

## #SaveOurSubjects Open Letter to Secretary of State Gillian Keegan

Dear Secretary of State

As organisations involved in education, the arts and creative industries, we are calling on you to reverse the ongoing decline of arts and technology subjects in state secondary schools. This narrowing of the curriculum is restricting student choice and preventing young people from developing the essential skills needed to support the economy, to build a well-functioning society, and to become responsible citizens. It is particularly affecting disadvantaged pupils and those in disadvantaged areas, where the government has promised to 'level up'. We believe that changing the accountability system, especially Progress 8 and the English Baccalaureate (EBacc), would support schools to offer a broader curriculum.

Between 2010 and 2022, there has been a fall of 40% in GCSE arts entries. Design and technology GCSE had 71% fewer entries in 2022 than 2010. There was a 23% drop between 2010 and 2021 of teachers teaching arts, and a 49% drop in design and technology teachers. A survey for the [Times Education Commission](#) found that less than half of secondary school teachers think the curriculum is 'broad and balanced', with 82% highlighting that the accountability system is overly concerned with academic achievement.

The initial decline in arts subjects corresponds to the introduction of the EBacc in 2010, with its focus on five subjects, excluding the arts. There was also a marked decline following the introduction of Progress 8 in 2016. Five of the eight Progress 8 subjects are EBacc subjects, and this has encouraged schools to focus on the EBacc at the expense of arts subjects. GCSE entries in EBacc subjects grew strongly from 70.4% in 2015 to 81.4% in 2019, with a corresponding drop in non-EBacc subjects.

While the drop in arts and technology subjects in state secondary schools affects all pupils, it affects disadvantaged pupils more. [In the private \(fee paying\) system](#) there has been an increase in investment, provision and value ascribed to arts and cultural education. This two-tier system has led to increased inequalities in terms of access to, and the value of, a broad educational experience. Young people in the wealthiest decile are three times more likely to sing in a choir or play in a band or orchestra weekly.<sup>1</sup> Black, Asian and ethnically diverse students face significant obstacles to studying art at every stage of their educational journey, which leads to and is affected by a lack of representation throughout the arts sector.<sup>2</sup>

Our creative industries contribute substantially to the economy. In 2019 DCMS estimated that the creative industries [contributed £115.9 billion](#), accounting for 5.9% of the UK economy and that there were over 2.1 million people employed in the creative industries sector. Employers themselves highlight the importance of arts and technology subjects. In 2019 the [Confederation of British Industry](#) reported that businesses have noticed a narrowing of the curriculum and stated that 'we need to provide a curriculum that instead of narrowing horizons, broadens them, and fosters skills such as creativity, resilience, communication, and problem-solving.'

Parents value arts and technology subjects too. In recent research carried out by Parentkind 80% of respondents agreed that it is very important for their child's school to provide access to a full arts and technology curriculum (such as art, design, drama and music) up to and including

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ukonward.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Beyond-school-enrichment-onward.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Elisabeth Murdoch, the Freelands foundation <https://www.artsindustry.co.uk/news/2420-probe-into-race-inequality-in-art-teaching-launched>

GCSE level. Over half (56%) said they had noticed arts subjects being treated differently from other subjects at their child's school, for example being taught on a rotational basis in Key Stage 3 or a reduced offer of arts and technology subjects being offered at GCSE.

A new campaign launched by the Edge Foundation and Independent Society of Musicians is calling for action to save our arts and technology subjects. It offers three proposals that we believe will allow secondary schools to broaden the curriculum and provide a level playing field for all subjects:

- Review the impact of accountability measures (the EBacc and Progress 8) on arts and technology subjects
- Reform the Progress 8 accountability measure, giving pupils more freedom of choice at GCSE
- Deliver the Arts Premium promised in the Conservatives' 2019 election manifesto

You have [previously stated](#) that you want to make the UK's education system one the rest of the world looks up to, and we strongly support that ambition. However, we cannot achieve this without providing a truly broad and balanced curriculum at secondary level.

We believe that every child has the right to a high-quality arts education, as part of a broad and balanced education that meets their needs, recognises their aspirations and supports them to make an active contribution to society. We urge you to consider our proposals and take steps to halt the decline in arts and technology subjects at secondary level.

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