



HOUSE OF LORDS' ENQUIRY INTO SECONDARY EDUCATION

Submission from National Drama

1. **National Drama (ND)** is the UK's leading professional subject association for all teachers, lecturers and theatre educators, whose work is concerned with learning about, and through, **drama and theatre education**.
2. ND exists to ensure that all children and young people have opportunities to learn **about and through drama and theatre education** within a broad, balanced and coherent curriculum that is taught by teachers who have appropriate levels of subject knowledge, expertise and have benefitted from recent and relevant training.
3. **Issues we wish to raise:**
 - The curriculum status of drama and theatre education within the 11-16 curriculum
 - The negative impact of an assessment driven curriculum
 - Implications for the training of specialist teachers of drama

The Value of Drama and Theatre Education

4. Drama is a subject with highly effective **pedagogical qualities**. It facilitates interaction, exploration, performance, self-expression and meaning-making. Drama as both subject and pedagogy has transformational potential, enabling children, teachers and young people to empathise and understand more of 'what it is to be human'.
5. Drama's contribution to children and young peoples' education is **academic, artistic, communal and social**. It is 'academic' because it develops skills in planning and generating ideas; imagining; negotiating; exploring; rehearsing; questioning; interpreting; researching; reflecting; problem-solving; presenting. It is 'artistic', because its artistic forms enable children and young people to both explore their world and to present their vision of the kind of world they wish to see. It is 'communal' because it celebrates the values and ethos of the school. As the Secondary Heads Association once claimed 'a school without Drama is a school without a soul' (1998). It is 'social' in that it remains an essentially collaborative process, facilitating and exploring the development of personal **self-esteem and wellbeing**.

Drama Education: The Global Context

6. The learning potential of Drama is internationally recognised for its contribution to the development of a **healthy, humane, creative and democratic society**.
7. Drama is a statutory curriculum requirement in Australia, Finland, South Africa, New Zealand, Iceland, Canada, Wales and Scotland.
8. In this context, it is unclear why Drama is of lesser curriculum status than other art forms within the National Curriculum in England.

Historical Legacy

9. The policies contained within the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA) and the fact that Drama was not designated as a Foundation Subject has prevented genuine artistic evolution and subject development. The long-term impact of this decision has been the **marginalisation of the subject's curriculum status**.
10. It is important to reflect that, during the 1980s and 1990s, the UK was an 'epicentre' of pedagogical development in Drama education. These theoretical developments, emanating from the UK context, have contributed to Drama becoming a mandatory requirement in many countries across the World.
11. The Labour government of 1997 did bring a 'cosmetic' curriculum expansion, with their policy of designating particular schools as Specialists in Performing Arts. They also provided funds to establish 'Creative Partnerships' between schools and professional artists, with the laudable intention of promoting creativity, innovation and learning. However, the reality was that there was more funding for a 'few' but still insufficient funding for 'all'. Once this funding had come to an end, there was minimal evidence of a lasting legacy.
12. The introduction of the 'National Strategies' by the same Labour government had a detrimental and lasting impact, as there was little reference to Drama. The National Curriculum for English, at that time, placed Drama as a strand within English 'speaking and listening'. It is now clear that The National Strategies were evidence of government seeking school improvement through the imposition of a favoured pedagogy and by high-stakes accountability, foreshadowing what was to come.
13. Since 2010, the reforms of the coalition government, and in particular, the introduction of the **English Baccalaureate**, has had a devastating impact on Drama and Theatre education in terms of funding and subject status. Indeed, since 2010 arts education as a whole has been '**progressively marginalised and devalued**' (Ashton and Ashton, 2022: 4).

