

Connect Reflect – Participant Information Session

Summary of Information Session held on Wednesday 15 April 2026

1. Introduction

Kate Atkinson (Head of Programmes, Clore Leadership) led the session, supported by Sarah Stott (Project Coordinator). Kate introduced herself and noted that the session would be recorded and shared along with the slides for participants to refer back to. Auto captions are available via the CC button.

Sarah introduced herself as the main day-to-day contact for Connect Reflect. Participants were encouraged to get in touch with Sarah by email with any questions following the session.

Kate asked participants to hold questions until the end of the session, noting that many might be answered during the presentation.

2. About Connect/Reflect

Connect Reflect is now in its second year. It was piloted in 2025 and came about in response to a major piece of research – the World of Work – carried out by Clore Leadership in partnership with the Arts and Humanities Research Council, Arts Council England, and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation. The research is available on the Clore Leadership website and provides a detailed picture of the range and complexity of challenges currently facing cultural sector leaders, including financial pressures, geopolitical uncertainty, and a sense of isolation.

Connect Reflect was designed as a direct response to that research, providing individual support to help leaders navigate those challenges. Arts Council England is funding this second phase of the programme in 2026.

The programme has two strands: facilitated peer learning groups and one-to-one coaching. Applicants choose one strand – not both.

The programme aims to provide support, connection, self-reflection and leadership growth. It recognises that many leaders feel they are facing challenges alone and offers a structured mechanism to address that. The emphasis on self-reflection is a key feature of Clore Leadership's approach more broadly.

Places are subsidised by Arts Council England funding. There are up to 75 coaching places and up to 100 peer learning group spaces available this round.

3. Peer Learning Groups

Peer learning groups are a series of three online sessions, each 90 minutes long. Sessions are held on Zoom, roughly a month apart. Groups have up to 10 members and are facilitated by an experienced Clore Leadership facilitator drawn from a pool of practitioners who have held these spaces before.

The fee for the peer learning strand is £30 plus VAT for all three sessions in total.

The groups are confidential spaces for exchange, support and ideas. The best way to describe them is as a small group of critical friends: peers from different parts of the cultural sector, bringing different leadership contexts and experiences, who meet to support and gently challenge one another, ask questions, share ideas, and offer fresh perspectives on each other's challenges.

The sessions are structured and facilitated, but the themes and content are driven by the group members themselves – not by a fixed agenda or training programme. The groups are not a training session and won't give all the answers; participants are expected to take what they learn and apply and test it in their own context between and beyond the sessions.

Peer learning groups can support participants with working through professional challenges, testing ideas, getting input from critical friends, or simply having a space to share a difficulty and experience solidarity and support.

At the start of the programme, the names of group members will be shared with participants so that any conflicts of interest can be flagged. Clore will also send all members the Community of Learning Agreement – a framework setting out how Clore hopes to work together in learning spaces, including expectations around ways of working, red lines, and encouraging curiosity and exploration.

Group composition will generally be cross-sector, with members drawn from different areas of arts and culture (performing arts, visual arts, heritage, museums, and so on) and from around the country. Clore will be running three targeted groups in the autumn for leaders with specific protected characteristics: a group for Deaf, disabled and neurodivergent leaders; a neurodivergent-only group; and a group for leaders from the Global Majority. All three targeted groups will be facilitated by facilitators with shared lived experience of those characteristics.

Group dates are available on the Clore Leadership website, along with facilitator biographies. New group dates will be released in stages through the autumn up to the scheme's end in December.

4. Coaching

The coaching strand offers three one-hour sessions, delivered online or by phone (agreed between the participant and the coach). The fee is £90 plus VAT for all three sessions in total.

Coaching is individual support that helps you find your own solutions to a particular challenge. Kate used the analogy of peeling an onion: the coaching relationship helps you work beneath the surface of a challenge – understanding what is driving it, identifying blockers, testing strategies – through reflection, coaching frameworks, and questions. It is a highly self-reflective process; coaches will not give all the answers or do the work for you.

Between and beyond sessions, participants are expected to try out, apply and reflect on what they are working through with their coach. Coaching can support a wide range of challenges: difficult professional relationships, feeling stuck or lacking direction, developing strategies for a particular area of work, or exploring and building on your own strengths.

To select a coach, participants indicate in their application what they are looking for – areas of experience or sector expertise, a particular coaching style or approach, or a shared lived experience. Clore will then review the application alongside its pool of around 50–60 coaches and suggest up to three coaches (or just one, if preferred). Participants are encouraged to look at coaches' websites and LinkedIn profiles, then arrange a chemistry call – a short introductory conversation to see whether the relationship feels right. The final choice rests entirely with the participant. If none of the initial suggestions feel right, participants can ask Clore to look again.

Once a coach is selected, the dates and pace of the three sessions are agreed between participant and coach, shaped by the nature of what the participant wants to explore.

All coaches on the scheme are established practitioners with a minimum level of coaching experience, professional insurance, training and supervision in place, and experience of working with leaders in the cultural sector.

5. Maximising Impact

Three peer learning sessions or three coaching sessions is not a large amount of time, and Clore is taking steps to help participants make the most of it.

Participants are encouraged to begin thinking now – before applying – about what kind of support feels right for them, and what questions or challenges they would like to explore. Jotting these down in advance can be a useful starting point.

Once accepted onto the scheme, Clore will send pre-programme materials to help participants understand both strands in more depth, prepare for entering them, and think about how to action learning between sessions.

