committed arts and culture champion, one interviewee commented that, if there isn't endorsement from the manager/leader, they will struggle to develop practice in the setting and, in many cases, will move on to another setting where they can take their ideas forward.

Dedicated leadership initiatives

In addition to managers and leaders participating in training, networking, peer-to-peer and research processes as described above, a few interviewees described dedicated programmes on creative leadership for early years leaders:

- The NDNA offer specific online training for leaders, separate from their offer for practitioners.
- Book Trust described the particular importance for leaders of approaches that affirm existing strengths in a setting, rather than criticising and providing alternatives, and also, for the arts, the importance of clearly articulating the instrumental and intrinsic benefits of arts and culture for children, across the EYFS.
- Manchester Museums are proactive at going out to participate in local headteacher networks
- Earlyarts offer a comprehensive Creative Leadership course designed for senior managers and leaders in the cultural and early education sectors.
- Family Arts Campaign ask that it is the CEO who sign up to their Family Arts Standard.
- Many head teachers, heads of Foundation Stage and settings managers have bought in to the NPQM/EL (national professional qualification for middle / executive leadership) training programmes formerly designed by the National College for Teaching and Leadership, and distributed through the Teaching School Alliances, or one of a plethora of leadership programmes available from private education providers. Whilst these aren't dedicated arts leadership courses, many include creative approaches to leadership that can be cascaded and embedded throughout all teaching and learning.

In general, many interviewees advocated for influencing leadership the power of 'experiencing is believing', as described above.

Evidence alongside practicable frameworks and practical steps

One interviewee described how the 2008 EYFS curriculum had been highly effective in moving early years settings' managers forward with its well compiled and inter-related combination of research evidence, mapped on to a framework that settings could use, along with practical steps, ideas and techniques settings could deploy and, in the form of Development Matters, clear guidance for practitioners on what to look for in children's progress. (Since the completion of this research, such a framework has been produced for music and early years, published in September 2018.)¹⁶

3. What would help develop relationships with outside organisations?

Questions included:

- What would increase the access to external arts/cultural experiences by EY children
- What would increase the quality of arts/cultural experiences accessible by EY children
- What would support arts/cultural organisations to develop EY capacity, expertise and resources, including co-working/co-designing/co-researching/co-learning with EY settings, parents and wider community

Again, interviewees had fewer specific suggestions in response to these questions than (1.), excepting that many of the above suggestions already feature participation from or leadership by arts and cultural organisations:

- Many of the commended training experiences and arts/cultural experiences valued by settings are provided by arts and cultural organisations.
- Several settings describe the value of visits to the setting from early years arts and cultural specialists, such as artists, dancers and musicians in residence.
- Many successful examples of networking and peer-to-peer working include arts and cultural organisations and individuals.
- Most cited action research projects around arts and culture in early years have been built on partnerships between early years settings, arts and cultural organisations and research specialists/university departments.

Three groups of issues and suggestions, related to arts and cultural organisations, did emerge, as follows.

The dangers of parachuting

Several interviewees expressed reservations about arts and culture projects and experiences being parachuted into early years settings, or where settings visit arts and cultural venues:

- These can often exaggerate practitioner perceptions that “arts are not for them” and “I could never do that”, thus disempowering practitioners from sustaining arts and cultural opportunities in the setting.
- Relatedly, several interviewees described the way that experiences and opportunities parachuted in, or flown out, from arts and cultural organisations – wow experiences – can distract attention from the real need to change practice in the setting itself.

¹⁶ *Musical Development Matters*, Nicola Burke (Early Education, 2018), developed alongside the Tri-Music Together project and Youth Music. <https://www.early-education.org.uk/musical-development-matters>

What would (and already does) help to develop arts and culture in early years settings?

- Overall, several interviewees expressed caution about the role of arts and cultural organisations in early years: fundamentally, in most cases, it needs to be more about co-learning and less about performing.
- One interviewee also noted that in some settings there are so many visitors (local authority, health and safety, speech and language, arts and culture) that it becomes unsettling for many of the children.

Quality of early years experiences

- Several interviewees described experiences provided by arts and cultural organisations that had little understanding of child development or how to develop children's ideas and were much more focused on adult performers delighting or entertaining children. Of itself this is not a bad thing to engage children's interest, but is perhaps only half the potential experience.
- Some interviewees described CPD experiences provided by arts and cultural organisations that had been of poor quality, including little or no understanding of or respect for early years specialism, and have dissuaded settings from pursuing any further similar opportunities.
- Several interviewees suggested the idea of an early years Artsmark for arts and cultural organisations (i.e. instead of, or as well as, an award for early years settings).

Lack of knowledge and signposting

- Several interviewees described the widespread lack of availability of well-collated information, and people accessing it, about arts and cultural opportunities for early years and families.
- Book Trust described how using local infrastructure (particularly local authorities) to distribute Book Packs was vital to their building up a fabric of relationships and networks to develop the wider work of the organisation.

