



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Securing the long term future of art history education in the UK

As the lead body for art history in the United Kingdom, the Association of Art Historians plays a key role in ensuring both the professional practice and public understanding of the subject.

The announcement by AQA of their intention to discontinue GCE A and AS Level in History of Art is therefore particularly worrying to us, both as an organisation that represents practitioners of the subject and more broadly as a champion for art history and visual culture, within and beyond education.

The decision to withdraw History of Art at Key Stage 5 marks a considerable loss to young people's access to – and understanding of – a range of different cultures, artefacts and ideas. Signposting educational opportunities such as an A Level in History of Art to students who may never have considered this an opportunity forms a central part of our on-going campaign work with partners across the UK, in regional hubs such as Brighton, Bristol, Leeds and Nottingham.

This situation is of significant concern to us, and whilst fighting for the continuation of History of Art at A Level remains a cornerstone of our campaign work, it is not the whole picture. The position that the subject occupies within the school system is also fundamental in developing awareness of art history at undergraduate level and beyond. Almost a third of universities in the UK offer the opportunity to study art history; the potential impact to the creative and cultural industries into which the higher education sector feeds should not be underestimated.

Those studying or learning about art history have a unique opportunity to engage with and to think differently about the world around them, understanding its histories, cultures and societies through arts, objects and materials. Students gain valuable and sought-after research and analytical skills, useful within education as well as in the wide range of careers that they can go on to pursue.

A central component of our national campaign is the recently-published *Thinking About Art*, the first A Level History of Art textbook to be produced specifically for teachers and students, as well as a wider audience. Written by experienced school teacher Penny Huntsman, and based on AQA course specifications and themes, this already well-received resource points to the current vibrancy of art history as well as indicating its potential for growth.

The concerns that we have for art history education are not unique, and are shared by many of our colleagues across the arts and the wider humanities. As we work to secure the future of the subject, our collaborations with partners across many other sectors and subjects remain vital to guaranteeing the long term prosperity of cultural education within the UK.

In the coming weeks and months, as part of our on-going campaign, the AAH will in the first instance



continue to work with the widest range of stakeholders to explore all possible avenues for maintaining the provision of art history at A Level. This forms part of our long-term broader strategy to increase national awareness of the value within education of art history, and as a result to expand its uptake at university level.

Professor Craig Clunas, University of Oxford: “A Level History of Art has been one of the ways young people have discovered a delight in serious engagement with art and culture. It has also been one of the ways they have advanced to a study of the subject at university level, and gone on to productive careers in a wide range of fields. The decision by AQA to withdraw the qualification happens at a time when exciting developments to broaden the syllabus to a wider global range of art are under way, as are initiatives to bring the subject to an even more diverse range of schools and students. It represents a narrowing of opportunities, a limitation of horizons for students, and is a highly regrettable decision. I very much hope AQA will reconsider, failing which I hope another board will see the necessity for a qualification in this vital area of human creativity to be made available.”

Professor Abigail Harrison Moore, University of Leeds: “The abrupt decision to cut the A Level in History of Art will snatch away access to the subject in school for young people. I have spent many years working with young people across Yorkshire, Derbyshire and beyond to introduce them to art history. I believe the subject opens up amazing opportunities for them to work in the cultural sector and to develop skills such as visual literacy, communication, and critical thinking – in this country and across the world.”

Professor Deborah Swallow, Courtauld Institute of Art: “The definition of art history as a ‘soft subject’ and the demise of its existence as an A Level seriously misunderstands a subject which is enormously important to the economy, culture and well-being of this country. Art history is a rigorous interdisciplinary subject which gives its students the critical skills to deal with a world that is increasingly saturated with images. It brings together visual analysis with history, languages, literature, chemistry, and art and design to name but a few inter-related areas of study and research. Those studying it at university level have a significant impact across the cultural sector, especially in public museums and galleries. Art history as a subject needs to be much better known and not denigrated.”

You can find out more about the AAH’s campaign work at www.aah.org.uk/campaigns or by contacting our Campaign Manager, Trevor Horsewood, on 0207 490 3211 or at trevor@aaah.org.uk.

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Notes to Editors

- The AAH is a UK-based organisation for those with a professional commitment to and interest in art history and visual culture. Formed in 1974, the AAH plays a key role at national level in helping shape and secure the future of art history in education.



- The AAH is a charity working within arts and education. We run a broad programme of events, publications, and funding opportunities for those involved with art history and visual culture in further and higher education, museums and galleries, and schools, as well as those studying art history or undertaking freelance work. We provide resources and networks for our 1300 members and the wider art history community.
- The AAH publishes the leading academic journal, *Art History*. We run the internationally-respected AAH annual conference, which offers a valuable platform for current, interdisciplinary research and critical debate around art and art history.
- Building on the success of our 2015 text book, [Thinking About Art](#), by Penny Huntsman, the next two years of our work in education takes the book's title as a campaign umbrella and call to action. 'Thinking About Art' sums up our approach to supporting art history in education from primary to postgraduate level and beyond into informal learning settings such as museums, galleries, and other cultural organisations.

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