

A Creative Education and Enrichment Programme for Every Child

By Alison Cole and Nathan Lloyd

Introduction

The Cultural Policy Unit (formerly the independent Arts and Creative Industries Policy Unit, hosted by the Fabian Society) has put forward a number of recommendations focusing on providing every child with access to a high-quality creative education and a programme of enrichment. Labour's Creative Sector Plan ('Creating Growth', March 2024) drew substantially on our proposals, including the section entitled 'Creative Education for Every Child'. This spelt out the government's goal to deliver a curriculum that is rich, broad, inclusive and innovative, with creative subjects studied both for their intrinsic value and for their ability to build confidence and essential skills, such as critical thinking, oracy, creative problem solving and teamwork.

We applaud the ambition and the recent measures to restore cultural and creative education to the curriculum, and we would like to see primary schools spend a minimum 2 hours per school week on timetabled creative subjects. Creative subjects have been proven to boost children's engagement in their education across the board, and to provide life-skills that will sustain children of all abilities and backgrounds, from the early years, through fulfilling careers and beyond.

We regard these not just as 'expressive' subjects – which is a vital part of their value – but as subjects that are as rich and varied as English language and English Literature. In other words, each creative subject teaches both knowledge and essential skills and straddles many dimensions; creative, expressive, practical, vocational, theoretical and historical. So, for instance, the visual arts should not only be about creating and making, but should also embrace visual literacy, art history, and illuminate potential career paths (from curation to product design and animation). There should be joy and rigour. Nor should the arts be confined to specific subjects: they are some of the best interdisciplinary tools at a

teacher's disposal and have the potential to bring all lessons and children to life, both in and outside of school hours.

Under the previous government, the arts were completely devalued as part of state education. Not only were they excluded from all-important performance measures, such as the EBacc and Progress 8 for secondary schools, but they were also squeezed out of the primary school day. For example, despite the art and design primary school curriculum, the average devoted to art and design is 40 minutes a week, with the subject area largely delivered by pressured, generalist teachers. The recent schools' inspection report concluded that two thirds of teachers do not feel confident about teaching art.

Funding has also been cut so that the arts have become almost unaffordable in terms of materials, instrument teaching and school trips to museums, theatres, and heritage sites. Broadly speaking, only the independent sector can afford these 'luxuries' – which are certainly not luxuries in their eyes, but an essential component of a complete education.

Core Proposals

A summary of the ideas we have put forward to government appears below:

- **Timetable creative subjects – with a set school minimum.**

Cultural and creative education: the arts (music, dance, drama, art, craft design and technology) should be embedded in a reformed national curriculum, with schools spending a minimum of 2 hours of each school week on timetabled arts subjects, with an additional programme of rich extra-curricular activities. Lessons in creative subjects contribute to the

development of pupils' interests and talents and interdisciplinary skills which can be utilised across the curriculum, as well as providing a source of inspiration for future careers.

Extracurricular or enrichment opportunities should be additional to core, mandatory provision. This would require a DfE/DCMS joint approach to working up and implementation.

- **Teach First for the Arts: urgently tackle depleted workforce and ensure teachers are able to provide a high-quality arts education.**

A broad and balanced curriculum can only be delivered by confident and well-trained teachers. The lack of detail provided in the primary school curriculum for art and design, music, dance and drama, and the lack of CPD and training opportunities available to teachers means that the arts are often delivered by teachers who feel underconfident in these subject areas. All these subject areas must be reviewed and better defined.

There is also a crisis in the arts teacher workforce: targets for recruitment are not being met. High quality CPD should be made available to non-specialist primary school teachers, and a scheme similar to Teach First for the arts should be created. A Teach First for the Arts scheme could place arts graduates into state schools in areas of low social mobility to increase academic outcomes and provide access to opportunities in our most disadvantaged communities. With a tendering exercise for Teach First post-2027 now launched, a new arts pathway within the scheme could be considered.

