

AccessArt response after reading the Curriculum & Assessment Review Interim Report

Whilst AccessArt welcomes many findings in the report, our intention here is not to summarise the [Interim Report](#) – or even comment on the particular findings – but instead, as a Subject Association for Art, to take the opportunity to remain true to AccessArt’s charitable aim, ethos and beliefs, and to state (again) the issues we believe we need to address to ensure a high-quality art education for all.

From the offset, it was made clear that there are many areas which sit beyond the scope of the Review. These include an exploration of pedagogy, teacher training and CPDL, and pupil wellbeing / engagement. Whilst AccessArt accepts that the Review has been tasked with a narrow remit, we wholeheartedly believe that

without being willing to explore the interconnectedness of these areas, and other issues, it will be hard to pin down excellence in Curriculum & Assessment. Only a holistic, expansive and collaborative approach can achieve the required level of excellence.

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Is Art Thriving?

We can see an example of how looking through a narrow lens will hold us back by exploring how the panel currently perceives the state of art education.

The Review panel considers art and design to be “thriving” due to its numbers showing those taking art at GCSE is broadly stable. This, despite the evidence put before it in the form of the [Art Now](#) report, and other publications, in particular the [Sutton Trust](#) showing the disparities between those accessing high quality creative education and careers, and those missing out on these opportunities.

This is also despite the panels’ own evidence given in the “Polling of key stage 4 and 16 to 19 learners and parents” document, where the panel share:

“For key stage 4 learners, 45% studied an arts subject and 54% did not. For those who did not choose to study an arts subject, 51% did not do so because they did not enjoy them; 45% because they were not very good at them; 38% because they did not think it would be useful to their future...”

AccessArt would like to see the panel demonstrate an appetite and ability to forensically question and challenge the notion that this is somehow good enough; that we can choose to allow the 54% majority who choose not to take art, to leave school thinking art has no place in their lives. Here we can see how the potential unwillingness to look beyond the scope of the review plays into a blinkered mindset. Despite the panel being tasked with exploring how every child can receive the best education, we have yet to see the rigour and

courage needed to ask why 51% of children in KS4 do not think they are good at art. The answer is not only in curriculum, but also in staff training and pedagogy – two areas the panel are not able to consider.

We don't have to, and shouldn't, write those children off. In line with Article 31 of UNESCO Convention for the Rights of the Child, "Every child has the right to rest, relax, play and to take part in cultural and creative activities." We are able to keep a far greater number of children engaged in art. In the AccessArt survey of schools using the curriculum these figures rise considerably. We can do this by enabling and enthusing staff with greater training, by creating relevant curriculum underpinned by rigorous pedagogy which schools can adapt and which give pupils ownership of their learning.

During the next stage of the review AccessArt, calls for a more joined up and expansive conversation about the interrelationships around curriculum and assessment, and about how we can use this conversation to do better, for every child.

Instances of words in the Interim Report:

Maths: 61

English: 63

Science: 23

Art: 5

The Arts: 10

Music: 8

Drama: 5

DT: 6

Dance: 0

A Discussion about Art, Craft & Design as a Unique Subject Area

Whilst the Ofsted Subject Review Art & Design (February 2023) acknowledged that art as a subject requires a unique approach, and that many systems applied to other subjects do not best serve art, there is little reassurance in the Interim Report that this thinking is embraced. Indeed, at our Curriculum & Assessment meeting it was acknowledged that the same metrics had been used for art as other subjects.

An example of how the language and approach used in other subjects might limit excellence in an art curriculum is the use of the word “mastery.” The Review panel define “mastery” in this context as “the process of ensuring students understand a particular foundational concept before moving to the next one.” Once again, we cannot use words like mastery within a conversation about curriculum without understanding or at least being willing to talk about the pedagogical implications of this word, in the context of art. Making and talking about art is a deeply iterative process. It does not comply with a linear, sequential or tick box progression. Skills do not neatly build

in the way the panel hope. All artists understand this. This is not to say we don't believe we should equip pupils with the skills and knowledge they need to enable them to express themselves, but is it appropriate to talk about mastery for pupils of school age? We would like to see the panel demonstrating an understanding of the value of play and exploration in art, alongside opportunity to visit and revisit. Perhaps then the 54% majority who think art is not for them can feel welcome to stay in the room. "Mastery" implies endpoint, which pedagogically speaking can shut down artistic exploration. (Unless of course mastery is in the exploration itself, in which case please let's clarify the language. Semantics are vital if we are to express precise intention).

During the next stage of the review, AccessArt would like to see a curiosity towards, and understanding of, the fact that the language which works for one subject, may not work for art. We need to use language precisely if we are to enable teachers and pupils.

Instances of words in the Interim Report:

Mastery: 12

Pedagogy: 0

A Discussion About Knowledge

It is no surprise that the "knowledge-rich" mantra of the past years is retained. Evidence is cited that the recent focus on knowledge is a success

reflected in uptake at GCSE and pathways at 16+, although it is recognised that this does not work for all.

