

Narrative & Messaging

A recording of the presentation given by Paula Briggs, CEO & Creative Director AccessArt, at the April 2025 All Party Parliamentary Group for Art, Craft and Design Education. In this presentation, Paula explores the importance of keeping core values in mind when working towards high-quality visual arts education for all, if we are to avoid the contraction of the further subject area. Paula also shares AccessArt's response to the Interim Curriculum & Assessment Review, and shares some key information about current funding for arts in schools.



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.

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What is a Sketchbook?

How Do We Adapt our Art Teaching to Include Children with Specific Educational

Needs?

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.

[Is Art Thriving?](#)

[A Discussion about Art, Craft & Design as a Unique Subject Area](#)

[A Discussion About Knowledge](#)

[A Discussion about Assessment's impact upon Pedagogy, and Vice Versa](#)

[A Discussion about Extracurricular](#)

[A Discussion about the Connection between Art and Creative, Critical and Higher-Level Thinking Skills](#)

[A Discussion about teacher and pupil wellbeing and engagement.](#)

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.

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[Sign Now!](#)

Making a Cardboard Sketchbook

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1. Your name
2. Your Title
3. Your interest in the issue
4. Your email address

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- We ask for your name so we know to whom to address communications.
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- We ask you to specifically opt in for us to share your name, you can choose to remain anonymous.
- We intend to publish this letter on our website and social media accounts.
- We are also seeking publication in the national media.
- The letter may also be reproduced in international media.
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Open Letter to Government: Why Art Education Needs to Change: Inclusion, Wellbeing, Employment & Creative Industries

As a Subject Association for Art, and as a Registered Arts Education Charity, AccessArt invites you to sign the open letter below. We currently have over 1300 signatures and will be sending our letter

to the press very soon. Please do sign now – our combined voice will carry greater weight.

Please do share this page within your networks and on social media, thank you.

[Please find our Fair Processing Policy here.](#)

Please note if you leave a comment on this page below, that is not the same as signing the letter (pls use the form to sign).

Open Letter to Keir Starmer Prime Minister, Bridget Phillipson Secretary State for Education, Lisa Nandy Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport

Dear Members of Parliament,

With the Interim Report of the Curriculum and Assessment Review imminent, experts and advocates of arts education understand the significance of this opportunity. Will the government demonstrate that they have listened to the powerful, combined voices of experts in the field, and understood the unified message: that the current Curriculum

approach – the “knowledge-rich” mantra, the unnecessarily stringent approaches to testing, and the unfair bias placed on schools by the EBacc and Progress 8 – is failing to provide all pupils with a fit-for-purpose arts education.

We are deeply concerned that if the Review decides the arts in schools are “good enough” then a once in a lifetime opportunity will be missed and the Government will fail to meet its own commitments.

We need to hold Keir Starmer, Bridget Phillipson and Lisa Nandy to account, and remind them; we are looking to them to demonstrate the curiosity, courage and creative thinking we so badly need to nurture in our children to responsibly prepare them for their futures.

We remind the government of their verbal commitments:

Inclusion

“... A review of the curriculum to put arts, sports and music back at the heart of our schools and communities where it belongs.” ^[i]

“The arts, creativity, drama, music – they must be available to every child, to us all. Excellence is for everyone, and background must be no barrier to opportunity.” ^[ii]

‘I will help working-class pupils defy the odds to succeed – just as I did’ ^[iii]

Wellbeing

“That’s why thriving and belonging will feature so prominently in our work in the opportunity mission, hand in hand with attainment... Healthy, happy children coming to school ready to learn – if we get this right, those children will achieve time and again... The best schools understand this. They also understand that it’s not easy, it’s not soft.” [iv]

Employment

Alongside CEO’s of AI companies, the government’s own website says that in preparing for the workforce of the future, “creativity, critical thinking, and emotional intelligence are still absolutely vital.” [v]

Creative Industries

“Labour will deliver a broader curriculum, to tap into the unbelievable creative talent of all our young people.” [vi]

“Every young person must have access to music, art, design and drama. That is our mission. Because we know that for our creative industries to flourish, every child needs to be given a chance.” [vii]

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.

Where people are feeling fear, art can help people process and express.

Where people are feeling fragmented, art can help people connect.

Where people are feeling despair, art can create optimism.

Where people are feeling disempowered and unheard, art can empower.

