

Expressive Arts Curriculum Background and Evidence Paper

March 2026

Executive Summary

Overview

This paper contextualises the 3-18 Expressive Arts curriculum within the wider Scottish education landscape, highlighting its contribution to national priorities for learner attainment, achievement, wellbeing, creativity, excellence and equity. It examines successes and challenges in the delivery of Art and Design, Dance, Drama and Music, with the addition of Film and Screen in September 2025, drawing on local, national and international evidence, underpinned by academic research and professional perspectives. While research across all the disciplines is still evolving, the findings presented here provide important insights to inform an evidence-based approach to curriculum improvement. In so doing, the paper supports stakeholders to reflect on key issues and shape the next phase of the Curriculum Improvement Cycle (CIC) for Expressive Arts in Scotland ensuring a modern, inclusive, research-informed and future-orientated curricula for all learners. Throughout this paper, 'the arts' is used as an inclusive term encompassing Art and Design, Dance, Drama, Film and Screen and Music.

Main Considerations

- Expressive Arts are central to Curriculum for Excellence (CfE), fostering creativity, wellbeing, equity and support the growth of the whole child and prepare children and young people to engage meaningfully with Scotland's cultural life.
 - In early years education, Expressive Arts play a fundamental role, fostering learning through play, storytelling and imaginative exploration. The arts build curiosity, resilience and social connection that shape lifelong outcomes.
 - International research consistently validates the importance of arts education with organisations such as OECD, UNESCO and WHO affirming the intrinsic and wider benefits of arts education, including creativity, critical thinking, identity and emotional development. UNESCO highlights its role in holistic education, supporting wellbeing, inclusion and mental health.
 - Globally, there is a growing trend towards integrating Expressive Arts into modern curricula. Countries such as Wales, Australia and New Zealand as well as provinces such as British Columbia in Canada integrate arts into curricula to connect creativity with identity, literacy and future-ready skills. Scotland can draw on these models to align with international best practice.
 - Despite their recognised value, the provision of Expressive Arts across Scotland remains inconsistent. Delivery across Scotland varies due to variations in teacher confidence, resources and prioritisation, creating inequitable access where some learners benefit from rich experiences while others face limited opportunities.
 - A lack of shared understanding of what and how to teach the arts affects consistency, especially in primary schools where confidence and training are limited. Addressing this is key to equitable, high-quality learning.
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- Expressive Arts align with Scotland's Developing the Young Workforce strategy. With creative industries among the fastest-growing globally, including Scotland's film sector projected at £1 billion by 2030. Embedding arts more deeply can connect education with employment pathways.

Next Steps

The background and evidence paper set out the need for a refreshed and evolved national technical framework for Expressive Arts that will support and exemplify progression at all levels across the five subject disciplines of Art and Design, Dance, Drama, Film and Screen and Music. The CIC process provides an opportunity to unpack these considerations in greater detail and support the development of coherent, inclusive approaches that reflect local contexts and emerging priorities in ways that better serve our children and young people. At the same time, the evidence suggests more consistency in curricular time allocation and consistent delivery across local authorities that supports learners to continue to experience success across a range of Qualifications Scotland's Expressive Arts National Qualifications and Awards as well as supporting teacher and practitioner career-long professional learning.

The themes raised may inform how stakeholders approach future decision-making and they outline the need to promote and share sector leading arts pedagogy and assessment practice. Moreover, this includes the voice of learners to ensure that the Expressive Arts are seen as relevant and useful by children and young people in order to develop the necessary knowledge and skills for the workplace, whether that be in any area of the world of work or, more specifically, within the creative industries.

To achieve this, it will be important, as part of the CIC process, to demystify the interface between the Expressive Arts curriculum and the work of both Scotland's tertiary education and professional arts organisations sectors. Accordingly, it is vital that Education Scotland works in close partnership with stakeholders throughout the CIC process to develop solutions and secure improvements to learning, teaching and assessment experiences across the Expressive Arts curriculum.

The Curriculum Improvement Cycle (CIC) provides a timely opportunity to co-create a future-orientated Expressive Arts framework that builds on the strengths of CfE. Drawing on international evidence, Scotland can address disparities in provision and align more explicitly with global trends.

A refreshed framework should ensure shared clarity, provide progression and depth and promote consistency of provision nationally. Similarly, there requires to be an investment and collaboration in ITE and continued professional learning, central to building teacher confidence, addressing barriers to participation and embedding sector-leading pedagogy. Through collaboration, targeted support and evidence-informed decision-making, the CIC can deliver a modern, inclusive and culturally responsive 3-18 Expressive Arts curriculum that supports creativity, wellbeing, equity, excellence and future-ready skills for all learners.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose

This paper offers a snapshot of the current educational landscape, drawing on a diverse range of research and evidence to illuminate prevailing trends, challenges and successes across contexts. It serves as a foundation for ongoing curriculum development, offering insights into the policy environment, learner experience and professional perspectives. By incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data, alongside contributions from practitioners, learners and the wider education community, it creates space for reflection and informed discussion. While not all available studies are included, those selected reflect the breadth of work currently shaping thinking in this area. The insights outlined here are intended to support the CIC stakeholder groups as they consider key issues and navigate the next steps in the evolution of the curriculum.

1.2 Sources of Evidence

A comprehensive body of research was developed through a collaborative effort involving representatives from Education Scotland's Curriculum, Learning, Teaching and Assessment (CLTA) team, the Data, Performance and Research (DPR) team, the Scottish Government Analytical Services and the Scottish Government Library Support Service. This collaboration brought together a wide range of expertise to support the identification, evaluation and organisation of relevant literature. The sources drawn upon include, but are not limited to, peer-reviewed academic papers, stakeholder reports, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMI) publications, Scottish Qualifications Authority/Qualifications Scotland (SQA) and Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Level (ACEL) data analysis, surveys, government data sets, research produced by national agencies, Scottish Government reports and international publications from organisations such as the OECD and the United Nations.

Additionally, the perspectives of children and young people are represented through the work of bodies such as the Scottish Youth Parliament and the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland.

1.3 Scope of the Review

This evidence paper explores the Expressive Arts curriculum in its entirety across the 3-18 learner journey, considering breadth and depth of provision, progression and learner outcomes from early level through to the senior phase. This paper focuses on the Expressive Arts curricular area as outlined within Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence. It highlights key policy drivers and educational practices that support the delivery of Art and Design, Dance, Drama, Film and Screen and Music in Scotland from ages 3-18 promoting creativity, personal expression and cultural engagement. It reflects on learning and achievement in the broad general education (BGE), drawing on national indicators such as senior phase attainment across a range of qualifications, including National Qualifications and other awards. The paper aims to support a holistic understanding of the current curricular landscape, highlighting key themes and emerging patterns that will inform ongoing discussion and decision-making through the CIC process.

1.4 Related National Policies

Throughout this paper, many policies, frameworks and strategic papers have been considered to outline the wide scope and span of the Expressive Arts including those published by Creative Scotland which is a Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) sponsored by the Scottish Government, responsible for supporting the arts, screen and creative industries and aligning its work with national cultural policies and strategic priorities.

Curriculum for Excellence – CfE

In 2002 a national debate and consultation on education within Scotland was launched by the Scottish Executive to gather views on the future of education, initiating the requirement to reform the Scottish curriculum, creating a more flexible, inclusive, 3-18 curricular framework model. In 2004 'A Curriculum for Excellence' (CfE) was first published launching the four capacities: Successful Learners, Confident Individuals, Responsible Citizens, Effective Contributors with Expressive Arts identified as one of the eight core curricular areas. Over the successive three years, draft Experiences and Outcomes (E's and O's) were created and refined including Art and Design, Dance, Drama and Music with a focus on learning in, through and about the Expressive Arts.

In 2010, CfE was officially rolled out with schools beginning to implement the Expressive Arts as part of a statutory entitlement for all learners. In 2011 the Donaldson Report: 'Teaching Scotland's Future', highlighted the need for improved teacher education to support the delivery of CfE, challenging the role of the teaching professional which has evolved significantly, with concerns raised across extensive literature about expectations on Scotland's teachers and what pervades are the complexities and demands now upon the role of teachers with Donaldson emphasising the need for professional learning and leadership within Expressive Arts education.

In 2017, Education Scotland published updated guidance and resources for CfE, reinforcing the importance of creativity, enjoyment and cultural engagement. The Scottish Government, in response to the independent review of CfE by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2021), is currently reassessing the aspirational vision of CfE and our evolving society and the key role of education within the current Curriculum Improvement Cycle (CIC).

In September 2025, Screen Scotland, with Education Scotland and Scottish Government officially launched the national rollout of Film and Screen into CfE.

Realising the Ambition: Being Me

'Realising the Ambition: Being Me' is Scotland's national practice guidance for early years, building on Pre-Birth to Three and Building the Ambition. It outlines the developmental needs of children from birth to Primary 1 (Education Scotland focus is from age 3 onwards) and emphasises the importance of nurturing relationships, play-based learning and responsive pedagogy.

'Realising the Ambition: Being Me' supports nurseries and other Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) settings by providing a clear, research-informed framework for delivering the Early Level curriculum in a way that is developmentally appropriate, child-centred and responsive to individual needs. The guidance supports continuity across transitions and highlights the foundational role of early learning in shaping lifelong wellbeing and educational outcomes.

Principles and Practice in Expressive Arts

The 'Principles and Practice in Expressive Arts', published in 2010, is an extension of CfE and provides guidance and a strategic framework bringing the vision of CfE to life through creativity, personal expression and cultural engagement. This framework is grounded in the four capacities of Successful Learners, Confident Individuals, Responsible Citizens and Effective Contributors and aligns with the 'Building the Curriculum' series (2006-2011) which outlines progression of skills, understanding and the development of transferrable skills for learning, life and work through the Expressive Arts. The framework supports children and young people to develop these skills through creativity, encouraging active learning, interdisciplinary connections and supporting how learning through Art and Design, Dance, Drama and Music nurtures holistic development, promotes wellbeing fostering equity, inclusion and progression. The document aligns with the vision of CfE for a flexible and inclusive education system where learners are at the centre through choice and progression pathways for success. It supports the development of artistic skills and appreciation for the Arts, emphasising the inspiration and enjoyment the Expressive Arts can offer allowing children and young people to express themselves creatively and emotionally, building practical skills and abilities through cultural links and identity.

Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC)

'Getting It Right for Every Child' (GIRFEC) was first introduced in Scotland in 2006 later embedded in legislation through the 'Children and Young People' (Scotland) Act 2014. GIRFEC is a policy framework designed to ensure children and young people are supported through a multi-agency structure. GIRFEC promotes wellbeing, inclusion and equity through a rights-based approach to ensure every learner can thrive through early intervention across all services. In 2022, the Scottish Government published a policy statement to reaffirm their commitment to child-centred, rights-based support for all. The GIRFEC framework aligns closely with the aims of the Es and Os across the Expressive Arts where creative curricular areas - Art and Design, Dance, Drama and Music - support children and young people to explore identity, nurture creativity and confidence and express emotions which directly respond to the SHANARRI - Safe, Healthy, Achieving, Nurtured, Active, Respected, Responsible, Included - wellbeing indicators. 'Our Creative Journey', published in August 2017 by the Care Inspectorate, further highlights how Expressive Arts experiences in early learning and childcare settings can nurture wellbeing and support GIRFEC outcome 3: "Children and young people grow up loved, safe and respected so that they realise their full potential."

The National Improvement Framework (NIF)

The 'National Improvement Framework' (NIF), was first introduced by The Scottish Government produced by the Learning Directorate under the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills in January 2016, following a draft publication in September 2015 to drive equity and excellence in education encouraging schools to use creative approaches to raise attainment and close the poverty-related attainment gap. In 2025 the NIF was updated to reflect a move to greater clarity and accessibility setting out seven strategic outcomes in a concise format aimed at promoting equity, raising attainment and improving wellbeing for all children and young people in Scotland. These priorities align powerfully with the goals of the Expressive Arts curriculum who are uniquely positioned to support several NIF outcomes, particularly those focused on wellbeing, inclusion, learner engagement and skills for life and work. When aligned with the NIF's strategic outcomes, the Expressive Arts are a transformative force which support Scotland's children and young people to not only succeed academically, but also thrive socially, emotionally and creatively. The Expressive Arts provides a synergy to enhance learning and to raise attainment providing pathways to creative industries, fostering transferable skills with learners skilled in helping to shape their learning through participation and learner agency.

Scotland's Creative Learning Plan

'Scotland's Creative Learning Plan' was first published in 2013, alongside an impact review of 'Creativity Across Learning 3-18' in Scotland's schools. This high-level, inter-agency plan projected a bold, ambitious vision for a more creative nation and encouraged policy makers and practitioners to use creativity to benefit learners in all contexts for learning. Its key messages were strengthened by the inclusion of a quality indicator specifically focused on creativity skills in 'How Good is Our School? v4' (2015).

Since the publication of the 'Creative Learning Plan', key successes include the development of a shared language and common understanding around creativity and national recognition of its value. Long-term investment in local authority-led Creative Learning Networks through a partnership between Education Scotland and Creative Scotland created a powerful infrastructure and a key delivery mechanism. Funded programmes of work had a strong focus on building capacity for creative teaching, learning and assessment and were fundamental in helping learners and practitioners recognise, articulate and value their creativity skills.

The National Creative Learning Network continues to drive forwards the plan, its members facilitating effective and impactful partnerships between learning settings, creative practitioners and arts and cultural partners.

'Scotland's Creative Learning Plan' was refreshed in 2021, to meet the demands of a rapidly changing education, skills and cultural landscape, particularly in response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. It positioned creativity as a vital skill for life, learning and work and set out five aligned outcomes focused on improving learner wellbeing, enhancing learner confidence in applying creativity skills; expanding access to high-quality cultural experiences; increasing learner agency and embedding creativity in curriculum design.

The long-standing strategic partnership between Creative Scotland and Education Scotland evolved in alignment with 'Scotland's Culture Strategy', with a commitment to promoting equitable access to high-quality cultural and arts experiences for all children and young people, as detailed in 'A Collaboration for Creativity - An Action Plan', published annually between 2021 and 2023. Under this action plan, funding was allocated to partnerships between learning settings and arts partners to find innovative solutions to increasing learner wellbeing and wider sense of achievement through creative learning in and through the arts.

Developing the Young Workforce (DYW)

Developing the Young Workforce (DYW), encourages creative industries as viable career pathways, supporting skills development across the Expressive Arts. The Cultural Learning Alliance's May briefing note 2025 advocates for urgent reform to embed Expressive Arts at the core of education, citing their role in fostering agency, empathy, collaboration and critical thinking capabilities that align with Scotland's DYW strategy.

Launched in 2014 following the Wood Commission's recommendations, DYW aims to equip learners with meta-skills which unlike technical or subject-specific skills, focus on how we learn and interact, rather than what we know, nurturing these skills for life, learning and work. This had successfully reduced youth unemployment by 40% by 2017. Both frameworks emphasise equitable access, curriculum reform and dismantling subject hierarchies to ensure all young people, regardless of background, can benefit from high-quality arts education and creative career pathways.

Expressive Arts are already recognised within CfE and DYW continues to connect education with industry through 20 regional employer-led groups which is continuing to grow. Together, they present an exciting case for positioning creativity as essential to Scotland's educational and economic future.

Scotland's Culture Strategy

'Scotland's Culture Strategy', published in February 2020, recognises the role of arts and culture in education and community life, promoting lifelong engagement with the arts setting a national vision to embed culture across all areas of life, recognising its transformative power for wellbeing, education and community identity. The strategy is built around three ambitions - Strengthening, Transforming and Empowering - which align closely with the aims of the 3–18 Expressive Arts curriculum within CfE. Both frameworks value culture not only as a source of enjoyment and enrichment but also as a vital contributor to personal development, social cohesion and economic prosperity.

The Expressive Arts curriculum encourages learners to explore and express themselves fostering creativity, confidence and critical thinking. These are skills echoed in the Culture Strategy's emphasis on lifelong cultural participation and creative capability and reinforces the importance of ensuring all learners have access to high-quality cultural experiences throughout their school

journey. By linking cultural policy with educational practice, Scotland aims to nurture a generation that is culturally literate, creatively empowered and equipped to thrive in a fast-changing world. In December 2023, the Scottish Government published 'A Culture Strategy for Scotland: Action Plan'. This plan built on the vision of the Culture Strategy, presenting a series of practical recommendations to support a strong, resilient culture sector and a cultural landscape.