Six options for developing arts and culture in early years settings

In the telephone interviews we asked interviewees about their perspectives on arts and culture in early years and what would work to develop it. In the co-design sessions we asked early years settings what they would like to achieve around arts and culture and to design the process they would like to use to achieve. In the webinars, we asked early year arts and culture 'experts' to describe how their settings and practice had developed and how it might be developed in other settings.

We then distilled the insights from these three processes into six hypothetical options for early years settings, to assess what would appeal to settings, and why, to help develop arts and cultural practice and provision. The main part of the online survey then asked participants about these six options and we have used other survey questions to segment the resulting responses.

The six options are described below, as they were described in the survey. The market-based costings on which we asked participants to comment are also given. The costings are based on market research and the authors' experience of the costs paid and borne for comparable offers in the early years sector and elsewhere.

1. Online learning

An online platform for where settings staff can learn about a wide range of techniques, approaches and practical ideas for developing arts, culture and creativity with children. It would include lots of video-based learning, and self-assessment and peer-assessment tools. It would have a strong emphasis on peer-to-peer sharing, like 'online workshops', and could interlink with popular online early years journal packages.

It would be modular, meaning that a setting could develop, or specialise, in particular areas at different times, e.g. clay and model-making, or engaging parents and families, or arts for speech and language development.

It would give a profile of strengths and weaknesses for individual practitioners, and for the setting as a whole, and would allow you to compare your practice to others nationally. These profiles could be used to gain certificates that recognised both a setting's/practitioner's level of professional practice and also the progress that they had made over time.

Indicative cost: £35 per 2-hour course

2. Award

A process to help your setting design and implement its own approach for developing provision in the arts, culture and creativity, that includes:

- A self-assessment tool on your current practice, provision and activities for children
- 1 day's personal support to develop an action plan for your setting – what you'd like to work towards and how

- Signposting to training, other CPD and opportunities offered for young children and EY practitioners by nearby arts and cultural organisations
- Mentoring to support you through implementing your action plan
- Requirement to submit a progress report with case studies once you've worked through your action plan (after 1-2 years)...
- ...leading to a certified, graded award celebrating your practice and achievement, that is endorsed by Arts Council England.

It would be carefully designed to help you achieve EYFS objectives in and through arts, culture and creativity.

Indicative cost: £250 per setting

3. Co-learning programme

A scheme which your setting could join that would provide well-organised opportunities for your setting's staff to take part in professional learning events with arts and cultural organisations (like museums, libraries, galleries, music venues etc.) and other early years settings and organisations. The scheme would include:

- Networking events for people to meet, share ideas and experiences, build joint plans together, identify funding sources etc.
- Buddying and shadowing for people in different organisations to work alongside each other and learn from each other's practice.
- Action research support, for staff and collaborators to work on their own research questions around children's artistic and cultural experiences.

It would operate loosely across your local authority area, but with links and exchanges between different areas. It would be an opportunity for different organisations to share and develop practice together and tackle common agendas. Participating settings/organisations could promote the scheme's "charter mark", indicating their involvement.

Indicative cost: £150 per year to join

4. Pack

A set of ideas, techniques, prompts and suggestions, presented on cards in a physical pack, along with booklets explaining the toolkit is designed to work, the research it's based on, how it fits in with the EYFS etc. (A bit like the Birth-to-Three Matters pack.) The toolkit would include things like:

- Ideas for activities to inspire children's creative play using some of the objects and materials you're like to have in your setting
- Examples of children's creative ideas and how you could develop them
- Different ways in which arts and culture could be used to support EYFS objectives across the curriculum.

The toolkit would also come with a smartphone app, which has all the cards, and where you can also share experiences with other practitioners of using the ideas, and add new ones yourself.

Indicative cost: £120 per pack

5. Training

A structured year-long programme of training and expert support for your setting. The programme would have a strong emphasis on giving practitioners experiences of developing their own creativity in the arts and empowering them to have confidence and skills to support children across a range of different art forms. It would include:

Six options for developing arts and culture in early years settings

- 2-3 training sessions per year in your or a neighbouring local authority for settings staff and managers
- at least 2 visits to arts/cultural venues
- a weekend residential course for a member of staff/manager, and
- bi-monthly visits to your setting from an early years creative arts specialist to observe, mentor and advise your setting on development
- Annual get-together for participating settings across a larger area

At the end of the programme, the specialist mentor would provide a set of observations and recommendations, and certify the setting's level of attainment and progress in supporting children's arts, culture and creativity.

Indicative cost: £900 for a year-long programme

6. Programme for families

A year-long programme for your setting, with a specialist mentor, to identify your own action research questions on how to work with parents/families together to support children's artistic and cultural experiences and learning and other issues as appropriate. It would include:

- An initial session with practitioners and families to identify ideas and aspirations
- Expert mentor support in the setting and by phone to support the action research process as it happens
- An appropriately trained early years creative arts specialist to visit the setting monthly and, if appropriate, families' homes to work with children, practitioners and families
- Regular sharing of insights and experiences from other programme participants
- A package of fun activities for the home, the setting and out and about in the community.

