

DesignLab
Nation

V&A

Year 8 Report

September 2024 – August 2025

'[It has] inspired our students to think about the broad range of careers that they can have in the creative industry... This whole project has been excellent, and my students have enjoyed every moment.'

Participating teacher, DLN Bradford

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**Bradford
District
Museums
& Galleries**

The Box



DesignLab Nation was made possible through the support of Sarah Nichols and Oak Foundation.

DesignLab Nation and the Adobe Creative Residency are supported by:

Adobe Foundation

Front cover: Student looking at Cliffe Castle Museum display, DLN Bradford © Olivia Johnston
This page: Students experiencing outdoor artwork, DLN Plymouth © Dominic Moore

‘DesignLab Nation connects students with design and local cultural spaces that they may never have accessed before. Through collaboration and creative learning, it builds confidence, nurtures imagination, and opens up fairer access to the arts for all.’

Dr. Tristram Hunt, Director of the V&A



Map showing DesignLab Nation partnerships to date (September 2017 – August 2025)

Overview

Working with museum and gallery partners across England on in-depth student projects, the V&A’s national schools programme DesignLab Nation (DLN) connects secondary schools with their local museums and regional creative industries, as well as the V&A’s collection, to inspire students, support teachers, and preserve the essential role that Art, Design and Technology play in education for young people.

At the heart of the programme is collaboration: between museums, schools, teachers, artists, designers, makers and industry professionals. These partnerships support local creative networks and enable students—particularly those at risk of less equitable access to cultural opportunities—to meaningfully connect.

Creativity is a vital skill for young people—crucial for self-expression, future employability, resilience and well-being. A creative, design-led mindset will drive innovation across disciplines, embracing new technologies and imagining new futures.¹ The economic value of the creative industries in the UK should not be understated. Between 2011 and 2019, the sector grew at double the rate of the UK economy, and since 2015 has created 400,000 additional jobs.² Despite their importance, arts and creative subjects continue to be sidelined within the national curriculum in England. Opportunities to engage with art, design and creativity remain unevenly distributed, particularly for students in areas of socio-economic disadvantage.³ It is this inequality in creative access that DLN aims to address. The British Council’s *UK Arts, Culture and Young People* report (Nov 2024) states:

- Inequitable access to cultural provision, especially for underrepresented communities
- The need for greater responsiveness to neurodiversity, disability, and diverse learning styles
- The deprioritisation of creative subjects in formal education
- The importance of centring youth voice in the development and delivery of cultural programming

These concerns are echoed in the *Cultural Learning Alliance (CLA) Report Card 2025*, which reveals a 42% drop in Expressive Arts GCSE entries since 2010 and a 27% fall in arts teacher numbers – figures that reflect a deeper systemic shift away from creativity in schools.⁴

At the V&A, we believe that creativity must be championed as a fundamental right, not a luxury. Across our learning programmes, we work to expand access to design, making, and cultural engagement. Initiatives like the Adobe Creative Residency bring working artists and designers into the heart of the museum, providing them with studio space, mentorship, and opportunities to collaborate with young audiences and schools.⁵ This not only supports the development of new work but makes the creative process visible, accessible and inspiring.

DesignLab Nation builds on these principles. Each year, partner museums recruit three local schools they have not recently worked with – prioritising those from areas of above-average income deprivation or low cultural engagement. The programme is fully funded, covering travel, workshop materials, and includes visits to both local museums and the V&A. Students also connect with local design industries or studios, colleges and universities to build broader awareness of creative career pathways.

Alongside the annual review of the 2024–25 academic year, this year’s case study explores the legacy of the programme since its inception eight years ago. This is to further understand how connections develop between stakeholders and are maintained post-project, and how they could be further strengthened for robust networks of creative teaching across the nation.

To date, DesignLab Nation (September 2017–August 2025) has been delivered in 10 regions across England: Blackburn, Coventry, Sheffield, Stoke-on-Trent, Sunderland, Blackpool, Ipswich, Plymouth, Bradford and Newcastle/Gateshead.

¹ Innovate UK, ‘Design in innovation strategy 2020-2024’ (Last accessed 16/07/25) [tinyurl.com/527x566z](https://www.innovateuk.com/527x566z)

² Creative PEC, ‘Creative Further Education in the four UK nations’, (July 2024) [tinyurl.com/mrx6m9mw](https://www.creativepec.com/mrx6m9mw)

³ Creatives Unite, ‘The Collapse in UK’s Creative Further Education’ [tinyurl.com/mvx54ntj](https://www.creativesunite.com/mvx54ntj)

⁴ Cultural Learning Alliance Report Card 2025 [tinyurl.com/2dsk3zpy](https://www.claalliance.com/2dsk3zpy)

⁵ V&A Blog, ‘Introducing the Adobe Creative Residency Programme’ [tinyurl.com/2r9fat55](https://www.vam.ac.uk/2r9fat55)

Programme aims

The V&A's national secondary schools programme, DesignLab Nation, aims to:

- Inspire the next generation of professional designers, makers and innovators
- Equip young people with 21st-century skills necessary for workplaces of the future
- Develop partnerships with regional museums, designers and schools to expand the reach of the V&A's collection and expertise outside of London
- Focus on local making, design heritage and industry, highlighting both historical and contemporary design and its importance to regional collections, place-making and learning
- Support in-depth student projects through the delivery of design challenges that mirror the design journey
- Support teachers and build regional and national design networks

Partner Museums

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4/5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8
Blackburn: Blackburn Museum and Art Gallery							
Coventry: Culture Coventry							
Sheffield: Sheffield Museums					*		
Stoke-on-Trent: Potteries Museum and Art Gallery							
Sunderland: National Glass Centre							
Ipswich: Colchester and Ipswich Museums							
Blackpool: Grundy Art Gallery							
Plymouth: The Box							
Bradford: Bradford Museums and Galleries							
Newcastle/Gateshead: Shipley Art Gallery							
Stoke-on-Trent: V&A Wedgwood Collection							Programme pause

*DesignLab Legacy programme, which is self-run and self-funded by partner

'I have learned so much from it and would love to do it again.'