- **Introduce an Arts Premium: ringfenced funding for the arts in primary schools, based on the PE and sports premium.**

Arts subjects lack ringfenced funding, meaning resources have dwindled

within school. The government should introduce ringfenced funding based on the PE and sports premium, which provides an average of nearly £9000 per school. The Conservatives promised an arts premium in 2019 but did not deliver it.

The arts premium should match the current PE and sports premium rate. Schools could use the funding however they wished; for instance, to increase the engagement of all pupils in arts education by funding school trips, employing part-time specialist arts teachers or purchasing new equipment.

- **Pilot a graduate 'artist in residence' scheme to support learning and performances of all pupils.**

The government should pilot a graduate 'artist in residence' scheme to support the learning and performances of all pupils. This would involve placing recent arts graduates in areas of low social mobility to promote arts within school, form and lead ensembles, and support colleagues.

- **Twin arts organisations and schools: Ensure that every school is partnered with a local arts organisation.**

The government should ensure that every school is partnered with a local arts organisation to promote arts and culture in school and enhance lessons, with the aim of broadening children's horizons. Twinning fosters organic relationships between pupils and arts professionals. There are already impressive examples of schools twinning with arts organisations. In September 2020, the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment (OAE) moved into Acland Burghley School in north London. Since then, Acland Burghley and the OAE have fostered a close relationship that benefits both parties and the local community, with a new financial model that supports both the orchestra and the school. According to an evaluation undertaken since

the orchestra moved into the school, the GCSE pass rate had risen from 24 per cent to 77 per cent, and in summer 2023 the school registered the highest attendance in Camden.

Twinning arts organisations with schools does not have to replicate the OAE/Acland Burghley model directly. After all, many schools do not have the space to house a residence scheme. Whatever model a school adopts, it should be focused on community connections, increased participation in the arts, and wider opportunities for children.

- **Embed the arts in a reformed National Curriculum across all schools, including academies.**

Arts education has been marginalised in many schools. The government should ensure that all schools, including academies (which currently don't have to follow the National Curriculum), follow a reformed National Curriculum which has greater focus on high-quality and accessible arts education.

- **Grade the arts: the government should look to reform the accountability and inspection frameworks for schools.**

Ofsted inspections in their current form are considered a barrier to the provision of high-quality arts education. Labour should look to reform the accountability and inspection frameworks for schools, including consideration of the value of arts and physical education.

- **Intangible heritage: incorporate England's and the wider UK's intangible heritage into a reformed curriculum.**

The government ratified the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2024. With the ratification of the

Convention and the addition of British heritage to the protected list, the government should incorporate England's and the wider UK's intangible cultural heritage into a reformed school curriculum.

- **Ensure pupils eligible for pupil premium are not charged for instrumental or vocal tuition.**

Sustained instrumental learning has become the preserve of those who can afford it. Schools should be prevented from charging any pupil eligible for pupil premium for extra-curricular instrument lessons, with free lessons for non-pupil premium children promoted within school where possible.

- **Review and reform the 'Artsmark' scheme to develop a trusted and easily understandable measure of arts provision in schools for parents and teachers.**

Artsmark, awarded by Arts Council England, is a creative quality standard for schools. However, just 18% of schools have an Artsmark. The government should review and encourage reforms to the Artsmark scheme to develop a trusted and easily understandable measure of arts provision for parents and teachers.

- **Art in Breakfast clubs and wraparound care: integrate arts and cultural activities throughout the school day, particularly during non-lesson time.**

The government's planned breakfast clubs present the perfect opportunity to embed the arts and creativity into school time. Arts activities and visiting professionals/artists/behind the scenes specialists should be integrated into wraparound care. All schools should have arts assemblies at least once a week and singing assemblies should happen regularly. Every primary school should ensure that daily story time for early years foundation stage and reading time for KS1–KS2 occurs. Books and quiet spaces should be available during wraparound care, lunchtime and

breaktime.