Time to Shine: Scotland's Youth Arts Strategy

'Time to Shine: Scotland's Youth Arts Strategy', launched in 2013 by Creative Scotland, sets out a 10-year vision to support children and young people aged 0–25 to thrive through arts and creativity. Developed through national consultation, the strategy aligns with Curriculum for Excellence by promoting learning in, through and about the arts, emphasising inclusion, progression and provision across all art forms. It reinforces the value of Expressive Arts in developing creativity, confidence and cultural identity, supporting initiatives like the Youth Music Initiative and national youth arts companies to expand access and nurture talent across Scotland's 3–18 education landscape.

Numeracy in Expressive Arts

The 'Numeracy in Expressive Arts' guidance from Education Scotland (2023) has been created to support practitioners to consider how to make pedagogical links between numeracy and Expressive Arts. The guidance highlights how learners develop mathematical skills, including measurement, pattern recognition, sequencing and data handling through artistic processes like designing, performing and evaluating. Links can be made through interdisciplinary learning, which can deepen pupils' understanding by embedding numeracy and mathematical skills through activities in Art and Design, Dance, Drama and Music. Encouraging learners to apply mathematical thinking while engaging in Expressive Arts processes like designing, performing and evaluating creates links and makes learning connections. The document supports practitioners in planning meaningful, skills-rich learning experiences that connect numeracy with artistic expression, enhancing both cognitive and creative development.

Creative Scotland's Annual Plan 2024–25

Creative Scotland's 'Annual Plan' 2024–25 outlines key strategic priorities - Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), Sustainable Development, Fair Work and Internationalism, that directly support Scotland's 3-18 Expressive Arts curriculum. The plan commits to multi-year funding for arts organisations from 2025–28 and introduces enhanced support for youth arts, including the development of a new National Youth Arts Strategy aligned with UNCRC principles.

Programmes such as the Youth Music Initiative (YMI), inclusive dance festivals and targeted support for care-experienced and disabled young artists reflect the curriculum's emphasis on creativity, participation and cultural identity. The plan also reinforces the role of Expressive Arts in promoting wellbeing, sustainability and employability, core aims of CfE, while advocating for equitable access and creative progression across Scotland's diverse communities.

Youth Music Initiative

The Youth Music Initiative (YMI) is a national programme funded by the Scottish Government and administered by Creative Scotland, designed to ensure that all children and young people in Scotland have access to high-quality music-making opportunities. Since its launch in 2003, YMI has a strong emphasis on equity and inclusion.

Funded by the Scottish Government, YMI ensures that every young person in Scotland is offered a year of free music tuition by the end of primary school, aligning directly with the aims of the 3-18 Expressive Arts curriculum within CfE. YMI has supported thousands of projects across Scotland, aiming to break down barriers to participation and promote equity in music education. The initiative targets children and young people aged 0–25, with a particular focus on those who might not otherwise have the chance to engage in music due to social, economic, or geographic barriers.

YMI operates through three main funding streams: the Formula Fund, which guarantees every pupil access to a year of free music tuition by the time they leave primary school; Access to Music Making, which supports inclusive and community-based projects; and Strengthening Youth Music, which invests in workforce development and infrastructure.

The YMI programme also aligns with broader national goals around wellbeing, creativity and lifelong learning. By fostering musical skills, confidence and cultural engagement, YMI plays a vital role in Scotland's commitment to nurturing the potential of every young person through music.

2 National Data Sets

2.1 SQA/Qualifications Scotland Attainment and Presentation Data

The data included in this section examines [attainment](#) and trends across a range of National Qualifications linked to Expressive Arts over the past 8 years (2018-2025). The analysis focuses on stable trend periods; therefore, 2020 and 2021 data were excluded due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The inclusion of 2025 data is essential for several critical reasons. Firstly, the reintroduction of assignment components for most subjects in 2024 means that 2025 represents the first complete academic year operating under fully restored assessment arrangements, enabling meaningful comparison with pre-pandemic structures. Secondly, several subjects demonstrate marked recovery in 2025, making this data point essential to avoid presenting an incomplete or misleadingly negative picture. Finally, the eight-year timeframe allows for robust trend analysis, distinguishing sustained patterns from temporary fluctuations. Excluding it would compromise both the accuracy of trend analysis and the practical relevance of findings. Data for National 5 to Advanced Higher level focuses on Art and Design, Dance, Drama, Music, Music Technology and Photography qualifications. Data for non-graded qualifications (such as NPAs, NCs and National 2 - National 4 qualifications) have also been included here for parity of esteem.

2.1.1 Art and Design

National 5 (N5)

Entries increased from 9196 in 2018 to 11225 in 2025, a growth of 22.1%.
A-C passes rose from 8184 to 10429, maintaining a strong performance.
Pass rate improved from 89% to 92.9%, showing consistent high achievement.
National 5 shows healthy growth in both participation and achievement.

Higher

Entries increased from 5299 in 2018 to 5875 in 2025, a growth of 10.9%.
A-C passes ranged from 4210 to 4875, with minor year-to-year changes.
Pass rate varied from 80.5% to 84% with 84% being the peak in 2018. Current pass rate is 82.2%.
Higher level results are stable.

Advanced Higher: Design

Entries grew from 540 in 2018 to 890 in 2025, a 64.8% increase.
A-C passes rose from 491 to 825, maintaining a high pass rate.
Pass rate remained strong, fluctuating slightly but staying above 91.0%, peaking at 93.4%.
Design shows rising popularity and consistently high achievement.

Advanced Higher: Expressive

Entries increased from 920 in 2018 to 1330 in 2025.

A-C passes remain high, despite a slight decline in 2023, there has been a steady rise from 837 in 2018 to 1232 in 2025.

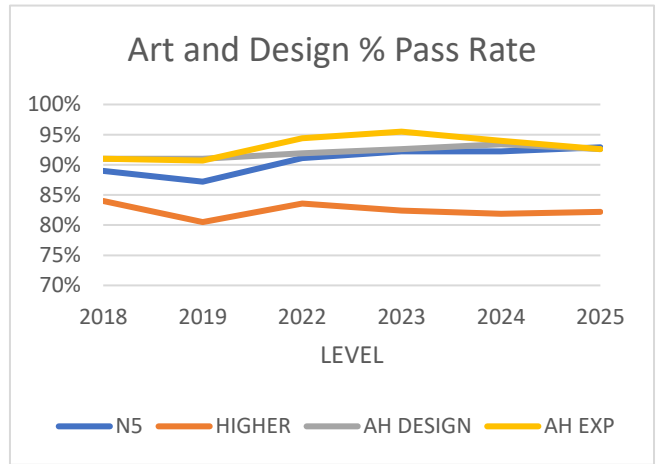
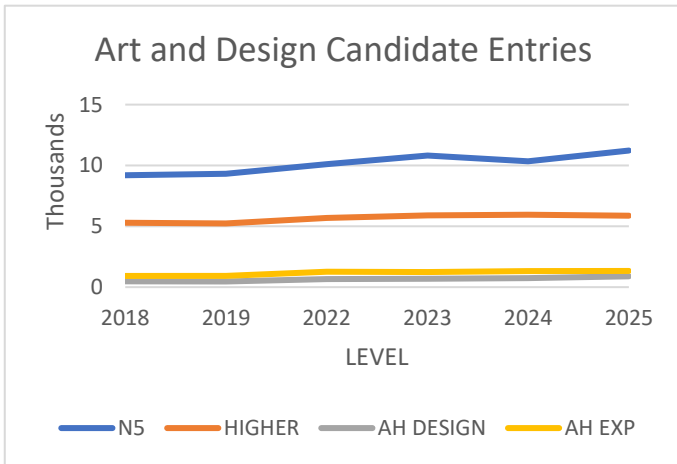
Pass rate rose from 91% in 2018 to 95.5% in 2022. However, over the last 3 years there has been a decline to 92.6% in 2025, though still very high.

Expressive remains a high-performing subject with excellent pass rates, though there's a slight downward trend in recent years.

Art and Design Summary

Art and Design has shown overall growth and sustained high achievement across all qualification levels from 2018 to 2025. National 5 experienced the most notable increase in demand, with rising entries and improved pass rates which reflects strong learner engagement and effective teaching. Higher entries remained stable, though a slight drop in pass rates suggests a need for closer attention to support strategies.

At Advanced Higher level, Design saw significant growth and consistently high performance, while Expressive maintained excellent results despite a modest decline in pass rate. Collectively, these trends indicate that art and design continues to be a popular and successful subject, particularly at the National 5 and Advanced Higher levels.



2.1.2 Dance

National 5 (N5)

Entries increased from 558 in 2018 to 920 in 2025, marking a 64.9% growth over eight years. A-C passes rose from 513 to 758, showing a steady improvement in attainment. The pass rate for National 5 fluctuated, starting at 92.0% in 2018, dropping to 77.9% in 2024, before recovering to 82.3% in 2025. National 5 Dance shows a positive long-term trend in both participation and attainment, despite mid-period fluctuations.

Higher

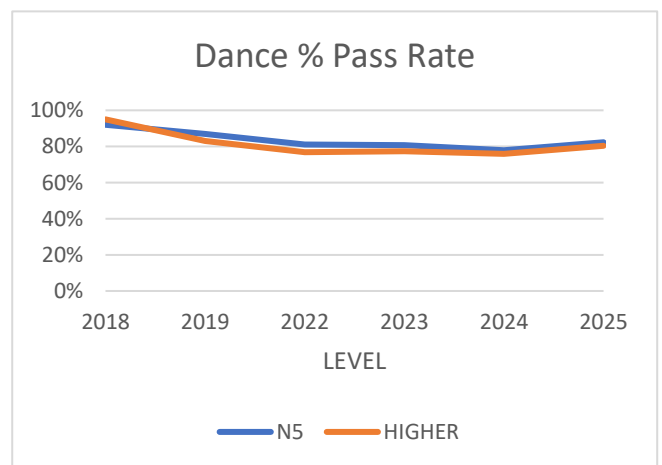
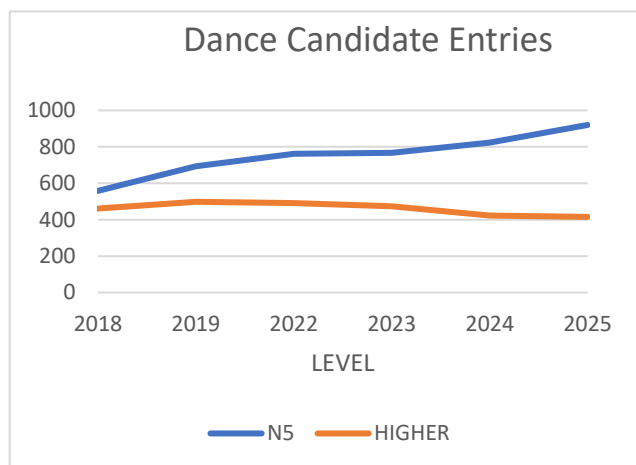
Entries declined from 461 in 2018 to 415 in 2025, a 10% decrease. A-C Passes dropped from 438 to 334, though there was a slight recovery in 2025 from 2024. The pass rate for Higher declined from 95.0% in 2018 to 75.9% in 2024, with a modest improvement to 80.3% in 2025. Higher Dance shows a downward trend in both participation and attainment, though recent improvements in pass rate suggest potential for recovery.

Dance Summary

Dance qualifications from 2018 to 2025 show a mixed picture. National 5 experienced significant growth in entries and A–C passes, rising by nearly 65% and recovered well from a dip in pass rate in 2024. It should also be noted that approval guidance changed in 2021 although this did not impact centres until after the pandemic.

In contrast, Higher Dance has seen a decline in entries and passes, dropping by 10%, though the pass rate showed a modest recovery in 2025 after earlier declines. It is of note that the Higher Dance question paper was introduced in 2019 and was not part of the 2018 exam diet.

Overall, Dance remains a subject with growing popularity at the National 5 level, with a downward trend at Higher.



2.1.3 Drama

National 5 (N5)

Entries increased from 4572 in 2018 to 5080 in 2025, showing a 11.1% increase over the period. A-C passes rose from 4320 to 4710, reflecting an improvement in attainment.

The pass rate for National 5 was 94.4% in 2019 reducing to 92.7% in 2025, with fluctuations in the intervening years.

National 5 shows strong performance with high pass rates and growing participation.

Higher

Entries decreased from 2750 in 2018 to 2685 in 2025, showing a 2.4% decrease over the period. A-C passes have fluctuated over the period from a high of 2445 in 2018 to 2151 in 2023. There has been, however, a growing improvement in attainment with a figure of 2304 in 2025.

The pass rate for Higher was 83.6% in 2018 and rose to 85.8% in 2025, with fluctuations in the intervening years. Higher shows strong performance with high pass rates.

Advanced Higher

Entries decreased from 600 in 2018 to 565 in 2025 with a high of 622 in 2022, showing a 5.8% decrease over the period.

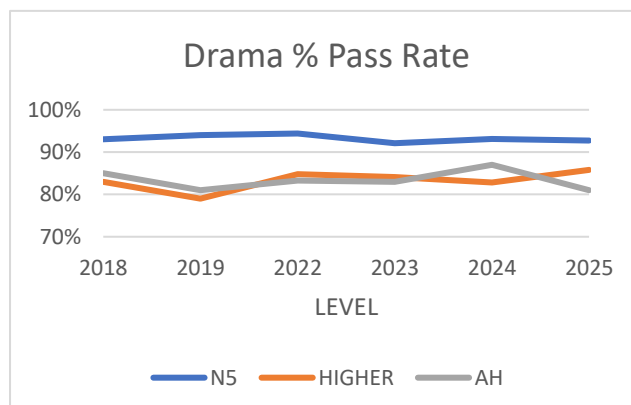
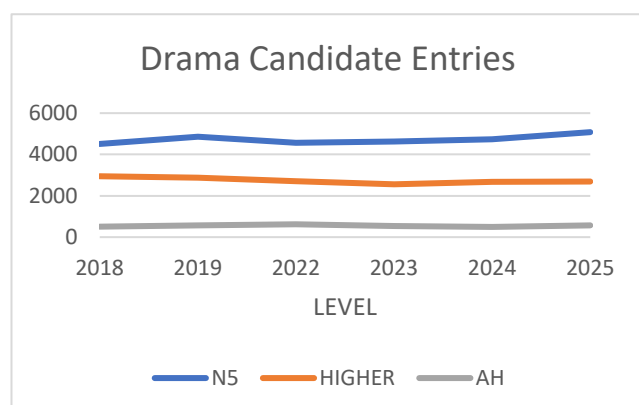
A-C passes fell from 510 to 458, reflecting a decline in attainment.

The pass rate for advanced higher was 85.0% in 2018 and declined to 81.0% in 2025, with fluctuations in the intervening years.

Advanced Higher shows moderate performance with variable pass rates.

Drama Summary

Drama has shown varied participation and achievement across all qualification levels from 2018 to 2025. National 5 entries increased steadily, with pass rates remaining above 92%, indicating strong engagement and performance. Higher entries remained stable, and pass rates improved over time, reaching their highest in 2025. Advanced Higher has experienced a decline in entries and pass rates mid-period but has seen a partial recovery in 2025. Overall, Drama attainment continues to be on an upward trajectory, particularly at National 5, while Advanced Higher may benefit from closer attention to support.



2.1.4 Music

National 5 (N5)

Entries rose from 7,098 in 2018 to 8,085 in 2025, showing steady growth.

A-C passes increased from 6,743 in 2018 to 7,285 in 2025, reflecting consistent attainment across the period.

Pass rate has declined from 95% in 2018 to 90.1% in 2025, showing a gradual downward trend across the years.

National 5 has seen a steady increase in entries over the eight years, with consistently strong performance in terms of absolute passes. However, the pass rate gradually declined year on year from 95% to 90.1%, though it remained high overall.

Higher

Entries remained relatively stable with 5,061 presentations in 2018 and 5,035 in 2025, with a peak of 5,180 in 2024.

A-C passes have declined across the period, from 4,808 in 2018 to 4,587 in 2025 although there was steady growth between 2022 – 2024.

Pass rate began at 95% in 2018, dipped to 92% in 2019, recovered to 94.3% in 2022, then decreased to 91.1% in 2025, showing a gradual decline in recent years.

Higher entries remained stable throughout the period, with slight fluctuations and a peak in 2024. The pass rate showed some variability, with an early dip in 2019, recovery in 2022, followed by a gentle downward trend, though it remained above 90% throughout.

Advanced Higher Music

Entries fluctuated between 1,645 and 1,773 across the period, starting at 1,712 in 2018 and ending at 1,645 in 2025.

A-C passes followed a similar pattern, ranging from 1,484 to 1,660 across the years.

Pass rate was 94% in 2018 with fluctuation over the years. There was a rise to 93.6% in 2023, however the pass rate declined to 90.2% in 2025.

Advanced Higher entries fluctuated throughout the eight-year period, remaining relatively stable overall. While the pass rate peaked in 2023 at 93.6%, it declined to 90.2% by 2025. Despite this downward trend in recent years, attainment remained solid across the period.