Participating student, DLN Bradford



Image, right: Students in Cast Courts at V&A Museum © Victoria and Albert Museum (with thanks to Helen Lawson)

Deliverables

In each participating region, we partner with a museum and a professional designer. Together, we deliver in-depth design projects to local secondary school groups (aged 11–16, about 25 students in each) and continuing professional development (CPD) sessions for regional networks of teachers. All participating students will visit both their local museum and the V&A during their project, as well as additional engagement with other local design industries, colleges and universities across the four project days. The programme supports the teaching of the 2017 Design and Technology (D&T) GCSE. Each year of the programme, partner museums recruit three local schools that they have not recently engaged with. Participating schools must be based in areas with above-average levels of income deprivation or/and have low levels of cultural engagement. DesignLab Nation is fully funded for all schools taking part, including travel to London and workshop materials.

Projects continued with established regional partner museums and galleries in Plymouth (The Box) and Bradford Museums and Art Galleries (this year at Cliffe Castle Museum, Keighley) and in Newcastle/Gateshead (Shipley Art Gallery). Following last year's 'In Focus Case Study' on the impact of the Teacher Development Strand, the extended CPD days took place during Bradford and Newcastle Year 8 projects. Teachers co-designed the student projects with the museum teams and project designers, ahead of their delivery. For Plymouth, who entered the fourth year of DLN partnership, focus shifted from pre-project co-design with teachers, to look instead at post-project programme legacy and how the connections developed over the course of DLN are sustainably maintained after the programme funding ends.

Participation Summary for Year 8 (September 2024 to August 2025)

233 Students	1019 instances of participation
62 Teachers	164 instances of participation

Participation Summary for whole programme (September 2017 to August 2025)

2001 Students	8961 instances of participation
463 Teachers	1274 instances of participation

'I enjoyed learning to work with others more than I normally would.'

Participating student, DLN Newcastle/Gateshead



Image, right: Students prototyping with recycled packaging materials, DLN Newcastle/Gateshead © Colin Davison

Key highlights of Year 8 programme

Inspired Students

233 students engaged from **9** regional schools – **1019** instances of student participation.

93%

of students are more confident in their art and design skills after the project.

77%

of students are more interested in choosing to study a creative subject at school or beyond.

'I found out that I love art.'

Participating student, DLN Newcastle/Gateshead

Developed Culture Capital

53%

of students visited their local museum for the first time.

91%

of students visited the V&A for the first time.

51%

of students were in receipt of Pupil Premium funding (compared to 27.5% of students nationally).

83%

of students felt that they now know more about design industries in their local area, at the end of the project.

'It was amazing to be representing our school in such a memorable place.'

Participating student, DLN Bradford

21st-Century Skills

Creative thinking:

77%

of students agree that DesignLab Nation has helped them with coming up with new ideas.

Critical thinking:

74%

of students agree that DesignLab Nation has helped them with solving problems.

Collaboration:

78%

of students agree that DesignLab Nation has helped them with working in a group.

'I achieved having confidence.'

Participating student, DLN Newcastle/Gateshead

Empowered and Supported Teachers

62 teachers engaged from across three regions – **164** instances of teacher participation.

100% of teachers rated their experience as positive, with an average score of **4.7 out of 5**.

100% of teachers would recommend taking part in the project to another school / teacher.

100% of teachers rated the post-project regional Teacher CPD event positively.

100% of teachers rated the content level and relevance of the Teacher CPD event as **excellent**.

100% of teachers agreed that DLN had supported their students with **collaboration** and **creative thinking**. In terms of **critical thinking**, some teachers were not sure if DLN had supported their students with solving problems and asking questions.

'Great exposure to the creative sector. Broadening students' horizons to raise their aspirations.'

Participating teacher

'We've all had a brilliant time, gained ideas and confidence and new knowledge of our fantastic city.'

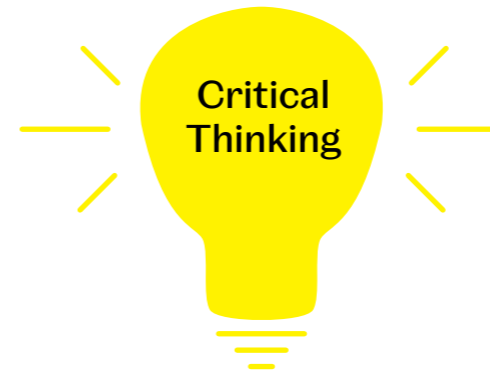
Participating teacher



Image: Student making with clay at Arts University Plymouth, DLN Plymouth © Dominic Moore

Developing Key 21st-Century Skills

Evaluation findings show that students developed key skills for the 21st century in the following ways:



- Decision making based on experimentation and testing
- Increased understanding of stages of design process
- Outward looking – consideration of ethics and sustainability
- Observation and questioning



- Increased practical skills allow ideas to take physical form
- Confidence to experiment without fear of failure
- Cultural capital – experience scaffolds imagination



- Compromise – through discussion and idea sharing
- Flexibility – working in unfamiliar groups
- Receiving and acting upon feedback
- Consideration of different points of view

Bradford



Image: Students experimenting with stained glass-inspired projections
© Victoria and Albert Museum
(with thanks to Helen Lawson)

Pollution to Solution with Naseem Darbey and Bradford District Museum & Galleries (Cliffe Castle Museum)

This year, DLN projects in Bradford were located at Cliffe Castle Museum, Keighley and inspired by the spectacular stained-glass collection on display.

Working with local artist Naseem Darbey, students from three different secondary schools were set a Design Challenge to create a nature-inspired modular design, using recycled materials. The brief emphasised that their design should champion the breadth and diversity of the District's Collection to members of the visiting public in Bradford: UK City of Culture 2025.

