

Cultural Learning Alliance Report Card 2025



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About the Cultural Learning Alliance

The Cultural Learning Alliance (CLA) harnesses the power of its alliance to champion a right to Arts and culture for every child. It uses evidence in three ways: to provide annual data-based surveys of children's access to the Arts; to share insights into the policy and practice landscape; and to demonstrate the ways in which an Arts-rich education provides skills for life and skills for work, enabling all children to fulfil their potential. CLA applies a social justice and inclusion lens to its work, supporting, platforming and empowering change.
www.culturallearningalliance.org.uk

About this Report Card

This is CLA's second annual Report Card and distils CLA's evidence work and reporting into a clear set of five annual indicators, based – as far as possible – on national time series data drawn from government data sets. Occasionally we broaden the scope of these annual indicators in new editions of the Report Card when we are able to include new evidence – for example in 2025 we have added Arts vocational qualifications data and data on an 'Arts entitlement gap'.

About the author

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CLA's work is made possible by:



Foreword from the Cultural Learning Alliance Co-Chairs

Last year's Report Card was all about the numbers. And one number in particular drew attention: the fact that the number of Arts GCSEs taken had fallen by 42% since 2010. There were also the shocking statistics that 42% of schools now do not enter any pupils for Music GCSE and 41% of schools do not enter any pupils for Drama GCSE – and that these figures had been climbing dramatically since 2016/17.!

Our 2024 Report Card provided us with clarity on what had been happening to Expressive Arts education in state secondary schools over the previous decade and a half – since the introduction of the EBacc – and presented a stark picture of erosion and inequality. The decline was driven primarily by the focus of previous governments (2010-2024) on a narrow range of subject areas leading to a systemic devaluing of Arts subjects and experiences in schooling in the state sector in England.

This year our findings are about the underlying story behind the numbers, and in particular what the data tells us about the factors that determine the likelihood of children and young people studying Arts subjects. We can now see that where a child grows up, and their family's socioeconomic status, are significant social determinants in whether or not they will pursue Expressive Arts options from the age of 14.

We have analysed GCSE and A Level data in relation to free school meals eligibility and the Office of National Statistics Index of Multiple Deprivation to reveal a clear relationship between the poverty of an area, and pupils in that area not studying the Expressive Arts in school; and therefore a clear relationship between the affluence of an area and pupils studying the Arts. Expressive Arts take up is lowest in regions and local authorities with the highest level of free school meals and highest levels of deprivation. We refer to this clear socioeconomic disparity in young people's access as an 'Arts entitlement gap'.

Arts take-up is lowest where deprivation levels are highest.



Foreword from the Cultural Learning Alliance Co-Chairs



Where a child grows up, and their family's socioeconomic status, are significant social determinants in whether or not they will pursue Expressive Arts options from the age of 14.

It is worth noting that London is an outlier here. For both GCSE and A Level entry data, London seems to challenge the pattern of a relationship between free school meals eligibility and Expressive Arts entries. We examine some possible reasons for this on page 23.

In parallel to the 'Arts entitlement gap' we examine new evidence which tells a continuing story about the ways in which independent school pupils have privileged access to after-school Arts and Music activities. In contrast, students eligible for free school meals are far less likely to experience out-of-school Arts activities.ⁱⁱ We refer to this as the 'Arts enrichment gap'.

In addition, we highlight evidence which reveals that young adults from working class backgrounds are four times less likely to work in the creative industries compared to their middle-class peers. The Sutton Trust continues to monitor the many ways that children in underserved communities miss out on so many experiences that the parents of independent school pupils expect and pay for.

Our findings also reveal a crisis in Arts teacher recruitment. Such was our shock on first reading the data that we had to re-read the numbers three times to check they were accurate. They are.



Foreword from the Cultural Learning Alliance Co-Chairs

Comparing 2023/24 to 2020/21 when Initial Teacher Training (ITT) recruitment was particularly strong (during the Covid-19 pandemic), the number of recruits for Art & Design has fallen by 84%. The government has only met 44% its ITT recruitment target for Art & Design ITT, with these targets derived from variables that include the number of unfilled (and anticipated unfilled) vacancies in a particular subject. There have also been dramatic falls in the number of new ITT entries in Music (76%), Drama (60%) and Design & Technology (45%) over this same time period. Between 2022/23 and 2023/24 alone, there were falls averaging 30% across ITT for Expressive Arts subjects.



We are taking decades of evidence and using it to reframe the value of Arts education, making deliberate choices in describing seven distinct and evidenced benefits.

In the 2023 Gulbenkian Arts in Schools report Geoff Barton, former teaching union head, makes the point that you don't get extra-curricular Arts without *curricular* Arts as the workforce to deliver it will have disappeared. Similarly, you don't get curricular Arts in the first place without a trained Expressive Arts teaching workforce. And you certainly don't get a trained – and diverse – creative industries workforce.ⁱⁱⁱ If we have one call to action for the government this year – other than fundamentally revaluing the Arts in schooling – it is that we urgently need a new Arts teacher training commitment from DfE.

Also new for this year, although obviously not reflected in this Report Card data, are the winds of change within the education policy environment in England. CLA made a lengthy evidence submission to the Curriculum and Assessment Review in November 2024, and we now know that the Review Panel has concluded in its interim report – in line with our Report Card findings – that the EBacc constrains pupils' choices and limits their access to Arts subjects. We are hoping to see a new revaluing of the Expressive Arts curriculum area in schools and a positive change in the weather for Arts education for 2026 and beyond. But as Baz Ramaiah observes within Indicator 4 in this Report Card edition, any policy changes affecting Expressive Arts subjects in England's curriculum is likely to require “commensurate investment in Arts teacher recruitment to meet increased demand from schools.”

In the meantime, our data is still being informed by the Arts-limiting policies and measures of previous governments, and that is likely to remain the case for some time. We will continue to record and publish the data annually, and to consider its implications – in particular for children and young people, and also for our creative industries.

Whatever the outcome of the Curriculum and Assessment Review, as we state in the foreword to last year's Report Card, none of this will be a quick fix – it will take at least two parliaments to deliver. It remains the case that “Our education system requires a significant course correction if we are to establish high-quality Arts provision for all children, and we will require practical and ambitious timelines for successful implementation.”^{iv}

But we are able to make some things come on stream more rapidly. CLA has spent the past year working on a new Capabilities Framework to articulate the personal and societal benefits of studying Expressive Arts subjects. We are building a shared language for how we talk about what the Arts *do*, and the impact they can have on young people's lives, so that we can robustly communicate the value and impact of an Arts-rich education. We are taking decades of evidence and research and using it to reframe the value of Arts education, making deliberate choices in describing seven distinct and evidenced benefits of studying Expressive Arts subjects: agency, wellbeing, communication, empathy, collaboration, creativity and interpretation.

Foreword from the Cultural Learning Alliance Co-Chairs



We still know very little about the Arts in primary schools.

You can read more about this emerging Framework on page 35. One look at its list of seven benefits makes clear why studying Expressive Arts subjects matters: children who don't have access to an arts-rich education miss out on the unique benefits that Arts subjects provide – which last long into adult life. This is why it is so important to chart the reality of what has happened to the Arts in schools, and to find ways to revalue the Expressive Arts as a vital area of learner experience during schooling.

CLA has long highlighted Professor James Catterall's research on the effects of Arts education on the achievements and values of young adults.^v We again draw attention to his findings here in relation to our 'entitlement gap'.

In a 12-year study involving 25,000 students, James S. Catterall found that extensive and deep involvement in Arts activities was a significant predictor of students' later academic achievement and community involvement. The relationship between Arts-rich educational opportunities and subsequent achievement persisted, even when controlling for socioeconomic status – in fact, the relationship strengthened for students with lower-socioeconomic status. Findings also provided evidence of strong advantages in volunteerism and political participation. English language learners who attended Arts-rich high schools were significantly more likely to pursue a bachelor's degree at age 20 and expect either a bachelor's or master's degree or higher. Given the new government's focus on opportunity, this is compelling evidence for introducing an Arts entitlement for every child.

In 2025 we will publish the findings of Rapid Evidence Reviews into Dance, Drama and Music (and a refresh of the existing Art & Design Review), supported by Midlands4Cities and co-commissioned by CLA and the Royal Shakespeare Company (the only performing arts organisation in the UK with Independent Research Organisation status). We look forward to sharing a great deal more evidence soon.

Our deprivation analysis this year is not the only new development for this edition of our Report Card. We are pleased this year to be including data on vocational qualifications (Level 2, the same assessment phase as GCSEs, and Level 3, the same assessment phase as A Levels). This has provided insights which make clear that it is not the case that schools are abandoning Arts GCSEs and A Levels in order to move to Arts vocational qualifications – there has been an overall fall for Arts vocational qualifications too, with very significant falls at Level 2 for Art & Design (40%) and Music (34%), and an average fall of 10% across Arts subjects at Level 3.

It is particularly disheartening to see that Arts take up is down across vocational qualifications as well as for GCSEs and A Levels. This has been caused by the uncertainty over the future of these qualifications after the previous government announced (in 2021/22) that it planned to defund many Level 2 and 3 courses. It had proposed removing funding for most courses that overlapped with T Levels (for which dropout rates are very high) from 2024. There was a pause placed on this defunding by the new Labour government in 2024. Level 3 Arts take up had been healthy and increasing before the former government's BTECs announcement. Before this new Report Card edition we might have speculated that the decline in arts GCSE and A Level take-up could have been mirrored by a positive uptick in vocational qualifications take up, but our new data analysis makes clear that this has not – recently – been the case.

Foreword from the Cultural Learning Alliance Co-Chairs

This second edition of our annual Report Card is not without its data gaps. We still know very little about the Arts in primary schools. In the absence of any publicly-available government data, Professor Pat Thomson's 2025 Researching the Arts in Primary Schools (RAPS) report (published by Nottingham University and funded by the Freelands Foundation) is extremely helpful.^{vi}

It tells us that there are six conditions or factors necessary for an Arts-rich education in primary schooling: leadership commitment to the Expressive Arts and the centrality of the Arts to the school; having specialist Arts staff in post; the consistency and breadth of the offer; having a strong extra-curricular Arts offer; and forging strong and ongoing external Arts partnerships.

Leadership commitment to Expressive Arts learning is vital: from school leadership teams, from cultural organisation senior management teams – and from central government.

Another data gap is Dance. The data for Dance is not captured in England in relation to Initial Teacher Training recruitment; unfilled vacancies for Arts teachers; or the vacancy rate for Arts teachers.

However, One Dance UK reports a significant decline in subject experts working in schools running parallel to the erosion of dance as an educational subject. Dance is both an engaging physical activity and an expressive artform. It is particularly important that Dance forms part of an entitlement due to the often-prohibitive cost to families of accessing quality dance training outside school, and because of all the evidence highlighting its immense benefits to health and wellbeing.^{vii}

As in 2024, we call on the government to capture more data on Dance, and to find ways to capture and share data on primary Arts provision. And we still need to make the important point that despite all the accountability drivers now mitigating against Arts subjects, some schools continue to value and prioritise the Arts as an essential component of a broad and balanced curriculum. It is still possible for primary and secondary schools to offer an Arts-rich education, and we know of examples of good and of excellent practice throughout England.

