



[www.air-artists.org](http://www.air-artists.org)

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## **AIR – Artists Interaction and Representation - calls for art education to be accessible to all**

When polled in February, 95% of AIR members gave hearty support to the view that art education should be accessible to everyone “irrespective of background and financial status”.

The Higher Education bill now passed into law means that from September 2012, universities in England can charge up to £9,000 a year for courses - a rise of £5,710 from the current £3,290. In addition, HE teaching budgets have been cut by 40%.

### **AIR taking part in TUC rally against cuts Sat 26 March, London**

AIR is making the case for artists and art education as vital factors in the well-being and future success of our nation as part of this major event.



*“The entire cultural landscape is set to contract, along with job opportunities and potential commissions. This is not just about our livelihoods, galleries and politics. It’s about our lifeblood - our culture!”*

## KEY INFORMATION

- **Cuts in HE will reduce access to opportunity and diversity in the visual arts**

One artist commented: *"A situation in which the only people able to study and have the opportunity to develop an art practice are those from privileged backgrounds will leave us with a dull, predictable and grim forecast of art, of interest only an elitist audience, and mainstream art that is staid, boring and purely commercial."*

*"If art becomes the domain of the wealthy, both in terms of education and consumerism, it can only erode society. The vitality that stems from diversity will be lost, affecting the arts at local, regional and particularly at international level."*

*"I came from a working class background so going to art school was hard enough, but under the current climate it would be impossible. I now teach in HE and the student profile changes each year – there are fewer and fewer students like me."*

*"Coming from a poorer background you have no buffer whilst doing a course: it's a leap of faith, especially if no one else in your family has attended university."*

*"Our society is becoming more unequal and divided in economic terms, impacting on culture and shared value systems."*

*"There will be many disenfranchised young people who will lose their identity and role in society, expensive for society culturally and economically."*

*"MPs are arguing that poorer students below the threshold need not worry about paying back loans. But whereas 'moneyed' classes are used to taking out mortgages and loans, the working class are not. They are more*

*used to paying their way as they go and will not want their 18-year olds to rack up debt so early in life."*

- **Vital making and craft skills will be lost to society**

Not only are artists worried about loss to the country and society of the "lateral the creative thinkers" art courses generate, they are also concerned about the impact of these financial constraints on facilities and practical resources:

*"I am concerned that courses such as textiles, ceramics and glass – that rely on 'making and doing' and require skill and experience – may close."*

Art and design courses need artists whose practices demonstrate the range of options and routes for visual arts careers. *"Practising artists as tutors and visiting lecturers are the lifeblood of art departments, contributing a rich diversity of experience."*

- **Art and design research fosters entrepreneurship and excellence**



*"HE is where ideas begin, concepts and born, new methods and practices are tried out. Without it, we will struggle to keep up in the world, especially across the small entrepreneurial businesses and freelancers whose contribution is vital to recovery."*

Investment within HE in art and design research is crucial if: *"The UK is not to lose its most creative people to other countries", this comment from an artist now based in Canada and comparing circumstances there with the UK's.*

*"There seems to be a lack of awareness of the huge difference visual arts makes to the economy, and to the economic and social infrastructure of*

*our towns and cities. They are essential in drawing people in; without them the quality of life suffers."*

*"By investing in research and development we strengthen our position in global markets that are exceeding expectations in the economic recession. Why limit our possibilities if we are on the edge of such growth?"*

*"In communities I work with are many vulnerable people who will suffer if skilled professionally-delivered arts activities diminish. They are vital for building self-esteem, good mental health, and problem-solving skills."*

*"The majority of people outside art and design may not realise who these contribute to how we live our lives, how our homes and everything in them look and function, our packaging and advertising, what we wear, cook in, eat with; the way films and theatre productions look, the prosthetics used by wounded soldiers, the transport we ride on – the river of creativity that flows through all this comes from those who once were students in our art and design schools."*

- **Artists' livelihoods and portfolio careers will suffer**



*"My AHRC-funded collaborative PhD on live and performance art prepared me for academic research and established my professional practice, both of which are now internationally recognised."*

- 72% of visual artists are self-employed, with portfolio careers including work in education.
- 51% of AIR members had worked in some capacity in HE in the past five years.
- Some 64% had contributed as a freelance or occasional lecturer

- 39% had been employed on a part-time basis and 9% full-time.

