

FREEDOM, ACCOUNTABILITY AND CHANGE

WHAT CULTURAL ORGANISATIONS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE NEW EDUCATION LANDSCAPE

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This is a time of considerable change for both the education and the cultural sectors. Ongoing funding cuts, particularly at local authority level, coupled with the end of some key state funded programmes such as Creative Partnerships and Find Your Talent are creating an environment where the cultural sector needs to rethink the way in which it approaches and delivers work within the education sector.

At the same time, a number of forces have also been at play within the education sector – the rise of new school models, the new National Curriculum, changes to school league tables and accountability systems to name a few. As noted by some commentators, there is a sense among insiders that some of these key changes have been pulling schools in different directions – on the one hand increasing their independence and freedom to self determine while, on the other, tightening systems of accountability and creating a more prescriptive environment for them to operate in.

While it is clear that these are challenging times for both sectors to be working together, some of these changes may also present opportunities to innovate, create new partnerships and models of working as well as ways of making them economically viable. They also create new



avenues to work towards sustaining the advantage that London schools have earned over the past decade¹ through programmes such as the London Challenge² and Teach First³, as well as addressing disparities in the quality of school provision within London itself. The following sections will consider some of the recent policy changes that are at the heart of these opportunities more in depth.

1 According to The Mayor's Education Inquiry (2012), since 2004 London Schools have outperformed the national average for achievement of 5 good GCSEs (including English and Maths) – the Mayor's Education Inquiry suggests that in 2011 62% of students in the capital achieved 5 GCSE A*-C compared to 58% nationally. London schools also perform better for poorer pupils, with the GCSE attainment gap between those who are eligible for Free School Meals and those who aren't being much narrower in London than in the rest of England.

2 The London Challenge was 8 years programme attempting to understand the contextual elements that make a school better; and focusing on improving outcomes in the lowest performing schools in London

3 <http://www.teachfirst.org.uk/>

1. THE RISE OF NEW SCHOOL MODELS

The increasing diversification of school models with their greater independence from local authorities has created an impressively varied territory featuring Academies, Free Schools, UTCs, Studio Schools and Trust Schools among others, as well as a system of formal and informal networks (academy chains/federations, teaching schools,



schools collaborating in ‘soft’ ways)⁴. These new school models with their newly granted independence from local authorities sit alongside an established sector of privately funded independent schools with their own budgets, admissions policies and governing boards, adding to the variation and complexity of the landscape.

As of April 2013, there were 323 academies in London, with the number set to rise as all ‘Outstanding’ schools (as rated by Ofsted) are being encouraged to convert to academy status. One in ten schools in London currently has an academy status, with the proportion being much higher for secondary schools (51%) than for primary schools (5%)⁵. By September 2013 the number of Free Schools in London reached 49⁶.

While being state funded, new school models also share a range of traits with the existing sector of privately funded independent schools. Academies and Free Schools’ financial and strategic independence from local authorities, their ability to set their own curriculum, their own pay and work conditions for staff and the length of their term and school days among others are all likely to have an impact on the way in which schools think, plan and deliver their services.

⁴ See The Institute of Education ‘Policy context of new school models’ (2013)

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/schools-pupils-and-their-characteristics-january-2013>

⁶ <http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/free-schools/b00222175/open>

These new freedoms are likely to change the way schools think about their cultural provision, potentially becoming more flexible and innovative. However, the extent to which this is likely to be happening in practice is hard to assess.

For instance, more freedom for schools to set their own curriculum could mean greater opportunity for collaboration with the cultural sector on developing content; this, coupled with the DfE’s requirement that from now on schools will be asked to publish details of their curricula online may mean that more and more schools will want to demonstrate the extent and richness of their cultural provision to parents and perspective pupils.

However, there may not be sufficient incentives for schools to do this if ultimately pupils are still going to be assessed through the same framework, regardless of whether the school does or does not follow the National Curriculum. Although anecdotally we know of new London schools which have embraced this freedom (e.g. School 21 featuring among our case studies⁷) findings from the recent Reform and Schools Network Survey⁸ suggest that, overall schools are being cautious, with just under one third saying they are making the most of curriculum freedoms.

Similarly, while schools may be enjoying more freedom to manage and spend their own budgets, they may also have higher expectations in terms of the quality of the work delivered by project partners and be more reluctant to take risks when trading in a market for services to schools which is becoming increasingly ‘deregulated’. So although schools might be faced with increasing choice of service providers and an ever increasing volume of offers, they may be less daring.

2. CHANGES IN FUNDING STREAMS

While new structures and models are being introduced, others are falling away. In general, funding cuts at local authority level mean that schools may no longer be able to access a range of key services that were once provided for free.

