



Strategy 2023-2030

Strategy 2023–2030

Contents

About Curious Minds	3
Curious about Curious Minds?	4
Our vision	5
Our mission	5
Curious about our values and approach?	6
Curious Minds' 3 core commitments	7
Definitions	8
What is cultural education?	9
What is the field we're building and who is involved?	10
Strategy	11
Into a Curious Future: Strategic Framework, 2023 to 2030	12
Curious about our theory of change?	13
Curious about our 2023-2026 strategic priorities?	14
The Future	18
Curious about the difference we want to make?	19

About Curious Minds

About Curious Minds

Definitions

Strategy

The Future



Curious about Curious Minds?



Since 2008, Curious Minds has been connecting children and young people, teachers and youth workers with incredible artists and creative practitioners; giving them access to information, expertise, space and resources to facilitate collaboration and innovation in the field of creative and cultural education.

We are an ambitious charity that works to bring about positive and lasting change. We provide strategic support to the cultural education workforce and deliver learning and development programmes that help diversify and professionalise the field of cultural education.

We use the terms 'Backbone Organisation' and 'Field Building Catalyst' to describe how we work across multiple sectors to support, develop, champion and mobilise the cultural education workforce to achieve collective impact.



We achieve national and international reach but focus our work on the North of England. Our team draws expertise from across the education, culture, public and private sectors.

Our long-term ambition is to become a professional body for creative and cultural educators in England. Leading nationally from the North!

We are 'field builders' for cultural education; creating the conditions and catalysing action to bring about organisational and systemic change – one teacher, one youth worker, one creative practitioner at a time.

Our vision

We know, from **evidence** and experience, that children who take part in arts and culture do better in school and are happier and healthier. As young adults they are more likely to vote, go to university, and to secure and stay in good jobs.

But despite decades of investment and good intention, too many children and young people still **miss out** on the pleasure, happiness and learning that engaging in arts and culture brings. And the situation is getting worse.

Post pandemic, the status and provision of arts subjects in schools is declining and the cultural participation gap between the most and least well off is widening. Without proper investment and a supportive infrastructure, soon only the most affluent families will be able to **purchase the advantages** of a great cultural education for their children. This isn't fair (and it isn't 'Levelling Up').



Powered by curiosity, we work to tackle unequal access to creativity and culture for children and young people who are often excluded by social and economic inequalities.

Bleak predictions about the **devastating impact** the cost-of-living crisis will have on the lives and life chances of already disadvantaged children and young people, means **our work is more urgent now than ever.**

We dream of a future where being creative and experiencing brilliant culture is a regular part of every child's learning and life.

Our mission

Driving all our work is the belief that, with the right support and space to innovate, the cultural sector can play a greater role in making the North of England the best place for children and young people to grow up and achieve their potential.

We work to bring about lasting systemic change in the field of creative and cultural education, and to diversify and professionalise its leadership and workforce.

Curious about our values and approach?

The 7C's

Seven words beginning with the letter C by which we hold ourselves to account and invite others to do the same. They guide our planning, recruitment and self-evaluation, and provide a framework for performance management.

We are **CURIOUS**

We are hopeful for a fairer future. We explore new possibilities and seek out best and next practice, listening and responding to the opinions and ideas of others, especially children and young people.

We **CARE**

We care deeply about children and young people, the adults who support them, and the places where they live and learn. We embrace, celebrate and champion diversity in all its forms.

We are **COURAGEOUS**

We are relentless in our pursuit of fair access to creativity and culture, and work to disrupt the status quo. We accept and deliver challenge, especially concerning diversity, inclusion, quality and relevance.

We **COLLABORATE**

Partnerships and collaboration are fundamental to how we work. In these times of change and uncertainty, we understand the importance of listening to build meaning and grow collective impact.

We are **CONSCIENTIOUS**

We take our leadership role seriously and never take for granted the privilege of being trusted by our funders and partners to do the right thing with the resources we are given.

We are **CREDIBLE**

We are evidence driven and always learning. We draw expertise from across education and culture, and skillfully navigate and connect both worlds. We seek out and build alliances with experts who know the things we don't.

We **CELEBRATE**

We celebrate and champion creative and cultural education, the diverse professionals delivering it, and the incredible children and young people our work is for.

Curious Minds'

3 core commitments



We want **all** children and young people to enjoy and contribute to society's cultural and civic life. We are ferociously committed to identifying and removing the systemic, social and economic barriers that stop children and young people from marginalised backgrounds engaging in arts and culture.