In early Autumn 2024, co-design sessions took place with the lead teachers from each participating school. The teachers collaborated with Naseem and teams at Cliffe Castle Museum and the V&A to explore both collections, test activities, finalise the challenge and session plans, as well as offer their subject area expertise. Following input from their teachers, the student projects kicked off after October half term 2024.

Students explored the eclectic collection at Cliffe Castle Museum and took inspiration from the Pre-Raphaelite stained glass and the Natural History and Geology collections. Guided by Naseem, they experimented with different drawing materials and styles and to abstract and convert their drawings into a positive and negative collage.

Next, students travelled to London to visit the V&A South Kensington and explored the Design 1900–Now gallery and the *Artists at Work: Museum Residencies 2024* display in association with the Adobe Creative Residency programme. Building on their Cliffe Castle Museum visit, students deepened their understanding of pattern, colour and composition, beginning to translate their 2D sketches into 3D pieces. In the Islamic Middle East gallery, Naseem led a collaborative collage activity, which students later transformed into stained glass-inspired projections using light and coloured filters.

Day 3 at Cliffe Castle Museum focused on prototyping. Students created samples by experimenting with recycled materials, particularly plastic bags, weaving and applying heat to test opacity, colour and texture, before also integrating waste fabrics and trying out new printmaking techniques.

Finally, back at school, students refined their final prototypes, applying their newly-acquired skills to produce a series of modular designs. They collaboratively determined how individual pieces would be assembled into a cohesive class artwork to be proudly displayed in the dedicated Breakfast Room at Cliffe Castle Museum, as part of Bradford's City of Culture 2025 celebrations.

Two celebration events with participating students and a Regional Teacher CPD event were held in June 2025.

Bradford Year 8 Participation Summary (September 2024–August 2025)

70 Students	339 instances of participation
16 Teachers	59 instances of participation

- Year 8 schools:**
- Co-op Academy Priesthorpe
 - Dixons Trinity Academy
 - Titus Salt School

Newcastle/ Gateshead



Image: Students on Gateshead high street site visit, DLN Newcastle/Gateshead © Colin Davison

High Street, My Street with Zoë Allen and North East Museums (Shipleigh Art Gallery, Gateshead)

In 2024/25, the second year of the DLN partnership at Shipleigh Art Gallery, students engaged with its Studio Ceramics collection.

Teachers and students from three classes of two Newcastle/Gateshead-based schools worked with artist and socially engaged practitioner, Zoë Allen. Together, they explored key ideas in Studio Ceramics, such as the difference in value between handmade and machine-made objects. These ideas informed student projects focused on Gateshead's high street, exploring how online shopping impacts local communities. In teams, students created models for high street interventions—such as seating designs or public sculptures—using packaging waste from big businesses. Each prototype aimed to reflect a sense of home and community, highlight local identity, use reclaimed materials, question conventional ideas of value, and explore the contrast between handmade and mass-produced objects.

Students began their projects at Shipleigh Art Gallery with a Studio Ceramics tour, as well as team-building construction activities. Zoë guided them through an exercise exploring different value systems of objects (monetary, social, symbolic, and material histories) within the context of a local museum collection.

In Session 2, students travelled to the V&A in South Kensington, London, and explored the Architecture and Contemporary Ceramics galleries. They heard from 2024 Adobe Creative Resident: Global Ceramics, Jacqui Ramrayka (Autumn 2024) or engaged with the *Artists at Work: Museum Residencies 2024* display featuring Jacqui's work (from January 2025). Alongside Zoë and museum staff, students took part in zine making, collaborative sculpture, and object-based inquiry to develop visual literacy, material awareness, and interpretive skills.

Session 3 took place at Orbis Community, a local creative hub and Year 1 DLN Industry Partner, reinforcing connections to contemporary local design. Here, students transformed 2D shapes into 3D forms, exploring structure and materials. Through drawing and discussion, they examined material stories and the intersection of handmade and machine-made processes. A visit to Gateshead high street linked these ideas to real-world contexts, preparing students for the final day of making.

At Shipleigh Art Gallery, students worked in groups to craft prototype maquettes of their high street interventions. Their exhibition, *High Street, My Street*, was displayed in the main gallery from July 2025 through the summer months, allowing students and families ample time to visit. A Regional Teacher CPD session, held in partnership with North East Art Teacher and Educator Network (NEATEN) at Shipleigh Art Gallery in July 2025, was followed by a celebration event with both schools attending the following week.

Newcastle/Gateshead Year 8 Participation Summary (September 2024–August 2025)

78 Students	380 instances of participation
37 Teachers	73 instances of participation

- Year 8 schools:**
- Kingsmeadow School
 - XP Gateshead (2 classes)

Plymouth



Image: Two students working with clay at Arts University Plymouth, DLN Plymouth © Dominic Moore

Public Art Interventions with Anna Boland and The Box

Our fourth and extended DesignLab Nation year in Plymouth was designed specifically to think about ways we can embed legacy into the final year of the funded partnerships and support the design networks forged through previous years. With a focus on legacy post-project, no pre-project Teacher Development Strand took place in this region. Two schools (UTC Plymouth and Eggbuckland Community College) participated in four-day design projects, working with artist, Anna Boland.

The student projects began at The Box and introduced the DesignLab Challenge to design a public art piece for the local area. The day included a hands-on activity inspired by Erwin Wurm's One Minute Sculptures, helping students explore the transient nature of art and its interaction with the environment. A guided tour of The Box followed, where students learned about sustainable materials and the city's landmarks and history, before venturing out on a walking and drawing tour of local public art.

On Day 2, students visited the V&A South Kensington, London. Here, students explored site specificity and how public art responds to their environment to create different atmospheres and effects. Students visited the Contemporary Glass, Ceramics and British Galleries and highlight objects such as the iconic Dale Chihuly chandelier at the museum's Grand Entrance.

