

CULTURAL REForestING



CULTURAL REFORESTING

EVALUATION REPORT
2020–24

CONTENTS

2	About this report
3	About Cultural Reforesting
5	The context of Richmond Arts Service
6	Opportunities and objectives
8	Stakeholders, beneficiaries and partnerships
10	Research partnership with Royal Holloway
12	Outputs, outcomes and impact so far
13	Cultural Reforesting activities in numbers
16	Project case studies
23	Creative ways to share impact
27	Objectives for the next phase
29	Data collection possibilities for the future
30	Evaluation design
32	Evaluation frameworks
34	Evaluation resources
35	Notes and references

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report was commissioned by Richmond Arts Service (RAS) and Orleans House Gallery (OHG) in Twickenham, which are run by the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames (LBRuT). It was supported by Royal Holloway, University of London through its 2024 Civic Fund. The report was written by Royal Holloway Research Associate Dr Caroline Harris.

Its aims are to help the service and gallery reflect on and evaluate the first four years of its Cultural Reforesting programme; to provide material and analysis towards an impact narrative and suggest creative ways this impact could be conveyed for different audiences; and to assist in refining objectives and planning evaluation for the next five years.

This is an internal report and reflection, but parts might be useful for funding applications and sharing what the programme has achieved with stakeholders.

A significant moment for reflection

In 2019, LBRuT declared a climate emergency. The Cultural Reforesting programme began in 2020 and will run until 2030, the year LBRuT has set as its target for becoming carbon neutral.

At its half-way point, in 2025, Cultural Reforesting will provide the theme of the annual Richmond Arts and Ideas Festival (13 to 29 June). In spring/summer (27 March to 31 August) the gallery is staging a Cultural Reforesting exhibition, with related arts and creative workshops and community-based activities.

This is also an important milestone year for the council, as it will develop and confirm its Climate Emergency Strategy and Action Plan for 2025 to 2030.



ABOUT CULTURAL REFORESTING

Cultural Reforesting is a long-term arts and community programme that is focused on finding hopeful, creative and effective responses to the nature and climate emergencies.

It does this on a local level by working with community groups and spaces in the borough and more broadly by developing models and ideas that could be applied in other locations across the UK and beyond.

At its core are the questions:

- how can we renew our relationship with nature – as a borough, as a society, and on a personal level?
- how might this be explored through renewing or initiating connection with arts and cultural activities?

Artist research projects to date have considered themes including more-than-human species agency, deep time, ecocide, environmental justice, biodiversity, cross species empathy, foodways, and child-led investigations.

The role of artist-led research

Artists are placed at the centre of this enquiry, as the arts can encourage new thinking about complex questions. An arts-led approach can recognise, value and hold a space for emotional expression and different perspectives. It can inspire people, providing a positive framework for exploring difficult issues such as climate change.¹

Cultural Reforesting brings artists together with residents and art visitors across London, community organisations, schools and other council departments. It involves academics and students, experts in traditional knowledge, and experts through professional and lived experience.

The programme provides funding, support and a showcase for selected high-quality projects that are proposed by the artists themselves in response to calls by RAS, or that answer a challenge set by other stakeholders.

In these ways, it aims to promote both cultural engagement and the growth of ecological understanding and activity.



Families in the Forest workshop at Orleans House Gallery grounds.

Why is it important to renew our relationship with nature?

Research on wellbeing and nature, such as into forest bathing and green prescribing, has shown the value of green spaces to human mental and physical health.² Renewing our relationship with nature, in ways that are accessible for as many people as possible, can be beneficial on a personal and societal level.

Other living beings play a vital role in human activity and survival. The concept of 'ecosystem services' has begun to put an economic value to this, although it is criticised as being human-centred and not calling on reciprocal care for other species.³ Renewing our relationship with nature is crucial for human and more-than-human thriving on the local and global scale.

Cultural Reforesting explores a deeper re-set in how people in the borough and beyond might relate to the natural world. 'Ecocentrism' is defined as:

'the ethical belief that assigns inherent value to both individual living beings and entire ecosystems, considering them as ends in themselves rather than as means to human ends'.⁴

Renewing our relationship with nature can support people in respecting and caring for other species and taking nature-positive action.

THE CONTEXT OF RICHMOND ARTS SERVICE

Cultural Reforesting is a core initiative of Richmond Arts Service, which is itself a LBRuT council service. RAS has a set of stated aims, outlined below.

RAS aims to build community through creativity. It fosters creativity and enjoyment of the arts and enables people to reflect on their lives and develop new ways of seeing the world.

The service brings thought-provoking art to the borough and cultivates a network of individuals, organisations and programmes that nourish the arts, local organisations and communities.

RAS is guided by and delivers on the following objectives:

1. Develop an ambitious arts programme which shares Richmond with the world and brings the world to Richmond. We will reach a larger and more diverse audience, offering the highest quality experiences which are authentic, meaningful and thought-provoking.
2. Be a catalyst for local artistic responses to global challenges – ecological crisis, inequality and isolation. We will work with artists, researchers, the cultural and creative sector, community partners and local services to explore new ideas, and play a role in change for the better.
3. Nurture wellbeing and a lifelong love of the arts, focusing our work on children and young people, creating opportunities to share learning between generations. Through volunteering we will provide opportunities to learn and share skills and experience, widening the service's reach into the community, helping people to play an active role in their local area.
4. Facilitate a diverse and resilient arts ecology in the borough, developing partnerships, attracting inward investment for culture and supporting artists and arts organisations committed to developing their practice. We aspire to make our programme reflect the diversity of arts practice in London and our audiences, workforce and volunteers reflect the diversity of west London.
5. Manage our resources effectively, develop staff and generate more income so we can continue to deliver the service for the widest possible public benefit.
6. Develop in a sustainable way, supporting Richmond's commitment to achieving carbon neutrality by 2030.

OPPORTUNITIES AND OBJECTIVES

The Cultural Reforesting programme has specific characteristics that arise in part from its gallery location and the position of RAS within the local authority.

Policy

As a council department, RAS is well situated to build relationships with other departments and service providers, from Parks and Open Spaces to children's services. This could offer a model for how an arts and culture programme can contribute to council environment and climate thinking, develop networks of knowledge and experience, and inform other areas of activity and policy in LBRuT and beyond.

Linked objective: Cultural Reforesting aims to influence local environmental and climate-related decision-making.

Informed decision-making

Projects contribute to knowledge exchange by involving ecologists and specialists in environmental forestry, ethnobotanists and indigenous experts.

Linked objective: Cultural Reforesting aims to improve climate and ecological literacy among decision-makers in the council and among the wider public.

Community co-creation

Artists are embedded with community groups so that projects are developed in dialogue. Projects are also co-created with other council departments, such as 'Darkness in Urban Spaces', which was initiated by Planning.

