



Higher Education Policy Institute

# A crisis in the creative arts in the UK?

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*Recent higher education debates have focused on the direct economic returns of obtaining a degree – and certain degrees in particular. Taking one county as an example, this report reveals the knock-on effect for the options available in schools. In short, creative disciplines are under attack.*

*Many people believe new developments, such as better longitudinal data on graduate employment outcomes, will lead to an excessive focus on the monetary returns of different educational options. This risks a less diverse school system and a poorer match between pupils' attributes and their education.*

*Using the findings of new research among schools in Norfolk, the Vice-Chancellor of one of the UK's specialist institutions shows exactly why this would be such a big mistake. The nation's cultural life would suffer but so too, eventually, would the very economic success that everyone wants to boost.*

## Introduction

A flawed equation dominates thinking about the economic value of education in the UK. According to this equation, improving literacy and numeracy equals economic prosperity and individual prosperity. Creating art or appreciating artistic endeavour is seen as producing a nation with an enriched cultural and social life, and a possible route to personal fulfilment.

But there is a flaw in the logic that says *to count* is to be economically productive, but *to create* is not.

To ignore the economic value of the arts and creative industries is to ignore an £84 billion annual contribution to the UK economy, 1.7 million British jobs, and a 9 per cent share of the UK's export market.<sup>1</sup>

Research undertaken by Norwich University of the Arts shows how the consequences of this flawed approach are playing out in school classrooms. They will soon play out in studios, workshops and creative spaces within universities. The consequences will then be felt by industry, in the jobs market and in the wider economy.

## 1. Replicating the STEM approach

Supporting STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) has been a priority of successive governments since the Roberts Report of 2002 warned of waning pupil interest and attainment in these subjects in Britain's schools.<sup>2</sup>

Fifteen years on, while concerns remain about the recruitment of sufficient specialist teachers, there have been laudable efforts in the public, private and non-profit sectors, and notable successes, in supporting STEM subjects. Attainment in Mathematics, Biology, Chemistry and Physics in England, Wales and Northern Ireland has improved, with increasing numbers of students achieving A\* to C grades at GCSE. Similarly, the number of students who opt to study Mathematics, Physics, Biology or Chemistry at A-Level has risen over the same period.<sup>3</sup>

However, the introduction of the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) in 2010 and the decision to make EBacc subjects compulsory in 2015 has meant the prioritisation of STEM at the expense of other subjects. The EBacc defines the core subjects that should be studied as English, Mathematics,

Humanities, Sciences and Modern Languages. Creative Arts have been downgraded to non-core subjects, albeit remaining part of the National Curriculum.

Figures from the Joint Council for Qualifications for GCSE entries in 2016 show a 6 per cent decline in the number of Art and Design pupils compared with 2015. This is the biggest year-on-year decline in candidate numbers recorded since 2000 – and there was a further decline in 2017. Likewise, the numbers opting to study Design and Technology at GCSE fell by 42 per cent from 2010 to 2017.<sup>4</sup>

To put it bluntly, the creative sector today faces the same issues as the Roberts Report outlined for Science and Engineering in 2002. We need to nurture what might be called 'ADaM' – Art, Design and Media – in the same way as STEM.

## 2. Art and design education in Norfolk

Our preliminary quantitative and qualitative review of Art and Design provision across Norfolk's state secondary school sector found widely differing approaches and support for creative subjects and differing local challenges. These probably reflect a worrying decline across the country for creative arts subjects, with significant implications for the creative economy.

Historically, overall performance in primary and secondary education in Norfolk has fallen below national averages. However, the most recent figures show a Progress 8 score – the Government's new measure of primary to secondary improvement in pupil attainment – of 0.1 in Norfolk compared to a national performance for state schools in England of -0.3 in 2016.<sup>5</sup> Yet Norfolk receives approximately £100 per pupil less than the average across England.

Against this backdrop, our review found common challenges in the teaching of Art and Design:

- negative perceptions and misunderstandings of the value of Art and Design within the curriculum, careers and quality of life by parents, school management and pupils;
- declining funding leading to cuts in staffing, courses and enrichment initiatives; and
- relative rural isolation and poor cultural infrastructure.

## 3. Perceptions and declining 'creative stamina'

Our review asked schools to identify what factors influence the choices pupils make at Key Stage 4 (aged 14 to 16): 79 per cent of respondents identified parent/carers' perceptions of subjects as the single

biggest influence on course choices. This was closely followed, at 78 per cent, by public perception of the EBacc or government messages. Forget the Westminster bubble, what ministers say and how they say it – and how it is replayed in the media – matters to parents, carers and consequently pupils.

