



## **Cultural Consortium Shropshire Education Consultancy Commission Final Report**

### **Section 1: Background**

In May 2016, Cultural Consortium Shropshire (CCS) commissioned Music Education Solutions Limited to undertake a 20 day consultancy contract with the education sector in Shropshire. This work was led by Dr Elizabeth Stafford, with the assistance of Gemma King.

The aim of the project was to canvass opinions from education settings on the role of the CCS, and in particular what support the CCS could provide for both teachers and pupils in Shropshire in the area of arts and cultural education.

All schools in Shropshire were offered the opportunity of a live visit or phone call from the consultancy team, and also the opportunity to fill in an online survey. Schools were targeted through the Shropshire County weekly schools bulletins, through social media including #ShropshireHour, and through pre-selection from CCS's existing contacts. In total 31 schools participated in this consultancy project, representing around 20% of the county's schools.

### **Section 2: Challenges**

Engagement from schools in this consultancy project was comparatively low. We surmise that this is largely due to the awkward timing of the commission, starting during exam period, encompassing the end of the summer term when performing arts teachers in particular are extremely busy, including the summer holidays, and then also taking in the start of a new academic year. Should this process be repeated, we would recommend that the Spring Term would be an ideal time to carry out this type of work.

Terminology also proved a challenge, with most schools taking 'Cultural Education' to mean widening pupils' perspectives of different cultures and religions. Many of the requests from schools involved funding or personnel for increasing awareness of cultural diversity, which is not within the remit of the CCS. It is however an indication of need in an important area of social education, and it is recommended that this information is passed on to Shropshire Council's education department for further action.

Due to the nature of the funding for this post, it was necessary for the consultants to talk to schools about Artsmark and Arts Award as well as CCS. This caused confusion as there was not a clear strategic link between these products and the CCS to share with schools. It is recommended that once a clear CCS support package for Artsmark and Arts Award is drawn up, this is communicated to all schools including those involved in this consultancy project.

Due to the pressures of time, with almost a year of no public event activity, the CCS has put in place a Tea Party event for teachers on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2016. Unfortunately due to the low number of school respondents to the consultancy project, we have not been able to provide a comprehensive picture of need, so the content for this event has been based on the needs identified by schools that did take part in the consultancy project, rather than on a big-picture of Shropshire-wide need. If this event attracts large numbers / different schools from those involved in the consultation, we would recommend that this event includes a consultation with schools on their needs, for example a simple paper-based survey for them to complete and submit on the day. This would ensure that future event content is informed by a comprehensive picture of need. In hindsight, knowing that the CCS was keen to start activity as soon as possible, it might have been better to fix a date for this event at the start of the consultancy period so that our consultants could promote the event as they visited schools, and wrap this event into the consultation process.

## **Section 3: Findings**

### **Awareness:**

Of the schools surveyed, 70% had not heard of CCS before being contacted. This is actually a positive result as it means that the consultation process has had a considerable impact on the profile of CCS in the education sector.

### **Arts & Cultural Clusters:**

53% of the schools surveyed stated that they would like to be part of an arts cluster, so there is a clear opportunity for CCS to set up these kind of networks in the future. 23% of the schools stated that they were already involved in a cluster, including those organised by the Music Education Hub, Shropshire Council (Art & Design Network), and self-organised networks such as those run by Oswestry School, Ellesmere College and the North Shropshire Arts Network.

### **Engagement**

There is a good level of engagement with arts and cultural providers amongst the surveyed schools. 89% of respondents are already engaging with the Libraries Service, and 78% with the Music Education Hub. 67% of the schools are engaging with dance organisations. Comparatively lower numbers were engaging with heritage organisations, museums and galleries (44% each), and only 33% of schools were engaging with theatre organisations.

### **CPD**

There was an extremely positive response from the schools surveyed on the offer of CPD from CCS. 80% stated there was a need for an Arts and Cultural

Conference in the county, and 70% would welcome web-based CPD support. 55% asked for network meetings (with the other 45% already participating in network meetings), and 50% for consultancy services from arts organisations. When asked if there were specific subjects that teachers needed more help with, Music (in particular Early Years) was the most frequently cited subject, with support for drama (secondary) and art (primary and secondary) also requested. The subject-specific requests largely centred on the development of teachers' own artistic skill, rather than how to 'teach' these subjects. Interestingly only 40% of respondents felt they needed training or information on careers in the arts. These results show that there is a significant opportunity for CCS to become a major provider of CPD for teachers in Shropshire.

### **Pupil Needs**

62% of the surveyed schools would welcome the establishment of a children's arts festival, and the same percentage would also be interested in having professional arts practitioners come to work in their school. However, the main request from schools – which was not on the survey questions but was added by almost every respondent – was for funding to support existing or proposed projects. There is therefore an opportunity for CCS to become a commissioning body, applying for funding to enable its partners to work with schools.

### **Membership**

59% of respondents indicated that they would become a member of CCS, and the rest said that they were interested but would require further information.

## **Section 4: Recommendations**

1. Use the Tea Party event as an opportunity for further, broader consultation.
2. Establish a network of Arts and Cultural clusters in areas without existing coverage.
3. Plan a large scale arts and cultural conference for the education sector.
4. Create an online CPD offer to be housed on the CCS website.
5. Highlight CCS partners' consultancy offers in CCS marketing materials.
6. 4. Establish a funding or commissioning system to which schools can apply.
7. Establish a clear support strategy for Artsmark and Arts Award and communicate this to schools.
8. Look into raising the profile of the education offers from local theatre / drama organisations, museums, heritage organisations and galleries if appropriate to the remit of the CCS.
9. Consider either a change of name for the consortium, or provide some messaging to schools around the meaning of 'cultural' education.

**Dr Elizabeth Stafford**

6<sup>th</sup> October 2016