We reveal other additional concerning findings this year. Drama has had the largest fall in Arts A Level entries since last year, and also has the largest overall fall since 2010 (a staggering 48%).

It has had the largest fall in teaching hours and has the highest vacancy rate of all Arts subjects, with 41% more unfilled vacancies than last year. We can also see a worrying 17% decrease in entries for Drama GCSE from the year of the Covid-19 pandemic (2019/20) to the 2023/24 academic year. There are so many individual Arts subject stories embedded within our latest findings, and several broader stories. These include the declining provision – and take-up – of Creative Arts and Design courses in Higher Education; the biggest decline in Arts teaching hours being at A Level; and the total number of Arts teachers being 27% smaller than in 2010.

We welcome the work of the National Education Union and others in using our data to make the case for an Arts-rich education for every child. This new Report Card edition makes a valuable contribution to our growing body of evidence about children's access to Arts and culture, and CLA will support all efforts to bring about vital system change.

The United Nations and UNESCO both assert that all children and young people have a right to access Arts and culture, a right to cultural expression, and a right to meaningfully contribute to the systems and policies that support them in this process.^{viii} This Report Card evidence makes clear that these rights are not being respected. It reveals fewer opportunities to access culture, and a long-term dismantling of the infrastructure that supports young people to access and benefit from Arts and culture – with the most marginalised bearing the brunt of a decline in universal provision in England.

The government elected in 2024 has a real challenge ahead to address this, but it has the opportunity to lead the way in beginning the systemic work to reverse the past decade and a half of decline – on behalf of all children and young people.

Sally Bacon OBE and Derri Burdon
CLA Co-Chairs

Executive summary

Key Findings

1

Poverty and Arts take-up

There is a clear relationship between the poverty of an area and pupils in that area not studying the Expressive Arts in school. Expressive Arts take up at GCSE and A Level is lowest in regions and local authorities with the highest level of free school meals and highest levels of deprivation. There is a clear socioeconomic disparity in young people's study of the Arts at both GCSE and A Level: we call this an 'Arts entitlement gap'.

Where a child grows up, and their family's socioeconomic status, are significant social determinants in whether or not they will pursue Expressive Arts options from the age of 14.

2

Recruitment to Initial Teacher Training for Expressive Arts subjects is in crisis

Despite very slight increases in the number of Arts teachers for most Expressive Arts subjects (2022/23 to 2023/24), the picture for Arts Initial Teacher Training recruitment is extremely concerning. There have been dramatic falls averaging 66% across Expressive Arts subjects since 2020/21 (the first pandemic year, when recruitment was highest) – and significant falls averaging 30% across Initial Teacher Training recruitment for Expressive Arts subjects since 2022/23.^{ix}

3

We are still largely seeing a trajectory of Arts decline in secondary education

A decade and a half of former government policies have led to erosion and decline across Expressive Arts subject take-up and the Arts teaching workforce. Expressive Arts subjects comprised 14% of all GCSE entries in 2009/10, and by 2023/24 this figure had more than halved, standing at 6.8% of all entries. They made up 13% of all A Level entries in 2009/10 and by 2023/4 this figure had fallen to 9.4%. Despite very small glimmers of good news for Music, this year's data reveals that the pattern of an overall fall in Expressive Arts qualifications take-up at Key Stages 4 and 5 revealed in last year's Report Card continues: across Expressive Arts subject take-up at GCSE and at A Level, vocational qualifications (included for the first time in this 2025 edition), and progression to Higher Education.

Executive Summary

Methodology and scope

- Our analysis focuses on data for the 2023/24 academic year for secondary schools in England, primarily drawing on data from official Department for Education (DfE) statistics, Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) reports or Office for National Statistics (datasets).
- As in the 2024 edition, this Report Card does not include analysis on Expressive Arts subjects in primary schools due to the absence of data, and similarly sometimes reflects other limitations on publicly available data (for example, recording of data on Dance is often lacking, as we observe in some sections of this report).

Indicator 1: Arts GCSE and other Level 2 vocational qualifications entries

- While the total number of GCSE entries across all subjects rose by 4.8% between 2022/23 and 2023/24, the number of Expressive Arts subject entries has decreased by 0.15% over the same time period.
- The largest falls between 2022/23 and 2023/24 have been in Media/Film/TV studies (20.6%) and Dance (5.6%). There have been small increases in entries in some subjects, for example Music (7.1%), Art & Design (2.3%) and Design & Technology (1%).
- Data on entries for vocational qualifications taken at Level 2 (the same assessment phase as GCSEs) also shows an overall fall between 2022/23 and 2023/24, with declines of 40% in Art & Design subjects, and 34% in Music. Our analysis also highlights falls of 11.6% for Drama entries.

- Building on analysis in our previous Report Card, we can see that there has been a remarkable 42% decrease in total Expressive Arts entries at GCSE between the 2009/10 academic year and 2023/24, with a 0.15% decrease between 2022/23 and 2023/24. Equally, entries in Expressive Arts subjects made up 14% of all GCSE entries in 2010/11. In 2023/24, Express Arts entries only make up 6.8% of all GCSE entries, indicating a considerable fall in the presence of Expressive Arts in GCSE study.
- The number of Key Stage 4 pupils sitting GCSEs has increased by 16% between 2015/16 and 2023/24, but the number of entries into GCSE Expressive Arts subjects has fallen by 26% in the same time period.
- The highest proportion of Expressive Arts entries at GCSE are in the South West (8.5%) and the South East (8.2%), both regions with the lowest percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals in England. By contrast, the percentage of entries to Expressive Arts

- subjects are lowest in Yorkshire and the Humber, the West Midlands (6.9%) and the North East (7.1%) – with the latter two regions having the highest percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals.
- Similarly, areas with higher levels of deprivation have lower participation in Expressive Arts at GCSE level. A total of 6.6% of all GCSE entries are in Arts subjects in the most deprived fifth of local authorities. By contrast, 8.3% of all GCSE entries are in Expressive Arts subjects in the least deprived fifth of local authorities.

Executive Summary

Indicator 2: Arts A Level and other Level 3 vocational qualifications entries and HE progression

- The number of A Level Expressive Arts entries has fallen by 1.3% between the 2022/23 and 2023/24 academic years. While Arts entries made up 9.8% of all A Level entries in the 2022/23 academic year, they make up 9.4% of all entries in 2023/24. The largest fall in entries has been in Drama (6.7%), followed by Media/Film/TV Studies (4.5%). By contrast, there have been small increases in entries for Music (0.3%) and Art & Design (0.3%).

- Entries in post-16 vocational and technical Expressive Arts subjects have fallen between 2022/23 and 2023/24 – a fall of 4% for Performing Arts; 17% in Crafts, Creative Arts and Design; and 9% in Media and Communication. These falls are in line with the pattern of large falls in entries since 2021/22, the year the former government announced it planned to scrap BTECs. Prior to 2021/22 – before the BTECs announcement – entries into post-16 Expressive Arts vocational and technical qualifications were increasing, particularly for Crafts, Creative Arts and Design.
- While the total number of A Level entries across all subjects increased by 1.3% between 2010 and 2024, there has been a remarkable fall in the number of Drama entries of 48%, as well as large falls in Music (43%) and Design & Technology (41%) in this time period. Expressive Arts entries made up 13% of all A Level entries in 2009/10 and now make up 9.4% of all entries in 2023/24.

- The percentage of A Level entries in Expressive Arts subjects is also lowest in the West Midlands (4.1%), the North East (4.4%) and the North West (4.6%), the areas of the country with the highest proportion of free school meal pupils. By contrast, the regions of England with the lowest percentage of pupils on free school meals have higher Arts participation at A Level, with Expressive Arts entries making up 5.6% of all A Level entries in the South East and 5.3% in the South West.

- Similarly, across the most deprived fifth of local authorities, Expressive Arts make up 4.2% of entries into all A Levels in 2023/24. By contrast, Expressive Arts subjects make up 5.4% of all entries in the most affluent fifth of local authorities.
- London overall, however, does not follow this pattern. Across GCSE and A Level entry data, London undermines the pattern of a relationship between free school meals eligibility and Expressive Arts entries (we suggest why this might be on page 23).
- The total number of undergraduates in England studying Creative, Arts and Design subjects is 112,390 in 2022/23, representing a fall of 1.6% from 114,225 in 2021/22.
- Relatedly, in 2020/21, 8.2% of all undergraduate degrees were taken in Creative, Arts and Design subjects. By 2022/23, this figure had fallen to 7.7%.



Executive Summary

Indicator 3 – Number of Arts teachers and hours of Arts subjects taught

- Between 2022/23 and 2023/24 in England, there has been a slight increase in the number of teachers for most Expressive Arts subjects. The largest increase has been in Music (3.6%). There have been very small increases for Drama (0.8%) and Art & Design (0.7%).
- While these increases are promising, the Arts teacher workforce is still much smaller than in was in 2010. Between 2011/12 and 2023/24, the overall secondary teacher workforce has grown by 6.7% – however, the number of Expressive Arts teachers has fallen by 27%. There are dramatic falls for some subjects: Design & Technology (52%), Media Studies (40%), and Drama (21%). Art & Design has fallen by 9%.
- The number of taught hours in Arts subjects at Key Stage 3 is largely the same in 2024 as it was in 2023. However, there have been some falls, with taught hours for Design & Technology falling by 4% between 2022/23 and 2023/24.

