



# Embracing Diversity in Cultural Education Policy and Curricula

## ABOUT THE STUDY

This is the first policy brief in a series published by the Cultural Heritage and Identities of Europe's Future (CHIEF), a research project funded by the European Commission and led by Aston University (UK). To understand how culture plays a role in policy and curricula, we carried out a review of policy documents and national and regional curricula in nine CHIEF countries: Croatia, Georgia, Germany, India, Latvia, Slovakia, Spain, Turkey and the UK. This briefing provides an overview of the key findings and recommendations.

Recent debates about the types of culture that young people should learn about in school curricula have brought attention to persistent cultural and social intolerance and the exclusion of minorities from cultural education. Our review of policy documents and curricula suggests that current measures designed to address these issues are ineffective, and intervention is needed.

In our review, we discovered how small of a role that culture has played in cultural education policy. This is indicative of a much larger issue – that is, we are moving further away from embracing diversity. While government expresses a commitment to cultural diversity and social tolerance, their failure to acknowledge the complex relationship between national identity and cultural inclusion undermines these commitments. Decreased public funding and opportunities for young people's cultural learning point to a need for government to see cultural education as an investment rather than an expense.

Culture is not a one size fits all, and cultural education policy and curricula should reflect the diversity of the general population. Our overarching recommendation is that the government take more diverse/mixed approaches to cultural education and consider the impact of socio-economic and ethnic inequalities on cultural provision for young people.

## FINDINGS

### Complex relationships between national identity and cultural inclusion

While the government expresses commitments to cultural and social tolerance in programmes that position cultural education as a driver of tolerance for diversity and inclusion, it fails to recognise the complex relationship between national identity and inclusion.

In failing to recognise this, as well as conflating inclusion with the integration of minorities to prevailing cultural norms, the government undermines these commitments. Inclusion then becomes conditional upon minorities submitting to unspecified (or underspecified) national cultural characteristics or forms of cultural heritage. When national narratives do not engage critically with difficult pasts (e.g. colonialism), it limits the participation of those whose histories are excluded, and results in missed opportunities to question exclusionary views.

## Structural and infrastructural barriers to access and participation

Underpinning the point above are the barriers to access and participation on the basis of socio-economic and ethnic inequalities. There is a need for the government to consider more broadly the impact of inequalities related to gender, religion and disability, and potential discrepancies between cultural provision and diverse young people's needs and interests.

## Lack of clear definition of culture and direction of policy

Most policy documents and curricula do not clearly define culture, cultural literacy or cultural heritage. This has implications for policy coherence because different governmental departments and bodies share responsibility for cultural education.

Most policy documents emphasise the instrumental value of cultural education rather than its intrinsic value. While benefits vary widely within and between national and regional contexts, there is consistency in the emphasis placed on the economic potential of cultural literacy, i.e. culture is seen as an expense rather than an investment.

There is a need for governmental bodies to provide clear definitions of culture, cultural literacy and heritage, as well as to give a clear direction of policy, in order to address the issues of policy incoherence.

## Declining funding

Public funding for cultural literacy education is increasingly targeted towards larger institutions (typically those associated with high culture). This has led to cultural providers having to diversify funding and rely on charitable sources, earned income and corporate or private philanthropy.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Embrace and engage with the tension between national culture and inclusion

**Government** should engage with the tension between national culture and inclusion. Political statements and guidance for implementation of policies and curricula should:

- unconditionally recognise the value of cultural diversity to society, national heritage and identity;
- challenge cultural narratives that ignore difficult pasts, marginalise minorities from national historical narratives and undermine the importance of these pasts to the national story;

- promote, through policy and curricula, approaches that do not simply conflate culture with nation, race and religion but rather embrace the full cultural diversity of the population;
- engage with and support grassroots cultural activism and civil society initiatives that celebrate and enhance intercultural dialogue and inclusion.

### Address barriers to young people's access to and participation in cultural learning activities

**Government** should:

- ensure that cultural education provision is synchronised with young people's current and emerging cultural interests;
- allocate more public funding to initiatives that target and/or encourage participation from disadvantaged groups;
- involve young people from different backgrounds in the decision-making processes for the funding of cultural education activities;
- collaborate with stakeholders already delivering grassroots cultural education activities;
- regularly evaluate measures aimed at enabling access and participation.

### Achieve policy coherence through consistency

**Polymakers** should:

- ensure all relevant policies (e.g. education, development, sport and culture) are consistent with, and work towards, stated policy goals for cultural education.

### Target public funding for cultural education

**Government** should:

- allocate adequate and secure public funding for cultural education;
- move beyond rewarding large cultural institutions to include diverse grassroots organisations;
- recognise not only the formal education system but also non-formal and informal environments of cultural socialisation as rich sources of cultural innovation, creativity and inclusion.

## PROJECT IDENTITY

<b>Project Name</b>	Cultural Heritage and Identities of Europe's Future (CHIEF)
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<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://chiefprojecteu.com/">http://chiefprojecteu.com/</a>
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## ABOUT CHIEF

Cultural Heritage and Identities of Europe's Future (CHIEF) is an international research project funded by the European Commission and led by Aston University (UK). The project started in May 2018 and runs until October 2021. It involves academic, civil society and policymaker partners across nine countries (Croatia, Georgia, Germany, India, Latvia, Slovakia, Spain, Turkey, UK).

### CHIEF:

- examines the processes and environments that influence young people's cultural literacy and cultural identity through an inter-disciplinary and methodologically varied approach;
- advocates an inclusive interpretation of Europe's cultural heritage as a foundation for cultural literacy and cultural identity;
- challenges ethno-nationalist, xenophobic or otherwise exclusionary understandings of European cultural identity that may lead to intolerance and marginalisation; threatening the future of the European project;
- recommends effective strategies for enhancing cultural literacy among young people in ways that reflect both the heterogeneity of modern Europeans' cultural backgrounds and heritage, and diversity as a historic feature of Europeanness.

### Further Reading

National Cultural/  
Educational Policy Review  
<http://chiefprojecteu.com/deliverables/national-cultural-educational-policy-review/>  
National Curriculum  
Review Reports  
<http://chiefprojecteu.com/deliverables/national-curriculum-review-reports/>