At the end of the programme, the specialist mentor would provide a set of observations and recommendations, and certify the setting's level of attainment and progress in supporting children's arts, culture and creativity with families.

Indicative cost: £500 for a setting for a year

Analysis of findings related to six options

Levels of interest in six options

Respondents were asked to indicate their interest in each option, from ‘We’d definitely go for this’ to ‘Not interested’. At the end of the questions on the six options respondents were asked, on balance, which of the six they’d be most likely to participate in. The results were then scored for interest (4-0) to give the following analyses:

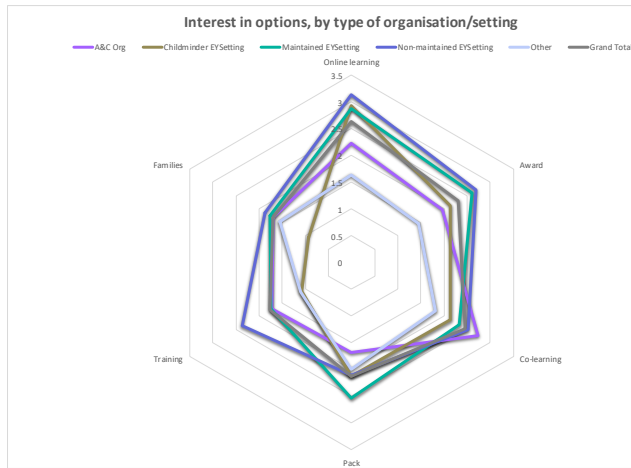


Figure 29: Interest in six options, by type of organisation

Based on respondents’ level of interested expressed in each option individually

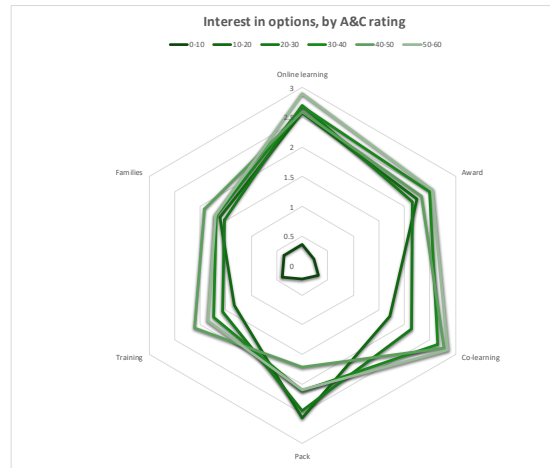


Figure 30: Interest in six options, by A&C profile

4=We would definitely go for this; 3=We would probably go for this; 1=We would probably not go for this; 0=Not interested

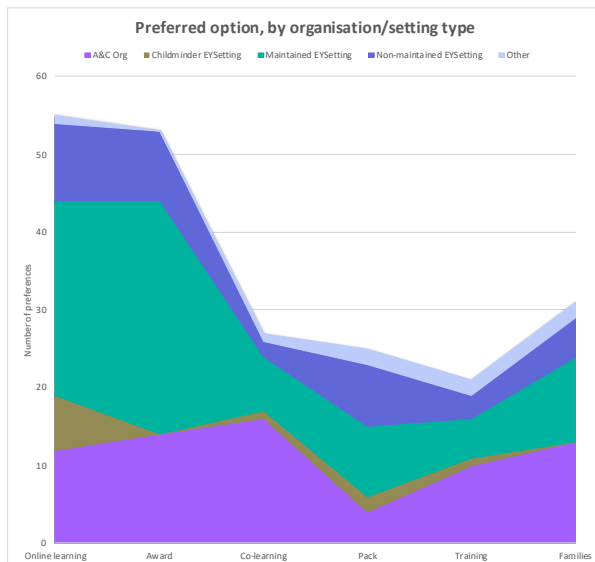


Figure 31: Preferred of six options, by type of organisation

Based on respondents’ choice of which of the six options they would “be most likely to participate in”

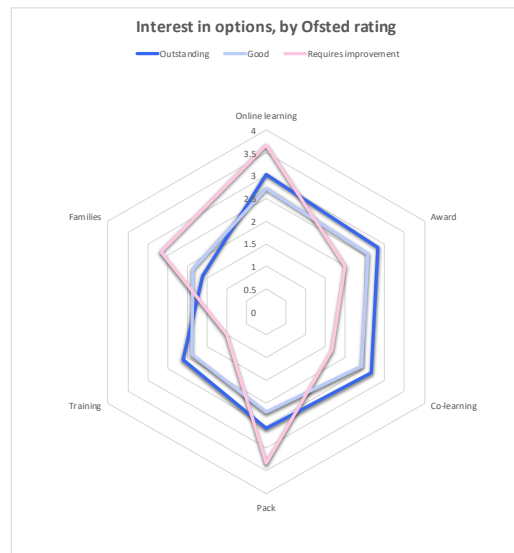


Figure 32: Interest in six options by Ofsted profile

n.b. Ofsted ratings are available only for 80% of maintained settings and 40% of non-maintained settings (no childminders).