Some respondents in schools felt that students were 'not mature enough' or had insufficient knowledge of courses and options in years 8 and 9 before starting Key Stage 4. For example, in one school, subject rotation meant that one Design and Technology option had not yet been covered in the curriculum by the time of the options evening.

Most respondents (73 per cent) raised the issue of a decline in 'creative stamina and resilience'. 'Students demand the magic "what do I have to do to get an A?"', one teacher explained. The sentiment was echoed by another respondent: 'I think students expect to be less ambitious, have less confidence and use fewer "messy" materials than in the past.'

## 4. Concerns at Key Stage 2 (age 7 to 11)

Seven in 10 respondents to our review (72 per cent) reported a decline in attainment in Art and Design on entry to year 7 (the first year of secondary school) – ahead of the national trend of 53 per cent of teachers across the country reaching the same conclusion. Nationally, 89 per cent of primary teachers in state schools have indicated that the time allocated for Art and Design has reduced in the last five years and in the two terms before Key Stage 2 National Curriculum tests (year 6).<sup>6</sup>

Respondent schools in Norfolk highlighted several concerns among teachers about Key Stage 2:

- lack of basic drawing and painting skills;
- use of art across the curriculum to teach other subjects but not as a subject itself;
- no access to 'messy play' at school (or at home) for some children;
- decline in independent thinking; and
- negative attitudes towards art as 'a subject worth doing' as they enter secondary school.

## 5. Concerns at Key Stage 3 (age 11 to 14)

Pressure on schools to demonstrate improving performance at Key Stage 4 (GCSEs) and in the priority EBacc subjects leads to strategic decisions on areas of focus at Key Stage 3, our review found.

'The new Key Stage 3 curriculum is very skills focused, as opposed to the old curriculum, which had more

emphasis on creativity', one respondent reported.

A decrease in curriculum time allocated to Art and Design and Design and Technology at Key Stage 3, in the earlier years of secondary school, was reported by 37 per cent of respondent schools. Our review also found that one reason for the loss of time for arts was the additional hours allocated to Mathematics and English at Key Stage 3 for lower attaining pupils, and EBacc catch-up and interventions at Key Stage 4.

In 45 per cent of respondent schools, the National Curriculum entitlement to Art and Design and Design and Technology was being curtailed by one year, with Key Stage 3 effectively ending in year 8 when pupils are aged around 12.

## **6. Concerns at Key Stage 4 (age 14 to 16)**

Our review suggests a decline in uptake of Art and Design and Design and Technology at Key Stage 4 (GCSE): 57 per cent of respondent schools reported a decline in Art and Design – either marginal or significant and based on teacher estimates – and 59 per cent reported a decline in Design and Technology.

The review found a decline in the number of Key Stage 4 option blocks in which Art and Design (57 per cent of respondents) and Design and Technology subjects (60 per cent) are offered.

## **7. Teacher shortages, recruitment and morale**

Despite tremendous enthusiasm and dedication to the arts, our review indicated a churn of Art and Design staff in Norfolk's schools, with reports of teachers not being replaced and difficulty in recruiting to rural schools. Teachers reported having to support non-specialists within their department – for example, in one school a non-specialist teacher was teaching A-Level Art and Design along with other subjects.

The review found 40 per cent of respondent schools in Norfolk have seen a decrease in staffing in Art and Design and/or Design and Technology since 2010. This outstrips the national trend: Design and Technology has 25 per cent fewer teachers and 23 per cent fewer teaching hours since 2010; while the number of Art and Design teachers has declined by 9 per cent, with a reduction of 13 per cent in teaching hours since 2010. Nationally, over the same period, the number of hours taught and the number of teachers rose between 10 per cent and 18 per cent respectively for the EBacc Humanities (History and Geography).<sup>7</sup>

The review found that continuing professional development was of the utmost importance to teachers – in terms of pedagogy and knowledge, management, skills development, meeting performance management criteria and sustaining their own practice as artists. However, access to continuing professional development is patchy: 42 per cent said they had access to termly internal skill sharing sessions but 24 per cent said such sessions happened 'rarely or never'. Only 5 per cent said they had access to an external training provider on a termly basis, but 35 per cent said this happened 'rarely or never'.

