

FURTHER TO OUR
MANIFESTO RECOMMENDATIONS

Building Creative Futures



Confirming quality in Dance, Drama and Musical Theatre



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CDMT

Salters' Hall

4 London Wall Place

London

EC2Y 5AU

Text developed by Philippa Bunting

Research supported by Emily Maloney



020 7240 5703



info@cdmt.org.uk



www.cdmt.org.uk



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Foreword by Jess Brown-Fuller MP

The UK's performing arts and creative sector is a source of pride and celebration. Theatre makers, dancers, and musicians alike produce art and performance envied the world over, embodying the essential human qualities of creativity, inspiration and innovation. The arts also act as a vehicle to bring people together, unlocking powerful connections between individuals, and society.

Taking part in performing arts activities has proven benefits to us beyond the learning of a technical skill. Children that take part in creative pursuits have better general educational attainment, as well as improved confidence, the ability to demonstrate initiative, and work collaboratively. These vital skills are taken forward in to all aspects of life, illustrating the excellent investment that is arts education.

We should not shy away from recognising the enormous financial contribution that the arts and culture sector makes to the wider economy too. From ticket sales to merchandise, local community events to international stages, the performing arts sector more than holds its own. In fact, the music, performing and visual arts contributed more than £11.2 billion in 2022, and employed more than 280,000 people, with a similar number of people also employed in the film, tv, radio and photography sector.

As a country, we have a duty to ensure that the next generation of employees is suitably equipped to join a sector that can drive the growth and innovation that the UK needs now more than ever. We must also, and perhaps particularly in the light of the recent report from the National Centre for Social Research, ensure that a career in the arts continues to be seen by our young people as a viable and valuable choice well into the future. To do so, it is imperative that we sustain and preserve the organisations that support the pipeline of performing arts provision, from pre-vocational through to professional training.

CDMT does outstanding work, advocating powerfully on behalf of members, increasing their public profile and influence with key industry and political stakeholders – not least in their work as the Secretariat of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Performing Arts Education and Training, of which I am proud to be Chair.

As the voice of their member organisations, CDMT promotes outstanding industry-approved institutions allowing prospective students, candidates and parents to better understand what excellent provision in the performing arts looks like, and I look forward to continuing to support them in this mission.



Introduction by Rosanagh Fuller

The publication of the independent review of the curriculum and assessment for England, and the announcement regarding the establishment of a new National Centre for Arts Education, together mark the onset of an encouraging period in the long history of performing arts education in the UK. Whilst many organisations are facing challenging times, with both domestic and international events putting pressure on everyday spending, there are indications that a quality education in the arts for all, one which both delivers powerful life experiences and enables progression for those who wish it, is moving up the priority list for politicians and policymakers.

Notably since 2023, CDMT has engaged in a sustained campaign, through publications, events, advocacy and the work of the All-Party Parliamentary Group, to champion access for all to an education in the arts. As such, we are delighted to see some of the ideas we put forward, in the form of recommendations, now reaching fruition as public policy. This booklet is the next step in that campaign, where we engage with the detail of some current initiatives, and look to future opportunities to further support, promote and celebrate the work of our member organisations.

We are also delighted to see the call in Becky Francis' excellent report for more specificity when it comes to the subjects of dance and drama, and a greater focus on skill-building when it comes to music. This represents a step change for all three subjects, and for the future learners that engage with them, including those for whom any one discipline may become a career.

Continuing to look to the future, we look particularly to the developing relationship that the UK is seeking to grow with the European Union, and the opportunities for collaboration and interchange that that forum potentially offers both pre-vocational learners and those in professional training. Having already established positive relationships with the European Union delegation in London and garnered support for our work from many European ambassadors and their staff, who joined us at the event to launch *Breaking Boundaries, Building Bridges* earlier in the year, we now look to further initiatives we can join and support to the benefit of the membership and its wider profile.

Through the analysis and recommendations that follow, I look forward to championing the work of CDMT member awarding organisations and professional schools with vigour and imagination.



1. The Implications of the Department for Education's Curriculum and Assessment Review

The independent Curriculum and Assessment Review in England, chaired by Professor Becky Francis CBE, delivered its final report in late 2025. Covering the national curriculum, 16-19 pathways, and their assessment, this review (the first since 2014) was designed to provide a thorough analysis of both strengths and weaknesses across all subject areas, and “provide all children and young people with a rich, aspirational, and challenging offer to support high and rising standards.” (Executive Summary, DfE 2025). Government has since accepted the core recommendations to modernise education, with a revised National Curriculum scheduled to be published in 2027 for first teaching in 2028.