The Ofsted Subject Review for Art was useful in its discussion of convergent and divergent knowledge. In addition, AccessArt would suggest a third state: emergent, as being vital to the processes of acquiring knowledge in art. In all stages, it must be understood that where a proportion of knowledge can be “taught,” the majority of knowledge in art needs to be experienced. Thinking about the curriculum only in terms of taught knowledge is a reductionist approach. Again, by embracing pedagogy, we can better appreciate the importance of creating experiences which ensure that knowledge is personally discovered through exploration and meaningfully understood. Added to this, enabling young people to feeling comfortable (and see the value in) being in a space of “not knowing” is vital not only to creative exploration but also to the ways of being in the world.

Pursuing only measurable knowledge, and avoiding immeasurable knowledge (like self-knowledge, or changed ways of being) is allowing the tail to wag the dog, and again results in a reductionist approach.

During the next stage of the review, AccessArt would like to see a conversation about the types of knowledge in art, and how we enable them.

Instances of words in the Interim Report:

Knowledge: 54

Pedagogy: 0

A Discussion about Assessment's impact upon Pedagogy, and Vice Versa

It is outside the remit of *our* response to comment on the value of assessment generally at various stages of education, but in art education, summative assessment in particular can be counterproductive to nurturing a creative curriculum. If we want to enable our learners to feel safe in taking creative risks, and our teachers to feel safe to nurture an exploratory classroom, then we need to be aware that summative assessment can place pressure on these processes.

During the next stage of the review, AccessArt would like to see a conversation about the impact of assessment on Pedagogy, and vice versa. We cannot ignore the connection.

Instances of words in the Interim Report:

Assessment: 154

Pedagogy: 0

A Discussion about Extracurricular

"The arts are a good illustration of some of the dilemmas for this Review, in that not all of the issues that have been identified relate to the curriculum or assessment framework. For example,

in arts subjects we have heard calls for improvements in equipment, more specialist teachers and better access to extra-curricular activities. These are important issues, and where we received evidence that extends beyond curriculum and assessment, we have passed that on to the Department for Education, who will reflect it in wider work.”

Can we tread carefully here? We need to ensure that we do not shrug off our responsibilities to help teachers deliver an excellent art curriculum to all, by making up for lost opportunities in the classroom via an extracurricular offer. We know that it is the most vulnerable who will least access an after-school offer. We already know that a large percentage of Primary Schools only teach art every other half term, due to curriculum pressures. Our efforts should be in ensuring first that all children have access to engaging art curriculum each week.

During the next stage of the review, AccessArt would like to be reassured that the new Curriculum does not see an extracurricular offer as a buttress to excuse a part time / carousel type curriculum.

A Discussion about the Connection between Art and Creative, Critical and Higher-Level Thinking Skills

The Interim Report does not yet demonstrate an

understanding of the link between the arts and creative, critical and higher-level thinking skills. This may be because of the lack of interest in talking about pedagogy. Round and round we go. But we do need to make this connection – and to help teachers, parents and pupils to make this connection, if we are to feed this through to the Curriculum.

During the next stage of the review, AccessArt would like to see a conversation about how art can help learners cultivate Creative, Critical and Higher-Level Thinking Skills, at all ages.

Instances of words in the Interim Report:

Creative Thinking: 1

Oracy: 0

Critical Thinking: 1 (With reference to AI)

Creativity 2: (Both with reference to the last review of the curriculum between 2011-2013)

A Discussion about teacher and pupil wellbeing and engagement.

We understand wellbeing and engagement are outside the remit of the Review, and yet, if our pupils do not attend, and our teachers leave, it won't matter how shiny and polished our Curriculum is.

At this point, the Review does not communicate an interest in the love of learning and love of teaching. There is a movement (outside the Review) to acknowledge as a whole that this is where we

need to turn our attention. With regard to art education, we do need to help pupils and teachers hold the subject with joy, so that it is a personally meaningful experience. This is not difficult, if again, we truly understand pedagogical mechanisms. By exploring the how and the why, as well as the what, we can embrace everything that art education has to offer, including what we learn through art, as well as about art, and truly embrace how art education can help shape our next generation.

Instances of words in the Interim Report:

Wellbeing: 1

Enjoyment: 0

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/curriculum-and-assessment-review-interim-report>

Paula Briggs, CEO & Creative Director AccessArt,
March 2025



[Open Letter to Government: Why Art Education Needs to Change: Inclusion, Wellbeing, Employment & Creative Industries](#)

It is time for us to create a rigorous, fit-for-

purpose, value-led arts education for all pupils. It is time for the government to connect education back to heads, hands and hearts, and value the arts alongside all other subjects, ensuring high quality arts education is a mandatory part of all regular curriculum entitlement for ALL pupils.

As a Subject Association for Art, and as a Registered Arts Education Charity, AccessArt invites you to [sign our open letter](#) to Keir Starmer Prime Minister, Bridget Phillipson Secretary State for Education, Lisa Nandy Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport.

[Sign Now!](#)