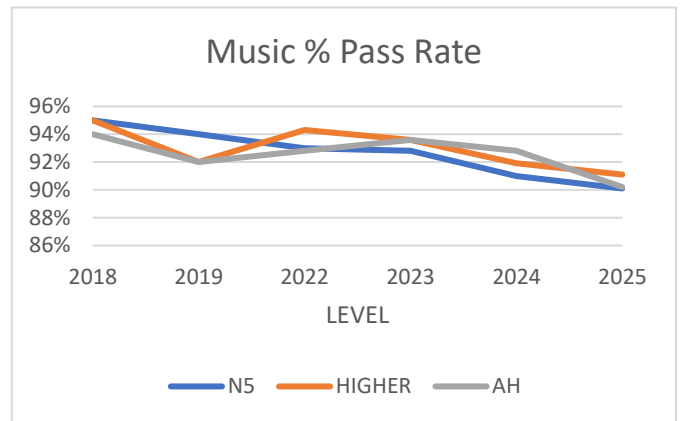
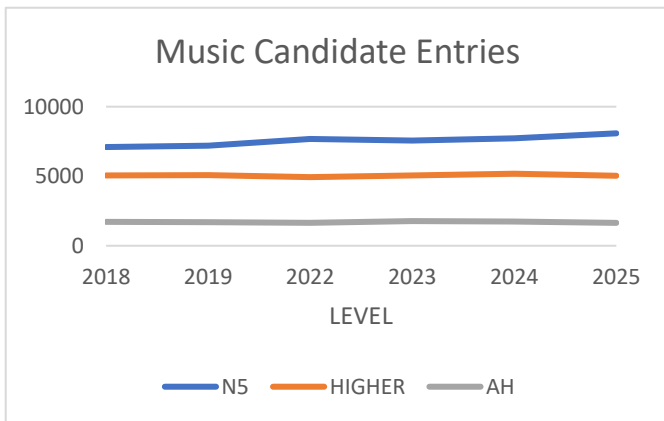
Advanced Higher: Portfolio

Entries for Advanced Higher: Portfolio are very limited in comparison with the Advanced Higher Music option. Entry numbers have risen from 11 in 2018, to 20 in 2025, indicating growing interest in recent years.

The pass rate was highly variable: 73% in 2018, 67% in 2019, then 100% for three consecutive years (2022-2024), with all candidates achieving A-C grades. However, in 2025, the pass rate dropped, with 15 out of 20 candidates passing, marking a decline in performance despite the highest number of entries.

Music Summary

Music has shown steady participation and strong overall performance across all levels from 2018 to 2025, though with some signs of gradual decline in outcomes in recent years. National 5 entries increased consistently across the period, from 7,098 to 8,085, reflecting growing interest, but the pass rate declined from 95% to 90.1%. Higher level entries remained stable throughout, fluctuating between approximately 4,900 and 5,200, with a peak in 2024. Pass rates at Higher showed some variability, declining from 95% in 2018 to 91.1% in 2025, though they remained above 90%, indicating continued strength. At Advanced Higher, the performance option maintained strong results across the period despite fluctuations in entries and a notable drop in pass rate to 90.2% by 2025. Overall, Music remains a popular and high-attaining subject, despite the downward trend in pass rates across levels in recent years.



2.1.5 Music Technology

National 5 (N5)

Entries increased from 883 in 2018 to 1,483 in 2024, with a slight decrease to 1,420 in 2025. This shows a 60.8% increase in entries over the eight years.

A-C passes rose consistently from 751 in 2018 to 1,290 in 2025.

Pass rate remained stable at 85% in both 2018 and 2019, then improved to 90.8% by 2025, showing a strong upward trend in performance.

National 5 experienced substantial growth in entries and A-C passes over the period, with entries increasing by over 60% from 2018 to 2024. The pass rate showed consistent improvement from 2022 onwards, rising from 85.1% to just over 90% by 2025.

Higher

Entries grew from 669 in 2018 to 1,265 in 2025, nearly doubling over the period.

A-C passes increased from 562 in 2018 to 1,148 in 2025, reflecting substantial improvement.

Pass rate fluctuated in earlier years (84% in 2018, 78% in 2019), then recovered to 80.9% in 2022 and rose steadily to 90.7% in 2025, indicating significant gains in achievement.

Higher saw a strong upward trend in both entries and A-C passes, with entries increasing by 89% from 2018 to 2025. After a dip in pass rate in 2019, performance recovered and improved consistently from 2022 onwards, reaching over 90% in 2025.

Advanced Higher

Entries varied across the period, starting at 58 in 2022, peaking at 84 in 2024, and falling slightly to 75 in 2025. (The Advanced Higher Music Technology course was not introduced until 2020; therefore, no data is available for 2018 and 2019).

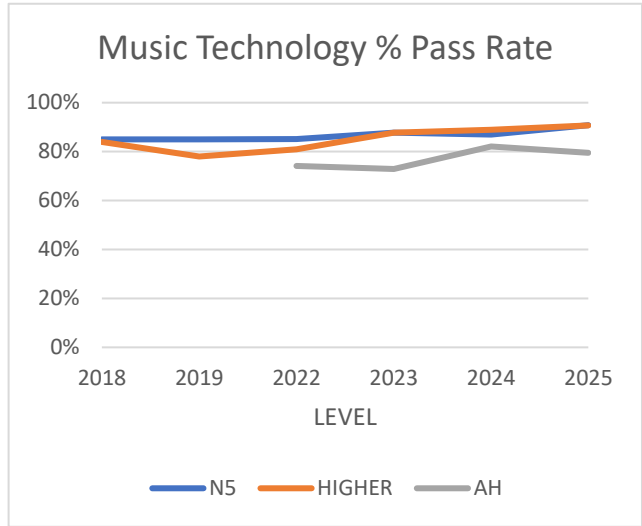
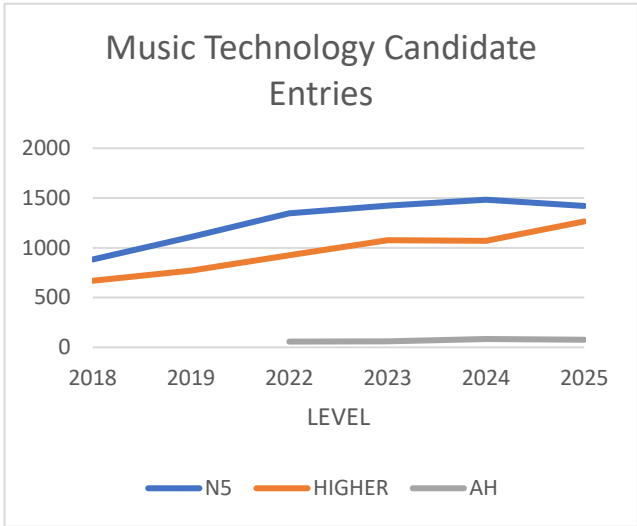
A-C passes increased from 43 in 2022 to 60 in 2025.

Pass rate fluctuated, with 74.1% in 2022, peaking at 82.1% in 2024. 2025 saw a slight decrease to 79.5%.

Advanced Higher had modest fluctuations in entries and pass rates, with performance peaking in 2024 before dipping slightly in 2025, though overall outcomes remained strong.

Music Technology Summary

Music Technology has demonstrated significant growth across all qualification levels from 2018 to 2025. National 5 saw substantial increases in both entries and A-C passes, with entries growing by over 60% from 2018 to 2024. The pass rate remained stable initially, then showed notable improvement from 2022 onwards, rising from 85.1% to 90.8%, indicating enhanced performance over time. Higher level entries and passes grew dramatically, with entries nearly doubling from 669 in 2018 to 1,265 in 2025. Despite a dip in pass rate in 2019, performance recovered strongly and climbed steadily to 90.7% in 2025, reflecting substantial gains in achievement and popularity. Advanced Higher (data available from 2022 onwards) showed more modest fluctuations, with entries peaking in 2024 and a slight dip in pass rate in 2025, though overall outcomes remained solid. Collectively, Music Technology is a growing and high-attaining subject, especially at the Higher level, with clear upward trends in both participation and success across the extended period from 2018 to 2025.



2.1.6 Photography

Higher

Entries over the period increased from 2,320 in 2018, peaking at 2,920 in 2025. This indicates a 25.9% growth in the number of candidates taking the qualification in recent years.

A-C passes declined from 2,018 in 2018 to 1,954 in 2019, before recovering to 2,220 in 2022. From 2022 onwards, A-C passes increased steadily to 2,605 in 2025, showing improved attainment over the most recent four years.

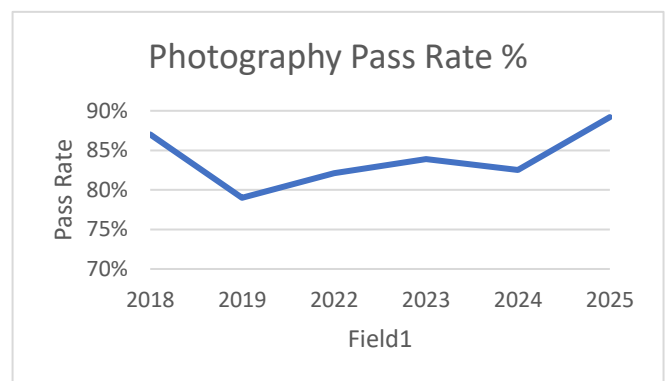
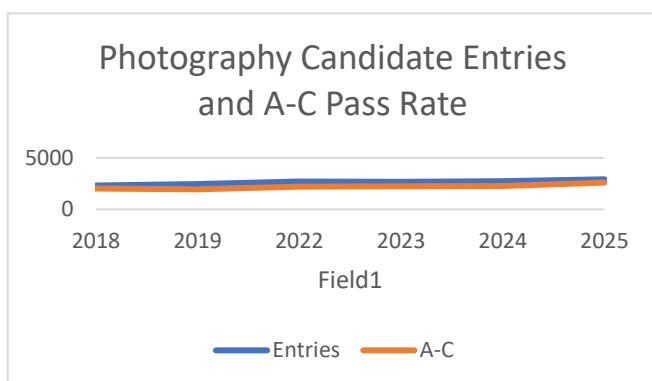
The pass rate experienced notable variation from 87% in 2018, dropping to 79% in 2019, then gradually recovering to 82.1% in 2022. From 2022 to 2025, the pass rate improved consistently to 89.2%, reflecting a clear upward trend in overall performance and outcomes in recent years.

Photography Summary

Photography at Higher level has experienced varying patterns of performance from 2018 to 2025. While entries initially remained relatively stable between 2018 and 2019, they showed growth from 2022 onwards, rising from just over 2,700 to nearly 3,000 by 2025, indicating growing interest in the subject.

The pass rate saw a challenging period between 2018 and 2019, declining from 87% to 79%, before beginning a sustained recovery. It is of note that 2019 was the introduction of the Photography question paper. Most significantly, from 2022 to 2025, the pass rate climbed from 82.1% to 89.2%, not only recovering from earlier declines but surpassing the 2018 results. A-C passes followed a similar trajectory, with numbers now at their highest point across the entire period at 2,605 in 2025.

This recent upward trend from 2022 to 2025 indicates that Photography is becoming increasingly popular and successful, with both participation and attainment on the rise, demonstrating strong improvement in overall performance and outcomes.



2.1.7 Overall Summary

Expressive Arts qualifications have shown overall growth in participation and achievement across most subjects and levels between 2018 and 2025. Over this eight-year period, the sector demonstrates strong resilience and expansion, with almost all subjects showing upward trends in entries and sustained high pass rates.

National 5 levels consistently demonstrate the strongest performance, with subjects like Art and Design, Dance, Drama and Music Technology showing particularly healthy growth in both entries and attainment. Music also experienced steady growth in participation, though pass rates declined gradually from 95% to 90.1%, remaining high overall but suggesting a need to investigate component performance. At Higher level, trends are more mixed: Photography and Music Technology showed notable increases in both entries and pass rates, with Photography demonstrating impressive recovery from earlier challenges to reach its strongest performance by 2025. Art and Design and Drama maintained stable or slightly improved outcomes, while Dance and Music experienced declines in pass rates despite stable or growing participation.

Advanced Higher entries and outcomes varied more widely across subjects. Art and Design (both design and expressive) and Music Technology demonstrated growth and strong attainment trends, while Drama and Music (Music and Portfolio) showed greater variability in participation and pass rates.

The extended timeframe reveals that while some subjects experienced challenging periods, many have demonstrated recovery and improvement in recent years. However, certain qualifications, especially at Higher and Advanced Higher levels, may require focused support to ensure consistent performance and learner success. Overall, the data reflects strong and sustained interest in the arts, with most subjects showing upward trends in engagement and achievement, particularly at National 5 and Higher levels.

2.1.8 National Progression Awards & National Certificates (NPA & NC)

Recent data from the Scottish Qualifications Authority/Qualifications Scotland (SQA) indicates a steady rise in uptake of National Progression Awards (NPAs) and National Certificates (NCs) across creative disciplines, including Art and Design, Creative Industries, Drama and Music. According to the ‘Attainment Statistics (Summary) 2023’, “entries for NPAs in Creative and Digital Media, Music Business and Drama have shown consistent growth, reflecting increased learner interest in vocational pathways within the arts” (SQA, 2023). This trend suggests that learners are increasingly pursuing alternative qualifications that offer practical skills and direct links to employment or further study.

The SQA/Qualifications Scotland also notes that “National Certificates in Art and Design and Music continue to attract a diverse range of candidates, particularly in colleges and senior-phase school settings” (SQA, 2023). These qualifications support progression into higher education, apprenticeships and careers in Scotland’s expanding creative industries. The growth in uptake aligns with national priorities around learner choice, skills development, and inclusive access to arts education.

Table 1 - Top 10 Subjects by Growth (2018–2025)

Level	Subject	Awarded Count 2018	Awarded Count 2025	Growth (%)
SCQF6	Music Performing	10	290	2800
SCQF6	Film and Media	15	260	1633
SCQF6	Creative and Digital Media: Technologies, Processes and Practices	10	125	1150
SCQF5	Art and Design	35	400	1042
SCQF6	Musical Theatre	45	250	456
SCQF5	Digital Media Animation	5	20	300
SCQF6	Acting and Performance	65	235	262
SCQF5	Photography	420	1465	249
SCQF6	Technical Theatre in Practice	40	110	175
SCQF4	Photography	120	270	125

As indicated in the table above, Photography (SCQF5) remains the fastest-growing subject, with awarded counts rising from 420 in 2018 to 1,465 in 2025, a 249% increase. This long-term growth highlights sustained learner interest in visual arts. The Art and Design (SCQF5) also displays a strong expansion, increasing from 35 awards in 2018 to 400 in 2025, a 1043% rise, reflecting a significant surge in creative engagement.

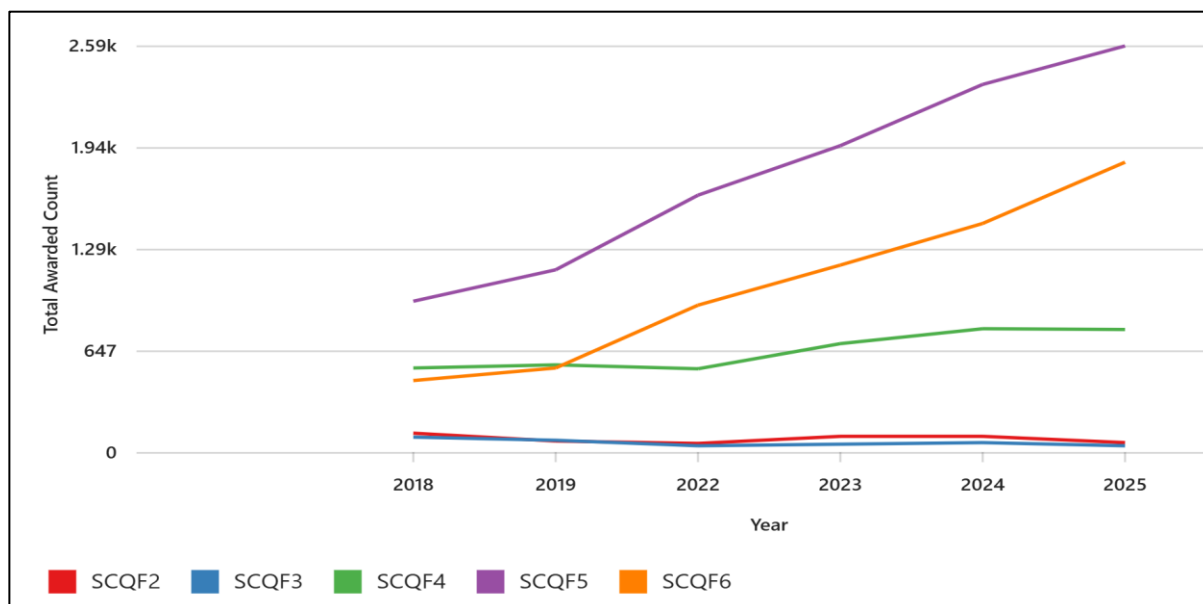
At SCQF6, Music Performing, Film and Media and Musical Theatre all demonstrate consistent upward trends. Music performing grew from just 10 awards in 2018 to 290 in 2025, marking a

2800% increase, while Film and Media rose from 15 to 260 awards and Musical Theatre from 45 to 250, confirming growing interest in performance-based qualifications.