As part of the consultative process, CDMT submitted a robust response informed by both the research and findings underpinning its two previous publications *Securing Access to Performing Arts Education for All* (2023) and the *Manifesto for Performing Arts Education* (2024), and the professional insights it is uniquely placed to attain. Underlying CDMT’s response was the passionately held belief that drama, dance, music and other creative pursuits are vital to the holistic education of children and young people, and that significant revision of the curriculum, including GCSE and A Level content, was needed to ensure that all learners, regardless of background, are able to access these crucial subjects both in support of future performing arts professionals, and for their development as authentic and expressive human beings.

It is encouraging to note that there are, in the final report, specific recommendations across dance, drama and music, that chime with the response CDMT provided to the public consultation, informed by information provided by its membership combined with independent research.

For Dance:

- Review how the PE Key Stage 1 to 4 Programmes of Study refer to Dance, including whether they are sufficiently specific to support high-quality teaching and students’ progression, including to further study.
- A review of the subject content, balance of assessment and assessment methods of GCSE Dance so that the qualification is inclusive, representative and better suited to the discipline.

For Drama:

- Update the Key Stage 1-3 English Programmes of Study to include a discrete section on Drama, with greater clarity about expectations for performing, creating and responding to dramatic works.
- Review of subject content, assessment methods and the balance of assessment for GCSE Drama to ensure that the qualification is up to date, suited to the discipline and enables progression to further study and careers in drama and theatre.

For Music:

- Revise the content of the Programmes of Study for Key Stages 1 to 3 to give all pupils a rigorous foundation in musical understanding and enable broader access to further study at Key Stage 4.
- A review of the Music GCSE and Technical Award concurrently to ensure purposes are both clear and distinct and that content and assessment meet these aims
- Better optimise investment in Music education to support the teaching and learning of musical instruments and the reading of music to ensure equitable access to, and progression in, Music education.

The intention of the review in the three areas of dance, drama and music is clear. To make the performing arts inclusive, to give them the specificity which ensures amongst other things visibility, and the desire to build strong progression routes for those who want to go further. This is a promising direction of travel, and one which CDMT wholeheartedly supports.

Building on these excellent starting points, CDMT intends to pursue two significant workstreams going forward:

- 1 Working with our Validated awarding organisations, we will seek to understand deeply the successes of their structures. This includes developing proposals for how Graded Exams could map on to the Key Stages, in support of the recommendations to improve subject specificity and the development of specific skills in the performing arts
- 2 Working with our Accredited professional training providers and industry representatives, we will seek feedback on ways in which specific qualifications and progression routes could be improved to support progression to Further and Higher Education, and eventual employment for those who wish to pursue a professional career in the performing arts

2. The Establishment of a National Centre for Arts & Music Education



On 18 March 2025, Education Secretary The Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP made a significant announcement for the future of arts education in the UK, heralding the development of a National Centre for Arts and Music Education, due to be established during 2026 and launched shortly thereafter. This new Centre will support delivery of high-quality arts education through a new online training offer for teachers, to promote opportunities for children and young people to pursue their artistic and creative interests in school, including through existing music hubs, and boost partnerships between schools and cultural providers.

“ Lisa Nandy, Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport argues:
“Arts and music bring people together and are enjoyed by communities across the country. We want every child and young person to have equal opportunities to access a high quality arts and music education, to ensure creativity can be explored by all and not just the privileged few. The government’s new National Centre for Arts and Music Education will ensure more children and young people’s untapped potential can be unleashed, improving the pipeline of talent for our world class creative industries.”

“ Darren Henley CBE, CEO of Arts Council England says:
“This bold innovation will nurture England’s next generation of creators, performers and audiences, levelling the playing field for all young people whatever their background. Subjects like art and design, dance, drama and music are central to every child’s education. They come with the added bonus of equipping young people for life by boosting their creativity, their confidence and their social skills. A National Centre for Arts and Music Education is a vital initiative, and we welcome it wholeheartedly.”

CDMT first advocated for a scheme like this in *Securing Access to Performing Arts Education for All* (2023), recommending that “drawing on existing initiatives and networks, the authorities build on the established music education hubs model to create more cohesive dance, drama and musical theatre provision in response to local need.” It is a testament to CDMT’s ongoing success in the field of advocacy, its approach of putting forward recommendations which are both aspirational and, crucially, achievable, rooted in structures that already exist.

