



Report on the 2017 Art, English, Geography and Music Enrichment Residential

Held at Homerton College, Cambridge

26th - 28th June 2017



Executive summary

This course was attended by 100 subject leaders in Art, English, Geography and Music from schools across the country. They raised issues regarding the current educational climate, and a panel of educationalists then responded. Below is a summary of the conclusions from the conference:

1. Data-driven accountability measures have led to a narrowing of school curricula

Delegates attending the conference felt that the opportunities for them to teach in ways that increase enjoyment of a subject or give students practical experiences had been diminished in the current data-driven climate. This feeling is particularly strong in the Creative Arts subjects, which are impacted by diminishing timetabled lessons or even exclusion from the school curriculum. Pupils themselves link their potential for success in a subject to their enjoyment of it and find enjoyment through having more practical experiences and opportunities to go deep into a subject.

2. This narrowing of curricula is impacting on the range of learning opportunities open to pupils, and the development of love of learning, but teachers can work to overcome this

Pupils emphasised that having the time and space to go deep into a subject, guided by passionate teachers, was key in engendering their love of learning. Panellists had a range of suggestions to help teachers to continue to provide these opportunities. Delegates emphasised the ways in which this residential had empowered them to look beyond constraints and continue to provide high-quality subject teaching that generates love of learning.

3. Non-'core' subjects each have a unique value for students' development, and care should be taken that none are side-lined

Pupils often felt that they would have liked more information when making decisions regarding which subjects to take into further education. Given the choice, they would like more opportunities to broaden their knowledge of their subjects beyond the classroom. Teachers of Art, Geography and Music were emphatic in their belief that failing to give all students access to their subjects was to deprive them of opportunities to enrich their education and expand their minds. Panellists had advice for teachers concerned about the place of their subject in the curriculum, and also for the new Ofsted Chief Inspector in helping schools move towards offering 'the right education for each child'.

Course report

This report brings together points made during discussions in three elements of this residential: the pupil panel that began the course, reports made by subject leaders following teachers' discussions and a panel of educationalists who responded to these reports.

- **The pupil panel**

The programme began with a panel of pupils with particular passions for Art, English, Geography and Music, and who were studying for their GCSEs or A Levels in one or more of these subjects. They spoke about what inspired them in these subjects. The pupils were drawn from two comprehensive schools in the local area.

- **Reports by subject leaders**

Throughout the course, participating heads of department discussed their subjects, the importance of teaching them and the issues they felt were currently affecting them professionally.

- **Panel responses**

Panellists responded to the issues raised by teachers. The panel members were:

- Steve Brace, Head of Education and Outdoor Learning, Royal Geographical Society
- Ian Brinton, English Association
- Ged Gast, Immediate Past President, National Society for Education in Art and Design
- Professor David Lambert, Geographical Association
- Henry Vann, Head of External Affairs, Incorporated Society of Musicians
- Victoria Walker, Trustee, Chartered College of Teaching

The report concludes with a selection of quotes from delegates.

1. Data-driven accountability measures have led to a narrowing of school curricula

Delegates attending the conference felt that the opportunities for them to teach in ways that increase enjoyment of a subject or give students practical experiences had been diminished in the current data-driven climate. This feeling is particularly strong in the Creative Arts subjects, which are impacted by diminishing timetabled lessons or even exclusion from the school curriculum. Pupils themselves link their potential for success in a subject to their enjoyment of it, and find enjoyment through having more practical experiences and opportunities to go deep into a subject.