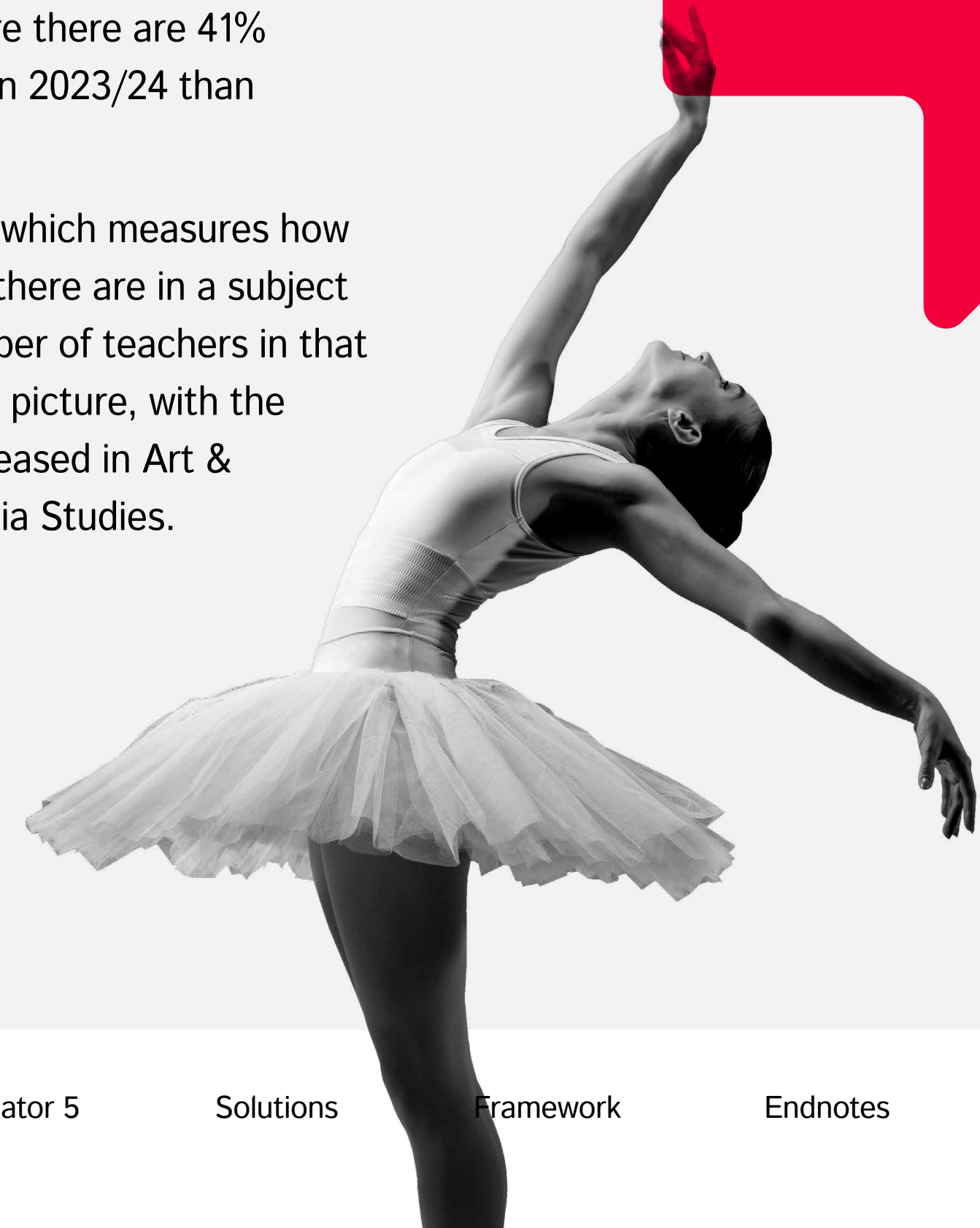
- There were slight increases in the number of taught hours in some Arts subjects at Key Stage 4 – a 1.4% increase in the number of taught hours in Art & Design and a 0.7% increase in Music. This is in line with increased GCSE entries in these subjects in 2024.
- The largest falls in teaching hours have been at Key Stage 5, with the largest being for Drama (7%), likely reflecting the fall in entries at A Level in 2023/24.

Indicator 4 – Arts teacher recruitment and retention

- Recruitment to Initial Teacher Training (ITT) in Arts subjects has been a particular concern in the 2023/24 academic year. Comparing 2023/24 to when ITT recruitment was particularly strong in the 2020/21 academic year (during the Covid-19 pandemic), the number of recruits for Art & Design has fallen by 84%. There have also been dramatic falls in the number of new ITT entrants in Music (76%), Drama (60%) and Design & Technology (45%) over this same time period. From 2022/23 to 2023/24 alone, falls in Expressive Arts ITT recruitment average 30%.

- In light of these alarming figures, it is no surprise that the new government has only met 44% of its target for new ITT recruits in Art & Design, as well as a mere 27% for Music and for Design & Technology.
- The government's teacher vacancy rate data shows that the number of unfilled vacancies has generally increased across Arts subjects, especially in Drama where there are 41% more unfilled vacancies in 2023/24 than there were in 2022/23.
- The vacancy rate data – which measures how many unfilled vacancies there are in a subject relative to the total number of teachers in that subject – shows a similar picture, with the vacancy rate having increased in Art & Design, Drama, and Media Studies.

Recruitment to Initial Teacher Training (ITT) in Arts subjects has been a particular concern.



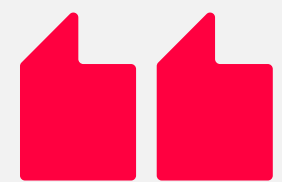
Executive Summary

Indicator 5: The ‘Arts entitlement gap’ and ‘Arts enrichment gap’

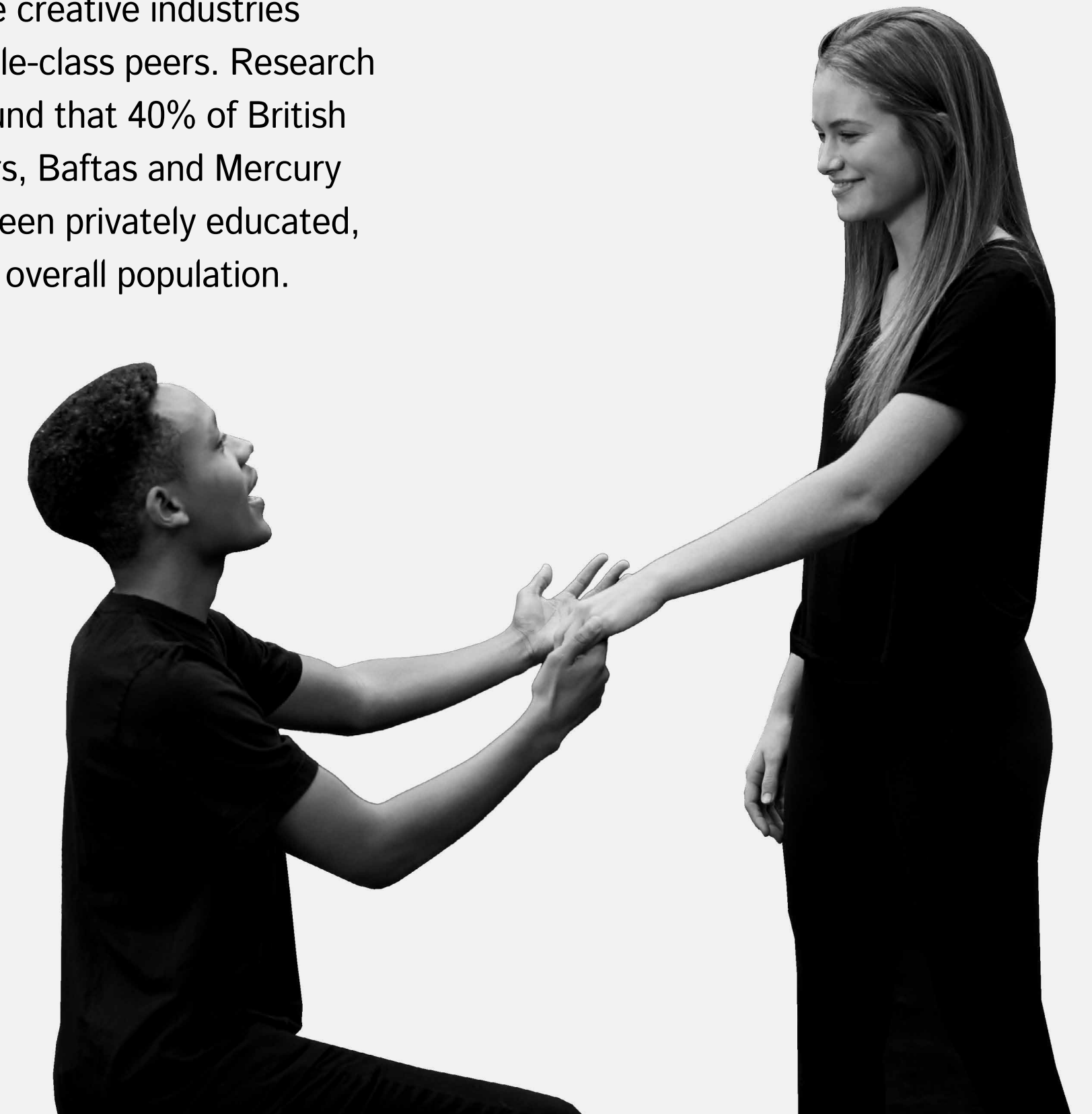
- There is a clear socioeconomic disparity in young people’s study of the Arts at both GCSE and A Level. A total of 6.6% of all GCSE entries are in Arts subjects in the most deprived fifth of local authorities. By contrast, 8.3% of all GCSE entries are in Arts subjects in the least deprived fifth of local authorities. Across the most deprived fifth of local authorities, Arts subjects make up 4.2% of entries into all A Levels in 2023/24. By contrast, they make up 5.4% of all entries in the most affluent fifth of local authorities.

- New research from the Education Policy Institute highlights that children in independent schools are much more likely to attend extra-curricular Arts and Music activities than children in any type of state school. Students who are eligible for free school meals are also much less likely than their peers who are not eligible for free school meals to attend Arts and Music activities. The Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) latest survey of youth participation in extra-curricular activities also finds that 56% of children living in the two most deprived fifths of the country participate in extra-curricular activities – including Arts activities – compared to 76% in the least deprived fifth.

- Other new research captures the consequence of these disparities in access to the Arts for young people. The Sutton Trust conducted data analysis that shows that young adults from working class backgrounds are four times less likely to work in the creative industries compared to their middle-class peers. Research by the Labour Party found that 40% of British nominees for the Oscars, Baftas and Mercury Prizes since 2014 had been privately educated, compared to 7% of the overall population.



There is a clear socioeconomic disparity in young people’s study of the Arts at both GCSE and A Level.



Explanatory Notes

A focus on England

This Report Card has a focus on the education system in England due to its specific accountability measures from 2010 which exclude the Arts (at the time of writing these are under review.)^x We have not included data for total entries across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, as other nations have not had the EBacc in place and have their own very different policy drivers.

A note on our numbers

Where there are numbers after decimal points in the data, we have generally rounded numbers up (0.5-0.9) or down (0.1-0.4), although occasionally in this edition we opt not to do this in highlighting year-on-year changes.

The number of GCSE entries has increased between 2009/10.

A note on cohort changes over time

In our 2024 Report Card we took a long view and surveyed changes over time (2009/10-2022/3). Because cohort sizes and exam entries change over time, we revealed that it was not just the number of entries falling, but also the composition of entries, i.e., Expressive Arts subjects comprised 14% of all GCSE entries in 2009/10, and this figure had halved by 2022/3, standing at 7% of all entries. This year we similarly examine the composition of entries to reveal further decline.

What do we mean by Expressive Arts?

The Cultural Learning Alliance (CLA) has adopted Expressive Arts as the collective term for Arts subjects in schools. In Wales, Expressive Arts is one of six equal 'areas of learner experience' mapped on to four core purposes of schooling. CLA's definition, as with the Welsh definition, goes beyond the existing four discrete art forms currently embedded in England's system (Art & Design, Dance, Drama and Music) to include Film and Digital Media (which spans TV, film, radio and games design). However, given the existing structures within the education system in England, this Report Card has a focus on Art & Design, Dance, Drama and Music – with the occasional addition of Media, Film and TV Studies, and also Design & Technology, since Design is shared by two subjects within the curriculum (although in Wales this sits within Science and Technology).

