



partnerships for schools

Enabling young people to be well informed equal partners and decision makers in the Building Schools for the Future Programme design process can be challenging.

This case study looks at how a local authority and social enterprise have developed a useful transferable model, using culture to meaningfully integrate young people into the project.

Culture and cultural learning as drivers for school design

Background

The Somerset BSF team held a firm belief that a project focusing on the transformation of learning and of communities needed to start with the engagement of young people. The team led early consultation activities, design festivals etc before engaging The Real Ideas Organisation (RiO!) to take the project to the next level.

RiO has contributed to local authority BSF programmes for some time. Since autumn 2007, RiO has been working in Bridgwater, developing and managing the 'Secondary Students Stakeholder Engagement' programme with Somerset County Council. Six schools have now participated in this programme. These schools are also part of the Creative Partnerships (CP) 'Change School' Programme².

The BSF Secondary Students Stakeholder Engagement Programme aims to enable young people to become 'expert clients' - well-informed equal partners and decision makers in the overall design and commissioning of their new schools. The young people benefit from seeing their school transform and are involved in the process of change and learning during the development itself.

RiO has taken lessons learned from previous BSF projects they delivered in schools in Bristol. They have honed their approach and are now able to deliver a comprehensive, creative stakeholder engagement programme and lead a team of artists, to deliver a public art programme as part of BSF.

Groups of young people are given a direct say over one specific element of the design of their school building and RiO feel that this helps to position them

at the centre of real, practical and positive changes in their communities. Young people start working with the BSF teams at the competitive dialogue stage of the procurement process and are involved throughout the process up until the point where the BSF contract is awarded. This ensures that the statutory and private sector partners listen to and engage in dialogue with the young people.

Somerset's vision for BSF involves 'developing a culture of creativity and engagement that transforms learning'. This vision has been supported and developed through the Somerset BSF Arts Stakeholder group. RiO and a group of cultural organisations named the Somerset Arts Providers (SAP) group are members of this Cultural Stakeholder Group and have been instrumental in creating opportunities for young people and culture in BSF. For example, they have advised on issues from design engagement, creative education and new creative relationships with schools, to new arts facilities and arts development in the community.

This co-ordinated and holistic review has enabled a more objective assessment of Somerset's cultural provision and resources. A 'BSF Response Officer' has been recruited by SAP and has been funded through the Arts Council's 'Thrive!'³ programme. This post will support the authority and will take forward the longer-term development work across the county.

Project description

The Secondary Student's Stakeholder Engagement Programme:
Bridgwater BSF Ambassadors project started in December 2008.

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RiOs first task was to establish a team of teachers and young people from the six schools in Bridgwater. The young people took on the role of 'expert clients'⁴ and ambassadors for the BSF process. Two students and one teacher representative from each of the Bridgwater BSF Schools (four secondary, two special schools) worked together. The Architecture Centre⁵ in Bristol worked with the group to give them a good working knowledge and understanding of the BSF process, school design and public art. This element of the project was funded through the Creative Partnerships initiative.

The group then worked with the local authority BSF team to select the 'Preferred Bidder' for the county's scheme. The young people will use this activity to contribute to a national qualification: the Young People's Arts Award⁶.

In January 2009, the 'Expert Client' group selected, through interview, Kathryn Hodgkinson as a 'Lead Artist' to the Bridgwater BSF project. Kathryn supported each school to establish a 'Public Art Commissioning Group' to research and recruit a public artist to work on their specific school.

Architect and facilitator Andy Siddall was also selected by the students to act as a supporting consultant on the Somerset BSF programme. During May 2009 he worked with pupil groups from BSF the sample schools and delivered a number of 'Schools of Architecture' sessions that enabled young people to lead design review panel sessions (based on the CABE⁷ School Design Review Panel model).