Day 3 involved a hands-on clay modelling session at the University of Plymouth, where students worked with new materials to refine their prototype designs. With expert guidance, they developed their ideas further, integrating new techniques and materials into their models while continuing to focus on sustainability. On the final day, students focused on final prototyping and refining their ideas. Through feedback from peers and mentors, they fine-tuned their designs, preparing them for presentation in a pilot workshop.

A final student group (from Notre Dame & St Boniface School) took part in a one-day pilot Design Thinking workshop held at The Box. This day was a condensed version of the four-day projects ran with UTC Plymouth and Eggbuckland School. This blueprint is designed to become a permanent feature of The Box's educational programme. Embedding the workshop into the museum's core programme aims to ensure a lasting legacy, inspiring future generations to think critically about art, design and environmental impact.

Plymouth

Year 8 Participation Summary (September 2024–August 2025)

85 Students

300 instances of participation

9 Teachers

32 instances of participation

- Year 8 schools:**
- UTC Plymouth
 - Eggbuckland Community College
 - Notre Dame School and St Boniface Catholic College (Legacy workshop)

Press Highlights

Schools North East *Kingsmeadow get hands-on experience with DesignLab Nation* (March 2025)

Shape: Gateshead Cultural Education Partnership – *DesignLab Nation Project Spotlight*

MuseumNext *Museum Learning: How Museums Can Inspire the Next Generation of Designers* (April 2024)

Wider Dissemination

Director of V&A, Dr Tristram Hunt, presented on DesignLab Nation at:

- Hereford College of Art 170th Anniversary, *The Civic and The Global: The Cultural Mission of the Victoria and Albert Museum* (4 February 2025)

Dr Helen Charman, Director of V&A Learning and National Programmes, discussed DesignLab Nation at the following conferences:

- Children's Commissioner for England: Festival of Children, London (3 April 2025)
- Nobel Center Talk (12 May 2025)

David Houston, Team Leader for Schools & Colleges (V&A) presented on DesignLab Nation at:

- King's College – Art, Culture and Education MA lecture, London, UK (26 November 2024)
- Project Deslizar Conference, Madrid, Spain (24 June 2025)

Vanessa Weibel, Senior Producer for Schools & Colleges (V&A) presented on DesignLab Nation at:

- Goldsmiths PGCE Innovate, London UK (8 September 2024)
- Skill shared/discussed at Schools and Academies Show, London (15 May 2025)

Evaluation

In Year 8 of DesignLab Nation, the V&A worked alongside external evaluator Catherine Mailhac to evaluate the programme against Our Programme Aims (page 4). Catherine also led on the evaluation in Year 7 (September 2023–August 2024).

The evaluation employed a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods, building on tools created during the first phase of DLN, in order to gain a full and rounded picture of the project.

The In-Focus case study explores programme legacy. Part of this is to reconnect with previous partners, teachers and designers/artists to start to create a picture of different types of legacy activity that have or have not happened in previous years of the programme. The other part of the case study is an in-depth analysis of the 'Legacy Workshop Pilot' at The Box this year. This is to support with action planning for how we can embed 'legacy thinking' into the final year of partnerships, across all DLN regions and therefore make the learnings and connections more sustainable to maintain. The evaluation findings on the following pages are drawn upon a full evaluation report created by Catherine Mailhac, available on request.

Evaluation Methodology

In order to gain a rounded picture of the programme, the evaluation framework includes a number of different methods:

- **Session observations**
- **Front-end and summative evaluation**
- **In-Focus case study**
- **Partner museum focus group**
- **Designer and teacher online and telephone interviews**
- **Teacher CPD evaluation forms**
- **V&A Learning Producer observations**

'I have learnt a lot and now can be more prepared for the future'

Participating student



Image: Students prototyping final designs at The Box, DLN Plymouth
© Dominic Moore

Evaluation

Impact on Students

Through the programme, the V&A aims for students:

- To have a better understanding about design industries in their local area.
- To be more interested in pursuing a career in the creative industries.
- To be more interested in studying a creative subject at school or beyond.
- To be more confident in their art and design skills, and develop 21st-century skills (creative thinking, critical thinking and collaboration) essential for future workplaces.
- To have a better understanding about design, and how to access collections and industries at a local and national level.

At the end of the project, participating students completed questionnaires to rate their experience of having taken part in DesignLab Nation.

93%

felt more confident in their art and design skills.

81%

knew more about design industries in their local area.

91%

of students visited the V&A for the first time.

61%

are more interested in a career in art or design.

53%

of students visited their local museum for the first time.

77%

were more interested in choosing to study a creative subject.

Highlights:

- A sense of progression (becoming more creative, more confident, better at designing and making).
- Gaining new technical skills and knowledge.
- Successfully completing an activity which matched or exceeded expectations.
- Teamwork and collaboration.
- Greater inclination to work in the creative industries.
- Knowledge and pride about their local area.
- Having fun/sense of enjoyment.
- Adopting a 'Designerly-thinking' mindset. Having 'a real, genuine, live project' was seen to be 'a much stronger experience' for students than a standalone visit.

Growth points:

- More time for making and refinement of final pieces.
- More time in galleries to explore at own pace/ more autonomy to select galleries of interest.
- More freedom/choice of materials.
- Clearer expectations/more information pre-project to know what to expect. This could help reduce anxiety around travel and being in the new environment of a museum or gallery.
- Support for students to feel more confident to present to peers in the final session.

'Really opened their eyes [...] Having that experience made her realise, "Oh, I have got a creative voice." She is now taking Art GCSE because of the DesignLab experience.'

Participating teacher

'I really can't sing its praises enough. I think I'd recommend this project to literally everyone!'

Participating teacher

Evaluation

Impact on Teachers

DesignLab Nation aims for teachers to:

- Be inspired and gain new skills and learning approaches ready to take back to the classroom.
- Feel more prepared in teaching the D&T GCSE and/or other creative subjects and to want to endorse it within the school.
- Feel more connected to their local museum, local design industries and local teacher networks.
- Have a better understanding of the V&A and partner museums as a resource for D&T and creative subjects.

