

Art & Design Education at the Crossroads¹

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a background to proposed changes in English art and design education and the perceived threats resulting from 'reforms' underway following the election of the coalition government in May 2010. Art and design education appears to be precariously poised on a cliff edge as a consequence of very questionable initiatives driven by the Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove. These include the proposed introduction of the academic 'English Baccalaureate' performance standard; a root and branch review of the National Curriculum likely to lead to slimmed down statutory requirements that marginalise the arts; far-reaching changes to initial teacher education with training for art and design teachers reduced by 40 percent; and student fee increases. Further concerns may include the outcome of a DCMS review of 'Cultural Education', and the consequences of the decision by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills to sever all funding for teaching the arts and humanities in universities and specialist higher education institutions. A postscript covering 2013 concludes the paper.

Keywords:

England
Schools
Curriculum
Education Policy
Initial Teacher
Education

¹ This paper was selected and edited through the double-blind review process of the review. The author would like to thank Cécile Doustaly for the first feed-back on this paper given at the conference she organized in December 2011: The Arts In Times of Crisis: British and French Perspectives (with the generous support of the CICC-Université de Cergy-Pontoise, Fondation de l'université de Cergy-Pontoise, Centre for Cultural Policy Studies-Warwick University, Musée Rodin, Fondation Pierre Bergé-Yves Saint Laurent, Musée du Louvre, Courtauld Institute of Arts, The Henry Moore Foundation).

Causes for concern

'The Future of Art and Design in Schools' has been a frequent and popular theme at art and design education conferences and in the field's publications for as long as I can remember. The reason is obvious: the subject too often is perceived as under some sort of threat in one way or another. While some might argue that art and design teachers are more paranoid than most, nevertheless the threats are sometimes real. Following the formation of the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government in May 2010, all teachers concerned with creative and cultural education in English schools, in my view, have good reason to be more than usually concerned. Arts education is at a crossroads or, just as likely, precariously poised on a cliff edge.

Why should this be so? The short answer is the coalition government's education policies: an avalanche of highly experimental and ideological Neo-Con initiatives driven by Michael Gove, the current Secretary of State at the Department for Education (DfE) in England. These include the introduction of the so-called 'English Baccalaureate', a 'root and branch' review of the National Curriculum, far-reaching changes to initial teacher education and to student funding. Then there is a review of 'Cultural Education' commissioned by the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) and the consequences of the decision by the Department of Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) to stop all government funding for teaching the arts and humanities in universities and specialist higher education institutions – these will be funded solely by student fees in future. This is compounded by little evidence of any joined-up government thinking and a long list of unintended – or possibly intended – consequences.

The English Baccalaureate

The proposed English Baccalaureate or 'EBac' should not be confused with the French Baccalaureate or the International Baccalaureate: the only similarity is the name. The EBac is a device designed by government '...to provide a powerful incentive for schools to drive the take up of individual science subjects, humanities such as history and, especially, foreign languages' (DfE 2010: 44). It is claimed the EBac together with a reformed National Curriculum will give schools '...the freedom and the incentives to provide a rigorous and broad academic [author's emphasis] education' (DfE 2010: 45).

The government's intention is that by achieving the stated combination of GCSEs (the examinations taken at age 16+) students will be entitled to a certificate recording their achievement (DfE 2010: 44). This has yet to materialise and seems unlikely to do so. The House of Commons Education Committee (HCEC) in their highly critical report on the EBac argued that plans for such certification should be shelved and they commented further: 'We do not

believe the EBac – the hybrid of a certificate and a performance measure, named after a qualification – is appropriately labelled: it is not a baccalaureate, and as it stands the name can therefore be misleading to parents, professionals and pupils' (HCEC 2011: 13). It seems clear that the EBac is not a qualification: it is government initiative to coerce secondary schools in England into promoting specific 'academic' subjects to age 16 and to set further arbitrary standards for measuring the 'success' of the English education system (hereafter referred to as 'accountability measures').

