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Creativity and the curriculum: educational apartheid in 21st Century England, a European outlier?

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ABSTRACT

In many European societies, arts education and culture play a central role in their education systems. In England, the situation is very different. There, for the last two decades, the state has progressively marginalised the role of the arts in the public education system in the belief that the 'market' does not value the arts. However, England also has a strong relatively autonomous private education system financed directly by parental fees. This paper explores the extent to which the top private schools have diverged from this process of marginalisation. The findings suggest that these top private schools have invested more in the arts, which have subsequently come to play an increasingly important role in the education they provide. One consequence is that we have witnessed the emergence of two 'systems' of education in England, which pose a significant challenge for cultural policy.

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Education in the arts and culture; the European context

Education in arts and culture is a complex area of policy, quite often cutting across or requiring the cooperation of different government departments. The underlying philosophy driving a government at any given time will inevitably lead to different approaches, which are actioned both through policies and rhetoric (Galloway and Dunlop 2007; Looseley 2011; Garnham 2005). This in turn influences and informs funding allocation and access to such education, reflecting the importance or value placed on cultural and artistic education within the national context.

In some countries 'education' and 'culture' are viewed as ubiquitous and combined in one department or ministry. In the Netherlands, for example, the 'Ministry of Education, Culture and Science' has objectives that include ensuring that 'everyone has the opportunity to experience and enjoy culture' and that 'teachers, artists and scientists are able to carry out their work' (government.nl).

Similarly, Finland's 'Ministry of Education and Culture' has 'far-reaching effects on people's well-being and success', with objectives that include 'providing citizens with possibilities for personal development through education and cultural services' and promoting international cooperation (minedu.fi). This is achieved in part through specialised, co-curricular schools that are government subsidised and offer education in music, dance, visual arts and craft (Strahle 2017). The art however, and music particularly, is deeply embedded in education from pre-school onwards. There is no emphasis on testing; learning and development are encouraged through exploration and engagement across subjects. Finland is widely seen as one of the most successful education systems globally (see OECD 2018).

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Elsewhere in Europe, where political responsibilities cross departments, there are various examples of departmental cooperation. In France, this occurs through 'The High Council for Artistic and Cultural Education' a department created in 2005 that is co-chaired by the minister of Culture and the minister of National Education and Youth but includes representatives from across government ministries. It seeks to develop the arts in school going beyond the previous model of 'two hours of music and drawing' (culture.gouv.fr). Arts and cultural education are viewed as a priority, important for self-fulfilment, cultural practices, and cultural and social participation (Maziere 2015). This has led the High Council to provide many cultural activities including artists in residence, heritage classes, and classes and workshops with professionals.

In Germany, the system is more complex with responsibilities for arts and cultural education delegated to the individual states (Länder). Coordination takes place through the Standing Council and involves the integration and collaboration of both public and private providers and funders at both state and national levels. The arts and cultural education are deeply embedded within this multi-layered system (Keuchel and Larue 2013). It is not the case that the school provides basic arts classes alongside trips to cultural and heritage sites but more an enmeshing of arts and cultural practices with participation both in school and in heritage and other cultural sites. Steigerwald (2021) suggests that this approach has its philosophical roots in education *by* culture, rather than education *in* culture found elsewhere. She juxtaposes this German conceptualisation of arts and cultural education with the more neoliberal (instrumental) conceptualisation found in some English-speaking countries. She points to the British use of terms such as 'arts education', 'art and cultural education', 'cultural education', and 'creative and cultural education', which are conceptually linked to economic outputs. This distinction between the underlying philosophies of these terms is important because it determines the perceived purpose and value of arts and cultural education, which in turn informs and shapes policies.

However, the situation in Britain is complicated by the fact that since the late 1990s state education and cultural policy have been devolved which means each of the home nations (England, N. Ireland, Scotland and Wales) have their own approach to culture, arts and education, and in some cases their own qualifications. The relative independence of these nations in relation to how cultural and education policies are shaped and how funding is allocated means that some nations, notably Scotland, maintains an ideological position that is more closely aligned to that of Germany, Finland and France (amongst others) even when this is not the approach of the British government in Westminster.

The focus of this paper is therefore on the approach in England, which differs in important respects from the European examples cited above in that culture and the arts are distinguished from education and located in two separate departments of state: the 'Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport' and the 'Department of Education'. However, both are subject to the same ideological approach, namely their orientation toward economic outputs. It also differs from its European counterparts in that it has two separate educational systems, one privately funded and with a high degree of autonomy from the state (unlike European counterparts) with a total of 2,366 private schools (BESA 2021) educating 7% of the population, and one funded by the state, with 24,413 state schools, educating 93% (Sutton Trust and the Social Mobility Commission 2019) and under state control. Moreover, as we argue in this paper, while the government has adopted a market orientation rationale in progressively reducing arts education in state sector, in the private education sector, the top schools have followed a contrary approach and increased the importance of arts education. In both these respects – the market orientation of the English government and the divergence of the two educational systems within England – England represents an outlier in the European context.

English state education and the art of measuring

During the second half of the 20th century the English state education system at secondary level largely consisted of comprehensive schools.¹ These were state funded and administered through local education authorities and included an arts advisory system, which played a significant role in the provision of arts and cultural education.

