

Andrew Hall
Chief Executive, AQA

19 October 2016

Dear Andrew Hall

We are writing to express our grave concerns regarding the decision to discontinue the AQA History of Art A Level. As AQA is the only exam board to currently offer the Art History qualification, the decision will result in a subject of profound social, cultural and economic importance disappearing from the UK A-Level landscape. The damaging consequences will stretch far beyond schools and colleges.

We live in a culture defined by the rapid production, circulation and consumption of images. Today, the visual represents our *primary* means of communication. It is only by studying the visual and material practices of the past—the power of images and objects to express and enforce feelings, ideas and beliefs—that we can fully appreciate their potential in the present. Art History is the only subject dedicated to the close analytical and contextual study of visual and material cultures across the ages. Society has never required its insights more.

An investment in precisely these principles sits at the core of the recent redesign of the AQA History of Art A-Level curriculum, based on advice and input from leading experts in the field. From 2017, A-Level students were to have the opportunity to study how the most pressing social and political issues we face today—from war to environmental change, identity to migration—play out, and have played out, through the visual and material world: an exciting and inspiring prospect. The changes had already been welcomed by Ofqual, which heaped praise on what it described as an engaging, inclusive, modern and relevant new curriculum. The revised approach was to provide the basis for a widespread campaign, overseen by the Association of Art Historians and involving faculty from across university Art History departments, to encourage and support a greater number of schools and colleges, particularly in the state sector, to offer the subject to 16-18 year olds. Rarely had the future of the Art History A-Level looked brighter.

The AQA decision will have an impact far beyond schools and colleges. The A-Level continues to be among the most important routes into the study of Art History at degree and then postgraduate level. Its discontinuation will have grave consequences for the future of the discipline in UK universities, a context in which it has traditionally thrived. This represents a vital loss for students, who will have their choices and opportunities curbed. It will also threaten the future success of the UK cultural sector. Many of the directors, curators and educators based in Britain's thriving museum, gallery and heritage industries studied Art History at university. Many also studied the subject at A-Level. Their world-leading work, experienced by millions each year, helps transform audiences' understanding of the world around them. It is also central to attracting the high-level of international tourism on which important parts of the UK economy rely. By denying young people access to the study of Art History at a vital juncture in their lives, the AQA decision will actively discourage the next generation from pursuing careers in the arts and place current successes in real danger.

Public statements issued by AQA indicate that the decision to end the A-Level is based on logistical difficulties involved in its assessment, rather than a judgement regarding the subject's perceived merits. But it is precisely because of the social, cultural and economic importance of Art History that it is so essential that we work together to find constructive ways to address and, ultimately, to overcome any logistical issues and secure a future for the A-Level. Members of the Association of Art Historians, leading university faculty, arts professionals and numerous teachers would welcome the opportunity to work with AQA to achieve this goal.

We urge you, in the strongest possible terms, to please take up this invitation.