Costume: Cutting, Sewing and Surface Decoration (SCQF5) saw a dramatic rise from no awards in 2018–2019 to 145 in 2025, suggesting a recent surge in demand for practical, craft-based skills. Similarly, Creative and Digital Media: Technologies, Processes and Practices (SCQF6) increased from 10 awards in 2018 to 125 in 2025, despite a slight decline from its 2023 peak of 190. Some subjects show a downward trend. Digital Media (SCQF5) peaked in 2023 at 200 awards but declined to 180 in 2025. Scottish Bagpipes (SCQF5) dropped from 80 awards in 2018 to just 15 in 2025, and Music for Wellbeing (SCQF6), which peaked at 50 awards in 2023, had no awards in 2025.

Several subjects had no awarded counts in 2025, including Digital Media Production (SCQF6), Contemporary Gaelic Songwriting and Production (SCQF5), Digital Media Basics (SCQF4), and Digital Media Editing (SCQF5). Their absence may reflect curriculum changes or reduced delivery capacity.

Overall, the data confirms a strong and growing interest in practical, creative, and performance-based subjects within SCQF awards, particularly in Photography, Music, Theatre, and Costume Design. Meanwhile, some digital and cultural subjects may benefit from renewed promotion or curriculum review. The dataset from 2018–2025 reinforces the trend of increasing learner engagement across NPA and NC qualifications, with several subjects experiencing substantial long-term growth.



Graph 1 - SCQF Total Award Count

2.1.9 Analysis of SQA/Qualifications Scotland Creative and Performing Arts Course Reports (2022–2025)

This report synthesises findings from SQA course reports across six creative and performing arts subjects, Art and Design, Dance, Drama, Music, Music Technology and Photography, over the period 2022–2025. The analysis identifies cross-cutting themes in candidate performance, pedagogical practice and systemic challenges, offering a holistic view of the current state of creative education in Scotland.

Highly Effective Practices

Across all subjects, practical components consistently emerge as areas of strength. Candidates demonstrate high levels of technical skill, creativity, and personalisation in performance, production and portfolio work. Notable examples include:

Art and Design: Focused portfolios following the recommended structure enabled candidates to access the full range of marks. Strong performance was linked to personal theme selection, independent development of ideas, and confident use of materials. High-achieving submissions also demonstrated clear visual and conceptual links between written analysis and practical work, enhancing coherence and creative impact.

Dance: Centres that adopt an integrated approach to course delivery, linking practical technique classes with theoretical content, consistently produce stronger candidate performance, particularly when dance terminology is reinforced throughout practical sessions and candidates are guided through choreographic and improvisation workshops before creating their own work. Candidates who study complete, full-length professional choreographies with strong narratives and comprehensive choreography, demonstrate significantly better understanding and are able to access higher marks across both practical and written components.

Drama: Candidates who demonstrate strong textual knowledge of the whole play, supported by appropriate quotations and stage directions, consistently perform well when they scaffold their responses to address questions systematically and use accurate drama terminology throughout. In performance assessments, centres that select appropriately challenging texts suited to individual candidates' talents and abilities, ensuring candidates are well-rehearsed and confident in their lines, enable candidates to access the full range of marks and demonstrate depth of characterisation and stagecraft.

Music: Most candidates demonstrated very good performance skills across all levels, with clear evidence of personalisation and choice in varied programmes and instrumentation. Well-prepared candidates with good exam technique showed familiarity with question types and appropriate exam strategies, particularly excelling in multiple-choice questions, concept identification, and sequential listening tasks. Successful assignments showed an understanding of familiar instruments and smaller ensembles, with clear harmonic understanding and creative development of musical ideas. These allowed candidates to achieve higher marks.

Music Technology: Candidates consistently demonstrate strong practical implementation skills across all levels, particularly in audio capture, mixing, and creative sound design. Production elements of projects show high quality work with effective use of processing skills and effects application. Many centres now employ well-structured templates that successfully guide candidates to provide focused planning information.

Photography: Candidates demonstrate strong technical and creative photography skills, with notable improvements in project presentation, critical reflection, and shoot development work. Most candidates effectively structure projects into manageable photoshoots, use contact sheets and edits to demonstrate decision making, and produce high quality final prints. Performance in multiple choice questions consistently remains strong. Enhanced understanding of photographic terminology and improved research linking visual imagery to candidates' own work shows effective teaching of foundational skills and exam technique across centres.

Challenges and Areas Requiring Improvement

A persistent challenge across all subjects is the disconnect between practical ability and theoretical articulation. Candidates often struggle to express their understanding in written form, particularly in response to command words such as describe, explain, and evaluate. This issue is evident in:

Art and Design: In some instances candidates showed limited creative development, with repetitive experimentation and minimal progression from initial ideas to final outcomes. Formulaic, centre-led approaches restricted individual expression and creative risk-taking. Evaluation skills were generally weak, with descriptive rather than analytical reflections and limited use of subject-specific terminology.

Dance: A persistent challenge across all years is candidates' limited understanding of command words (analyse, evaluate, compare, explain) and their lack of understanding of how to apply knowledge appropriately to questions, often writing everything they know rather than addressing what is specifically asked. There is widespread lack of understanding of what constitutes a motif and motif development, which negatively impacts performance across choreography practice, choreography reviews, and question paper responses, with many candidates using technical dance steps rather than creative movement linked to their choreographic intentions.

Drama: A consistent issue across all qualification levels is candidates' limited ability to interpret and respond accurately to command words (describe, explain, evaluate, and analyse). This often results in unfocused answers that fail to meet the specific requirements of the question. Drama literacy remains underdeveloped, with many candidates unable to apply appropriate theatrical terminology when discussing voice, movement and production elements (e.g. lighting, sound, costume, set design). Responses are frequently vague or generic, which restricts access to higher marks. Furthermore, there is a widespread lack of understanding regarding what constitutes suitable textual challenge at each level, which continues to impact overall performance.

Music: Music literacy skills remain a concern with candidates showing a lack of understanding across all levels. Many assignments demonstrated lack of harmonic awareness, ineffective progressions, and insufficient development of musical ideas, with repetitive sections showing minimal creative exploration. Inadequate reviews frequently provided descriptive rather than evaluative accounts, lacking musical detail about exploration and development processes, and failing to identify specific strengths and areas for improvement using appropriate terminology.

Music Technology: Persistent difficulties exist in AH research analysis, with candidates frequently investigating skills but failing to complete analytical work or provide supporting media files. Evaluation reports across all levels often lack evaluative comments and technical language while documentation contains irrelevant information rather than concise technical evidence. Candidates struggle with mastering stages, stereo microphone technique justification, and providing complete evidence for mandatory technical requirements across all qualification levels.

Photography: Candidates demonstrate improving confidence in technical execution, planning, and presentation; however, several common challenges remain. The evaluation of final prints continues to be demanding for many candidates, with a significant number not fully identifying valid strengths and areas for improvement in their finished images, even where technical issues are evident. In the question paper, extended responses remain challenging for many candidates, particularly where command words such as 'discuss' require image-specific analysis rather than generic explanations. While most candidates produce effective and relevant project plans, some plans lack sufficient focus on key logistical considerations. Research into photographer influences is strongest where candidates clearly identify a specific influence demonstrated within an image; research that is biographical or irrelevant does not allow candidates to access marks.

Development Needs and Strategic Considerations

Recent trends highlight both promising developments and areas requiring strategic attention across creative subjects. These approaches would suggest that frameworks prioritising depth over breadth can effectively evaluate creative competencies while reducing stress and maintaining academic rigor.

The integration of digital tools is increasingly enhancing creative possibilities, with candidates successfully combining traditional techniques and software applications across disciplines. However, persistent terminology gaps hinder performance, as many candidates struggle with subject-specific vocabulary, affecting their ability to engage with written components and question papers.

Formulaic teaching practices limit creative independence and restrict candidates' capacity to showcase personal strengths. Additionally, documentation quality in Music Technology logbooks and Music composition reviews remains inconsistent, with many submissions lacking depth, structure, or relevance.

To address these challenges, key development areas have been identified:

- **Integrated Curriculum Design:** Strengthen links between practical and theoretical learning to support analytical expression and critical thinking.
- **Professional Development:** Equip educators with strategies for teaching analytical writing, subject-specific terminology and high-quality pedagogy.
- **Assessment Literacy:** Enhance candidate understanding of command words and evaluation techniques through targeted instruction and exemplars.
- **Curriculum Planning:** Promote diversity in project topics and texts while discouraging over-scaffolding and inappropriate choices. Support centres in selecting age-appropriate, creatively rich materials.
- **Resource and Equipment Support:** Ensure equitable access to high-quality tools and facilities, particularly in Photography and Music Technology.

2.1.10 Conclusion

The SQA/Qualifications Scotland's creative and performing arts qualifications demonstrate strong foundations in practical skill development and creative expression; however, systemic challenges in theoretical engagement, academic literacy and pedagogical consistency require strategic intervention. By prioritising depth over breadth, fostering independent thinking, and enhancing teacher support, Scotland can further strengthen its creative education landscape and better prepare learners for progression into further study and creative industries.

Additionally, greater alignment between school-based qualifications and post-school pathways, such as NPAs, NCs and Higher National Diplomas (HNDs), would help ensure smoother transitions and clearer progression routes. To conclude, sustained investment in professional development and equitable access to resources across local authorities will be critical to addressing regional disparities and ensuring all learners benefit from high-quality Expressive Arts education.

2.2 Labour market Information

2.2.1 Labour Market Information: Scotland and Global Trends

On a global level, the World Economic Forum (2025) Future of Jobs Survey 2024 outlines the share of employers who consider various skills to be core skills in 2025 and the share of employers expecting skills to increase in importance by 2030. Networks and cybersecurity as well as environmental stewardship are listed among the top ten skills expected to significantly increase in use by 2030 yet are not currently considered core skills for most organisations.

Importantly, creativity, emotional intelligence and storytelling are all skills that are nurtured through Expressive Arts and valued increasingly across industries. These skills support innovation, effective communication and human-centred design where skills are about designing with people, not just for them, making them relevant far beyond traditional arts sectors.

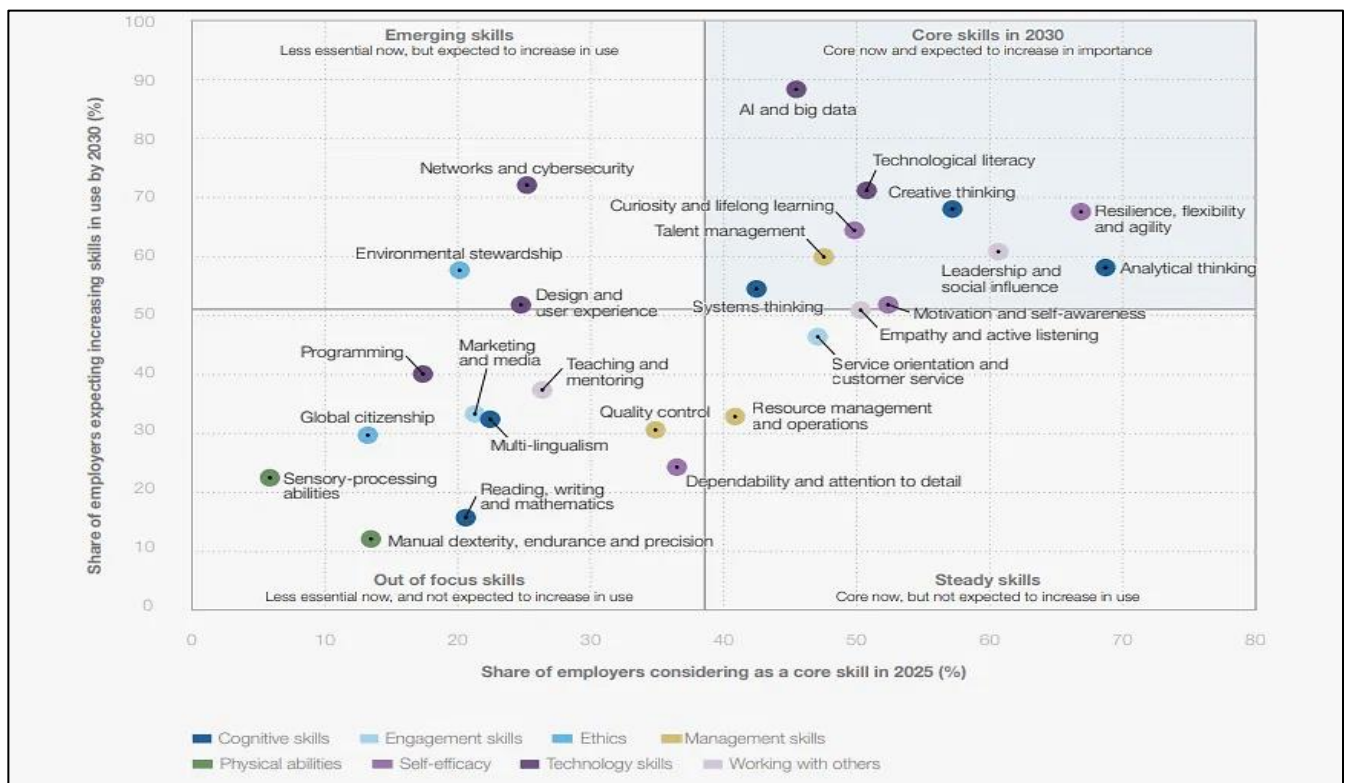


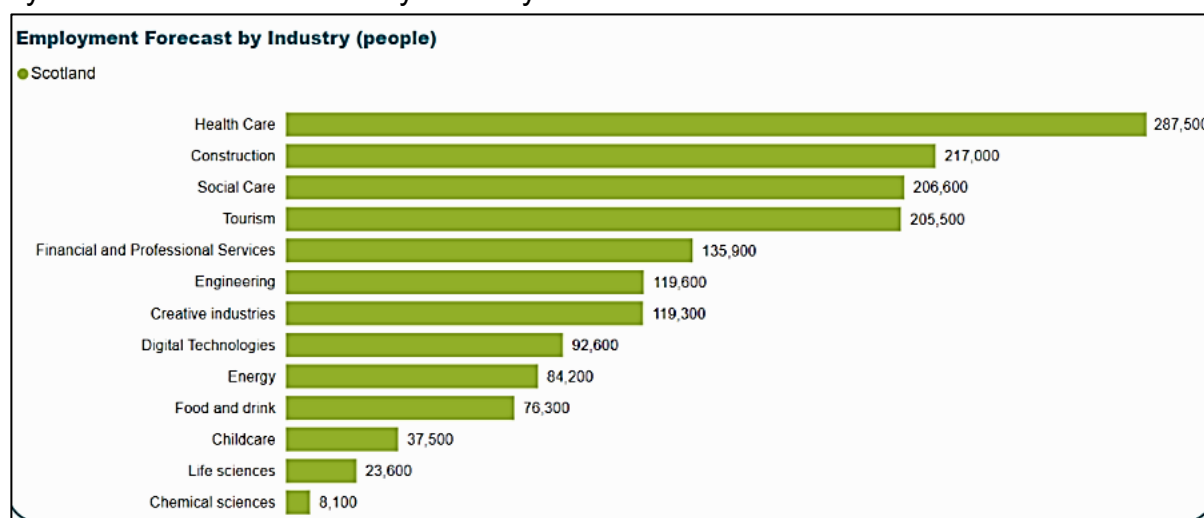
Figure 1 - (View on Tableau Public: Future of jobs - core skills 30 | Tableau Public)

A recent 'Horizon Scanning Project: Future Trends for Scotland' (Scottish Government, 2025) outlines three key trends for Scotland's labour market and skills:

- Scotland's working-age population is growing; however, ageing and ill-health create uncertainty for the future labour market
- Automation and decarbonisation are expected to change the labour market, displacing and creating jobs
- The focus on lifelong learning and skills will grow in future

Coupled with this, Skills Development Scotland (SDS) provide detailed labour market information using a consistent evidence base to inform future investment in skills, built up from existing datasets and forecasts. They work with key partners and stakeholders in the production of regional skills assessments to ensure an inclusive approach to their development, dissemination and utilisation. Regional skills assessments are published annually, covering all Regional Outcome Agreement areas, City and Growth Deal Regions and rural Scotland. The RSAs offer detailed information on regional labour markets across the country. The data included in these publications, including Oxford Economics forecast data, is the most up-to-date available at the time of writing.