The benefits of the establishment of the National Centre to CDMT members are many:

- Sustained visibility of arts education at a national, accountable level raises its profile across the piece and the opportunity for strategic oversight
- The potential for teacher support and CPD, and the sharing of expertise at a national level
- The involvement of existing graded examination structures, along with the extensive networks of teachers that deliver them
- The increased visibility of the outstanding progression routes to professional training our members collectively provide, and the signposting of potential career pathways to those who wish to specialise
- More equitable access for all to high-quality arts education
- Efficiencies brought about by the centralisation of resources

CDMT will take this topic forward by advocating that:

- 1 The extensive networks associated with CDMT are consulted in the preparation and delivery of the National Centre for Arts and Music Education
- 2 The National Centre for Arts and Music Education makes best use of the networks of teachers associated with the graded examinations networks and those associated with professional training providers.
- 3 The development draws on insights drawn from the establishment of successful similar initiatives for other disciplines, including for example the National Centre for Excellence in the Teaching of Mathematics, whose approach includes local and regional hubs, free online classroom resources developed by experts, and free continuing professional development (CPD) for participating schools.



3. The Funding Landscape for Performing Arts Education in the UK

The funding landscape for students attending FE/HE specialist performing arts provision is arguably one of the most complex in the UK. Encompassing five different funding streams – HE Student Loans, the Dance and Drama Award Scheme (DaDA), Advanced Learner Loans, private funding from family or benefactors, and the incoming Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) there is a good deal for learners to understand, and for institutions to assist them in navigating. In the pre-16 landscape there is also the Music and Dance Scheme (MDS) for musicians aged 8 upwards and dancers aged 11 upwards attending specific specialist schools full time, or Centres for Advanced Training (CATs) part time.

The CDMT providers covered by the various funding streams offer on average more than 30 contact hours per week to their students, unrivalled connections to the industry, and generate average progression rates of over 90% into performance roles within the industry. The challenges around funding are against a backdrop where the performing arts contribute approximately 40.3 billion to the UK economy, delivering a Gross Value Added (GVA) approximately the same size as the food and beverage sector (McKinsey 2023), and where the cultural industries are growing at a faster rate than other areas of the UK economy (DCMS 2026, HoC 2025).

Despite this positive contribution, there are specific and longstanding concerns associated with these funding mechanisms. The first is around forward planning. There appears to be some hesitancy within DfE to make firm commitments sufficiently far ahead to enable institutions to plan in an efficient way. For example, in 2026, DaDA providers have had to wait until June to hear firmly what budgets they will be allocated for September of the same year, leaving staff and prospective students with little in the way of information for the new academic year, and causing significant disruption to recruitment. Likewise within the MDS, budgets for the following academic year are frequently confirmed only in July or August for a September start. The rollout of the LLE has been delayed from an originally projected 2027 to a now 2030 start. These and associated issues mean that CDMT is engaged in an ongoing struggle on behalf of its professional training provider members to acquire institutional funding, sometimes on a case-by-case basis.

The second concern is around the burdensome application process institutions have to go through in order to register with the Office for Students (OfS), a prerequisite to students having access both to Student Loans and LLE funding. Initial OfS registration costs upwards of £28K, and involves a lengthy application process, further annual payments and a complex inspection regime.

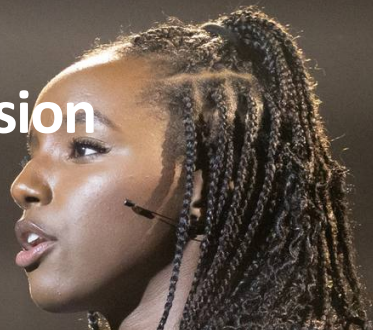
The third matter is the inequality of access to funding through the student loans scheme for some students, specifically students at providers not within the fee cap category with the OfS. These students are only able to draw down £6250 as a loan towards their tuition fees. Since this falls considerably below the true cost of delivering vocational training in the performing arts at this level, institutions are forced to either ask students to self-fund the difference, or fundraise at an institutional level. Similar challenges face students from Wales who, should they choose to study at a franchised university, may also only draw down £6250.

CDMT has conducted a number of successful advocacy initiatives in this area in recent years, including the campaign to persuade the DfE that it would be inappropriate to include Trinity College London (TCL) providers in the policy brought in in 2025 whereby independent schools to be subject to 20% VAT. This is estimated to have saved the training providers potentially affected in excess of £1M annually.

CDMT therefore recommends, and will continue strongly to influence and advocate that:

- 1 The DfE makes better long-term commitments to those they fund, confirming budgets in three-year cycles
- 2 Information on available funding is shared earlier in the academic year
- 3 The government sustains and enhances its support for professional performing arts providers with proven track records of success, particularly in relation to student employability
- 4 That where possible, the OfS registration process is streamlined, for example consideration given to evidence from other inspection regimes, such as Ofsted, or validating university partners

4. The European Dimension



The UK's relationship with its European neighbours has been evolving since Brexit, the impact of which event still continues to resonate in many areas of national life. All HE institutions have been affected as they work out how to continue to welcome students from Europe, now regarded as international students; partnership working across borders has been interrupted or made complex, and the very specific issue of touring arrangements has hit the performing arts sector particularly hard.