We think carefully about the ecology we work within; who is and is not represented, where and how. As well as considering children and young people as the ultimate beneficiaries of our work, we are deliberate about the adult professionals we choose to nurture and pragmatic about what it will take to shift the longstanding inequalities we witness.

CURIOUS ABOUT OUR COMMITMENT TO QUALITY IN CULTURAL EDUCATION?

We believe that equality and quality go hand in hand. Ensuring all children and young people have access to high-quality creative and cultural learning experiences, in and out of school, regardless of where they live or their ability to pay, is fundamental to 'levelling up' opportunity.

Developing the workforce is key. Overcoming preconceptions and barriers to engage with previously excluded children and young people is highly skilled work, yet most practitioners learn on the job with little support. We commit to creating new and clearer pathways that lead to the professionalisation of the cultural education workforce.



We are determined to hold on to the environmental gains we made during the pandemic and have redoubled our efforts to reduce the carbon footprint of our day-to-day operations.

We strive to influence, educate and advocate for a post carbon future through our daily work and programmes. This includes doing whatever we can to ensure children and young people see themselves as global citizens and develop the creative skills they will need to access opportunities arising from the transition to a low carbon economy.



About Curious Minds

Definitions

Strategy

The Future

Definitions

What is cultural education?



Whenever children and young people are learning through or about the arts and culture, they are engaging in cultural education.

An excellent cultural education will give children and young people regular opportunities to create, compose and perform; visit, experience and participate in extraordinary work and everyday creativity. It will connect them with diverse artists, creative organisations and their local cultural offer. They will be able to do more, know more, understand more and respond critically and creatively to the experiences they've had.

In schools and colleges, cultural education can involve the direct study of creative subjects such as art and design, dance, drama, theatre studies, film-studies, creative writing, media, music and built environment (these subjects are often referred to collectively as Creative or Expressive Arts). It also includes using arts and culture as tools to explore other subjects; to make difficult topics more accessible and to facilitate cross-curricular learning.

Children and young people also take part in cultural education outside school. **At home,** through self-directed activity such as reading and learning to play a musical instrument, engaging with and creating online content, and enjoying arts and crafts. **In the community,** by attending live shows and events, visiting historic sites, and engaging in creative activity at libraries, galleries, museums, archives, theatres, dance studios, cinemas, parks and other community settings.

Some children and young people will be motivated by a desire to develop their talent and skill in a particular area or artform; they might be considering a creative career. Many more will get involved to socialise, have fun and make friends, or to develop life-skills such as confidence, teamwork and communication. Others will be driven by a desire to make a difference in society and will want to use art and creativity as a vehicle to make change happen. All these young people are engaged in cultural education.

These lists aren't exhaustive, and we always leave room for children and young people to tell us what culture means to them. In this way we help young people to shape their own cultural and creative lives.



What is the field we're building and who is involved?

The field of cultural education spans multiple sectors and involves a wide range of professionals who contribute to the creative and cultural education of children and young people, in and out of school.



They include teachers and teaching assistants, youth and play workers, early years practitioners, teaching artists, producers, curators and other creative practitioners. They can be employees, freelancers, entrepreneurs or volunteers working in culture, education, youth, community and health settings. For some, cultural education is the main or sole focus of their work; for others, it will be a small part of a wider role. They don't all know they work in the field . . . yet!

Strategy



Into a Curious Future: Strategic Framework, 2023 to 2030



Our Mission	Our Theory of Change	Our 2023–2030 Priorities	Our Activity	Our Vision
In order to...	We will...	By focusing on...	Through the delivery of...	To achieve...
tackle unequal access to creativity and culture for children and young people	INNOVATE in the field of creative and cultural education	1 Purposeful Inclusion & Relevance	learning and leadership PROGRAMMES & PARTNERSHIPS that bring about individual, organisational and systemic change, and ‘level-up’ opportunity.	a future where being creative and experiencing brilliant arts and culture is a regular part of <u>EVERY</u> child’s learning and life.
	INVEST in a diverse cultural education workforce	2 Workforce & Leadership Development		
		3 Learning & Advocacy		
	INFLUENCE cultural education partnerships and policy	4 Quality & Creative Pedagogy		

We will explore this framework in more detail in the following pages.

Curious about our theory of change?