Employment Forecast for 2034 by Industry



Graph 2 - Bar chart showing the future employment forecast by industry for Scotland in 2034 (SDS, 2025a)

As can be seen from the graph above, health care, construction and social care are predicted to be the highest employing industries albeit Scotland’s creative industries, including art and design, dance, drama, film and screen and music, are recognised as vital contributors to the economy, cultural identity and innovation. In particular, the introduction of film and screen into Scotland’s curriculum is, in part, a direct response to the projected £1 billion pound economy for Scotland by 2030. Screen Scotland (2023) reports that the screen sector supports over 10,000 jobs and is expanding rapidly due to increased investment and global demand for content. According to SDS (2023) the creative industries sector employs over 80,000 people and contributes more than £5 billion annually to the Scottish economy. However, many creative professionals face income unpredictability and short-term contracts, and the Scottish Government (2020) acknowledges these issues in its ‘Culture Strategy’, noting that “many people working in the culture sector experience precarious employment and low pay” (Scottish Government, 2020).

Figure A4.5. Relationship between the share of tertiary new entrants and relative earnings, by field of study (2017)

Average across OECD countries with available data

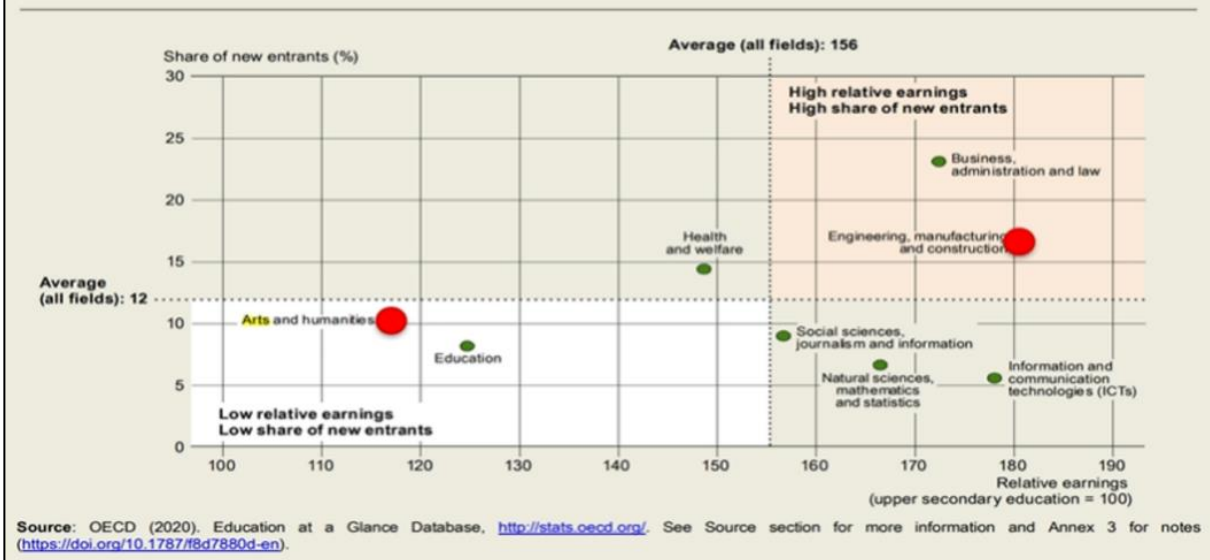
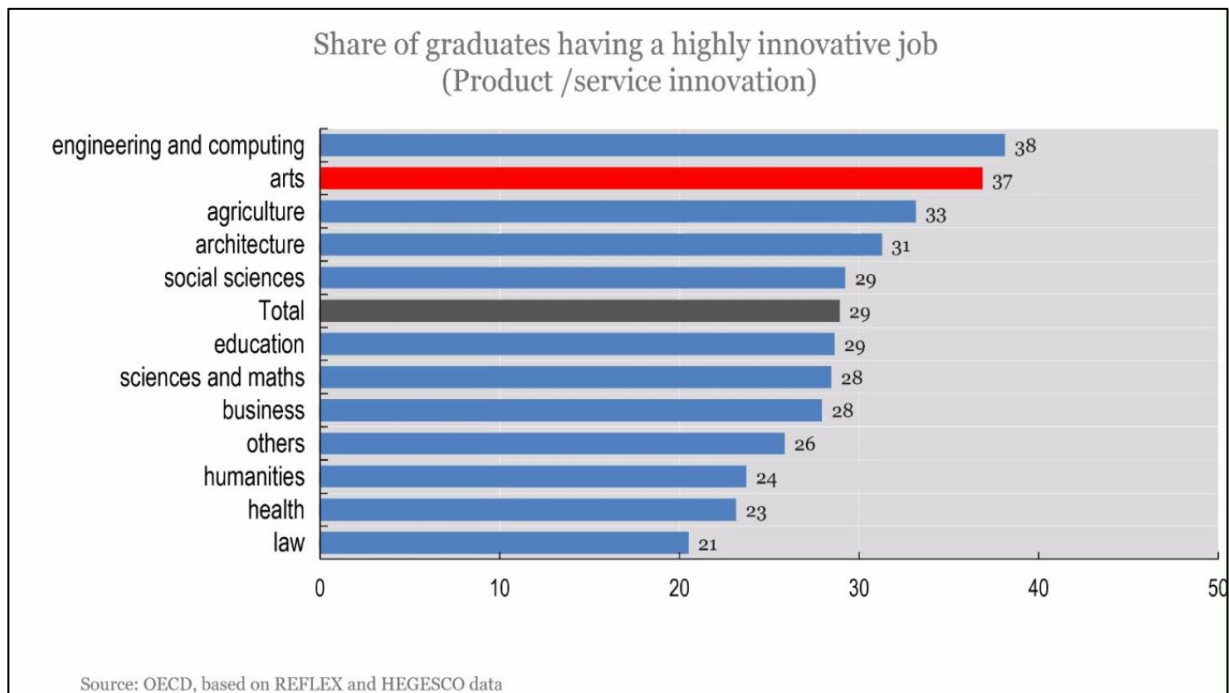


Figure 2 - OECD: Relationships between the share of tertiary new entrants and relative earning, by field of study (2017)

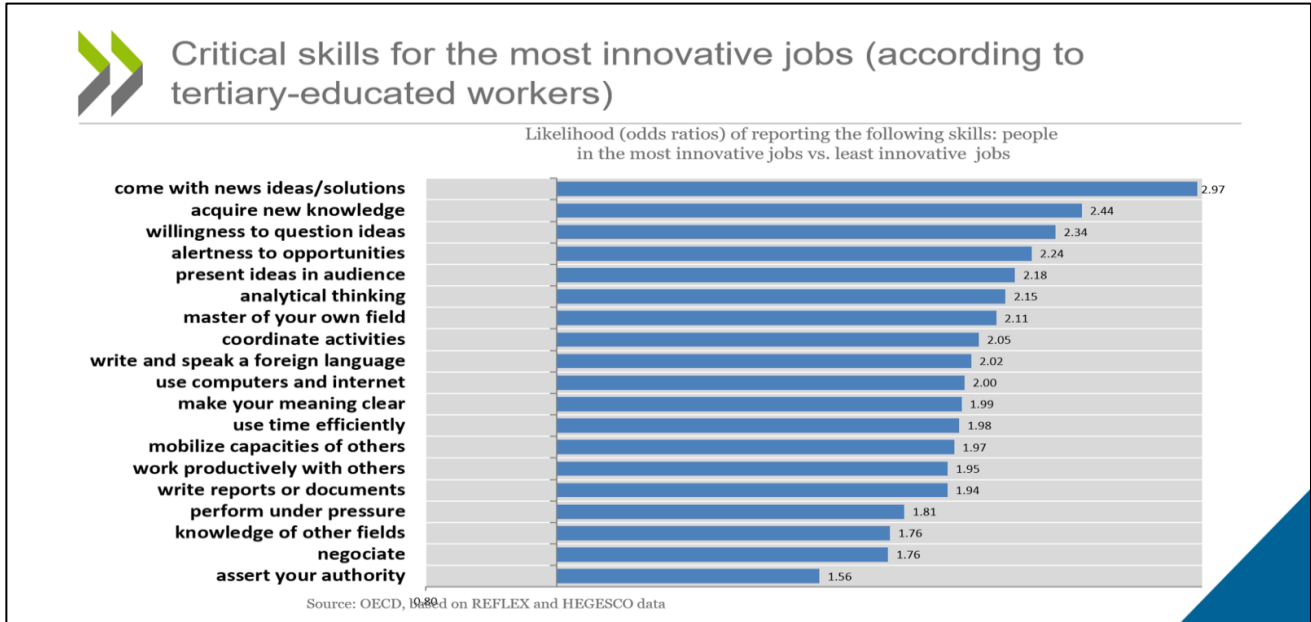
This OECD graph highlights economic utility; on the horizontal axis it shows the generated income of people over their life cycle of employment and on the vertical axis the share of those people going into varying professions. Based on this data, it indicates, for example, those who enter the engineering and manufacturing profession will generate a higher income than those who go into a career in the arts and humanities; consequently, this data drives human behaviour, and within education, this manifests itself in the parental support of children particularly around subject choices, which can create a dominance in curriculum areas such as science and mathematics. Similarly, this forecast also has implications for the range of pathways at different SCQF levels needed to allow learners to achieve the right level of qualifications for the jobs available. It is recognised that across SQA there is an extensive catalogue of very diverse range of pathways available; however, uptake does not always match. This suggests further work may be required to raise awareness about pathways with schools, settings, learners and parents and families.

Conversely, when OECD analysed what degree programmes graduates, in the one hundred most innovative jobs from OECD economies came from, the graduates held the following degrees:



Graph 3

From this data, those graduates from arts programmes came second in occupying jobs that were deemed to be highly innovative. OECD identified that people who had studied arts programmes had developed the skills that allowed them to acquire these key and critical occupations. Analysing this data more deeply, the OECD highlighted that the critical skills in the graph below are key to the success in these innovational careers:

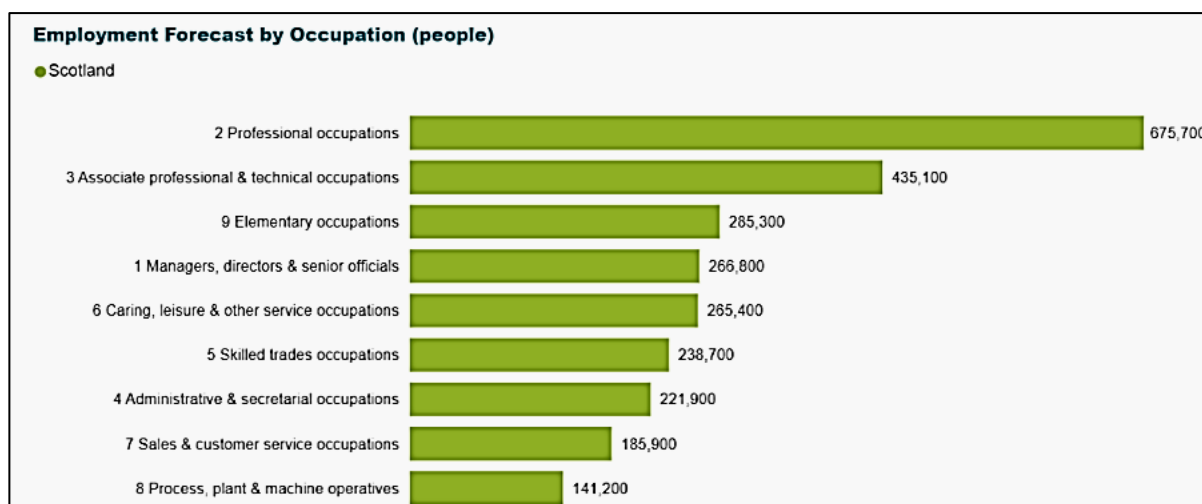


Graph 4

Within arts programmes, learning to develop creative thinking; learn to develop original ideas; to assess the originality of your own thinking; learn to test the boundaries of what is possible; to express yourself; to experience cultural diversity and experiences and different ways of thinking (OECD, 2022).

Therefore, to strengthen the Expressive Arts within Scotland’s CIC work, strategic alignment with OECD recommendations is essential, emphasising deeper learning, clearer progression pathways and enhanced teacher support. By embedding interdisciplinary approaches, digital competencies and learner agency, the Expressive Arts curriculum can better reflect global labour market trends and the evolving creative economy. This ensures learners are equipped not only with expressive and technical skills, but also with the adaptability and critical thinking needed for sustainable careers in the cultural and creative sectors.

Looking ahead the Employment Forecast by Occupation for Scotland in 2034 highlights:



Graph 5 - Bar chart showing the future employment forecast by occupation for Scotland in 2034 (SDS, 2025a)

The OECD (2022) emphasises that “cultural and creative sectors are key drivers of inclusive and sustainable growth” and that they “require a mix of artistic, digital and entrepreneurial skills to thrive in a rapidly changing labour market” (OECD, 2022). In Scotland, this is reflected in the growing demand for hybrid skill sets, particularly in digital production, marketing and project management (Skills Development Scotland, 2023) with Expressive Arts pathways including Music Technology, Digital Media and Performance gaining traction and greater visibility.

2.2.2 Young People's Career Ambitions

The recently published 'Young People's Career Ambitions' report (SDS, 2025b) collects views from school leavers on a range of areas, ideal job and preferred industries being just one of these. In this report over 3000 participants engaged. One of the questions asked was: "Thinking about the future, what is your ideal job/career?". The following infographic shows a thematic analysis of their responses.

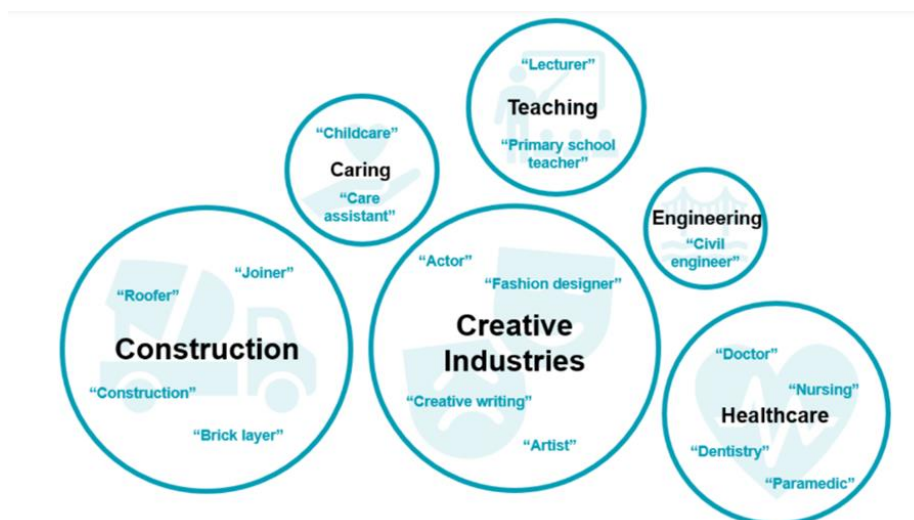



Figure 3 - Thematic analysis of young people's responses to the question: "Thinking about the future, what is your ideal job/career?" (n=1,629) taken from *Young People's Career Ambitions* (SDS 2025b)

The larger the circle, the more the job/career area was mentioned. Whilst there are some similarities to the labour market information, the largest area of interest to young people is creative industries, for which the requirement is less than half of that of healthcare (the top forecast industry in the labour market information). It can be said therefore that there is a mismatch in terms of what young people are interested in and what jobs will be available for them.


This variance highlights the importance of career education that includes creative industries and Expressive Arts pathways. The Capabilities Framework published by the Cultural Learning Alliance (2025) argues for entitlement to arts education for all learners, recognising its role in personal development, motivation and career exploration building on skills such as making, interpreting, experimenting and researching, even in non-arts fields.

2.2.3 Equity, Inclusion and Influencers


Interestingly, a supporting infographic to the report (SDS 2025c) shows that the preferred industry depends on a range of characteristics. For example, the following infographic shows the difference between males and females:

 Top Industries <i>(Top 5, % selected)</i>			
Female		Male	
Medicine and health	21%	Engineering	28%
Caring	17%	Construction	23%
Creative Industries	16%	Digital, computing, and IT	15%
Teaching / education	15%	Sport	12%
Media	11%	Media	10%


There are also differences in terms of ethnicity; however, the report has low sample numbers for this and does not disaggregate by ethnicity (only offering the categories ‘white’ and ‘minority ethnic’).