There is no clear rationale for the academic subjects that have been included or omitted in the English Baccalaureate. The range of subjects included is felt by many to be too narrow and not at all inclusive of all students in the school. The definition of humanities and languages appears to be arbitrary. For example, why include geography and history but not English literature? Why include Ancient Hebrew as a preferred language option? Why exclude all the arts subjects, design and technology, citizenship, personal, social and health education (PSHE) and religious education? John White observes:

[Gove's] new English Baccalaureate is virtually a carbon copy of the 1868 Taunton report's curriculum for most middle class schools, as they were then called. The new award will be given to all 16-year-olds who have good exam grades in 'English, mathematics, the sciences, a modern or ancient foreign language and a humanity such as history or geography'. Taunton's list is identical, except that it makes both history and geography compulsory. How is it that a curriculum designed for clerks and shopkeepers in Dickens' England is at the cutting edge in 2010? (White 2011: 27).

Following the first announcement it was immediately apparent that many secondary schools would guide their students towards the named EBac subjects at the expense of a broad and balanced curriculum. The Times Educational Supplement (TES) published evidence about how quickly the EBac had skewed the option choices offered to students for the current academic year: by July 2011 48 percent of secondary schools had already changed their curriculum offer to 'suit the demands of the English Baccalaureate' (Exley, 2011: 22). Options to study subjects like art and design, music, religious education, drama, technology, business and ICT, as well as vocational qualifications, were much reduced or even removed. An earlier indicative survey (on a sample of 100 representative teachers & schools) carried out by the National Society for Education in Art and Design showed that teachers reported a 39 percent fall in numbers opting for vocational courses, and 57 percent reported a cut in the capitation

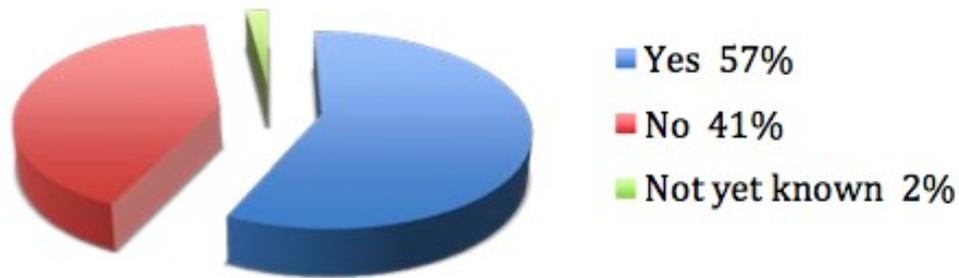


FIGURE 1. HAS THERE BEEN ANY REDUCTION IN CAPITATION PLANNED FOR YOUR DEPARTMENT?

allowance (finance for materials and equipment) for their department.

At the same time teachers noted the numbers of students who opted to study art and design at Key Stage 4 (14-16 years) fell by 50 percent in 2011-2012 while 30 percent expected the number of art and design teachers to decline (NSEAD 2011).

While government ministers seem obsessed by opening up opportunities for admission to the self-appointed elite 'Russell Group' of universities other reputable specialist institutions like the remaining independent art colleges, the Royal College of Art or the University of the Arts, as well as the art and design faculties of eighty or more other British universities are not only sidelined but have had all their funding for teaching removed.

Ministers appear to wish to narrowly prioritise their own routes through education as the only possible pathways to 'success'. An epithet often attributed to Rabindranath Tagore (unknown date) is

pertinent: 'Don't limit a child to your own learning, for she was born in another time'. Tagore also said: '... adults, because they are tyrants, ignore natural gifts and say that children must learn through the same process that they learned by. We insist upon forced mental feeding and our lessons become a form of torture. This is one of man's [sic] most cruel and wasteful mistakes'.