Art and Music teachers' views:

- Resources are increasingly diverted to Ebacc subjects, meaning less time for the Arts in the school timetable (in one case as few as eight periods for Art in a year). Staff numbers have been cut, class sizes increased and students are frequently removed from lessons to attend catch-up sessions for Ebacc subjects.
- In addition to this, the shift to a two-year Key Stage 3 in many schools means that students may only have a few hours' experience in Arts subjects before selecting their GCSE options. They do not have time to build the confidence to choose Arts subject at GCSE, resulting in further declines in take-up.
- Research by the University of Sussex found that the number of schools offering GCSE Music has reduced from 85% to 79% in the last 4 years, with only 1% of students taking A-Level Music. Given the international standing and success of the British Music Industry, this low figure seems incongruous.
- Teachers report feeling creeping isolation and loss of status, and that students and parents are beginning to perceive less value in the Arts.
- The lack of an Art or Music specialist HMI, and the decision to cease constructive feedback for moderated Art pieces, compounds this sense of isolation.

Delegates identified opportunities for improvement:

- Extracurricular Music activities and instrumental provision should be recognised as key indicators of a thriving Music department, and this would encourage senior leaders to provide the necessary resources to ensure opportunity for all students.
- Delegates welcome the mood of recent Ofsted statements: Amanda Spielman's speech at the ASCL conference, in which she called for 'the right education for each child', and Sean Harford's assurances that inspection will now work to underpin a balanced provision.

English and Geography teachers' views:

- The pressure to spend more time focusing on GCSE exam specifications, past papers and mark schemes, from Year 9 or even earlier, have meant a narrowing of the curriculum around exam specifications and fewer opportunities to give pupils a broad and deep understanding of the subject.

- The increased focus on exams has meant a reduction in opportunities for Geography fieldwork and fewer real-life case studies and works of literature being taught. For example, one delegate reported being obliged to teach the same exam-directed lesson on the same text to four different year groups on the same day.

The pupil panel were asked whether they would prioritise enjoyment or exam success, and stated that while both were necessary, success stemmed from enjoyment:

- Enjoyment and good results are intrinsically linked. Excelling in a subject comes from the basis of enjoying it; without enjoyment, the desire is limited to doing enough to get the required grade.
- Going beyond the curriculum can be fascinating, increase your interest in a subject and give you relevant skills.
- Too much focus on exams is stressful, and can make you want to give up.
- However, good grades are necessary for your long term future; with all the changes that are happening, it is important to understand how to achieve higher grades under the new system, so time needs to be dedicated to that.

The pupils were clear that opportunities to explore their subjects in-depth and hands-on helped them in their learning:

What helps you learn?

- Practical elements of a subject - making art, playing music, going out of school to see geographical features and connecting with English in broader contexts.
- Freedom and independence with individual guidance from the teacher. The chance to experiment with different art forms.
- Being visual or hands-on - the chance to see how others would annotate text or make models to better understand geographical processes.
- Case studies and the chance to connect the subject to the wider world, for example by watching a documentary.

2. This narrowing of curricula is impacting on the range of learning opportunities open to pupils, and the development of love of learning, but teachers can work to overcome this

Pupils emphasised that having the time and space to go deep into a subject, guided by passionate teachers, was key in engendering their love of learning. Panellists had a range of suggestions to help teachers to continue to provide these opportunities. Delegates, having spoken about the difficulties they are facing in the current climate, emphasised the ways in which this residential had empowered them to look beyond constraints and continue to provide high-quality subject teaching that generates love of learning.

The pupil panel were asked: *Why do you love your subjects?*

- **Art** - is visual and gives you freedom that other subjects do not. It is a means of communication in various forms.

- **English** - is creative and interpretive. You can read between the lines and imagine things your own way. You can interact with teachers on an equal level, debate in class and laugh together. One student, with English as an additional language, found studying the subject to be 'illuminating'.
 - **Geography** - teaches you how the world works. From disasters and current events, economics and politics to the physical processes.
 - **Music** - has existed forever and always will. There is a balance between practical and theoretical elements and you can work together as a group. Performing increases confidence and can help to overcome shyness.
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- Pupils all emphasised that having passionate teachers who loved the subject meant they were likely to love it too.
 - Feeling that there are fewer divisions between themselves and a teacher can help develop love of a subject, for example, debating ideas in class as equals or discovering shared interests with teachers (such as a book, band or music genre).
 - When teachers recognise that students need active encouragement to improve or a little push to take a risk, e.g. auditioning for a main part, it can help to increase a student's confidence in the subject.
 - Older students can also be inspiring role models within a subject, and by working across year groups friendships can form. Praise from older students is seen as more believable/genuine than that from a teacher, who 'has to praise everyone'.