Linked objective and outcome: Cultural Reforesting aims to gain public support for the cultural and societal changes required to tackle the nature and climate emergencies; and respond to the needs and wishes of local people.

Widening participation

Cultural Reforesting has built relationships with community groups, facilitated by RAS's links with council departments. There has been a particular focus on young people. The aims of the gallery and RAS in increasing participation in arts and culture by and for underserved and underrepresented groups dovetail with those of Cultural Reforesting in widening knowledge and participation around nature and climate.

Linked objectives: Cultural Reforesting aims to give a voice to diverse and underrepresented groups; and gain public support for the cultural and societal changes required to tackle the climate crisis.

Healthy ecosystems

Orleans House Gallery offers a 'tidal, riverside situation, a wonderfully messy, almost wild-feeling woodland, and a contemporary art gallery in a colonial building, with all the technology, culture and tides of people washing in and out every day' (Andy Franzkowiak). The gallery and grounds provide spaces for interaction, nature connection, building relationships and ways of being, and conservation. Cultural Reforesting links human and more-than-human health.

Linked objectives and outcomes: Cultural Reforesting aims to foster community health and wellbeing; demonstrate the positive relationship between humans and Richmond's vibrant, diverse ecosystems; and improve biodiversity and ecology of the local environment.

Creative research hub

The gallery itself and grounds have acted as a centre for testing ideas, involving and inviting visitors and volunteers to engage, and sharing outputs. RAS has partnered with artist researchers, academics and universities, including Royal Holloway, University of London.

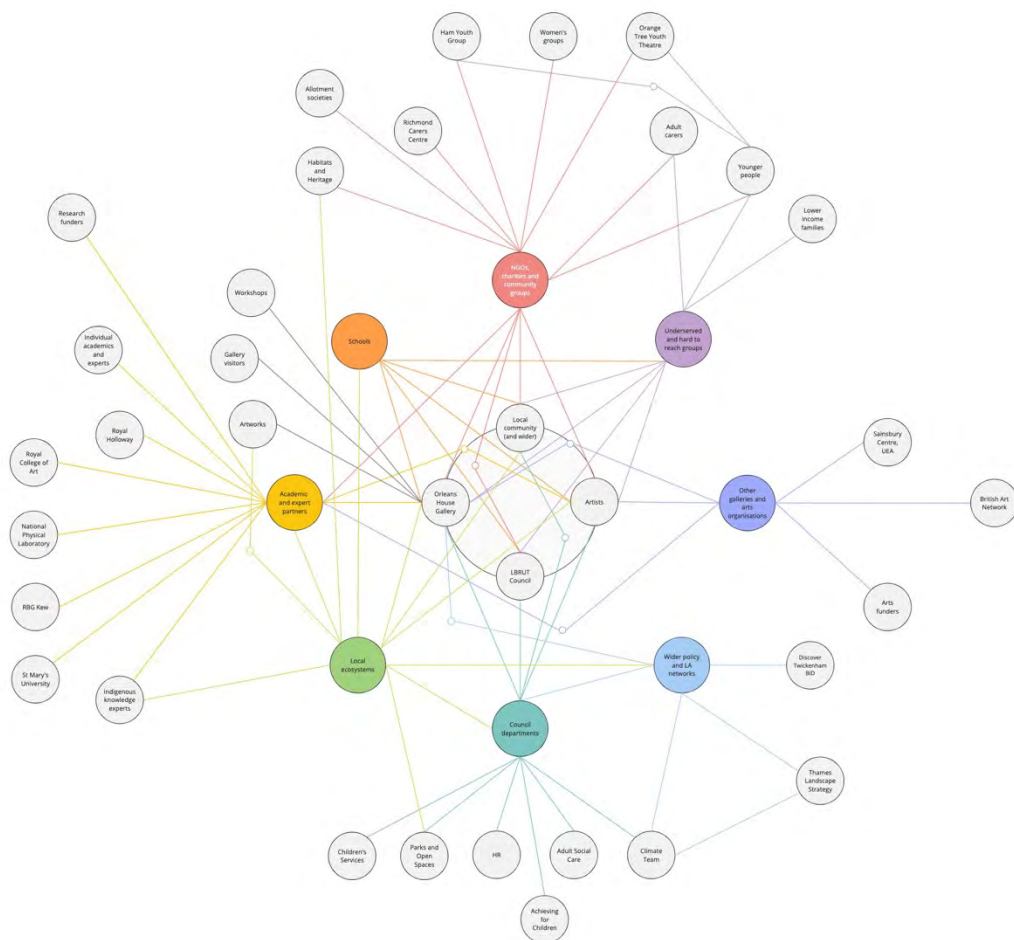
Linked outcomes: Cultural Reforesting aims to build community resilience and innovation; and to inspire creative art, culture and community-led adaptations and solutions to the ecological crisis.



Detail from 'Lichen Heritage' by Bryony Ella. Image: Christina Schek.

STAKEHOLDERS, BENEFICIARIES AND PARTNERSHIPS

Cultural Reforesting has created its own ecosystem of stakeholders and relationships, linking Orleans House Gallery, artists, community voices, academic and educational bodies, policymakers and younger generations, along with green spaces in the borough and the other species that inhabit them.



Key stakeholders and beneficiaries

Local residents and communities – in terms of health and well-being benefits; resilience; voice; involvement in creative solutions; benefiting from climate change mitigation, adaptations and solutions to ecological crisis; informed local decision-making

Underrepresented and underserved groups – as above, but particularly in terms of voice; involvement in creative solutions; increased access to arts and culture, including as artists

Artists and practitioners leading research projects – especially emerging artists: opportunities to develop artist-led research with financial and practical support; developing practice in relation to nature and climate emergencies; engagement and co-creation with community groups; exhibition opportunities



Collage by Eloise Moody during their residency.

Orleans House Gallery volunteers – key roles in delivering projects; taking part in activities; exhibition opportunities; involved in decision-making and design

Local schools – knowledge transfer; informed decision-making; enriching curriculum; widening participation in arts and culture

Richmond's ecosystems – through improving biodiversity and ecology; knowledge transfer; informed decision-making

LBRuT council – especially those responsible for delivering Net Zero and Biodiversity aims and targets, through informed decision-making; public support; creative art, culture and community-led adaptations and solutions to the ecological crisis

Council department employees – health and wellbeing; resilience; voice; involvement in creative solutions; informed decision-making

People and communities beyond Richmond residents – eg, those who received seed sculptures; visitors to the gallery and other locally placed artworks

Universities, academics and other educational institutions – opportunities for engagement with artist-led and ecological research; impact through working

with RAS and LBRuT; teaching and student opportunities; engagement and co-creation with community groups; knowledge exchange

As well as the stakeholders and beneficiaries already involved – those who answer the question ‘Who cares?’ – at the Royal Holloway workshop for the proposed Social Purpose Research and Innovation Centre, those attending began thinking about ‘Who should care?’.

