

Unlocking creativity: the economic impact of engagement with arts and culture among young people

By Dr Maliha Rahanaz

November 2025



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About PBE

We use **economics to improve lives**. Through analytical expertise and our close connection with the social sector, we help charities, funders, firms, and policymakers tackle the causes and consequences of low wellbeing.

Our analysts, researchers, and economists work on a wide range of issues related to low wellbeing, including mental health, education, employment, financial security, poverty, disability, inequality, volunteering, and civil society. Working with over 600 volunteer economists, we have supported over 600 charities since 2009.

About Factory International

Factory International is a global arts organisation based in Manchester – the creative force behind Aviva Studios, a major new cultural space built for cross-disciplinary work, and the biennial Manchester International Festival (MIF). Factory International commissions and presents bold, original work across music, theatre, dance, visual arts and digital – created in Manchester and shared with the world. It supports artists at every stage of their career and enables large-scale, experimental projects that wouldn't happen elsewhere. More than a producing powerhouse, Factory International invests in long-term cultural growth – training the next generation of creative talent, building deep community connections, and making culture more accessible for everyone.

Its Factory Schools programme, led and designed by Sameed Rezayan, Head of Creative Learning, empowers Greater Manchester secondary students by fostering creativity and wellbeing through arts and culture. Students take part in weekly sessions with artists, culminating in a final celebration that showcases their work. The programme aims to build resilience, aspirations, and social-emotional skills through meaningful engagement with cultural experiences.

Acknowledgments

PBE would like to thank the Porticus Foundation for its generous funding support for this report. We are also grateful to Professor Neil Humphrey, Dr. Qiqi Cheng, and the entire #BeeWell programme team at The University of Manchester for their valuable collaboration in developing this evidence.

Key takeaways

1 in 6

Mental health problems affect one in six children in early childhood and rise to one in four by age 19, with the move to secondary school marking a critical point in this increase.

0.6 points (0–10 scale)

The Factory International Schools Programme is estimated to improve wellbeing by 0.6 points on the life satisfaction scale (0–10) – equivalent to the wellbeing boost an adult experience when moving from unemployment into employment.

£10,000

The annual wellbeing benefits are valued at £10,000 per participant.

£7 for every £1 spent

If the effects of the programme are sustained over a year, then the programme would deliver £7 for every £1 spent.

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Maliha Rahanaz, Unlocking creativity: the economic impact of engagement with arts and culture among young people, PBE (November 2025)

Summary

Children and young people in the UK have the lowest wellbeing in Europe. National survey data from 2023 show that about one in five children and young people aged 8 to 25 years were likely to have a mental health problem. This prevalence begins early affecting one in six children in early childhood and rises to one in four by age 19, with the transition to secondary school marking a critical turning point.¹ These numbers highlight that early support is necessary to give children and young people the chance to thrive in the future.

One powerful form of such support could be early participation in arts and cultural activities. Drawing, singing, acting, playing music and getting creative with friends strengthen imagination, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills, laying the foundation for healthy cognitive and emotional development.² Taking part in arts and culture has also been shown to support learning across other subjects, including English, Maths, and Science.³

Engaging with arts and culture – whether creating something alone, with friends, or in a group – can offer powerful ways to connect with young people on their own terms. These activities foster aspirations, teamwork, and self-expression by providing safe spaces for feelings that may be hard for young people to articulate.⁴ If such activities can be offered alongside core subjects in schools, they can make learning more enjoyable and help children better understand and remember what they are being taught.

Despite these benefits of early engagement with arts and culture, young people continue to face various challenges in accessing inclusive, supportive and creative environments. Cuts to government funding for arts in schools have impacted access across the board, while the concentration of museums and cultural venues in urban centres leaves many communities underserved. These access challenges tend to be even more acute for those children and young people coming from lower income backgrounds and with transport costs acting as a particular barrier.

Arts and culture can play a vital role in supporting the wellbeing of children and young people, yet their economic impact on this generation remains underexplored. This report contributes to the growing evidence base by assessing the value for money of the Factory International Schools Programme (FISP) – a 10-month initiative designed to enhance young people’s wellbeing and confidence through sustained engagement with arts and culture.

1 NHS Digital, [Mental Health of Children and Young People in England, 2023: Wave 4 follow-up to the 2017 survey](#), (November 2023)

2 Pedro Carneiro, Claire Crawford and Alissa Goodman, [Which skills matter?](#), Centre for the Economics of Education, London School of Economics and Political Science (July 2006)

3 See for example, Child of the North & Centre for Young Lives, [An evidence-based approach to creating a culture of inclusive opportunity through arts and creativity](#) (March 2025) and Leyre Zarobe and Hilary Bungay, [The role of arts activities in developing resilience and mental wellbeing in children and young people: a rapid review of the literature](#), Perspectives in Public Health (14 June 2017)

4 Camille Farrington et al, [Arts Education and Social-Emotional Learning Outcomes Among K-12 Students: Developing a Theory of Action](#), UChicago Consortium on School Research (June 2019).

Our analysis builds on the evaluation conducted by the #BeeWell team at the University of Manchester, which found that compared to a matched group of young people from the #BeeWell dataset, FISP participants experienced significant improvements in life satisfaction—equivalent to around 0.6 points on a 0–10 life satisfaction scale. This is a meaningful change, comparable to the wellbeing boost an adult experiences when moving from unemployment into employment.

Delivered in partnership with schools, FISP provides in-school sessions led by professional artists who work closely with teachers to build trust, ensure continuity, and support effective student participation. Since its pilot launch in 2023, the programme has supported 181 students across five schools in Greater Manchester. To calculate the value assessment of the programme, we apply the HM Treasury’s (HMT’s) methodology to put a monetary value on this increase in wellbeing to understand how meaningful the change really is.