As well as this, shifts in funding streams which are specific to schools are also changing the playing field. The end of additional funding for secondary schools specialising in a particular subject (or set of subjects) in 2010 is likely to have had a

⁷ <http://www.anewdirection.org.uk/research/academies-free-and-independent-schools-research>

⁸ http://www.thersa.org/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/1008038/Unleashing-greatness.pdf

significant impact on schools' ability to plan and deliver opportunities related to certain areas of learning, including the arts. Findings from a piece of research conducted by the Institute of Education among 20 London schools suggest this has been a significant issue due to the size of specialist funding which in the past could reach up to £50,000 per school per academic year⁹. For these schools the funding was key to allowing arts departments to raise the standard of their provision, widen opportunities for pupils' engagement and work across the school and other departments in order to make the arts more integral to the school life and curriculum. While increased flexibility and deregulation may mean schools are able to be more creative and innovative in the way in which they deliver services and pay for them, the loss of such a substantial amount of funds, at the very least, is likely to mean that many schools have had to go back to the drawing board.

It also means schools need to increasingly think outside the box. The introduction of the Pupil Premium for instance, an additional amount of funding aimed at improving attainment among disadvantaged pupils, could represent an alternative avenue for schools to devote more resources to the provision of cultural and creative opportunities. In England the funding amounts to £ 1.875 billion for 2013-14, with schools receiving £900 per disadvantaged child. Each school is able to determine how the funding is spent, from interventions that are intended to directly affect performance in the classroom (e.g. additional in-class tuition, homework clubs, reduced class sizes) to those which focus on enrichment beyond the curriculum (e.g. school trips, arts and sports activities etc). However, while being free to spend the funding as they wish, schools are also held accountable for its impact. Anecdotally, we know that this has made many schools nervous about deciding how to spend Pupil Premium funds.

3. ACCOUNTABILITY AND CHANGES IN OFSTED'S RANKING SYSTEM

Self-determination and innovation may be at the heart of the rationale for new school models, but the way in which schools are assessed and held accountable for the performance and progress of their pupils is likely to continue to have an impact in the way they plan, operate and make choices.

Recent changes to Ofsted's ranking system (which

all schools, regardless of their governance model, are measured against) mean that, going forward, schools can no longer be ranked 'satisfactory' but instead will need to be 'good' or 'outstanding' to be deemed acceptable. While the majority of schools in England (78%¹⁰) are currently ranked 'good' or 'outstanding', changes to assessment criteria are likely to make it more difficult for schools to achieve 'outstanding' status - for instance, all lessons viewed by Ofsted now need to be rated as 'outstanding' for the whole school to be deemed so. Therefore, while they may be granted more freedoms, schools are also likely to be faced with increasing pressure to invest resources in ensuring certain standards and targets are met.



As noted by RIO in their 'Intelligence Gathering Report 2012/13' on the one hand this could mean schools are increasingly worried about investing in what makes the headlines. On the other hand, it could also constitute an opportunity for the cultural sector to work directly with schools to help them achieve these targets. This could be done in a number of ways, from helping them demonstrate their commitment to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development of all pupils (as outlined by Ofsted in their set of priorities), to helping them deliver against the progress of individual pupils which teachers are increasingly expected to report on. Needless to say, all of this will require cultural organisations to understand the priorities and needs of each individual school to be able to tailor their offer accordingly.

4. NEW PERFORMANCE MEASURES

As well as changes in Ofsted's criteria and ranking system, schools are subject to more and new performance measures in relation to attainment.

When the plan of an English Baccalaureate

⁹ The Institute of Education 'Provision of Arts and Culture in London Schools: Research conducted in Academies, Free Schools and Independent Schools' (2013) Report availability on request.

¹⁰ Source: <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2013/sep/09/schools-advances-ofsted-chief-wilshaw>

Certificate (Ebacc) for secondary schools was abandoned by the government at the beginning of 2013, much of the debate around performance measures was on the extent to which the new qualification (or even the expectation of it being introduced) would cause schools to focus their offer on core academic subjects such as English, Maths, Science, History and Languages and away from other subjects, including the arts. Or whether pupils would be discouraged (either directly or by those around them) from taking non Ebacc subjects as GCSEs, thereby creating a cycle of low supply and low demand.



The Cultural Learning Alliance estimates that between 2003 and 2013 the number of arts GCSEs sat in secondary schools across the country saw an overall decrease of 28%¹¹, even after changes in the number of pupils over time are taken into account; this appears to not just be driven by pupils' choice but also by what is offered in schools – a study by IPSOS Mori, for instance, shows that since the introduction of the concept of the Ebacc, 14% of schools have withdrawn arts subjects¹².

Although the idea of Ebacc as a formal qualification has been dropped, changes to school league tables are such that more detailed data on individual schools' results will be made publicly available, with a particular focus on Ebacc subjects. In this sense, even if an Ebacc certificate does not exist, schools may still continue to be incentivised to invest into those areas that are systematically and publicly scrutinised, which in some cases may well be at the detriment of their offer of arts subjects¹³.