This would be a useful step in developing objectives for the next five years: Which voices are missing or not fully represented? How might these be included, or more effectively involved? Which stakeholders and beneficiaries would Cultural Reforesting like to reach out to beyond the borough?

Research partnership with Royal Holloway

In 2023, RAS and Royal Holloway, University of London undertook a scoping project, led by Dr Rebecca McCutcheon with PhD placements Olivia Lamont Bishop and Harry Rollison, to identify ways to develop areas of shared interest and potential for research funding.

‘The two organisations share a strong interest in the role of research and the arts in supporting diverse communities, and in innovative approaches to policy development using arts and creative engagement. Collectively, we see the potential of such methods in supporting the development of skills and employment, increasing community participation in policy processes, and exploring our relationship with the environment’—
from the Scoping Project Report 2023

This was followed in 2024 by the funding of three civic engagement projects for Cultural Reforesting, co-developed by RAS and Royal Holloway researchers. These were supported through the university’s competitive Civic Fund – a one-off round of internal funding in 2023-24, which also funded this report and the research for it.

- For the Urban Rights to Roam project, artist researcher Dr Caroline Harris has been running workshops for carers in the borough to access and connect with local green spaces.
- Dr Rebecca McCutcheon is focused on site-specific performance and how this might influence relationships of practitioners and participants to the more-than-human world, including organising a Legislative Theatre workshop at Orleans House led by Dr Katy Rubin.

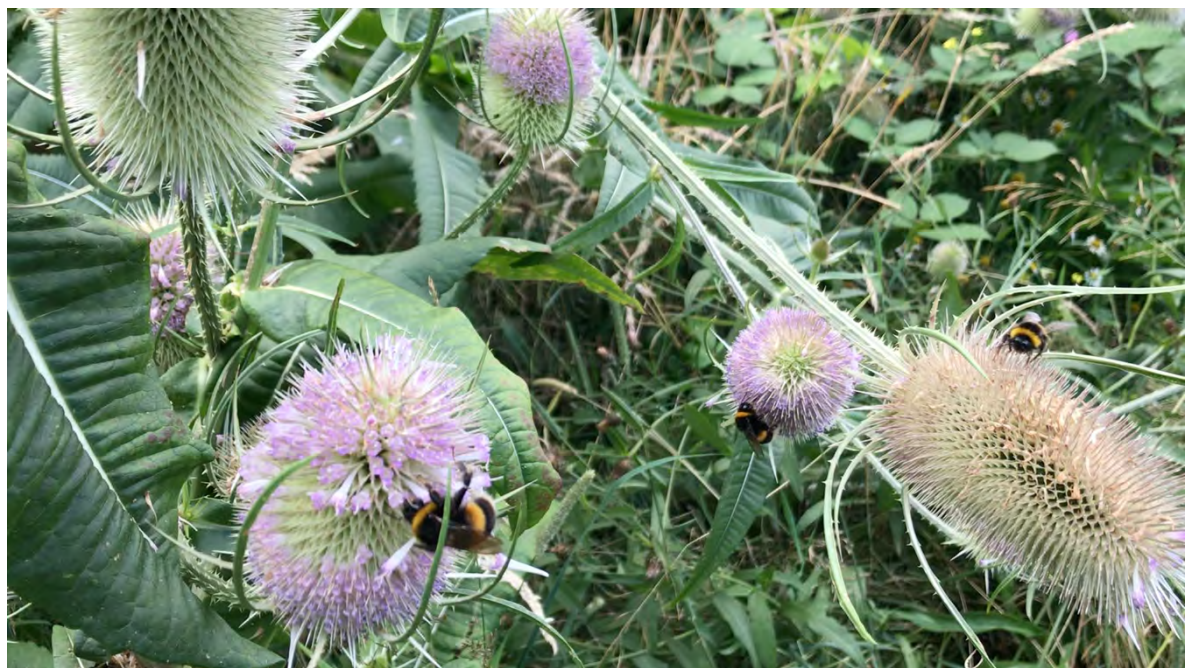
- Dr Briony Hughes will shortly be delivering creative workshops in schools and trialling a portfolio of arts-based Eco-Schools materials.

During 2024, Royal Holloway has set out plans to be a University of Social Purpose and to initiate a Social Purpose Research and Innovation Hub. Members of the RAS team, Tim Corum and Dawn Stevens, took part in a development workshop with representatives from other Civic Fund projects in July.

The report from 2023 highlighted several potential research funds, including the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) [Curiosity](#) and [Catalyst](#) awards, which have regular rounds of funding. Royal Holloway currently also has funding available for a variety of activities through its [Social Science Impact Accelerator](#).

A next step would be to develop grant funding application with input from the Research and Innovation team at Royal Holloway. Options could include:

- co-developing a community and arts-based research hub in LBRuT
- setting up a national network and developing and testing tools for carrying out and evaluating arts-led ecological research and community projects.



From video by Caroline Harris for the 'Urban Rights to Roam' project.

OUTPUTS, OUTCOMES AND IMPACT SO FAR

Direct tangible outputs of the programme include:

- exhibitions
- artworks, both within the gallery and grounds of Orleans House and beyond it
- workshop materials and other resources, such as for schools
- creative responses from participants.

Intangible outputs include:

- developing skills for artists and community members in **co-designing** projects
- increasing the level of **ecological knowledge** among council decision-makers and employees, residents and visitors, gallery volunteers and RAS team members themselves
- increasing the level of comfort that those involved feel in outdoor spaces and arts-based settings and **enhancing enjoyment and appreciation**
- participants in workshops and projects having access to, learning and practising **new art and creative skills**
- participants, artists, volunteers, council members and employees, and others, hearing and experiencing **different perspectives on nature** and environment, eg, through ethnobotany and indigenous knowledge.

Impacts have ranged from personally **transformative experiences** and ongoing practices, such as the nature-centred wellbeing Kinship Workshops, to physical **interventions in environments**, as with the Supermarket Forest seed sculptures, and **education** from early years to adult climate and ecological literacy.

There has been a focus on **working with and incorporating the input** of:

- youth groups
- child-led investigations
- families who are underrepresented in arts and culture settings
- groups who may face challenges in accessing both arts and green spaces, such as adult carers.

A longer-term and unfolding impact may be seen in the development and implementation of an Ecosystem Plan for the Orleans House grounds that incorporates creative, research, access and ecological aims, while the Darkness in Urban Spaces project is **contributing to planning policy** on lighting.

CULTURAL REFORESTING ACTIVITIES IN NUMBERS

These figures relate to activities from 2020 to July 2024.