Ministers might do well to take heed of such wisdom. While it is axiomatic that everyone should have a good basic education in core skills and knowledge, the entitlement for every child to a broad and balanced education as enshrined in the Education Reform Act 1987 is vital. Students should be encouraged to keep their options open and the focus should be on what young people need to be equipped with the attitudes, dispositions and values for a satisfying and productive future in the 21st century — not for the 19th century.

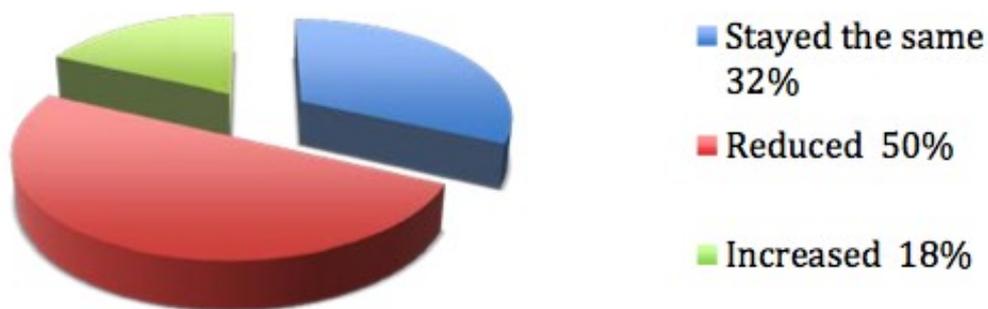


FIGURE 1. ART AND DESIGN DOES NOT CURRENTLY FORM PART OF THE NEW ENGLISH BACCALAUREATE FOR STUDENTS AT KS4. IN YOUR SCHOOL/COLLEGE HAVE THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS WHO OPTED TO STUDY ART AND DESIGN AT KS4...

The Curriculum Review

In contrast to this the government's 'White Paper' (DfE 2010) set out a narrower plan, decreeing that a new approach to the curriculum was needed '... specifying a tighter, more rigorous model of the knowledge that every child should expect to master in core subjects at every key stage' (DfE 2010: 10). A review of the National Curriculum was announced with the aim of '...reducing prescription and allowing schools to decide how to teach, whilst refocusing on the core subject knowledge that every child and young person should gain at each stage of their education' (DfE, 2010: 10). Over time it became apparent that this involved 'slimming down' the curriculum – possibly removing subjects from the statutory curriculum and concentrating on 'core knowledge' to the exclusion of much else.

To the Department for Education's (DfE) apparent surprise over 5000 responses to the curriculum review were submitted. The DfE attributed this to unusual 'interest' but 'concern' would have been the mot juste. An Expert Group was established under the chair of Tim Oates from Cambridge Assessment. Oates (2010) had previously written a pamphlet entitled 'Could do better: Using international comparisons to refine the National Curriculum in England, that had sufficiently impressed Secretary of State Gove to persuade him to write the foreword and make this appointment. Oates' pamphlet argued,

...that although the National Curriculum for England has been subjected to a protracted process of revision, the latest round of revisions failed adequately to draw from emerging analysis of high-performing systems around the globe. By taking a wrong turn in revision strategy, accumulated problems were not confronted and new problems were introduced (Oates, 2010: 1).

Oates claimed to draw on transnational analysis to understand the operation of other nations systems and to establish what we might learn from them. This might sound innocuous enough but, in my view, it was a polemic designed to comprehensively demolish the rationale and content of the New Secondary Curriculum (NSC) that had been introduced in 2007 after years of development and with a high level of consensus. Oates condemned it as disastrous.

From 2007 to 2010 ten subject associations worked with the now defunct Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QDCA) to provide professional development for secondary school heads of department. The overwhelming response to the NSC was strong support: teachers saw the new curriculum not, as Oates argues, as 'over-prescriptive' but as liberating. They understood they were free to provide a local curriculum tailored to their pupils needs. Many excellent case studies have been recorded pointing to the worthwhile changes taking place. It was evident that the NSC was motivating

and reinvigorating pupils and teachers alike. The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), before it seems to have been silenced, recognised it was having a significant impact.

