

# A manifesto for performing arts education:

## *Building creative futures*



**By Glyndwr Jones and Emily Maloney**  
at the Council for Dance, Drama and Musical Theatre

Supported by:





This manifesto is based on the findings and recommendations of the CDMT report  
**Securing Access to Performing Arts Education for All:  
 Building a Stronger Future** (September 2023)



Proper training for performers, backed with natural talent, is a springboard into our profession.

For years the CDMT has fought to maintain standards in an area of education of which Great Britain can be rightly proud. I am pleased to be able to support them in this ongoing endeavour.

**Sir Cameron Mackintosh**



Quality performing arts education for all is critical to support the next generation of talent and can have a transformative impact on young people's lives. We applaud CDMT's manifesto and mission.

**Andrew Lloyd Webber Foundation**

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## Introduction

Some of the most powerful experiences any of us will have, the ones that free our imaginations, feed our souls, and foster a profoundly creative approach that sets us up well for life in many different spheres, will occur through encounters with the arts. Specifically, and the focus of this manifesto, with the performing arts disciplines of dance, drama, music and musical theatre.

Ideas, curiosity and experimentation are the cornerstones of creativity, inherent in all of us when we are young, as our imaginations burst with wonder and excitement at each new experience we encounter. As we learn, we are naturally influenced by our surroundings: the culture and attitudes of our family and friends, our physical and emotional environment and, of course, the values and principles which guide our education.

Lighting the flame of creativity in support of every young person's future is essential to building robust, innovative and happy individuals. However, many children and young people today face unprecedented challenges, with those from underrepresented, and often intersecting groups, such as learners from the global majority, low-income families, job seekers, looked after children, young carers and those with disabilities being disproportionately impacted. Their wellbeing, dreams and aspirations both demand and also deserve a creative approach, along with equitable access to the kind of opportunities for growth that are crucial to achieving better life outcomes for all.

The question for us today is how do we foster the best environment in which to nurture our young people's creativity? How do we best plant, and ripen, the seeds of vital skills for life such as collaboration, initiative, problem solving, imagination and communication – all natural corollaries of creative work? And how vital a role might sustained engagement with the performing arts play in this important project?

This is the context within which this manifesto has been framed. Its key messages are that we should, by all means available to us:

- **Encourage** the development of creativity through dedicated time for children and young people to experience the power of the performing arts
- **Bring together** in- and out-of-school performing arts provision across the board, building on existing expertise and enhancing it through collaboration
- **Improve** the performing arts progression route, and celebrate achievements at both the institutional and individual level
- **Promote** partnerships across the sector, and harness the power of technology to increase access and enhance outcomes
- **Support** specialist training institutions to continue contributing to our thriving cultural sector by supporting practitioners and teachers as they develop into the professionals of the future.

## Put more performing and expressive arts practitioners into schools

to address the decline in teachers and curriculum hours

Every child deserves to be inspired to explore, imagine and experiment. To express their thoughts and innermost feelings, and to discover how they relate to others and society more widely. To both unlock the magic within, and build strong life skills for the future.

Meaningful encounters with the performing arts can be powerful in helping us discover our true interests, preferences, talents and dreams, creating lasting memories long into adult life.

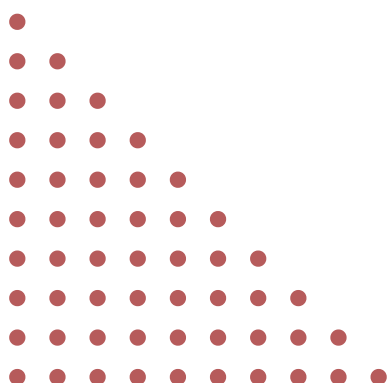
Cultivating these opportunities, supporting young people as they deepen their relationship with the performing arts and the creativity they unlock, and introducing them to the cultural sector more widely would benefit from greater collaboration between the teachers, leaders and creatives that inhabit it. Inspirational role models are vital in providing influence and motivation to learners too.

Since 2010, there has been a reduction of more than a fifth for both the total number of performing arts teachers employed in mainstream schools, and the curriculum hours for these subjects. This picture is especially concerning in the context of a 10% increase to the state-funded secondary school population in England alone over the last decade.

Interestingly, the number of UK teachers preparing students towards graded exams in the performing arts is estimated at:

- 15,000 for dance
- 10,000 for drama
- 60,000 for music.