One delegate asked the panel: *The pressure to bring exam skills down into the Year 7-9 curriculum is killing the opportunity to engender a love of English. How can I inspire the department to change this way of thinking?*

- Good exam results do not need to come at the expense of enjoyment of a subject. However, courage is needed to make our vision of a broad curriculum that engages students work practically in our classrooms.
- Ensure time is set aside for teachers to discuss the subject among themselves - what fires us as teachers and what poetry/literature matters to us.
- Look for moments of opportunity for joy, e.g. at the end of the summer term, where there can be time away from exam preparation. If this is not possible in lessons, then take ten minutes after a class or use lunchtimes. Students will come and they will begin to ask for the same from other teachers.
- If the exam is out of students' comfort zone, they will need the cultural capital to cope with it; giving them this requires teaching that goes beyond exam skills.

Delegates were asked: *Following this residential, what do you now feel encouraged and able to do?*

- *"I am reminded that teachers are people with interests and experiences, and that our teaching and our students both benefit when we share these passions. We as teachers*

become more human and three dimensional, with more to offer beyond what is deemed 'relevant' in the current curriculum."

- *"I am encouraged to use my wonderful team; there are many specialisms within the department, and perhaps even shared areas of interest and expertise in my subject beyond the department!"*
- *"I feel able to ask 'why' we are teaching what we are teaching and to re-examine our offer. It could be that somebody decided several years ago."*
- *"To be brave and use my voice as the subject specialist in the school, with my line manager and SLT."*

3. Non-'core' subjects each have a unique value for students' development, and care should be taken that none are side-lined

Pupils often felt that they would have liked more information when making decisions regarding which subjects to take into further education. Given the choice, they would like more opportunities to broaden their knowledge of their subjects outside the classroom. Teachers of Art, Geography and Music were emphatic in their belief that failing to give all students access to their subjects was to deprive them of opportunities to enrich their education and expand their minds. Panellists had advice for teachers concerned about the place of their subject in the curriculum, and also for the new Ofsted Chief Inspector in helping schools move towards offering 'the right education for each child'.

Pupils chose their A Levels based on:

- Passion for a subject, or the ability to express themselves through that subject.
- Interesting open days or events for subjects they had not previously studied.

They felt they could have made more informed choices if:

- They had been given more information about how A Level differed from GCSE.
- They had had A-Level taster sessions, or an introduction to A-Level aspects of the subject to stoke their curiosity.

Students were asked how they would use an off-timetable day, and expressed a desire to broaden their experience of their subjects, often outside the confines of the classroom:

- Going to the theatre to broaden their understanding of what they are learning in English, and gain new ideas.
- Having an author or musician visit the school to talk about their craft and how they got into it.
- Seeing a live music performance.
- Creating and performing their own pieces.
- Exploring higher mathematics with someone who works in the field.

Teachers emphasised the unique value of Geography and the Creative Arts:

- Geography and the Creative Arts are academically rigorous subjects and should be recognised as such.
- These subjects each have a critical role in promoting a particular set of skills and experiences:
 - Geography is distinctive in that it unites the study of people and their environment, with opportunities to learn from real-world examples
 - The Arts cultivate creative problem solving, risk taking and critical analysis, producing students who are willing to be flexible and improvise. In an increasingly polarised world, they train people to engage critically with all aspects of society and show pupils that problems can have more than one solution.
 - Music has been shown to improve cognitive skills, self-confidence and self-esteem, with numerous reports suggesting that students who take Music or Art lessons achieve a better quality of learning in other subjects.
- By failing to support these subjects, schools deprive children of opportunities they may not otherwise encounter:
 - Geography fieldwork has a critical role in providing pupils from all backgrounds with opportunities to experience the outdoor world.
 - The Creative Arts are a right that belongs to us all, they should never be a privilege.