At the end of the project, the lead teachers completed questionnaires to rate their experience of having taken part in DesignLab Nation.

- **100%** of teachers rated their DesignLab experience as positive or very positive (with an average score of 4.7 out of 5).
- **100%** of teachers would recommend taking part in the project to another school/teacher.
- **100%** of teachers felt that the project had had some impact on perceptions of their subject area in school.
- **100%** of teachers thought that the project had supported their students to connect with local design history and industry.

21st-Century Skills

- **100%** of teachers thought that DesignLab Nation had supported their students with working in a group (Collaboration).
- **100%** of teachers agreed that DesignLab Nation had supported their students a lot with generating with new ideas (Creative Thinking).
- **100%** of teachers felt their students had been supported in making decisions (Critical Thinking).
- **82%** of teachers felt their students had been supported in the skills of solving problems and asking questions (Critical Thinking).

Teacher CPD events:

- **100%** of teachers rated the post-project Regional Teacher CPD event positively.
- **100%** of teachers rated the content level and relevance of the Regional Teacher CPD event as excellent.

Year 8 Teacher Evaluation – summary of insights from feedback forms, interviews and observations.

Highlights:

- Students gained valuable exposure to the cultural sector, creative careers and higher education.
- Teachers saw growth in confidence, resilience and 21st-century skills. One noted students now show 'a real genuine passion' and are 'looking at careers in that kind of area' which is more impact than they had expected from the project.
- The project boosted the profile of creative subjects in school, increasing their 'reputation and validity.'
- Students built strong relationships with the designer and museum staff, who 'have been so professional and kind and supportive through this process and have inspired [our] students to think about the broad range of careers that they can have in the creative industry.'
- Teachers felt supported through expert-led development and collaboration.
- The project encouraged fresh teaching approaches and stronger connections to museum programmes.

Growth Areas:

- Managing logistics (travel, collecting Free School Meals, safeguarding) during the four-day project was demanding, especially for less experienced teachers, though support was effective.
- Long travel days affected student focus; tactile and unstructured gallery time helped and are recommended.
- Using gallery spaces (rather than neutral rooms) would enhance inspiration during visits.

Image: Seated teacher drawing at Teacher CPD event, Shipley Art Gallery, DLN Newcastle/Gateshead © Colin Davison

'I think for me, it's been one of our most successful partnerships.'

Participating partner museum staff member

THE WORLD NEEDS

CREATIVES NOW



Image: Students in front of Arts University Plymouth with their DLN certificates, DLN Plymouth © Dominic Moore

Evaluation

Impact on Partner Museums

Through the DesignLab Nation programme, the V&A aims for partner museums to:

- Feel more connected to local secondary schools and teachers.
- Feel more connected to local designers and local design industries.
- Raise the profile of D&T in the curriculum in their local area.
- Feel connected to the V&A, other partner museums and a national network aiming to raise the profile of D&T.
- Develop and embed a model for future programmes, working specifically with secondary school D&T students and teachers.

Year 8 partner museum staff evaluation – summary of insights from feedback forms, interviews and the All Partner Meeting:

Highlights:

- DesignLab Nation helped partners expand their secondary school offer and reach and build relationships with local teachers. *'The amount of inspiration and creative energy that the students got from being there, that is something that we'd very much like to repeat. We've never really done that before, so I think that's something that we would take from it and start looking at doing in the future.'* (Participating teacher)
- Provided valuable professional development for staff and freelancers; one partner described it as 'revolutionising' workshop design.
- Raised local teachers' awareness of partner museum resources.
- Supported engagement with students' local city through activities like walking tours, enhancing student connection to space, design and local heritage.
- Partner feedback highlights that the DLN Producer support in managing project logistics and addressing challenges was appreciated.
- Teacher Development Strand added significant value to the programme.
- Earlier scheduling improved planning for student displays, CPD, and events.
- Experienced local designers eased logistics and reduced staff pressure.
- Partnership with local teaching networks to promote events and reconnected with industry partners.

Growth Areas:

- Project administration strained core team capacity, especially part-time or freelance staff.
- Condensing activities into intense periods posed challenges.
- Some students and teachers struggled to follow session connections; reinforcing the brief throughout and engaging students beforehand was recommended.

'A lot of them now are saying things like 'Oh, I want to be an artist'... It's been such a game changer for the kids to see that it's actually a career that they could choose.'

Participating teacher



Image: DLN Newcastle/Gateshead project artist supporting student activity © Colin Davison

Evaluation

Impact on Designers and Artists

Through the DesignLab Nation programme, the V&A aims to work closely with regional project designers, artists and makers in order to:

- Support in-depth student projects through the delivery of design challenges which mirror the design journey of a practising designers, makers or artists.
- Provide insight into the process of a designer (finding inspiration, writing a brief, prototyping, developing, presenting, etc) to support the current GCSE D&T syllabus.
- Engage with designers, makers and industries who celebrate local design in their practice.
- Encourage designers to act as conduits to speak about the importance of locality and community with students, teachers and museum staff.
- Focus on local making, design heritage and industry, highlighting both historical and contemporary design and its importance to regional collections, place-making and learning.

'I am so proud of what those kids have made, and the way that we've managed to pull it together in the gallery.'

Participating project designer/artist

The external evaluator interviewed all project designers for Year 8 to capture their insights and perspectives against programme aims.

Findings indicated that designers:

- Felt proud of the final displays.
- Found discussions about their practice with students rewarding and impactful.
- Felt more connected to collections and appreciated selecting objects aligned with the Design Challenges.
- Valued the project's clear and well-structured format.
- Felt more connected to other galleries and knowing what was going on in them/how they worked.
- Appreciated being on the radar for future work for schools.
- Broadened their horizons to working further afield.
- Had good connections with individuals involved in the project.
- Incorporated some new techniques and materials which might be reworked in future projects.
- Thought more about sustainability, material processes and choices.

