



RSC responses to the Office for Students Consultation on recurrent funding for 2021-22

[Read the government OfS document in full \(PDF\).](#)

Question 1: To what extent do you agree with the proposal to distribute a greater proportion of OfS recurrent grant through the main high-cost subject funding method? (See paragraphs 15 to 36)

Strongly disagree

Please provide an explanation for your answer. If you believe our approach should differ, please explain how and the reason for your view.

We have huge concerns about the impact of the proposed distribution and resulting cuts to arts courses on existing inequalities, the cultural and creative sector talent pipeline, the ability of our creative industries to remain world-leading in future years, and the message they send about the value of arts subjects overall.

The value of arts subjects

The proposal represents a further erosion of the value placed on studying arts subjects. Subjects that we know play a significant role in the development of student knowledge, critical thinking skills, wellbeing and individual agency (University of Nottingham, 2018). In a longitudinal research study called *Time to Listen* undertaken by the University of Nottingham, the RSC and Tate involving over 5,500 responses from young people across the English regions, students and teachers told us that studying arts subjects is a critical part of school life. They also told us that arts subjects help young people to develop the knowledge, capacities and attributes they need for an uncertain future. They improve their wellbeing and help them deal with the pressures of school and adult life. Yet young people and teachers also told us that it is becoming harder for them to access and give priority to arts and cultural education.

We reported in 2018 that the unintended consequence of emphasising the importance of STEM subjects; focusing school performance measurements on progress in some subjects and not others; and the Russell Group universities 'Facilitating subjects' list (which has since been removed) is that young people and teachers feel that arts and cultural education is less valued, and therefore less valuable.

'Students are getting messages from all over the place that doing arts subjects is wrong...'
Secondary English Teacher, *Time to Listen* research study, 2018

We need to recognise the link between decisions made in tertiary education and their impact on compulsory phases of education. For example, the Russell Group 'Facilitating Subjects list' had a profoundly damaging impact on the state and status of arts subjects (which were excluded from the list) in schools. There is an interdependence between tertiary and compulsory phases of education and this proposal, if implemented, is likely to have a further negative impact on the value placed on the study of arts subjects at GCSE and A Level.

Inequalities

We believe the proposals will widen existing inequalities, decreasing participation rates in higher education by students with disabilities and those from lower socio-economic groups. The consultation document makes clear "*Students studying design, and creative and performing arts have the highest proportion of any broad subject group to have a reported disability, with particularly high proportions in relation to cognitive or learning difficulties and mental health conditions. They also have a higher than average proportion coming from POLAR quintiles 1 and 2.*" From an equity perspective, to propose cuts in funding to these courses will mean less access for students with certain protected characteristics and from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Talent pipeline and retaining a world leading creative and cultural sector

If the 49% cuts go ahead, colleagues in HEIs tell us many arts courses will have to close. The arts and cultural sectors need qualifications that enable pathways and progression routes to a range of creative disciplines. The courses we stand to lose are an essential part of the creative industries talent pipeline eco-system. Degree courses are particularly important to the creative industries as they have a higher proportion of degree holders than other sectors. The creative industries have demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptation through a pandemic that has hit them harder than almost any other sector. The talent pipeline is essential to rebuilding and protecting our reputation on a world stage.

The £10 million in exceptional funding for specialist providers will not plug the gap in funding, and will not benefit the many arts courses run in universities other than the 11 specialist providers. It will also not prevent the erosion of the importance of arts subjects in compulsory education. The overall reduction in funding and the explicit demotion of arts and creative subjects in HE will in fact make careers in the creative sector increasingly the preserve of the privately educated.

Overall, and as noted by the Theatre and Performance Research Association, the proposals seem to ignore evidence from across the economy as to the importance of subjects beyond the STEM remit in terms of money generated by the cultural industries and the wider, vital skills garnered through the study of these subjects (see for example: thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/skills-qualified-future-quantifying-demand-arts-humanities-social-science).

