

DRAMA AT THE HEART OF THE NEW ENRICHMENT FRAMEWORK: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR EVERY DRAMA TEACHER

Vol. 1

Sept 2026

**National Drama Unpacks:
The Enrichment Framework**



@National_Drama

WWW.NATIONALDRAMA.ORG.UK

NATIONAL DRAMA



Drama and the Enrichment Framework: Why this is a Moment for Drama to Step Forward



Drama departments have long understood something that is now becoming much more visible in national policy: education does not end when the bell rings.

The Department for Education's new Enrichment Framework for Schools and Colleges, published in June 2026, provides a national structure to help schools design, strengthen and evaluate their enrichment offer. Importantly, it is non-statutory guidance, rather than another compliance framework, and is intended to support schools and colleges in reviewing what they already do and identifying where provision can be strengthened.

For Drama teachers this should be seen as an opportunity.

Much of what Drama departments have quietly built for years: productions; clubs, theatre visits; student leadership; community partnerships and creative projects, now sits squarely within a national conversation about what every young person should be able to experience.

For many Drama teachers these are not simply 'extras'. They are often where some of the most important learning happens.

The new framework provides an opportunity to make that case more clearly.

The challenge for Drama teachers is not necessarily to do more. It may simply be time to recognise, articulate and evidence the value of what we already do.

The Department for Education describes enrichment as a broad range of activities and experiences that sit beyond the core curriculum, either as co-curricular activity linked to the curriculum or extra-curricular activity that complements it. Its purpose is to help children and young people explore interests, develop skills, broaden their experiences and prepare for life and work.

Crucially, the framework identifies arts and culture as one of the five areas to which every pupil should have access. This explicitly includes participation in, and live experiences of, music, art, dance, theatre and other expressive arts.

For Drama, the curtain has not just gone up. The spotlight has moved.

What is the Enrichment Framework?

The framework is designed to help schools and colleges plan, strengthen and review their enrichment offer. It is supported by eight benchmarks, case studies, resources and practical self-assessment and action-planning tools. It applies across primary and secondary schools, including schools with sixth forms, as well as a range of specialist and further education settings.



Photo: Tangle Photography

The eight benchmarks are:

1. A strategically aligned enrichment offer.
2. A broad and well-rounded enrichment offer.
3. A well-communicated enrichment offer that celebrates participation and achievement.
4. An enrichment offer shaped by the school or college community.
5. An accessible and engaging enrichment offer.
6. An enrichment offer that works in partnership.
7. An outcomes-focused enrichment offer.
8. A continually improving enrichment offer.

We suggest Drama teachers might read these not as eight new hoops to jump through, but as eight useful questions.

Are we clear about how Drama contributes to the wider life of the school? Is our offer accessible? Who takes part and who does not? Are students helping to shape it? Are we making good use of local theatres, artists and cultural organisations? Can we explain the difference participation makes?

These are questions Drama departments are exceptionally well placed to answer.

Drama already sits at the heart of the framework

The framework sets out an expectation that every pupil and student should have access to a broad range of enrichment opportunities across five key areas: civic engagement; **arts and culture**; nature, outdoors and adventure; sport and physical activity; and wider life and future skills.

The most obvious connection for Drama teachers is **arts and culture**. The framework explicitly recognises theatre as part of a broad and well-rounded enrichment offer. But the contribution of Drama reaches much further.

A school production, for example, is rarely just an arts experience.

It can involve:

- creative expression and cultural participation;
- teamwork and collaboration;
- communication and confidence;
- leadership and responsibility;
- technical and digital skills;
- problem-solving;
- community engagement;
- careers education;
- volunteering;
- wellbeing and belonging.

A Drama department may, therefore, find itself contributing, not to one corner of the enrichment framework, but to several of its priorities at once. The framework also emphasises that enrichment should align with wider school priorities, including attainment, attendance, behaviour, careers guidance, curriculum, personal development and wellbeing.

That gives Drama teachers a particularly useful language when discussing enrichment with senior leaders.

Instead of saying, *We would like to put on another production*, the conversation can become:

This project will provide a significant arts and culture experience while also developing student leadership, strengthening community partnerships and contributing to our personal development and careers offer.

It is the same work. But it is now being connected to the strategic language of the school.



FOR SECONDARY DRAMA DEPARTMENTS: THINK BEYOND THE ANNUAL PRODUCTION

The annual school production will often be the flagship of a Drama department's enrichment offer, but it should not be the only evidence of its impact.