Online learning and award options most popular

- Greatest interest in the six options is almost evenly split between the online learning, award and co-learning options (Figure 29). When forced to make a choice (Figure 30), interest is almost evenly split between online learning and award options.
- As Figure 29 shows, group settings (maintained and non-maintained settings) are fairly equally interested in all of the options except families programmes, and most interested in online learning. Childminders are significantly more interested in online learning than the other options.
- Non-maintained settings are those most interested in online learning and awards (Figure 29) but, if forced to choose, maintained settings are most likely to go for an award (Figure 31).

Settings with less strong A&C profiles prepared to pay less and for easier options

- Figure 30 shows that settings with stronger arts and culture profiles are those most interested in online learning, award, co-learning and training in particular.
- Settings with less strong arts and culture profiles are much more interested in the Pack option, which is cheaper and arguably less intrusive. Those with the least strong arts and culture profiles expressed very little interest in any of the options.
- An analysis by Ofsted rating (Figure 32) showed that 'Requires Improvement' settings (n=3) were most interested in the Pack and Online learning options, whereas 'Good' and 'Outstanding' settings were similarly interested in online learning, award, co-learning, pack and training options. There was a particular correlation between settings with high Ofsted ratings for 'Personal development, behaviour and welfare' and interest in the Award option.

Arts and cultural organisations interested in face-to-face

- Arts and cultural organisations are most interested in the co-learning option, followed some way behind by online learning and award options. In the open text responses, several arts and cultural organisations said they'd prefer face-to-face training to online.

Preparedness to pay for six options

Given the speculative costs for each option, respondents were asked how prepared and able they would be to pay for each one, from 'Bargain – we would have paid more' to 'Someone would have to pay us to use it'. The results were ranked and scored for preparedness to pay (3-0) to give the following analyses:

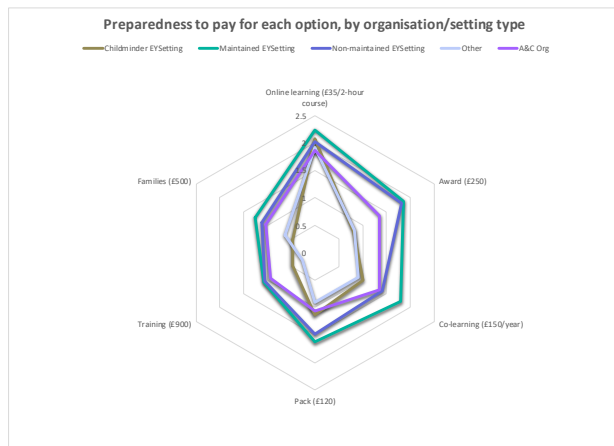


Figure 33: Preparedness to pay for each option, by type of organisation

4=We would pay more; 3=We would pay this amount; 2=We would pay half; 1=It would need to be free; 0=Someone would have to pay us to use it.

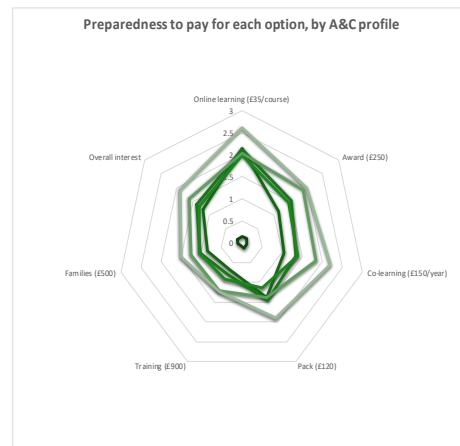


Figure 34: Preparedness to pay for each option, by A&C profile

(lighter green lines are the settings with stronger profiles; darker lines are those with less strong profiles)