The consultation document recognises that "...previous government studies have shown that participation in higher education brings a wide range of benefits both to the individual and wider society." And that "...Graduates in the proposed price group C1.2 subjects also play an important role in supporting important parts of the UK employment sectors, economy and cultural life. Many of the subjects in the proposed price group C1.2 are relevant to professions in the government's shortage occupation list." It is contradictory to make these assertions and then propose a 49% cut in the funding required to continue the courses.

We endorse the SCUDD and Theatre and Performance Research Association response to this question and believe that OfS should, at the very least, retain current funding levels to the proposed C1.2 categorised subjects.

Question 2: To what extent do you agree with the proposal to split price group C1 in order to implement a reduction of 50 per cent to the high-cost subject funding allocated to subjects in the performing arts; creative arts; media studies and archaeology? (See paragraphs 15 to 26)

Strongly disagree

Please provide an explanation for your answer. If you believe our approach should differ, please explain how and the reason for your view.

We are concerned that the current proposals will, inevitably, result in fewer arts courses being offered. Detailed work has been undertaken into the funding levels required to provide comprehensive education in these fields. A reduction of 49% in funding is inconsistent with the consultation document's acknowledgement of the importance of these fields and with the detailed calibration of the costs of delivering them. Course cuts would seem unavoidable if the proposals go forward.

As referenced in our answer to Q1, we believe that this in turn will limit rather than expand opportunity for all, widen existing inequalities and decrease participation rates in higher education by students with disabilities and those from lower socio-economic groups. We believe an equity impact assessment is needed to understand the potential effect of this proposal on students with protected characteristics.

We also believe that the proposal is likely to have a detrimental effect on our world leading creative industries that according to DCMS figures contribute £115.9bn a year to the UK GVA. The creative industries accounted for 5.9% of UK GVA in 2019 (the last year of figures) and are growing at four times the rate of the UK economy as a whole (43.6% between 2010 and 2019 in real terms). The Creative Industries employ 2.1 million people, and the number of jobs in the Creative Industries increased by 34.5% from 2011 to 2019, more than three times the growth rate of employment in the UK overall (11.4%).

Given the role of the creative industries in our economy, the requirements from the Department for Education to cut funding to arts courses seem to work counter to the governments stated ambitions of levelling up the country and their own Industrial Strategy.

We are also concerned that the proposal further devalues studying arts subjects and that this in turn may impact on the numbers of students studying them and going into the teaching profession. The Department for Education published the New Music Curriculum on the 26 March which included a recommendation for 1 hour of high-quality music education a week throughout Key Stages 1, 2 and 3. There is already a shortage of teachers to deliver this music education – in four of the last five years the targets for trainee teacher recruitment have not been met (from 2016 to 2020 the overall recruitment target was 1,978 teachers and only 1,747 were recruited, or 88% of the target number), cutting HE Music courses will further constrict the supply of high quality music teachers to deliver the Department for Education's stated goal for music education.

We endorse the Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance, SCUDD and Theatre and Performance Research Association responses to this question. We believe cutting funding

for arts subjects is a blunt approach to the funding challenge set out in paragraph 16 and urge the OfS to reconsider and to take a more nuanced stance.

We support the point raised by the Theatre and Performance Research Associate about the fact that arts and humanities research and scholarship is at the heart of COVID recovery work taking place at the moment (see <https://ahrc-blog.com/2021/03/23/the-pandemic-and-beyond-the-arts-and-humanities-contribution-to-covid-19-research-and-recovery/>) – this work is directly and vitally relevant to the priorities set out in paragraph 26 of the consultation document. The proposals to cut funding to the arts ignores the fact that research in the arts is of vital importance socially, culturally, economically and in terms of health and wellbeing. The proposed cuts severely limit the future of such urgent and important research. The cuts will decimate arts and humanities research in the UK and thereby the UK's standing as a world-leader in Higher Education.