The Cultural Learning Alliance uses Expressive Arts as the collective term for Arts subjects in schools.



Explanatory Notes

As at the date of publication, Film and Digital Media are not formal National Curriculum requirements (the National Curriculum is currently being considered by the Curriculum and Assessment Review panel). Film continues to be under-recognised within Arts teaching and learning in many schools – which is regrettable given the significant role it plays in young people’s lives.

GCSEs and A Levels are not the only Arts qualifications available.



Data gaps

The government’s recording of data on Drama and Dance for our five key indicators varies from year to year – perhaps in relation to their status as non-foundation subjects.^{xi} For example, in relation to GCSE entries (Indicator 1) and teacher recruitment (Indicator 4), Dance data is sometimes included as part of PE but also sometimes as part of Drama (e.g., for ITT recruitment data for 2011/12). Drama is sometimes recorded as part of English. Dance is sometimes not recorded at all – for example, in relation to the size of the overall teacher workforce and taught hours (Indicator 3), or teacher recruitment (Indicator 4). The consequence is that Dance is excluded from our coverage of Indicators 3 and 4, reflecting the government’s own lack of data reporting for the subject. We would ask that this data is recorded and made available for 2026.

As in 2024, this Report Card is unable to track coverage of Arts teaching in primary schools as they do not have the qualifications data that is readily available for the secondary sector.

A note on the technical and vocational qualifications landscape

GCSEs and A Levels are not the only Arts qualifications available. There is a wide range of broad-based ‘Applied Generals’ (BTECs^{xii} and Diplomas) which develop creative skills such as enquiry and problem-solving, as well as introducing a range of media. There are many other qualifications beyond BTECs which are in Arts subjects – and a number of Awarding Organisations. Despite this range of qualification types and awarding bodies, government data aggregates these different qualifications under general subject types such as ‘Dance’ or ‘Music’. This is reflected in our reporting on vocational qualification data (for Levels 2 and 3), which is included within our 2025 Report Card for the first time.

A note on equalities data

Ofqual collects in-depth information from Awarding Bodies on pupil demographics and monitors a range of equalities variables, such as ethnicity, gender, free school meals status, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities status, first language, and region. We know, for example, that there is substantial variation in pupil attainment by pupils’ ethnic group.^{xiii} While Ofqual collects this demographic entry data for specific subjects, this data is not routinely reported publicly. It is therefore beyond the scope of this Report Card to cover equalities data in detail for entries into Arts subjects in Indicators 1 and 2 for most equalities variables. However, for this edition of the Report Card we have used DfE free school meals data, together with the Index of Multiple Deprivation data (from the Office of National Statistics) to examine Arts take-up in relation to disadvantage.

Explanatory Notes

A note on Art & Design and Design & Technology from the National Society for Education in Art & Design

Art & Design GCSE and A Level is offered as a broad-based Art, Craft and Design specification, and also as five specialist options (known as endorsements): Fine Art; Graphic Communication; Textile Design; Three-dimensional design; and Photography. All GCSE Art and Design options are assessed using the same assessment objectives, but the content varies according to the specialism. Since the introduction of a new GCSE specification for Design & Technology in 2019, there has been a marked increase in entries for GCSE endorsements in Graphic Communication, Textile Design and Three-dimensional Design – and a fall in entries for Fine Art and the general specification.

At the same time there has been a significant fall in entries for Design & Technology GCSE and A Level. Given the increasing number of schools that have merged the two subject areas due to shortage of staff and reduced budgets, it is likely that these Art & Design endorsements are being offered as an alternative to Design & Technology. This raises concerns about student choice – these subjects are very different in both pedagogy and progression pathways and should be taught by subject specialists if learners are to have the very best and most appropriate support.



We have concerns about student choice and access to subject specialists.



Introduction and methodology

Our indicators

As in the first edition of our Report Card in 2024, our analysis this year focuses on five key indicators for access to and participation in the Expressive Arts for secondary school-aged children and young people in England. This year we are building on our previously published edition by including Level 2 vocational qualifications data for Indicator 1 (alongside GCSE entries) and Level 3 vocational data for Key Stage 5 (alongside A Levels) in the Indicator 2 section. We have also added data on what we term an ‘Arts entitlement gap’ in Indicator 5. The five indicators are:

1. Arts GCSE and other Level 2 vocational qualifications entries
2. Arts A Level and other Level 3 vocational qualifications entries and Higher Education progression in creative subjects
3. Number of Arts teachers and hours taught in Arts subjects
4. Arts teacher recruitment and retention
5. The ‘Arts entitlement gap’ and ‘Arts enrichment gap’



Our findings are drawn from publicly available free school meals data from the DfE. We have also applied Index of Multiple Deprivation data from the ONS.

Our data

Our analysis focuses on data for the 2023/24 academic year for secondary schools in England, with all data being drawn from official Department for Education (DfE) statistics, Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) reports or Office for National Statistics (datasets). Our findings for our new ‘Arts entitlement gap’ in Indicator 5 (now introduced alongside our ‘Arts enrichment gap’) are drawn from publicly available free school meals data from the DfE. We have also applied Index of Multiple Deprivation data from the Office of National Statistics. As there is no single, publicly available dataset that covers socio-economic disparities in young people’s Arts participation outside of school, our findings for Indicator 5 (the ‘Arts enrichment gap’) are drawn from a range of the latest cited literature.

Data gaps

We acknowledge that – as in 2024 – this Report Card does not include analysis on Expressive Arts subjects in primary schools, reflecting the current lack of data on Arts teaching in the primary phase. Similarly, some of our analysis reflects the limitations of publicly available data. It would be helpful if DfE were to collect data on the number of Arts specialists in primary schools, as well as how many hours are spent on each national curriculum area (they already collect this data for each secondary subject area). Government recording of data on Dance is often lacking and this is reflected in our reporting on Dance for Indicators 3 and 4. We would also request that DfE collect this data. For full details, see Explanatory Note on page 14.

Indicator 1: Arts GCSE and other Level 2 vocational qualifications entries

Expressive Arts GCSE entries

The total number of GCSE entries for the 2023/24 academic year was 5,811,790 – an increase of 4.8% from the 2022/23 academic year. This increase is explained by the 5.2% increase in the number of 16-year-olds sitting GCSEs between the 2023 and 2024 assessment years. However, despite this notable increase in overall entries, the total number of Expressive Arts entries at GCSE has fallen by 0.15%. As a consequence, while Expressive Arts entries made up 7.0% of all GCSE entries in the 2022/23 academic year, they make up 6.8% of all entries in 2023/24.

As detailed in Table 1 below, the largest falls in entries between this academic year and the previous year have been in Media/Film/TV studies (20.6%) and Dance (5.6%). There have been modest increases in the number of entries for Art & Design (a rise of 2.3%) and Design & Technology (1%) – however, these fall below the 4.8% increase in overall entries, highlighting an enduring pattern of a relative decrease in Expressive Arts entries.



Expressive Arts entries made up 7.0% of all GCSE entries in the 2022/23 academic year; they make up 6.8% of all entries in 2023/24.



Indicator 1: GCSE entries

Music has defied this pattern, with a promising 7.1% increase in entries between 2022/23 and 2023/24. However, this increase follows a fall of 12% in entries the previous year, so the trend is still overall one of decline for Music entries. The refreshed National Plan for Music Education, published in 2022, is too new to have had an effect on this data, and the recent reorganisation of the Hubs, down from 116 to 43 larger Hubs, has created some issues.^{xiv} The increase in GCSE entries may actually be a consequence of pupils being directed away from studying Level 2 vocational qualifications in Music, some of which have been discontinued or are no longer included in the government's Progress 8 system for producing secondary school league tables (such as Level 2 Music qualifications by the NCFE awarding body). This supposition is supported by the significant decrease in Music Level 2 vocational entries described below.

Vocational qualifications (Level 2)

Data on Expressive Arts entries for vocational qualifications taken at Level 2 (the same assessment phase as GCSEs) also shows an overall fall. This data was not included in our survey last year. Between 2022/23 and 2023/24, the total number of entries for Level 2 vocational qualifications in Arts subjects fell by 15%. Between 2022/23 and 2023/24 entries fell by a shocking 40% in Art & Design subjects, and 34% in Music. Our analysis also highlights falls of 11.6% for Drama entries. These falls may reflect the previous government's policy of terminating current Level 2 vocational qualifications by 2025, leading to schools reducing the availability of these courses to their pupils. Equally, a 14% increase in the number of entries for Level 2 vocational Dance qualifications between 2022/23 and 2023/24 may reflect Dance pupils being moved from GCSE entry to vocational entry.

Table 1

Percentage change in Arts Expressive Arts subject entries between 2022/23 and 2023/24

GCSE subject	Percentage change in number of GCSE entries between 2022/23 and 2023/24
Art & Design	+2.28%
Dance	-5.58%
Design & Technology	+1.03%
Drama	-1.20%
Media/Film/TV Studies	-20.64%
Music	+7.06%
Performing/Expressive Arts	-3.22%

Indicator 1: GCSE entries

There is a further possibility that the recent exclusion of awarding body RSL's 'Creative and Performing Arts' Level 2 qualification from the government's Progress 8 system for generating school league tables may have led to many schools discontinuing teaching for this qualification and moving pupils towards Level 2 Dance qualifications as an alternative.

A picture of long-term decline since 2010

These falls in Arts entries between the last two academic years take place against a background of a gradually diminishing Expressive Arts participation at GCSE over the last 15 years. Expressive Arts entries made up 14% of all GCSE entries in 2010/11. They made up 7.0% of all GCSE entries in the 2022/23 academic year, and this percentage has decreased to 6.8% in 2023/4. Equally, while the number of Key Stage 4 pupils sitting GCSEs has increased by 16% between 2015/16 and 2023/24, the number of entries into GCSE Express Arts subjects has fallen by 26% in the same time period.

Building on analysis in our previous Report Card, we can see that there has been a remarkable 42% decrease in total Arts entries at GCSE between the 2009/10 academic year and 2023/24. The number of Design & Technology entries has fallen by a remarkable 70% between 2009/10 and 2023/24, while the number of Dance entries has fallen by 59% over the same time period. Media/Film/TV Studies entries have also fallen by 57% between 2009/10 and 2023/24.

If we look more recently, we can see there has also been a worrying 17% decrease in entries for Drama GCSE from the year of the Covid-19 pandemic (2019/20) to the 2023/24 academic year.



There are some key differences in Expressive Arts entries between parts of England.