- **Build visual literacy into teachers' toolkits, so children are taught to navigate the digital-visual world and learn vital life skills.**

Visual literacy should form part of a reformed art and design curriculum at primary level. Visual literacy means being able to critically observe, question, analyse and articulate what one sees and develop the language and oracy skills needed to communicate key visual information effectively. Recent advances in AI and digital tools and applications are making it increasingly essential for children to be able to navigate an increasingly complex visual world. The government should build visual literacy through art into teachers' toolkits, so that children learn not only how images are constructed and manipulated, but how to hone their critical thinking and observational skills, which are ever more essential to future career paths.

- **Introduce PISA-style tests as part of school testing.**

The government should introduce PISA-style tests (see OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment) to encourage schools to utilise the creative skills developed as part of arts and cultural education in real-world scenarios.

- **Introduce an *11 by 11* Childhood Arts Guarantee: eleven arts activities all primary school children should have experienced by the time they leave school.**

To ensure that all children access key cultural experiences by the time they leave primary school and to contribute to Labour's mission to break down barriers to opportunity, we recommend the government introduces an *11 by 11* Childhood Arts Guarantee: all children should experience the following, if they wish to undertake it:

1. **Learn a musical instrument.**
2. **Act in a drama.**
3. **Visit the best art, culture and heritage in their area and nationally (at least one visit a year).**
4. **Use a library and read for pleasure.**
5. **Learn a traditional or contemporary dance style.**
6. **Sing in a choir.**
7. **Learn about great artworks and creative thinkers (authors, poets, artists, composers etc).**
8. **Watch and review a feature film.**
9. **Use digital tools to create an artwork, podcast, photography or video.**
10. **Perform or display artistic talents (school plays and performances, music ensembles and exhibitions).**
11. **Design and paint a mural at the end of Year 6 (a legacy work for the next generation of children).**

• Create a list of trusted artists: Support schools to engage professional artists by establishing a list of trusted artists in every local area.

Trusted arts professionals can be difficult to find due to fragmented systems and differing DBS requirements between schools. The government

should support schools to engage professional artists by establishing a list of trusted artists in every local area to work in schools, removing this burden from overstretched teachers.

- **Provide funding for a free visit to a local arts institution, museum, gallery or theatre for every primary school child every year.**

Schools are the main access points to the arts and its institutions for many disadvantaged children, acting as a gateway to countless opportunities for children. The government should provide funding for a free visit to a local arts institution, museum, gallery or theatre for every primary school child every year. Transport and any entry fees would be paid for, and we estimate this would cost around £180m a year.

- **Take art works into schools, together with wraparound teaching materials, through a nationwide loans programme and an open data policy.**

As part of our 'Arts for everyone, wherever they are' policy (see 'Fabian Ideas pamphlet, 'Arts for Us All', July 2024) we recommended that the government should ensure artworks can be loaned to schools, along with specific teaching resources, with the Government Art Collection leading the way.

- **Museum in a box scheme: Require all museums, galleries and other appropriate institutions to provide a school loans box scheme for primary schools.**

Based on the Leeds Museums and Galleries loan box scheme, the government should require all museums, galleries and other appropriate institutions to provide a school loan box scheme for primary schools. It would allow pupils in every school to handle, access and engage with objects in the classroom.

- **A library for every school: a holistic library offer including a National Library Card (see separate CPU report); the Big Primary Book Group; bridging gift of a graphic novel.**

The government should explore the possibility of delivering a holistic package of measures to promote reading for pleasure and library use, which will in turn benefit children's attainment. This package could include:

- **A library for every school through the School Library Association, who have a policy on this with pedigree, rigour, sustainability and book curation considered.**
 - **Creating a Big Primary Book Club, where a list of books is curated, funded by private and philanthropic sources, which every child can access either via school or a community library, along with resources for teachers to use these books in lessons in school.**
 - **Provide a 'bridging' gift of a graphic novel at the end of primary school, as graphic novels have been shown to encourage reading.**
 - **Provide a National Library Card automatically at birth, to ensure continuity between school and local library useage (including Summer Reading challenges).**
- **Create a National Music Education Service, with a National Music Education Network as a steppingstone, together with a National Instrument Library.**

Music education is sporadic across the country, meaning children's experience of music depends on where they live. There are examples of brilliant work happening across the country, but 22/23 data collected by Arts Council England shows many schools are not engaging with their local

Music Hub, which provides instrument lessons, ensembles, CPD, resources and advice for teachers. There are also workforce issues in the sector, with schools and Hubs struggling to recruit music teachers.