The RSC opposes the splitting of the C1 price group, resulting in cuts to recurrent grants for arts subjects, in the strongest possible terms.

Question 3: Notwithstanding your answer to question 2, if we were to split price group C1 as proposed, to what extent do you agree with our approach to implementing this? (See paragraphs 27 to 28 and Annex B)

Strongly disagree

Please provide an explanation for your answer. If you believe our approach should differ, please explain how and the reason for your view.

We echo the concerns of the Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance. Splitting arts courses from STEM subjects reinforces binary divisions between the arts and sciences. Colleagues in STEM subjects are vocal in their support of the arts and the value to innovation when students access a combination of arts and science disciplines.

There is an interdependence between the study of arts and the study of sciences is illustrated in research studies. For example, research by the University of Sussex for Nesta found that firms that combine arts and STEM skills are more likely to bring radical innovations to market (Siepel, J., Camerani, R., Pellegrino, G., and Masucci, M. (2016). *The Fusion Effect: the economic returns to combining arts and science skills*. London: Nesta). This should inform our understanding of the interdependent relationship between the study of arts and science subjects.

We are deeply concerned by the approach of the consultation document which separates disciplines into STEM or 'not STEM'. This is an exceptionally narrow and damaging approach to understanding how and what students' study on programmes that are not explicitly aligned with 'science, technology and health' disciplines.

Question 4: To what extent do you agree with our approach to counting students from the Crown Dependencies in our funding allocations for 2021-22? (See paragraphs 34 and 35.) *

NA

Question 5: To what extent do you agree with the proposed approach to remove the targeted allocation for students attending courses in London? (See paragraphs 37 to 48.) *

Don't know

Question 6: To what extent do you agree with the proposed approach to remove London weighting from the formula-based student premium allocations? (See paragraphs 37 to 48.) *

Strongly disagree.

London HEIs undoubtedly have higher costs than those outside the capital. The loss of London weighting to institutions will result in cuts to staff and pay, student services, facilities and teaching. This proposal would most impact teaching-intensive universities and damage social mobility for the least advantaged students.

Question 7: To what extent do you agree with the proposal to provide £40 million to support Uni Connect activities in 2021-22? (See paragraphs 59 to 63.) *

Don't know

Question 8: To what extent do you agree with the proposal to distribute an additional £5 million through the existing student premiums in the proportions show in paragraph 65, and to earmark this £5 million to be spent on student hardship? *

Agree

Question 9: To what extent do you agree with the proposals to distribute £15 million to address student transition and mental health, through a combination of competition and a new formula-based student premium? (See paragraphs 67 to 71.) *

Agree

Question 10: To what extent do you agree with the proposal to maintain in cash terms the rate of funding for the nursing, midwifery and allied health supplement, which will increase the total budget to £27 million? (See paragraphs 74 to 75.) *

Agree

Question 11: To what extent do you agree with the proposal to maintain in cash terms the rate of funding for overseas study programmes, but base the allocation on the higher of relevant student numbers in either 2019-20 or 2020-21? (See paragraphs 76 to 78.) *

Strongly agree

Question 12: To what extent do you agree with the proposal to maintain in cash terms the budgets for other targeted allocations as proposed in paragraph 79? *

Don't know

Question 13: Do you have any comments about any unintended consequences of these proposals, for example, for particular types of provider or for particular types of student?

As noted in our response to Q1, there is a significant risk that this proposal will further destabilise and reduce access to arts and cultural subjects in secondary phases of education. We need to learn from past mistakes and recognise the powerful relationship that exists between decisions made at tertiary levels of education and how those decisions are then interpreted in compulsory phases of education. The demotion of arts and humanities at secondary, tertiary and research level will make widening adult participation in the arts harder to achieve and reduce audience confidence. Arts and cultural participation are essential for everyone's well-being and starts with young people having positive, respected invitations to engage in them, endorsed importantly by HE providers. These proposals will do significant damage to the range and confidence of those invitations.