During the latter part of the century governments sought to centralise control over all these schools through such measures as the imposition of a national curriculum in 1988 and Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), which imposed a common inspection framework. At the turn of the century, the educational system was becoming more complex with the introduction of some directly funded 'academies'.² The overall result was a loss of influence of the local authorities over arts education.

This centralisation of control over the educational system provided the conditions that enabled a subsequent marginalisation of the arts. The advent of the Labour government of Blair (1997–2010) saw a brief struggle in 1997 to stop this marginalisation of the arts as the Minister for Culture, Media and Sport, Chris Smith, attempted to foreground arts and culture. Chris Smith's vision was to have creativity through the arts embedded across policy and departments and significantly within the curriculum and the education system (Gross 2020). An aspect of education as crucial for the economy as it was for social cohesion and developing self-esteem. Smith spearheaded a concerted effort by those surrounding policy makers to embed arts in the state curriculum, to move away from measuring and testing in education and to align education, not only with the arts but with all industries that required creativity as they developed. This is evident in the testimonies of Chris Smith (ibid) but also in the many reports commissioned and written at the time that provided evidence and advocated for the centrality of arts and cultural education in the English system – Making Movies Matter (FEWG 1999); A Bigger Picture (DCMS 1998).

The report that epitomised this demand for a new approach to education and the arts was 'All Our Futures' (1999) produced by the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCCE) which reported to the Secretary of State for Education and Employment and the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. It outlined the challenges for education in delivering the government's visions for the future of Britain.

The committee was briefed to address 'informal' as well as 'formal' education and the report found that creative and cultural education was essential in the complex, diverse and multi-cultural context of the UK. The report argued that the existing education system was designed for life in a post-war, industrial economy, which no longer reflected the complexity and cultural diversity of current society nor was the existing education system equipped to provide the creative needs and skills essential for working life, politics, business, sciences and all aspects of everyday life. It stated that cultural and arts education are essential to 'promote inclusion and combat exclusion in a world of rapid social and economic change' (25). In many ways, the proponents of this new approach were advocating an approach to arts and cultural education that was more typical of the that adopted by the European countries above, foregrounding participation and engagement in the arts as the basis for improving the quality of life in general.

Eventually, proponents of this new approach lost the battle within the government and the DfEE refused to distribute summaries to schools despite lobbying efforts.³ Chris Smith was replaced by Tessa Jowell in 2001 who did not support this approach and it was abandoned. Buckingham and Jones (2001) concluded that part of the resistance to broader changes in the curriculum came from a fear that this might alienate the more centre-right voters who had contributed to labour's election victories. Meanwhile, the Minister for Education and Employment, David Blunkett, persisted with a focus upon numeracy and literacy skills and through his concentration on the importance of the 'core' curriculum, laid the foundations for later governments to use 'STEM' subjects to further marginalise the arts. This reflects broader and long-standing debates around the *value* of the arts and the *purpose* of education.⁴

The English Baccalaureate (EBacc)

In 2010 Labour lost the election, a hung parliament ensued, and it was the Conservative party in coalition with the Liberal Democrats that took power. They introduced two policy measures, namely the EBacc, a policy tool designed to enable the government to measure the ‘performance’ of schools, and the other, the clustering of ‘key’ subjects under the STEM acronym. Used in conjunction with funding cuts, driven by wider austerity policies following the 2008 financial crisis, arts education has been progressively marginalised and devalued in English state schools.

The primary functions of the EBacc, introduced in 2011, were twofold; firstly, as a measure to signify to parents and the wider public how well a school was ‘performing’ on specific, prescribed measures, and secondly as a mark of achievement for individual students. The EBacc certifies that a student has achieved grades C or above in six different subjects; Maths, English, two sciences (latterly computer science was included in this category), history or geography, and a modern or classical language. As a performance measure, schools are judged on the percentage of the school’s pupil population who have achieved the award. Controversially, the EBacc measures (number of children attaining C or above in these specific subjects) were applied retrospectively to the results obtained by state school children in 2010, measuring schools on grades achieved prior to the introduction of the EBacc in 2011 and omitting the grades of non-EBacc subjects from measurement scores.

The government stated that the purpose of the EBacc was to ‘narrow the attainment gap’ between the richest and poorest students. Beyond this, it was also clearly aligned to an articulated desire to create more performance measures and accountability related to schools that was publicly available. Most significantly, the new EBacc did not include any arts-based subjects.

In 2011, the House of Commons Education Committee ordered an inquiry focusing upon concerns around the objectives of the EBacc, including the choice of subjects to be included, and the manner of the introduction of the EBacc that did not pass through any process of consultation. The report stated that ‘The choice of subjects included in the EBacc has been one of the most controversial aspects of its creation’ (4). The committee heard from a range of experts, headteachers, practitioners, and others who provided clear and strong evidence of the importance of the arts in education. The government’s response was that it had to make ‘difficult choices’ and they had focused upon the subjects most valued by Russell Group Universities.⁵ This ignored evidence provided that engagement in the arts was significant in developing social cohesion and understanding in a multi-cultural and diverse society, supporting learning in ‘academic subjects’ and providing many desirable skills and attributes, such as communication, teamwork, presentation, creativity and confidence. This evidence echoed the many reports submitted during the previous government.