Regional variation

Further to these overall national patterns, there are also some key differences in Expressive Arts entries between parts of England. Analysing the percentage of total GCSE entries in Expressive Arts subjects by region, the highest percentage of Arts entries are in the South West (8.5%) and the South East (8.2%). These are both regions with the lowest percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals in England. By contrast, the percentage of entries to Expressive Arts subjects are lowest in Yorkshire and the Humber, West Midlands (6.9%) and the North East (7.1%) – with the latter two of these regions having the highest percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals (London is an outlier here, as we explain in more detail in relation to A Levels in Box 1 on page 23). This suggests that there is a relationship between the level of poverty and deprivation of a geographic area and participation in Arts in Key Stage 4.

Entries analysed by area deprivation level

This relationship is further supported by our analysis of how entries into Arts subjects at GCSE vary between local authorities based on the level of deprivation in the area. Using the Office of National Statistics Index of Multiple Deprivation, which brings together several measures of poverty in local authorities, we can see that areas with higher levels of deprivation have lower participation in Arts at GCSE level. A total of 6.6% of all GCSE entries are in Arts subjects in the most deprived fifth of local authorities. By contrast, 8.3% of all GCSE entries are in Arts subjects in the least deprived fifth of local authorities. In line with the regional entries data, this suggests that access to and participation in Arts GCSEs is related to the affluence of an area a child grows up in.

Indicator 1: GCSE entries

Figure 1
Percentage of GCSE entries in Expressive Arts subjects by local authority deprivation

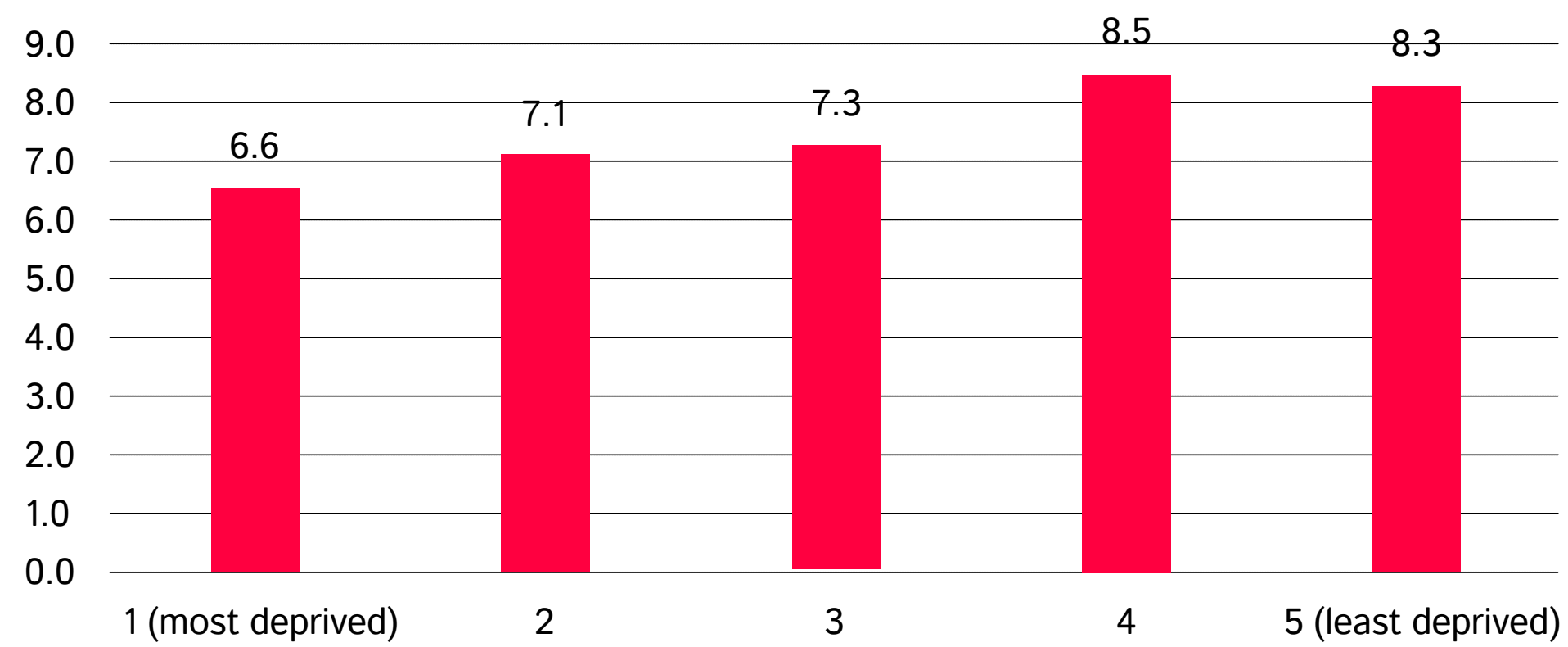


Table 2
Percentage of GCSE entries in Expressive Arts subjects by region

Region	Percentage of GCSE entries in Arts subjects
East Midlands	7.2
East of England	8.0
London	7.0
North East	7.1
North West	7.2
South East	8.2
South West	8.5
West Midlands	6.9
Yorkshire and the Humber	6.8

Indicator 2: Arts A Level and other Level 3 vocational qualification entries and Higher Education progression

Arts A Level entries

While the total number of A Level entries has increased by 1.8% between 2022/23 and the 2023/24 academic year, the percentage of those entries that are in Expressive Arts subjects has fallen by 1.3% in the same time period. While Arts entries made up 9.8% of all A Level entries in the 2022/23 academic year, they make up 9.4% of all entries in 2023/24.

Decreases and increases

The largest fall in entries between 2022/23 and 2023/24 has been in Drama (6.7%), followed by Media/Film/TV Studies (4.5%). Decreases in other subjects have been smaller, such as Design & Technology (0.3%). By contrast, there have been small increases in entries for Music (0.3%) and Art & Design (0.3%) – although this increase falls well below the increase in overall entries across all subjects at A Level.

A long-term picture of decline since 2010

These changes in the number of Expressive Arts A Level entries between 2022/23 and 2023/24 take place in a context of large falls in A Level Expressive Arts entries since 2010. While the total number of A Level entries across all subjects increased by 1.3% between 2010 and 2024, there has been a fall in the number of Drama entries of 48%, as well as dramatic falls in Music (43%) and Design & Technology (41%). This year's data shows that this pattern of an overall fall in Arts participation at Key Stage 5 continues. Expressive Arts entries made up 13% of all A Level entries in 2009/10 and now make up 9.4% of all entries in 2023/24.



The pattern of an overall fall in Arts participation at Key Stage 5 continues.

Indicator 2: Arts A Level and other Level 3 vocational qualification entries and Higher Education progression in creative subjects

Regional variation

In addition to these changes in entries at a national level, there are also some worrying disparities in Expressive Arts A Level entries at a regional level. The North East, the West Midlands and the North West are the regions of England with the highest percentage of pupils on free school meals. The percentage of A Level entries in Arts subjects is also lowest in these three regions (excluding London): 4.1% in the West Midlands, 4.4% in the North East, and 4.6% in the North West. By contrast, the regions of England with the lowest percentage of pupils on free school meals have higher Arts participation at A Level, with Arts entries making up 5.6% of all A Level entries in the South East and 5.3% in the South West. This suggests that there is a relationship between the poverty of a region and pupil participation in and access to A Level Arts.

Entries analysed by area deprivation level

In addition to the regional picture, data from the local level also suggests a relationship between the relative poverty of an area and participation in the Expressive Arts at A Level. Using the Index of Multiple Deprivation data (published by the Office of National Statistics and covering the local authorities of England), it appears that areas that have higher levels of deprivation have lower levels of entries into Arts subjects at A Level. Across the most deprived fifth of local authorities, Arts make up 4.2% of entries into all A Levels in 2023/24. By contrast, Arts subjects make up 5.4% of all entries in the most affluent fifth of local authorities. This suggests that there is a relationship between the relative poverty of an area and pupils in that area’s participation in – and access to – study of the Expressive Arts at A Level.

Table 3

Percentage of A Level entries in Expressive Arts subjects by region

Region	Percentage of A Level entries in Arts subjects (2023/24)
East Midlands	5.1
East of England	5.8
London	3.5
North East	4.4
North West	4.6
South East	5.6
South West	5.3
West Midlands	4.1
Yorkshire and The Humber	4.6

Please note these figures are rounded up/down. The percentage for the NW is 4.57% and for Yorkshire and the Humber the figure is 4.64%.



There are some worrying disparities in Arts A Level entries at a regional level.

Indicator 2: Arts A Level and other Level 3 vocational qualification entries and Higher Education progression in creative subjects

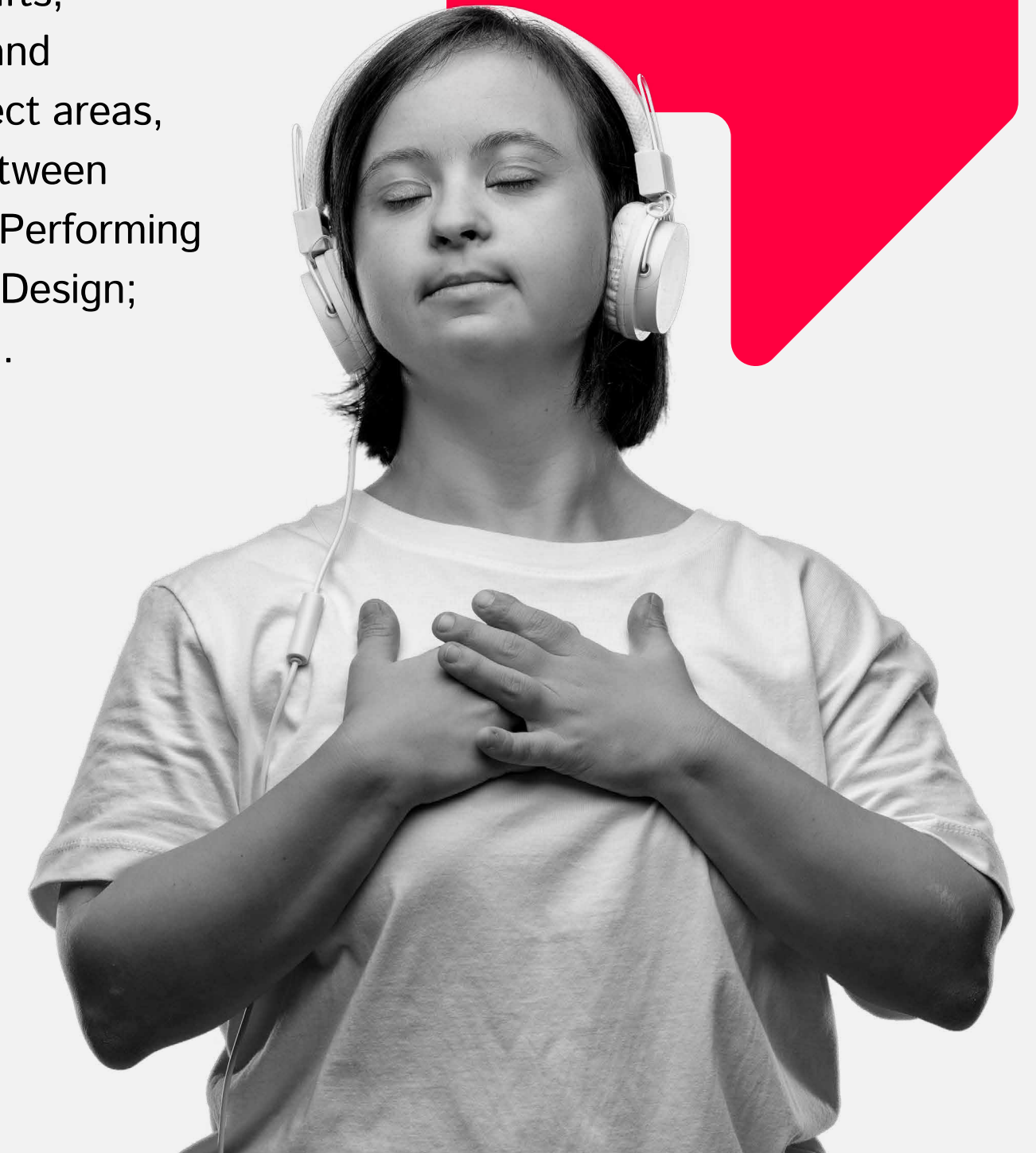
Box 1 – London as an outlier in regional data