The arts and cultural sectors also need qualifications that enable wide jobs pathways and progression to a range of creative disciplines. The courses we stand to lose are an essential part of the creative industries talent pipeline eco-system. Degree courses are particularly important to the creative industries as they have a higher proportion of degree holders than other sectors.

We are concerned that the current proposals will widen existing inequalities, rather than expand opportunity for all. These reforms, if they lead to cuts in arts courses, are likely to have a damaging impact on the economic diversity of the cohorts and the number of students with disabilities progressing to university. Arts courses have a higher than average number of students with reported disabilities and those from POLAR quintiles 1 and 2 – something OfS has acknowledged in the consultation:

'We believe that courses in the performing arts, creative arts, media studies and archaeology are very important, bringing huge benefit to society and our culture, as well as to the individuals who take them. They make a particularly important contribution to access and participation.'

The likely reduction in courses offered, and the proposed loss of the London weighting for funding, will negatively affect the number of people from ethnically diverse backgrounds entering the workforce as London based courses have a higher proportion of ethnically diverse students.

We need to ensure that those who are shaping the UK's cultural life represent all the communities in the UK. Improving representation within arts courses' HE cohorts is particularly important for improving the creative industries' representation, as already mentioned they have a higher proportion of degree holders than other sectors.

This narrowing of the talent pipeline will limit the ability of our world-class creative industries to evolve, continue to grow, and to rise to the challenges and opportunities of post-Brexit Britain.

We agree with the Theatre and Performance Research Association that the proposal to cut funding to arts subjects will undoubtedly lead to cuts in arts provision across the UK; and this will see numerous redundancies, damage the UK's reputation as a leader in this territory and irrevocably damage the cultural industries in the UK for generations to come. The proposals unduly penalise students with certain protected characteristics and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, making the study of arts a space of enormous privilege. We believe the proposals need to be reconsidered.

Question 14: Do you have any comments about the potential impact of these proposals on individuals on the basis of their protected characteristics?

The likely reduction in courses offered will negatively impact on the number of people who identify as disabled or who are from ethnically diverse backgrounds people entering Higher Education and the creative and cultural industries. As noted by OfS students studying in London are more ethnically diverse and the removal of London weighting for funding will have an impact on the range of arts courses offered in London and potentially therefore the number of students from ethnically diverse backgrounds studying arts courses.

As has been noted previously, cutting funding for arts subject areas will impact the numbers of students accessing Higher Education who identify as disabled. We would therefore like to know what Public Sector Equality Duty Assessment has been undertaken for these plans and the outcomes.

We need to ensure that those who are shaping the UK's cultural life represent all the communities in the UK. Improving representation within arts course HE cohorts is particularly important for improving the creative industries representation as they have a higher proportion of degree holders than other sectors.

The proposal as they stand will only serve to exacerbate issues of representation and access, and will unduly negatively impact individuals on the basis of protected characteristics.

Question 15: To what extent do you agree with the proposed changes to terms and conditions of grant for 2021-22? (See paragraph 97.) *

NA – non contentious

Question 16: Do you have any other comments on the proposals in this consultation?

The proposed cuts in high-cost funding to arts subjects will not only decimate higher education arts provision in the UK but will also lead to negative impacts in the creative industries as the pipeline of training is compromised, and negative impacts in other sectors as students with arts can go into a broad range of professions. The proposals could lead to a situation where only the wealthiest in our society will be able to access arts education at higher levels and/or where the limited opportunities to study these subjects entrench beliefs that they are 'exclusive'. The cuts will see further and accelerated closures of university arts departments and programmes. The consultation does not take account of the wider impact the cuts will have in terms of arts research that is at the forefront of COVID recovery work, that is deeply embedded in health and wellbeing practices inter/nationally and that is at the core of our world-leading cultural industries.

The RSC urges the OfS and government to think again.