## **8. Funding**

Cuts have led to an increase in class sizes in 82 per cent of schools in the last 12 months, according to the Association of School and College Leaders' 2017 survey.<sup>8</sup> Inevitably, the resource implications of large classes are felt most keenly in equipment-heavy subjects such as Photography or Design and Technology. Our review found examples of schools where access to a popular course, such as Photography, was restricted because of limits on the amount of available equipment. The review also found that 50 per cent of departments had seen funding cuts since 2010 while 33 per cent reported no change.

## **9. The role of higher education**

The review suggests a multi-faceted role for universities in support of arts education. This ranges from advocacy and efforts to change parent and pupil perceptions of the value of the arts, to helping enrich the curriculum by supporting trips, out-of-hours clubs or exhibitions, organising school visits by artists and other creative people and helping pupils access relevant technology and equipment.

## **10. Why it matters**

Let us step back to our starting point: the flawed equation.

When the Confederation of British Industry talks about employers' needs, it talks about the 'first and foremost need' for 'young people with attitudes and attributes such as resilience, enthusiasm and creativity'.<sup>9</sup>

When Britain's future is described as a knowledge economy, it is worth noting that 60 per cent of jobs in the creative industries are taken by people with at least a degree or equivalent, compared to 33 per cent of all jobs in the UK.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, we are told jobs within the creative industries are at less risk of automation, making them an attractive prospect for the future when new technology changes old rules and roles.<sup>11</sup>

Research from the innovation foundation Nesta shows that companies that harness both art and science – STEAM rather than STEM – outperform competitors in terms of sales, employment, productivity and innovation.<sup>12</sup>

As our review suggests, evidence is emerging locally, and I suspect nationally, that creative subjects are at risk of decline: declining student participation, declining funding and declining attainment.

Our great tradition in the creative industries is not because our nation is somehow innately creative. Rather, it is because we have created a strong arts education system through primary and secondary schools to further and higher education. As other countries seek to emulate this 'pipeline' we are in danger of fracturing it.

You do not enrich the nation's cultural and social life by starving it of talent, nor is that the best way to feed the economy. Of course we should support STEM subjects, but not at the expense of ADaM.

### In discussion with teachers, the key needs were identified as:

1. broadening students' horizons and giving them access to a wider range of original work (historical and contemporary);
2. contact with professionals as role models, particularly young people and school alumni nearer to their own age and including those in careers to which they could relate – for example, a successful local photography studio – as well as more high-profile examples;
3. meeting current students as role models, perhaps including an opportunity to show their own work;
4. providing access to concentrated opportunities to produce more considered projects, perhaps in collaboration or on a larger scale;
5. supporting opportunities to develop creative resilience, understanding the value of learning through risk taking, trial and error; and
6. displaying and exhibiting work.

## Methodology

Norwich University of the Arts' research focused on Key Stages 3 and 4 within the state sector (excluding special schools) in Norfolk and factors influencing the uptake of Art and Design subjects, including Design and Technology at Key Stage 4.

The work included desk research, meetings with representatives from local cultural organisations active within secondary education, conversations with regional and national experts, interviews with secondary teachers, meetings with sixth-form providers and research among Norwich University of the Arts's staff.

A letter was sent from Norwich University of the Arts' Vice-Chancellor to headteachers of all (52) 11-to-16 state maintained schools in Norfolk. Focus groups with 26 attendees from 20 different schools were held at: Springwood High School in King's Lynn; Norwich University of the Arts; and Aylsham High School.

The survey was sent to 148 individual teachers in 52 schools and had a response rate of 33 per cent (49 individual teachers) at 60 per cent of the schools (31).

## Endnotes

- 1 [http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/523024/Creative\\_Industries\\_Economic\\_Estimates\\_January\\_2016\\_Updated\\_201605.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/523024/Creative_Industries_Economic_Estimates_January_2016_Updated_201605.pdf)
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- 4 <http://www.jcq.org.uk/examination-results/gcses/2016>  
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- 6 <http://www.nsead.org/downloads/survey.pdf> p.12
- 7 <http://www.culturallearningalliance.org.uk/news/manifestos-are-out/manifestos-are-out/arts-teaching-hours-and-workforce-falls/>
- 8 ASCL Funding Survey, 2017 <https://www.ascl.org.uk/news-and-views/news-news-detail/survey-finds-class-sizes-are-rising-as-a-result-of-funding-crisis.html>
- 9 <http://www.cbi.org.uk/cbi-prod/assets/File/pdf/cbi-education-and-skills-survey2016.pdf>
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- 12 <http://www.nesta.org.uk/news/businesses-boasting-art-and-science-skills-grow-8-faster>