 Top Industries <i>(Top 5, % selected)</i>			
Minority Ethnic		White	
Medicine and health	23%	Engineering	16%
Digital, computing, and IT	17%	Construction	14%
Media	16%	Creative Industries	13%
Engineering	13%	Medicine and health	12%
Creative Industries	12%	Teaching / education	12%


It also shows that there are marked differences in young people who are LGBT:

 Top Industries (Top 5, % selected)			
LGBT		Non-LGBT	
Creative Industries	29%	Engineering	18%
Media	20%	Construction	15%
Digital, computing, and IT	14%	Medicine and health	13%
Caring	14%	Teaching / education	11%
Medicine and health	14%	Sport	11%


There is also a significant difference in industries selected for those from the most deprived areas (SIMD 1) compared to those from the least deprived areas (SIMD 5).

 Top Industries (Top 5, % selected)			
SIMD 1		SIMD 5	
Engineering	15%	Medicine and health	18%
Construction	14%	Engineering	16%
Caring	14%	Creative Industries	14%
Medicine and health	11%	Teaching / education	12%
Creative Industries	11%	Media	11%

Care experienced children compared to non-care experienced children also show differences in their preferred industries:

 Top Industries (Top 5, % selected)			
CE		Not CE	
Construction	20%	Engineering	16%
Caring	12%	Creative Industries	14%
Hospitality	12%	Medicine and health	13%
Armed forces, policing or security	10%	Construction	12%
Engineering	10%	Teaching / education	11%

Lastly, learners with disabilities and those without also show different preferences:

 Top Industries (Top 5, % selected)			
Disabled		Non-disabled	
Creative Industries	21%	Engineering	18%
Medicine and health	16%	Construction	15%
Caring	15%	Medicine and health	12%
Teaching / education	14%	Digital, computing, and IT	11%
Media	13%	Teaching / education	11%

The report also shows there are small differences in who each of the above groups listed as key influencers on their career with the majority listing parents and carers as their top influencers (except care experienced learners who listed careers advisors). The next most listed influencers were career advisors followed by other family members. Teachers also featured.

Finally, the factors influencing their chosen industry also vary by characteristic with most fluctuating between their ‘interests and hobbies’ and ‘the need to earn money’. ‘Qualifications achieved’ also featured highly and ‘education/training’ to a lesser extent. Interestingly, 35% of young people cited social media as an influence with TikTok ranking the highest followed by Instagram and YouTube.

Within the Expressive Arts, education can play a key role in engaging diverse learners, supporting self-expression and identity and offering progressive pathways to success. Education Scotland's support materials include tailored professional learning and curriculum design for schools in deprived areas and with diverse learner populations. The Cultural Learning Alliance's Capability Framework (2025) reinforces this by advocating for equitable access to high-quality arts education for all children and young people, regardless of background. It highlights that the arts are essential for nurturing creativity, communication and building confidence. Additionally, it outlines that excellence across the Expressive Arts must be inclusive, supporting learners to thrive socially, emotionally and academically across a broad range of learning and teaching contexts.

2.3 National Statistics

'Growing Up in Scotland' (GUS) and Creative Scotland, highlight the importance and impact of the Expressive Arts on children and young people, though direct statistical tracking of engagement in Art and Design, Dance, Drama, Film and Screen and Music remains limited.

A 2022 review commissioned by Creative Scotland found that arts and creativity in education can significantly support health and wellbeing, emotional literacy, inclusion, and engagement, especially for pupils who may be less responsive to traditional teaching methods. The report noted that Expressive Arts activities empower young people to co-design learning experiences, build resilience, and develop critical and creative thinking skills, all of which are essential for lifelong learning and employability.

While 'Growing Up in Scotland' does not currently publish detailed statistics specific to Expressive Arts participation, its evolutionary data has been used to explore broader developmental outcomes, including transitions, wellbeing and social inclusion, which are areas positively influenced by arts engagement. For example, drama and dance have been shown to foster a sense of belonging and emotional safety, particularly for children from migrant backgrounds or those experiencing disadvantage (Ritchie & Gaulter, 2020).

In summary, although national statistics directly linking Expressive Arts to public health outcomes are still emerging, existing research strongly supports their role in promoting wellbeing, equity and engagement across Scotland's 3-18 curriculum.

2.4 Other Data Sets

2.4.1 Impact of Instrumental Music Education

This section summarises key findings from Education Scotland's 'National Music Meeting' presentation in May 2025 which was delivered to the Heads of Instrumental Teaching (HITS). It highlights the role of instrumental music education in supporting attainment and addressing the poverty-related attainment gap.

Instrumental music services contribute significantly to the development of young people's employability skills, including literacy, numeracy, communication, teamwork, and problem-solving. Music education also enhances personal qualities such as resilience, confidence and discipline. It supports health and wellbeing and fosters community engagement through ensemble work and performances.

Initial Leaver Destinations

Data from the presentation shows that learners engaged in instrumental music are more likely to achieve positive destinations, including higher education, employment, and further education. This supports the argument that music education contributes to long-term success beyond school.

Attainment vs Deprivation

The following charts highlight a clear attainment gap between learners from the most deprived Quintile 1 (Q1) and least deprived Quintile 5 (Q5) backgrounds; however, learners involved in instrumental music show higher attainment levels, suggesting that instrumental music teaching can help narrow the poverty-related attainment gap.

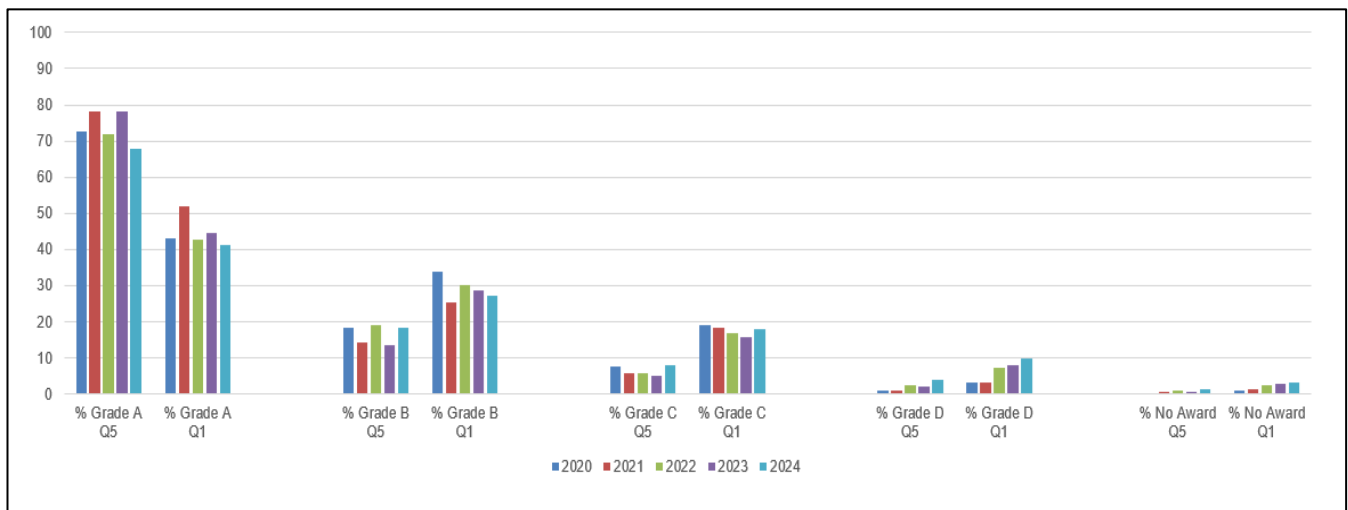


Figure 4 - National 5 Music Awards: Quintile 5 vs Quintile 1

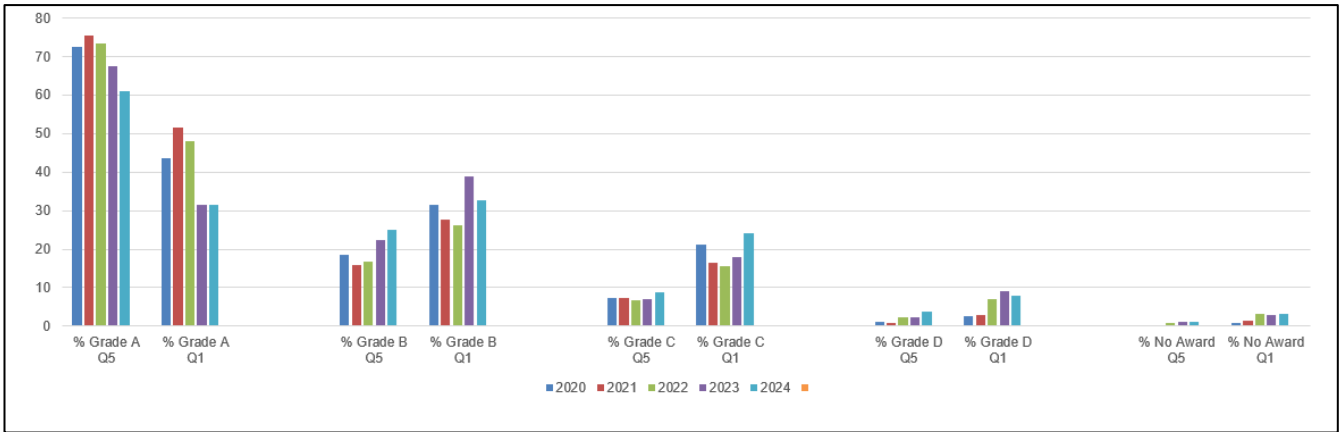


Figure 6 - Higher Music Awards: Quintile 5 vs Quintile 1

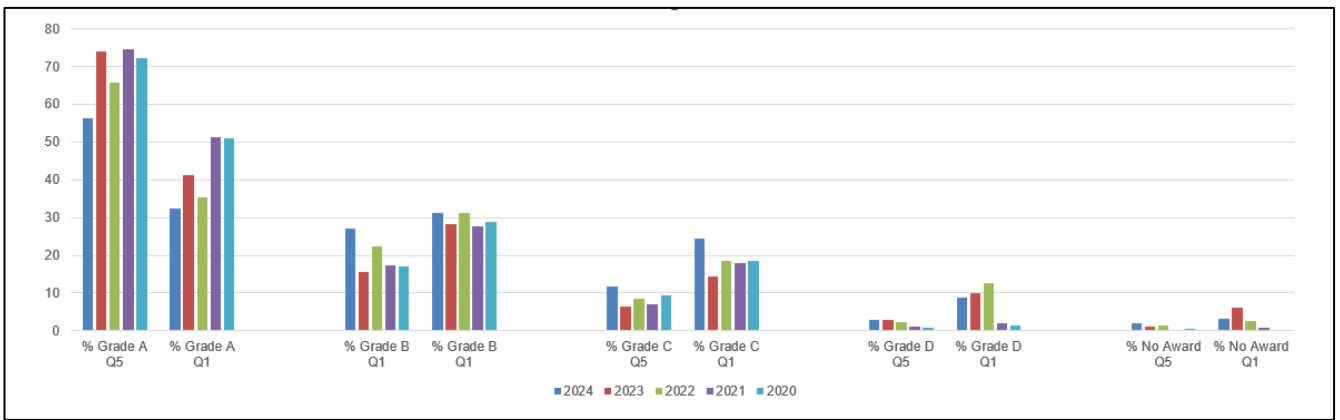


Figure 5 - Advanced Higher Music Awards: Quintile 5 vs Quintile 1

Impact of Equity through Music Education in the Senior Phase

The following chart illustrates the distribution of National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher music qualifications across deprivation quintiles. It shows that learners from less deprived backgrounds tend to attain more as a result of the inclusive potential of music teaching.

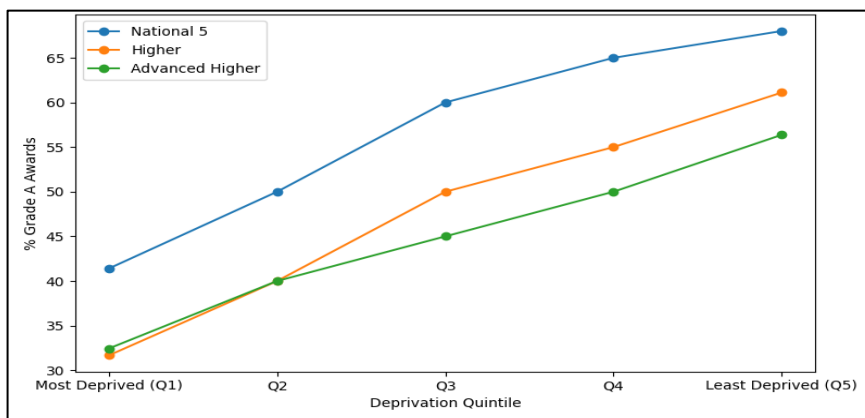


Figure 7 - Music Awards by Deprivation Quintile (2024)

3 International Reports and Comparative Studies

3.1 International reports

Increasingly the Expressive Arts are being recognised as an essential component of education systems worldwide. They encompass disciplines such as Art and Design, Dance, Drama, Music and, more recently, in Scotland, an introduction of Film and Screen across the 3-18 curriculum. The arts subjects are valued for their ability to foster creativity, social and cultural connection, as well as contributing to the emotional wellbeing of each learner embedding transferrable skills. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) have all undertaken international reports establishing a growing evidence base, highlighting the influential and inherent value within Expressive Arts education. These reports outline the implications for the curriculum of Expressive Arts globally and how we can build the findings into the CIC work moving forward.

3.1.1 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

'Arts for Arts Sake' (OECD, 2013), an international research report by OECD, notes robust support for improvement in verbal skills, socio-emotional growth and motivation through engagement within the Expressive Arts, whilst recognising that evidence of direct transfer from the arts to STEM outcomes remains inconsistent (Winner, Goldstein & Vincent-Lancrin, 2013).

The report emphasises that the strongest rationale for arts education lies not in its potential to raise academic attainment, but in its capacity to cultivate "artistic habits of mind", such as observation, imagination, persistence and reflection. "Arts education is often said to be a means of developing critical and creative thinking." (OECD, 2013), skills that are foundational to lifelong learning and personal growth.

While the report highlights strong support for broader cognitive and personal development, including increased motivation and engagement in learning through the arts that align closely with the aims of CfE in Expressive Arts (Scottish Government, 2009) it also reinforces the value of the arts as a core component of education, rather than a peripheral subject.

3.1.2 UNESCO and Global Curriculum Trends

UNESCO, Diversity of Cultural Expressions, (2005) reinforces the Expressive Arts as an intrinsic part of holistic education, highlighting their role in the Sustainable Development Goal 4.7, 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. These goals focus on global citizenship, cultural diversity and education for sustainable development (UNESCO, 2024).

In Scotland, CfE integrates Expressive Arts as a core area spanning art and design, dance, drama, film and screen and music, encouraging progression in both technical skills and cultural awareness (Education Scotland, 2025 updated). In Eswatini, Expressive Arts were introduced in 2020 to promote national heritage and creativity, though challenges remain in teacher training

and infrastructure (UNESCO, 2020). Similarly, in Gabon, Expressive Arts activities such as drumming, mask-making and storytelling are embedded to foster collaboration and cultural identity (SCILT, 2024).

3.1.3 The World Health Organisation (WHO) - Health and Wellbeing

The World Health Organization (WHO) provides compelling evidence of the impact of Expressive Arts engagement on health and wellbeing. Its scoping review of over 3,000 studies found that participation in the arts can improve mental health, reduce social isolation and support children's development, with additional benefits for resilience, identity, belonging and emotional regulation (Fancourt & Finn, 2019). These findings are echoed by Clarke and McLellan (2021), who showed that engagement in Expressive Arts curricula in UK secondary schools supported pleasure and enjoyment as well as personal growth and integrated wellbeing. The WHO concluded that when embedded consistently and inclusively, the Expressive Arts curriculum serves not only educational purposes but also preventative health functions.