This begs the important question of who, apart from Michael Gove and Tim Oates, decided the NSC was a 'disaster'. Where was the evidence for this presented? No systematic evaluation has taken place. The first cohort of pupils has yet to take their General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examinations. It may yet prove somewhat embarrassing if there are improved GCSE results in 2012. Should there be so ministers will probably dismiss such improvement as further evidence of dumbing down and as the justification for radical change. It is inexcusable that there has been no proper evaluation of the NSC before launching into yet another major 'review' with all the disruption it inevitably causes for pupils, teachers, schools and the education system as a whole.

The missing arts

The 2010 White Paper makes one solitary reference to the arts in all of its 91 pages. Paragraph 4.31 reads:

Children should expect to be given a rich menu of cultural experiences. So we have commissioned... [a report] to explore how we can improve music education and have more children learning to play an instrument. The ... Review will also inform our broader approach to cultural education. We will support access to live theatre, encourage the appreciation of the visual and plastic arts and work with our great museums and libraries to support their educational mission (DfE, 2010: 46).

It will be apparent immediately that the White Paper identified the government's concern with appreciation of the arts and, other than learning to play an instrument, made no reference to practical creative activity. By the summer of 2011 the promise to support our 'great museums and libraries' was ringing hollow with libraries scheduled for closure across the country and the Museums Association (Newman & Tourle 2011) reporting that because museum funding was being cut by 25 percent or more, over 60 percent of museums had cut back their public events, half had reduced opening hours, over 85 percent were cutting staff including a 30 percent cut in education staff. At the same time it was already clear that many schools would no longer offer the full range of options at Key Stage 4 (14-16 years). Arts teachers were being made redundant, arts departments were being reduced in size, areas of experience were being lost, less cost-effective vocational courses were being closed, access to continuing professional development was either very limited or non-existent,

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funding for access to visiting artists, galleries and museums was disappearing and overall capitation – the money allocated to arts departments – was being cut.

The curriculum review asked whether arts subjects should have a statutory place in the curriculum at all and there were indications that the government had already decided they should not. Such a decision, if implemented, would surely represent Philistinism on an unprecedented scale.

Rationales for arts education

There are many justifications for including art and design and arts education as part of general education, admittedly some more convincing than others, but there is no shortage of well considered and researched rationales. These include the report of the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCCE) *All Our Futures: Creativity Culture and Education* (Robinson 1999), the UNESCO (2007) *Road Map for Arts Education: Building Creative Capacities for the 21st Century* and the subsequent ‘Seoul Agenda’, and the 2011 report commissioned by President Obama *Reinvesting in Arts Education: Winning America's future through creative schools* (PCAH, 2011). It seemed evident however that the British government was either unaware of – or set on ignoring – the growing and wide international consensus on the importance of arts education.

Historically in the mid-nineteenth century the rationale for introducing art education to schools was to fulfil two clear aims: to provide ‘an education of the eye, and of the hand, such as may indeed be the first step in the career of a great artist’ (Committee of Council on Education, 1857-1858), but, significantly, also to meet the economic needs of the country by training skilled artisans whose work would be capable of challenging increasing international competition,

notably from French design and manufacturing (Doustaly 2010).

If the growing international consensus about the importance of the arts is insufficiently convincing to economic and political pragmatists then they need only look at the economic data. The most up-to-date statistics for the creative industries from the Department of Culture Media and Sport state:

- creative industries contributed 5.6% of the UK's Gross Value Added in 2008
- exports of services by the creative industries totalled £17.3 billion in 2008, equalling 4.1% of all goods and services exported
- there were an estimated 182,100 businesses in the creative industries on the Inter-Departmental Business Register (IDBR) in 2010. This represents 8.7% of all companies on the IDBR
- software and electronic publishing make the biggest contribution to GVA of the creative industries, at 2.5% in 2008. They also make up a large number of total creative firms (81,700) (DCMS, 2010).