The government made a manifesto commitment to establish a National Music Education Network. We recommended this should take the form of a broader National Music Education Service, which incorporates a National Music Education Network. The National Music Education Service should act as a national coordinating body and a network of local organisations to provide high quality, joined up and geographically fair music education.

Requiring every state school to engage with their Music Hub is one of the recommendations in our separate proposal for a National Music Education Service (see Fabian Ideas pamphlet, 'Arts for Us All', July 2024).

- **Scale up Saturday Clubs and create a framework for the provision of weekend and holiday provision for teenagers.**

A framework should be created to make Saturday Clubs and holiday provision more widely accessible for teenagers, expanding the programme that was funded by Arts Council England. This will allow teenagers to explore creative interests with the guidance of expert tutors.

- **Mobilise the arts to tackle crises that are prevalent amongst schools: SEND support, truancy and absenteeism and child mental health.**

England currently faces a crisis in SEND provision/support, truancy and absenteeism post-Covid and in children's mental health. While individual arts programmes have been shown to alleviate these issues, there is no coordinated large-scale programme to mobilise the arts to help the most vulnerable children in society.

- **Provide great art mentors**

The government should provide every child with the experience of great masters and contemporary practitioners. The arts are not just about children making things. The great books, poems, paintings and pieces of music really do “hold the keys to the kingdom”. They provide visions, values, heightened empathy, and often mentors and models for life. As Toni Morrison put it about the authors she discovered and that inspired her: ‘These people are my access to me; they are my entrance into my own interior life’. Experiences with great artworks, as The New York Times summed up recently, “are not about acquiring new facts but to feel somehow elevated, enlarged, altered.”

- **Reintroduce craft and 3D making at all key stages**

Craft develops fine motor and haptic skills, helps children to understand abstract concepts through practical learning, aids the understanding of science and technology, and offers alternative methods of communication. Many children do not have access to craft materials at home, so it is vital that school offers opportunities to design, make and craft – skills that are often central to so many future career paths.

Key Contacts

Please feel free to [Contact Us](#) with any questions

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Alison Cole is Director of The Cultural Policy Unit, having previously established the Arts and Creative Industries Policy Unit, hosted by the Fabian Society. She is the former Editor of The Art Newspaper and has worked as an Executive Director for some of the UK's leading cultural organisations, including Art Fund, where she led the VAT campaign to make all national UK museums free, London's Southbank Centre and Arts Council England. She served as a trustee of the Foundling Museum and is currently adviser to cultural education charity Art UK, originator of 'The Superpower of Looking' visual literacy programme, and a member of the Critics' Circle.

She is also a writer, journalist and art historian, having completed postgraduate study at The Warburg Institute, London. Her books include 'Michelangelo: The Taddei Tondo' (2017) and 'Italian Renaissance Courts: Art, Pleasure and Power' (2016).

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Nathan is Head of Research at The Cultural Policy Unit, having previously served as Senior Researcher in the Arts and Creative Industries Policy Unit, hosted by the Fabian Society. Prior to that, he was a Political Researcher at the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, briefing Sir Tony for political engagements and co-authoring reports across multiple policy areas, including health, defence and energy. He also worked as a researcher for Lord Andrew Adonis and supported the writing of Ernest Bevin: Labour's Churchill, a biography of Clement Attlee's Foreign Secretary.

As a writer, he has also contributed to Labour Together reports and published political commentary in The New European. He was trained as a playwright at the Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse, from which he has maintained a keen interest in policymaking within the arts and cultural sector.

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