3.1.4 International Comparative Insights – Subject Specific

Across the globe, several national and regional curricula have been internationally recognised as exemplary in their treatment of the Expressive Arts. Scotland's CfE positions Expressive Arts as a central curricular area, integrating Art and Design, Dance, Drama, Music and now Film and Screen into a coherent framework that fosters creative expression, critical thinking and cultural understanding. UNESCO has cited Scotland's model as an example of holistic provision, illustrating how multiple disciplines can be interconnected to develop learners' expressive capabilities from early years to secondary education (Education Scotland, n.d.; UNESCO, 2024). Australia's 'Arts Curriculum' similarly consolidates five art forms, Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music and Visual Arts within a unified framework, balancing creative practice with critical analysis. Its emphasis on both making and responding supports a dual focus on production and reflection, encouraging learners to engage critically with artworks as well as develop practical skills (Australian Curriculum, 2015). Finland provides another influential example, with arts education deeply embedded in its comprehensive schooling system. Finnish curricula highlight equity, creativity and cultural heritage and music education has attracted international acclaim. From ages 7-16, Music is compulsory, supported by extensive extracurricular provision through municipal music schools, which nurture both performance and composition (OECD, 2013; Sahlberg, 2011). This demonstrates how sustained commitment to a single art form can contribute simultaneously to national cultural identity and individual artistic competence.

Historically, Drama education in England has been situated within the English curriculum rather than the Expressive Arts. The 'Education Reform Act 1988', failed to grant Drama Foundation Subject status and "deemed [it] to belong within English" (Drama and Theatre Education Alliance, 2025). Therefore, Drama has become a pedagogical tool to support literacy and communication rather than a standalone creative discipline. The 'National Plan for Drama and Theatre Education' (2025) seeks to redress this imbalance by advocating for Drama to be recognised as a discrete subject across all educational stages from early years to higher education. Much has been explored on the marginalisation of Drama in English policy frameworks such as the English

Baccalaureate (EBacc) and Progress 8, which exclude arts subjects and thereby diminish their curricular status (Drama and Theatre Education Alliance, 2025).

Internationally, Lewicki (2009) notes that the United Kingdom has “the longest and richest tradition” of drama in education, where it is embedded as both subject and pedagogy. Scotland and Wales offer more progressive models with Scotland including drama within the Expressive Arts CfE, taught from 3-18 years and Wales embedding drama in its ‘Curriculum for Wales’, 2022 across ages 3-16. British Columbia places a strong emphasis on cultural perspective and creative competencies, recognising Drama as a distinct curricular area, taught from 5-18 years (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2023). Italy and Poland by contrast, treat drama primarily as extracurricular activity, with limited formal curricular integration. Drama education is emerging in China however currently this curricular area remains largely extracurricular, with educators expressing interest in adopting approaches to integrate and enhance classroom practice (Zhou, 2024).

New Zealand’s Dance curriculum exemplifies cultural responsiveness, embedding Māori and Pacific traditions alongside contemporary and classical forms. This bicultural and multicultural approach positions dance as a medium for both cultural preservation and cross-cultural understanding (UNESCO, 2010; Ministry of Education NZ, 2017). The Netherlands has developed a sophisticated dance education system that integrates creative movement from early years through to professional training, balancing artistic rigour with inclusivity and transcultural approaches. Institutions such as the Dutch National Ballet Academy and the Academy of Theatre and Dance exemplify this dual commitment to artistic excellence and educational accessibility (UNESCO, 2024; NOC*NSF, 2019).

Visual arts education has been strongly influenced by Italy’s Reggio Emilia approach, which views art as one of the “hundred languages of children” and places creative expression at the heart of early learning. By emphasising process over product, the role of the environment as the “third teacher” and the presence of the atelierista (artist-teacher), Reggio Emilia has shaped global practice, particularly in early childhood settings across Europe, North America, and Australasia (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 2012). The Reggio Emilia influence demonstrates how visual arts can be positioned not merely as a subject area but as a fundamental mode of communication and inquiry.

International research reinforces the transformative power of art and design education and offers comparative insights for Scotland’s curriculum. Ofsted’s 2023 review of art and design in England highlights that “At its best, the subject is both intellectually challenging and creatively demanding... enabling pupils to appreciate and interpret what they observe, communicate what they think and feel, or make what they imagine and invent” (Ofsted, 2023). The International Journal of Art & Design Education adds that art education must critically engage with the social and cultural values that shape learning, promoting inclusive and reflective practice (NSEAD, 2022). A comparative study by the National Foundation for Educational Research across 21 countries found that visual art curricula often emphasise both technical skill and conceptual development, with countries such as Finland, Japan and Canada favouring portfolio-based assessment over standardised testing (Taggart, Whitby & Sharp, 2004). These international

models demonstrate how creativity, cultural literacy and learner autonomy can be embedded more effectively through flexible and inclusive curriculum design.

More recently, film and screen education has gained recognition as integral to Expressive Arts curricula. In Wales, curriculum reforms have embedded digital and screen-based media alongside traditional art forms, reflecting the increasing importance of multimodal literacy and digital creativity in preparing young people for contemporary cultural participation (Chapman, 2023). In Scotland, film and screen has been officially launched within the Expressive Arts curriculum for learners aged 3-18 (Education Scotland, 2025). A key feature of the development process was partnership with Screen Scotland and the Screen Educator in Residence (SEIR) programme, which placed screen practitioners in schools to work collegiately with teachers and learners to increase skills and work towards the associated SQA qualifications (Levels 5 and 6).

At the same time, UNESCO case studies from Eswatini and Gabon illustrate that access to high-quality Expressive Arts education remains uneven globally. While these curricula aim to foster heritage preservation, creativity and intercultural understanding, implementation is often constrained by limited teacher training, resources and infrastructure (UNESCO, 2020; SCILT, n.d.). These examples highlight the importance of sustained investment and capacity-building if Expressive Arts education is to achieve equity across diverse global contexts.

Taken together, these examples highlight several common features of highly effective Expressive Arts curricula: integration across art forms; cultural responsiveness and authenticity; balance between creation and criticism; and investment in teacher preparation and specialist pathways. Reports from UNESCO, OECD, WHO and comparative curriculum reviews converge in recognising these as the cornerstones of strong Expressive Arts education systems worldwide (UNESCO, 2010; OECD, 2013; CIDREE, 2019). While models vary, with Scotland and Australia prioritising integration, Finland focusing on depth in music, New Zealand embedding cultural responsiveness, the Netherlands combining artistic rigour with inclusivity, and Reggio Emilia shaping global early childhood practice, they converge in affirming the Expressive Arts as essential for creativity, cultural identity, wellbeing and democratic participation.

3.1.5 Reflections on International reports and comparative studies

The global evidence base affirms the Expressive Arts as essential to holistic education, offering benefits that span personal development, academic achievement and social wellbeing.

International organisations such as the OECD, UNESCO and WHO converge on the view that Expressive Arts foster creativity, cultural literacy and emotional resilience, while equipping young people with the collaborative and communicative skills needed in innovation-driven societies.

Despite these strengths, systemic challenges persist. These include unequal access to trained educators, inconsistent provision, limited resources and underdeveloped assessment frameworks. While disciplines like drama and dance show strong evidence of impact, areas such as film and screen remain underdeveloped and require clearer curricular frameworks.

Internationally, there is no single model for success. Scotland's CfE is notable for its integrated approach across the Expressive Arts. Finland's subject-specific depth, especially in music, reflects a national commitment to equity and cultural heritage. Australia balances creative practice with critical response, while New Zealand leads in culturally responsive dance education, embedding Māori and Pacific traditions.

The Netherlands integrates transcultural and urban dance forms into early and professional pathways, and Italy's Reggio Emilia approach redefines early childhood arts education by positioning visual arts as a language of learning.

Across these systems, common principles emerge; interdisciplinary integration, cultural responsiveness, a balance between making and reflecting and sustained investment in teacher development. These shared values underpin the measurable benefits of Expressive Arts and reinforce their intrinsic and instrumental value in education.

For Scotland, international comparisons highlight the strengths of CfE in offering a broad, integrated Expressive Arts curriculum aligned with the four capacities. However, challenges such as variability in delivery, low teacher confidence and inequitable access underscore the need for renewed strategic focus within the CIC. Addressing these issues is essential to realising the full potential of Expressive Arts in developing creative, confident and culturally literate learners.

3.2 International Comparative Assessments

Across the Expressive Arts we do not have international comparative assessments to include in this section.

4 Education Scotland/HMIE Evidence

4.1 Education Scotland/HMIE evidence and reports

This section draws upon HMIE summarised inspection findings reports from visits to establishments between January and July 2025. These findings are publicly available at [Inspection and review | Education Scotland](#). This section was conducted within agreed parameters to ensure the scope remained manageable. Observations of practice made in this section highlight examples of good practice as well as relate to opportunities and challenges within Expressive Arts.

During the period from January to July 2025 HMIE visited;

- 32 secondary schools
- 99 primary schools
- 67 ELC
- 9 ASN/SEN settings

Across early learning, primary, secondary and ASN settings in Scotland, Expressive Arts provision is highly variable, reflecting both areas of strength and significant gaps. In some settings, Expressive Arts are well embedded within the curriculum, with learners benefiting from a broad range of creative experiences, structured progression and opportunities to develop skills in Art, Dance, Drama, Film and Screen, Music and Music Technology. Where highly effective practice is evident, Expressive Arts contribute to learners' confidence, communication, personal development and wider achievement. These settings are supported by specialist staff, innovative programming and strong links to performance and community engagement.

However, the overall landscape is marked by inconsistency. In many settings, Expressive Arts are underrepresented or not clearly defined as a distinct area of learning. Challenges include limited access to specialist staff, a lack of progression pathways and a tendency to prioritise other curricular areas. These issues are particularly evident in early years and ASN settings, where creative activities often occur informally and are not always framed within an Expressive Arts context.

4.1.1 ELC

Care Inspectorate reports have not been included at this stage due to the ongoing development of a new joint inspection programme. This plan introduces a refreshed approach to multi-agency scrutiny and improvement support, which is still in progress. Once the updated framework and findings are fully implemented and published, they will provide a more comprehensive basis for inclusion in future curriculum evidence papers.

Based on this comprehensive analysis of 57 Scottish early years centre HMIE inspection reports, Expressive Arts provision shows significant gaps in both delivery and documentation. The analysis reveals that Expressive Arts activities were mentioned in only a minority of centres, with

music and singing dominating the limited provision found. Most centres that did engage with Expressive Arts focused primarily on songs and rhymes, often as language development tools rather than creative expression.

The analysis reveals some examples of good practice, including an HMIE report, April 2025 where "children are learning about different artists and create artwork using a range of techniques such as marbling, spray painting and collage". An HMIE report, January 2025 also showed promise where "practitioners ignite children's curiosity and creativity through STEM activities, a renewed focus on music and Expressive Arts, outdoor learning and increased opportunities for children to cook and bake."

However, these examples were exceptional among the 57 centres examined. The findings indicate substantial areas requiring development, particularly in Drama, Dance, Film and Screen and Music Technology. This suggests that Expressive Arts may not be recognised as a distinct curriculum area across the sector, despite creative activities taking place that could be better framed and developed within an Expressive Arts framework.

4.1.2 Primary

An analysis of HMIE inspection reports from 99 Scottish primary schools highlights considerable variation across schools, with some demonstrating strong practice while others reveal significant variances. Music emerges as the most commonly mentioned Expressive Arts activity, with several schools showing exemplary provision including an HMIE report, January 2025 where "all children in P4 to 7 have the opportunity to work with a music specialist, including through the medium of Gàidhlig. All P4 to 7 children learn traditional songs on the tin whistle" and an HMIE report, May 2025 where "children have increasing opportunities to develop their performance skills, for example, through instrumental tuition and participation in the Fife music festival."

However, the analysis reveals concerning deficiencies in some schools. Some schools were identified as needing further development in their Expressive Arts provision. Inspection findings noted that "staff do not yet provide sufficient progressive learning across expressive arts, science, technology and social studies. This is having a negative impact on progress and attainment in these areas." Some schools were found to have curriculum imbalance where "staff have identified correctly that the curriculum is heavily weighted towards literacy and numeracy. As a result, children do not experience a suitably broad and balanced curriculum." These observations highlight the importance of ensuring Expressive Arts are planned and delivered as part of a broad and balanced curriculum. While some schools demonstrate innovative approaches, such as an HMIE report, June 2025 where "teachers plan interesting art lessons which help children develop skills in design, drawing and in using a range of materials. Children learn about artists' lives, and their work. They created portraits of Frida Kahlo and replicated Charles Rennie Mackintosh designs", many schools showed limited evidence of structured Expressive Arts provision beyond basic music activities, suggesting significant opportunities for development across the sector.

4.1.3 Secondary

Based on the comprehensive analysis of HMIE inspection reports from January to July 2025 covering 32 secondary schools across Scotland, Expressive Arts demonstrates a significant but varied presence in Scottish secondary education, with notable examples of excellence and areas requiring development.

The evidence reveals that many schools have successfully embedded Expressive Arts within both the Broad General Education and senior phase curricula. An HMIE report, March 2025 exemplifies this success, with "all young people presented for art at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher were awarded a grade A to C between 2020/21 and 2023/24. All young people presented for Music and Music Technology at National 5 were awarded a grade A to C between 2019/20 and 2023/24."

Schools are increasingly offering structured pathways with clear progression. An HMIE report, March 2025 demonstrates this approach through their "School of Dance which allows students to specialise from S1 and progress to SCQF Level 7," while also offering "Dance Teaching as an SCQF-accredited qualification in the senior phase."

Several schools are pioneering innovative approaches to Expressive Arts education. An HMIE report, February 2025 has introduced "innovative courses in Film and Screen and Creative Thinking which enables young people to relate what they are learning to the world of work," demonstrating how Expressive Arts can connect directly to career pathways.

Cultural integration is particularly strong in Highland schools, where "young people use their digital skills to create a short film for the national competition, Film G" in an HMIE report, January 2025, while an HMIE report, July 2025 celebrates "participation in the Inverness Gàidhlig Mòd" and explores "Gaelic culture and economic opportunities in tourism and business through expressive activities."

Performance opportunities are a key feature of Expressive Arts provision across many Scottish schools. Inspection reports highlight how activities such as school shows, concerts, and extracurricular clubs enrich the curriculum and provide valuable platforms for learners to develop confidence, creativity and communication skills. These experiences often contribute to a positive school ethos and help foster a sense of community and inclusion, demonstrating the wider benefits of Expressive Arts beyond the classroom.

An HMIE report, February 2025 represents the pinnacle of specialist provision, offering "the highest standard of specialist music education for very able primary and secondary school musicians from the age of nine to 19." Their approach includes "instrumental and vocal learning which is outstanding with learners enjoying exploring and participating in a very wide range of advanced music activities, selected from a wide range of genre. This includes for example, classical, jazz and folk music and other contemporary repertoire."

The reports reveal considerable efforts in some schools to ensure Expressive Arts are accessible and inclusive for all learners. An HMIE report, March 2025, for example, provides "bespoke high-quality learning in Drama to support young people. As a result, a few young people excel in this area and participate in drama-based activities out with school," specifically within their Department of Deaf Education, demonstrating sector-leading inclusive practice. Similarly, an HMIE report, January 2025 demonstrates exceptional provision, with "young people achieving exceptionally well in the cultural, drama, musical and sporting activities on offer, developing significant skills in confidence, communication and life skills." These examples highlight how targeted and inclusive approaches in Expressive Arts can empower learners and contribute meaningfully to their personal and social development.

Many schools are leveraging Expressive Arts for leadership development, with multiple institutions offering "Dance Leadership" programmes and SCQF-accredited awards. The reports consistently highlight how Expressive Arts develop "teamwork, leadership, cooperation and collaborative skills" alongside creative expression.

Expressive Arts in Scottish secondary education show considerable potential when effectively implemented, contributing meaningfully to academic success, personal growth, inclusive practice and community involvement. Schools that embed Expressive Arts through well-structured curricula, accessible opportunities and varied accredited pathways demonstrate how creative subjects can support learners' wellbeing, confidence and achievement. However, the variation in provision across schools highlights the need for ongoing development. Ensuring that all learners have access to high-quality Expressive Arts education will require continued investment, strategic planning and a commitment to equity across the sector.

4.1.4 ASN

Inspection reports from 9 ASN schools in Scotland reveal significant variation in the provision of Expressive Arts. An HMIE report, March 2025, demonstrates strong practice, with "almost all young people successfully gaining a very good number of National Qualifications awards at National 1 in Expressive Arts," and staff using "fully immersive technology to engage learners and help them meet their individual targets." In an HMIE report, June 2025, the school integrates Expressive Arts into learning by making use of "learners' interests in music, sport and literature to motivate them to engage purposefully in learning activities." Another HMIE report, March 2025, shows how the school offers personalised music education, including piano lessons, while an HMIE report, March 2025, highlights the incorporation of cultural and creative activities such as folk dancing, where "young people participate enthusiastically... often leading to accredited awards." Other schools offer creative or practical activities, but these are often vocational rather than Expressive Arts focused.