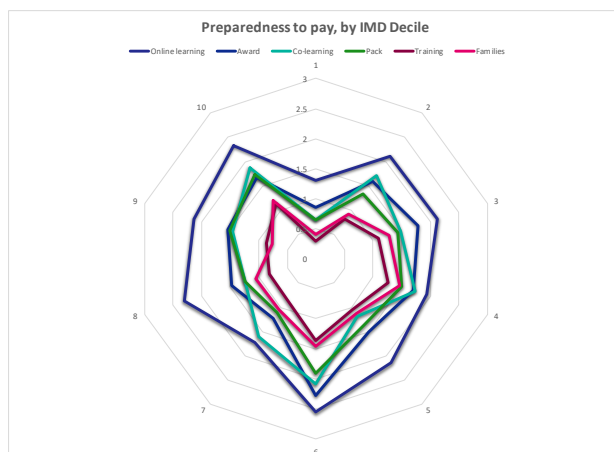


Figure 35: Preparedness to pay for each option, by deprivation decile

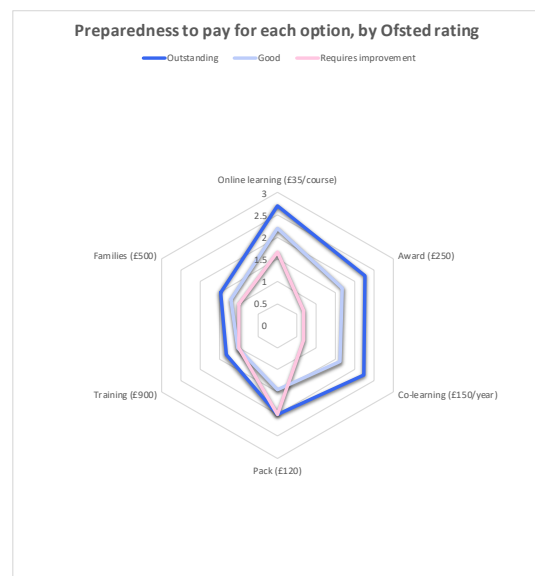


Figure 36: Preparedness to pay for each option, by Ofsted rating

Group settings will pay for online learning, award and co-learning

- Group settings are most prepared to pay for Online Learning, Award and Co-learning options (Figure 33).
- Maintained settings are most prepared to pay for any option

Childminders and less arts-strong settings will only pay for cheaper, easier options

- Settings with stronger arts and culture profiles are prepared to pay more for all six options (Figure 34). Those with least strong arts and culture profile (0-10) not prepared to pay for anything
- Childminders are only really prepared to pay for Online learning and Pack options (Figure 33). For comparison, Childminders' Ofsted registration costs around £35/year and their insurance is generally under £100/year – both 'mission critical' items.
- Settings with low Ofsted ratings are very unlikely to pay for Award or Co-learning options but more prepared to pay for Pack and Online learning (Figure 36).
- Deprivation is a moderately reasonable predictor of preparedness to pay (Figure 35): particularly, those in the most deprived areas (decile 1) are very unlikely to pay.

Award most popular of expensive options but low cost generally a priority

- The Award is the most popular of the more expensive options (award, training, families) but online learning (the cheapest option) is the most universally popular for all organisations
- Given the popularity of training (and its central commendation in the interviews), it's interesting that it is the least popular choice over all (Figure 31), perhaps in large part due to its cost (£900). For a year's worth of training, £900 is certainly within the realms of what settings will pay for training in general, illustrating the lack of budget that may be available in EY settings for arts and culture-related development and the imperative for any ACE strategy to keep the costs down. Text responses also suggested it was the type of training offered in this option that was a deterrent, with other options covering elements of training too, but for more staff in the setting.

Quadrant analyses

Figure 37 and Figure 38 show quadrant analyses of the interest in and preparedness to pay for Award and Online learning options.



Figure 37: Quadrant analysis of interest in and preparedness to pay for an Award

Bubble size indicates arts and culture profile strength. Bubble positions have been marginally randomised (+/- .45) to make overlapping bubbles visible.

Observations:

- The most likely constituency for an Award comprises group settings with the stronger arts and culture profiles – the ‘stronger’ settings.
- Many of the group settings with less strong arts and culture profiles, most of the arts and cultural organisations and almost all of the childminders are in the lower two quadrants – less prepared to pay. (Those at the bottom of the chart have said they would need to be paid to participate in an Award process.)
- Of those most interested by least able to pay (the ‘target’ quadrant) most are maintained settings with less strong arts and culture profiles.



Figure 38: Quadrant analysis of interest in and preparedness to pay for Online learning

Bubble size indicates A&C profile strength. Bubble positions have been marginally randomized (+/- .45) to make overlapping bubbles visible.

Observations:

- The greater interest and preparedness to pay for online learning, compared to an Award, is clear.
- There is a much greater arts and culture profile diversity in the top right quadrant – a good breadth of arts-strong and arts-weak settings are highly interested and prepared to pay for online learning.
- Most of those respondents least interested, or prepared to pay, are arts and culture organisations.
- The majority of childminders are interested and prepared to pay.
- Most of those in the ‘target’ quadrant (bottom right: interested but not prepared to pay) would expect the online learning platform to be free, which part of it could be, or all of it could be subsidized for some.

Open-text responses to the six options

The following is an analysis of the open text responses to the six options. Respondents were asked why they'd be interested in each option, what would be important to make it useful for them and what similar products/services they currently know of or use, if any.

