

Laidlaw Research and Leadership Programme 2026 Summer Report

Laidlaw Scholar (2026 - 2027)

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(2732 words)

0. Acknowledgement

I would like to thank everyone who supported me throughout my six-week research internship. First and foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Theano Moussouri (UCL Institute of Archaeology), whose encouragement and constructive feedback helped guide me throughout the project and shape its direction. I would also like to thank Dr. Bin Guo for providing me with valuable resources and helping me throughout my research. My appreciation also extends to the members of the Kensington Palace (KP) Schools Team, who warmly welcomed me to the Kensington Enrichment Programme (KEP). Finally, I would like to thank the Laidlaw Foundation and UCL for providing me with this invaluable opportunity.

1. Introduction

London is undergoing a profound demographic and cultural transformation. A city once predominantly White has become an increasingly culturally and ethnically diverse global city, with White British being a minority.¹ Museums, therefore, can no longer act as a representative of White upper-class cultural capital. A decolonization process that reconsiders their priorities is necessary for them to adapt to the city's new reality. Now the question is: What can museums do? This report is about my participation in the Kensington Enrichment Programme (KEP) at Kensington Palace (KP). KEP is a five-year project that explores the potential of KP through forming partnerships with local educational communities, strengthening ties between schools and their wider communities. My research project aimed to explore how KEP enables a museum to support local educational communities and act as a collaborative community and learning partner.

2. Overview

My project is in line with UCL's participation in the KEP, a project with the KP and its partner schools in Kensington and Chelsea and nearby boroughs. Kensington Palace is a royal residence located in Kensington, London, managed by the independent charity Historic Royal Palaces (HRP). Of KP's six partner schools, three are primary schools (Ark Brunel Primary Academy, Essendine Primary School, St. Edward's Primary School), two are secondary schools (Hammersmith Academy, St George's School), and one is a SEND School (Jack Tizard School). I took part in the KEP for six weeks, from June 22nd to July 31st, 2026, joining Professor Moussouri and Dr. Guo. My research consisted mainly of three parts: compilation of school profiles, observation and participation in school events, and a literature review. The first part of the project spanned about three weeks, during which I created a school profile for each partnership school. In the second part, from the second to the fourth week, I observed KEP's events with the schools, helping out the KP staff during the process. The final two weeks of the project consisted of a literature review on trauma. The review, through synthesizing the

¹ Office for National Statistics. 2022. 'Regional Ethnic Diversity'. GOV.UK, December 22. <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/uk-population-by-ethnicity/national-and-regional-populations/regional-ethnic-diversity/latest/#main-facts-and-figures>.

existing scholarship, aimed to incorporate trauma-informed practices into museums like KP as one possible future direction.

3. Aim and Objectives

My main aim throughout the research project was to explore how cultural institutions can support educational communities by forming alliances and becoming a collaborative learning partner with schools. All three components of the project accomplish the main aim through the two objectives. The first objective is to learn what KP is doing to support the local school communities through the KEP. School profiling and participant observation illuminated this especially, by giving me an understanding of how KEP operates to meet each school's unique needs. The second objective is to reconsider the role of heritage institutions like KP and theorize the significance of becoming an educational community partner. Participating in the events and doing a literature review immersed me in both practice and theory; observing the events and understanding the current development of scholarship helped me conceptualize the significance of KP in a broader landscape of museums.

4. Methodology

I took the following methodology for my project. To create the school profiles, I used publicly available data, including school websites, Ofsted reports, and Department for Education statistics. By synthesizing these resources, I contextualized the school and student body for each KP partner. In the second phase of my project, I kept a logbook that recorded descriptive and reflective observations in two separate columns. Helping prepare for the events alongside the KP staff was also an opportunity for me to learn from their experiences. Finally, for the literature review, I strengthened my understanding of the implications and significance of KEP within an academic context. I began by scanning the field of trauma studies, focusing my readings on how educational institutions can become trauma-informed and the theories and frameworks surrounding its transformation.

This report is written in both a personal and analytical style. My personal observations comprise a large portion, as the vast majority of data is sensitive. For example, the data collected during workshops indicated that participants could have emotionally traumatic responses. Simultaneously, I ensured that my report would go beyond description. I analyzed my experience through the aim and objectives and also reflected on my personal growth throughout the project. This helped my report become analytical, instead of a detailed itinerary of what I did. The full list of activities I participated in can be found in the appendix.