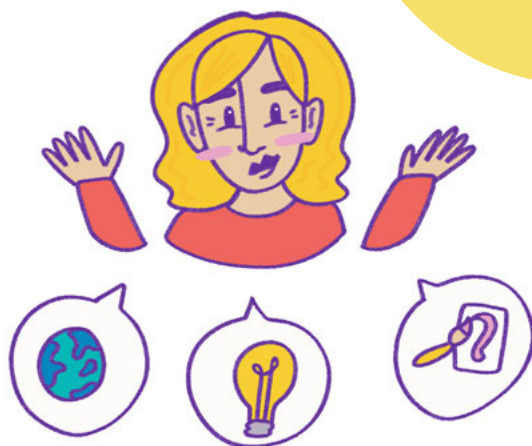
We think carefully about **where we work** and **who we work with** to deliver the greatest impact possible with the resources we have.

“

Curious Minds is a catalyst for cultural education, driving organisational and systemic change one teacher, one youth worker, one creative practitioner at a time

Social Value Lab Report 2020

”



We INNOVATE in the field of cultural education

by collaborating with **multi-sector partners** to explore and test new approaches to the delivery of cultural learning and leadership programmes **in the North West of England**. We scale our most successful programmes **nationally and internationally**.

We INVEST in a diverse cultural education workforce

to grow, develop and professionalise the **cultural education workforce across the North of England**.

We INFLUENCE cultural education partnerships, plans and policy by engaging with **practitioners, leaders and politicians locally, regionally and nationally**, to galvanize cultural education partnerships and shape the debate about the importance of creativity and culture in childhood and adolescence.

We work directly with creative practitioners, teachers and youth workers.

These individuals go on to change their colleagues and the schools and organisations they work in.

Schools, cultural and youth organisations in turn influence other organisations and statutory agencies they work with.

Leading to long-term systemic change in society.

Curious about our strategic priorities?

1 Purposeful inclusion and relevance



“Lean into your curiosity about any issue, and there will likely be people to share a little bit more of their knowledge and insight and give you ideas on how to make change.”

Ayo Tometi, human rights activist and community organizer

Curiosity is our methodology!

We always start by asking great questions of ourselves and the experts and young people we work with and for. We aim to respond practically and purposefully to achieve positive and lasting change.

Our decision to prioritise 'purposeful inclusion and relevance' is driven by our expertise and insight into the current challenges.

It is widely accepted that...

Black, Asian, Ethnically Diverse, disabled and working-class people are significantly underrepresented in the creative and cultural workforce.

Arts and culture offers often fail to engage or inspire children and young people from marginalised backgrounds.

The best cultural education happens when schools and youth groups work in partnership with cultural organisations and creative practitioners.

Curious Minds knows that...

Access to cultural learning and creative careers isn't equal. Young people often face practical, functional and attitudinal **barriers to participation**.

Involving young people in the design and delivery of programmes increases engagement.

Education and youth settings need support to connect and collaborate effectively with cultural partners.

We will...

Innovate

Invest

Influence

- Harness creative and cultural learning as a vehicle for anti-racism and inclusion.
- Broker and galvanise multi-agency cultural education partnerships in places where children and young people experience social and economic barriers to participation and progression.
- Amplify the voice and agency of children and young people to influence the cultural offer and engage in creative placemaking where they live.
- Create new routes into the cultural education workforce for young creatives from under-represented backgrounds.

2

Workforce and leadership development



Healthy curiosity is a great key in innovation.

Ifeanyi Enoch Onuoha,
author and human capacity developer

We cultivate curious leaders and practitioners!

Curious leaders can unlock transformational results. Curiosity is a learning style and leadership trait that we prioritise and nurture, and a behaviour that fuels our methodology and approach.

Our decision to prioritise 'workforce and leadership development' is driven by our expertise and insight into the current challenges.

It is widely accepted that...

Curious Minds knows that...

The cultural education workforce involves a range of creative professionals.

The cultural education workforce isn't professionalised, and this holds back its collective progress and impact.

Cultural education providers are mostly small and medium charities and social enterprises. Freelancers made up 68% of the cultural education workforce when last measured in 2019.

Creative educators are undervalued and underrepresented at strategic decision-making tables. This is especially true for those working at grassroots level and as freelancers.

Overcoming preconceptions and barriers to engage with previously excluded children and young people is highly and uniquely skilled work.

Many practitioners learn on the job with little support.

We will...

Innovate

Invest

Influence

- Design and deliver high quality leadership and professional development programmes; prioritising early career teachers and middle leaders in schools, and early and mid-career teaching artists from diverse backgrounds.
- Develop, mobilise and champion a more diverse, resilient, knowledgeable and better-connected cultural education workforce.
- Support emerging and grassroots cultural organisations to respond collectively to regional and national education and youth employability initiatives.
- Champion the vital role cultural education plays in nurturing the creative talent of the future.