The premise that subjects outside of those listed were less valuable and less important also meant that those who were accomplished in the arts but not in academic subjects would be disadvantaged, and therefore the EBacc would not provide the levelling up that it promised. The report stated:

Academic subjects are not the only path to a successful future, and all young people, regardless of background, must continue to have opportunities to study the subjects in which they are likely to be most successful, and which pupils, parents and schools think will serve them best. (House of Commons Education Committee, 2011, Summary, 3).

Michael Gove the Secretary of State for Education replied that there was sufficient space within the curriculum and the school day to provide students with the opportunity to pursue additional subjects outside the EBacc. In reality, it appears that, with schools being measured on whether or not students attained these six specific GCSEs there was little in the way of time or resources to focus attention elsewhere. A report utilising data from the government’s ‘Taking Part Survey’ over a period of 10 years shows a drop in participation of 47% for theatre and drama and 36% for music over the last 10 years with the poorest children most likely to experience this loss (Elgot 2021). Similarly, the English qualifications authority report that the take up of arts subjects is in significant decline with

37% fewer entries for arts-based GCSE entries in 2020 compared to 2010 (Ofqual 2020). Other indicators of this decline since the EBacc was introduced in 2010 are evident in the number of teachers for drama and music, which has dropped by 420 whilst the number of teachers for subjects included in the EBacc has increased by 4,561. Correspondingly, there is a drop in the number of teaching hours devoted to arts vs EBacc with arts-based subjects seeing a decline of 7,181 teaching hours in a school year versus an increase of 89,728 hours for EBacc subjects (DfE 2016).

The STEM debate

Alongside and allied to the EBacc has been an increasing focus on and value attached to 'STEM'. The acronym STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) entered into common use in English education policy in the 2002 report 'SET for Success' (Morgan and Kirby 2016). In education policy discourse, the acronym is often used in opposition to 'arts' to denote core subjects that are seen to align with the fields within the acronym and lead to lucrative employment. The trend to focus on 'core subjects' and the emphasis on STEM has accelerated through subsequent governments and policies despite much debate about the need to include the arts 'STEAM' (Welch 2012; Perignat and Katz-Buonincontro 2018; Allina 2018; Katz-Buonincontro 2018). In the 2010–2015 government policy paper on the 'public understanding of science and engineering', the beliefs of the government are made explicit: 'the government believes we need high level skills in STEM, and citizens that value them'. As two of the four STEM 'subjects' are not subjects in themselves and none of them come with an explicit explanation of the 'skills' required to enter STEM-related work, what this means for education and the school curriculum is open to interpretation. For the current government, it is clear that STEM does not involve arts-based education, which is 'not a strategic priority' as evidenced and stated in a 2021 consultation on recurrent funding 2021/22 that led to cuts in funding arts-based subjects at Higher Education (HE) level (OfS 2021, 17). It is also evident in the priorities for the EBacc that arts and culture is not valued as an essential element of state education. More explicitly, in 2015, Nicky Morgan, the Secretary of State for Education, who later became the Culture Secretary, advised young people that choosing arts subjects at school would 'hold them back for the rest of their lives' (Hytner 2017). The current education strategy includes 'Ensuring pupils are offered more stretching programmes of study: increasing the take up of STEM study, the EBacc and facilitating A-levels' (DfE 2016).

The logic provided for the focus on STEM via EBacc subjects is that academic attainment in the EBacc subjects at school is seen as key to gaining access to high status universities and higher earnings in the labour market. Later, research by Britton, Dearden, Shephard, and Vignoles (2016), using national data sets, found a link between the subject studied at school and earnings roughly a decade after students graduated from university. Summarising their findings they state, 'We find subjects like Medicine, Economics, Law, Maths and Business deliver substantial premiums over typical graduates, while disappointingly, Creative Arts delivers earnings that are roughly typical of non-graduates.' (Britton, Dearden, Shephard, and Vignoles 2016, 1). Although much of the variation is accounted for by differences in the characteristics of students taking these options (54). When it comes to STEM they found that for the lower earners (at the 20th percentile), the subject studied has little impact, it is at top of the earnings profile, the 90th percentile, that they found the variation by subject more evident, with 'some subjects, such as economics, medicine, law and languages, going on to achieve significantly higher earnings than other subjects' (Britton, Dearden, Shephard, and Vignoles 2016, 24). However, as they and others note, there are a number of other factors that also affect earnings such as socio-economic background, level of prior educational achievement and type of school attended. Indeed, Green, Heneske, and Vignoles (2017) identified a substantial direct pay premium for those who attended private schools, while the British Academy study (British Academy 2020) found that the length of time in the labour market affected the earnings of those who studied the arts. Thus, while there is a high probability that some students studying STEM subjects will achieve higher earnings, this is only one factor influencing subsequent earnings. Moreover, there are

many other benefits to be derived from studying the arts apart from the level of income they provide, as we detail in the subsequent sections. Nevertheless, this link between STEM subjects and subsequent earnings is the current government's rationale, which demonstrates the instrumental philosophy that underpins policy decision making.

