

## **Response from The Visual Arts and Galleries Association to The Commons Select Committee on Education Inquiry into the English Baccalaureate, March 2011**

### **Introduction**

Visual imagination and learning is a resource essential to society.

The ability to express ideas visually underpins innovation in many spheres of activity that matter to our economy: from engineering, architecture, product design and software development to the creative industries. At a very simple level objects and concepts begin life as a drawing in some form.

Visual literacy - the ability to interpret, critically reflect upon and use images to create meaning, is increasingly important in a multi-media and global society.

Visual expression and visual literacy are abilities that need to be nurtured from a young age within the education system.

Knowledge and understanding of our rich and diverse visual culture and that of other societies provides insight into our own and others experiences and histories.

If pupils are to continue to have a rounded education that will equip them for life, it is crucial that learning and the status accorded to subjects is not limited to the traditionally academic.

### **1. The purpose and benefits of the E-Bac and its value as a measure of pupil and school performance**

We welcome moves to heighten the aspiration of young people, however if the knowledge and highly transferable skills, provided by visual arts learning are not accountable towards school status they will attract fewer pupils at Key Stage 4.

Many schools and pupils excel in the arts and this should be recognised in school and pupil achievement.

VAGA is concerned that the limited subject range included within the E Bacc will provide neither parents, nor pupils with an adequate measure of pupil and school performance and present a partial valuation of the achievements of both pupils and schools.

## **2. The choice of subjects included in the E-Bac**

Whilst we endorse the need for as many pupils as possible to achieve 'good passes' in 'rigorous' GCSEs or iGCSEs the limitation to 'rigorous' subjects fails to acknowledge the educational benefits derived from subjects such as art and design and design and technology.

The rigour required to think creatively in the arts is no less than that required to think creatively in science, maths or the humanities.

Practical learning - haptic and visual skills, need to be properly recognised and valued in our secondary schools. Art and design attracts pupils from all social backgrounds and there is increasing evidence that visual arts learning can lead to improved engagement across the curriculum<sup>1</sup>

Excluding practical learning from the E-Bacc is a retrogressive move away from provision of a balanced education.

## **3. The implication of the E-Bacc for pupils, schools and employers**

The creative industries are vital to the UK economy ( contributing 6.2% of the UK's GVA in 2007). The narrowing of focus at Key Stage 4 is a significant threat to the development of the creative thinking required to foster innovation across the economy.

By prescribing the E-Bacc too tightly we are in danger of failing to meet the diverse needs of employers and the economy or equip pupils for the portfolio nature of self-employment and micro-businesses.

**Hilary Gresty**  
**Director, VAGA**

VAGA, The Visual Arts and Galleries Association, is a membership body and UK-wide professional network supporting and representing organisations and individuals working in all aspects of the visual arts. We have a membership that, uniquely bridges the creative, arts and museum sectors.

We are also members of Visual Arts UK, an alliance of representative bodies and national agencies. Together with ArtQuest; AIR, Artists' Interaction & Representation; The Crafts Council; Axis; National Federation of Artist Studio Providers; a-n The Artists Information Company; engage and the International Curators Forum, we have a constituency of at least 60,000 visual arts professionals.

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<sup>1</sup> See the work of engage , [www.en-quire.org](http://www.en-quire.org) and CCE <http://www.creativitycultureeducation.org/> Creativity Culture & Education found in recent research that students who took part in Creative Partnership Programmes and worked with artists and cultural organisation did better in their GCSEs (see [Guardian article on 14 Sept 2010](#)).