We find that if the wellbeing impact of the programme were sustained for just two months, FISP would fully recover its total costs of £1,314 per student. This means that, even without considering any benefits outside the scope of this study, the programme demonstrates potential for value for money within a relatively short time frame. And if the wellbeing benefits were to be sustained for a year, it would deliver £7 in benefits for every £1 spent.

This analysis of FISP shows that investing in arts and culture not only supports young people’s wellbeing but also delivers strong value for money, even under cautious assumptions. It is likely that this return is strengthened by the sustained, school-embedded approach taken by FISP, though further qualitative evaluation would provide deeper insight into precisely how and why the programme works. The findings contribute to a growing body of evidence showing that access to high-quality arts and cultural experiences can have a powerful positive impact on children and young people. Previous PBE evaluations, including work with the Artis Foundation, have shown similarly impressive returns.⁵

This evidence base should be of particular interest to policymakers concerned with deploying tight public budgets in a way that can best meet the needs of the country. With children and young people in the UK reporting concerning high levels of poor wellbeing and mental health challenges, the government should explore what more it might do to tap into the power of arts and culture access as a means of tackling the problem.

⁵ Amit Kara and Sadia Sheikh, [Do the arts perform at school? The economic case for delivering a curriculum-based performing arts programme in primary schools](#), Artis Foundation in association with PBE (June 2022)

Introduction: Access to arts and culture in schools

Early engagement in arts and culture has been shown to enhance imagination, problem-solving and critical thinking skills, which are essential for cognitive and emotional development.⁶ Growing research is shedding light on how engaging with arts and culture could enhance the wellbeing of children and young people.

For example, a review found that secondary school students in the UK who took part in structured arts activities – referred to as planned and curriculum-linked creative experiences guided by a teacher, artist, or facilitator – achieved better academic results than those who did not.⁷ Similarly, engaging in the arts can provide up to three months of academic progress in English, Maths and Science.⁸

Moreover, arts activities not only support learning, but are also a powerful force for building resilience and improving mental health of children and young people.⁹ These findings suggest that engaging with arts and culture can be a powerful complement to other forms of support, helping young people thrive as they move into adulthood.

But are we realising these beneficial effects of the arts? Evidence suggests young people face significant challenges in accessing inclusive, supportive, and empowering creative environments. These challenges can affect young people differently, depending on their circumstances.¹⁰

A recent report by Cultural Learning Alliance (CLA) finds that a young person's chance of continuing with arts from age 14 depends on their background and where they live, with young people in England's most deprived areas, and those eligible for free school meals, experiencing fewer opportunities to engage in creative and cultural opportunities. The situation in schools is also particularly worrying, with growing concerns about whether young people have regular and equal access to arts and cultural opportunities.¹¹ This matters because schools in most deprived areas are likely to face tighter budgets, fewer specialist teachers, and limited access to arts and culture resources. Outside of the classroom, young people may also have fewer chances to engage with arts and culture because there are often limited local options available.

⁶ Pedro Carneiro, Claire Crawford and Alissa Goodman, [Which skills matter?](#), Centre for the Economics of Education, London School of Economics and Political Science (July 2006)

⁷ Mark Newman et al, [Understanding the impact of engagement in culture and sport: A systematic review of the learning impacts for young people](#), EPPI-Centre, Institute of Education, University of London (July 2010)

⁸ Child of the North & Centre for Young Lives, [An evidence-based approach to creating a culture of inclusive opportunity through arts and creativity](#) (March 2025).

⁹ Leyre Zarobe and Hilary Bungay, [The role of arts activities in developing resilience and mental wellbeing in children and young people: a rapid review of the literature](#), Perspectives in Public Health (14 June 2017)

¹⁰ [UK Arts, Culture and Young People: Innovative practice and trends](#), British Council (December 2024)

¹¹ Cultural Learning Alliance, [Report Card 2025](#), (March 2025)

Continued lower funding for the arts is a key barrier to opportunities for young people to engage in them. Government decisions indicate deprioritisation of the arts. For example, English Baccalaureate (EBacc) is a set of subjects – such as English, Maths, Science, Modern Foreign Languages and Humanities – that the government wants most students to take by 2025. But this does not include any arts subjects. When the EBacc was first rolled out between 2010 and 2013, 27% of schools cut courses as a result and arts subjects were hit the hardest. This made it harder for young people to access creative subjects like music, drama, and dance.¹²

Spaces and infrastructure that support young people’s engagement with arts and culture outside of schools are also being affected. Across England, many arts and culture centres are at risk of closing because core funding has stayed the same since 2010, despite rising costs and growing demand for them.¹³ This lack of funding is very different from what we see in other parts of Europe. In Germany for example, the government invests twice as much public funding as in England into the arts.¹⁴ More recently there have been some indications of a change in emphasis, with the government allocating funds for families and young people. But the longer-term challenge of tighter funding – especially in the school setting – nevertheless continues to resonate.¹⁵

The benefits of creative engagement on young people’s development are often overlooked in favour of test scores and academic targets – even though creativity is closely linked to long-term outcomes in health, employment, and overall wellbeing.¹⁶ While other subjects have their strengths, evidence suggests that the arts have their own unique benefits, too. Arts and culture provide powerful ways to engage young people on their own terms. Such activities nurture aspirations, teamwork, and self-expression by offering safe spaces to explore emotions that may otherwise be difficult to express. When integrated alongside core school subjects, they can make learning more engaging and help children better retain and understand what they are taught.