More generally, recent changes to the grading system and structure of examinations at GCSE and A-level, which have been referred to as the biggest shake-up of exams in England for a generation¹⁴ mean that schools and teachers will be dealing with

quite a fundamental change in the way pupils are assessed. This may mean that a considerable chunk of teachers' and senior leaders' time and energies may be taken up with adapting to the new system, something that cultural organisations will need to be aware of when looking to build partnerships with schools.

5. SCHOOL PARTICIPATION AGE

Another potentially important factor shaping the environment in which schools are operating is the raising of the school participation age in England and Wales from 16 to 17, as of September 2013 and to 18 as of September 2014. While this doesn't mean a young person needs to be in full time education in a school or college setting, it does still require them to be in some form of training or employment based learning opportunity (e.g. an apprenticeship or employment combined with part time training). This is potentially another area in which the cultural sector could contribute by stepping in and providing more practical courses aimed at those young people who prefer a more vocational path.

6. HOW ARE DIFFERENT TYPES OF SCHOOLS RESPONDING TO THE NEW CONTEXT AND THEIR INTRINSIC FREEDOMS?

6.1 Academies and Free Schools – are new governance structures making a difference?

Assessing how different types of schools are responding to the factors shaping the current policy context and gauging the extent to which this has influenced their cultural offer is an interesting question, but one that does not appear to have a straightforward answer.

In the case of academies, for instance, evidence on the extent to which they are making the most of their increased freedoms is mixed. In their report 'Unleashing Greatness'¹⁵, the Academies Commission highlight a number of reasons why this may be, including the fact that the vast majority of existing academies have only recently converted to this status and may therefore still be getting to grips with the implications. Many of them are also, in effect, likely to be maintained schools which have undergone a change of status. Indeed, among the academies interviewed by the

11 Cultural Learning Alliance, 'Arts GCSE Entries Research' (2013)

12 <http://www.culturallearningalliance.org.uk/news.aspx?id=114>

13 <http://www.culturallearningalliance.org.uk/news.aspx?id=118>

14 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-24759476>

15 http://www.thersa.org/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/1008038/Unleashing-greatness.pdf

Institute of Education¹⁶ there was a sense that the academy status didn't make much of a difference to the school other than having access to extra budget.

However, in the case of Free Schools – which, in practice, are newly established academies rather than existing schools converted to academy status – the dynamic may be different. Being set up from scratch may mean that these schools are up for a 'fresh start' and one that is often driven by a very specific vision of one or more stakeholder groups (e.g. parents, teachers, a sponsor etc). Analysis of the current policy landscape by the Institute of Education suggests that a recent trend for Academy Chains has been to set up Free Schools rather than taking over existing schools, with the process being much simpler compared to a conversion process which is often complex, lengthy and may be subject to resistance by a number of stakeholder groups¹⁷. In this sense, it may be easier for these types of schools to make the most of their status and the advantages that come with it.

Although Free Schools are still in their infancy and it is therefore hard to draw conclusions and indeed to generalise, our case studies point at examples of schools which have deliberately embraced some of these newly granted freedoms in order to support their cultural provision.

School 21 weights half of its curriculum to the arts and uses it as thread through a number of practices which are central to the life of the school. Being small, flexible and not tied to the curriculum are all factors that appear to be key in the school's ability to freely shape its cultural provision. Similarly, Ark Conway Primary, who has a free school status and is part of an academy chain, also talk about the benefits of being able to shape their own curriculum and, more generally, to run with their own vision and values while still feeling supported by a larger network. More widely, we have seen examples of free schools being set up directly by an arts organisation or an artist – Plymouth School of Creative Arts, The Weekend Arts College in Camden and the Chase and Status School planned to open under DJ Will Kennard's vision to develop musical talent in the Tower Hamlets area, to name a few.

Being a free school or an academy may also not necessarily be the only way for an establishment to be innovative when it comes to delivering cultural

opportunities to pupils. In their recent enquiry on the state of the academy sector, the Academies Commission mentions the fact that many of the freedoms currently enjoyed by academies and free schools around curriculum, length of school day and managing budgets have in practice always been available to local authority maintained schools, albeit in different guises. Many maintained schools, for instance, work within the framework of the National Curriculum but are able to adapt their own curriculum to meet the needs of their pupils. Schools that are voluntary aided or have Foundation status have a similar amount of financial control of their budgets and financial assets to academies.



Among our case studies, St Paul's Way is a good example of how a local authority maintained school has made the most of their Trust School status¹⁸, leveraging links with Higher Education institutions to build new partnerships with artists and cultural organisations and raise pupils' aspirations. The school cites its ongoing links with the local authority and higher education trust partners as being key to its vision and success in building long term partnerships.