Advice for Geography teachers:

- Research from the Geographical Association shows that 69% of Geography departments see cost as the main obstacle to fieldwork. The following solutions could help to alleviate this burden:
 - Local area studies.
 - Cross-curricular fieldwork.
 - Timetable redesign, to provide regular space for visits.
 - Empowering heads of department to lobby SLT to use pupil premium funding.

Advice for Art and Music teachers:

- a) Being more effective in school
 - As teachers, you are tasked with acting in the best interests of your subject and your students. This can mean making SLT aware of anything you feel could be pertinent to the life chances and outcomes for your students, including a reduction in focus on the Arts.
 - Communicate with local primary schools to create a more coordinated curriculum and allow for more effective transition into secondary school.
 - Formally baseline or benchmark your data in the first term that students are with you. This will allow you to measure your pupils' progress in the Arts specifically.
- b) Enlisting the help of others:

- Those working in the Arts have to fight for their subjects in their schools, unlike teachers of other subjects. This makes subject networks and professional bodies stronger and more important - use these resources to support and guide you.
- With the appointment of the new Chief Inspector, Ofsted are likely to challenge schools that do not have a broad and balanced curriculum.
- Be proactive during an inspection. They can be data-driven and therefore focus on core subjects, but if you talk to an inspector about the Arts, they will respond to you.
- Parents' views are a powerful way of affecting an Ofsted inspection. Ensure that your parent community is aware of any squeezes on the Arts, and encourage them to make their voices heard.

The panel were asked: *What advice would you give to the new Chief Inspector for Schools to help schools move towards offering 'the right education for each child'?*

- Create accountability within schools; have a sentence in the inspection report that asks what Arts provision students have access to *within* the curriculum. Doing this helped to shine a spotlight on pupil premium funding.
- Consider the linear impact of the drop in focus on the Arts in primary schools. Many students will be coming into secondary school without foundational knowledge in the Arts, making targets unrealistic.
- The primary language of the Music classroom should be music, so the primary language of Music assessment should be music too. Progress 8 as usually defined, where there is no Key Stage 2 data for Music, is therefore not helpful.

Selection of delegate quotes:

“Three days ago, I was ready to chuck in the towel after a decade in teaching. Today, I leave this course reinvigorated and enthused to embark on another decade in a career I love. Thank you!”

“The course has given me a stronger voice to stand up for the vital and individual elements of teaching and learning in my subject area.”

“It has really made me consider how I should articulate the value of my subject and how to focus on 'the art of the possible'.”

“Not only have I made invaluable course contacts over the past few days but I have been challenged to question the ethos of my department for the betterment of my students and for my own professional development.”

“It has given me the time to reflect on how and why we are teaching what we teach and what we need to be including to ensure our students develop a love for the subject we feel passionate about.”

“The philosophy behind the teaching of English and its intrinsic importance, over and above the examination requirements, was made a key message of the residential. This is something that is sometimes forgotten in the frenetic and examination focused atmosphere that often pervades school environments.”

“The time away from the hustle and bustle of school life to just focus on my subject has been invaluable. I have had the space and like-minded people to talk to which has helped me have a clearer view for why Music is an essential subject to be taught. Hearing other teachers' views and hearing about their situations has made me motivated to try new things but also create a very strong core of Music in school.”

“Being a student again and listening to interesting lecturers was fantastic. When I am invigorated about language and literature myself, that passion will carry through to my classroom practice. - I also enjoyed hearing about what other teachers are doing and I picked up a lot of good ideas.”

“The lectures have been invaluable in reinvigorating me and making me think carefully about my planning and also meeting other delegates. I have found some delegates both supportive and innovative in their teaching and I intend to use those ideas to inform my practice.”

“The lectures have been excellent and a range of viewpoints have been put forward. It has also been really helpful to talk to Heads of Departments from other schools to celebrate our successes and discuss solutions to challenges.”