Yours Sincerely,

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Dr Marion Coutts, Goldsmiths, University of London
Dr Meaghan Clarke, University of Sussex
Dr Flora Dennis, University of Sussex
Dr Catherine Grant, Goldsmiths, University of London
Dr Cadence Kinsey, University of York
Prof Michelle O'Malley, Warburg Institute, University of London
Dr Lara Pucci, University of Nottingham
Prof Geoff Quilley, University of Sussex
Dr Chad Elias, Dartmouth College
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Dr Claire Jones, University of Birmingham
Dr Mark Harris, Goldsmiths, University of London
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Dr John Bonehill, University of Glasgow
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Prof Paul Smith, University of Warwick
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Professor Katharine Cockin, University of Hull
Professor Craig Richardson, Loughborough University
Prof Arthur J. DiFuria, Savannah College of Art and Design
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Dr Stephen Shukaitis, University of Essex
Dr Anthony Gerbino, University of Manchester
Dr Dorothy Price, University of Bristol
Prof Robert Adlington, University of Nottingham
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Dr Alyce Mahon, University of Cambridge
Dr Sarah Edith James, University College London
Prof Jim Aulich, Manchester Metropolitan University
Dr Sarah Walford, University of Warwick
Prof Anna Contadini, SOAS
Professor Mark Hallett, Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art
Professor Elizabeth Prettejohn, University of York
Sam Thorne, Nottingham Contemporary
Susanna Brown, Curator, Photographs, Word & Image Department, Victoria & Albert
Museum
Dr Kate Retford, Birkbeck College, University of London
Dr Alison Slater, Manchester Metropolitan University
Christopher Adams, Estorick Collection
Prof Martin Hammer, University of Kent
Prof Craig Clunas FBA, University of Oxford
Neil Walker, Djanogly Art Gallery
Dr Rachel Wells, Newcastle University
Dr Fiona Anderson, Newcastle University
Dr Rebecca Gill, National Gallery, London
Bethan Davies, New Art Exchange
Professor Chris Jones, Newcastle University
Professor Andrew Burton, Newcastle University
Dr Eckart Marchand, The Warburg Institute, University of London
Katie Cuddon, Newcastle University
Caro Howell, Director, The Foundling Museum
Catrin Huber, Newcastle University
Giles Bailey, Newcastle University
Dr Kate Nichols, University of Birmingham
Antonia Harrison, Curator, Compton Verney
Anna Harding, Chief Executive, SPACE
Dr Jennifer Alexander, University of Warwick
Professor Tamar Garb, University College London
Dr Jessica Barker, University of East Anglia
Jenny Pengilly, Estorick Collection
Janine Freeston, Royal Photographic Society
Daniel Fabris, Estorick Collection
Professor Jas' Elsner, Corpus Christi College, Oxford
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Dr David J. Appleby, University of Nottingham
Jacqueline Pennell, Goldsmiths, University of London
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Dr Samuel Smith, University of Manchester
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Dr Francesca Berry, University of Birmingham
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Dr Joanne Crawford, University of Leeds
Dr Mark Bradley, University of Nottingham
Dr Beth Williamson, University of Bristol
Abi Pole, Exhibitions Manager, Compton Verney
Christopher Griffin, Tate
Dr Christopher Taylor, University of Leeds
Prof Steve Edwards, Birkbeck College, University of London
Prof Frank Finlay, University of Leeds
Dr Fiona Candlin, Birkbeck, University of London
Prof. Geraldine Johnson, University of Oxford
Dr Andreia Alves de Oliveira, artist
Dr Eva Frojmovic, University of Leeds
Sarah Richardson, Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne
Laura-Jade Vaughan, New Art Exchange, Nottingham
Dr Suzanna Chan, Ulster University
Dr Ignacio Acosta, University of Brighton
Brian Connolly, Ulster University, Belfast
Dr. Aisling O' Beirn, Ulster University, Belfast
Luke Alder, Estorick Collection
Dr Elaine Tierney, V&A Research Institute (VARI)
Dr Carol Bolton, Loughborough University

Dr Dora Thornton, Curator of Renaissance Europe and Curator of the Waddesdon Bequest, British Museum
Dr Ross Balzaretto, Head of Department of History, University of Nottingham
Dr Isobel Elstob, Birkbeck College, University of London
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Professor Tracy Bhamra, Loughborough University
Dr Olivia Horsfall Turner, V&A
Dr Gilda Williams, Goldsmiths College, University of London
Victoria Howarth, Jerwood Gallery
Emily Hedley Jerwood Gallery
Anna McCrickard, Jerwood Gallery
Kirsty Williams, Jerwood Gallery
Dr Allison Stielau, University College London
Dr Frederica Law-Turner, Department of Medieval Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art
Dr Mark Stocker, Curator of Historical & International Art, Museum of New Zealand
Melissa Hamnett, Curator, V&A
Prof Phillip Lindley, University of Leicester
Dr Gavin Grindon, University of Essex
Dr. Simon Richards, University of Leicester
Professor David Ekserdjian, University of Leicester
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