Funding

As arts are not a strategic priority in England and have been omitted from all measures of schools' performance and success, funding is inevitably diverted to prioritise subjects that are part of these performance measures, namely the EBacc and a narrowly and simplistically defined focus upon STEM (Siekmann 2016). As seen above this has meant a drop in the number of teachers for arts-based subjects, a drop in the number of hours that these subjects are taught and a drop in the take up of these subjects at GCSE level. The problems facing English state schools trying to include arts subjects has been exacerbated by the drop in funding. The Institute for Fiscal Studies (Britton, Farquaharson, Sibieta, Tahir, and Waltmann 2020) reported that annual spending at secondary school level has been in decline since 2010 with spending per pupil dropping by 9% in the last decade. The average spend per pupil in England is £6,100 per year, whilst this amount is £7,300 in Scotland (Britton, Farquaharson, Sibieta, Tahir, and Waltmann 2020).

Because of the impact of the EBacc and Stem, these cuts in per capita funding for education have had a disproportionate effect on the availability of arts education. In 2020, the Institute for Fiscal Studies warned that current plans in relation to school budgets over the next 3 years will result in 'an unprecedented' 13 – year real-term freeze in funding. Further cuts to education in arts subjects is evident in the context of higher education with a 'reprioritisation of funds' that will cut funds for arts-based subjects in the higher cost category by 50% (Ofs 2021). When challenged the response from the DfE was 'The reprioritisation is designed to target taxpayers' money towards subjects that support the NHS, science, technology and engineering, and the specific needs of the labour market ...' (cited in Weale 2021).

Together the use of school measurements that exclude the arts and culture and the cuts in funding has led to a reduction in the opportunities for those in state schools to engage with the arts and culture. The implications of this in terms of access to careers in the creative industries specifically is explored by Brook, O'Brien, and Taylor (2020) and Carey, O'Brien, and Gable (2021). The result in terms of education is the growing marginalisation of arts education in England. The government has done this in a number of ways: it has pitched the arts against STEM subjects leading to the exclusion of arts from EBacc, thereby placing pressure on state schools to marginalise the arts in the curriculum, and additionally through reducing resources available for education in general it has created extra pressure on individual schools to cut the arts from state education. Noting this evident devaluing of arts and culture in education, Hytner (2017) observes, 'Meanwhile, the prospectuses of private schools compete for fee-paying parents with ever more lavish music and drama facilities. If you pay for your children's education, you're assumed to want them to be introduced to worlds that are being slowly withdrawn from those in the state sector.'

English private education and the art of investing

Contrary to the experience of the state system, the leading schools in the English private system have witnessed a growth in the importance and value attached to the arts and culture as part of the preparation of young people with the life skills necessary for effective participation in the society's elite positions. An approach more in line with that of many European countries.

The private sector in the UK plays a somewhat unique and distinctive role in English society. Statistically, the numbers in private education are small (7%) but they have much greater significance when they are placed in a national political, economic and cultural context. This is because the high status, more expensive private schools⁶ (often referred to as 'public schools') provide a much higher

proportion of students who progress to the most prestigious universities (especially Oxford and Cambridge) and then into top positions in the economic, political and cultural life of the country. For example, in 2020 half of the Johnson cabinet went to Oxbridge, while 65% of his cabinet went to private schools (Walker 2019; Sutton Trust 2019), a smaller proportion than Major's cabinet of 1992 where 71% were privately educated or Thatcher's cabinet of 1979 where 91% were privately educated. This suggests, as does other evidence (Hecht, McArthur, Savage, and Friedman 2020, 21) that over time the significance of a 'public school'/private education may have declined a little but the overall picture as the Sutton Trust study illustrates (Table 1) is one of the continuing successes of these schools in providing access to positions of power within British society.

It suggests that the values these schools espouse and the skills and attributes they transmit to their pupils are likely to be very influential in shaping the behaviour of national leaders in many institutional spheres.

Changes in English private schools' approach to education

Traditionally, the arts have not played a major part in the academic curriculum of the private schools. However, by the latter decades of the 20th century the external environment facing the private schools presented a number of threats. Not least of these was the fact that the tightening bond between high level educational qualifications and subsequent earnings in the higher levels of the labour market was becoming very clear, not just to academic researchers, but to the leaders and pupils in the private sector and especially their parents (Fox 1985). The private schools responded by placing more effort and resources in improving their academic performance. This was achieved by reducing the pupil/teacher ratio and improving the quality of their teaching. Employing more teachers meant that the pupil/teacher ratio fell from 13 to 1 in the 1980s to approximately 9 to 1 in 2004 (Green and Kynaston 2019, fig.4, 85). By 2021, the ratio of 9:1 remained the same for private schools compared with 22:1 in state schools (HMC 2021). The result was a dramatic improvement in the A-level grades of private school pupils opening up a huge gap of 35% between the performance of private and state school students (Ofqual 2020; Williams 2021; gov.uk 2021); a gap that has increased over the period of the pandemic (Adams 2021). This increase in the availability of resources also coincided with a significant increase in the provision for the arts and access to high spec spaces, equipment and industry professionals (detailed below).