Adobe Creative Residency

This year, we were pleased to collaborate with two Adobe Creative Residents as part of the ongoing partnership between the Adobe Foundation and the V&A. The Residency brings makers into the museum, offering studio space, mentorship, and opportunities to engage with audiences and exhibit work. Each year, three creatives are based at V&A South Kensington for 12 months (January – December), working closely with the Learning team and a designated audience group.

Global Ceramics Resident (2024), Jacqui Ramrayka

Jacqui led creative activities during DLN student visits (September – December 2024), drawing on her ceramic practice exploring the Indo-Caribbean diaspora, memory and grief. In Spring 2025, she returned to deliver talks in front of her work on display, giving students insight into the process and impact of a working artist, and encouraging exploration of creative careers.

Inclusive Design Resident (2025), Jess Starns

From January 2025, Jess supported accessibility and inclusion through consultancy, particularly for V&A visits by Plymouth-based schools in Spring 2025. Her practice focuses on inclusive design, disability history and neurodiversity. Jess advised on accessible approaches, materials, and equipment, and shared her toolkit with Partner Museum teams during the All Partner Meeting in Aug 2025.

The Adobe Creative Residency is supported by:

Adobe Foundation

'[The best part of DesignLab Nation was...] when we went to London and worked with an actual artist'

Participating student, DLN Newcastle/Gateshead



‘Staff and students were invigorated by the project’

Participating teacher, DLN Plymouth



Image: Students in stained glass gallery at Cliffe Castle Museum, DLN Bradford © Olivia Johnston

Evaluation

In-Focus Case Study: Programme Legacy

Background and Purpose

This year, the in-focus case study explored legacy and aimed to measure the programme’s lasting impact on design education and professional networks. The intention is to create a framework for how we can plan legacy-thinking into the programme delivery in future years.

Evaluation Methodology

The In-Focus case study on programme legacy reconnected with former partner museum staff, teachers and designers/artists to capture some of the legacy activities across past years. Those who were still connected to the project in some way were invited to share their experience. This study therefore offers a snapshot of legacy activity, rather than a comprehensive review. It also included an in-depth analysis of the one-day ‘Legacy Workshop Pilot’ at The Box (Plymouth), to support the integration of sustainable legacy thinking throughout all DLN regions in the final year of funded projects.

Key Findings

Overall, the case study finds that there is evidence of the DLN programme having an impact after the funded projects have finished. Interestingly, taking part in this research gave interviewees the chance to look back and take a longer view of developments in their own practice and in school. As one teacher explained, *‘It was really clear that this should be more of the way forward, because the creativity that the kids showed through it was absolutely astounding... We started to progress our curriculum following it. Now, on reflection, I can see DesignLab Nation was the catalyst.’*

The following page lists examples of activities that have occurred following the conclusion of the funded projects. These illustrative examples are extracted from the full evaluation report featuring interviews with past participants. Their insights help inform recommendations for sustaining engagement.

‘On reflection, [DLN] was a really big part of it... It has changed the culture.’

Previous participating teacher

Students

- **Developed a deeper understanding of creative pathways** and felt energised by the collaborative environment with similarly motivated peers. Teachers felt that some chose to pursue creative subjects, including Art and D&T at GCSE and A-Level, as a direct result of their involvement. DLN work (in Years 8 and 9) had supported with future GCSE portfolios.
- **Reported increase in independent gallery visits**, demonstrating a wider engagement with cultural learning and student confidence. Teachers reported significant impact post-project; for example, students studying a creative degree or accessing culture independently. As a result of the first-time museum and gallery visits, the project had *'opened up a way through for [them] to navigate the subject... and understand that, with a bit of preparation, [they] could successfully navigate the world.'*
- **Volunteered at their local gallery** after the project to get work experience.

Teachers

- **Felt greater confidence in planning and leading external visits and increased professional development.** For some, this translated into career progression, with teachers taking on more senior roles.
- **Have a broader appreciation of creative industries, stronger advocates for out-of-school learning and local cultural engagement.** Some are integrating clearer creative career pathways into their curriculum, linking students with opportunities like the Arts University Plymouth's pre-degree course. *'DesignLab Nation really inspired other teachers and made them step up a bit. It's had a wider impact in terms of management letting trips go. [Personally] it's opened up lots of avenues that I wouldn't have been confident enough to explore.'* (Previous participating teacher)
- **Noticed changed perceptions of D&T/creative subjects.** A teacher reported having a greater uptake from girls in D&T at A-Level following DLN. The teacher suggested that DLN had probably helped students perceive the subject differently, seeing that it *'was not just engineering'*. The number of girls choosing the A-Level has grown each year since.
- **Shared DLN resources** across national academy trusts.
- **Introduced a V&A unit of work** with an annual visit to the V&A.

Designers

- **Felt more connected** to museums and education partners.
- **Were offered space to reflect on and evolve their own practice.**
- **Felt increased confidence working with schools.** DLN has informed one designers' practice by giving a structured approach to working with schools through the double diamond framework.

Partner Museums

- **We received limited responses from past museum partners.** Redundancies and staff changes made it challenging to gather detailed insights.
- **Believed working with the V&A boosted their profile.** For example, increased interest from local council in the general work of the gallery.
- **Felt inspired to look at their collections more closely** to consider different angles and through a design perspective.
- **Built relationships with different practitioners.** Having the DLN funding gave partner museums the opportunity to bring in designers to work with schools. A positive partnership was made between a partner museum and a university which has been maintained post-project.
- **Reported increased teacher interaction and return visits.** However, it cannot be understated that DLN was one of several factors, alongside other work, funding streams and the staff skills of partner museums engagement teams.
- **Felt capacity challenges due to significant demands on staff time.**

Conditions influencing legacy activity

- Positive conditions included committed staff, student enthusiasm, and high-quality partnerships, especially when supported by funding and structured frameworks.
- Barriers included organisational instability, staff turnover, and lack of capacity, particularly among museum partners. Some partners reported that the demands of the programme were more significant than expected, leaving them cautious about engaging in similar projects in future.
- The process of reflecting for this research itself proved to be valuable, prompting schools and individuals to recognise the longer-term ripple effects of their involvement.