Around **20,000** visits to 2 major exhibitions

Remember the Future (May to November 2021) and Supermarket Forest (summer 2022 to 2023) each drew around 10,000 visitors and were accompanied by programmes of artist conversations, workshops and other events, including in schools and as part of the Let's Get Creative family sessions, that spread engagement further. Other exhibitions and installations include:

- To the Ground, a pop-up by students on the MA Photojournalism and Documentary Photography at London College of Communication (May 2022)
- Voices of the Ecosystem, a series of talks by artists and walks for visitors around the grounds, available via the Echoes app (September 2022 to June 2025)
- The Dataset's Dream, a dusk audio recording and series of illuminated glass 'casket cocoons' by Bryony Ella and Thomas Sharp with researchers from the UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (December 2022)
- Climate 20XX: Imagining Multispecies Futures, a group show by students on the MA Information Experience Design at the Royal College of Art (January 2023)

24 artists and creative practitioners

Both established figures such as Andy Merritt (Something & Son) and Ackroyd & Harvey and emerging artists such as Ama Josephine Budge and Bryony Ella, who have undertaken residencies, facilitated workshops, created artworks, developed their own practice and continue as part of an ongoing network of artist researchers linked to OHG. Other creatives involved include the London College of Communication and RCA student exhibitors and Orange Tree Theatre Youth Groups.

Nearly **1,300** local school pupils

Involved in activities around creating the 'Take the Time' mural in central Twickenham (Orleans Park and Waldegrave Schools) and the Supermarket Forest project (St Edmund's, St John the Baptist and Hampton Hill Primary, alongside Culture 4 Keeps).



Image: Tricia de Courcey Ling.

More than 23 research institutions, academics and experts

Including, among others, British Ecological Society, London College of Communication, National Physical Laboratory, Royal Holloway, University of London, St Mary's University, UK Youth for Nature, University of Kent, Mishal Baig of St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace, Dr Sarah Edwards of Oxford University and other ethnobotanists from Oxford Botanical Garden, Sami leader Liisa Holmberg, eco psychology practitioner Sian Jones, environmental forester Frankie Wood.

70 seed sculptures shared with 25 locations

Produced by volunteers for the Supermarket Forest exhibition with artist Andy Merritt, these sculptures have been planted in schools in the local area and in Scotland, Warren Gardens Wildlife Haven in Twickenham, Holly Lodge educational centre in Richmond Park, Heatham House Youth Centre, The Vineyard community centre, Cape Farewell in Dorset and sites in Manchester.

13 council departments and service providers

Cultural Reforesting has reached out across council departments, involving not only Parks and Open Spaces and the Climate team, but Community Engagement, Learning and Development, HR, Libraries, Achieving for Children and Adult Social Care. Employees have taken part in the Kinship Workshops led by Tom Goodwin and Katie Coe, while the Darkness in Urban Spaces project with artists Harun Morrison and Kim Coleman was developed in collaboration with Planning.

At least 7 community sectors and organisations

From ecology and wildlife organisations and the friends of local green spaces, including through NGO Habitats and Heritage; youth groups, such as Ham Youth Centre; women's groups; allotment societies; carers' groups; and business development, such as Business Improvement District (BID) Discover Twickenham.

1 album of songs recorded with early years children

As part of Finn Chatwyn-Ros's Curious Tots sessions for babies and pre-walking toddlers. Other activities centred on children and their carers included Families in the Forest (2021 and 2023) with Adam Kammerling and Jess Ihejetoah, for three to eight-year-olds and families in the borough with lower cultural engagement; Play Make Art during Abigail Hunt's artist residency in 2022.

PROJECT CASE STUDIES

These three case studies represent three ways in which Cultural Reforesting is having impact. The information drawn together here could be distilled down for shorter thumbnail sketches. Not all of the programme's projects have been discussed in this report; a useful exercise would be to write very brief summings-up to characterise each project so far and its outcomes.

Exhibitions that reach beyond the gallery

SUPERMARKET FOREST

This show at Orleans House Gallery extended into the grounds, local community and beyond, involving primary school students, academics from St Mary's University, Twickenham and Oxford Botanical Gardens, gallery volunteers and Orange Tree Theatre Youth Group, among others.

Interactivity

The residency by artist Andy Merritt resulted in a series of plantable seed sculptures based on the 'three sisters' system of Native Nations cultivation in now-North America. Andy Franzkowiak reported that:

'The interactive nature of the exhibition, making seed kits that personify the ethnobotanical science behind planting, and understanding agroforestry, plant blindness is proving fascinating for audiences, our volunteers and people wanting to take the seed kits to plant in their own homes and institutions.'



Supermarket Forest seed sculptures on display.

Attracting new visitors

A survey completed by 78 visitors during the exhibition showed that for 48% this was their first visit to OHG. Nearly 75% of total respondents said they would like to see more like this (strongly agree or agree) and a similar number that their visit brought lots to talk about, was memorable, and that they learned or discovered something new. Over 82% said it was enjoyable.

Ethnobotany and the Orleans House ecosystem

Ethnobotanist Dr Sarah Edwards drew on experience working with aboriginal communities in Australia and South America to lead a cross-cultural walk through the grounds, sharing botanical, cultural and historical perspectives towards overcoming 'plant blindness'. Edwards' participation was funded by a grant from the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC).

Creativity and environmental science in education

Edwards, Merritt and poet Arji Manuelpillai carried out a young people's participation programme, with four workshops organised through RAS's partnership with Culture 4 Keeps and eight with Year 6 students at three local primary schools. RAS worked with more than 240 young people, with over 400 hundred individual participations. The young people created poetry and some visual responses, which were displayed in the gallery.

The groups produced creative responses to the themes of:

- Trees and their importance to the environment
- Looking at and understanding their natural environment
- Where produce comes from and its journey from seed/birth to shop
- Learning about ethnobotany and scientific careers.

Dr Sarah Edwards reflected that:

'Taking the workshops to schools and getting the young people to go outside and look at plants, while listening to stories of how people interact with and use them etc. seemed to inspire a considerable proportion of the young people. This was backed up by the feedback cards that the young people filled in themselves. Arji's spoken word techniques with the playful use of games to produce collaborative poetry was innovative and worked wonderfully.'

Among the students' feedback, one participant remarked: 'We got told some plants are medicine, some to treat cancer and what are poisonous and not. I really liked today. It was the best. I wanted them to stay with us, thank you.'

Knowledge sharing and network building

Artist Andrew Merritt met with academic partners during the lead-up to the exhibition, supporting him in developing his ideas and themes. A sharing space was created with St Mary's University in summer 2022, with around 40 participants from across the sciences, social sciences, arts and humanities, along with local authority collaborators, including councillors.

Performance and food literacy

Students from St Mary's University performed refugee stories around food. Orange Tree Theatre Youth Group members took part in Special Offerings: A Super Solstice Procession in June 2023 to mark the planting of the exhibition's seed sculptures.