3 Learning and advocacy



“Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose.”

Zora Neale Hurston,
author and filmmaker,
1891–1960

Our work is powered by curiosity!

We approach every activity and interaction as an opportunity to know more, understand more, and to share our learning as widely as possible. We will turn up the volume on this facet of our methodology as we continue to develop and refine our curiosity powered approach to evaluation and practitioner-led research and advocacy.

Our decision to prioritise ‘learning and advocacy’ is driven by our expertise and insight into the current challenges.

It is widely accepted that...

Curious Minds knows that...

The Government expects school leaders to use evidence to inform decision making.

A lack of robust evidence about what works in cultural education can make it difficult to persuade school leaders to prioritise creative and cultural learning.

Arts Council England is funding more direct activity for and with children and young people, especially in places where there has been low cultural engagement in the past.

More activity doesn't necessarily widen access. Less funding for infrastructure support increases the potential for fragmentation and disparity in the range and quality of opportunities available to those who face **barriers to participation**.

We will...

Innovate

Invest

Influence

- Upskill the cultural education workforce to engage in practitioner research and to monitor and evaluate the impact of their work more effectively and systematically.
- Use the evidence we and others collect to champion creative and cultural education as a driver for school improvement, health and wellbeing, personal progression and creative placemaking.

4 Quality and creative pedagogy

Curiosity fuels our approach to Teaching for Creativity!

For the positive impacts of creative and cultural education to be realised, children and young people must experience high-quality provision. We also know that the impact of a poor quality first experience of culture can be permanent and pervasive for children and young people. 'Permanent' because it will take something special to get them to try again. 'Pervasive' because they won't just write off that venue, performance or play – they're likely to dismiss an entire artform or sector.

Our decision to prioritise 'quality and creative pedagogy' is driven by our expertise and insight into the current challenges.

You can't just give someone a creativity injection. You have to create an environment for curiosity and a way to encourage people and get the best out of them.

Sir Ken Robinson, author and educationalist, 1950–2020

It is widely accepted that...

Creativity is consistently ranked among the top skills businesses need. Research suggests jobs asking for creativity will increase by the year 2030.

Research shows that disadvantaged children and young people have the most to gain from engaging in high-quality arts and culture.

Raising the quality of the creative and cultural learning experiences children and young people from poorer backgrounds have access to is fundamental to levelling up opportunity.

Young people who have regular access to high-quality creative and cultural education develop higher levels of **cultural capital**, giving them a step-up into top jobs and broader opportunities.

Curious Minds knows that...

Most teachers haven't had any training about how to teach for creativity and schools are increasingly struggling to prioritise and protect it.

The poorest children and young people often get the worst deal in terms of quality and opportunities for progression.

Teachers, youth-workers and children's services commissioners don't always know what a high-quality cultural education looks like or what it takes to achieve it.

Young people who attend **fee-paying schools** are much more likely to get a high-quality cultural education. The **Durham Commission** identified a huge disparity in teaching for creativity between schools, often reflecting socio economic factors.

We will...

Innovate

Invest

Influence

- Connect and collaborate with teachers, youth workers and creative practitioners to design, deliver and evaluate targeted cultural learning programmes
- Work with teachers and leading academics to develop and articulate our 'curiosity-led' approach to Teaching for Creativity.
- Work with teaching artists and leading academics to explore, develop and test a new methodology for 'Teaching Artistry'.

