

**National Campaign for the Arts
Response to Primary Curriculum Review Consultation on the Final Report
23 July 2009**

1. Introduction

1.1 The National Campaign for the Arts (NCA) is the UK's only independent lobbying organisation representing all the arts. It provides a voice for the arts world in all its diversity. It seeks to safeguard, promote and develop the arts and win public and political recognition for the importance of the arts as a key element in our national culture.

1.2 This consultation response is structured according to the five sections of the questionnaire¹ and has been informed through consultation with our members.

2. How the curriculum is organised

2.1 The NCA welcomes the curriculum review and supports the move to organise the curriculum according to six broad areas of learning and the emphasis on cross-curricular learning.

2.2 The NCA is pleased that this review recognises the arts as a major component of primary education and strongly welcomes *Understanding the arts* as one of the six the area of learning. We are particularly pleased to see that the final report makes the educative benefits of the arts explicit, for example Recommendation 9, which states that "schools should capitalise on the powerful contributions of the performing and visual arts, especially role play and drama" in developing children's spoken communication.

2.3 The NCA agrees that the proposed areas of learning will help to make useful links between subjects and hopes that this will work to enhance the importance of the arts and how the arts can be used to help children develop skills and interests that will be useful throughout and beyond their education.

2.4 Whilst the NCA understands that at this stage the review cannot be too prescriptive, we hope that the new curriculum will allow greater freedoms for schools allowing them to pursue an approach tailored to local community and individual learner needs.

3. Essentials for learning and life

3.1 The NCA agrees that developing children's IT skills across the curriculum is important, including in exploring new art forms, but is concerned that the new emphasis on ICT means that practical arts skills risk being sidelined.

¹ http://www.qcda.gov.uk/libraryAssets/media/95793_irpc_questionnaire_NEW_SS1_2_doc.pdf

3.2 The NCA would ideally like to see a curriculum where the core subjects are literacy, numeracy, ICT and cultural understanding/awareness, where the arts can play a role in helping children to develop social and communication skills as important as learning to read, write, count and use a computer.

4. Areas of Learning

4.1.0 *Understanding the arts*

4.1.1 The NCA is very pleased to see a detailed description of what *Understanding the arts* means and how the arts can be integrated in primary education. The NCA strongly agrees that the arts have an important role to play in developing children's creativity and enhancing their social and emotional development. However, there are concerns that placing *Understanding the arts* last in the current list of the six areas of learning gives a signal that the arts are in some way less important.

4.1.2 The points outlined under essential knowledge cover the basics of how the arts influence what children should learn at school, but seem a little vague, for example: "Children should build secure knowledge that designing, creating and performing require discipline, control, technique and practice." This statement could be backed up with a recommendation that schools develop relationships with artists in order that children can learn first hand about the processes and practice of the arts.

4.1.3 The arts can do much to help children develop the skills they need to make further progress in school and in life. The NCA is pleased to see that the key skills include displaying and performing for a range of audiences and communicating ideas to evoke responses.

4.1.4 In terms of cross-curricular studies, the NCA agrees that developing ICT skills is important, but stresses that learning about more traditional art forms should be brought more to the fore.

4.1.5 The NCA is pleased to see that the report recommends additional teacher training and support, but in addition to teachers being able to meet "the raised expectations of children's ICT capabilities", we highlight the need for improved teacher training in the arts. The importance that the report places upon cross-curricular teaching would be supported through the use of arts in the classroom, and only with better teacher training can the arts come to serve any successful or meaningful function in primary education. We would like to see the government make provisions for this.

4.1.6 The NCA is concerned that schools do not have the necessary resources and equipment such as teachers trained in the arts and musical instruments to make the recommendations in *Understanding the Arts* a reality. We would like to see clearer outlines as to how these plans will be delivered. The NCA recommends that primary schools identify where they are lacking in expertise and that the government help them bring in artists and other practitioners in order to deliver a more rounded curriculum.

4.2.0 *Understanding English, communication and languages*

4.2.1 The NCA approves of the curriculum aims but we would welcome greater emphasis on how the practise of the performing arts can be used not only to develop understanding and language skills but also social development and communication. Art forms such as theatre and spoken word should be encouraged as practical activities. However, schools must make sure that covering the arts in English classes is not seen as a substitute for overall learning about the arts.

4.3.0 *Understanding physical development, health and wellbeing*

4.3.1 The NCA is pleased to see that dance is recommended as a physical activity with tangible benefits.

4.4.0 *Historical, geographical and social understanding*

4.4.1 The NCA agrees that “Through exploring cultures, beliefs, faiths, values, human rights and responsibilities, children develop a deeper understanding of themselves and others, and a sense of belonging.” We welcome the recommendation that “Children should use a range of sources of information and visit historic buildings, museums, galleries and sites.”

4.4.2 However, more emphasis could be made on cross-curricular learning and how the understanding the arts will help children to understand the historical, geographical and social environment that surrounds them. The NCA welcomes the recognition that children should have opportunities “to extend their personal, emotional and social development, particularly by learning to work collaboratively with others in community activities to improve the environment and to carry out first-hand investigations in their locality” and suggests that the arts should play a role in this.

5. **Languages**

5.1 The NCA welcomes the move to include foreign languages at Key Stage 2 of the primary curriculum and agrees that schools should be free to choose what languages they wish to teach.

5.2 The NCA would recommend that languages are not taught in isolation, and that children also gain an understanding of culture through learning a new language.

6. **Learners’ needs and transition**

6.1 The NCA believes that the proposed curriculum will enable schools to meet the needs of learners if it is delivered as envisaged.

7. **Conclusion**

7.1 The NCA welcomes this review of the primary curriculum, especially for the inclusion of *Understanding the Arts* as one of the six areas of learning. However, we would also like to see how the curriculum will provide for learning outside the classroom and recommend that the benefits of visits to theatres, concert halls, museums and

galleries and other sites of culture and learning outside of the context of school are made more explicit.

- 7.2 The NCA would also like to highlight the need for better teacher training in the arts if the recommendations of this review are to be put into action. The importance of bringing artists into the school environment and their role in enhancing learning should also be considered by the government.