Respondents were clear about the range of features and benefits they would expect to receive from each option in order for it to be seen as value for time and money, and several desired features were cited repeatedly across all six options, including:

Networking potential

- Bringing artists, cultural and early years organisations together
- Facilitate complementarity between potential project partners
- Sharing ideas, challenges, solutions, techniques, support
- Accountability for progression towards certification
- Seeing practitioners in action with creative approaches to get ideas on how to broaden / improve practice
- Go-and-see visits to cultural venues to help familiarise settings
- Examples of different or best practice in one place
- Social forum to encourage staff to share & receive new ideas 'on the job'

Expert and face-to-face support

- Mentors and expert advisors in the setting
- Artists in the setting

Research based

- Activities and processes backed by theoretical and pedagogical research about what creativity is, with links to deeper research to underpin learning
- Face-to-face support from experts to help embed understanding
- Joint action research opportunities to see impacts of creative learning
- Relevance and links to EYFS / CoEL / DM frameworks which guide EYs practice so can be used more widely for planning, observations & assessments
- Ability to collect (via assessment against well-being scales or EYFSP) and store evaluation data for national comparison against EAD and other scores.
- Links to broader issues, e.g. physical health, resilience, emotional intelligence, well-being, mental health, home learning environment

Practical content

- Improve confidence, inspiration, motivation of staff by understanding how it will impact on them personally (well-being) and professionally (skills and knowledge) as well as on children's learning and development
- Relevant to EYs / arts and culture working principles and ethos
- Multiple ideas in one place, cross-arts, cross-cultures – encouraging practitioners to explore wider range of media than normal
- Differentiated approaches between age-groups and developmentally appropriate
- High quality activities backed by tutorials to enable deeper level learning
- Starting points rather than wholesale activities to encourage meaningful learning experiences rather than replicable, prescribed tasks
- Open-ended activities that are more child-led and avoid templates
- Access to international case studies and examples of best practice
- Personalised so different content for staff at different levels from L3 practitioners to post-grads / senior managers (better value for money)
- Hands-on and practitioner-friendly with non-specialist language
- Examples of children's creative ideas
- Specialist ideas for SEN / families in all creativity / art form areas
- Evaluation / Audit of creative provision toolkit
- Different to or enhancing existing toolkits available (e.g. IRIS, Educare, Earlyarts) - more useful if broadened to include creativity (not just arts) as a learning process / tool for whole curriculum & school improvement, e.g. creative leadership / thinking / teaching methods.
- Range of creative thinking / teaching / leadership tools to support ongoing creative processes, rather than list of activities that can be quickly exhausted
- Assessment tool as obligatory feature so staff know it's making an impact
- Suggestions for inexpensive resources
- Activities that settings can use to involve parents re: take-home ideas and meaningful links with local cultural venues

Structure/format of online learning platform

- Affordable (or free) with no additional travel time or costs
- Flexible to learn in own time, without needing childcare or staff cover
- Mobile to learn in small spaces / packaways / outdoors / around the home
- Ability to train several staff at once without compromising ratios
- Highly visual, interactive, video-based learning (esp for case studies) and games (to play with ideas)
- Personalised / Modular approach to fit setting constraints / staff levels / gaps in knowledge / ethos and local objectives and encourage responsibility and ownership of learning
- Ability to identify and address strengths and weaknesses in daily practice
- Self-assessment to improve current practice but avoiding prescriptive, tick-box approach
- Peer-assessment to encourage accountability and cascaded learning
- Mentoring support, artists time and bespoke expert appraisal of evidence/practice (against objective standards and compared across other settings) makes it easier to continue and sustain in-house after course so that it becomes part of universal offer for all children

Advocacy / Business Development potential

- National recognition against objective standard, as long as not target-led
- Meaningful award that recognises progress, passion, detail, investment, thought, genuine creativity and personal commitment from staff
- High status accreditation endorsed by Ofsted, DFE, ACE is hugely beneficial for reporting, advocacy and fund raising
- Accreditation linked to SIP is more meaningful and likely to be completed
- Certification will be more motivating for individual staff, offering a quality assurance and internal understanding of arts in the wider EYs sector
- Tool to help settings demonstrate importance of arts and creativity in EYs to pitch to funders, parents, staff, community partners, etc.
- Recognising and raising profile of creativity of younger children, not just older ones
- Signposting local cultural venues (based on location of user) to help embody the arts experiences referred to in the training
- Enabling arts orgs to submit case studies or publish own training content for EYs settings / families
- Opportunity to feature and ‘play’ with artists own ideas
- Advocacy tool and opportunity for settings to use as USP and differentiate from other businesses

Amalgamated Online Learning, Co-Learning and Award programme

Many respondents expressed an interest in a combination of the Online Learning, Co-learning and Award options as being a desirable and useful approach.

The networking aspect, which was very popular in the Co-Learning proposal, may also require different models to accommodate different working patterns, experience and qualifications, e.g. childminder / practitioner networks (like the former EYPs) and action learning sets for more senior or academic staff.

A partnership endorsement by national bodies would significantly increase the status and desirability of such a programme. An accreditation or award also increases the motivation to prioritise and complete a development programme, especially for practitioners who might not otherwise engage with arts, culture or creative practice.