Deep personal impact

KINSHIP WORKSHOP: NATURE CENTRED WELLBEING

Developed by Tom Goodwin and Katye Coe, with [psychologists, dance artists and social care workers](#), the [Kinship Workshop](#) programme demonstrably renews a relationship with nature. It does so through a series of simple daily activities, attending to people's sensory selves and surroundings, then reflecting in a communal way.

Aims of the project

The workshops series supported Cultural Reforesting aims such as improving climate and ecological literacy within the council, influencing decision-making and improving wellbeing. It also contributed to the values of the Shared Staffing Arrangement between Richmond and Wandsworth boroughs, which aim 'to capture the best of how we work together and to inspire the change we need to create in our culture'.

Activities

Goodwin and Coe initially engaged in a six-month Cultural Reforesting residency at Orleans House Gallery, looking at how embodied practices in nature might bring nature-centred thinking into organisational structures. The programme was piloted with five sessions in autumn 2023, with council staff from the Climate team and Adult Social Services and input from Learning and Development. Its impact on participants led to developing the programme further, in collaboration

with Occupational Health and HR at the council, into a more widely focused 10-week series in 2024.

Goodwin and Coe also:

- offered 15-minute morning [‘Sit Spot’](#) practices for gallery visitors
- delivered a Kinship Workshop activity for the public as part of Richmond Arts and Ideas Festival 2023
- led a five-day training session around nature-centred wellbeing
- held a Fireside Session, where artists and council members met, ate and talked together about the themes of the project.



Kinship Workshop outdoor practice with council employees.

Feedback on the sessions

A video of feedback showed how ‘the response to these [workshops] was astounding and clear’. Comments on what people gained and discovered included:

‘I’m more aware of nature, not just in the sense of the grass, the trees, but everything that is natural, including the animals, to appreciate that they can speak to me in a way, they can give me some understanding of maybe how I can tune in to myself and even learn from nature itself.’

‘For me I think it’s just being able to re-centre, re-calibrate yourself but using things that are around you, like nature, being able to go outside,

just being able to be grateful for what we have on our doorsteps. I've been utilising the "sit space" and being at peace with nature just when work is getting on top of me...'

Impact for the artists: organisational scaling

Goodwin and Coe reported that:

'For us, the most significant impact of the project was the opportunity to spend time reflecting, the opportunity to bring close collaborators into our process, and the opportunity to work with a group of council workers to test Kinship Workshop's underlying principles on an organisational scale. We would definitely work with Richmond Arts Service again. We very much appreciated the Service's trust and support in our work ... The positive feedback has helped us to understand that the work we do is applicable to a broader spectrum of people outside of our normal reach.'

Transforming land management policy

ORLEANS HOUSE ECOSYSTEM PLAN

From 2020, RAS has worked in partnership with the council's Parks and Open Spaces Service to develop and oversee an Ecosystem Plan for the ecological and creative development of the gallery grounds. The Community of Practice who have contributed include artists in residence, ecologists, climate scientists and town planners.

Themes that underpin the aims of the plan include:

- valuing all other species, communities and natural systems that play equal parts in the evolution of the site of Orleans House Gallery, as collaborators of knowledge and value
- positioning the role of artists and the spaces we work in as places that wider society can experiment with, and think differently in
- understanding how other species might also see the evolution of the site, which is full of international species, some of them protected for future generations through the Will of the last private owner, Nellie Ionides
- supporting healthier relationships with nature.

The contribution of artist-led research

RAS has reported that the research being undertaken by artists in residence Ackroyd & Harvey, Nestor Pestana, Bryony Ella, Eloise Moody and Vicky Long

'supported us to interrogate our use of language, widen our list of collaborators (to include more-than-human species), and use the urgency of the ecological crisis to encourage creative thinking and the testing of new ideas'.

Strategic goals of the plan are to:

- **Restore and conserve the woodland** and develop the site as a living collection: *we will research, record and interpret the wood – recognising the grounds as a natural and cultural asset equally important for human visitors and for the animals, plants and fungi that inhabit it;*
- *Develop Orleans House Gallery and Woodland Gardens as an* **integrated cultural and environmental destination**: *we will present a welcoming place which enables people to explore the relationship between people and the environment – with its unique identity, offering visitors a sense of arrival at a special place and the chance to explore and enjoy the site through interpretation and creative programming;*
- Develop **infrastructure in an environmentally sensitive and sustainable way**: *enabling us to make the most of the site – linking the gardens, gallery, stables, woodland and café and creates a range of spaces for programming, exemplifying best practice in sustainability, art and design as well as the management of public and green spaces*
- Develop a **community of practice** to help us refine and deliver the plan: *the Arts Service is committed to experimentation and embedding collaborative research into its major programmes and projects. Each of the aims in the terms of reference will be linked to a research question and partnership.*



Orleans House woodland by Eden Spence.

Outputs to date

- An **Ecosystem Plan for 2021-31**, published in updated form in 2024, which includes the aims of how Cultural Reforesting and artist researchers will engage with the site, and how this is recorded.
- The plan has **mapped notable trees**, invasive species, other flora and fauna and types of habitat – including woodland and acid grassland, which are London Biodiversity Action Plan habitats – and noted heritage and access and visitor usage.
- **Gallery volunteers** have been involved through the Cultural Reforesting Explores programme in activities such as researching the cedar of Lebanon in the grounds.
- Nestor Pestana's World-Building Project residency, with a **bat expert** from the Natural History Museum and local NGO Habitats and Heritage, used technology to explore **building empathy with other species** and imagine what a healthy bat society and wider ecosystem might be like. There was a public workshop in April 2022 and a planned longer-term output is a sculpted maternity roost in the grounds.

CREATIVE WAYS TO SHARE IMPACT

Different audiences and stakeholders will vary in the types of impact and activities they are interested in as well as the ways in which they would like to engage with this information.

For residents and other publics

Communications and interactions will be tailored towards different groups and what they might respond to.

Website

Currently, and as recognised, the website section on Cultural Reforesting is difficult to navigate. In the redesign and creation of content, the following could be useful to consider:

- **Archive of projects:** Instead of an 'archive', which can be off-putting as a term and seem to be about the past and things that no longer need to be looked at, a blog roll, with dated contributions and filters, would allow visitors to see content from further back if they wished, without this being in a separate section.
- **Language:** This needs to be matched to the audiences for events so that it is as accessible as possible. Some of the pages read quite academically at the moment. There are a number of different formulations of what Cultural Reforesting is about, so it would be helpful to write up some more standardised forms of words so it appears consistently – though with scope for its evolving aims, objectives and activities.
- **Rationale and plan for content:** This may already be in progress, but it could be useful to think about what types of articles might appear, alongside event listings, eg:
 - o personal perspectives from artists, ecologists, indigenous experts, community groups/members
 - o write-ups and feedback from events, so visitors can gain a picture of what workshops are like and whether they will enjoy them
 - o broader news and updates about plans and what is happening
 - o articles about nature arts, connection and wellbeing activities that readers can do themselves, with quotes showing how they have been of benefit to people, such as the 'Sit Spot' and 'Wild Drawing'.