As part of the evaluation of BSF bidder's Invitation to Continue Dialogue (ITCD) submissions, students reviewed the proposed schemes from the two bidding teams and presented their feedback and scores to school Senior Leadership Team's (SLT's) and the BSF team at Somerset County Council. The student's scores formed part of the authority's overall scores for ITCD, demonstrating the key role they have undertaken in decision making around BSF.

The artists and facilitators working on this project were contracted by RiO until the Preferred Bidder stage of the BSF process. Once a BSF team has been selected, the Preferred Bidder takes over the responsibility of delivery



and project management of the arts programme, and contraction of the artists.

The programme has raised the profile of culture, cultural learning and the abilities of young people across all participants; students, schools, Somerset County Council and bid teams, by proactive partnership working. The project has enabled young people add considerable value to their communities.

The project has been designed to offer a small number of students a focussed, high impact experience and offer broader benefits to a larger number of young people. For example, teachers have specifically observed how several students, including those from the special schools, have grown in confidence through their involvement with the programme so far. Self esteem has been raised and their approach to other situations and work has become more positive and confident. The presentations to bid teams and the BSF team in Somerset have been high points of the process so far for all concerned with young people talking eloquently and knowledgably about design, the work of artists and their schools.

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RiO has aimed to set high expectations and establish best practice for engagement models that can be used in later waves of BSF in Somerset. The aspiration is for the work is to start even earlier, enabling young people to contribute to the authority's overall BSF vision – at 'Readiness to Deliver' and 'Strategy for Change' stages. Comprehensive evaluation of the project has been commissioned, and will cover a wide range of issues from the impact on young people, architects, contractors etc, to the effectiveness of strategic interventions in BSF and the long term impact of arts development.

Key lessons learned

This is a complex process and set of partners to navigate as the project crosses a number of work streams in Somerset County Council and beyond, In the future the partners aim to achieve the following:

- more preparation;
- more skilled prioritisation;
- bottoming out logistics sooner;
- a tighter tie in with the procurement timetable;
- communication of clearer expectations from schools and the BSF team;
- more precise programming with greater co-construction of the programme and activities within it; and
- clearer outcomes for all expressed at the outset.

Communication between the many different local authority work streams, schools and partners is a great challenge so open and regular dialogue is essential.

Conditions for success

- Open minded and forward thinking by the local authority BSF team that is committed to setting high quality precedents, and which has a firm belief in stakeholder engagement and a commitment to act on that belief.
- Previous relationships between partners and a shared approach to creative learning,

curriculum development and QCA work were developed through the Sedgemoor Learning Alliance.

- RiO's previous experience of BSF and Creative Partnerships funding.
- Arts and creative education stakeholder group was in place, enabling wider partnerships and strategies.
- Shared expertise of partners (and networks) in all teams and across agencies in co-constructing agreed processes.
- Clear statements, expectations and scored questions regarding stakeholder engagement and public art in ITPD and ITCD documents.
- Ensuring county public art policies are in place and will be applied as planning conditions.
- Positive relationships between schools and partners with mutual trust and respect.
- The levels of funding available for this project have enabled development and exploration of different approaches.
- The main requirement is the commitment on all sides to undertake and deliver the best opportunities possible for young people to realistically take part in and have an impact upon BSF.

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Key contacts

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References

1. RiO is a social enterprise which creates and provides programmes, products and services that help young people around the world realise their potential.
2. Change Schools: Schools whose development is supported by Creative Partnerships (CP) to bring about significant changes in their ethos, ambition and achievement.
3. Thrive! aims to develop the organisational performance of arts organisations and build their capacity to navigate 'a rapidly changing environment'.
4. 'Expert clients' is a term widely used in Local Authority / contractor circles but here used by RiO to describe young people as well-informed equal partners and decision makers in the design and commissioning of their new schools, as well as participants in a positive creative process of change and learning during the development itself.
5. www.architecturecentre.co.uk/
6. Arts Award is a national qualification which supports young people to develop as artists and arts leaders. Young people aged between 11-25 can achieve Arts Awards at levels 1, 2 and 3 on the national qualifications framework.
7. www.cabe.org.uk