Paula Briggs, Co-Founder, CEO and Creative Director AccessArt

[i] Lisa Nandy, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, September 2024

[ii] Bridget Phillipson, Secretary of State for Education, X, 14th August, 2023

[iii] Bridget Phillipson, Secretary of State for Education, The Guardian, 20 July 2024

[iv] Bridget Phillipson, Secretary of State for Education, Confederation of School Trusts' Conference, November 2024

[v] <https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2025/01/what-ai-means-for-jobs-and-how-were-preparing-the-workforce/>

[vi] Bridget Phillipson, Secretary of State for Education, The Rest is Politics, June 2024

[vii] Keir Starmer, March 2024

“Acts of Kindness” Workshop

Collage: Deconstructing, Reconstructing and Abstracting

What We Like About This Resource...

“I really like how this playful resource helps us to make a creative response inspired by a stimulus, ensuring that the stimulus is only an entry point into an outcome that will look totally different. Exploring the themes of colour, texture and composition through the lens of different artists also helps us see how we can interpret (and re-interpret) colours and materials in a meaningful way. Viewfinders and collage are also great tools for those who experience ‘fear of the white page’ and will allow learners to make conscious creative decisions as they go.” – Tobi, AccessArt

You May Also Like

Adapting AccessArt: Colour and Composition



Cut Paper Collage Still Life



Cooking with collage



Session Recording: The Tiny Art School Movement: Spotlight

Tiny Art Schools: The Little Makery

Tiny Art Schools: Creative Days

Zoom Access Link: Artist Educator Spotlight

The AccessArt Lab: Workshop Sessions

<< [Back to AccessArt Lab](#)

The AccessArt team will use the AccessArt Lab to devise, trial and develop content for the AccessArt website. [Explore the Areas of Focus and Core Values of the AccessArt Lab here.](#)

As part of this process, we will be running in-person workshops at the studio at Stapleford Granary, Cambridgeshire.

These workshops sessions will evolve over our time at Stapleford and fall into two workshop types:

Open sessions



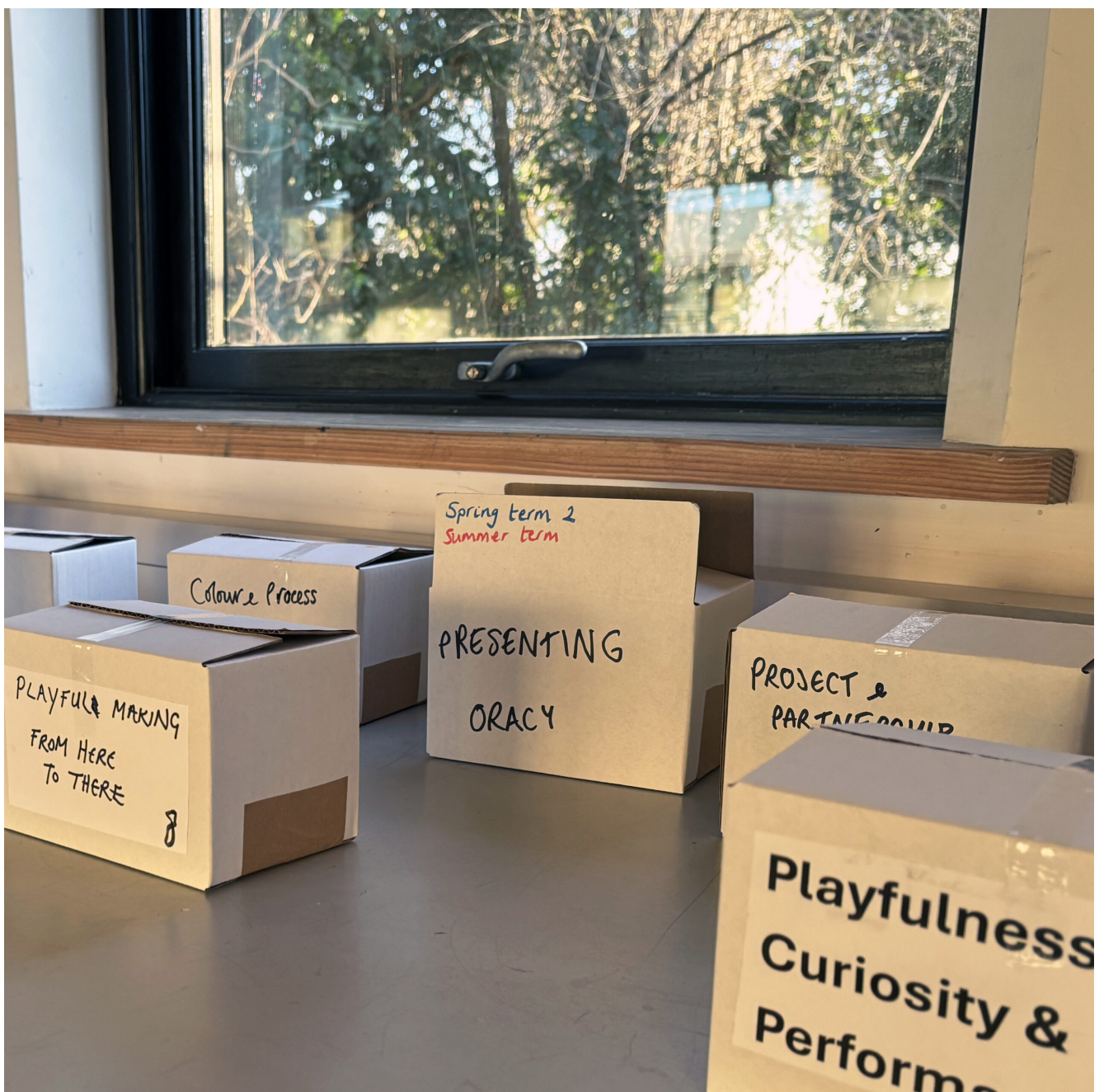
The Open [In-Person Sessions](#) will be open to various audiences. These sessions will be programmed over the following weeks and months.