Findings

a. School Research

The background research on each school helped me understand how KEP is tailored to each

school's individual needs. The findings clearly indicated the various challenges and strengths KP's partners face. Most partner schools have a much higher rate of Free School Meals (FSM), Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan, Special Educational Needs (SEN), and English as an Additional Language (EAL) pupils than average schools. Ofsted reports often acknowledged the school's support system towards their diverse student body as their strength. As one example, the 2023 Ofsted inspection found that at Essendine Primary School, SEND pupils are "identified early on" with "lots of thought" put into ensuring that they "access the same curriculum as their peers."² KEP's strengths align especially well with those of its partners. Currently, schools often situate excursions to cultural institutions as a culturally enriching part of their program. The early KS3 unit on 'Kings and Queens' was often complemented by a visit to the KP, a former Queen Victoria residence. However, a broad survey across each of the school's curricula revealed that KP can do more than be a school trip destination. Interdisciplinary studies were one of the areas in which the KEP could be most effective. The workshop with St Edward's Primary School was particularly illustrative. During the event, Year 4 students wrote and presented stories of Queen Victoria's ascension to the throne using literary devices covered in English class. An HRP actor dressed as Queen Victoria responded to these stories. This workshop demonstrated that a collaborative attitude on KP's side that involves itself more in each school's learning practice can lead to learning outcomes specifically tailored to each of the school's needs.

However, research also indicated that forming alliances is not without obstacles. Schools in England are becoming 'academised,' strategically forming multi-academy trusts in the face of government pressure. One of the partners, Ark Brunel Primary Academy, for example, is part of Ark Schools, an academy trust with 39 schools. As noted by Pennington et al., multi-academy trusts tend to lack democratic alliances with their local community, as the executive authority in devising the school curriculum is mostly held by multi-academy trust board members instead of each school.³ Therefore, regardless of KP and each partner school's willingness to collaborate in designing workshops, the bureaucratic structure of multi-academy trusts may pose a burden for effective partnership. When the KP becomes more proactive in forming collaborative alliances with schools, this could be effective for students' learning. Nonetheless, forming these relationships is a difficult task in itself.

Through this phase, I learnt the basics of collaborative research, especially how to work with partial information and draw preliminary findings, leaving room for further research by successors. Using

² Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills, and Una Buckley. 2023. 'Find an Inspection Report and Registered Childcare'. Ofsted. <https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/21/101111>.

³ Pennington, Andrew, Feng Su, and Margaret Wood. 2024. 'Academisation, Neoliberal Technologies of Governance and the Rapid Growth of Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) in England'. *Cambridge Journal of Education* 54 (4): 517–33. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2024.2392537>.

publicly accessible data proved to be a reliable but insufficient method; for instance, the data provided by the Department for Education was often not detailed enough to fully contextualize the student body. Therefore, I made sure to highlight research gaps and future steps. These are essential skills for me when working in collaborative research projects in my professional career.

b. Field Research

My field research expanded my understanding of heritage institutions and the roles they fulfill. This step was crucial in gaining first-hand understanding of how KEP works, and in assessing its strengths and future directions. For instance, talking to the KP staff was extremely valuable for me both in terms of personal and professional development. Their insights, drawn from their experience as museum practitioners, enlightened me on the variety of positions that exist beyond the traditional curator and front-of-house jobs.

One of the highlights showing KEP's potential was the Family Day with Hammersmith Academy (HA), where students and families came to visit the palace. They engaged in various activities, such as minigames on the lawn, hands-on history, and paper book-making sessions, while enjoying free admission into the palace. I believe this event embodied the palace's potential in bringing together extended school communities most prominently. In one scene, a family with roots in India engaged in a dialogue reflecting on the colonial legacy through the hands-on history booth. In another scene, HA headteachers, KP staff, and parents engaged in conversations while the children played minigames on the lawn. In all of these situations, the palace acted as an extended part of HA where the school communities came together in a non-academic setting. This could be significant for the schools, as a stronger school community should encourage collaboration among school management, teachers, and families, resulting in better educational results. More significantly, however, events like these could further stimulate the KP's transformation. As Lonetree discovered, contributions from diverse local communities are necessary for decolonizing museums.⁴ Having more events like Family Day is important, as it encourages local school communities with diverse backgrounds to attend the event, further accelerating the internal changes that the palace goes through to adapt to London's new reality.

On a personal level, the most challenging yet important element of this phase was being conscious of my position in relation to the KEP. A UCL researcher does not work directly for the KP or any of the schools, although they collaborate closely with both parties. I was fully aware of my need to maintain a critical distance from both parties. There were obvious limits to what I could do, given that my experience is limited. Yet, practicing this mindset during the workshops was a unique and valuable experience for me, as I had often been a participant or an organizer of such events but not a

⁴ Lonetree, Amy. 2012. 'Introduction' *Decolonizing Museums*.
<https://uncpress.org/9780807837153/decolonizing-museums/>.

researcher.

Another challenge I faced was assessing the value of each workshop from a long-term standpoint. Continued data collection is crucial to observe the long-term effects of the KEP, as the project is notable for its long and sustained partnership with partner schools, meaning partner schools often have the opportunity to revisit the palace at various phases of their education. Data collection, preferably from the same individuals over an extended period, would be necessary to fully grasp the strengths of KEP. As my internship took place in the first year of the project, there was not enough accumulation of data to assess this adequately.

c. Literature Review

One of the core responsibilities of a researcher is providing the theoretical backbone to the practitioners. I proceeded with the literature review, having the following question in mind: “How and to what extent can the KEP address broader issues beyond the palace and schools?” The literature review specifically focused on trauma studies and trauma-informed practices, as I hypothesized them to be areas in which the KEP can best support the local communities. In stark contrast to the incredible glamour of South Kensington, parts of North Kensington have experienced more social, economic, and cultural deprivation. One prominent case is the Grenfell Tower fire in 2017, an event that exposed the multi-layered ‘social harm’ inflicted on local communities, as pointed out by Tombs.⁵ As one parent from Hammersmith Academy has informed me, the event has deeply scarred local communities. By incorporating trauma-informed practices, the KEP could systematically alleviate the trauma felt by the deeply divided local communities in Kensington and Chelsea.