Over half (56%) got up to 25% of their income from work in HE, whilst 16% got between 25-50% from this area. A further 29% earned 50% or more of their income from HE work, that included lecturing and technical positions. Significantly, half believed that their HE income was likely to reduce in the future.

- Analysis by a-n The Artists Information Company of paid work for artists in 2010 revealed 34% came from FE and HE institutions.

Common comments included: *"More and more full-time staff are being laid off, replaced with hourly paid lecturers like me"; "My hours have been reduced to zero, although I still 'on the books' as a visiting lecturer"; "My course can no longer fund visiting lecturers"; "I will be expected to teach the same module on less hours and with double the class size"; "Having just finished a PhD, I was heading towards a career balancing research, my practice and teaching. With teaching budgets cut, I am struggling to find HE work"; "My income has reduced due to 25% cuts already, both by reduction in hours and modules not recruiting because of fees increases".*

- **Online activism will enable more artists to express support**

AIR members surveyed expressed a high level of support for campaigns and advocacy in support of art education and against these punitive cuts. Whilst over two-thirds (67%) wanted to participate in activism and debate online, 58% wanted to write to their MP. Some 40% wanted to participate in demonstrations or protests or to join in on direct action.

Typical comments included: *"Online is an excellent way to mobilise support"; "I will do what I can to protect the creative industries from this ridiculous narrow-minded government"; "Celebrity' artists [need to be encouraged] to speak to the media and lobby their MPs on these issues".*

- **Artists want to join with others to deliver this campaign**



*"It's a case of finding the fellow travellers and sustaining each other through what will be a long haul."*

Artists say AIR's campaign should involve: *"As many different organisations as possible. For once, artists should put aside their differences and work together"*.

Artists recommended AIR should partner with student and teaching unions including NUS and UCU. High profile and 'heavyweight' artists should get involved - *"to give something back"* - as they have greater influence, attracting press and media interest.

Other suggestions ranged from arts funders in England, Scotland and Wales, "National museums and showcase galleries such as Tate, Baltic and Whitechapel", to artists' groups and studios, "Fine art and crafts societies or unions such as Association for Contemporary Jewellery, Association of Illustrators, Royal Academy, Royal British Society of Sculptors, Royal Watercolour Society, Scottish Artists Union". Also mentioned were BECTU, Equity, Engage, Musicians' Union, VAGA, NSEAD, RSA, ELIA, Campaign for Drawing and National Campaign for the Arts.

*"Art has done and is capable of so many things: it's broken taboos and social pieties, it's a social commentary, propaganda and revolution, it can alter culture and more. Even those who refuse to see its power utilise it."*

**Contact for interviews and further briefings on this campaign**  
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## **Notes**

E-survey of artists with AIR membership in January 2011, that received 934 responses, a 6% return. Although respondents were not asked for data on age, location or career stage, comments show the survey was completed by artists ranging from recent graduates to retired artists in rural and urban locations in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Respondents practiced across a range of fine and applied arts including painting, performance, photography, ceramics, textiles, glass and jewellery and interpretive or community arts.

Previous AIR surveys show 72% to be self-employed and that artists are well-qualified within the cultural workforce, with 63% holding a BA and 31% an MA.

Founded in 2006, AIR – Artists Interaction and Representation is a professional body for visual and applied artists, member of the European Council of Artists (ECA) and DACS appointed organisation for collective licensing. For more information including Mission and current activities go to [www.air-artists.org](http://www.air-artists.org)

#### **AIR Council**

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