To make sure you are kept up to date when we announce new in-person, open sessions, please:

[Register for free at AccessArt](#) if you are not already a free subscriber or member

- [Join the AccessArt Network Facebook Group](#)
- [Follow us on Instagram](#)

Invite-only sessions



The Invite-Only Sessions will be open to selected experts in the field to help the AccessArt team brainstorm and better understand content and approach. This is an exciting opportunity for more experienced educators to join in and help contribute to stimulating thinking and discussion.

If you are an educator and would be interested in attending any in-person, invite-only sessions, please read our “AccessArt Lab Areas of Focus & Core Values” post to make sure you understand the spirit and intention which will drive these sessions. If you would then like to be added to our register of interested educators list, please email paula@accessart.org.uk with the following information:

- Name and contact details
- Brief outline of educational areas of interest / experience, including audience/pupils.

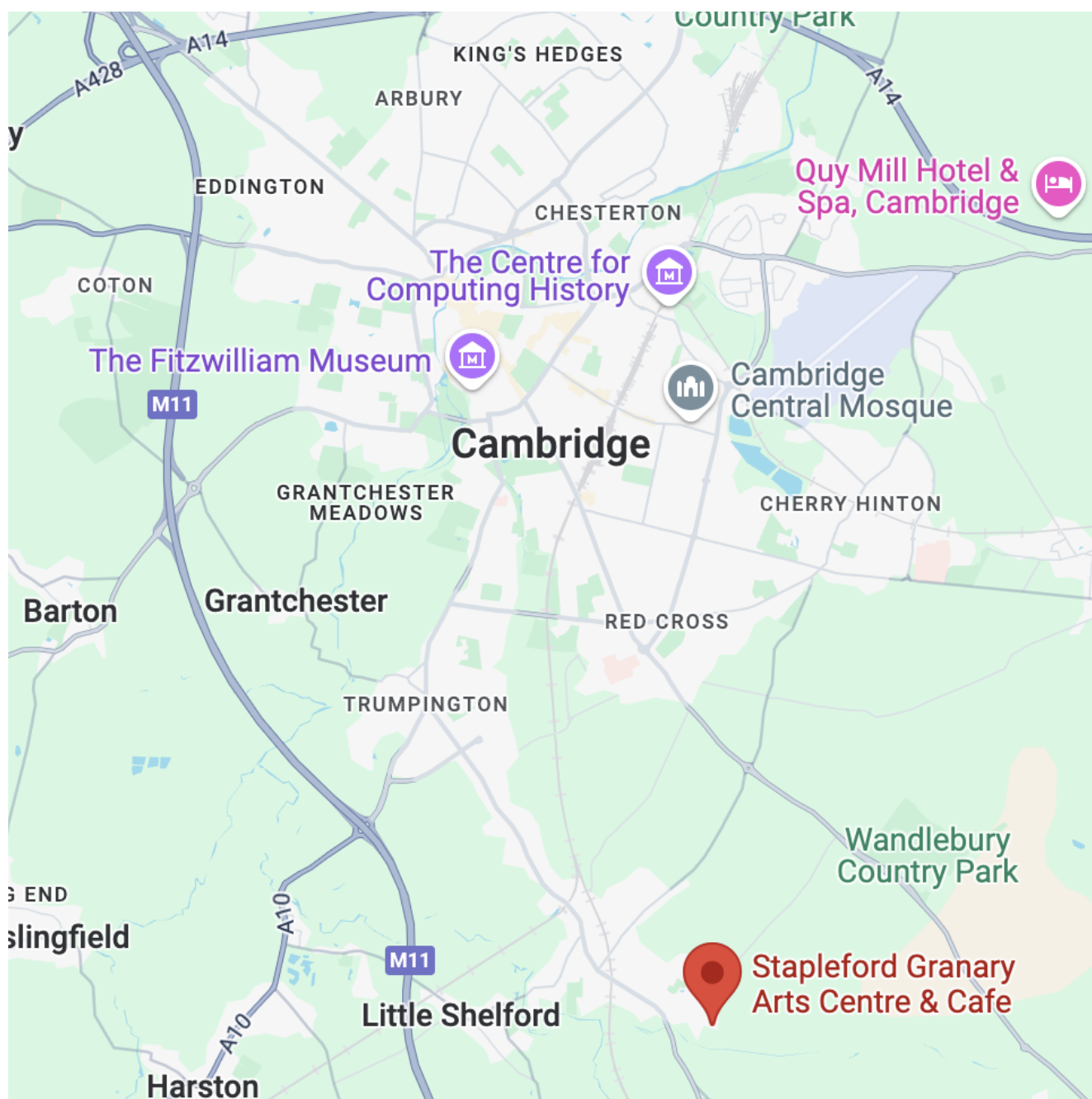
The AccessArt Lab will begin in January 2025. Please join the [AccessArt Network Facebook](#) group and register at [AccessArt](#) for free to be kept in touch.