These teachers, often working in isolation and outside currently nationally understood systems of teacher qualifications, make significant contributions to the cultural provision in their local areas.



In an age where every profession, sector and aspect of life demands creativity, supported by skilful, agile individuals in the workplace, it is crucial that young people have opportunities to hone these qualities from the outset.

Our young people are inquisitive souls, and the skills learnt through participation in performing arts activities helps them to develop as confident, self-reflective individuals, prepared for adult life.

**The Rt Hon. Lord Vaizey of Didcot**



Thinking imaginatively, and mindful of the efficient use of school resources, we propose that the education ecosystem could be enhanced through integrating in- and out-of-school provision in primary and secondary schools by:



Extending the model established for music hubs to embrace dance and drama, including building networks and connections to support creative work across the performing arts



Drawing upon the expertise of teachers, leaders and performing arts practitioners not based in schools, particularly those associated with Ofqual recognised awarding organisations in the arts.

Together we can promote a 'network of excellence': a powerful resource which would build on current expertise and enhance it through collaboration. It could also, in time and with further support, be strengthened through establishing a Qualified Specialist Arts Teacher status for those holding appropriate qualifications.

Importantly, the Department for Education (DfE) has, in recent years, increased its overview of out-of-school settings, supported by the CDMT through its Recognised Awards scheme.

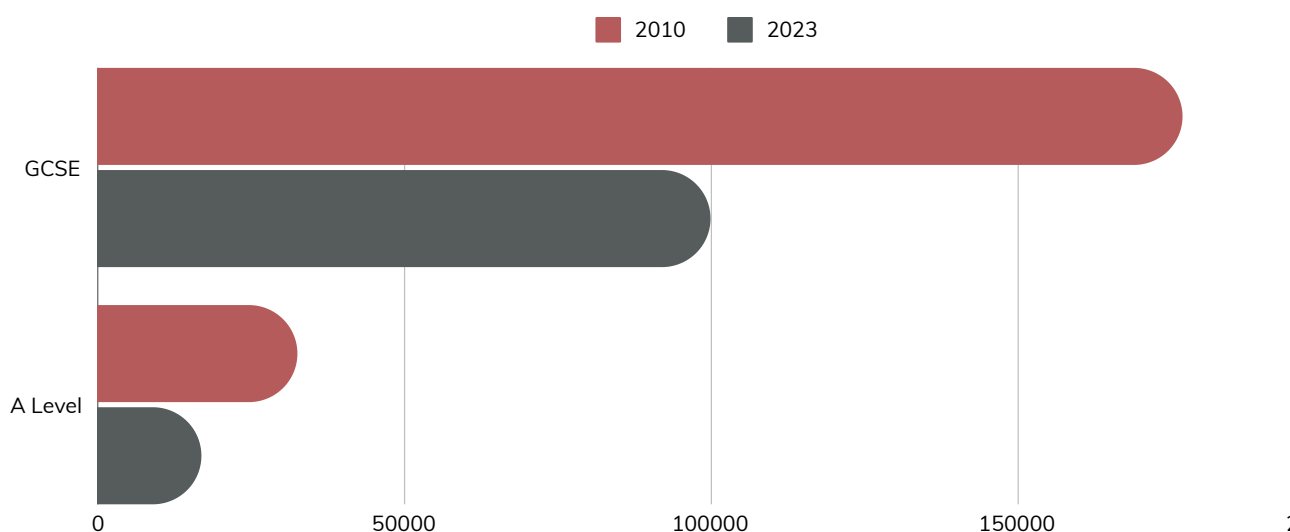
This has encouraged policy makers to have increased confidence in this area, and afforded them the opportunity to think more resourcefully when defining the ways in which creative education is to be delivered.

## Review use of performing arts qualifications to address reduced take up of GCSE/A Levels by students

For most young people, the qualification choices they make between the ages of 14 to 18 are the first opportunity to take ownership of their education journey and ambitions, and to feel empowered in understanding the progression routes to further and higher education that are open to them.

As students make decisions that will start to affect the course of the rest of their lives, it is important that we ensure access to the performing arts not only for those who are going to be future specialists and pursue careers in the cultural industries, but also for those to whom they represent a life-enhancing experience in their own right.

Data on GCSE and A Level entries evidences the challenge teachers and learners are facing in accessing the performing arts in mainstream education settings. Between 2010 and 2023, there have been significant decreases at both GCSE and A Level for qualifications in performing/expressive arts, dance, drama and music. The graph below illustrates a decline of 44% at GCSE in those subjects during the last decade, and correspondingly 48% for A Level. This is especially concerning given that GCSE and A Level entries on the whole increased in this time.