These improvements were funded through an increase in school fees. As Green and Kynaston (2019) found in their research, 'By 2018, the average annual day fee had reached £14,562, with £33,684 for boarding, in real terms three times the rate for 1980.' (125). Even for the most affluent families on the 95th rung the fees doubled from 10% to 20% of their income. These are of course averages and since 2018 the fees for the more prestigious schools have increased significantly. For

Table 1. Percentage of those from independent schools in elite positions 2019.

| | |
|---------------------------|----|
| Permanent Secretaries | 59 |
| Diplomats | 52 |
| Senior Judges | 65 |
| Armed forces | 49 |
| Public body chairs | 45 |
| Company chairs (FTSE 350) | 34 |
| Entrepreneurs | 34 |
| News media | 43 |
| TV film and music | 38 |
| Popstars | 20 |

Table derived from 'Elitist Britain' 2019, Sutton Trust Report for the Crown.

example, for the year 2023 the annual fee for pupils at Eton was raised to £47,094 and Harrow had a similar figure, while a day school such as Latymer was charging £21,484 per annum in 2021 (see school websites for further details).

The contrast with the resources available to state schools is striking. Figures from Green and Kynaston (2019, fig 5, 102) suggest that in 2016 the resources available to all the private schools to fund the secondary education of day pupils were over twice those provided for state schools, while for the sixth form in private schools they were more than three times those available to state schools. This huge difference in income and wealth meant that the private schools have been able to invest not only in more high-quality teachers but more support staff. By 2021, 83% of the HMC schools had pastoral services (HMC 2021). They also have specialist staff to provide learning support and advice on access to the Oxbridge and Russell Group universities in the UK as well as the Ivy League colleges in the USA.

Importance of the arts in the academic curriculum

As noted above, it is not just in academic achievements and pastoral care that the private schools have increased provision. There are also suggestions that over the last two decades priorities have shifted, as arts subjects have become more highly valued and integrated into the curriculum in private schools. In order to investigate this question, we sought to identify high-status schools whose pupils were more likely to enter top positions in the state and private sector. We took advice from ex-pupils of top private schools, consulted publications from these schools, consulted websites that provided advice for affluent parents and also used the level of fees charged. We also included single sex and mixed sex schools. This provided us with a list of 20 'top' private schools, details of which are provided in Appendix A. Of these 20 schools only one did not include drama as a subject in the academic curriculum, although it did have a theatre fully backed by professional support staff. All the others provided tuition in Art, Drama or Theatre Studies and Music to A level with some also including Music Technology, Photography and other related subjects. In these schools, there is no distinction between strategic and non-strategic subjects. These schools were clearly viewing the arts as an essential and integral part of the curriculum with some highlighting the role played by the arts in improving academic achievements.

The centrality of arts in the co-curriculum as preparation for lifetime skills

What is also distinctive about the approach of the top private schools to education is that they see the arts as having benefits far beyond the narrow academic route. For the top 20, while they still emphasise the value they attach to academic education and especially their successes in public examinations, in their public pronouncements they now stress that the education they provide is much broader than that. For them, the academic achievement they provide is just a start, their aim is to develop the young people's interests, enhance their understanding of culture, provide new opportunities and provide skills and inculcate values that cannot be obtained in a conventional academic education. For that they depend on the co-curriculum. Here, the arts, drama and music, together with sport and the Combined Cadet Force (CCF) now provide the core of this approach to education. A few schools, 4 of the 20 we researched, still refer to these as extra-curriculum activities, but these subjects are valued equally. The private schools' representative body, the Headmasters and Headmistresses Conference (HMC 2021) explains: 'Great emphasis is placed on developing rich and diverse co-curricular programmes based on the conviction that individuals thrive in an environment in which all of their abilities and talents are recognised and nurtured'.

As these schools are operating in a competitive market, they each tend to emphasise different aspects of the benefits the co-curriculum provides. At Westminster, the school emphasises the value of the arts and the contribution that makes to performance in subsequent careers.

At Westminster we know that creative expression is a vital outlet for inquisitive minds. As we encourage our pupils in the pursuit of knowledge, we recognise that they need a variety of ways to both explore and express their questions and conclusions. Involvement in music, art and drama sparks creativity and innovation in many areas of life and study as well as building our pupils' confidence, improving their communication skills and sharpening their empathetic abilities. Engaging in the Arts has a positive impact on a pupil's all-round academic performance, improving both their interest in other subjects and their results. . . . This is borne out in wider society: creativity is now one of the top five skills sought by business leaders when recruiting new talent; it has been shown that Nobel laureates in the sciences are 17 times more likely to be actively engaged in the arts than average scientists; and studies show that participation in the Arts increases civic engagement and leads to better overall social cohesion. (Westminster School 2021a).

At Beneden, a single-sex girls' school, whilst discussing the academic curriculum on their website, the school stresses the importance of the co-curriculum for life beyond the school.