[Stapleford Granary](#) is an Arts Centre whose aim is to foster cultural understanding through education.

The venue offers music, art, education &

conversation in a beautiful 19th century farm complex, situated at the foot of the Gog Magog Downs, just 5 miles from the centre of Cambridge.

Please note the [AccessArt registered office and all contact details remain as detailed here.](#)



You May Also Like...

AccessArt Lab Areas of Focus & Core Values



How tiny Art Schools grow



The AccessArt Lab Areas of Focus and Core Values

<< [Back to AccessArt Lab](#)

The AccessArt Lab provides AccessArt with the opportunity to focus on practical and pedagogical exploration of key areas of interest which have emerged over the last few years. The work in the AccessArt Lab will be guided by the areas of focus and core values described below.

[Find out about the in-person sessions](#) we will be running at the Lab to help facilitate these areas of focus.

Areas of Focus



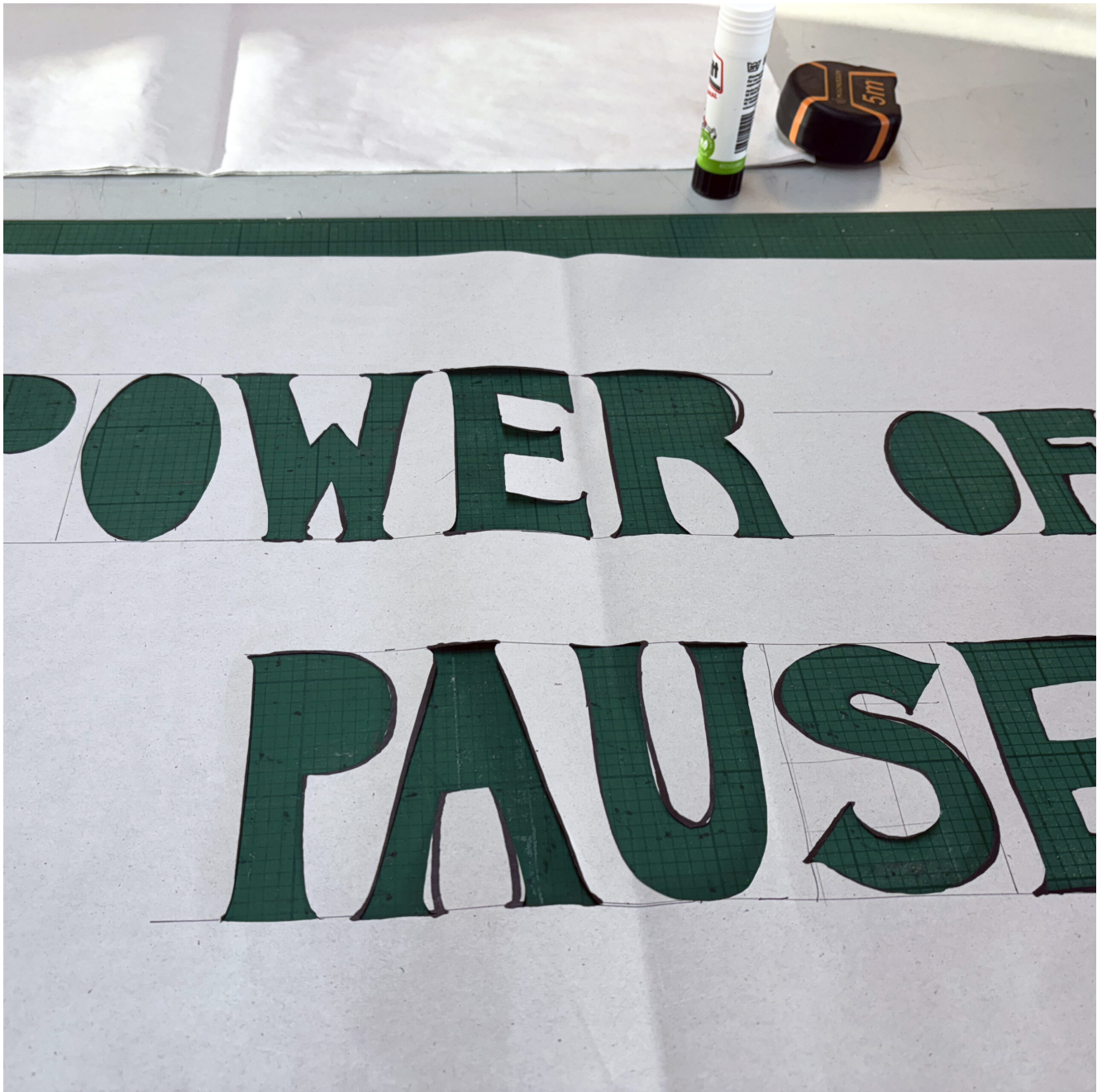
The AccessArt Lab will be exploring the following areas of focus. New areas will be allowed to evolve over time.

Exploration of Inhabiting “Spaces of Not-Knowing” – What does it feel like to be in spaces of not-knowing? What are the risks and benefits? What might be the outcomes? How can we enable these spaces?

- **Exploration of Social Models of Learning – How can we embrace shared experiences and outcomes to discover more open, inclusive and diverse ways of thinking and acting?**