The sessional working structures in smaller settings combined with higher staff turnover, tighter staff—children ratios and less well-resourced environments means that expert / mentor visits need to be sensitive to those constraints. Settings suggested that one year was the absolute maximum time frame for retaining momentum on a training programme and many suggested it should be shorter (e.g. two terms). This needs to be balanced with having enough time to allow skills and knowledge to become embedded in daily practice and to demonstrate impact on children over time.

Some respondents thought that online / screen-based learning can reinforce isolation through individual rather than co-learning and has mostly short-term benefits, although there was widespread support for the flexibility and diversity that online learning can offer. The learning becomes more sustainable when supported with face-to-face expert mentoring or an element of group-work for assessing, sharing, appraising or training.

Respondents from the arts and cultural sector offered to provide / host the mentoring / network training aspects, or provide content from their own in-house resources, in an attempt to join up provision and not

find themselves in competition with their funding body. This would require some co-ordination and quality testing against agreed criteria, but is certainly not impossible. In addition, a sector-wide approach ensures wheels are not reinvented nor signposts missed to the many art-form / museum specific apps already available.

Obstacles to Take-up

In terms of the other options, the concerns and obstacles to desirability were mainly to do with the high cost and time investment required for a longer-term, more intense programme of training and development. Smaller settings valued training highly for their EYs provision but couldn't afford it. Larger settings were more able to finance such programmes but couldn't prioritise training for EYs over other key stages. Plus training budgets were mainly allocated on established teaching and leadership programmes already designed and nationally recognised for schools, such as the government's Specialist Leaders of Education programme for Teaching Schools.

Respondents suggested this longer training programme would be better positioned as an individual programme of study at post-graduate level or a work-based leadership programme (such as the Clore Fellowship), where the recipient could focus on a more specialised aspect of creative practice, with the option of investment from their setting.

The Pack + App and Creative Families support project were the least popular options. The packs were not considered interactive, personalised or inspiring enough for this market, and would rely on staff already being engaged and motivated to use them. They would be competing against many hundreds of packs in the EYs market place, many of which are now freely available as online resources and are regularly accessed by sector, even though many lack any quality assurance.

Many agreed that packs are useful where there is a training or mentoring programme attached (as in the case of the renowned Birth to Three packs) to ensure embedding of practice, but Local Authorities do not now have the resources to provide support, as a result of which, activity packs are often shelved or used only for prescriptive activities.

Apps are often not appropriate for teaching in some schools, cultural venues and other settings. In addition, apps need to be regularly updated and maintained to work with evolving operating systems across multiple mobile platforms. One of the reasons why apps fail in EYs is that they are often designed by a national agency or university who do not have a technical infrastructure and whose business model does not revolve around making a sustainable income from the app.

The Families support project was mostly unpopular due to it being costly, requiring specialised expertise from other agencies who may be better placed to do this sort of work, and the high risk of failure. Getting families to be consistently involved is very difficult and certification was not felt to be an appropriate motivation for working with families as this work is dependent on many factors out of settings' control. This option might be better modelled on an action-research / short-term project / multi-agency partnership / community arts-based approach.

That is not to say that the theme of supporting families couldn't be part of the content in the online learning programme, which may make the programme more viable for funding through the Pupil Premium allocation for some settings. For the arts and cultural respondents, many simply desired expert advice and training on how to market to, and consult with, EYs and families in creating their programme – more about business development than outreach.

Appendices

Appendix A: Participants

Telephone interviews

Charlotte Arculus (Early years arts specialist)	Elizabeth Jarman (Elizabeth Jarman Training)
Elaine Bates (Manchester Museum)	Susanna Kalitowski (PACEY)
Jude Bird (Curious Minds)	Clare Lovett (Spitalfields / Royal London Hospital)
Fiona Bland (NDNA)	Clare McGread (National Literacy Trust)
Alison Carter (Barking and Dagenham)	Lucy Medhurst (Artswork)
Leigh Chalmers (BBN Nurseries)	Beatrice Merrick (Early Education)
Sarah Cressall (The Creation Station)	Sarah Mumford (IVE)
Jenny Daly (Family Arts Campaign / Deptford Albany)	Maria Oldfield (Crocodoodle)
Jan Dubiel (Early Excellence)	Jane Parker (Soundwaves Extra (SW Hub))
Robin Duckett (Sightlines Initiative)	Jess Pitt (Roehampton University)
Laura Fuller (A New Direction)	Julia Roderick (Sound Connections / LEYMN)
Jo Graham (Learning Unlimited)	Chris Stenton (Foundation for Community Dance)
Clare Halsted (Cultureshift / Octopus Inc)	Kelly Walsh (Booktrust)
Pepita Hanna (Artsconnect)	Lucy Williams (NCB)
Ros Hawley (Lime Music & Health / Royal Manchester Hospital)	Jane Zanzottera (Artforms)

Co-design sessions

Soho Family Centre PVI/social enterprise Nursery, London Early Years Foundation (manager and seven practitioners)

Widcombe Acorns PVI/charity Pre-school, Bath (manager and seven practitioners)