One in four new jobs in the United Kingdom is in the creative sector and creative employment provides around two million jobs in this sector and in creative roles in other sectors. Employment in the creative industries has grown at double the rate of the economy as a whole. The Prime Minister has spoken of supporting economic growth and has highlighted the creative industries as an important growth area in rebalancing the economy (Cameron, 2010). He pledged that government departments and agencies will work closely together to make sure that there is an appropriate level of support available for the creative industries. And yet ministers deliberately seem to continue to pigeonhole art and design in schools as ‘fine art’ and they ignore the design and contemporary creative and media industry associations. Secretary of State Gove advocates

perspective drawing as the core of the subject, while Schools Minister Nick Gibb complained to me that nobody had taught him how to shade a circle to look like a sphere. Both ministers appear content to see the arts – and design and technology – wither in the curriculum without any thought of the economic realities let alone less prosaic rationales.

Where do these policies lead?

What happens to young people who want to pursue creative subjects? Or have more physical or practical leanings? Or are less academically inclined? Neuroscientists tell us that not all people learn in the same way and it has long been recognised that some have exceptional ability in certain subjects – maths, music, and the arts for example – that is not matched by all-round academic ability. Will these individuals once again be branded academic failures by the narrow measures of a limited education system? Secondary school students seem destined by ministerial diktat to be drawn into forced study of a limited diet of academic subjects and be directed away from other subjects where their true interests and abilities lie. The House of Commons Education Committee commented: ‘...that the EBac’s level of prescription does not adequately reflect the differences of interest or ability between individual young people, and risks the very shoehorning of pupils into inappropriate courses about which one education minister has expressed concerns’ (HCEC, 2011: 39).

There is little evidence that the coalition government’s much increased emphasis on academic subjects is what employers and industry actually want. They have long argued that they need people with a range of flexible skills including: self-reliance, enthusiasm, team working, technical skills, versatility, a creative approach to problem solving and creative thinking; the ability to innovate; and digital and online creative skills. These are precisely the skills that sound arts education is especially good at nurturing. In September 2011 the Confederation of British Industries published a report (CBI, 2011) identifying skill shortages in the creative industries and calling on the government to ensure young people are able to study a range of creative subjects and to include a creative subject within the specification for the EBac. The CBI was, of course, ignored.

It is a fact that many very successful people were marked as failures at school – the ‘A Better Baccalaureate’ web site (2011) bears testimony to this – and, sadly not all recover from this early set back. Much potential talent is wasted. Sir Ken Robinson argues there is much more to intelligence than academic ability and much more to education than its development. He makes the point:

Academic ability is not the same as intelligence. Academic ability is essentially a capacity for certain sorts of verbal and mathematical reasoning. These are very important, but they are

not the whole of human intelligence by a long way. If there were no more to human intelligence than academic ability, most of human culture would not have happened. There would be no practical science or technology, no business, no arts, no music, no dance, drama, architecture, design, cuisine, aesthetics, feelings, relationships, emotions, or love. I think these are large factors to leave out of an account of intelligence. If all you had was academic ability, you wouldn’t have been able to get out of bed this morning. In fact there wouldn’t have been a bed to get out of. No one could have made one. You could have written about the possibility of one, but not have constructed it. Don’t mistake me, I think that academic work – and the disciplines and abilities it can promote – are absolutely vital in education, and to the full development of human intelligence and capacity. But they are not the whole of them. Yet our education systems are completely preoccupied with these abilities to the virtual exclusion of many others that are equally vital – capacities that becoming more important every day. (Robinson, 2001: 81).

The House of Commons Education Committee clearly concurs with this view: ‘...academic subjects are not the only path to a successful future, and all young people, regardless of background, must continue to have opportunities to study the subjects in which they are likely to be most successful, and which pupils, parents and schools think will serve them best’ (HCEC, 2011: 31).