6.2. Independent schools

In terms of governance, most of the new school models such as academies and free schools could be seen as falling in between the traditional model of local authority maintained (i.e. state funded) schools and independent schools which are privately funded. The latter have traditionally had greater flexibility in terms of governance systems, admissions, budgets and curricula as well as greater freedom from systems of accountability (e.g. league tables) than their state funded counterparts.

¹⁶ The Institute of Education 'Provision of Arts and Culture in London Schools: Research conducted in Academies, Free Schools and Independent Schools' (2013)

¹⁷ The Institute of Education 'Policy context of new school models' (2013)

¹⁸ Trust schools are state-funded foundation schools which receive extra support (usually non-monetary) from a charitable trust made up of partners working together for the benefit of the school

London has the highest concentration of independent schools in the country with 507 establishments equally spread between the inner and outer boroughs of the city. In general, due to their financial model, independent schools tend to have greater resources at their disposal to deliver their services, including cultural activities both within and beyond the classroom.

Indeed, findings from interviews conducted by the Institute of Education among schools from a range of governance models in London suggest that, while many schools feel resources devoted to their cultural provision are more and more constrained by changes in funding or diverted to support other objectives, independent schools are not feeling the pinch to the same degree. They may also be in a better position to raise the standard of provision and widen choice by attracting specialist teachers and having a better student-teacher ratio.

Interestingly, however, an analysis of Ofsted comments related to schools' arts and culture provision across London schools¹⁹, suggests that there is considerable variation in the level and depth of cultural provision within Independent Schools.

While nearly two thirds of Ofsted comments with a reference to arts and culture provision among Independent Schools are overtly positive, more than one in ten points at poor provision, a proportion that is significantly higher than in the case of other types of schools such as Academies and alternative or special provision (e.g. Pupil Referral Units and Special Schools).

Many of the reasons why there seems to be a core group of Independent Schools who are particularly focused on ensuring pupils have exposure and access to cultural opportunities are fairly intuitive. Some may be similar to those of mainstream schools, such as for example using arts and cultural activities to increase academic attainment across a range of subjects. It is also likely to be a way of responding to the need of producing rounded, resilient, articulate thinkers beyond ensuring that students achieve good grades in exams.

Others reasons may be more specific to the nature of independent schools. Research conducted by The Cultural Learning Alliance among heads of

Independent Schools across the country²⁰ for instance suggests that a strong cultural provision is often a response to parents' demands and expectations, which are likely to be even more significant for particular types of independent schools (e.g. boarding schools). It is also way of raising profile and reputation in a market where schools are directly competing for parents' money.

On the other hand, pin pointing what is at the root of the sizeable minority of independent schools with poorer provision is harder. This could be to do with the nature of the independent sector and the range and variety of priorities that are likely to be driving different establishments – from boarding schools which are expected to provide an all rounded education for their pupils to other types of schools which may have a specific focus (e.g. faith schools).

7. NAVIGATING THE CHANGES – WHAT NEXT?

The wave of changes that has been sweeping the education sector recently is remarkable and likely to be affecting, in one way or another all schools. Changes in funding, changes in performance measures, the rise of new school models, the increasing 'marketisation' of services to schools and the rise of the school leaving age are among some of the key factors that are likely to be influencing the way schools plan and deliver their services and activities, including the provision of arts and culture. If current estimates of pupil population growth turn out to be correct, London will need 90,000 new school places by 2016, making the question of how schools will respond to the recent changes in policy landscape an even more pressing one.

This is a new territory that both schools and potential cultural partners are learning to navigate. It is a territory that is in constant flow, often characterized by opposing forces and therefore challenging. However, it is also one that may offer opportunities for innovation, the development of new partnerships, models of delivery and ways to fund them.

Being a partner in the development of a free school, supporting the development of parts of the curriculum that specifically relate to arts and culture, providing services to a network of schools such as an academy chain or a teaching school alliance are all potential ways in which cultural partners can rethink the way in which it works with schools. It is early days to draw conclusions on

¹⁹ The Institute of Education 'Provision of Arts and Culture in London Schools: Research conducted in Academies, Free Schools and Independent Schools' (2013)

²⁰ Cultural Learning Alliance, 'Independent Schools Interviews' (2012)

extent to which this is already happening. As noted by RIO in their latest Intelligence Gathering Report, the pace of the recent changes for both the cultural and education sector may mean that both parts need to 'turn inward' before they are able to find new approaches and ways of working together, but there are reasons to believe that the forces at play are strong enough to drive change.

WWW.ANEWDIRECTION.ORG.UK

IMAGES:

**Ark Conway Primary Academy
School 21
St Paul's Way Trust School
The Cavendish School**