At a time when too many young people in the UK are experiencing low levels of wellbeing, we need to understand and effectively prioritise between opportunities that help all young people grow and thrive – including the arts.¹⁷ While policymakers have had to make difficult decisions in light of funding cuts, ultimately children and young people have missed out on chances to engage in arts and culture. This is concerning at a time when young people are increasingly voicing that arts and culture matter to them.¹⁸

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- ¹² For instance, arts subjects accounted for just 6.7% of all GCSE entries in 2023/24 which is less than half of what they were in 2009/10. Enrolment figures are also troubling, with around 42% of schools no longer offering Music GCSE, 41% not offering Drama GCSE, and a striking 84% not offering Dance GCSE. See: Cultural Learning Alliance, [Report Card 2025](#), (March 2025).
- ¹³ Dan Wilson Crow, [Arts Council England chair says sector at ‘tipping point’ amid funding fears](#), The Guardian (16 May 2025)
- ¹⁴ Philip Oltermann, [Plan to cut Berlin arts budget will ‘destroy’ city’s culture, directors warn](#), The Guardian (27 November 2024)
- ¹⁵ Department for Culture, Media & Sport and the Rt Hon Lisa Nandy MP, [Forgotten assets to help families and young people thrive](#) (2 June 2025)
- ¹⁶ Cultural Learning Alliance, [The Arts in Schools Briefing](#) (November 2023)
- ¹⁷ Jon Franklin et al., [Caught in a trap? Low wellbeing in the UK 2025](#), PBE (3 July 2025)
- ¹⁸ Arts Council England, [ART31 – Young People and Arts Engagement](#) (2020)

With budget constraints continuing to bite, we need to understand the potential unique impact, and resulting value for money, that arts opportunities might provide. Evidence of the impact of young people's engagement with arts and culture in the UK remains limited and often too narrow, especially when compared to international studies.¹⁹ Without this evidence, there is a real risk that the potential of arts and culture and its impact on children and young people's wellbeing remain overlooked in policy and programme design.

Our report aims to provide a value for money assessment of the Factory International Schools Programme (FISP) which is a year-long initiative designed to enhance the wellbeing and confidence of young people, particularly secondary school students, through sustained engagement with arts and culture. By evaluating the FISP in-school arts programme through the wellbeing improvements of its participants, we aim to add key evidence that will help policymakers to build a fairer, more complete picture of the importance of the arts for young people and wider society.

Broadly, in this report PBE defines engagement with arts and culture as young people's interaction with artistic practices, either through:

- Active participation – such as performing a poem to an audience or taking part in a creative workshop, or
- Reactive participation – such as contributing artwork to an exhibition or submitting a photograph to be included in a publication, and
- Appreciation of diverse cultures and traditions that help young people understand how the expressive arts connect with the wider world in fostering cross-cultural understanding

Through these experiences, young people not only apply their creative skills to produce and perform more interactive work but also develop the ability to recognise the creativity and technical skills in the work of others.

Amid these challenging trends, many charities are working to respond and adapt. Organisations like Factory International are also leading the way, inspiring young people in schools to participate in and experience the arts. FISP collaborates with schools in the Greater Manchester area over the course of the academic year.

¹⁹ As discussed in Annex C. Arts and culture among young people – evidence gaps

Factory International Schools Programme

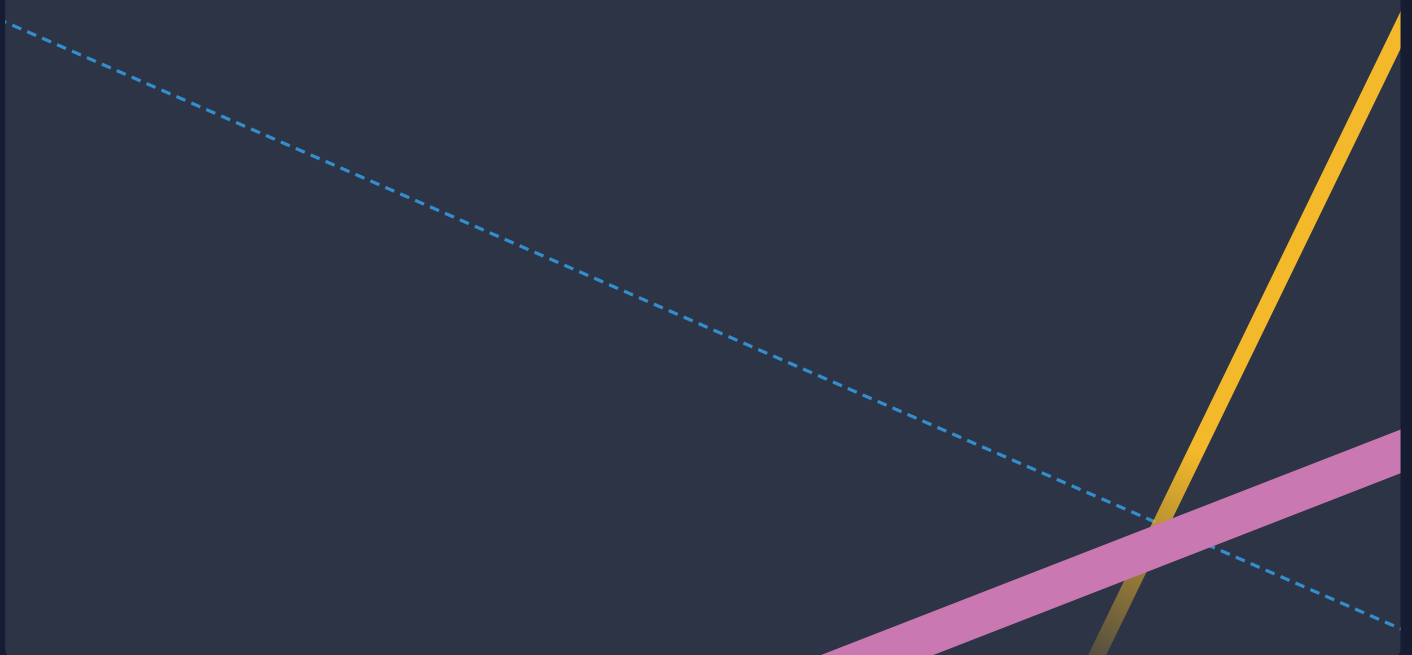
Factory International began FISP as a pilot programme in 2023/24 with 181 children across five secondary schools in the Greater Manchester area. Participants include a broad mix of young people, including those eligible for Free School Meals (FSM), those with special educational needs (SEN), and those from diverse ethnic communities. For example, the programme included the following mix: 25% at risk (i.e. those with low attendance, attainment or with behavioural issues); 25% role models (i.e. those meeting or exceeding expectations with arts as an interest), and 50% passive learners (i.e. those on the threshold of engagement). Artists from FISP lead sessions with secondary school children to help them unlock their creative potential. FISP also places teachers at the heart of their work by involving them in both facilitating sessions and selecting students. For example, while students interested in joining FISP submitted written applications, the final selection was made by teachers to ensure that those most likely to benefit could participate, alongside peers who would serve as positive role models. Case studies 1 and 2, provided by FISP, reflect on the journey of young people in engaging with the programme.