14. There has also been a more implicit, pervasive ideological factor contributing to the current crisis in arts education: under the thrall of fashionable educational theorists, **learning in secondary schools has become 'knowledge-based' and, increasingly, assessment driven.** The vision of what constitutes 'learning excellence' has been deliberately changed. Imposed curriculum constraints and summative assessment procedures have created a seismic shift in the culture of Drama teaching, learning values and artistic expectations. Education has become more functional, individually-orientated and assessment-led. The identity of Drama as a subject has, out of necessity, been forced to change. Drama teachers have been compelled to radically re-appraise 'what is possible' in **the current educational context, which is characterised by constraints, results, accountability and market values.**

15. This change in learning values, when combined with the impact of the Covid pandemic has affected all phases of Drama and Theatre education. The present government's view of 'effective teaching and learning' reflects values that actually contradict established Drama and Theatre pedagogy.

16. The evidence to support ND's argument can be found in statistics gathered by The Cultural Learning Alliance and the government itself. The following figures indicate the decline since 2010:

- **the number of drama teachers has been reduced by 18 per cent;**
- **the number of hours taught reduced by 12 per cent;**
- **examination entries in arts subjects reduced by 42 per cent;**
(DfE, 2020)

17. At Key Stage 3, Drama teachers are increasingly compelled to design their curriculum around the syllabus requirements of one of the four GCSE Examination Boards, rather than the needs of young people in the 11-14 age-range. This is true of many subjects, but it particularly impacts negatively on drama.

18. Examination Subject options are sometimes made as early as Year 8, preventing opportunities for all students to a broad and balanced curriculum at Key Stage 3.

19. There is an abundance of anecdotal evidence of schools **actively discouraging students from taking examinations in Drama.**

20. The very identity of Drama and Theatre as a practical subject at GCSE is being undermined by the **imbalance of written work to practical assessment: 70% written: 30% practical.**

Teacher Education in Drama

21. The proliferation of 'school-based' routes into teaching is increasingly resulting in a narrow and functional training experience for many drama teachers. National Drama advocates that learning how to teach Drama requires more than 'good subject knowledge' and a restrictive focus on the existing practice of one or two schools: It needs well-resourced training courses taught by experienced practitioners. Courses should include practical work that exemplifies key aspects of pedagogy and theory, as well as time for **critical reflection and the assimilation of relevant research.**

22. SEND Education in Drama

The marginalisation and neglect of drama provision for children and young people with particular learning needs must be addressed. There is an urgent need for:

- Drama CPD for teachers and support staff in SEND schools;
- Policies that clarify the role that theatre companies play in deepening learning for children and young people in SEND education;
- Funding for increased resources that develop classroom practice and theoretical understanding of Drama in SEND schools.

22. In marked contrast to this rather 'gloomy' scenario, the growth in Drama and Theatre education for **pupils in private education** has been **considerable**. Independent schools continue to value Drama and many have invested heavily in theatre buildings and in professional partnerships with the industry (Ashton and Ashton, 2022).

23. The Effects of Recent Government Policy

- Ofsted rarely report on teaching and learning in Drama and do not produce a subject report for Drama.
- There are limited opportunities to attract funds for Drama research grants or teacher development.
- Theatre Education, particularly for young people in state schools, is increasingly becoming an expensive 'extra', rather than part of their curriculum entitlement.
- Curriculum restrictions, such as EBacc, have prevented the development of Drama pedagogy,
- The closure of PGCE Drama specialist courses and the growth of school-based teacher training has narrowed training opportunities for drama teachers.
- Drama Departments in schools are routinely undervalued, and viewed as 'easy targets' when schools are compelled to make budget cuts.

24. We would ask the inquiry to consider:

- The inclusion of Drama as a Foundation Subject in the curriculum with the same status as Art and Music.
- A review of the impact of current teacher training programmes in drama.
- An immediate review of the impact of the Ofsted Inspection process on arts subjects and, in particular, drama.
- A review of GCSE Examinations in drama, which are currently not fit for purpose.

25. References

Ashton, H and Ashton, D (2022) Creativity and the Curriculum: educational apartheid in 21st Century England, a European outlier. *International Journal of Cultural Policy* DOI:0.1080/10286632.2022.2058497.

DfE (2020) <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-workforce-in-england>

Secondary Heads Association (1998) *DRAMA SETS YOU FREE*. Bristol: Central Press.



Responding, Supporting and Leading