A strong Drama enrichment map might include:

Participation

Drama clubs, lunchtime activities, improvisation groups, scriptwriting clubs and opportunities for students simply to take part without auditioning.

Performance

Productions, showcases, festivals, informal sharings and opportunities to perform for different audiences.

Theatre-making

Student writing, directing, devising, producing and technical theatre.

Cultural experiences

Theatre visits, workshops, visiting practitioners and encounters with different forms, genres and traditions of theatre.

Leadership

Student directors, assistant stage managers, technical teams, Drama ambassadors, peer mentors and older students supporting younger performers.

Community

Performances for local audiences, work with primary schools, care homes, charities and community organisations.

Careers

Encounters with actors, directors, producers, designers, technicians, arts administrators and the huge range of careers connected to the creative industries.

Once mapped in this way, Drama enrichment begins to look less like a collection of events and more like a coherent journey. And that is exactly the kind of strategic thinking the framework encourages.



For Primary teachers, Drama may have an even broader role to play!

The framework applies to primary schools and recognises that enrichment should give children access to a wide range of experiences beyond the formal curriculum.

Drama can be a powerful vehicle for delivering this.



A primary Drama programme can support children to:

- find confidence in speaking and performing;
- develop vocabulary and communication;
- collaborate and negotiate ideas;
- explore stories, history and different cultures;
- develop empathy by considering different perspectives;
- take creative risks;
- lead and contribute to a group;
- experience live theatre and performance;
- discover interests they may not encounter elsewhere.

For some children Drama is their first experience of standing in front of an audience. For others it may be the first time they discover that their ideas have value within a group.

Primary schools do not need a theatre, a lighting rig or a West End-sized budget to provide meaningful Drama enrichment. A storytelling project, a lunchtime drama club, a partnership with a local secondary school, a visit from a theatre company or a whole-class performance can all become part of a rich cultural offer.

The important question is not, 'Can we put on a huge production?'

It is, 'How are we ensuring that every child has meaningful opportunities to participate in the expressive arts?'

The positives for Drama teachers

There is a danger that, whenever a new framework arrives teachers immediately reach for another spreadsheet. This framework should not automatically mean more paperwork for Drama departments. In fact, there are several reasons to be positive.

1. Drama is explicitly visible

The inclusion of theatre within the arts and culture category is significant. Drama is not being left to sit in the footnotes of enrichment. Theatre is specifically named as an experience that should form part of a broad offer. That gives departments a useful national reference point when advocating for time, resources and recognition.

2. It provides a stronger language for explaining impact

Drama teachers have always known that students gain more than performance skills from taking part. The framework gives departments a vocabulary that connects Drama enrichment with wider priorities such as personal development, wellbeing, future readiness, careers and belonging. This can help move conversations away from the idea that enrichment is simply a 'nice extra'.

3. It creates an opportunity to celebrate the work already happening

Many schools have rich Drama offers that are poorly documented because teachers are busy actually delivering them. The framework's emphasis on communication and celebrating participation and achievement is an invitation to tell those stories. Who performed for the first time? Who discovered an interest in technical theatre? Which students became leaders? Which partnerships opened new opportunities? These stories matter.