For both GCSE and A Level entry data, London seems to challenge the pattern of a relationship between free school meals eligibility and Expressive Arts entries. For example, London has the lowest percentage of A Level entries in Arts subjects (3.5%) but has a relatively lower proportion of pupils on free school meals compared to other regions. This exception to the pattern may be explained by the fact that London has the highest percentage of A Level entries in STEM subjects (40%, compared to 35% at the national level), suggesting there might be specific demographic and structural reasons separate from poverty that lead to pupils in London pursuing STEM subjects over Expressive Arts subjects. Although it is difficult to present a general picture across London, as there is such a diverse and moving picture between boroughs, London is the region in England with the highest proportion of young people from an ethnically diverse background, and there is evidence that these young people are more likely to study STEM subjects at A Level (FFT Datalab, 2023).

Vocational Qualifications (Level 3)

Most Key Stage 5 students study A Levels, but a substantial group take other Level 3 options, including BTECs, T Levels and other applied general and technical qualifications. Ofqual groups the wide range of Expressive Arts vocational and technical qualifications under three categories: Performing Arts; Crafts, Creative Arts and Design; and Media and Communication. Across all three subject areas, there have been declines in entries between 2022/23 and 2023/24: a fall of 4% for Performing Arts; 17% in Crafts, Creative Arts and Design; and 9% for Media and Communication.

The number of Arts vocational qualifications taken has declined since 2022.



Indicator 2: Arts A Level and other Level 3 vocational qualification entries and Higher Education progression in creative subjects

These falls take place in a context of considerable increases in post-16 vocational and technical Expressive Arts entries between 2019/20 and 2021/22. Over this time period, entries increased by 10% in Performing Arts and 11% in Media and Communication. Entries in Crafts, Creative Arts and Design nearly doubled between 2019/20 and 2021/22. Given the fall in A Level Arts entries between 2019/20 and 2021/22, this pattern suggests that pupils interested in pursuing Expressive Arts subjects at the post-16 phase may have moved away from A Level study to vocational study.

Despite these increases, entries in Expressive Arts technical and qualifications declined after 2021/22. Between 2021/22 and 2023/24, entries in Performing Arts fell by 22% and in Media and Communication by 6%. Entries have fallen especially sharply over this time period in Crafts, Creative Arts and Design, with a fall of 28%. These falls in entries may reflect schools decreasing their entries into BTECs, the primary post-16 technical and vocational qualification, in light of the former government's 2022 commitment to ceasing funding for BTECs by 2025.

Higher Education

The most recent available HESA data on Higher Education (HE) participation in Creative, Arts and Design subjects is available for the 2022/23 academic year. According to this data, the total number of undergraduates in English universities has increased by 1.3% between 2021/22 and the 2022/23 academic year. By contrast, the total number of undergraduates in England studying Creative, Arts and Design subjects is 112,390 in 2022/23, representing a fall of 1.6% from 114,225 in 2021/22. This data also shows a fall of 2.4% in the number of undergraduates in creative subjects in England between 2020/21 and 2022/23, despite a 4% increase in the total number of all undergraduates in the same time period.



Creative subjects are making up a smaller proportion of all undergraduate degrees in England.

Relatedly, Creative, Arts and Design subjects are making up a smaller proportion of all undergraduate degrees in England. In 2020/21, 8.2% of all undergraduate degrees were taken in Creative, Arts and Design subjects. By 2022/23, this figure had fallen to 7.7%. All of this points to a diminishing presence of creative subjects in university undergraduate education in England. For example, at least 14 universities have made significant cuts to their Arts and Creative subjects departments in 2024.^{xv}

The number of undergraduates studying Arts subjects is declining.



Indicator 3: Number of Arts teachers and hours of Arts subjects taught

Number of Expressive Arts teachers

Between 2022/23 and 2023/24, there has been a slight increase in England in the number of teachers for most Expressive Arts subjects across all Key Stages in secondary schools. The largest increase has been in Music (3.6%). There have been very small increases for Drama, (0.8%) and Art & Design (0.7%). The number of teachers in these subjects has increased at a higher rate than the overall teacher workforce, which grew by 0.05% between 2022/23 and 2023/24. By contrast, the number of Media Studies teachers fell by 2.2% in the same time period.

A long-term picture of decline

While these increases are promising, it is worth taking a wider view and noting that this still makes the Arts teacher workforce much smaller than it was in 2011/12, the earliest year after the 2010 change of government for which data is available. Between 2011/12 and 2023/24, the overall secondary teacher workforce has grown by 6.7% – however, the number of teachers in Expressive Arts has fallen by 27% (this figure stood at 21% in our 2024 Report Card). Decreases in teacher numbers have been especially high for Design & Technology (52%), Media Studies (40%), Drama (21%) and Art & Design (9%).

Hours of Expressive Arts subjects taught: Key Stage 3

The number of taught hours in Arts subjects at Key Stage 3 is largely the same in 2024 as it was in 2023. However, there have been some falls, with taught hours for Design & Technology falling by 4% between 2022/23 and 2023/24. Taught hours have slightly increased for Music (2%) over the same time period for the Key Stage 3 phase. Taking a wider historical view, there has been a 60% fall in the number of hours of Design & Technology taught to Key Stage 3 pupils between 2011/12 and 2023/24. This is particularly concerning given that GCSE choices are made at the end of this Key Stage.

There have been slight increases in the number of Arts teachers (3.6% for music).



Indicator 3: Number of Arts teachers and hours of Arts subjects taught

There has been a 60% fall in the number of hours of Design & Technology taught to Key Stage 3 pupils between 2011/12 and 2023/24.



Hours of Expressive Arts subjects taught: Key Stage 4

The number of taught hours at Key Stage 4 is largely similar in 2024 to 2023. There were slight increases in some subjects – a 1.4% increase in the number of taught hours in Art & Design and a 0.7% increase in Music. This is in line with increased GCSE entries in these subjects in 2024. However, as there was a 7% increase in Music entries in 2024, a 0.7% increase in taught hours in the subject suggests that there has not been a proportionate increase in the amount of contact time with teachers received by GCSE Music pupils.

Hours of Expressive Arts subjects taught: Key Stage 5

For the total number of taught hours in Arts subjects in secondary schools, falls between 2022/23 and 2023/24 are highest at Key Stage 5. The largest fall has been for Drama (7%), likely reflecting the fall in entries at A Level in 2023/24. Similarly, there has been a 3% fall in taught hours at Key Stage 5 for Media Studies, in line with the fall in A Level entries for the subject. Unusually, there has been a 4.5% fall in hours spent teaching Music at Key Stage 5, despite the 0.3% increase in Music A Level entries in 2023/24.



For the total number of taught hours in Arts subjects in secondary schools, falls are highest at Key Stage 5.

Indicator 4: Arts teacher recruitment and retention

Expressive Arts teacher recruitment

Recruitment to Initial Teacher Training (ITT) in Expressive Arts subjects has been a particular concern in the 2023/24 academic year, with falls averaging 66% since 2020/21. Comparing 2023/24 to when ITT recruitment was particularly strong in the 2020/21 academic year (during the Covid-19 pandemic), the number of recruits for Art & Design has fallen by 84%. There have also been dramatic falls in the number of new ITT entries in Music (76%), Drama (60%) and Design & Technology (45%) over this same time period.

From 2022/23 to 2023/24 alone, falls average 30% in Expressive Arts ITT recruitment.

These findings make clear that pandemic and immediate post-pandemic improvements in ITT recruitment have concluded, and that ITT is returning to the pattern of low recruitment for Arts subjects that has been the overall norm since 2010.

In light of these alarming figures, it is no surprise that the government has only met 44% of its target for new ITT recruits in Art & Design, as well as a mere 27% for Music and for Design & Technology. As ITT recruitment targets are derived from a formula based on the number of teachers leaving the profession in specific subjects, and the demand for teachers that schools are reporting in the annual workforce census, the failure to meet these targets may mean secondary schools simply not having enough teachers to offer much or any Arts to pupils. Any policy changes affecting (and revaluing) the Expressive Arts in the school curriculum in England which emerge from the current Curriculum and Assessment Review will require commensurate investment in Arts teacher recruitment to meet increased demand from schools.

Table 4

Percentage decrease in ITT recruits in Expressive Arts subjects

Subject	Percentage change in new ITT entrants – 2020/21 to 2023/24	Percentage change in new ITT entrants – 2022/23 to 2023/24
Art & Design	-84%	-27%
Music	-76%	-33%
Drama	-60%	-32%
Design & Technology	-45%	-29%

NB: Figures for Dance are unavailable as this data is not reported by the government

Indicator 4: Arts teacher recruitment and retention

Expressive Arts teacher retention

On Expressive Arts teacher retention, we can see from the government’s teacher vacancy rate data that the number of unfilled vacancies has generally increased across Expressive Arts subjects, especially in Drama where there are 41% more unfilled vacancies in 2023/24 than there were in 2022/23. This may reflect an increased demand for Arts teachers from schools, but a lack of supply of these Arts teachers in the labour market.

