Kick the Dust programme evaluation: empowering young people in heritage

25/04/2024

See all updates

Our £10million pilot programme to make heritage relevant to people aged 11-25 has concluded after six years of achievements and learning.

Attachment	Size
PDF View Kick The Dust Evaluation: Final Report (.pdf) as PDF(775.78 KB)	775.78 KB

Responding to research that showed young people were under-represented as audiences, participants and volunteers in heritage, we funded 12 large-scale projects across the UK to address the problem.

Our aim was to increase the scale and quality of youth engagement with heritage in the long term. We also wanted to make heritage relevant to a greater diversity of young people and show how their voices can benefit heritage.

Between 2017 and 2023, over 5,000 young people were participating in Kick The Dust projects at any one time.

Key findings

We've worked with Renaisi to evaluate Kick The Dust since 2018. To produce this end of programme evaluation they collected data and surveys on projects' outputs and outcomes and conducted in-depth interviews with four Kick The Dust projects.

The evaluation concluded that Kick the Dust:

- **Gave projects security through large-scale, long-term funding.** Providing the time and money to trial new approaches to youth engagement resulted in high-quality, innovative heritage content created and led by young people.
- **Increased the diversity of participants.** The young people involved changed perceptions of heritage, which attracted a diverse group of audiences – however some projects were already engaging with diverse ethnic communities.
- **Empowered young people.** Projects increasingly gave young people the reins to lead. Young participants increased their understanding and insight into heritage, developed skills and some joined the heritage workforce or took up leadership roles.
- **Achieved positive outcomes for young people by engaging them with heritage.** Young people found like-minded friends and connected to people with different backgrounds and experiences. Heritage also helped them explore their identity and connected them to their local area.
- **Explored heritage creatively.** Young people identified unique aspects of heritage through creative activities which supported and expanded their understanding of the past and other people's lives. In turn, this enabled greater understanding and reflection of their own and other people's experiences.

- **Benefitted heritage organisations.** Organisations developed their own expertise in working with young people and welcomed a more diverse group of people to their services. Some have made structural changes to embed these learnings within their organisations.

What is Kick The Dust's legacy?

Because of the strong foundations developed through Kick The Dust, heritage organisations are more confident working with young people in the future. For some organisations, youth leadership and co-production are major and positive organisational changes that contribute to a more inclusive sector.

They are also committing resources to sustain their youth engagement, including continuing or building further partnerships with other organisations. And at some organisations young people are now permanently involved in decision-making.

Heritage organisations involved in Kick The Dust projects have shared their experiences and best practice with their networks, changing attitudes more widely in the heritage sector.

However, there are challenges to sustaining this progress in the future. Empowering young people to lead in heritage requires continuing long-term efforts to change attitudes and organisations' cultures. Organisations also raised concerns about funding uncertainties limiting their ability to recruit and engage young people, such as offering paid placements.

Tips for organisations working with young people

Set your project up for success by considering how you can:

- build in flexibility at the planning stage to ensure your project can adapt to changing circumstances
- be ambitious in how much decision-making authority you give to young participants
- consider how to give young people a voice within your organisation's wider work, including recruitment and governance
- plan early how you'll use what you learn to continue youth engagement in the future

Explore more

Read the full Kick The Dust evaluation in the PDF attached to this page to find out more about the difference our funding has made.

Our research and evaluation

We regularly conduct research to discover what is happening in the heritage sector, and we evaluate our work to better understand the change we are making.?Read more of our insight.