The government’s insistence on a ‘slimmed down’ curriculum in which the arts are at best marginal and very probably absent sends out a highly misguided and damaging message: it very clearly tells children, schools, their parents and society at large that the arts are of no importance.

Autumn 2011: a very inconclusive conclusion

It is abundantly clear that the government has embarked on an unprecedented experiment with the future of education in England and it is impossible to predict what the eventual outcome might be – especially for arts education. Despite widespread criticism education ministers seem little inclined to alter any of their proposals.

Work on the curriculum review is behind schedule. Phase one which focuses on English, Maths, Science and Physical Education is not complete and phase two intended to look at all other subjects has not yet commenced. No formal announcement on which subjects will be included in

the national curriculum from 2013 and 2014 is expected until spring 2012 although well-sourced rumours suggest that the statutory primary curriculum – these subjects occupying 50-70 percent of curriculum time – will be restricted to mathematics, science, English, history and physical education. Publication of the report on cultural education has also been delayed, possibly to ensure that it does not conflict embarrassingly with key ministerial decisions that have already been taken.

A number of evidence confirms that there are ongoing reductions in the arts subjects in many secondary schools across England. While this is not true in all schools, a picture emerges where schools are increasing the opportunities for students to select Ebac subjects and/or decreasing other choices such as the arts and design and technology. Drivers for this situation include decisions by head teachers to try to improve their Ebac scores in advance of their next Ofsted inspection and school governors with changing views of the relative value of different subjects. There is a growing idea that subjects such as the arts are not ‘academic’ and therefore of less value and that they will hinder university entrance and future career opportunities. Linked to this is an increasing belief that so called ‘softer’ subjects do not challenge students sufficiently or help improve ‘literacy’ skills.

It is a fact that art and design is frequently amongst the highest achieving subjects in schools’ overall examination results. The arts continue to motivate many students and help convince them of their potential for some success. Remove these subjects and many students will have little in the curriculum to interest them or to offer opportunities for creative thinking and self-expression. Art and design has always been a popular with students. It was recently rated the second most popular subject (fractionally below PE) in a nationwide opinion poll of students (BBC 2011). The reason for this is probably because art and design is both academic and practical: it provides opportunities for students to

express their personal opinions, to have a voice and to be able to reinterpret classical and contemporary forms whilst applying their knowledge, skills and understanding to make original and deeply personal outcomes.

The key issues that I have described are set against mounting teacher unrest about punitive pension proposals, a continuing salary freeze, the promise of more ‘accountability measures’, more and more schools opting out of local authority – and therefore democratic – control. Some talk of wholesale privatisation of the education system. Changes in teacher education shift the main responsibility from universities to schools. ‘Consultation’ on the government’s strategy for initial teacher education is ongoing although the quota of art and design teachers being trained has been more than halved in the past two years as a consequence of policies driven more by ideology than demographics. Many post-graduate training courses in the arts will no longer be viable and the probable loss of specialist teachers, equipment and facilities will not be easily reversed without significant cost in the future. It seems inevitable that art and design (and other subjects including music, design and technology, citizenship and religious education) will have a much weaker position in the curriculum and it will be left to the judgement of individual schools whether or not to continue to offer these subjects in future. The student entitlement to a broad and balanced curriculum has been abandoned.

Government policies at both school and university level seem intent on destroying 150 years steady development of arts education to the serious detriment of the British society and the economy. Ultimately there is nothing that makes the British people inherently more creative than others: the reason for the United Kingdom’s strong creative and design industries and hitherto vibrant arts sector is the education system that drives it. Governments and Secretaries of State come and go and sooner or later

“THE ARTS CONTINUE TO MOTIVATE MANY STUDENTS AND HELP CONVINCED THEM OF THEIR POTENTIAL FOR SOME SUCCESS. REMOVE THESE SUBJECTS AND MANY STUDENTS WILL HAVE LITTLE IN THE CURRICULUM TO INTEREST THEM OR TO OFFER OPPORTUNITIES FOR CREATIVE THINKING AND SELF-EXPRESSION.”

there will be a u-turn on these senseless and destructive policies. We can only hope that this occurs before more irreparable harm has been done.