Against this backdrop, and in the spirit of fostering cross-cultural relationships, earlier this year, CDMT co-hosted the event Building Bridges: The Role of Cultural Diplomacy in EU–UK Relations in partnership with the EU Delegation to the UK at their offices in London, sharing a platform with the EU Ambassador to the UK, Pedro Serrano. This event also encompassed the launch of our latest booklet Breaking Boundaries, Building Bridges. , an impassioned argument for the power of the arts for individuals, for nations, and for the world at large.



The foreword, by Lord Vaizey of Didcot, sets the tone:

“To examine how the arts break boundaries and build bridges is to explore the deepest impulse of human creativity: the need to imagine, to express, to communicate, to connect, and to remember. The arts help individuals to understand themselves and one another more deeply, and allow societies to negotiate identity and navigate change. They empower nations to relate across linguistic, cultural and political divides. Intimate and collective, deeply personal yet public, whilst rooted in particular experiences they are nonetheless capable of reaching far across time and space.”

This launch event coincided the EU's recently released strategic framework Culture Compass for Europe, which places culture at the heart of EU policy, aiming to make Europe the best place to be an artist, and charting a new vision for vibrant, world-leading cultural and creative sectors.

The government has recently confirmed that the UK and EU have reached agreement over the Erasmus+ programme, meaning that UK students will be able to take part from 2027. Erasmus+ is an EU programme providing grant funding for international placements and partnership projects across education, training, youth and sport, offering opportunities for personal growth through studying, learning, and working in eligible countries. There are also indications that the situation around arrangements for touring musicians and artists is increasingly optimistic, with signs that it can be resolved positively.

Exploring this European dimension, through discussions with EU colleagues involved in cultural diplomacy, led CDMT to the conclusion that this was a valuable additional area for exploration, to the benefit ultimately of the membership. More frequent interchange on the international stage can only strengthen the impact of the arts and cultural sector at home, as well as making a vital contribution to the repairing and renegotiating of relationships with Europe post-Brexit.

Next steps for CDMT will be to:

- 1** Collect examples of successful international partnership work, to support the principles and approach of Culture Compass for Europe, the work of the Cultural Exchange Coalition (CEC) and the Forum on EU-UK Cultural and Media Relations
- 2** Continue, through the APPG, to keep matters relating to performing arts training and Europe, including the issue of touring and working abroad, uppermost in parliamentarians' minds
- 3** Explore how the mechanism for Erasmus+ might best work for CDMT members, sharing information on the application process, building case studies specific to the performing arts and facilitating cross-organisation working



Conclusions

CDMT welcomes recent developments in UK arts education policy, specifically the results of the curriculum and assessment review, and the establishment of the National Centre for Arts and Music. These are encouraging initiatives, and merit our support. We particularly applaud the call for a subject specific focus for dance and drama, and for stronger skill building and instrumental learning for all in music, and the possibilities that the establishment of the National Centre brings for the sharing of skills, expertise and resources in the service of an enhanced arts education for all.

However, we know that the position of performing arts education is never secure, and in that context it is vital that we continue to make the argument for both the value of a performing arts education for all, and also the huge importance of ensuring support for our future professionals. Support that includes a stable funding landscape, with time given to institutions to make plans. Building on its positive and long-lasting relationships with the DfE and others, CDMT has long been, and continues to be, positioned to conduct successful advocacy and exert influence in favour of its members in this area as in others.

The European dimension of our work is currently more exploratory, but rich in possibility for the future. Many of our members already have an international profile, and work in partnership with other institutions across the globe: we want to both make this visible, and also explore ways in which all our members, their students and teaching staff, can benefit from the huge insights and opportunities cross-national working can bring.

As always, CDMT will maintain an ongoing programme of publications and events, in support of the work of the membership and of the APPG, as well as, during 2026, conducting a wide-ranging survey of the membership to further inform our future work. It is an honour to serve the next generation of talent, alongside the teachers, leaders and examiners who are enabling their career development, in support of our world-class sector of which we are so proud.



Hasan Davis, youth advocate and self-styled hope dealer:

“Art is not a part of life, it is not an addition to life, it is the essence of those pieces of us that make us fulfilled. That give us hope. That give us dreams and provide the world a view very different than what it would have been without us.”

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