

24 October 2016

Rt. Hon. Justine Greening
Department of Education
Ministerial and Public Communications Division
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Dear Justine Greening,

AQA decision to discontinue A and AS Level Art History and Archaeology

I have read in the press that AQA has decided to discontinue the A-Level and AS-Level in Art History and Archaeology ('Decision to scrap A-level art history labelled a 'disgrace' by critics' The Daily Telegraph 14 October 2016). I am writing to ask you if these reports are true. I understand from the reports that this decision has been taken by AQA purely on financial grounds. If these reports are true and this is the case, I would like to invite you to review this decision.

While it is true to say that studying these subjects at A and AS level is not critical to going on to study them at university (there are other subjects that are required for this), they open students' minds to possibilities at an impressionable age and can inspire a passion for learning about the past that can last a lifetime and which can have unforeseen benefits. Many have spoken eloquently about the positive influence that studying art history has had on their careers (see 'Cornelia Parker, Stuart Maconie and more on the axing of A-Level Art History' in 'The Guardian' 17 October 2016). A subject such as archaeology encourages interdisciplinary thinking and an engagement with science by people who may not think of themselves initially as scientists. Although not necessarily directly leading to a career in art history or archaeology, studying these subjects can be an important part of forming an interest and later a career in the arts, culture or heritage. It has been shown that these industries form powerful economic forces, attracting tourism, exporting culture, art, design and the performing arts to the rest of the world, and in so doing generating billions of pounds of income for the UK. We need to stimulate rather than deter access to these industries.

The Institute of Conservation (Icon) is a registered charity and the professional body for the conservation of our cultural heritage. Icon raises awareness of the cultural, social and economic value of caring for heritage and champions high standards of conservation. We know that people follow many different routes to enter our profession. For many conservators, myself included, art history was a critical part of that journey. We learned about the cultures and artefacts of the past,

learned to value them, and some time later decided to train to look after them. Conservation is also a multi-disciplinary subject crossing the boundaries between art and science.

For most, these experiences are obtained through formal study at university. However, Icon is committed to strengthening non-graduate routes into our profession, working with others in our sector to provide new-starter internships, Trailblazer apprenticeships and traineeships. By removing the possibility of studying art history or archaeology at school, two of the signposts on the way to a non-graduate route to conservation are taken away. Moreover, to support non-graduate access to our profession, these A and AS levels should be available to all students whether in fee-paying or state-funded schools.

I urge you to look into this matter and review this decision at your earliest opportunity. I look forward to hearing from you in due course and will watch developments with interest.

Yours sincerely,

Alison Richmond, Chief Executive

cc. Siobhan Stevenson, Chair of Board of Trustees; Caroline Peach, Vice-Chair of Board of Trustees