Postscript 2013

The final details of the English National Curriculum to be taught in schools from September 2015 remain unresolved, nearly two years since this paper was first drafted. A final 'consultation' closed on 8 August 2013. The current National Curriculum has been 'disapplied' for the academic year 2013-2014 to allow schools to prepare for the 'final' version, eventually released on 11 September 2013 (see quote ending the paper).

The Council for Subject Associations concluded in its response to the consultation:

Whilst we recognise that some improvements have been made to earlier drafts, much of the current documents lack coherence and intellectual rigour. They are often poorly drafted, showing clear evidence of a rushed and poorly conceived process - subjects associations feel that their principal role has been to try to make the best of a bad job (CfSA 2013).

The Henley review of cultural education (Henley 2012) was eventually published in early 2012 and met with a lukewarm government response. Crucially, advice about including arts subjects in the EBac was ignored. Nevertheless some concessions have been made in the latest curriculum drafts which were published in July 2013 (DfE 2013a), in the face of widespread criticism from the arts and cultural sector.

Art and design and music have a statutory place in the curriculum for key stages 1-3 (ages 5-14). In a critique of the latest draft of the programme of study for art and design, the NSEAD (2013a) objected to the way it is predicated on an outdated fine art model that is neither stimulating nor challenging. Scant attention has been given to craft and design education (thus failing to provide pathways to much of art and design in higher education). There is a failure to reference contemporary practice, global perspectives or approaches linked to the creative industries, to digital technologies and the future. In the view of the Society the proposed curriculum is unfit for purpose for young people in the 21st century.

The position of dance remains ambiguous within the physical education programme of study: it is not a sport but an essential art form and should be valued and recognised as such. Drama is absent from the statutory framework for English in any structured way. There is nothing that ensures that teachers will teach drama or use it, especially at key stages 1 and 2 and there is no drama content guidance.

The EBac remains although plans to issue an EBac Certificate have been scrapped. A second

headline accountability measure is to be introduced in response to criticism of the narrow focus of the EBac. The rationale for two accountability measures (EBac and 'Best Eight') is unclear. Recording the 'Best Eight' examination subjects of all pupils might encourage a broader and more balanced curriculum for a wider range of children provided the model allows for English, mathematics and six other subjects to be counted. It would also avoid the reputational damage to some subjects implicit in the present proposals. This issue also remains unresolved. Attempts to replace the GCSE examination have foundered although a further 'reform' is in process with the aim of making it harder and more 'rigorous'.

Other measures continue to be introduced apace. The majority of teacher education (training?) will now take place in schools. Five university post-graduate centres for art and design education have closed and more are likely to follow.

Ironically the majority of state-funded secondary schools in England are now designated as 'Academies' - as of 1 August 2013 there are 3,086 academies (DfE 2013b). These schools are exempt from following the National Curriculum. Thus the final unanswered question must be for how much longer will there be a National Curriculum at all in England?

To conclude, here is the National Society for Education in Art and Design online comment (NSEAD 2013b) to the final version of the art and design curriculum published on 11 September 2013 (DfE 2013c):

'As it stands, the Society and its members have been listened to, but not enough. The final version is neither aspirational, nor inspiring, and certainly not 'world class' The final version does not describe the unique nature, depth, breadth and future of the subject, nor fully meet the needs of children and young people living and engaging in the 21st century. The Society have formed a Curriculum Writing Group to move the statutory National Curriculum for art and design forward on our own terms, and we will be presenting this on our website shortly.' (NSEAD 2013 b)

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