Interestingly the Welsh Government has recently revamped mainstream expressive/performing arts qualifications. This new offer makes innovative use of existing expertise, placing learners at the centre of experiences and creative choices.



Young people deserve to enjoy a sense of autonomy and independence in the education decisions they are making, which will ultimately result in a feeling of ownership and personal investment in their futures.

Through embracing the power of choice, and ensuring that qualifications are accessible and support the aspirations of learners, we can help them push open the doors to success.

**The Lord Aberdare**

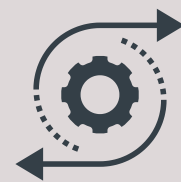


In light of this, it is time for us to review and strengthen the performing arts qualifications we offer to students aged 14 and upwards. We need to be confident that the opportunities available to young people are relevant to their aspirations and authentic to diverse experiences, embracing content that supports creative development and promotes curiosity in rewarding ways.

Qualifications should map to contemporary genres, capture modern practices and include a strong element of digital engagement and entrepreneurship to reinvigorate engagement with the performing arts in the maintained school sector.

**To improve the performing arts qualifications offer we propose:**

A review of GCSE and A Level provision which more widely recognises young people's experiences of the performing arts, both informal and formal (such as graded exams), acknowledging achievement across all genres



That the full range of Ofqual-recognised creative and performing arts qualifications be included in the evidence used to inform schools' performance measures, including Progress 8.



Working together, the sector can refresh the performing arts progression path, a structure which can be made complete with comprehensive careers information for schools' advisors supporting young people.



## Learning through the performing arts to inspire creative lives

Engagement with the performing arts brings positive benefits to both individuals and their communities, improving personal, educational and societal outcomes in a wide range of contexts. The power of such experiences in enhancing lives can be evidenced in a number of ways:

- Supporting the development of literacy, numeracy, and cognitive skills
- Improving employability
- Promoting collaborative working, individual initiative, and problem-solving skills
- Building self-confidence and motivation
- Encouraging the development of strong emotional intelligence and inner resilience
- Fostering both physical and mental wellbeing.

Some of the first communities to foster creativity and imagination in children are our early years settings and schools. Their vital and ongoing work in giving our young people profound cultural experiences and broadening their aspirations and ambitions requires support, and deserves to be more widely acknowledged.

Beyond this, and as children explore further, taking advantage of the opportunities available to them both in and out of school, possibly accessing activities through innovative use of technology, their creative journey becomes richer, and more complex.



This is particularly true in the performing arts, where currently a good deal of sustained engagement takes place in out-of-school settings, which can have a cost implication on family budgets. Making quality provision equally accessible and attractive in all schools and communities is crucial.



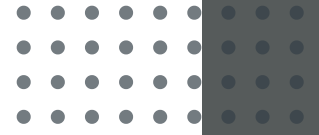
*'The work of the artist...leads the rest of us into fresh pastures and teaches us to love and to enjoy what we often begin by rejecting, enlarging our sensibility and purifying our instincts.'*

*John Maynard Keynes (1945)*

The ability to engage in the arts enhances individuals' lives, combats both physical and mental health issues, and provides people with opportunities to channel their creativity and energy.

**The Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury**





**We can demonstrate strength by coming together to offer young people a wide range of rich, and accessible, creative provision. Achievement as a result of these opportunities must be formally acknowledged, and more value ascribed to individuals' accomplishments. We can do this by:**

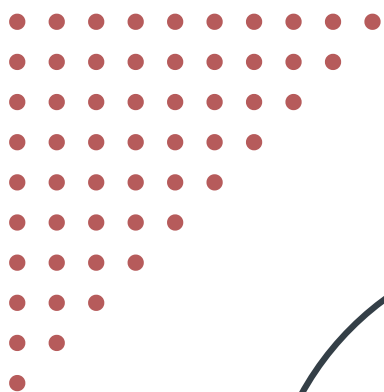


Encouraging the use of digital learner logs to capture the range of young people's innovative and artistic activities within and outside school



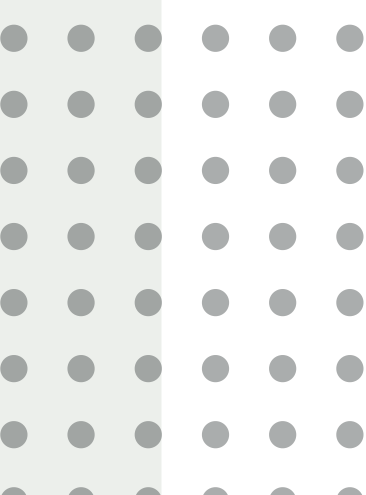
Coming together as a sector to establish a central convening structure which can facilitate partnerships between mainstream schools and out-of-school settings at a national level, including promoting and recognising enterprising projects that make creative use of technology.