We are extremely proud of our exam results and our value-added scores, which show each student achieving excellent results for her. But we are not a hot-house: things that live in hot-houses cannot survive outside them. At all times, we place the girls' academic education in the wider context of her wellbeing, her co-curricular activities and the need to flourish in a world where exam results, whilst very important as a passport to opportunities, are not the source of contentment and fulfilment. (Beneden School website 2021).

However, while each stress the distinctive elements in their approach to the co-curriculum, the underlying message is the same, namely that these opportunities are the route to the acquisition of skills and attributes required for success in adult life. This is very much a holistic approach to education where the focus is on developing the whole person.

Of course, these 'Mission Statements' and lists of 'Values' are all part of modern business and marketing techniques, which the private schools have mastered and therefore in many respects they are aspirational. However, there are three factors, which suggest these values do shape the behaviour of the school's leadership in important ways. The first is the range of opportunities they provide, the second is the amount of their resources they invest in providing them and the third is the way they have been able to integrate arts provision with the arts industry. We examine each in turn.

(i) The range of facilities provided for education in the arts.

We examined the range of facilities provided for the study of Art, Drama, and Music. The results are displayed in [Figure 1](#).⁷

With regard to the provision for drama, between them the 20 schools had 33 theatres and/or drama studios, many having both, with schools like Eton having three, although Eton is not alone with this level of provision. Moreover, in 17 of the schools we found evidence to indicate the employment of support staff such as Theatre Managers, Theatre Technicians and Administrators. Ten of the schools had dedicated dance studios usually as part of their provision for drama and theatre.

The following are examples of the provision available. At St Paul's, the Samuel Pepys theatre is described as a purpose-built theatre with flexible staging and seating for up to 280, state-of-the-art sound system; a show-relay and paging system; a fully equipped teaching wing, doubling as a separate back-stage area for productions; two large flexible, multi-functional spaces for use as classrooms, rehearsal rooms, performance spaces and dressing-rooms, and natural ventilation in classroom and ancillary spaces using low carbon technology and auditorium climate control (St Paul's School 2021).

At Hampton the acoustics consultancy involved in the construction describe the performance centre as: 'a multi-use auditorium, music practice rooms, music and drama teaching rooms, dance studio, classrooms and offices.' The Hammond Theatre as an:

. . . auditorium, which is used for classical music, theatre, amplified music, opera and musicals. Movable reflectors and panels can be used to redefine both the acoustics and the layout of the auditorium and stage to allow for different uses. Retractable curtains and ceiling panels adjust the reverberation time and volume accordingly. An orchestra pit can be opened up to accommodate a medium-sized orchestra, and the curved seating rows in the stalls can be retracted to create a large area of flat floor. (Adrian James Acoustics).

Number of specific arts facilities provided by 20 high status private Schools

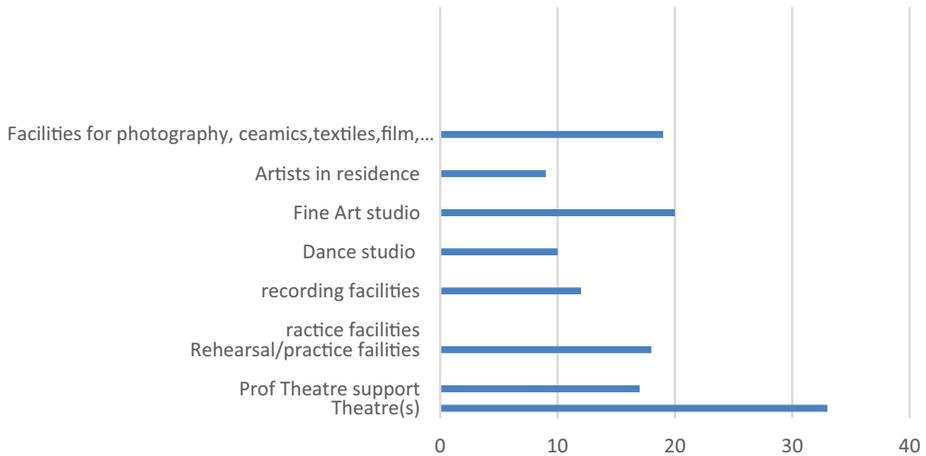


Figure 1. Number of specific arts facilities provided by 20 high status private schools.

With regard to provision for music, all 20 of the schools we examined had dedicated provision for concerts. Almost all the schools (18) had dedicated rehearsal and music practice rooms, with some having as many as 15 practice rooms. In addition, full-time music teachers were supported by professional musicians providing classes in specific instruments. The number of such staff at Eton is 75 although numbers in the region of 20–40 were more common among the other schools. Further 13 schools had dedicated recording facilities.

For the arts, the provision was also extensive: all 20 schools had dedicated fine art studios, and 19 of them had specialist provision for photography, sculpture, ceramics, textiles, digital media and others. However, not all are provided for all these activities. In nine schools, there was an Artist-in-Residence there to provide the advice and instruction in the latest developments in their field.

The arts departments also provided extensive provision for the co-curriculum. Here, all the schools had a wide range of societies and activities for pupils again with a wide range between 30 and 160. Of course, the arts while playing a central part in the co-curriculum were joined here by extensive provision in sport and other activities such as the CCF.

