

Arts Apocalypse: 14 organisations and artists unite to raise the alarm on the decimation of the arts in schools and colleges



AccessArt has joined forces with the National Education Union and a coalition of organisations in the arts and education sectors to spotlight the eroding of the arts across the curriculum.

The Arts Apocalypse statement offers policy solutions that the signatories believe would help save the arts from catastrophe.

We urge politicians of all parties to consider the statement, take notice of the critical situation and commit to implementing the solutions offered.

[Please download the full statement and share](#)

Arts Apocalypse: Time For Change in a Failing System

The crisis in our schools is deep, multi-faceted and worsening. The current state of arts education is one of the clearest signs of what has gone wrong with our whole system.

A commitment to arts education is essential to arrest the decline and to build an education system fit for the 21st century.

We call on politicians of all parties to recognise and respond to the problems on the scale that is necessary. We encourage educators and the wider arts community to push for radical change in their schools and communities.

The arts are essential to human fulfilment; they are meaning-making activities which have a personal, social and economic value. But in education, what is recognised in principle is often denied in practice. In an underfunded system, we have seen arts education decimated as school leaders are forced to make impossible decisions on an ever-dwindling budget and a damaging focus on a narrow curriculum.

In primary schools, the demands of testing all too often push arts education into a corner of the curriculum. Primary teachers report that they do not feel enabled to be successful arts educators. Initial Teacher Training fails to prepare teachers

to deliver arts subjects with confidence. Opportunities for professional development are rare.

In secondary schools, the move towards ever greater accountability rooted in the promotion of the EBacc system has a similar effect: students are actively discouraged from pursuing Arts-based routes. Subjects, like English, which the government sees as important have been stripped of their creative content. Assessment in other arts subjects is overloaded with written tasks. Increasingly, the government steers schools to deliver a prescriptive, often centrally planned curriculum, focused on examinations, in which Arts are sidelined. The impact on behaviour, mental health, school engagement and attendance has been catastrophic.

We demand systemic change

Learning to be a teacher of art or music – indeed of any subject – should mean learning about the skills and knowledge associated with that specialism. Reshaped by government, teacher education has come to mean something else – a training in generic skills, a lowering of quality.

The numbers are plunging. As a generation of students who have been through the declining system reach adulthood, recruitment of specialist teachers in the Arts subjects has fallen to dangerous levels. This negative spiral threatens

the very existence of quality Arts education in schools. Where good practice does exist, it is in spite of the system, not because of it.

The consequences of not changing course are bleak. We have a system that does not help students reach their potential, that neglects their cultural experiences at home and in the community, that adds to problems of poor mental health, behaviour and attendance.

The relegation of the Arts subjects to third class citizens in our education system threatens the future of the creative industries in this country, but it also hinders our ability to nurture children to fully develop their talents and interests. It obstructs their access to the Arts, rights which are protected in Article 29 and 31 of the UN Convention on the Human Rights of the Child.

We believe that the benefits of a rounded, broad curriculum with an equal focus on the Arts can bring huge societal, economic, and personal mental health benefits to future generations. We demand systemic change.

We want politicians to pledge the following:

- A significant increase in education spending, with specific funding for Arts education.
- To increase the supply of teachers in the Arts, where ITT recruitment falls well short

of targets.

- To conduct a full review of curriculum and assessment from EYFS to Post-16 with the stated aim of broadening and improving Arts education. Practices such as Progress 8, EBacc and SATs that work to sideline Arts education should be ended.
- To no longer use damaging low value language and 'Mickey Mouse' rhetoric to describe arts subjects.
- To rebuild Arts education organisations which support schools.
- To give education and arts trade unions, subject associations, arts educators, arts organisations a seat at the table when the curriculum is reviewed.

The Arts Apocalypse statement is supported by the following organisations:

[National Education Union](#), AccessArt, WGGB – The Writers' Union, Centre for Literacy in Primary Education, Black Lives in Music, Equity, Musicians' Union, One Dance UK, Susan M Coles - Arts Creativity Educational Consultant, Artist, UK Literacy Association, Music for Youth, National Drama, London Drama and National Society for Education in Art & Design.