Over time, the record of achievements across the spectrum of engagement with the performing arts could further be captured and made more robust through, for example, extending use of the existing Personal Learning Record.



Significantly, the positive wash back effects of creative endeavours on young people's educational attainment, transferable skills and wellbeing is clearly accepted by policy makers.

For example, this is presently being advocated through the development of a Cultural Education Plan in England, with which CDMT engages.





## **Invest in high quality performing arts training** to ensure that the UK creative sector continues to thrive

The unparalleled quality of the UK's theatres, musicals and dance companies not only contributes significantly to cultural life nationally and internationally, but also enhances our reputation and status throughout the world. For instance, pre-Covid, our sector sold in excess of 34 million tickets for more than 63,000 shows a year, thereby contributing over £8 billion in revenue to the UK economy, £1.28 billion of it in ticket sales alone.

This global USP is in large part attributable to the excellence and relevance of the professional performing arts training institutions that support it. Both are a matter of national pride for the UK, and a big contributor to its economic success.

In 2022, our flourishing creative and cultural sector:

- Generated £125 billion for the UK economy, almost 6% of its total GVA
- Accounted for more than 7% of total UK filled jobs.

In light of this valuable fiscal contribution, support for the vocational training institutions preparing the professionals of the future is an excellent investment. However, the funding landscape for this world-class provision in the performing arts is varied, and sometimes difficult to understand from both an institution and user perspective.

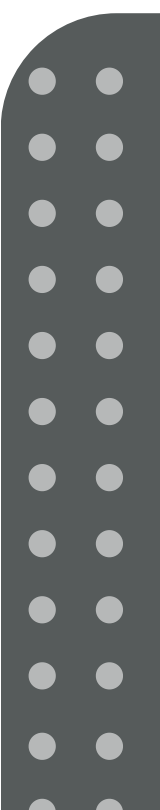
Taking into consideration the various challenges in this area over time, and the DfE's recent evaluation of the Dance & Drama Awards funding scheme in particular, it is important going forward that decisions being made for the wider industry should align with decisions made for those who train its future professionals.

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Creativity is all around us, both within ourselves and others. It influences and shapes our lives from beginning to end. We must therefore, with passion, and with energy, be ready to embed it in our education system through any way possible, including by enhancing young people's access to and experience of, the performing arts.

Glyndwr Jones, *Director of the CDMT*

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**Both the UK economy and aspiring future professionals can benefit by government money being used wisely through:**



Focusing on specialist world class providers delivering appropriate contact hours at quality facilities



Consolidating funding models so that they are utilised to best effect.

A coherent approach at all stages of the performing arts education pipeline, coupled with equitable access to provision in young people’s formative years, can promote engagement with the professional training ecosystem by all communities, ultimately ensuring the development of a diverse and thriving creative and cultural sector.

Together, graduates from world-class vocational training institutions, such as CDMT Accredited schools and Conservatoires UK providers, make significant contributions to our creative industries, especially in maintaining its global reputation. This contribution could be better celebrated by government not only in and of itself, but also to ensure that a career in the performing arts continues to be seen by young people as a viable and valuable choice well into the future.



The UK projects itself as innovative, creative, forward thinking, and those that represent us in the West End, TV, and dance performance, play a huge part in enabling us to do that. The specialist providers who train them should be supported to do their jobs to their best capacity.

**The Baroness Benjamin OM DBE DL**



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I am delighted to support this Manifesto for Performing Arts Education with its wealth of helpful and inspirational content to support the building of creative futures for all. The authors' mission in advancing both artistic performance and creative opportunity chimes strongly with my own personal and professional experiences.

This manifesto captures the economic and emotional value of refreshing performing arts education provision in support of our communities for times to come, and I urge all those interested in creating a harmonious, productive and resilient UK to read its recommendations.

**The Baroness Wilcox of Newport**

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