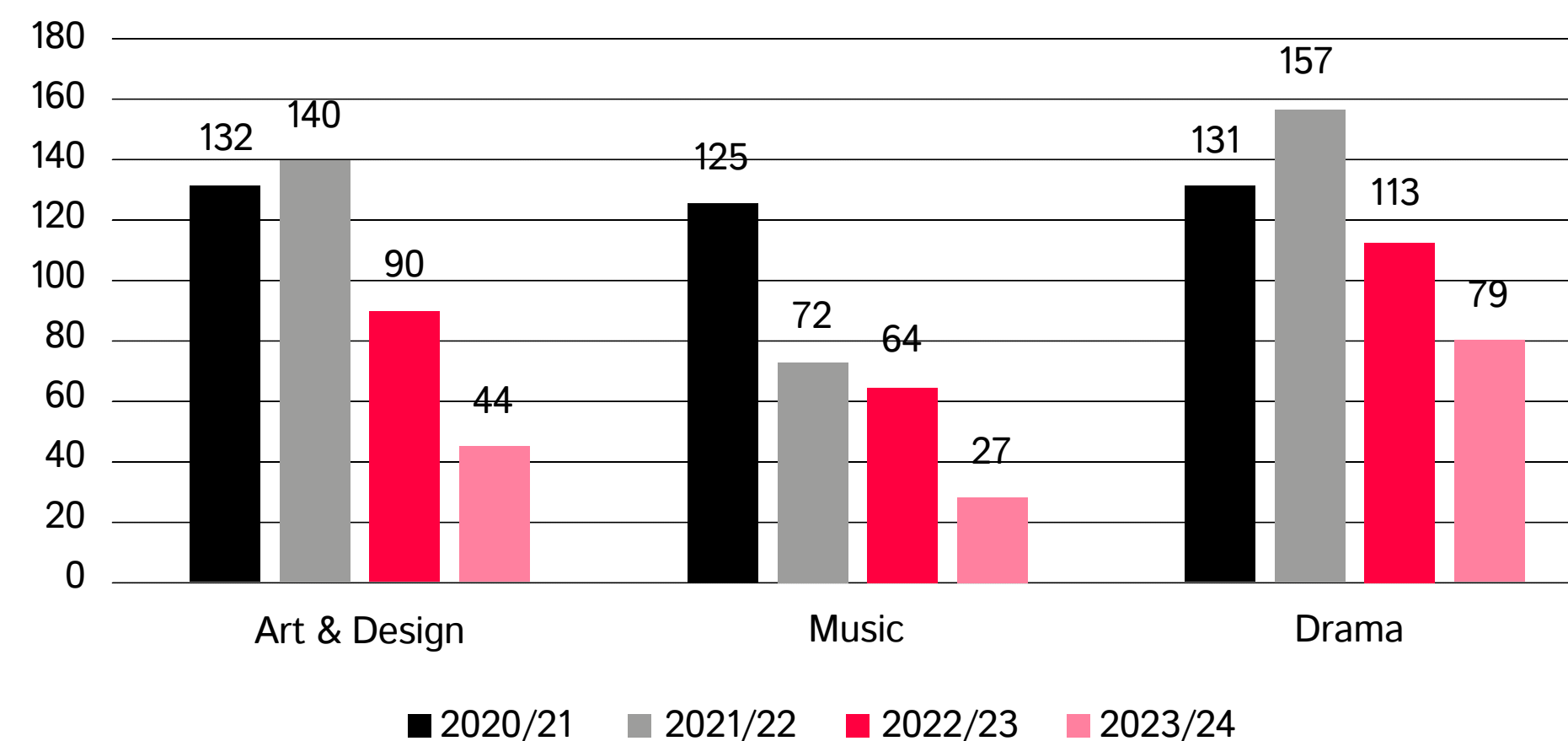
The vacancy rate data, which measures how many unfilled vacancies there are in a subject relative to the total number of teachers in that subject, shows a similar picture with the vacancy rate having increased in Art & Design, Drama, and Media Studies. The vacancy rate is especially high for Music at 1.5 for the 2023/24 academic year, placing the subject in league with Physics and with Computing, both subjects for which the government has specifically developed targeted recruitment and retention strategies.

Box 2 - Initial Teacher Training for Dance & more widely

The government currently does not report data on the number of Dance ITT entrants. This creates challenges for monitoring the state of Dance ITT. However, the fact that there are currently only a very small number of providers of the Dance PGCE in England, and a very small number of School-Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) places, suggests an equally small number of annual entrants to Dance ITT.

It is worth noting that it is very difficult to establish exactly which courses are available for Expressive Arts ITT subjects more widely. We would suggest that this information could be made much more easily available for prospective students. In the meantime, CLA is planning further research into the data gaps related to Arts ITT availability.

Figure 3
Percentage of ITT recruitment targets met in Expressive Arts subjects by year



NB: Figures for Dance are unavailable as this data is not reported by the government

Indicator 4: Arts teacher recruitment and retention

Recruitment to Initial Teacher Training (ITT) in Arts subjects has been a particular concern in 2023/24.



Table 5

Unfilled vacancies for Expressive Arts teachers in England by year

Subject	2022/23	2023/24	Percentage change between 2022/23 and 2023/24
Art & Design	81	92	+13%
Drama	39	59	+41%
Music	83	103	+21%
Media Studies	5	12	+82%

NB: Figures for Dance are unavailable as this data is not reported by the government

Table 6

Vacancy rate for Expressive Arts teachers in England by year

Subject	2022/23	2023/24
Art & Design	0.7	0.8
Drama	0.5	0.7
Music	1.2	1.5
Media Studies	0.1	0.3

NB: Figures for Dance are unavailable as this data is not reported by the government

Indicator 5: The ‘Arts entitlement gap’ and ‘Arts enrichment gap’

What we mean by an ‘entitlement gap’

The ‘attainment gap’ refers to the differences in academic outcomes (such as exam grades) between young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and those from more advantaged backgrounds. The ‘Arts entitlement gap’ similarly refers to the differences in access to and participation in the Expressive Arts in schools between young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and those from more advantaged backgrounds.

It is important to identify this gap because of strong evidence of the connection between Arts engagement and the academic achievements and values of young adults. Previous longitudinal research has robustly shown an association between involvement in Arts activities in Arts-rich schools and pupils’ later academic achievement and community involvement. This association is especially strong for the most disadvantaged students (Catterall., 2009).

The ‘Arts entitlement gap’ at GCSE and A Level

As presented in previous sections of this report, there is a clear socioeconomic disparity in young people’s study of the Expressive Arts at GCSE and A Level.

Using the government’s Index of Multiple Deprivation data on the relative poverty of different local authorities in England, we identified that areas with higher levels of deprivation have lower participation in Arts at GCSE level. A total of 6.6% of all GCSE entries are in Arts subjects in the most deprived fifth of local authorities. By contrast, 8.3% of all GCSE entries are in Arts subjects in the least deprived fifth of local authorities.

The ‘Arts entitlement gap’ refers to the differences in Arts access in school between young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and those from more advantaged backgrounds.



Indicator 5: The ‘Arts entitlement gap’ and ‘Arts enrichment gap’

There are also variations in GCSE entries between regions which may reflect differences in Arts GCSE participation based on a young person’s socioeconomic background. Analysing the percentage of total GCSE entries in Arts subjects by region, the highest percentage of Arts entries are in the South West (8.5%) and the South East (8.2%). These are both regions with the lowest percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals in England. By contrast, the percentage of entries to Arts subjects are lowest in Yorkshire and the Humber, the North East, and the West Midlands – with the latter two regions having the highest percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals in the country.

At A Level, using the government’s Index of Multiple Deprivation data, we can see that areas that have higher levels of deprivation have lower levels of entries into Arts at A Level. Across the most deprived fifth of local authorities, Arts make up 4.2% of entries into all A Levels in 2023/24. By contrast, Arts subjects make up 5.4% of all entries in the most affluent fifth of local authorities. Socioeconomic disparities are also visible in the differences in entries to Arts A Levels between regions. The North East, the West Midlands and the North West are the regions of England with the highest percentage of pupils on free school meals. The percentage of A Level entries in Arts subjects is also lowest in both regions, standing at 4.4% in the North and 4.1% in the West Midlands. By contrast, the regions of England with the lowest percentage of pupils on free school meals have higher Arts participation at A Level, with Arts entries making up 5.6% of all A Level entries in the South East and 5.3% in the South West.

Arts disparities between independent and state school provision

Research has highlighted the specific disparity in access to and achievement in Expressive Arts subjects between independent and state schools. A study by a research team at University College London concluded that when socioeconomic status is taken into account, children in state schools achieve largely the same exam results in Science, Maths and English as their peers in independent schools. However, when it comes to Expressive Arts subjects, children in state schools still achieve lower grades than their peers in independent schools. This reflects the focus in state schools in recent years on improving pupil progress in ‘core’ subjects, frequently at the expense of engagement with the Arts. The researchers highlight the potential long-term impact of these disparities on state-educated children participating in the Arts later on in life (Anders et al., 2024).

What we mean by an ‘enrichment gap’

There is also considerable evidence for the existence of an ‘enrichment gap’, whereby young people from wealthier backgrounds have much greater access to extra-curricular Arts provision and opportunities compared to their peers from lower-income backgrounds.

The ‘Arts entitlement gap’ reflects the state school focus on ‘core’ subjects, frequently at the expense of Arts engagement.

Indicator 5: The ‘Arts entitlement gap’ and ‘Arts enrichment gap’

Gaps in access to enrichment for children and young people

We summarised a wide range of literature in our 2024 Report Card that supports the existence of an enrichment gap. Three recent pieces of research further support the existence of this gap. The Education Policy Institute (EPI) conducted analysis of the Longitudinal Survey of Young People in England: Cohort 2 (LSYPE2), the National Pupil Database and HESA data, and found that children in independent schools are much more likely to attend extra-curricular Art and Music activities than children in any type of state school. Students who are eligible for free school meals are also much less likely than their peers who are not eligible for free school meals to attend Art and Music activities. This is especially troubling as the study also finds that children who attend clubs for Art and Music are 56% more likely to get admitted to university than their peers who do not attend such clubs (Education Policy Institute, 2024).

These findings point in the same direction as results from a new government survey. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) piloted a new survey of young people in 2024 to understand young people’s participation in, and access to, extra-curricular activities. The survey is being trialed as a potential replacement for the Department’s previous ‘Taking Part’ survey which has not taken place since 2020.

With 1,981 respondents aged 10-19 years old from across England, the survey found that 19% of young people had participated in an Art or Music extra-curricular activity in the last year. The survey also found that 56% of children living in the two most deprived fifths of the country participate in extra-curricular activities – including Arts activities – compared to 76% in the least deprived fifth. In the most deprived fifths of the country, 34% of children also believe that there are not enough extra-curricular activities in their area, compared to only 24% of children in the least deprived fifth of the country (DCMS, 2024).

The survey also found that while 24% of children who did not participate in extra-curricular activities were unsure where in their local area they could attend any activities, 46% of children were unaware of where they could attend Art or Music related activities.^{xvi} This suggests that knowledge of how to access extra-curricular activities is worse for the Arts than it is for other types of activity (DCMS, 2024).

Gaps in employment and achievement in the creative industries

Several other pieces of research pick up this thread on the long-term consequences of the enrichment gap, showing how disparity in access and participation often leads to disparities in employment and success in the creative industries. The Sutton Trust conducted data analysis that shows that young adults from working class backgrounds are four times less likely to work in the creative industries compared to their middle-class peers. Privately educated students represent over half of Music students at the most prestigious conservatoires (despite making up only approximately 7% of all pupils). At four institutions – Oxford, Cambridge, Kings College London and Bath – more than half of creative students come from affluent backgrounds (The Sutton Trust, 2024).