St Edmunds Maintained Nursery and Children's Centre, Bradford (manager and 18 practitioners/teachers)

Webinars

1. Presenters: Lucy Driver (St Paul's Nursery Schools and Children's Centre, Bristol), Sharon Hogan (Midland Road Nursery School and Children's Centre, Bradford)
2. Presenters: Claire White (Hornsea Nursery School), Alexandra Law (Harry Roberts Nursery School)

Appendix B: Semi-structured telephone interview questions

The research that we are conducting originates from questions around the feasibility of a potential Artsmark (used in Primary and Secondary schools) for early years but we want to leave it open (at least during this research) whether an 'Early years Artsmark' or some alternative might be most effective and well-used. It could be something like a kitemark/certification scheme, or a self-evaluation tool, or a framework for settings and arts/cultural organisations to evaluate together, or something altogether different. It would need to fit well with settings and build on what they're already doing, and to be easy to operate – both for settings and for those administering it.

With this in mind, and the early years work you're involved with, we'd like to ask your opinion on what kind of tools/processes/awards/etc. would work well, or are currently working well, to support the following:

1. Help practitioners in early years settings to develop skills/confidence in supporting children in and through the arts;
2. Help practitioners to harness the arts and creative approaches across the EYFS curriculum;
3. Help settings increase the quality of their arts-related provision;
4. Help settings to better understand children's arts-related abilities and progress;
5. Strengthen leadership and governance related to championing arts and culture in settings;
6. Help settings and their children to access arts opportunities provided elsewhere, such as in arts/cultural organisations and venues;
7. Help to foster co-working relationships between early years settings and arts-related organisations, such as music organisations, theatres, libraries, museums, galleries etc.
8. Overcome some of the practical barriers to developing arts in settings (e.g. financial, ratios, skills/experience)

Broadly speaking, the current Artsmark aims to enhance arts and culture in schools:

- a) by providing a simple framework for them to self-assess their provision;
 - b) by supporting schools to embed arts and culture in their strategy and planning, setting their own aims and objectives for development;
 - c) by connecting Artsmark schools together, and with arts/cultural organisations;
 - d) by requiring them to evaluate and write up a case study of their arts-based practice;
 - e) by awarding schools' effort and achievements in supporting the arts – the Artsmark.
9. What would be critical for these five processes to be welcomed and to work well in early years settings?

We have not reproduced all the questions from the online survey in this report for reasons of space and because the questions are repeated in the analysis and charts above.

Appendix C: How the Arts and Cultural profile was calculated

In the online survey, participants were asked to indicate how strongly they agreed/disagreed with various statements 'About arts and culture in your setting':

1. We have sufficient skills and expertise to support early years arts in our team
2. We have sufficient skills and expertise to support early years creativity in our team
3. Parents and carers often help us with arts activities
4. Our setting manager is convinced of the value of arts and culture for young children and is proactive in developing arts and cultural provision and skills
5. We use artistic and cultural activities for children across all areas of the EYFS curriculum.
6. Our staff have CPD at least once per year from a specialist to support them with artistic and creative provision for children.
7. The majority of our provision in arts and culture begins with an adult-led challenge or activity, rather than children's own ideas.
8. We have active partnerships with other early years organisations, and with arts/cultural organisations (e.g. libraries, music service, venues, galleries, museums) that help our children's learning.
9. Our setting offers a diverse artistic and cultural provision that is both sensitive to children's individual characteristics and cultural backgrounds, and which broadens their cultural awareness.
10. Parents and visitors to our setting can clearly see that arts and culture are a vital part of the offer and environment we provide.

The 'provision' element of the arts and cultural profile was calculated by giving a value of 4 where participants strongly agreed with the statement, decrementing to 0 where they strongly disagreed. The order was reversed for question 7.

Participants were asked to evaluate the frequency of visits to and from their settings, including 'How often do external people/organisations come in to support arts and culture in your setting?'

1. Artist in residence
2. People from arts/cultural organisations (artists, musicians, dancers etc.)
3. Education, health, play, speech and language, and other learning and development specialists
4. Arts/culture/creativity training (in your setting or elsewhere)]

And 'How often do you take early years children to visit arts and culture venues and experiences?'

5. Arts venues (concerts, theatres, galleries etc.)
6. Museums and heritage
7. Libraries
8. Forests and woodland

The 'visits' element of the A&C profile was calculated by giving a value of 4 where participants indicated the activity happened every week, decrementing to 0 where it never happened. Values were doubled for questions 6 and 7 and halved for question 8, to reflect a weighting for arts and cultural visits in line with the focus of the research.

A total arts and cultural profile strength indicator was calculated by adding the two totals together (provision and visits).

It was not in any way the intention of this research to give respondents' settings any kind of 'score' but instead to understand how settings with different levels of arts and culture-related engagement, provision and opportunity would have different responses to options to develop arts and culture. Hence we have not included in this report any numeric values related to arts and cultural profile, but only relative indicators of strength.