'The project made a huge difference in allowing us to work with older children/young people. We struggle to engage older children through our schools programme. Unfortunately, without the funding that DLN brought we are seeing less of our teenage audiences through our formal schools offer.'

Previous DLN Partner museum staff member

Recommendations for sustaining legacy

Create ongoing connection points (structured follow-up)

- Introduce lightweight ways for past participants to stay engaged, such as informal online meetups, an annual online/in-person sharing event or an alumni network with mini case study updates to track impact.
- Act quickly to capture post-project enthusiasm. Share follow-up resources or invite participants to future events soon after project delivery to build on momentum and retain relationships.

Embed career pathway guidance into delivery

- Expand the programme's scope to include clearer signposting to post-16 and post-18 opportunities (e.g., pre-degree courses, apprenticeships, local creative employers).

Enable ongoing professional development

- Offer CPD opportunities or knowledge-sharing events for participating educators beyond the funded period.

Co-design with legacy in mind

- In future cycles, embed legacy planning within project design, ensuring participants are equipped to sustain the benefits and relationships forged during the programme.
- Recognise capacity challenges in delivery partners – continue to consider ways to reduce burdens on museum staff and increase flexibility, perhaps through modular or phased approaches.

‘DesignLab Nation was a really fertile space for us to explore working with secondaries in a different way and to work with a local artist.’

The Box staff member, partner museum



Image: Student group on gallery during the one-day pilot Legacy Workshop, The Box, DLN Plymouth © Dominic Moore

Evaluation

In-Focus Case Study: Embedding Legacy DLN Plymouth (The Box) One-Day Workshop Pilot

Background and Purpose

In its final year of the DesignLab Nation (DLN) programme in Plymouth, The Box piloted a one-day workshop to explore how creative engagement could continue beyond the funded period. This initiative aimed to distil DLN’s core values into a flexible, scalable format suitable for ongoing delivery. This case study specifically explores how to ensure the legacy of DesignLab Nation continues and maintains the relationships between key stakeholders (teachers, students, partner museums and the V&A) after the funded period ends.

Adapting the DLN Model

Condensing a four-day programme into one day presented clear challenges. The team—comprising The Box’s partner lead, a designer, and DLN Producer—selected the most effective and accessible activities from previous years. However, key elements such as university visits, industry partner visits, designer Q&As and resource materials had to be omitted due to time constraints and staffing changes. These were recognised as missed opportunities for deeper engagement and could be reintroduced in future iterations via post-visit packs or follow-up sessions.

Workshop Structure and Experience

The one-day pilot welcomed Year 9 and 10 students from Notre Dame School and St Boniface Catholic College.

The morning began with a fast-paced making activity inspired by artist Richard Serra, designed to encourage spontaneity and build creative confidence. Students then explored the galleries, with time for drawing and observation. For many, this open-ended way of engaging with art was unfamiliar, and some found it challenging to connect. Teachers noted that previous visits to The Box had been brief and task-focused; in future, this element could benefit from simpler tasks or preparatory work in school to support observational skills. The design challenge invited students to develop ideas for a public sculpture, using plinths to sketch and respond to key design questions around materials, message, and audience interaction.

In the afternoon, students prototyped maquettes using a variety of collected and recycled materials. This hands-on session was a clear highlight,

with 96% identifying ‘making things’ as their favourite part of the day. The day ended with group presentations. Some students were reluctant to present in front of unfamiliar peers, and the designer suggested a more informal format (gallery-style sharing) could help build confidence, particularly with the limited time available compared to the full four-day DLN model.

Reflections on Embedding Legacy

While not a substitute for the original programme, the pilot showed that a shorter DLN-style workshop can meaningfully deliver some core values (creativity, collaborative and cultural engagement), offering a potential legacy model. Teachers valued the session both as a standalone offer and as a starting point for classroom follow-up. They felt it could suit a wide range of secondary students (Years 7–11) and were keen to maintain links with the V&A. However, ongoing delivery presents barriers including budgets, transport and staff capacity. Teachers also highlighted the need for clearer pre-visit information to support student engagement.

Other DLN partners discussed legacy workshops, raising key questions:

- Do sessions need to be designer-led (given costs)?
- How can they be made affordable and appealing to schools?
- How can teachers help shape the content?
- What alternative funding streams could support pilots?

Conclusion

The Box’s one-day workshop offers a promising, scalable legacy model for DLN. Despite time constraints, it successfully engaged students and encouraged teacher reflection, while reinforcing school/museum relationships. Future versions could be strengthened by clearer career links and better pre-visit resources and information. This pilot provides a strong foundation for ongoing legacy planning and a model that other museums could adapt to sustain creative education beyond funded programmes.

The V&A Schools and Colleges team is developing a formal legacy framework, building on findings from Catherine Maillac’s extended evaluation report.