These can then be linked to and from content for newsletters.

- **Resources:** for teachers and for children and their carers, for example; these might be downloadable sheets as well as links (e.g., Dr Briony Hellon Hughes's project is developing a set of eco-art resources).
- **Newsletter sign-up:** Can this be made more visible, to encourage more website visitors to sign up?

Engagement at community events

Does Cultural Reforesting have a presence/stand at other local community events, beyond RAIF? This could be an opportunity to share what the programme is doing in person, invite people to workshops and exhibitions, and survey current attitudes towards and knowledge about climate and ecology and arts and cultural engagement. Could this be co-organised with other council departments, such as Parks, to reduce resource requirements, as well as through the Cultural Reforesting Explores programme, with volunteers as champions?



Richmond youth assembly based at Orleans House

In a similar way to the activities and report [‘Young Londoners’ Priorities for a Sustainable City’](#), which Dr James Sloam and Dr Rakib Ehsen of Royal Holloway co-authored, might RAS build on its links with schools and youth groups to produce a set of priorities for Richmond created through arts-led workshops and activities?

Cultural Reforesting physical map

To show, in a space in the gallery, the range of activities that have taken place, as a ‘forest’ growing across the borough and beyond.

Podcast and/or video series

To cater for audiences who might like to engage in different ways. Although these would require regular time and resourcing.

For funders

As noted at the workshop in July, arts funders will be concerned with high-quality artworks being commissioned and shown, and reaching underserved groups, while other funders will be more interested in outcomes in terms of community, health, policy and strategic aims. Research funding has its own criteria in terms of producing new knowledge, public engagement and the impact of research.

Short designed impact report PDF – that highlights key activities and achievements, organised under the kinds of headings that funders could want to know about, such as:

- Access, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
- community co-creation and community benefits
- biodiversity and climate-related impact
- informing policy and decision-making
- role of arts in and as research
- financial relationship to council along with funding gained and how this has been spent.

This should be clear, visual, attractive and quick to read, aimed at providing headlines and eye-catching images and graphics for busy people. For an example, see the [Peckham Platform Impact Report](#).

Catalogue of Cultural Reforesting artworks – presented as a PDF or slideshow, or printed, with accompanying text from artists and others involved.

Academic symposium or conference – as a funding output, for dissemination and to build networks. Organised in collaboration with an academic partner.

For local authorities

Ways to pass on the knowledge, principles and what has been achieved and learned through Cultural Reforesting so they can be applied and developed in other contexts.

Evaluation methods for arts and ecological research in communities – see later, on developing evaluation methods as a piece of research with a partner such as Royal Holloway. A resources toolkit.

Taster day event(s) – for invited local authority representatives and others to experience some of the workshops, introduce the methods used and results, encourage discussion, networking and sharing of ideas.

For legacy

Is there scope for a Cultural Reforesting book? See for example the publication by Poets House in New York, for the programme [The Language of Conservation: Poetry in the Zoos](#). The aims of such a book would need to be clear, in terms of its content and audiences. It could form a research output.



'Take the Time' mural in Twickenham.

OBJECTIVES FOR THE NEXT PHASE

‘The impact of this [arts-led research] work is usually that new perspectives emerge revealing otherwise apparently unimportant aspects, and/or multi-sensory experiences help to share and open up specialised knowledge to wider audiences’—from the paper ‘Valuing Arts and Arts Research’ published by Valuing Nature

Below are some prompts for thinking about potential directions for Cultural Reforesting objectives in the next few years. These are based on the existing objectives, outputs and outcomes, and on themes that emerged from the workshop facilitated by the author of this report on 4 July 2024.

Next steps from existing objectives

The achievements of Cultural Reforesting can be seen as a starting point for next steps – as with the aim of taking artist research beyond the gallery and grounds and into other green spaces across the borough and beyond. As another example:

Cultural Reforesting has established a model for arts-led ecological and community-based research, through embedding artists with relevant community groups.

Now we would like to...

Taken-for-granted outcomes

In order to deliver on its objectives, RAS has needed to set up networks, collaborations and ways of working. These are worth recognising and include:

- Instigating and maintaining **cross-council collaborations**
- **Mentoring, support and a showcase for emerging artists and researchers**, including early career researchers (ECRs are in the first few years after their PhD; there are UK Research and Innovation funding streams that specifically target developing ECRs)
- Building and supporting **multidisciplinary teams and networks**, which involves negotiating different frameworks of language and processes.

What might RAS want to do next with these?

Including diverse voices and other stakeholders

RAS has already worked with a range of diverse groups and sectors of the community. How might this be taken further or in different directions?

- Are there other models for collaboration and co-production that might be tested?
- Are there community groups or groups of residents and workers in the borough that RAS or council departments would particularly like to reach and hear from that they haven't so far?
- How might these voices themselves inform future objectives?
- Could the work with youth groups be built upon further, in terms of engagement with the [London Youth Assembly](#) or other initiatives with and for young people?
- Are there other artists RAS would like to reach?

Communicating about climate and ecology

Themes raised at the July workshop included how to communicate what Cultural Reforesting is about to a wide range of people, plus the different worldviews, languages and approaches that people are used to, depending on their disciplinary and organisational background (eg, arts-based and ecocentric as different from conservation and management).

- Could fostering communication around ecology, climate, ideas of ecocentrism be an objective itself? This could also involve different community and faith groups, for example.
- There has been [research in the US](#) on responses to the terminology of climate change and global warming vs climate emergency and climate justice. There could be a research possibility in exploring the languages of ecological communication.

Arts-led research

At the July workshop, it was suggested that artist-led research is brought more specifically into the overall aims and objectives. The role of the arts and culture in creating change might need to be demonstrated.

Nonhuman advocacy and ecocentrism

This was a much-discussed theme in the workshop. How far and in what ways might these concerns and this perspective be overtly brought into the objectives? Currently, the wording of the objectives focuses on climate: should this be shifted to convey the importance of ecology and biodiversity loss? For example, that Cultural Reforesting empowers people towards caring about, for and being a generative part of nature, both individually and in community.

DATA COLLECTION POSSIBILITIES FOR THE FUTURE

Some data and feedback have been collected for past and ongoing projects, and reflections from the RAS team on learning from projects. For an impact narrative, however, it would be helpful to include more personal accounts and feedback that could show what has been gained by participants, artists and organisations from being involved in Cultural Reforesting.