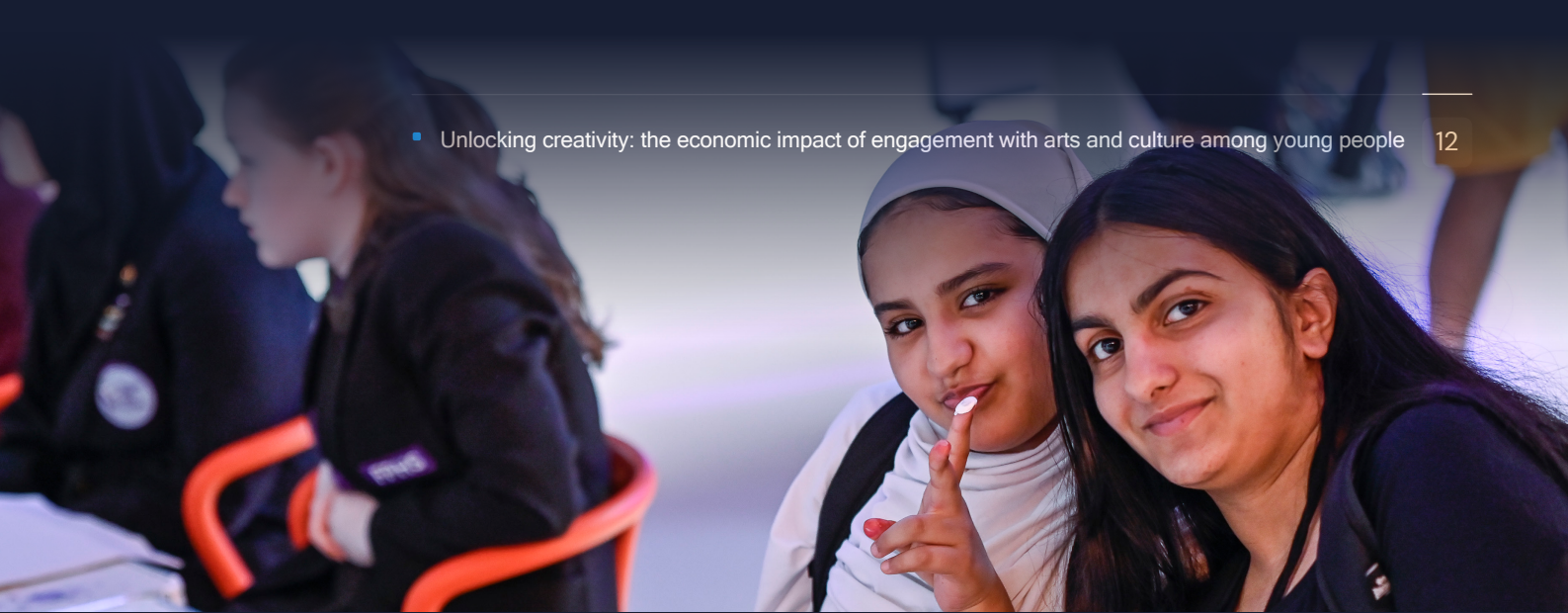
FISP activities delivered across the school year to engage young people in arts and culture

Each activity is carried out over a half-term period, with six in total as detailed below:

1. **Free your mind:** Encourages young people to consider good versus evil and how they can express that through music composition in groups of four to seven. The goal is to present or perform the composition in class to other participants.
2. **What home means to you:** Individual participants work with artists and other peers by writing a poem. The half-term goal is to perform a poem to other FISP participants, teachers and local community members.
3. **What is power:** Students work independently to make a collage to convey different themes of power in the society. The half-term goal is to submit this collage alongside others to be included in a magazine that will show all FISP participants' work.

4. **Imaginary workshop:** Students in groups of four to six plan a workshop considering an art or a creative form which their audience would enjoy. Students are in charge of planning the costs and the timings of the workshops whilst also learning about different career options within this sector. The half-term goal is to present the workshop to the class where the final three groups are selected to bring their workshop to life at the year-end showcase hosted by FI.
5. **My stomping ground:** Students understand how surroundings contribute to one's identity. Students in groups of two to four use photography to capture images that tell a story about who they are. At the end of this half-term, students submit their favourite photos to be potentially featured in photography book.
6. **Rediscovering creativity:** Students draw on the skills they have developed throughout the previous half-terms to create a performance piece in groups of four to six. They subsequently perform these pieces in front of a large audience as part of the year-end showcase.





