**UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM: barriers to embedded and sustained high-quality school arts provision**

**Absence of purposes for schooling**

Since the National Curriculum was introduced there has been little focus on the *purposes* of schooling. Without a systemic rationale for what is taught, and a coherent and ambitious vision for education (in relation to the economy, society, community or the individual), it is impossible to map arts subjects – as a curriculum area – onto agreed purposes, making it hard to make the case for their value. There is also a …

**Government focus on STEM subjects**

Some subjects – particularly STEM – are viewed as strategically important by government. Learning to count is deemed more important than learning to create. This is made evident by …

**Accountability measures which downgrade arts subjects**

With a strategic focus on non-arts subjects, there has been increased accountability (Progress 8 and the EBacc) focused on a narrow range of subject areas which has led to a systematic downgrading or exclusion of arts subjects and experiences. Structural barriers have led to a lack of subject parity and the gradual erosion of the important ‘broad and balanced’ principle. One aspect of accountability that is problematic for the arts is …

**Assessment**

We have an assessment regime that does not work for arts subjects, which require different kinds of measurement, and the investment required to develop these has not been made because of their perceived low status. Our schooling system prioritises school performance based on exam grades in defined subject areas, and its success measures do not value the whole child. This is one element of a …

**Catalogue of attrition**

At every stage in the schooling system the arts are disadvantaged: at initial teacher recruitment and training (where there are no bursaries for arts subjects or arts CPD investment), through to a lack of specialist support for arts teaching in primary schools. The prioritisation of EBacc (non-arts) subjects in secondary accountability measures has meant a reduction in the level of arts subjects, teachers and resources available, and therefore declining take up of arts subjects at GCSE and A Level. Dance and drama have no parity at inspection level, and film and digital media have been excluded from the national curriculum. We have an imperfect assessment regime for arts subjects, and we have the long tail of the exclusion of the arts from the higher education facilitating subjects list before 2019, thereby further disincentivising arts take-up. And access to the arts is not equitable: we have a two-tier system, with the arts more highly valued in independent schools.

**In conclusion …**

This downgrading of the arts is damaging for young people’s lives, aspirations and wellbeing, for the arts education workforce, for the workforce more widely, and for the health and diversity of the creative industries. In the absence of consensus around purpose, and in the context of intense accountability focused on a narrow range of subject areas, there has been a systematic exclusion or downgrading of arts subjects and experiences. Acute funding pressures have exacerbated this situation. Consequently arts provision has been disproportionately adversely affected by the prioritisation of performance tables and Ofsted inspection, and the undervaluing of arts subjects within the state education system has led to a reduction in the number of arts subjects offered. Loss of subjects and teachers cannot easily be reversed. When curriculum time is compromised, resources – including the recruitment of specialist staff – are reduced too. And the effects of this are hardest felt by pupils from low-income families, where parents have less scope to find and pay for access to externally provided cultural enrichment opportunities.

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