Data collection, feedback and reflection so far have taken the form of:

- Visitor survey data from Orleans House Gallery
- Numbers attending exhibitions, workshops and other events
- Some anecdotal and informal feedback from participants in workshops and projects, including video recording
- Some feedback forms and analysis from artist projects
- Photographic documentation
- Creative feedback, such as the Ideas Hub
- Some reflections from the artists and process evaluation through wash-up meetings by the Orleans House Gallery and RAS team
- Evaluation for NERC for Supermarket Forest.

While medium-term outcomes and longer-term impact can be challenging to link directly to activities, outputs such as numbers attending a workshop, the publics involved, what was produced and the skills and knowledge gained can be recorded and surveyed.⁵

Additional information on shifts in behaviour, climate and ecological literacy, relationships to local green spaces and longer-term impact, such as on school activities and teaching, could also still be gathered and analysed for projects from 2020 to 2024.

What could be gathered now for past and current projects:

- Testimonials or reflections written in response to prompts or questions – for example, from artists, teachers, community organisations, council departments and employees
- Semi-structured interviews (either in-person or on Teams) with people from the groups above
- Follow-up survey (online form) distributed via email where in compliance with GDPR or sent via a link in newsletters/social media (in the latter case with a question that identifies which event(s) respondents had attended)

- Follow-up event(s) inviting people to celebrate and participate in an engaging activity and also provide feedback.

RAS could discuss with Royal Holloway whether a PhD placement could be set up to undertake this retrospective work through the [PGR Career Enhancement Placement Scheme](#).

EVALUATION DESIGN

Aside from finding the resources (external or internal, or both) to allow for data collection and analysis, there are other challenges in measuring impact for Cultural Reforesting.

Abstract and long-term change

The discussions at the summer 2023 workshop with Royal Holloway noted that: 'Given that Cultural Reforesting is framed around the question "How can we renew our relationship with nature through the arts?" academics mentioned that "renewal" is not only behavioural, but a long, abstract process. This therefore makes it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to measure the impact the Cultural Reforesting programme has ... Academics instead encouraged RAS staff to reframe their thinking through the notion of disruption: Cultural Reforesting is a disruptive programme, as are the arts/artists more generally, and so, what if RAS was to measure the point of disruption instead? This is a singular point, often an initiatory one too, and therefore significantly easier to measure.'

However, funders and decision-makers, as well as the usual frameworks for gauging change, are also interested in the longer-term and wider-ranging impacts. It could therefore be useful to follow up with past and continuing participants – such as schools – and set up a longer-term study of a particular group.

Personal and societal impact

Social impacts are complex and it is difficult to interpret how experiences that are transformatory for individuals or small groups may have impact on a societal level. However, Annabel Jackson Associates, analysing the social impacts of the Millennium Awards, noted that:

‘a grant that reaches more people is not necessarily better than one that has a transforming effect on one person; a grant that improves ten elements of personal impact is not necessarily better than one with a major effect on one element.’⁶

Individual impacts are therefore important to evidence and include in a narrative, which might look at different levels and layers of change to build up a composite picture of impact.

Using scales as a measure: potentials and difficulties

One question that could be potentially interesting and useful, for individual artist projects and Cultural Reforesting as a whole, is: What would a renewed relationship with nature – and the arts – look like, in Richmond and beyond?

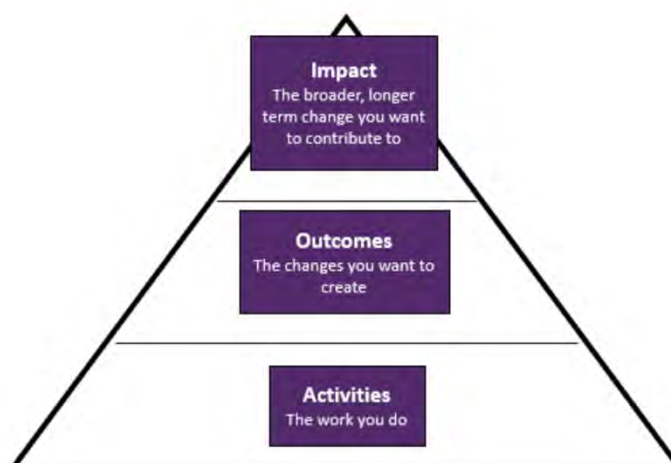
Answers to this might inform a scale to assess the types and levels of ‘renewal’ that could take place as a result of Cultural Reforesting interventions. The Creative City Development Scale, for example, is a series of 10 scenarios or sets of criteria that characterise different levels of urban creative development.⁷ Such a scale might be seen as too closed and prescriptive, as there would be many different understandings of what a renewed relationship with nature would involve. However, thinking about it could make a helpful workshop or world-building exploration in itself.

Measuring health and wellbeing

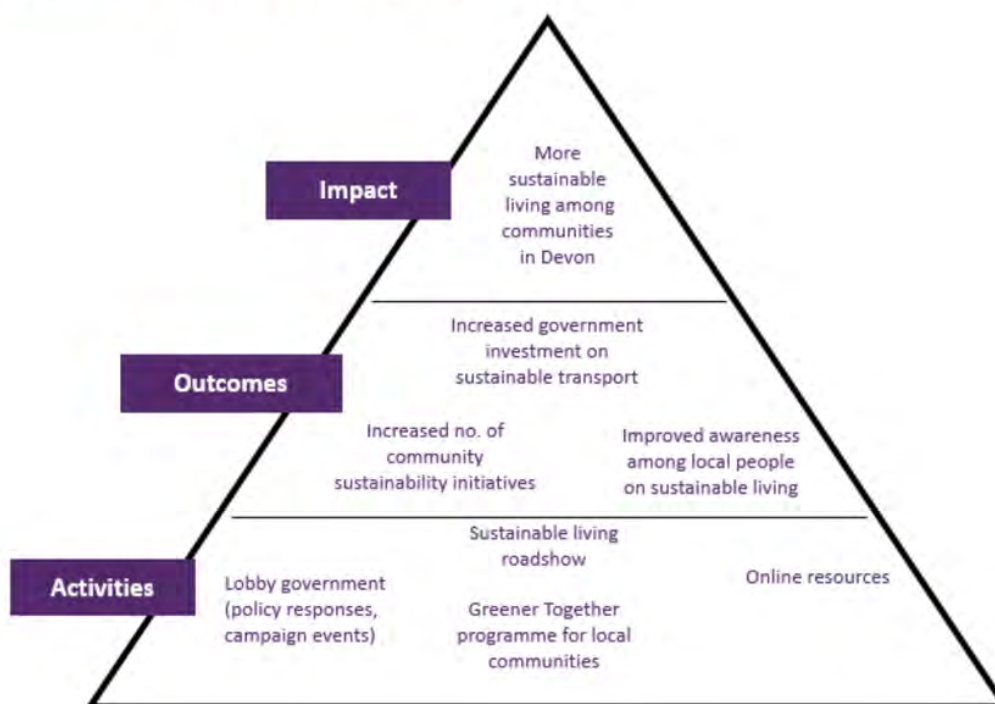
While immediate wellbeing can be self-reported and feeding back on it incorporated into sessions, studies related to physical and mental health outcomes may require participants to fill in health questionnaires, so sharing personal information and requiring an ethics process. Ideally, clinically recognised sets of criteria will be used, some of which are linked from the [Artwork monitoring and evaluation resources](#). Royal Holloway researchers in health studies and social science areas would also have relevant expertise.