Case study 1: Alexa's story

Alexa²⁰ joined the FISP in Year 9, having recently moved to the UK. At the time, she felt isolated, lacked confidence, and was hesitant to express herself creatively. Although she enjoyed writing when she was younger, she didn't believe her work was good enough and she was unfamiliar with poetry.

Through the programme, she began developing her creative writing, photography and collage skills. The support and encouragement from artists and facilitators, particularly Reece, helped her recognise her talent and take pride in her work. Over time, she became more confident both in and outside the classroom where she now raises her hand without fear and engages fully in lessons.

Her form teacher also noted a significant transformation: she became socially and emotionally more confident, even reciting her poetry in front of the entire year group. Moreover, Alexa now mentors younger students and dreams of becoming a writer, psychologist, or even a doctor – crediting the programme for helping her understand people better and develop emotional insight.

For Alexa, FISP was more than an arts and culture programme – it was a turning point that helped her find her voice, build friendships, and realise that her ideas are worth sharing.

²⁰ All names used in the case studies are fictional and have been changed to protect the privacy of young people



Case study 2: Brian's story

Before joining FISP, Brian²¹ was navigating an intense personal crisis. His mother has been diagnosed with a serious illness, which left him anxious, angry, and emotionally overwhelmed. This deeply affected his school life. His relationships suffered, ability to focus weakened and his academic performance declined.

Trust and self-belief had all but disappeared and he felt he was spiralling out of control.

His turning point came in Year 9, when he joined FISP. Although Brian was hesitant at first, the programme facilitators helped him stay committed. Each term offered a new creative outlet – from rap and poetry to photography to zine-making – enabling Brian to express emotions, develop leadership, and take responsibility for his contributions.

The safe, judgement-free environment allowed him to grow in confidence and rediscover his sense of self.

Now, Brian is on a scholarship at Xaverian Sixth Form College with the Manchester Giants pursuing Sports Science and he hopes to combine sport and creativity to support other young people.

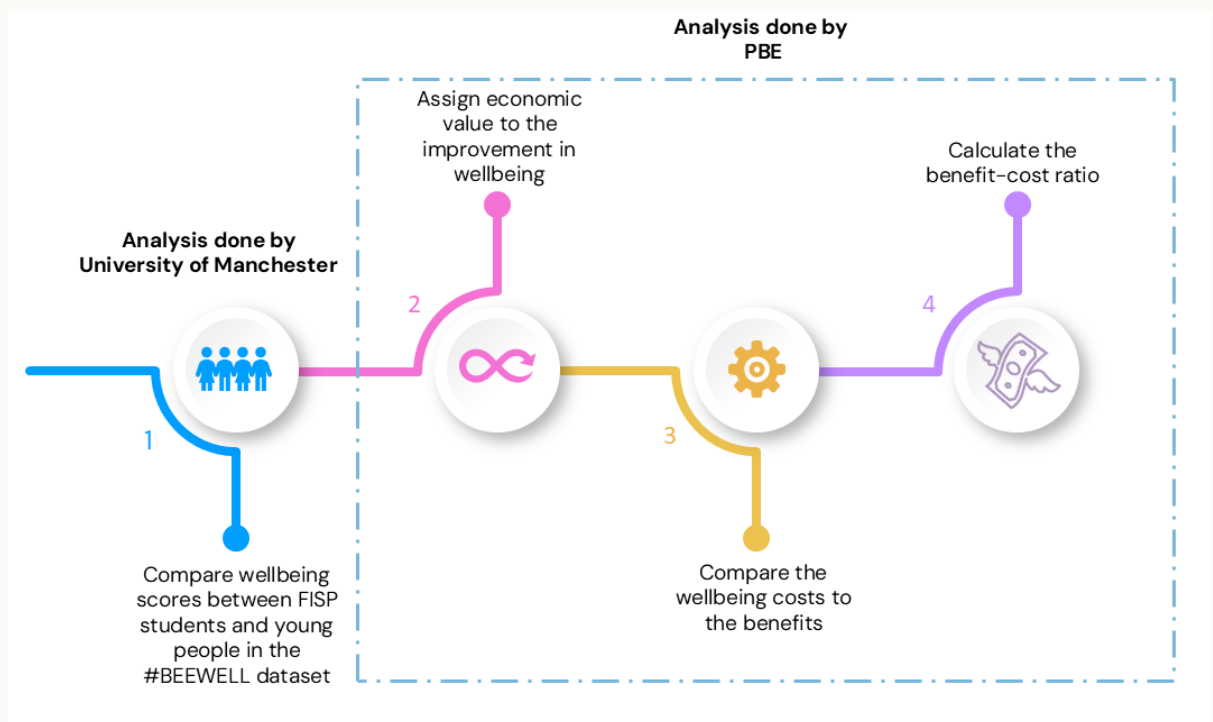
For Brian, FISP was more than a creative project rather it was a transformative space built on trust that helped him heal, grow and imagine a new future.

²¹ All names used in the case studies are fictional and have been changed to protect the privacy of young people

Approach

To understand the potential value for money of the FISP programme, we followed a four-step process. Step one required us to understand the change in self-reported wellbeing (more specifically, 'life satisfaction') experienced by the young people participating in the programme. Step two converted these gains into monetary values. Step three compared these benefit estimates to the costs of delivering the programme. And step four brought steps two and three together to generate an estimated cost-benefit ratio. This report's main findings on FISP's value for money are based on the approach shown in Figure 1 and summarised in more detail below.