The Future

About Curious Minds

Definitions

Strategy

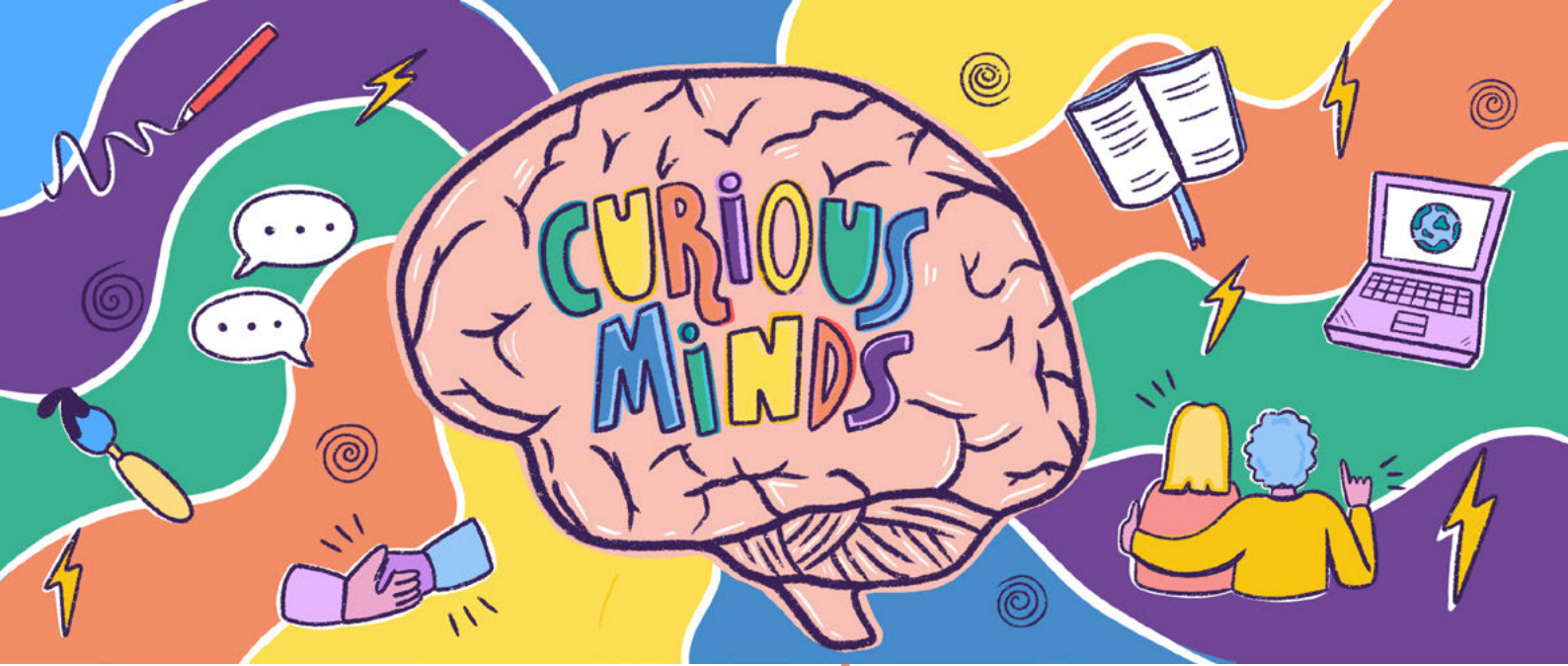
The Future



Curious about the difference we want to make?

By 2030 we want to see...

- **More children benefitting**
More children and young people, especially those from marginalised backgrounds, are benefitting from regular and sustained engagement in quality cultural learning, progression and employment opportunities at school and where they live.
- **A more diverse & dynamic workforce**
The cultural education workforce is more: diverse and connected; visible and respected; expert and ambitious; dynamic and resilient. Creative practitioners and cultural organisations are making a valuable contribution to relevant government agendas and initiatives, and are getting more paid work.
- **Stronger local partnerships & collaboration**
Local cultural offers are coherent, visible, relevant and inclusive. Cultural providers work in partnership with schools and other key agencies. Local Children's Services and place leaders know and value the cultural sector's contribution to delivering positive outcomes. Participation enables children and young people to exercise their voice, influence and leadership.
- **Young people from diverse backgrounds are leading & influencing organisational & systemic change**
Cultural organisations and place-based cultural partnerships are creating and embedding opportunities for young people to lead and influence organisational and systemic change, including through paid roles and board positions.
- **Cultural education is a first choice career for more young creatives entering the workforce**
More young people entering the creative workforce are purposefully choosing to enter the cultural education sector as arts teachers, teaching artists and participatory specialists in the field of cultural education.
- **More robust evidence of impact**
There is more and better evidence that participation in quality creative and cultural activity delivers positive social, educational and wellbeing outcomes for children and young people, schools and communities.
- **More compelling advocacy**
Professionals working in the field of creative and cultural education are more knowledgeable and better equipped to generate, share and use case studies, evidence and data to drive improvement and influence planning and decision making.
- **Teaching for creativity is a priority for more schools**
More schools are taking positive steps to embed creative teaching and learning across the curriculum. More schools state it as a priority for school improvement and are holding themselves to account.



Have we piqued your curiosity?

If so, we invite you to come and be curious with us.

If you would like to work with Curious Minds to transform creative and cultural opportunities for young people who are often excluded by social and economic inequalities, please get in touch:

info@curiousminds.org.uk

For more information
visit our website:

www.curiousminds.org.uk

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