When documenting the extent of the facilities available to young pupils it is easy to lose sight of the fact that these are there to provide opportunities for pupils. And this can have a powerful impact of their experience of education, as Max Webster, a theatre and opera director and former pupil of St Paul's (1996–2001), explains, 'How incredible at age 14 or 15 to be given a fully equipped studio and a budget to direct a play. What more could an aspiring director want than money and resources?' (Blair 2021)

(ii) Investments in new and upgraded facilities over the last two decades

It is through their investment in facilities that the top private schools also demonstrate their commitment to the co-curriculum. Davies and Davies (2014) found that private (independent) schools with higher fees spent proportionately more of their budgets on non-teaching staff and facilities, while Green and Kynaston, using data from the Independent Schools Council census 2013 state that 'Taking the country as a whole, private schools' capital spending in 2013 was increasing following a pause in the wake of the financial crash of 2008' (Green and Kynaston 2019, 104) After

that no figures have been reported, but they suggest that the trend may have continued. Thus, not only are the top private schools spending more on facilities and the personnel to staff them, but they also appear to be increasing that spend over time.

Just what this means in terms of concrete projects can be illustrated from the examples found in the websites of the 20 schools we studied. Here we looked at investments that have taken place over the last two decades in the field of the arts, theatre and music, the focus of this paper. Similar investments were made in the field of sports. However, when examining the investments private schools have made in provision for these areas, it is important to note that the financial fortunes of private schools fluctuate over time. As noted above, they are in competition with each other as well as other high performing state schools. Hence, their ability to invest in facilities will vary over time.

Of the 20 schools we examined 17 show evidence of considerable investment over this period. At Westminster, in the early part of the 21st century the school invested in the purpose-built Millicent Fawcett Hall theatre, while a few years later in 2005 it invested in the Manoukian Music Centre, which the school website describes as ‘an excellent facility – fully equipped with a recital hall, recording studio, classrooms, practice rooms, rehearsal rooms and instrument storage to the highest standards’ (Westminster School 2021a). In 2008, Cheltenham Ladies College, invested £6 million to convert a grade 11* listed Regency villa into teaching accommodation and a new 325 seat theatre. In 2009, Hampton school invested £4.5 million in a new performing arts block. In 2014, St Paul’s invested heavily in their Drama Centre and the Samuel Pepys Theatre. In 2015, King’s School Canterbury invested £6.5 million in a new Music school. The same year saw Brighton College invest £6.5 million in new music and recital halls, followed by a £17 million investment in a new theatre in the performing arts centre commissioned in 2019 (Skelly & Couch 2021). In 2018, King’s College opened a new state-of-the-art music school and concert hall. A year later, in 2019, King’s school Canterbury followed their new music school with an investment in their new 334 seats Malthouse theatre, which the well-known actress and entertainer Joanna Lumley described as ‘better than those in professional environments’ (King’s School 2021). In 2021, Eton reported that they were supplementing their three theatres by upgrading the school hall to create a state-of-the-art symphonic concert hall.

In view of this extensive provision for the arts and co-curriculum, it is not surprising that in 2107, the Sunday Times found that private schools in London had 59 theatres, many of them state of the art, compared with the West End’s 42 (Gale and Gillespie 2017). The fact that these investments are accelerating over time is also suggested by claims in the media of an ‘arms race’ (see Whelan 2009), and more recently by Rory Kinnear, a former pupil of St Paul’s who states, ‘over the years there has been something of an arms race between independent schools vying with each other to provide better and better facilities ...’ (Blair 2021).

All the schools we examined acknowledged their privileged status and many have arrangements that enable selected state schools to use them. Indeed, Rugby announced at the end of 2018 that they were opening their Macready theatre to the general public and, in response to the government decision to remove arts from the curriculum of the state schools, the school would be giving a third of all touring tickets to local school groups for free. The artistic director, Tim Coker was quoted as saying, ‘Removing the arts from the curriculum will have such a damaging impact on our creative economy, social mobility and well-being... Our response is to offer whatever support we can to create opportunities for young people in our region and for the community as a whole.’ (Morris 2018). It illustrates a clear awareness of the fact that these school have facilities and opportunities that are not available to the rest of the population.

(iii) Links to the creative industries

Finally, private schools are distinctive in the level of professionalism and integration that they have achieved with the artists and companies in the creative sector. This has been done in a number of ways; at Westminster the ‘Department is comprised of an actor, director, lighting designer and stage manager, all of whom worked and taught extensively at the Royal National Theatre earlier in their careers. This allows the Department to maintain links with the professional industry, drawing on their contacts and past collaborators to offer specialist workshops and assist with productions

throughout the year.' At Westminster the musicians regularly attend junior departments at the Royal Academy, Royal College and Guildhall, while many are members of national ensembles such as the Nation Youth Orchestra and National Youth Choirs of Britain. At Eton the three different theatre spaces are staffed by professional theatre practitioners, which include a resident designer as well as a Theatre Director and Filmmaker-in-residence 'who are appointed every year to bring the most up-to-date perspectives to the department' (Eton College 2021). The use of artist-in-residence is another common practice used by these private schools to reinforce links with the wider industry while music departments often invite leading theatre companies and practitioners to visit for workshops and masterclasses, as is the practice at King's College.