It is also worth knowing that the programme's three sessions are a starting point, not an endpoint. Peer learning groups can continue to meet independently after the programme ends – some groups from last year are still doing so. Coaching relationships can also continue beyond the scheme, though any continuation beyond the three funded sessions would be arranged and funded independently between the participant and coach.

6. Confidentiality & Evaluation

Both strands of the programme are confidential. Facilitators and coaches will establish clear ground rules and ways of working at the outset of each relationship. Participants will agree how they want their sessions to run – including accessibility requirements, logistical preferences, and any specific ground rules.

The Community of Learning Agreement will be sent to all participants and all those involved in delivering the programme. It applies to everyone – participants, facilitators, coaches and the Clore team – as all are members of the same community of learning.

At the end of the programme, participants will be asked to complete a short evaluation. This helps Clore report to its funders and understand what has worked well and less well, and the impact the programme has had. Evaluation findings from

the first phase have already shaped how the programme has been developed for this round.

7. Safeguarding

Clore Leadership has a safeguarding responsibility for this programme. Kate Atkinson is the Designated Safeguarding Lead. Both facilitators and coaches have been briefed that if a safeguarding concern arises, confidentiality is overridden and the concern must be referred to Kate.

Clore has a safeguarding policy and reporting mechanisms in place. Depending on the nature of the concern, it may be logged internally or escalated and reported to relevant authorities.

8. Eligibility

To be eligible for the programme, participants must:

- Be in a leadership role within an organisation (the programme is not open to solo freelancers working outside of an organisational context, though freelancers fulfilling a leadership role within an organisation are eligible).

- Be based and working in England (the programme is funded by Arts Council England).

- Not have taken part in the 2025 pilot – previous participants are not eligible to apply this time around, unless there is a shortfall in uptake.

Leadership roles can be executive/operational or artistic – both are eligible. The programme is aimed at mid to senior level leaders.

Generally, one place is available per organisation. Larger organisations (250 or more employees) may apply for two places, in which case applicants should liaise with their HR or organisational development team to avoid duplicate applications.

Priority groups for this round are: Deaf, disabled and neurodivergent leaders; leaders from the Global Majority; and leaders working within Arts Council England priority places. 60% of places are ringfenced for National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) and Investment Principal Support Organisation (IPSO) leaders.

9. Apply

Applications are made through a straightforward web form on the Clore Leadership website. Participants apply for one strand only – either peer learning or coaching – and are asked to provide some information about what they are looking for and what they hope to get from the programme.

If the preferred strand is full, Clore will operate a waitlist and will try to offer a place on the alternative strand where possible.

For any questions about eligibility or specific circumstances not covered by the information session, participants are encouraged to contact Sarah or Kate directly by email.

10. Payments

Once accepted onto the programme, participants will be sent an Eventbrite link to make their payment. Payment confirms and locks your place on the scheme.

Fees are subsidised by Arts Council England funding. The participant contribution is:

Coaching: £90 plus VAT in total for three sessions.

Peer learning: £30 plus VAT for all three sessions.

11. Timeline

The timelines differ slightly between the two strands:

Peer learning groups: The first groups begin around May, with further groups running through the autumn to the scheme's end in December. Dates are already on the website. Participants can also request information about autumn dates when applying. The application deadline for peer learning is Thursday 30 April 2026. Places will be offered from the beginning of May.

Coaching: Sessions can take place at any point between May and December 2026, with dates agreed between participant and coach. Places on the coaching scheme will be offered at the end of May. The application deadline for coaching is Wednesday 6 May 2026.

12. Questions

The following questions were raised by participants during the session.

Examples from the pilot

Participant: Would you be able to give some examples from the pilot of what type of things people brought to the groups or to coaching, and how they benefited?

Kate: Sure. I mean, it's difficult because we don't – we're not privy to the really specifics of the kinds of conversations that happen, as you'd expect, it's confidential, so we're not involved in that. But we are aware that the kinds of things that people spoke to – navigating difficult professional relationships, so it might be a challenge with maybe board members, and kind of some strategies to explore and work through that and make the relationship more effective, to deal with some of the interpersonal challenges of that, but also how that then impacts in terms of operating efficiencies and strategic decision-making. It might be around feeling a sort of loss of professional mojo and just feeling like the stress of what's going on means that people are stuck in a particular place with their leadership and they've kind of lost that sense of inspiration and fulfilment that has previously driven them – so it's about reconnecting with that through the support of a coach or peer learning group. It could be around a very specific scenario: you've got a problem with a particular strand of work and you want some insights into how you might drive that forward. It's really, really varied.

Access costs

Participant: Will access costs be covered?

Kate: Yes – that should have been in our presentation. We have an access budget, and if you have access requirements to access either peer learning or coaching, you

can share those in your application [other application formats are also available]. There is a BSL version of the information on the Clore Leadership website.

Applying for both strands

Participant: Could we apply for a peer group place, and if there isn't space say we'd be happy with a one-to-one coaching space?

Kate: We will offer a waitlist in the event that either strand is filled up, and we will do our best to offer a place on the alternate strand if we possibly can and have capacity.

Arts Council priority places and postal address

Participant: We don't have premises – our work is across the UK. I live in an Arts Council priority place. Would that qualify, or would it relate to our postal address?

Kate: That's a question where we might need to get the input of our funders, because I'm not sure I know the straightforward answer to that. We'll need to come back to you on that. If you've got a question around eligibility that's quite specific or niche and hasn't been addressed in this session, please do ping us an email and Sarah or I will be able to give you a more specific steer.