Figure 1. Key steps to estimating the economic value of wellbeing changes delivered by FISP



1. **Compare start- and end-of programme wellbeing, using the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Life Satisfaction measure, against a similar group of young people in the #Beewell dataset:** To assess the impact of FISP on student's wellbeing, the #BeeWell team at the University of Manchester compared changes in the ONS life satisfaction scores with those of a very similar group of young people from the #BeeWell dataset. This group of young people had not taken part in the programme but had similar characteristics to the students in the FISP. The analysis with the two groups revealed that FISP students experience a **0.6 point** improvement in the ONS life satisfaction scale, measured on a scale of 0–10 points, compared to the young people in the #BeeWell dataset.²²
2. **Assign an economic value to the improvement in wellbeing:** According to HM Treasury's guidance,²³ a one-point increase in life satisfaction sustained over a year is valued at £13,000 in 2019 prices,²⁴ (£16,359 in 2025).²⁵ By multiplying the wellbeing impact, measured by increase in life satisfaction points from Step 1, by this value, we can estimate the value of the average wellbeing improvement experienced by a typical FISP student. While we acknowledge this would mean an economic value of £9,782 per person, we cannot assume the impact lasts for a full year, as we lack follow-up data to show how long the effect lasts for after the programme ends. Instead, we test a range of scenarios to explore how long the wellbeing improvements might last, and how the benefits differ under these scenarios.
3. **Compare the wellbeing benefits to the programme costs:** According to FISP financial data, in the 2023/24 academic year, the programme incurred a total cost of £237,939. This covered expenses such as salaries for the creative learning manager and artists, teacher training, and the planning and delivery of the end-of-year showcase. It also included travel costs for staff visiting schools throughout the year. To give this figure some context, FISP spent approximately £47,587 per school. Overall, FISP supported 181 students during this period, resulting in a delivery cost of £1,314 per student.
4. **Assess value for money:** We then compare the costs and benefits to determine how long the wellbeing effect attributable to FISP must last for the benefits to at least outweigh the costs (i.e. the breakeven point). After this, we compare the ratio of benefits to costs under different scenarios based on how long we assume the wellbeing improvements last. This ratio, called the benefit-cost ratio (BCR) shows how much benefit is generated for every £1 spent on the programme. A ratio above one means the programme's benefits exceed its costs, indicating value for money.

²² As a way to strengthen the reliability of the findings, researchers at University of Manchester employed a range of matching methods to validate the results. Several of the matching methods show that FISP improved life satisfaction of their students when compared to young people who were not part of FISP, with an effect size roughly found around 0.6 points on the 10-point scale.

²³ HM Treasury, [Green Book supplementary guidance: wellbeing](#) (July 2021)

²⁴ The ONS life satisfaction measure of wellbeing is one of the four standardised personal wellbeing questions used by the ONS. Individuals are asked, "Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?" with responses provided on a 0–10 scale where 0 is "not satisfied at all" and 10 is "completely satisfied". For more details, please see the ONS website.

²⁵ To reflect current price levels, this figure has been adjusted to 2025 prices by using the methodology in the guidance, resulting in an equivalent value of £16,359.

Key assumptions

Our analysis and interpretation of the results is guided by five key assumptions:

- (i) We assume that the programme has a direct impact on children's wellbeing as reflected in improvements in FISP participants' life satisfaction scores. However, there may also be longer-term effects — for instance, some students may continue to engage with FISP beyond their school years, pursuing paid work or careers in the creative industries. Such outcomes would not only contribute to the wider economy but could also lead to sustained improvements in wellbeing into adulthood, which are beyond the scope of this report to capture.
- (ii) We assume that the #BeeWell group of similar young people's wellbeing can reasonably represent what might have happened without FISP engagement (i.e. the control group can serve as a counterfactual). #BeeWell takes various background factors, such as FSM, gender, SEND and ethnicity into account, but there may be other unseen factors that influence the comparison group's wellbeing that we cannot consider. Different methods were used to find that comparison group in #BeeWell data, yielding broadly consistent but slightly different results. We look at how the findings of each of the different methods change our value for money findings in our sensitivity tests 1a and 1b.
- (iii) Since FISP is a pilot programme, there is no prior data on how long its effects might last. We assume that any improvement in wellbeing occurs only after the completion of the programme and is sustained for a year thereafter. This assumption is made to maintain the simplicity in the analysis but in reality, the improvement in wellbeing after the programme may not be

linear. To account for this uncertainty, we report the benefit-cost ratio for one of the conservative scenarios in our results to compare it to our core scenario (i.e. wellbeing benefits for the FISP participants persist for a year). We model two other scenarios in sensitivity tests 2a and 2b to explore how changes in the assumed duration — including potential fade-out over time — affect the programme's value for money.

- (iv) In our main analysis, we use HM Treasury's central estimate to assign a monetary value to changes in wellbeing. We also test the effect of applying both higher and lower estimates in sensitivity tests 3a and 3b. This helps us understand how different valuation assumptions (based on different studies) could influence the results.
- (v) The cost figures in this report are from FISP's financial data of running the programme and so, assumes there are no other costs for simplicity. However, there may be costs that are felt by other parties. For example, fostering relationships with FISP likely uses school staff time, and activities taking place on school grounds may generate some additional utilities costs. Additionally, we have not been able to consider what benefits might have arisen from putting resources into engaging children in another activity (e.g. sports) at school; such alternatives are infinite and difficult to assess what would have happened in such cases. We can consider these foregone benefits as costs of this programme. We do not have the data to quantify these costs discussed, and as such note that the total costs to society may be underrepresented.