Evaluation Summary

Strengths:

- Strong, supportive relationships formed between V&A staff teams and partner museums, designers and teachers, with partners and teachers reporting a sense of feeling understood and supported.
- Visits to the V&A and partner museums were very impactful. As highlighted elsewhere, for many students this was their first visit to London and the V&A. There was a sense of progression, connecting first to the project theme within their local museum and context, before connecting to 'cultural capital on a wider national scale.'
- The Teacher Development Strand (TDS) was seen as a valuable addition to the programme model.
- Ongoing collaborations continued with industry partners such as Orbis Community and Arts University Plymouth.
- Partner museums engaged with schools, particularly in secondary and higher education, that they had rarely or never worked with before.
- Teachers reported that the project broadened their perception of 'art museums,' with the V&A connection sparking new interest.
- Successful CPD events were delivered in DLN regions. Connecting with existing networks of art and design teachers and hosting a joint event was seen as a valuable tool.
- The Year 8 designers had all worked with their partner museums previously. These felt like established, trusted relationships which helped make things run smoothly, thus minimising workload.
- Having other people lead the sessions enabled teachers to take on a slightly different role, allowing them to be playful and a part of the process.
- Creating opportunities for conversations was seen to prompt fruitful connections. For example, following a conversation between the museum Director and a teacher at the celebration event, the museum was introduced to the school's History Lead, who is currently on the National Curriculum Board redesigning the history curriculum.

Recommendations:

- Dedicate time within the pre-project TDS days to plan logistics, for example arranging packed lunches for Free School Meals students on visit days with early departures outside normal hours.
- Increase partner travel grant to support any booking issues and rising cost of travel. Include the potential of travel delays in all Risk Assessments and session plans.
- Continue frequent check-ins between partner museum staff teams and the DLN Producer to share challenges and anticipate any issues.
- Explore ways for teachers to be supported to think about ideas for pre-visit/post-visit which might give more context for the London trip and future visits.
- To make the most of visits to the museums, galleries, industry partners and universities, avoid doing activities in neutral, generic spaces.
- To reduce overwhelm for students visiting London and the V&A for the first time, provide a resource of what to expect or social story ahead of their visit. Discuss ways to reduce student anxiety for travel with the teachers during the TDS days.
- Address the student selection challenge for teachers with discussion points and strategies built into the pre-project TDS days.
- Support students to build confidence in their presentation skills for their peer-to-peer crit of final pieces.



Image, right: Staff member and student creating samples, DLN Bradford
© Olivia Johnston



Newcastle/
Gateshead

Hull

Stoke-on-Trent

Map showing regional partnerships
for DesignLab Nation Year 9
(September 2025 – August 2026)

Looking Ahead

We are currently looking forward to:

- Continuing our existing partnership working with North East Museums for academic year 2025–26 (this will be the third year of DesignLab Nation in the Newcastle/Gateshead area). For Year 9, as with the previous two years, the projects will take place at Shipley Art Gallery, Gateshead. The Design Focus will explore the amazing collection of chairs and seating design on display.
- Resuming DesignLab Nation presence in the Stoke-on-Trent area, working with V&A Wedgwood Collection. Year 9 projects will reinterpret Josiah Wedgwood’s iconic Portland Vase exploring identity, journeys and connections with Stoke-on-Trent’s ceramic heritage. Ceramicist and 2024 Adobe Creative Resident, Jacqui Ramrayka, will be the project designer for this region.
- Beginning a new three-year partnership with Hull Museums and Galleries. Year 8 projects will explore the concept of home through the intersecting lenses of design and manufacturing, drawing inspiration from both the local Hull Museums and Galleries’ collections and the V&A’s national collection of design. The projects will visit a number of the museums and galleries in Hull, and the student display will be held at Streetlife Museum in Summer 2026.
- Continuing to develop programme legacy for schools and teachers we have engaged with and building connections between DesignLab Nation and our national schools challenge, V&A Innovate.
- Continuing to integrate inclusive practices into the programme through collaboration with 2025 Adobe Creative Resident Jess Starns, including visual storytelling for V&A visits. From Spring onwards, work with the 2026 Adobe Creative Resident will explore the use of Artificial Intelligence.
- Creating a suite of new V&A Object Discussion card resources for Year 9 projects. These will aim to support students and teachers with object-based learning and their design journey.
- Reviewing the DesignLab Nation visual design identity.
- Planning ahead of Year 10 and ‘Decade of DLN’ anniversary activity.

Hull Museums
& Gallery

NORTH EAST
MUSEUMS

V&A Wedgwood Collection

Programme Funding and Thanks

Programme Funding

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all our donors who have supported DesignLab Nation.

DesignLab Nation was made possible through the support of the Adobe Foundation, Sarah Nichols, and Oak Foundation.

We would also like to thank:

The students, teachers and staff of our DesignLab Nation Year 8 Schools:

Co-op Academy Priesthorpe, Dixons Trinity Academy, Egguckland Community College, Kingsmeadow School, Titus Salt School, UTC Plymouth, XP Gateshead

Lead teachers:

Arwen Frankish (Kingsmeadow School)
Caroline Guest (Titus Salt)
Cheryl Mills (Egguckland Community College)
Fiona Brigham (Co-op Academy Priesthorpe)
Jake Rowlinson (UTC Plymouth)
Molly McEntee (Dixons Trinity Academy)
Tilda Macphail (XP Gateshead)

Our Legacy Workshop pilot schools (Plymouth):

Notre Dame School and St Boniface Catholic College

Thank you to all supporting teachers and teaching staff members.

Our Year 8 DesignLab Nation Partner Museums:

The Box (Plymouth), Bradford District Museums and Art Galleries (Bradford), North East Museums (Newcastle/Gateshead)

Our Year 8 Project Designers & Adobe Creative Residents:

Anna Boland (Plymouth), Naseem Darbey (Bradford), Zoë Allen (Newcastle/Gateshead)

Jacqui Ramrayka (Adobe Creative Resident 2024: Global Ceramics)
and Jess Starns (Adobe Creative Resident 2025: Inclusive Design)

Our Year 8 Industry Partners:

Arts University Plymouth, Keighley Creative, Orbis Community and Butterfield Signs (for providing acrylic material for students in DLN Bradford projects).

Our Year 8 External Evaluator:

Catherine Mailhac

Image, right: Student working on clay prototype, DLN Plymouth © Dominic Moore

Back cover image: Students on Grand Entrance balcony, V&A South Kensington © Victoria and Albert Museum, London (with thanks to Helen Lawson)



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