EVALUATION FRAMEWORKS

Impact and evaluation frameworks suggest that selecting suitable evaluation methods forms part of the initial planning process – so should be linked to redefining Cultural Reforesting objectives. The 'evaluation triangle' shows how activities can relate to the planned impact and outcomes, as in this example from NCVO and the case of Greener Devon:



Greener Devon campaign



Defining what to evaluate and gather information on

Considering the objectives and activities of Cultural Reforesting, it could be helpful to have a sheet for each project that sets out how it plans to contribute, and how that compares with the actual outcomes. This could be useful in deciding what to gather information and stories about. For example:

Access, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- Who will benefit from the activity? Who are the target co-creators, audiences, stakeholders that the activity aims to include?
- Which underrepresented and underserved groups does it seek to involve?
- How will it reach out to and include these stakeholders and groups?
- Which specific community organisations, council departments and others are relationships being built with?
- How will the activity be made accessible, and what limits to accessibility might there be?
- How might barriers to inclusion be addressed?

Renewing relationships with nature

- In what way does the activity aim to engage with the more-than-human world?
- What locations will it take place in?
- What other species might it interact with?
- How will human participants be invited to engage and renew their relationship?
- What direct benefits, if applicable, does it aim to have for more-than-human collaborators and ecosystems?
- What indirect benefits does it aim to have?

A similar exercise could be completed for other themes and objectives.

A vision, mission statement and values can also help in defining what is key to the programme and therefore what to measure, as on the [Peckham Platform website](#).

Common methods of evaluation:

- **Quantitative** – for measurable outcomes; not only attendance numbers and demographics, but answers from feedback surveys, for example

- **Qualitative** – such as interviews, focus groups and observation, which can be used to understand broader impacts of individual projects and of the programme as a whole
- **Participatory action research** – so that participants work closely with evaluators to design and implement the evaluation, allowing for project directions and outcomes to change
- **Case studies** – a way of presenting evaluation material and analysis for a particular project, group, or individual, using a range of methods; see the [pros and cons of using case studies](#) on Creative & Credible
- **Creative and arts-based methods** – artworks produced by participants, such as film, creative writing, drawing, are used as a way of understanding the impact of the project.

EVALUATION RESOURCES

The following resources outline processes for evaluating and conveying impact for the arts and voluntary sectors and provide useful context:

Artwork

[‘Monitoring and Evaluation: Showing What You’ve Achieved’](#) (2024)

Creative & Credible

[‘How to Evaluate Arts and Health Projects’](#) (2015), an evaluation knowledge exchange between the University of the West of England and arts consultants Willis Newson

NCVO

[‘The Evaluation Process’](#) (2023)

Public Health England

[‘Arts for Health and Wellbeing: An evaluation framework’](#) (2016)

The RSA

[‘The Cultural Learning Evidence Champion’s Handbook’](#) (2019)

Valuing Nature

[‘Valuing Arts and Arts Research’](#) (2019), an output of the Valuing Nature Programme, funded by the UK research councils and DEFRA.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ The Climate Heritage Network was among those calling at COP28 for cultural heritage, arts and the creative industries to be put at the heart of climate action: 'Cultural heritage, including traditional knowledge, strengthens resilience, helps communities to adapt to climate impacts, protects places, and offers green, circular and regenerative solutions. The arts speak to hearts and minds, inspiring action and helping us to understand climate change through storytelling and shared experiences.' From 'Call to Action: Culture at the Heart of Climate Action', Climate Heritage Network, www.climateheritage.org/jwd.

² Research on forest bathing includes: Clarke, Fiona J., Yasuhiro Kotera and Kirsten McEwan, 'A Qualitative Study Comparing Mindfulness and Shinrin-Yoku (Forest Bathing): Practitioners' Perspectives', in *Sustainability*, vol. 13, no. 12, June 2021, p. 6761, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13126761> and McEwan, Kirsten et al., 'A Pragmatic Controlled Trial of Forest Bathing Compared with Compassionate Mind Training in the UK: Impacts on Self-Reported Wellbeing and Heart Rate Variability', in *Sustainability*, vol. 13, no. 3, Jan. 2021, p. 1380, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13031380>. For green prescribing findings see Carrington, Damian, "'Better than medication": Prescribing nature works, project shows', *The Guardian*, 4 Sep. 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/environment/article/2024/sep/04/better-than-medication-prescribing-nature-works-project-shows?utm_term=.66d9906c391c1051ec%E2%80%A6.

³ See, for example, 'Explainer: What Are Ecosystem Services?', Earth.Org, 3 January 2023, earth.org/what-are-ecosystem-services/; Schröter, Matthias et al., 'Ecosystem Services as Contested Concept: A Synthesis of Critique and Counter-Arguments', in *Conservation Letters*, vol. 7, issue 6, Nov./Dec. 2014, pp. 514–23, <https://conbio.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/conl.12091#:~:text=Second%2C%20some%20argue%20that%20the,of%20the%20ecosystem%20services%20concept>.

⁴ From 'Ecocentrism', Science Direct, www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/ecocentrism#:~:text=Ecocentrism%20is%20the%20ethical%20belief,as%20means%20to%20human%20ends.

⁵ While 'outputs' are directly produced by activities and are generally short-term, 'outcomes' may be defined as the 'likely or achieved medium-term effects of an intervention's activities and outputs', which may affect indirect as well as target groups, and impacts as 'positive or negative, primary and secondary long-term effects produced by an intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended'. From 'Outputs, Outcomes and Impacts', ERA-LEARN, <https://www.era-learn.eu/support-for-partnerships/governance-administration-legal-base/monitoring-and-evaluation-of-european-r-and-i-partnerships-the-ripe-toolkit/monitoring-and-evaluation-basics/building-the-logic-frame/outputs-outcomes-and-impacts>.

⁶ Annabel Jackson Associates 2000, quoted in *Measuring the Economic and Social Impacts of the Arts: A Review* by Michelle Reeves (2016), <https://socialvalueuk.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/measuring-the-economic-and-social-impact-of-the-arts-a-review.pdf>.

⁷ The scale is included and discussed in *Measuring the Economic and Social Impacts of the Arts: A Review*.