

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## HANDBOOK ON CULTURAL AWARENESS AND EXPRESSION

OPEN METHOD OF COORDINATION (OMC)  
 WORKING GROUP OF EU MEMBER STATES' EXPERTS  
 ON 'CULTURAL AWARENESS AND EXPRESSION'

### 1 | Introduction

Humans constantly give meaning to everything they feel, see, hear or experience. This process of symbolic signification is guided by our cultural awareness and our capacity to express ourselves.

Cultural awareness and expression is the eighth key competence defined by the European Union in 2006<sup>1</sup> (KC#8). These key competences for lifelong learning are a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes, which are particularly necessary for personal fulfilment and development, social inclusion, active citizenship and employment. The European Commission works with EU countries to strengthen 'key competences' – knowledge, skills, and attitudes to help learners find personal fulfilment and, later in life, find work and take part in society. These key competences include 'traditional' skills such as communication in one's mother tongue, foreign languages, digital skills, literacy, and basic skills in maths and science, as well as horizontal skills such as 'learning to learn', social and civic responsibility, initiative and entrepreneurship, and finally, **cultural awareness and expression**.


The approach is to promote key competences by:

- providing high-quality learning for all students based on relevant curricula;
- reducing early school-leaving;
- increasing early childhood education;
- improving support for teachers, school leaders, and teacher educators.

Cultural awareness and expression is a transversal competence and all EU Member States have developed various instruments in order to promote the acquisition of this competence. In formal education (e.g. schools) this happens in a direct way, in the non-formal sector (e.g. cultural institutions) in a more indirect way, and in informal learning (e.g. in families and peer groups) in an almost exclusively indirect way. Key instruments for specifically addressing cultural awareness and expression are arts education and cultural education, both essential for lifelong learning and the full development of personality and citizenship.

In public debates on education in the arts and culture, different lines of argumentation are used. Some follow the rich aesthetic tradition with a strong emphasis on art history and artistic skills. In recent decades, we have seen the rise of an economic school of thought, highlighting the importance of creativity and innovation. Furthermore, there was, is and always will be the social line of argumentation, in which education in the arts and culture is seen as a contribution to social cohesion and identity.

<sup>1</sup> Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:32006H0962>



The EU definition of cultural awareness and expression touches on all of these dimensions. These perspectives all take a normative position, which is not a problem as long as we are aware of that. The position this report takes is rooted in the humanistic, democratic tradition of thinking. The indisputable principles of democracy and freedom of expression guarantee the fertile ground on which our human capacities can fully grow and flourish. In today's world – assailed as we are by an abundance of images, by permanent and rapid change, and by a strong need for self-determination and identity – cultural awareness and expression is rightly called a *key competence*. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of this competence in a period in which openness, optimism and tolerance are placed under such strain in Europe.

## 2 | Context of the report

This report is the outcome of the work undertaken by a group of 25 experts representing EU Member States. The Working Group was launched in March 2014 under the Council Work Plan for Culture 2011-2014<sup>2</sup>, which implements the European Agenda for Culture.

The work of the group benefited from a useful transversal approach, with representatives of both the education and culture sectors (ministry departments, national expertise centres, advisory boards, and cultural/education practitioners).

The handbook aims to provide policy-makers with inspiring practices and targeted recommendations with regards to cultural awareness and expression.

## 3 | Definition of Cultural Awareness and Expression

Cultural Awareness and Expression can be defined as the ‘appreciation of the importance of the creative expression of ideas, experiences and emotions in a range of media, including music, performing arts, literature, and the visual arts.’

Cultural knowledge includes an awareness of local, national and European cultural heritage and their place in the world. It covers a basic knowledge of major cultural works, including popular contemporary culture. Supporting European ideals of solidarity and respect, it is crucial to understand the cultural and linguistic diversity in Europe and other regions of the world, the need to preserve it and the importance of aesthetic factors in daily life.