The literature review largely affirmed my initial guess, while pointing to the underdeveloped state of the field. Findings show that trauma is a word usually associated with PTSD and understood as an individual and psychological phenomenon. Various fields and scholars use different definitions of trauma and their variant phrases, such as collective trauma, historical trauma, and psychological trauma. Chou highlighted the lack of conceptual and methodological coherence for intergenerational trauma⁶, but this was true for trauma in general. Studies were dense in discussing trauma within an individual, or in the context of psychology, but few explored it as a collective phenomenon. How a community experiences, treats, and heals from trauma is yet to be uncovered. A few scholars, like Chudzik et al. and O’Toole, have developed frameworks to treat collective trauma in schools, noting that previous frameworks have over-emphasized individual psychological

⁵ Tombs, Steve. 2019. ‘Grenfell: The Unfolding Dimensions of Social Harm’. *Justice, Power and Resistance* 3 (1): 61–88.

⁶ Chou, Fred, and Marla J. Buchanan. 2021. ‘Intergenerational Trauma: A Scoping Review of Cross-Cultural Applications from 1999 to 2019’. *Canadian Journal of Counselling and Psychotherapy* 55 (3): 363–95. <https://doi.org/10.47634/cjcp.v55i3.71456>.

trauma.⁷ I was unable to find works that put these frameworks and theories to an actual test. These works were published from 2025 onwards, implying the field is currently growing. However, their initial studies signify the natural affinity of KEP with schools' approaches to trauma. Both studies suggest that a more holistic approach, from management all the way down to the individual classes, is necessary for addressing collective trauma. When KP becomes a part of an extended school community, it can be a powerful tool for schools in making themselves trauma-informed.

The literature review reaffirmed the importance of KEP. No work focuses on trauma-informed practices in museums, especially placing them as part of an extended school community, like that of KP and partnership schools. Input from the KEP could be a powerful example that helps with the initial development of the field, making the KEP more important than ever. This phase was also great for my personal development, as I now understand the theoretical underpinnings of KEP and its key strengths and potential.

5. Conclusion

In essence, KEP is a project that deeply connects cultural institutions to the local and school communities. My six-week participation in the programme broadened my views on what institutions like KP can do when they have effective alliances with schools. KEP goes beyond traditional museum-school relations, particularly by museums becoming a more active participant. Instead of playing the role of cultural nourishment for school curricula, KP is already trying to become an extended part of schools, showing immense potential for providing interdisciplinary learning experiences. Future directions for the KEP include making its practice more trauma-informed and collecting more data to justify or readjust the direction of its programme. Finally, as a history student, I believe decolonization can be more clearly embedded in the KEP. Being on the side of the students should mean acknowledging the diverse student bodies of KP's partner schools as a strength. This would be in line with KP's already ongoing efforts such as "The Last Princesses of Punjab" exhibition, shedding light on powerful change-making women from non-Western backgrounds. KEP provides a clear answer to the question of what role museums should play in modern Britain: they can serve as collaborative educational partners to schools.

⁷ Chudzik, Mia, Alysse Loomis, and Finau Conklin. 2026. 'A Critical Perspective on Trauma-Informed Care in Early Childhood Education: Recommendations for Research, Practice, and Policy'. *Early Childhood Education Journal* 54 (3): 1223–33. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-025-01921-y>;; O'Toole, Catriona. 2026. 'EMBRACE-Ing a Second Wave of Trauma-Informed Research and Practice in Schools: An Embodied and Relational Approach'. *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma*, ahead of print, June 4. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40653-026-00912-4>.

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Appendix

Date/Time	Event Name	School	Status
23 rd June 9:00 ~ 10:30	Parent's Coffee Morning	Essendine	Cancelled
1 st July 12:00~15:30	Psychology Conference	Hammersmith	Observed
4 th July 10:00~16:00	Family Day	Hammersmith	Observed
7 th July 10:30~13:00	Writing Workshop	St Edward's	Observed
9 th July 10:00~13:00	Work Skills and Transition Activities	Jack Tizard	Cancelled
10 th July 10:00~13:00		Jack Tizard	Cancelled
14 th July 10:00~13:00	Year 6 Leaver's Celebration	Ark Brunel	Observed
15 th July 10:00~13:00		Essendine	Cancelled
16 th July 12:00~16:00		St. Edward's	Cancelled

Table 1. List of KEP events I observed over the six weeks