

Why now is a crucial time for the creative arts in schools

There has been a significant decline in engagement with the arts in Scotland in recent times, both at school level and in tertiary education. Yet, the arts are a vital organ for economic and cultural momentum, and now is a crucial moment to address this issue in schools across the country to ensure our creative future.

Creativity is at the heart of innovation: both the sciences and arts ask students to think critically, solve problems and ask questions that inspire creative solutions and advances. The disciplines are inextricably linked, and I feel passionately, as many do, that we should be thinking about **including art to form the acronym Steam** (science, technology, engineering, art and maths) when considering the curriculum, rather than the more commonly used Stem (science, technology, engineering and maths).

The creative industry in the UK provides more than 2.1 million jobs and, in 2021, **creative industries contributed more than £5 billion to the Scottish economy**, according to Scottish government figures.

There will not be a future for the creative industry, however, if we don't have a generation of young people who are inspired to fulfil these roles.

Communication is key. Teachers often encounter parental concerns around the options available to students pursuing creative subjects. To support teachers facing this wall of opposition, we are working to demonstrate the breadth and variety of feasible employment streams available in the creative industries through the **Jupiter+ programme**, a new arts and education initiative in Scotland, rejuvenating empty spaces in towns and cities with world-class artwork and providing free creative education opportunities for young people (Jupiter+ Perth launches tomorrow).

We've found time and financial challenges restricting students' and teachers' engagement with the arts. We must be flexible and listen to what teachers need - that has led us to establish travel bursaries, with support from Perth and Kinross Council for schools and colleges.

As an example of how we can bring art to life for students, we've commissioned artist Rachel Maclean to create an immersive exhibition in a shop on Perth High Street. Above the shop, there will be three storeys of learning spaces including a green-screen studio, media labs and creative workshop spaces, which will be used by and available to students aged 15 and over. These are the sort of rich environments where students can enhance their portfolio work, improve critical thinking skills and gain a greater awareness of contemporary art practice and creative careers.

The creative industries are core to the success of Scottish culture, and it is vital that we capture the attention, imagination and potential of our young people to maintain this legacy of achievement and radical creativity.

We appreciate the extraordinary work of our teachers, but need the government, education sector and the leadership of our schools to support this endeavour - and to ensure that young people are not steered away from fulfilling their potential in the arts.

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