- **Re-Connection to Physical Senses, Body-Based Activities and Exploration of Resistant Forces – Whilst not turning out back on digital, how can we better protect and appreciate time spent in the physical world? How can we build tolerance of what resistance feels like (in interaction with materials and ideas, and in communication between people), and how can we more positively manage our relationship to resistance?**
- **Teenage Enquiry-Based Learning – How can we devise a rich, diverse and adaptable curriculum to engage all teenagers?**

Core Values

▪



The work undertaken in the Lab will be guided by the following principles:

- Awareness of the programming and messaging of our everyday lives and how this impacts upon our thought, action and wellbeing. Alongside this, an exploration of how we can explore a gentler, yet more physical way of thinking and acting, and the benefits this might

bring.

- Permission for “Pause” – in all forms – space to think, space to act without outcome, space to play...
- Appreciation of “question” over “answer” – Where do we put the emphasis and how does it change our experience?
- An understanding that exploration of all areas of focus within the lab ultimate benefit others (people, communities and society) through accessible sharing of practice and ideas.

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You May Also Like...

AccessArt Lab Workshop Sessions



How tiny Art Schools grow



Tiny Art Schools: Art School Ilkley Part One

Tiny Art Schools: Art School Ilkley Part Two

Tiny Art Schools: Art School Ilkley Part Three

“When We Hold Art Education In Our Hands”

Recording of a presentation delivered by Paula Briggs, CEO and Creative Director of AccessArt, at the All Party Parliamentary Group for Art, Craft & Design Education on 17th December 2024.

Session Recording: Improving Outcomes in Drawing