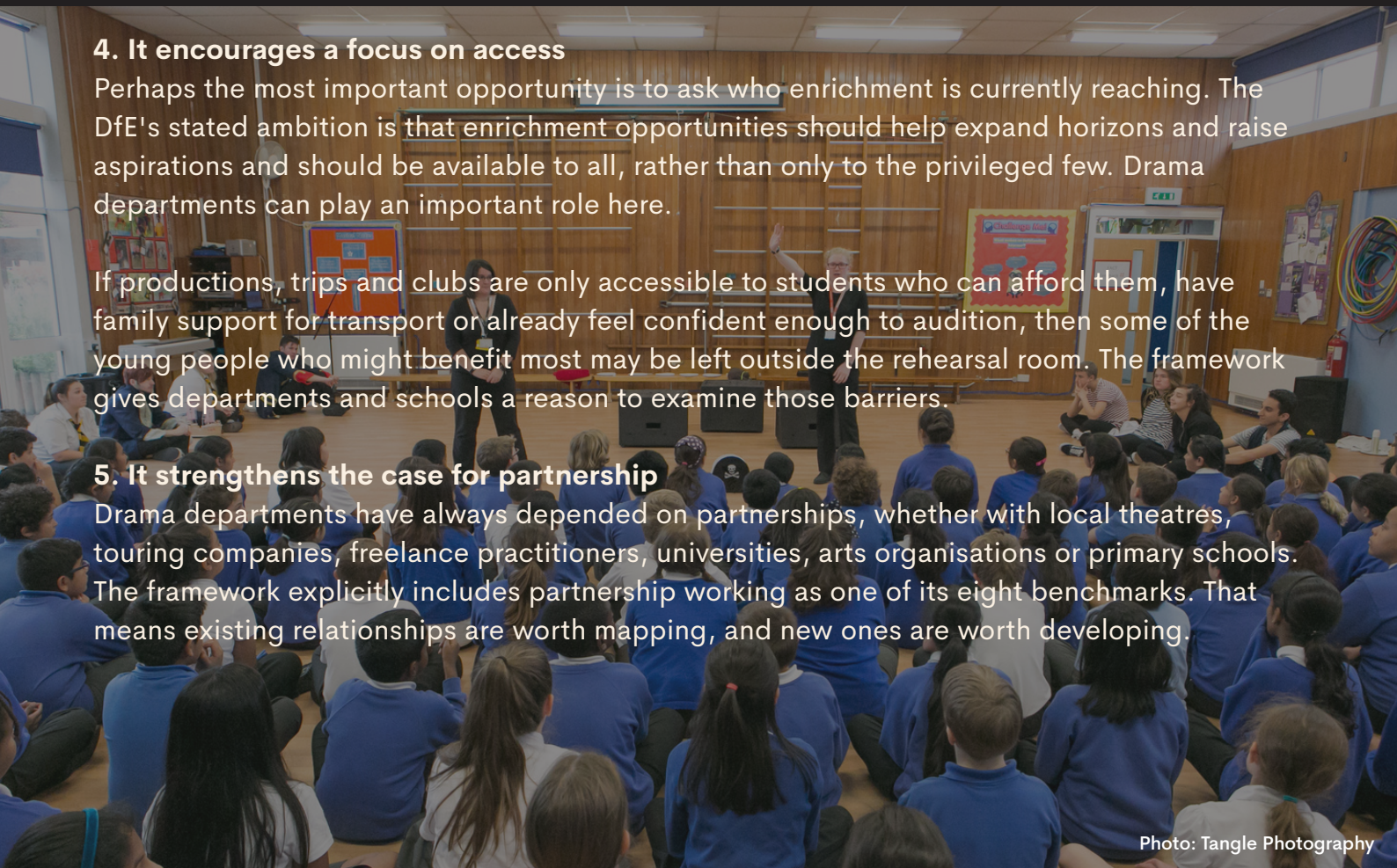
4. It encourages a focus on access

Perhaps the most important opportunity is to ask who enrichment is currently reaching. The DfE's stated ambition is that enrichment opportunities should help expand horizons and raise aspirations and should be available to all, rather than only to the privileged few. Drama departments can play an important role here.

If productions, trips and clubs are only accessible to students who can afford them, have family support for transport or already feel confident enough to audition, then some of the young people who might benefit most may be left outside the rehearsal room. The framework gives departments and schools a reason to examine those barriers.

5. It strengthens the case for partnership

Drama departments have always depended on partnerships, whether with local theatres, touring companies, freelance practitioners, universities, arts organisations or primary schools. The framework explicitly includes partnership working as one of its eight benchmarks. That means existing relationships are worth mapping, and new ones are worth developing.



Top tips: how Drama departments can get ready



1. Map what you already do

Before inventing anything new, create a simple overview of your existing enrichment.

Include:

- activity;
- year groups involved;
- approximate number of participants;
- whether it is free or paid;
- barriers to participation;
- which enrichment benchmark it supports;
- key outcomes;
- partnerships involved.

You may discover that your department is already delivering a much richer offer than anyone has formally recognised.

2. Map not only participation but also provision

A long list of activities does not necessarily mean every student has access to enrichment.

Ask:

- Which year groups participate most?
- Who participates repeatedly?
- Who never takes part?
- Are particular groups underrepresented?
- Are cost, transport, timing or confidence creating barriers?

The framework places significant emphasis on accessibility and engagement. Understanding participation patterns will therefore be more useful than simply counting how many clubs you offer.

3. Create a clear Drama enrichment journey

Think about what you want a student to experience over their time in your school.

