



14 May 2021

Dear Secretary of State for Education,

a-n The Artists Information Company has recently taken part in the Office for Students (OfS) consultation on recurrent funding for 2021-22. The consultation document and supporting materials from the Department of Education highlighted a number of concerns that I have set out in this letter.

a-n The Artists Information Company is the largest professional membership organisation in the UK for visual artists and freelancers working in the visual arts with over 21,000 members. We currently have partnerships with 57 HE providers, who support approximately 16,617 students studying fine art, design, craft, applied art, art history and curatorial studies with 5,539 students graduating each year. We provide professional development support for students through to graduation and provide a platform and annual talent showcase in our Degree Shows Guide. We support graduates to become professional artists and art workers employed in the visual arts sector and the creative industries. We have deep knowledge, built up over 40 years, of the pathways and routes into the creative and cultural industries and are extremely concerned about the impact of the proposed distribution of funds and the resulting cuts to arts courses.

We have concerns about the Office for Students consultation process and structure which brings into question how the proposals will be shaped and implemented. The consultation was not widely publicised and the results are unlikely to have a full representation from the people and institutions that it will affect. The consultation did not set out a clear rationale or evidence for the proposed cuts to arts courses and the proposed timeline from consultation (26 March to 6 May 2021) to implementation (August 2021) is poorly planned both from a current and prospective student and institution perspective. Given that the majority of arts courses are multi-year, the proposal will have a detrimental effect on the current students and on students starting courses from September 2021.

On a practical level, the consultation was difficult to navigate and poorly designed in both the questions and format. This has made it very difficult for individuals to respond, especially those with access needs, and the results therefore will have an in-built inequitable bias contravening provisions set out in the Equalities Act (2010) on access. In addition to practical access concerns, information in the consultation document indicated that there are higher numbers of disabled students engaged in HE arts courses so we want to see a full Equality Impact assessment having been done prior to consultation.

The Office for Students has proposed that courses in price group C1 – covering subjects in music, dance, drama and performing arts; art and design; media studies; and archaeology – are not among its strategic priorities and will be subject to funding reductions. The proposed reduction of £121.40 per student represents a funding cut of 50 percent in the



subsidy to these specialist subjects. We strongly disagree with this proposal and furthermore, oppose the removal of the London weighting.

We also question the proposal to cut these courses as it will cause immediate disruption, have a far-reaching impact, and has been made without proper attention to the detail or the foresight to link to wider Government policy and the economy. The proposal is out of step with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Cultural Recovery Fund investment of £1.5bn in the cultural and creative industries and does not align with their Here for Culture strategy.

The proposal will detract from one of the UK's fastest-growing economies. The Creative Industries contributed £116bn in GVA in 2019 and supports 1 in every 16 jobs (DCMS 2019). This success has been built upon the UK's world leading arts education and its entrepreneurial graduates - 65% of employees in the creative sector have a degree, evidencing the value of the universities and schools of art. An arts education develops high-level creative skills along with complex problem solving and critical thinking, areas that the World Economic Forum identified as the top three skills for future jobs.

The current proposal will limit the availability and accessibility of places on arts courses and result in fewer courses being offered. This will have a detrimental impact on our ability to retain our world leading position, attract inward investment through our cultural capital and our share of the global art market. The UK art market thrives due to a well-developed infrastructure of commercial galleries, public museums and galleries, and most importantly artists, of which the majority of the workforce have studied on arts courses. Arts education is fundamental to the lives of the next generation of artists and designers.

The majority of our membership studied on arts courses and value universities as a way to learn, network, grow and experience the arts as a career and many now work in HE institutions. Research by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation shows that this constituted a large part of artists' incomes and by implementing these cuts there will be large-scale redundancies in the HE sector that will impact on other parts of the sector.

Artists and designers learn about art so they can see and engage with the world in a new and exciting way. They collaborate with scientists, engineers, new technologies, the NHS. Art positively contributes to wider society and not just the economy; it has the power to bring communities together, which we have all seen throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

Universities have a fundamental role in energising cities and towns through complex relationships with communities, businesses, R&D, innovation and strategic partnerships with arts and culture. Shared teaching and research spaces in galleries, community programmes, artist opportunities will be negatively impacted by any cuts. If funding for arts education is reduced, university courses may not cover their costs, and the talent pipeline will be impacted. The knock-on effect would be fewer skilled workers in the creative



industries, reduction in investment for cultural regeneration, and decreased health and wellbeing driven through place-making agendas. The arts sector is vital to the rebuilding of the country's economy and requires nurturing and investment, especially now.

We urge you to reconsider. Higher Education is a fundamental right of all people in this country and students deserve the full art school experience, as any other sector would provide for their students.

We ask you to revoke the policy proposals on the basis of strong evidence of the value of HE arts courses to the growth of the creative industries and in turn the UK economy, and the flawed and inequitable consultation process. If you believe that innovation is a strategic priority, are committed to investing in the future, and want to prevent widespread redundancies, you will not cut HE funding for arts subjects.

If you or your department would like to discuss these concerns, further please contact me.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Julie Lomax'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Julie Lomax
CEO, a-n The Artists Information Company