Results

The #BeeWell team's analysis suggests that engaging in FISP over a year could be improving wellbeing of young people by 0.60 life satisfaction points compared to if they didn't have this opportunity. This is a significant change – about roughly the same effect measured for an adult moving from unemployment to employment.

What is less clear, however, is how long this wellbeing boost from FISP last. This is needed to understand whether the programme is likely to generate value for money; the longer the wellbeing boost is felt, the more valuable a young person finds the better quality of life, and therefore the higher the benefits when compared to the costs. Our results suggest, if the wellbeing impact of the programme were sustained for just about two months, FISP would fully recover its total costs of £1,314. This means that, even without considering any benefits outside the scope of this study, the programme demonstrates potential for value for money within a relatively short time frame. Additionally, if these wellbeing improvements actually last a year, FISP would be delivering benefits of £7.44 for every £1 spent.

Our analysis also indicates that the programme offers strong value for money under assumptions about how long participants continue to benefit from FISP. In one of the more conservative scenarios, we assume that there is a linear increase in students' wellbeing over the ten-month duration of the programme and then there is linear decrease over the next ten months. Even under this cautious assumption, the programme still represents good value: for every £1 invested, it is estimated to generate £6 in benefits.

It is important to recall that these estimates tell us the direct wellbeing benefits of FISP. But in reality, there could be other changes that are simultaneously happening. For example, there may be structural shifts in teaching as a result of interventions such as FISP. Teachers who help to identify and support students through FISP are not just facilitators — they also gain deep personal insights into their students' needs, strengths, and creative potential. This collaborative process could strengthen teacher-student relationships and support broader school priorities around inclusion, engagement, and wellbeing. Over time, such experiences may influence how teachers approach their wider classroom practice and pastoral care, creating ripple effects that extend the programme's impact well beyond its immediate participants. While we are unable to quantify these wider effects in this report, they still represent a valuable addition to the programme's impact.

Sensitivity analysis

The main findings of this report are that FISP is likely delivering significant value for money – this remains robust to a range of different assumptions (detailed in Annex B) and we continue to find promising evaluation results. The main scenarios that we considered are (a) changing the duration of the impact felt by FISP students; (b) changing the monetary value of the wellbeing improvements (i.e. considering low and high values from existing studies) and (c) using different estimated effects from various matching methods.²⁶ For all the scenarios that we considered, the benefits for every £1 spent fall in the range of £1.68 and £9.16 suggesting that wellbeing benefits are likely to outweigh the costs of the programme even under some more cautious scenarios around how long the wellbeing effect lasts.

Although these figures are promising, it is important to interpret them with caution as FISP is still in its early years of piloting the programme. Moving forward, it would be valuable to assess whether similar results hold when evaluated with a larger sample size and to improve comparability #BeeWell dataset. As such, the #BeeWell team is undertaking a 12-month follow-up study with data collected to align with the #BeeWell dataset This would help to provide insights into whether the effects of the programme are sustained over time.

²⁶ See Annex B. Sensitivity analysis

Conclusion

Achieving excellent grades in foundational topics like maths, science, and English is sometimes viewed as the only way to succeed academically. But in an era where young people encounter a wide range of difficulties, it is important to recognise how a creative mind will help young people to grow into confident and well-rounded adults.

Our analysis of FISP suggests that investing in arts and culture helps young people to thrive and offers significant value for money. The fact that the programme is consistently found to deliver value for money under even conservative assumptions adds confidence to our findings. This is not only reassuring for FISP but adds greatly to society's understanding on the value of arts and culture opportunities for young people.

At a time where young people's wellbeing in the UK is comparatively low, and government budgets are constrained, these results can help inform decision-making around what initiatives to prioritise for the sake of young people and wider society.

Looking to why a programme is effective is also invaluable for policymakers. FISP embeds the curriculum in the academic year – reflecting FI's aim to engage the students throughout. Perhaps it is the fact that the programme is sustained and embedded in the school setting that helps young people to feel like they are generally doing better in life. We suggest that further qualitative evaluation would be helpful in making the most of understanding and replicating FISP's success.

In the bigger picture, our findings from FISP strengthen the economic case for investing in arts and culture opportunities for young people. They show that such programmes can deliver measurable improvements in wellbeing, helping policymakers make more informed choices about how to allocate resources across youth development initiatives.

At the same time, our analysis highlights important data gaps. To fully understand the broader and longer-term benefits of engagement with arts and culture – for young people, communities, and society – more consistent and comparable evidence is needed. Adopting wellbeing valuation approaches, such as those used in this report, within policy appraisal and funding frameworks would help to ensure that arts and culture are assessed on an equal footing with other interventions. By doing so, government can make smarter, more holistic investment decisions that reflect the true contribution of arts and culture to young people's development and to society as a whole.

Annex A: Methodology for calculating the impact of FISP on life satisfaction

The University of Manchester team, led by Neil Humphrey and Qiqi Cheng, analysed #BeeWell data to estimate the potential wellbeing impact (based on ONS Life Satisfaction) of the FISP. The #BeeWell data is well positioned to estimate this relationship as it captures this measure at two points for a large sample of children.

First, the researchers used propensity score matching (PSM) to match programme and control participants. This method assigns each participant a score that represents their probability of receiving the intervention given various selection criteria, baseline outcomes and other socio-demographic characteristics (such as age, gender, FSM, SEND). This method makes it possible to construct a comparable control group from the large #BeeWell dataset. The researchers used various PSM methods to understand the robustness of the effects. For our analysis purposes, we have used the estimated effects from the matching method called nearest neighbour matching method with 10 neighbours. Several other PSM methods were also used to evaluate the robustness of the results and its effect on the life satisfaction outcome. The resulting effects and their implications for the benefit–cost ratios (BCRs) are presented in Annex B.