For example:

Year 7: Try Drama and perform with others.

Year 8: Explore theatre beyond the classroom and begin taking creative responsibility.

Year 9: Lead, devise and experience different forms of theatre.

Key Stage 4: Develop specialisms, mentor younger students and encounter careers in the sector.

Post-16: Lead projects, work with partners and take increasing responsibility for producing and creating work.

The precise model will depend on your context, but a visible journey helps demonstrate that enrichment is intentional rather than accidental.

4. Collect evidence little and often

Do not wait until the end of the year and then try to reconstruct everything from old emails and a slightly haunted spreadsheet.

Build simple evidence collection into the activity itself.

This might include:

- participation numbers;
- student voice;
- short reflections;
- photographs and programmes;
- examples of student leadership;
- feedback from partners;
- records of progression;
- case studies of individual students.

You do not need a mountain of data. You need evidence that helps you answer the question: What difference did this experience make?

5. Capture student voice

The framework says enrichment should be shaped by the school or college community. Drama departments are ideally placed to ask students directly.

Try questions such as:

- What opportunities would you like that we do not currently offer?
- What stops students from taking part?
- Which experience has had the biggest impact on you?
- What would make Drama enrichment more welcoming?
- If you could design a theatre trip, workshop or project, what would it be?

Student voice should not just appear in a survey. Where possible, let it influence what happens next.

6. Be clear about your partnerships

Create a simple partnership map.

Who do you work with?

- theatres;
- theatre companies;
- arts organisations;
- universities;
- drama schools;
- local primary schools;
- community groups;
- freelance artists;
- alumni.

Then ask: what does each partnership actually provide for students?



7. Prepare a one-page enrichment story for leadership

Senior leaders do not always need the full production scrapbook.

Prepare a concise document that answers:

What do we offer?

A clear overview of Drama enrichment.

Who does it reach?

Participation data and any identified gaps.

Why does it matter?

Links to school priorities, the enrichment framework and student development.

What is the impact?

A mixture of quantitative information and student stories.

What are the barriers?

Funding, staffing, space, transport or access.

What do we need next?

One or two realistic priorities for improvement.

That document can become a powerful starting point for conversations with senior leaders and governors.

What should you be ready to show?

If a member of the leadership team, a governor or an inspector asks about Drama's contribution to enrichment, you should be able to point to a coherent picture rather than a folder full of disconnected events.

Be ready to demonstrate:

- Intent: Why does your Drama enrichment offer exist?
- Breadth: What opportunities are available beyond the classroom?
- Access: Who can take part and what are you doing to remove barriers?
- Student voice: How have students influenced the offer?
- Partnership: Who do you work with and why?
- Leadership: How do students take responsibility and lead others?
- Impact: What difference is participation making?
- Improvement: What have you identified as the next priority?

The framework itself includes a self-assessment tool and an action-planning tool, alongside case studies and resources to support schools in evaluating and developing their provision. These are well worth exploring before designing your own system from scratch.

The Opportunity for Drama

The Enrichment Framework should not be seen as another reason for Drama teachers to add more to already overflowing workloads. Instead, it offers an opportunity to make visible the educational value of work that Drama teachers have long understood.

- The student who finally finds the confidence to speak.
- The quiet technician who discovers a future career.
- The Year 10 who mentors a Year 7.
- The child who attends the theatre for the first time.
- The group that learns how to disagree, create, rehearse, fail, rethink and try again.
- The student who discovers that school can be a place where they belong.

The new framework gives Drama departments a timely opportunity to step forward, map what they do, identify who they are reaching and make a confident case for the role that theatre and creative participation can play in a broad, ambitious education.

The message for Drama teachers is a positive one: you may already be doing far more of this work than you realise. Now is the time to tell the story.

References and further reading

DfE (2026) The Enrichment Framework for Schools and Colleges. Available at:

- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-enrichment-framework-for-schools-and-colleges>
- [Background supporting the Enrichment Framework](#)
- [Enrichment Benchmarks](#)
- [Resources to support schools and colleges with enrichment](#)



NATIONAL DRAMA MEMBERSHIP

Join the leading subject association for Drama teachers
and Theatre Educators because together we make our
subject stronger.

VISIT OUR WEBSITE TO JOIN



@National_Drama

WWW.NATIONALDRAMA.ORG.UK

National Drama Executive 2026

Photography Credit: Tangle Photography

Charity Number: 1173215

NATIONAL DRAMA