Indeed, skills relate to both appreciation and expression. They also include the ability to relate one's own creative and expressive points of view to the opinions of others and to identify and realise social and economic opportunities in cultural activity. In the current context and focus on growth and jobs in changing workplaces and societies, the influence of cultural expression on the development of creative skills which can be transferred to a variety of professional contexts, is essential.


## 4 | Good practice in the Member States

To be able to see how Cultural Awareness and Expression, Key Competence 8 (KC#8), is applied in Europe, 43 specific practices<sup>3</sup> were identified as good illustrations of how KC#8 can be fostered in a direct or indirect way. Some of them are new practices in the field of arts and cultural education, others are well-established practices or organisations that have been around for a number of years.

2 <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=URISERV%3Acu0007>

3 Detailed information about the projects is available in the Annex to the Handbook.





The variety of approaches that can be observed is something from which one can learn, hence the 7 'lessons' drawn. The exercise is a way of looking at the future by reviewing the present. The lessons presented in the handbook reflect the way in which Member States include KC#8 in their current policies on lifelong learning, but at the same time an analysis of what is considered a good practice helps us to formulate suggestions for the future development of the field of arts and cultural education.

## LESSONS

1. Take into account the preconditions for the successful development of cultural awareness and expression when shaping policies and projects.
2. Reconsider the crucial role of teachers and curricula.
3. Cultural awareness and expression is a cradle-to-grave key competence.
4. Consider the different layers of cultural awareness.
5. Culture is multifaceted and there are multiple ways to train cultural awareness and expression.
6. Cultural awareness and expression is a shared responsibility (variety of key actors involved in education).
7. It is time to think strategically about cultural awareness and expression/KC#8.


## 5 | Conclusions and recommendations

Putting cultural awareness and expression into practice has implications for many different fields and policy levels, from work by teachers in the classroom that promotes pupils' talents to UNESCO initiatives that promote international dialogue on arts education.

Cultural awareness and expression naturally needs to be addressed under cultural and educational policies, but firstly a more strategic and integral approach needs to be developed.

### RECOMMENDATIONS TO CULTURE AND EDUCATION AUTHORITIES AT NATIONAL AND EUROPEAN LEVEL

#### FOR AN INTEGRATED POLICY DEVELOPMENT

1. Connect different policy areas/sectors within Member States, supported by cross-sectoral infrastructure, in order to achieve better access and sustainability.
  2. Improve the knowledge base for policy making in the field of cultural awareness and expression through the exchange of projects and research findings.
  3. Support policy development in cultural awareness and expression by developing appropriate modes of monitoring that ensure high quality.
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## FOR CULTURAL POLICY

4. Make cultural experiences as accessible as possible to all citizens.
5. Stimulate cultural participation of all citizens, with specific attention to children, starting from an early age, and to citizens from underprivileged socio-economic backgrounds.
6. Raise awareness of the importance of cultural institutions and products through emphasising their connection to the challenges of society.
7. Give particular attention to lifelong, intergenerational and intercultural learning of cultural awareness and expression with the goal of stimulating social cohesion.

## FOR EDUCATIONAL POLICY

8. Integrate cultural awareness and expression into mainstream primary and secondary education, in a way that is of high quality, and appropriately assessed and monitored.
9. Develop Initial Teacher Education and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for all educators (teachers, school leaders, early childhood education and care (ECEC) and vocational education and training (VET) professionals, higher education (HE) lecturers and support staff, and culture education professionals) in order to improve skills and the understanding necessary for developing cultural awareness and expression in learners and their institutions.
10. Design, implement and evaluate programmes and instruments that stimulate projects or institutions to build up sustainable cooperation with schools. Consider connecting this policy with the public funding of cultural institutions.
11. Take measures to raise the standards and maintain the high quality of arts education, in both formal and non-formal learning environments.

The **full report** is available at:

[http://ec.europa.eu/culture/library/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/culture/library/index_en.htm)

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