Children who attend clubs for Art and Music are 56% more likely to get admitted to university than their peers who do not attend such clubs (EPI, 2024).

Indicator 5: The 'Arts entitlement gap' and 'Arts enrichment gap'

The Sutton Trust has found that top-selling musicians are six times more likely than the public to have attended independent schools.



The Sutton Trust's findings dovetail with research by the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (PEC) which identified that only 8% of creatives working in the TV and film industries are from working class backgrounds. By contrast, 60% working in those industries are from middle- and upper-class backgrounds. The concentration of film and TV jobs in London also presents further barriers to working class participation (Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre, 2023).

These disparities also extend to success within the creative industries. Research by the Labour Party in 2024 found that 40% of British nominees for the Oscars, Baftas and Mercury Prizes since 2014 had been privately educated, when only 7% of the overall population are privately educated (The Guardian, 2024). The Sutton Trust has similarly found that top-selling musicians are six times more likely than the public to have attended independent schools (The Sutton Trust, 2024).

Relatedly, analysis by The Guardian found that 30% of creative leaders and 36% of chief executives at the 50 organisations that receive the most funding from Arts Council England, are privately educated. This means that these roles are four times more likely to be filled by the privately educated than by those who are state educated (The Guardian, 2025).

Conclusion

In sum, these additions to the research literature further strengthen the case that there are disparities in children's access to Expressive Arts education and to Arts enrichment, and that these can lead to disparities in progression to Higher Education, employment and success within the creative industries.

Solutions to the problems highlighted in this Report Card

The Cultural Learning Alliance (CLA) sets out the issues, the context and the solutions for Expressive Arts subjects.

In 2024 CLA summarised the changes needed to set a course correction to halt – and reverse – the decline of Expressive Arts teaching and learning in its Blueprint for an Arts-rich Education. These changes were presented in the context of widespread calls for education system change and are about the wider context for schooling as well as the specific issues for Arts education. There is now a Curriculum and Assessment Review underway and the Blueprint, together with the 2024 Report Card and the Arts in Schools report (2023) recommendations, have been presented within CLA's submission of evidence to the Review.

If Expressive Arts subjects become fully embedded and revalued within the curriculum and assessment system, then much will have to change to enable that, including a new approach to, and investment in, Arts teacher recruitment.

The foundational education policy changes that CLA is seeking are:

- 1. Setting new purposes for education** – with the Expressive Arts as one of the group of core and equal curriculum areas mapped onto the new purposes
- 2. A minimum four-hour Arts entitlement within the school week** that enables high-quality, progressive learning experiences to the end of Key Stage 3. There should be an entitlement to Arts opportunities and experiences to the end of Key Stage 4 and post-16. In addition, there should be extra-curricular Expressive Arts opportunities at all stages and phases of schooling
- 3. Complete reform of the school accountability system** to ensure it no longer adversely impacts Expressive Arts subjects – abandoning the EBacc and reforming Progress 8 – and **changes to student assessment** in line with the recommendations of Rethinking Assessment.^{xvii}

4. An entitlement to teacher training and teacher development opportunities for Expressive Arts subjects

Underpinning these system changes there will need to be:

- An emphasis on a rounded learning experience for the personal development and wellbeing of the 'whole child' – for the present as well as for the future
- A focus on representation, breadth and relevance across the Arts curriculum, resources and practice
- A commitment to ensuring that the cultural sector can respond strategically and collaboratively to meet the needs of young people in schools and in their communities and is resourced specifically to support this work.

We want to see equal curriculum areas, including the Expressive Arts.

A new Capabilities Framework for Expressive Arts subjects

In addition to setting out solutions, CLA makes the case for why Expressive Arts subjects matter.

Since the end of 2023, the CLA Evidence and Value Narrative Working Group has been developing a new Capabilities Framework. The Group has several universities represented and has been advised by our Senior Evidence Associate, Professor Pat Thomson of Nottingham University.

The Framework sets out seven capabilities developed through Expressive Arts subjects. Each of these has personal benefits to the child/young person, but also broader societal benefits, and we see the two distinct areas of benefit as connected, not separate. We see the Framework as providing a helpful shared language for talking about the benefits of an Arts-rich education.

Within the Framework, the value of the experiences, skills and knowledge that children and young people acquire through Expressive Arts subjects are described within three pillars that represent the kinds of capabilities/qualities that Expressive Arts subjects and experiences provide. These in turn encompass seven capabilities that have personal benefits for the child, which in turn lead to societal benefits: agency, wellbeing, communication, empathy, collaboration, creativity and interpretation. These three pillars and seven capabilities (as they relate to personal benefits) are summarised here:

BEING AND BECOMING: **Agency | Wellbeing**

1. Agency – confidence | identity | autonomy
2. Wellbeing – flourishing | resilience | pleasure

RELATING: Communication | Empathy | Collaboration

1. Communication – self-expression (including oracy) | listening skills | relationship building
2. Empathy – compassion | understanding and appreciation of difference(s) | open-mindedness
3. Collaboration – co-operation | participation | connectedness

CRITICAL AND CREATIVE THINKING: **Creativity | Interpretation**

1. Creativity – imagination | curiosity | originality
2. Interpretation – independent critical thinking | reflective judgement | meaning making

The detailed version of the Framework will be launched later in 2025 and will include the societal as well as the personal benefits. Each capability is being mapped against the significant body of evidence gathered through Rapid Evidence Reviews across Art and Design, Dance, Drama and Music, commissioned in partnership with the Royal Shakespeare Company through Midlands4Cities.

Endnotes

- i. Cultural Learning Alliance. (2024.) 2024 Report Card p.10. <https://www.culturallearningalliance.org.uk/evidence/#annual> Between 2016/17 and 2022/23, the percentage of schools with no entries for Music increased by 14% (from 28% to 42%). Similarly, 29% of schools in 2016/17 had no entries for Drama GCSE; this figure had increased to 41% by 2022/23.
- ii. Education Policy Institute. (2024). Access to extra-curricular provision and the association with outcomes. <https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/access-to-extra-curricular-provision-and-the-association-with-outcomes/>
- iii. The Sutton Trust. (2024). A Class Act. <https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/a-class-act/>
Tambling, P and Bacon, S. (2023) The Arts in Schools: Foundations for the Future, London, A New Direction and Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation <https://www.culturallearningalliance.org.uk/arts-in-schools/#foundations>
- iv. Ramaiah, B., (2024). 2024 Report Card. Cultural Learning Alliance p.5. <https://www.culturallearningalliance.org.uk/evidence/#annual>
- v. Catterall, J. (2009). Doing well and doing good by doing art: The effects of education in the visual and performing arts on the achievements and values of young adults. ArtsEdSearch. <https://www.artsedsearch.org/study/doing-well-and-doing-good-by-doing-art-the-effects-of-education-in-the-visual-and-performing-arts-on-the-achievements-and-values-of-young-adults/>
- vi. Thomson, P., Hall C., Maloy, L. (2025). Researching the Arts in Primary Schools. The University of Nottingham. <https://artsprimary.com/>
- vii. Colin, N., Stamp, K. (2024). Dancing (Arts for Health). Emerald Press. Open access book. 'In addition to the many physical benefits, studies have demonstrated the value of dance activity for anxiety, stress, depression, memory, language development and attention. Depression scores can reduce significantly after dance interventions which are more efficient at improving mental health than other physical activity.'
- viii. Douglas, L. (2025). Shaping Creative Futures with Young People at the Centre. Cultural Learning Alliance, Latest News. February 2025. <https://www.culturallearningalliance.org.uk/shaping-creative-futures-with-young-people/>
- ix. This figure includes Design & Technology (without it the aggregated figure rises to a remarkable 73%). The figure excludes Dance, for which data is unavailable.
- x. Curriculum and Assessment Review. (2025). <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/curriculum-and-assessment-review>
- xi. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/curriculum-and-assessment-review-publishes-interim-findings>
Foundation Subjects are Art & Design, Citizenship, Computing and IT, Design & Technology, Geography, History, Languages, Music and PE. They differ to the core subjects of English, Maths and Science. There are other subjects which can be compulsory but are not core or foundation subjects, such as religious education, and relationships, sex and health education, which are worth mentioning as they add to the list of subjects schools must allocate time, staff and resources to cover. In 1988 the new secondary National Curriculum specified Art & Design and Music as foundation subjects, with Dance and Drama relegated to sitting within PE and English respectively, and this remains the case today. The Dance content in the PE curriculum is very limited. Dance and Drama are not always available in all schools if there is a school-level decision not to teach them. Art & Design and Music have subject leads at Ofsted; Dance and Drama do not, so there is not parity at inspection level.
- xii. BTEC stands for Business and Technology Council Education Qualification.
- xiii. Education Policy Institute. Annual Report 2024: Ethnicity. [https://epi.org.uk/annual-report-2024-ethnicity-2/#:~:text=By%20age%2011%2C%20many%20ethnic,and%207.9%20months%2C%20respectively\).](https://epi.org.uk/annual-report-2024-ethnicity-2/#:~:text=By%20age%2011%2C%20many%20ethnic,and%207.9%20months%2C%20respectively).)
- xiv. Cultural Learning Alliance. (July 2024.) Latest Thinking: Reflections on Music Hubs. <https://www.culturallearningalliance.org.uk/music-hubs/>
- xv. Full scale of university cuts emerges. Arts Professional (1 May 2024). <https://www.artspromotional.co.uk/news/full-scale-university-arts-cuts-emerges>. Goldsmiths, University of London – cutting Arts and Humanities modules; Oxford Brookes – scrapping its Music department; UEA – 36 academic staff posts to go, with most of the job losses to fall in Arts and Humanities; University of Birmingham – no longer accepting students for its Drama and Theatre Arts course; Bristol Old Vic Theatre School – ending undergraduate training over cost issues; Northampton University – creative courses under threat, including Illustration; The University of Kent – cutting six courses, including Art History and Music, and 58 jobs, to focus on areas like business, psychology, and biosciences.
- xvi. The DCMS survey of young people survey asked about “Art or music groups, courses or clubs” with the aim that this covered everything under Expressive Arts (including Drama and Dance). It gives the examples of what is covered by Arts or Music groups as “painting class, crafts club, drama club, choir or music lessons.”

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Acknowledgements

CLA would like to thank **Baz Ramaiah** (CLA Policy and Evidence Associate) for authoring this Report Card, and all the colleagues who gave their time to read, comment upon and check early drafts, or sections of drafts. In particular:

CLA Associates

Jacqui O'Hanlon MBE, Deputy Executive Director and Director of Creative Learning and Engagement, Royal Shakespeare Company

Professor Pat Thomson, School of Education, University of Nottingham

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Ros Asher, education consultant

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Published 2025 by Cultural Learning Alliance

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