



# Arts in Schools and the Curriculum Review: *Opportunities and ideas for change*

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## A Clare Duffield Foundation Roundtable

15 January 2025

A Background Briefing

### | Overview

To mark the 60th Anniversary of the Clare Duffield Foundation, long-time champion and funder of cultural learning, we are convening a group of leaders in education, culture, philanthropy and the creative industries to consider how best to create equal access to excellent arts education.

In recent months, the government has launched several reviews, consultations, and priorities relevant to this agenda. A summary of some key developments is provided here, along with a more comprehensive briefing on the Curriculum and Assessment Review and a summary of the current context for delivering arts education in schools.

The meeting will explore the potential for change through the Curriculum Review, share policy and practice recommendations from the sector, and discuss the changes needed for children, young people and the workforce to thrive.

## | Curriculum and Assessment Review

### Introduction

Curriculum reform is central to the government's manifesto. As Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer has stated: *"Creativity will be at the heart of the curriculum."* This has been echoed by Secretary of State for Culture, Lisa Nandy MP, who recently declared: *"We are reviewing the curriculum to put arts and music back at the heart of the national curriculum, where they belong."*

### Launch of the Review

The Curriculum and Assessment Review (CAR) is led by Becky Francis, CEO of the Education Endowment Foundation, supported by a panel of experts from academia and the education sector. The review is currently in its first phase, following national consultations and roadshows, with thousands of submissions received. The interim report is expected in Spring 2025, with a full report due in Autumn 2025. While the review has a very defined scope, it offers a crucial opportunity to influence national curriculum content and assessment practices, particularly in arts education.

### Scope of the Review

The review will focus on 'evolution, not revolution.' Key areas within scope include:

- Curriculum and assessment for children aged 5-19
- Reforms to ensure content is more inclusive, diverse, and accessible
- Adjustments to how accountability systems (e.g. Ofsted) interact with curriculum and assessment
- Enhancing support for progression to Higher Education and skills development for the workplace

Out of scope:

- Removing key qualifications like GCSEs and A Levels
- Overhauling exam-based assessment models
- Curriculum changes related to apprenticeships, extracurricular activities, and early years education

Once implemented, CAR's recommendations will apply across all state schools, including academies, marking a shift from recent educational policy.

## | Broader Policy Context

In addition to the Curriculum Review, the government has introduced other priorities with the potential to inform and shape the future of arts education in schools, including:

- **Place-making & Our National Story:** Through her emphasis on place-making and defining our national story, Secretary of State for Culture, Lisa Nandy MP, has emphasised the importance of ensuring every child can engage in the arts and heritage and pursue careers in the creative industries, regardless of the child's location or background.
- **Creative Industries Jobs & Growth:** The government's ongoing consultation on the Industrial Strategy highlights the Creative Industries as a key area for growth, with opportunities to align creative education reforms with the DCMS Creative Industries Sector Plan.
- **Devolution White Paper:** The proposed devolution of powers to local government offers significant opportunities for Combined Authorities to enhance local creative and cultural provision for children and young people, supporting local growth plans. The **Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill** will also empower local areas to play a stronger role in education.
- **National Youth Strategy:** Aims to better coordinate youth services and increase investment in shared outcomes for children and young people, where arts, culture, and creativity can play a key role.
- **National Government Frameworks:** Alongside growth and opportunity missions, the Prime Minister has set milestones for improving 'school readiness,' where arts and creativity contribute directly to children's developmental outcomes.

## | The State of Arts Education in England

To understand how we might improve arts education in England, it is important to be aware of the current context.

### Challenges for Schools

The education system faces significant challenges:

- **Funding:** Between 2010 and 2020, schools saw a 9% cut in per-pupil funding, and while funding has increased, schools' purchasing power remains limited (Education Policy Institute, 2023).
- **Teacher Recruitment & Retention:** Fewer than two-thirds of secondary teacher posts are filled, with a third of teachers leaving within five years (Education Policy Institute, 2023).
- **SEND:** The number of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) has increased by 139% since 2015, with councils facing a £4 billion deficit in funding (Schools Week, 2024).
- **Inequality:** Disadvantaged children continue to face poorer academic outcomes and higher absence rates (Education Policy Institute, 2023).

Despite these challenges, England performs well in international rankings for Maths, English, and Science (PISA, 2023).

### Policy Changes Since 2010 Impacting Arts Education

Several key policies have impacted arts education:

1. **Academies & Free Schools:** The growth of academies and free schools, which are not bound by the national curriculum, has led to a reduction in arts provision at Key Stage 3 (KS3) (The Cultural Learning Alliance, 2024).
2. **Curriculum Reform (2014):** The introduction of a 'knowledge-rich' curriculum and changes to GCSEs and A Levels have reduced the flexibility for arts subjects. The move towards exam-based assessment has also affected the teaching of creative subjects (Department for Education, 2015).
3. **English Baccalaureate (EBacc):** The exclusion of arts subjects from the EBacc has contributed to a 42% decline in arts GCSE entries (The Cultural Learning Alliance, 2024).
4. **T-Levels vs BTECs:** The government's push to phase out BTECs in favour of T-Levels has raised concerns about the accessibility of vocational qualifications in the arts for disadvantaged students (The Sixth Form Colleges Association, 2024).

## Challenges in Arts Education

Key issues facing arts education include:

- 1. Quantity & Quality of Arts Teaching:** Multiple reports indicate reduced curriculum time and poorer teaching quality in the arts. For example, between 2011 and 2019, Music teaching hours fell by 11% at KS3 and by 36% at KS5 (The Cultural Learning Alliance, 2024).
- 2. Teacher Workforce:** The arts teacher workforce has shrunk by 14% between 2011 and 2023, and recruitment into Initial Teacher Training (ITT) for arts subjects has fallen significantly (The Cultural Learning Alliance, 2024).
- 3. Accountability Systems:** The EBacc and Progress 8 have contributed to a decline in arts GCSE entries, with subjects like Design & Technology and Dance experiencing sharp drops (The Cultural Learning Alliance, 2024).
- 4. Inclusivity:** There is increasing pressure to diversify the arts curriculum, but many teachers feel underprepared to include artists from diverse backgrounds. For example, a third of Art teachers have not encountered works by ethnic minority artists (Runnymede Trust, 2024).

## | Opportunities for Change in Curriculum and Assessment

Cultural sector submissions to the CAR make a number of suggestions for reform. We are sharing a selection of those here to inform discussion:

- **Widening the National Curriculum's Purpose:** Emphasising creativity, and ensuring the curriculum supports the development of creative skills alongside knowledge.
- **Reforming Assessment:** Discontinuing the use of Year 6 SATs to set targets for creative subjects and embedding the findings of the **Oracy Commission** to give speaking and listening parity with reading and writing.
- **Curriculum Continuity:** Ensuring arts education is consistent and high-quality across key stages, rather than being limited to technical specialisms in later years.
- **Reforming the EBacc:** Calls to include arts subjects within the EBacc or scrap it entirely.

### Wider Reform

In addition to the CAR, many in the sector believe broader educational reform is necessary, including:

- Stronger teacher training and CPD in the arts.
- Increased investment in extracurricular activities like school trips and after-school clubs.
- Addressing recruitment and retention issues for arts teachers.
- Aligning national outcomes for young people with workforce development and providing stronger messaging for parents and carers.

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