It is also important to note that this expansion of facilities took place during a period when the arts, and the creative industry of which they are a part, were emerging as an increasingly important component of the national economy. These investments reflect the fact that these private schools were not just incorporating the arts in general into their curriculum, they were also adopting a more professional approach toward their teaching. One consequence of this is that the products of these private schools have started to play not just a disproportionate part in the leadership of the creative arts but in many respects to dominate the sector (Brook, O'Brien, and Taylor 2020). For example, in the post war years we witnessed a significant influence of the local authority state funded fine art colleges in the rock music industry (Frith and Horne 1987; Beck and Cornford 2012) but by 2014, 60% of rock music chart acts were privately educated compared with 1% 20 years before (Burchill 2014). More recently, as Table 1 illustrates, in 2019, 38% of the richest individuals in TV, film and music attended private schools as did 20% of pop stars. While the state has been reducing the part played by the arts and music in state education in the private schools, investment in the arts and music has been incorporated into the academic curriculum but then used to develop life-skills for all pupils through the co curriculum. Moreover, while doing this they have also been successful in facilitating access to positions at the top of those industries.

Conclusions

In this article, we have outlined the divergent roles and value of arts and cultural education in private and state education in England. What our results suggest is that the private system in England, at least among the leading private schools, has moved in a contrary direction more akin to the strategies followed by the European states we have identified. In fact, the difference in the approach toward arts education in England is such that we can realistically describe the system as one of educational apartheid. One system preparing young people for elite positions in the state and economy and another preparing young people for positions in the middle and lower orders.

One of the drivers for this investment in the arts, as expressed by the leaders of these schools, is the belief that the benefits of arts education in providing skills and inculcating values, extend well beyond the economic returns associated with a narrow academic education. However, this investment may also have been stimulated by the competition between these schools to attract the children of wealthy parents, but just how far that is the case remains a question for further research. As does the extent to which the other private schools in England have followed the lead of the top private schools. We have cited some evidence to suggest that the better resourced private schools may be following this lead, but the extent to which this is the case remains a question for further research.

Recent work by David O'Brien and others (see Brook, O'Brien, and Taylor 2020) has highlighted the class inequalities that currently exist in the creative industries of England. Our findings build upon this and the work of Banks and Oakley (2016) and others looking at education and training in the sector to provide a clear indication that this inequality is rooted in earlier imbalances with regards to the value of, and access to, arts and culture in education in England. This inequality is embedded within the English system through an ideological positioning of the arts and culture that is enacted through not only cultural policy but significantly through educational policy.

Whilst both the private and state systems operate under the same legal and political framework and therefore the same 'neoliberal' ideology, this dual system has led to England becoming an outlier in Europe through a separation and denigration of arts and cultural education within the state system. To return to Steigwald's (2021) analysis of arts and cultural education in England being underpinned by a neoliberal, market-led and economic ideology; this paper demonstrates that while this is the rationale political leaders provide, the underlying philosophy is a fundamental disregard and lack of value ascribed to arts and culture in the state education system, which is more tightly controlled than the private sector that has been free to pursue a more holistic approach.

Notes

1. A small number of local authorities resisted the implementation of comprehensive schooling and remained with selective grammar schools supplemented by non-selective secondary modern schools.
2. 'Academies' are both a charity and a limited company, they have greater financial autonomy as they are financed centrally. State schools deemed to be 'failing' are turned into academies.
3. The implications of the conceptual shift in policy at the time is extensively discussed, most notably in Garnham (2005).
4. Political discourse consistently positions the arts more generally as being of little economic value which has often led to the need for the arts to be justified in economic terms (see John Myerscough, *The Economic Importance of the Arts in Britain*, Policy Studies Institute 1988). Chris Smith and others before him notably Jennie Lee (1965) argued for the importance of the arts for personal growth, social cohesion, inclusion, and participation in society.
5. The Russell Group Universities consist of the higher status universities in the UK.
6. The British use the terms 'public', 'private' and 'independent' schools as a definition for elite private schools depending upon their historic origins. The term 'public schools' is commonly used in England to refer to schools that are charitable institutions and functioned in the 20th Century and before to educate sons of the ruling class for ruling positions in the state and empire. Their income comes from the fees they charge, while their charitable status provides them with a shelter from state taxes in return for which they must provide subsidised access for some children. This is politically contentious (Henry, 2018). These 'public' schools have traditionally been differentiated from the other independent schools, but for ease and clarity we will use the term 'private' to refer to all such fee-paying schools.
7. We used secondary sources to identify these facilities such as school publications and their web-pages and other published data. As a result we may not have captured all of their facilities so these are likely to be conservative figures.

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Appendix A

List of 'top private schools' used for the analysis

Beneden

Brighton College

Charterhouse

Cheltenham Ladies College

Dulwich

Eton

Hamptons

Harrow

King's School Canterbury

King's College School

Latymer

Marlborough

Merchant Taylors

Rugby

Wycombe Abbey School

Westminster

Winchester

Roedean

St Paul's

St Paul's Girls