

Securing the long term future of cultural education within the UK

As the lead association for art history in the United Kingdom, the Association of Art Historians has a key role in ensuring both the professional practice and public understanding of the subject. The announcement from AQA of the likely loss of the GCE A and AS level in History of Art is therefore of significant concern, both as a body representing teachers of the subject and more broadly in our role as an advocate for the subject both within and beyond education.

As an organisation we recognise and understand many of the challenges faced by curriculum authorities such as AQA as they look at their portfolio of subjects and qualifications, and so will continue working with colleagues there to unpick ways in which we may be able to mitigate some of the risks that they have outlined today. That said the proposal to no longer continue with the redevelopment of History of Art at Key Stage 5 would mark a significant loss to young people's access to - and understanding of - a range of different cultures, artefacts and ideas.

This principle of access forms a cornerstone of our emerging campaign work with universities and museums and galleries around the country to increase opportunities for young people to engage with art history and art in their own communities. Similarly being able to signpost educational opportunities such as an A level in art history to students who may never have considered this an opportunity forms a significant part of our campaign work with partners across West Yorkshire, Bristol, Brighton and Sussex. The loss of that A Level means that for many prospective students of the subject that door will close and future opportunities lost.

In a presentation earlier this year teacher Sarah Philips spoke to a rapt audience of young people, weaving her way through art history from Van Gogh to contemporary artists such as Maurizio Cattelan. In it she highlighted how yes, art history is certainly a well-kept secret, but as a vehicle for learning about human behaviour and human concerns and creativity, it is unsurpassed. The draft specification for the new History of Art A Level is – as many of our colleagues across culture, education and the university sector agree - engaging, modern, diverse and relevant. It offers study which is both scholarly in depth and inspiring in breadth. Its themes offer students the potential insight into the problems and creative solutions found by past and present societies across the world. As a consequence we believe that the specification not only supports the development of core skills in writing and communication and the ability to read and research widely and effectively but also encourages empathy, tolerance and mutual respect.

The concerns we have for art history education are not unique and shared by many of our colleagues across the arts and the wider humanities. As we work to secure the future of this A level we know also that our work with partners across and within many other sectors and subjects will be key to securing the long term future of cultural education within the UK.

You can find out more about campaign work at www.aah.org.uk/campaigns