Secondly, difference-in-differences (DiD) was used to evaluate changes over time by examining both pre- and post-intervention outcomes and the differences between the intervention and control groups.²⁷ Based on these estimations, the FISP participants experienced an improvement of 0.598 points on a 0–10 life satisfaction scale. What this means is if this improvement could be maintained over a year, this effect would be considered as about 0.60 WELLBY points. As per HM Treasury’s Green Book guidance on wellbeing, the value of 0.60 WELLBYs could be about £9,782 using the standard valuation.²⁸

²⁷ Stephanie Ray et al., [A preliminary independent evaluation of the Factory International Schools Programme](#) (16 May 2025)

²⁸ HM Treasury, [Green Book supplementary guidance: wellbeing](#) (July 2021)

Annex B: Sensitivity analysis

Sensitivity tests are conducted to analyse the impact of key assumptions on the core conclusions of this report.

Matching approach: For our analysis, we have used the estimated effect size from nearest neighbour matching method with 10 neighbours. In order to understand the robustness of the results, #BeeWell team used various different matching techniques to identify the relevant control group from the #BeeWell dataset. By applying these different matching techniques, we get different point estimates for the wellbeing effect (i.e. the life satisfaction score) experienced by the FISP participants, which in turn give us different estimated values of wellbeing benefits. These sensitivity tests will show how the results change depending on the type of matching technique used. In sensitivity tests 1a and 1b, we explore how the different point estimates impact the value of the wellbeing benefits. Sensitivity test 1a compares results for the nearest neighbour matching (with 1 neighbour) and test 1b compares results for the optimal matching.

Persistence of wellbeing impacts: In the core scenario, we assumed that the wellbeing improvements experienced by FISP participants are sustained for a year. Now we also look at other long-term duration and its effect on the wellbeing experienced by FISP participants. Sensitivity test 2a assumes that there is a linear increase over 10 months and then the impact is back to zero. Sensitivity test 2b assumes that there is a linear increase over a year (i.e. 12 months), remains steady for another three months, and then the impact gradually declines over the next 12 months.

Alternative monetary values for wellbeing: HM Treasury's guidance provides a range of values for wellbeing around the central estimate as well as lower and upper values that ranges from £12,584 to £20,134 (in 2025 prices). Sensitivity tests 3a and 3b show the impact of using these different wellbeing valuations.

Table B1. Summary of results from sensitivity tests

	Benefit per young person	Total wellbeing benefits	Benefits per £1 spent
Core scenario	£9,782	£1.7m	£7.44
Sensitivity 1a: Based on the University of Manchester results using nearest neighbour matching (1 neighbour)	£10,257	£1.8m	£7.80
Sensitivity 1b: Based on the University of Manchester results using optimal matching	£2,208	£397k	£1.68
Sensitivity 2a: Assume wellbeing effects grow over 10 months, and then back to zero	£4,076	£733k	£3.10
Sensitivity 2b: Assume wellbeing effects grow over a year, stay steady for three months, then gradually fade over the next year	£10,598	£1.9m	£8.06
Sensitivity 2c: Assume wellbeing effects have a linear increase over the ten-month duration of the programme and then a linear decrease over the next ten months	£8,152	£1.5m	£6.20
Sensitivity 3a: Low HMT value for wellbeing	£7,525	£1.3m	£5.72
Sensitivity 3b: High HMT value for wellbeing	£12,040	£2.2m	£9.16

Annex C: Arts and culture among young people – evidence gaps

Evidence on young people’s engagement with arts and culture remains limited and often too narrow, making it difficult to capture the full picture of its impact on their lives.²⁹ For example, some research may only explore how music education affects academic performance while others look solely at visual arts and emotional wellbeing. Rarely do these studies consider multiple forms of arts and cultural engagement or track long-term outcomes like social development, mental health or even future employability. What this means is that studies often measure short-term or singular outcomes (e.g. improved test scores) and in this process may miss capturing broader impacts on critical thinking, identity formation, empowerment or wellbeing.

This gap is particularly clear when comparing international evidence. In the US, studies have shown that arts engagement can strengthen critical thinking, support emotional expression and resilience and empower young people by fostering a sense of shared identity and experience.³⁰ Although these findings show wider benefits of arts and culture, there is limited evidence from the UK both in terms of how much research exists and what it covers. This gap in local evidence may mean missed opportunities to use engagement with arts and culture as part of the solution at a time when the wellbeing of young people is at its lowest level in the UK.³¹

Another gap that remains is our understanding of how underrepresented groups access and benefit from arts and culture engagement – such as LGBTQ+ young people, pupils with SEND and those eligible for FSM. Evaluations do not often disaggregate impacts by these group-based characteristics leading to limited evidence around what works and what does not. Some evidence is available on how adult with a long-standing illness or disability are significantly less likely to engage with arts,³² helping to understand that factors such as financial situations, travel costs, lack of confidence, need for greater acceptance and diversity, more information/awareness is needed to increase participation for disabled/marginal adults

While these findings offer valuable guidance, there is a lack of similar data for children and young people from these backgrounds. We do not yet understand how these barriers affect younger audiences, or how arts and cultural engagement might support their development, wellbeing, and sense of identity. Without this evidence, there is a real risk that their needs—and their potential—remain overlooked in policy and programme design.

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Dr Maliha Rahanaz

Maliha.rahanaz@pbe.co.uk

Maliha Rahanaz | LinkedIn

 @pbe

 @pbe.co.uk

 www.pbe.co.uk

 020 3632 2668