

ELIA Working Group Arts Education: Synopsis of Activity

The ELIA Working Group Arts Education was initially formed to consider arts education in schools and recruitment to our sector.

The Working Group has met four times since its formation in October 2017 (Amsterdam, Cluj, Brussels, Amsterdam). Research and a complementary literature review were undertaken into understanding the relevance of Arts in Schools as an incremental step to further and higher education, with a questionnaire circulated to ELIA and AEC Board Members. The results are not definitive but indicative and are reflected in the actions listed below.

The scope and hierarchy of objectives soon broadened to include advocacy and to encompass both primary and secondary arts education. For these reasons, questions have arisen regarding the target audience for our recommendations, that is whether to focus on a) ELIA members themselves or b) as ammunition for national lobbying initiatives or c) lobbying EU institutions for minimum standards.

During the Working Group discussions, a recommendation was formally made by the ELIA Executive Group, in collaboration with the AEC, to reposition the issue of STEAM within Key Competence #8 in an advocacy effort aimed to affect the Council of Europe recommendation May 2018.

Actions for Basic Provision for Arts Education in School across Europe

The Intrinsic Value of Arts Education in Schools

An Arts Education in Schools has some obvious intrinsic goals - providing pupils with opportunities for practicing music, fine arts, dance, theatre, design, crafts, art appreciation and culture.

The Added Value of Arts Education in Schools

However, an Arts Education in Schools has additional and far reaching benefits that may not always be apparent or quantifiable. The added value of Arts Education often stimulates pupils' cognitive architectures, emotional balance and social development, and the furtherment of overall creative thinking and critical reflection; all of which are key competences being sought by society. Arts Education has the capacity for facilitating inclusiveness and cultural awareness¹ by offering modes of expression and communication that are not solely language-based. Therefore, the importance of adding the A- representing the Arts- to the skills required for the 21st century is needed making the potential of STEAM visible.

¹ See KA#8 Cultural Awareness and Expression

Suggested Actions for Minimum Requirements on Arts Education in Schools based on outcomes from ELIA Working Group ‘Arts in Education’

Action #1 on Arts as Core Curriculum - Given the well evidenced wide-ranging benefits to social cohesion and well-being of Arts Education in Schools, ELIA recommends that the European Union and its national governments enshrine Arts Education in Schools as a mandatory part of the core curriculum in all types of secondary schools for a minimum of three years, post primary, with a stipulated basic minimum contact of two to four hours per week over the average 36 week school-year.

Ideally, Arts Education should be offered throughout secondary school. Whilst it would be unrealistic to propose that the full range of artistic subjects be taught, a variety of subjects should be offered to take account of pupils’ individual interests and talents.

Action #2 on Availability of Art on the non-core Curriculum - In some national contexts it has been shown that whenever arts education is not mandatory in schools within the core curriculum, pupils (and parents) tend to drop these subjects in favour of others that are considered “less of a luxury” and “more useful.” These tendencies suggest the need for raising public awareness of the benefits of arts education as well as on the economic importance of the creative industries, which can only thrive in an environment in which high importance is placed on arts education, both on the school and higher education levels.

Our research indicates that in all but a very few countries Art is less available on the core curriculum than other Humanities subjects. Therefore in countries where Art is not offered as core throughout the pupils’ school experience, access to it is restricted both by availability and by being placed or perceived as subservient to other subjects.

ELIA recommends that the European Union and its national governments ensure that the Arts are at least as available as other subjects in the Humanities in schools.

Action #3 on Arts Teachers in Secondary Schools - Teaching artistic subjects, as with any other school subjects, requires high competence and expertise in the specific subject as well as pedagogical training. For this reason, arts teachers should be both teachers as well as practicing artists. While this is desirable for all levels of education, it is vital that arts teachers working at secondary school level, have the experience of combining artistic practice and theory with their teaching profession.

Bearing this in mind, we recommend that the European Union and its national governments ensure that:

- Those who wish to undertake supplementary courses to become qualified Arts teachers should be graduates of (HE) arts schools/universities of higher education having qualified with at least a primary degree as specialised arts practitioners, acquired at institutions belonging to this sector.
- The pedagogical part of teachers’ training may be offered either at higher education arts schools or in cooperation with general higher education institutions.

- It would be advantageous for the provision of continuous education for arts teachers to take place at least partly at specialized HE arts schools/universities of the arts.

Action #4 on Ensuring the Contemporary Relevance of the School Art Syllabus and the alignment of the HE and the School Art Syllabi

In order to fulfil the expectations of arts teachers' and encourage pupils' career paths and interests, the school syllabi in the visual and the performative arts should have the possibility to be aligned and operated as incremental to the HE syllabus subjects.

In order that this can happen, ELIA recommends that the EU and its national governments advise a maximum period by which time the school syllabus needs to be regionally or nationally reevaluated. Our research indicates that there is an alarming disparity between European/EU nations in how often they review/contemporize their school syllabi in art, ranging from 40 years to regular 4 to 5 years cycles. There are also acute variations, with pupils in countries where the syllabus is less relevant to HE being at a considerable disadvantage in fulfilling their career aspirations, thus also affecting recruitment paths to Arts Universities and Conservatoires.

Bearing this in mind, we recommend that the European Union and its national governments to advise on:

- the maximum period by which time the school syllabus needs to be re-evaluated
- the consultation and drafting of School syllabi in close cooperation and collaboration with HE Arts Schools faculties to ensure currency and incremental clarity and consistency for the benefit of all stakeholders.

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