Overall, reports indicated that while there are pockets of good practice, the sector would benefit from a more consistent and intentional integration of Expressive Arts to support creativity, communication and emotional development in learners.

4.1.5 Conclusion

The analysis of HMIE inspection reports highlights both the potential and the uneven implementation of Expressive Arts across Scottish education. Secondary schools tend to offer more explicit and structured Expressive Arts provision, largely due to the presence of subject-specialist staff and established curricular pathways.

This contrasts with early learning centres, primary and ASN settings, where Expressive Arts are often delivered by early years practitioners and primary teachers. While strong examples of inclusive, creative and high-quality practice exist across all sectors, the overall variability suggests a need for more consistent support, clearer curricular guidance and investment in specialist expertise.

Similarly, the national thematic report into curriculum design by HMIE found that too many children and young people did not currently experience the full range of experiences and outcomes they are entitled to in their BGE. The report identified in one-teacher departments, in the secondary school context, that a teacher's departure could result in difficulties for continuity in certain subjects in both the BGE and senior phase and that recruiting qualified staff is particularly challenging in Expressive Arts and other subjects (Education Scotland, 2024).

Strengthening Expressive Arts provision system-wide will help ensure all learners benefit from the confidence, creativity and personal development these subjects can foster.

4.2 Education Scotland Reports and Evidence

Apart from the 'Numeracy in Expressive Arts' guidance from Education Scotland (2023) which was written to support practitioners to consider how to make links between numeracy and Expressive Arts skills, the Expressive Arts in recent years have not had any Education Scotland publications of evaluation, insights or evidence across the curricular areas - Art and Design, Dance, Drama and Music.

The launch of the Film and Screen curriculum (2025) has been realised through collaborative working over successive years with key stakeholders including Screen Scotland, Education Scotland, SQA and the Scottish Government. In July 2022, Screen Scotland invited practitioners and partners from across all educational contexts, 3 to post-18, to attend a symposium to create a framework for the draft Film and Screen curriculum. This first phase began the journey to embed the opportunity for film and screen across Shetland, Highland, Dundee, Edinburgh and Argyll and Bute with Phase 1 in early learning and primary with the guidance of Screen Educators in Residence (SEiR) to support testing of the draft curriculum. Phases 2 and 3 introduced secondary learners and partnership working with Forth Valley College and SQA on Level 5 and Level 6 qualifications.

Each local authority took a different approach and throughout this process the curriculum was refined and adapted to ensure cohesive learner progression through levels resulting in attainment for young people. Launched in September 2025, the Film and Screen curriculum now sits within the suite of Expressive Arts subject areas and has led to the national roll out of the new 3-18 Film and Screen curriculum which will be integrated into the Expressive Arts CIC work moving forward. The Creative Wellbeing Fund 2021/22 outlines the benefits of Expressive Arts teaching and learning, as evidenced by the evaluation. Jointly led by Creative Scotland and Education Scotland, arts-based projects were supported across six Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs) to address post-pandemic challenges and promote holistic learning. The evaluation found that "creative partnerships between schools and artists" led to improved emotional resilience, confidence and achievement among learners.

Learners played a central role in shaping and leading these projects, which helped build confidence, problem-solving skills and emotional literacy. Creative activities also supported smoother transitions between school stages and promoted inclusion, especially for those facing barriers to learning. Collaborations with professional artists and cultural organisations introduced new skills and career pathways, while also enhancing teacher confidence and professional development (Education Scotland, 2022).

Many projects encouraged community involvement and amplified pupil voice, aligning with Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, reinforcing the importance of creativity in inclusive education. Despite challenges such as staffing pressures and geographic isolation, flexible and imaginative approaches enabled meaningful engagement and lasting impact.

The Creative Wellbeing initiative demonstrates how Expressive Arts can be a powerful tool for recovery, inclusion and learner empowerment across Scotland's education system.

4.2.1 Scotland's Centres of Excellence and St Mary's Music School, Edinburgh

International research highlights the importance of specialist settings for arts education, emphasising that excellence in the performing arts is most effectively developed through expert teaching, sustained practice and strong partnerships with cultural organisations (Anne Bamford, 2006; UNESCO, 2006).

Scotland's Centres of Excellence combine specialist music, dance and musical theatre education providing learners with access to intensive training alongside the national curriculum, enabling learners to develop their abilities and 'maximise their artistic potential' (Education Scotland, 2024).

Currently, Scotland has five national Centres of Excellence with specific remits around Music, Dance and Musical Theatre.

- Aberdeen City Music School at Dyce Academy (Aberdeen City Council),
- City of Edinburgh Music School at Broughton High School (Edinburgh City Council),
- Douglas Academy Music School at Douglas Academy (East Dunbartonshire Council),
- Sgoil Chiùil na Gàidhealtachd (National Centre of Excellence in Traditional Music) at Plockton High School (The Highland Council),
- The Dance School of Scotland at Knightswood Secondary School (Glasgow City Council).

St Mary's Music School, Edinburgh is an independent specialist music school providing music and academic education to primary and secondary school learners. Instrumentalists, composers, singers and choristers are all given opportunities to excel both musically and academically.

Specialist arts education provision provides a fundamental role in sustaining advanced arts training and widening access to specialist expertise, supporting the development of future professionals within the creative and cultural sectors who shape Scotland's and the world's artistic future.

4.3 Curriculum improvement cycle pilot reviews

The Expressive Arts pilot curriculum review was conducted between late 2022 and mid-2024, with key stakeholder events and reporting milestones early in 2024. The pilot review involved over 150 participants including practitioners and teachers across early years, primary, secondary, local authorities, ITE, SQA and industry specialists as well as key stakeholders including Education Scotland, SQA, Creative Scotland, the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (RCS), the National Parent Forum of Scotland (NPFs) and representatives from initial teacher education institutions and local authorities who worked collaboratively to outline current challenges, inform curriculum improvement and future reform.

Activities focused on how Expressive Arts contribute to the four capacities of CfE and on reviewing the technical framework (Es and Os and Benchmarks) for each of the curricular areas, Art and Design, Dance, Drama and Music.

The pilot review revealed a strong practitioner consensus on the need to evolve the existing technical framework. Educators across sectors expressed a desire to declutter the curriculum and simplify guidance, noting that the current framework, particularly the Es and Os and Benchmarks, lacked clarity and coherence. Participants emphasised the importance of maintaining professional autonomy in Expressive Arts, advocating for a curriculum that supports contextual and place-based learning while also providing clearer expectations for progression and knowledge acquisition.

A key finding from the review was the tension between prescription and autonomy. While hierarchical subjects such as mathematics benefited from more prescriptive guidance, Expressive Arts educators preferred a flexible framework that allows for creative and locally responsive curriculum design. Expressive Arts were seen as vital for developing cross-curricular knowledge and skills, supporting the four capacities and providing real-world contexts for learning.

Practitioners also indicated that what was not needed was more layers of guidance; but new, clearer guidance that replaces and streamlines existing documents. There was also a need for more consistent national standards to support moderation and professional judgment, particularly in areas like Expressive Arts where assessment can be more subjective.

The CIC proposes a shift towards a Know–Do–Understand model, underpinned by “Big Ideas” that articulate the conceptual foundations of each subject. This approach aims to clarify the role of knowledge in Expressive Arts without over-specifying content, thereby supporting deeper learning and interdisciplinary connections.

In conclusion, the Expressive Arts pilot review highlights the need for a reimagined curriculum framework that balances clarity with flexibility, supports progression across the 3-18 learner journey and strengthens the coherence between curriculum areas and cross-curricular themes. These findings align with broader recommendations from the OECD (2021) and national education reform initiatives, reinforcing the importance of co-designed, practitioner-led curriculum development.

Table 2 - Summary Table: CIC Expressive Arts Pilot Review – Key Findings & Recommendations

Theme	Key Findings	Recommendations
Curriculum Clarity	Overcrowded, unclear expectations; need for decluttering	Streamline guidance, clarify essential knowledge.
Autonomy vs. Prescription	Expressive Arts educators value autonomy, but want clarity on expectations	Allow nuanced prescription; more autonomy for Expressive Arts, more prescription for hierarchical subjects
Cross-Curricular Learning	Expressive Arts vital for cross-curricular skills and four capacities	Clearly define and support cross-curricular links in guidance and frameworks
Progression & Assessment	Lack of clarity on progression and assessment	Provide clear progression pathways and assessment guidance tailored to Expressive Arts
Professional Learning	Need for capacity building and collaborative structures	Invest in transformative professional learning and maintain practitioner-led development groups
Implementation	Co-design valued, but practical challenges in participation	Continue co-design, address barriers to participation, and ensure iterative, inclusive development

5 Stakeholder reports and reviews

5.1 Key stakeholder reports

5.1.1 YDance

YDance's 'Step It Up' programme has provided significant evidence of how Dance can be embedded within CfE, offering a compelling model for integrating Expressive Arts into primary education. The initiative placed strong emphasis on developing teacher confidence through sustained professional learning, enabling primary staff to deliver dance lessons that foster creativity, expression and physical literacy. Teachers reported increased confidence in using dance as a pedagogical tool, with many noting a shift in their perception of Dance from a specialist subject to a versatile area for cross-curricular learning.

Pupils participating in the programme demonstrated higher levels of engagement, wellbeing and self-expression, reinforcing dance as both an educational and health-promoting activity. The programme's inclusive approach supported a wide range of learners, including those with additional support needs, and contributed to improved classroom relationships and pupil behaviour. Importantly, 'Step It Up' illustrated the value of a co-research model, where teachers and dance artists worked collaboratively and reflectively, learning alongside pupils. This approach not only enhanced curricular integration but also promoted sustainability, with many schools continuing to embed dance in their practice beyond the funded period.

Key findings from the programme highlighted the importance of long-term partnerships, embedded planning time and leadership support in sustaining arts-based learning. Teachers valued the opportunity to co-plan and co-deliver with dance artists and many expressed a desire for continued collaboration. The programme also demonstrated how dance can support wider educational priorities, including health and wellbeing, literacy and numeracy, through kinaesthetic learning strategies.

In an international context, Scotland's approach through 'Step It Up' aligns with systems that successfully position dance within their curricula, such as Finland and Australia, where arts education is recognised as integral to holistic development. The programme offers a model for embedding dance in primary education, grounded in inclusive practice, professional collaboration and learner-centred pedagogy.

The National Theatre of Scotland (2018, 2020) has documented the impact of participatory programmes such as Futureproof and Exchange, which widen access and foster inclusion for young people from diverse backgrounds. Youth Theatre Arts Scotland (2020, 2023) reports positive outcomes for confidence, wellbeing, and transferable skills, while identifying gaps in access for disadvantaged groups. These findings align with international research demonstrating drama's contribution to social engagement and equity (Catterall, 2009; Gallagher, 2007). The Scottish Drama Training Network (2019) highlights barriers in progression routes from school drama to higher education and professional training. Professional associations such as National

Drama (2021) and the Scottish Drama Association (2017) stress the pedagogical and social value of Drama, echoing OECD and academic studies on creativity and transferable skills (Sawyer, 2011; Winner et al., 2013). Teacher unions and professional bodies have raised concerns about workload and the challenges of non-specialist delivery in primary, while the General Teaching Council for Scotland embeds creativity and inclusion within its standards (GTCS, 2021).

Stakeholder perspectives reinforce the academic and inspection evidence while adding depth to questions of access, progression, and sustainability. They demonstrate both the vibrancy of drama in community and youth theatre and the fragility of school-based provision without systemic support. For the CIC process, these voices provide an essential reminder that reform must be informed by the lived experiences of learners, teachers, and cultural partners as well as by research and policy.

5.1.2 Creative Scotland: Youth Music Initiative

The Youth Music Initiative (YMI) has been a cornerstone of Scotland's cultural and educational landscape since 2003, providing approximately £9 million annually to support music-making for children and young people across all 32 local authorities. Established in response to the landmark "What's Going On Now?" report, YMI was originally framed around the ambition that every child should have the opportunity to learn a musical instrument before leaving primary school. Over two decades, the programme has evolved from a predominantly school-based instrumental learning offer into a multi-strand initiative encompassing universal provision, targeted inclusion work, and sector development.

A comprehensive independent review conducted by tialt in 2025 drew on over 100 survey responses, 25 interviews, focus groups, case studies, and extensive documentary analysis to evaluate the programme's effectiveness. The research reveals that YMI now reaches hundreds of thousands of children and young people annually through four main strands: the Formula Fund (providing universal entitlement to 12 hours of music-making in primary schools), Access to Music Making (supporting marginalised groups through trauma-informed and youth-led projects), Strengthening Youth Music (workforce development and infrastructure support), and the Youth Arts Open Fund (broader creative opportunities administered through YouthLink Scotland). The programme has successfully diversified beyond classical and traditional repertoires to embrace contemporary genres including hip hop, DJing, digital composition, and culturally responsive projects, while extending reach to care-experienced young people, those in poverty, rural communities, and children with additional support needs.

However, the review identifies significant structural challenges threatening the programme's sustainability. The combination of flat budgets alongside rising costs such as Musicians' Union rates increasing from £25.40 per hour in 2007 to £44 per hour in 2025, represents a substantial real-terms reduction in spending power. This financial pressure, combined with annual funding cycles, creates workforce precarity, limits long-term relationship-building, and forces difficult trade-offs between breadth of reach and depth of engagement. The research also highlights fragmentation between strands, particularly weak connections between Formula Fund and Access provision, which limits progression pathways for children and young people. Practitioners across all strands emphasised that current evaluation frameworks fail to capture the programme's true impact on wellbeing, confidence, belonging, and cultural identity, outcomes that align closely

with wider policy goals including UNCRC, SHANARRI, Curriculum for Excellence, and attainment objectives.

The review proposes seven key recommendations to secure YMI's future:

- Facilitating cross-strand collaboration to create coherent progression pathways.
- Reforming the funding model toward multi-year commitments that support depth over pure universalism.
- Investing in national infrastructure for CPD and peer learning.
- Redesigning monitoring and evaluation to reflect relational and wellbeing outcomes.
- Creating dedicated space and funding for innovation.
- Strengthening links with Instrumental Music Services.
- Addressing workforce precarity and sustaining the sector through realistic budgets, career pathways, and professional recognition.

At its heart, the report calls for a shift from viewing YMI solely as a Music education programme to recognising it as essential cultural infrastructure that requires long-term investment and strategic policy alignment to continue putting music at the heart of young people's lives across Scotland.

5.2 Subject associations

5.2.1 MEPG: The Music Manifesto for Scotland

MEPG is a membership organisation which aims to tackle inequity, realise potential and challenge perceptions of Music education.

The Music Manifesto for Scotland, developed by the Music Education Partnership Group (MEPG), presents a strategic vision to integrate Music education into the core of Scotland's educational, cultural and economic frameworks. It highlights the transformative impact of Music on academic achievement, emotional wellbeing, and social development, especially for young people.

It highlights Scotland's rich musical heritage and its global recognition as a UNESCO City of Music position it to lead in creative education. The manifesto calls for urgent action to address post-pandemic challenges, including reduced access to music tuition and widening attainment gaps. Key recommendations include mainstreaming music in schools, enhancing teacher training, leveraging digital platforms, and ensuring equitable access through revised funding models.

The Music Manifesto for Scotland outlines a comprehensive vision to embed Music at the heart of Scotland's education system, cultural identity and economic development. It emphasises the transformative power of Music in fostering creativity, enhancing academic performance and promoting emotional wellbeing among young people. "Students who engage in music learning perform better academically, contribute to their communities, form positive relationships, continue their education into university, earn more through their lives and age better, physically and cognitively."

The manifesto argues that music is not merely a cultural asset but a vital tool for national wellbeing and economic growth. It highlights the legal framework provided by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which guarantees every child the right to participate in cultural and artistic activities.

5.2.2 YDance Impact Report 2023–2024

YDance (Scottish Youth Dance) is the National Dance organisation for children and young people in Scotland. Its mission is to ensure every child has access to exceptional dance opportunities that support personal growth, learning, and creativity. The organisation works across four key areas: Perform, Engage, Learn, and Connect, with embedded priorities including equality, diversity and inclusion, environmental sustainability, fair work, and children's rights.

In the 2023–2024 period, YDance delivered 951 sessions involving 3,260 young people across 15 local authorities. These included workshops, training sessions, and performances, engaging children from early years to young adults. The organisation also trained 93 teachers and youth workers to support inclusive and high-quality dance education.

Among its flagship initiatives, the National Youth Dance Company of Scotland created and toured "The Art of Falling," showcasing young talent nationally and internationally. The Horizons programme provided inclusive dance opportunities for young people with and without disabilities,

culminating in performances and leadership qualifications. The CashBack on Track project reached 635 young people in alternative education and youth justice settings, significantly improving confidence, wellbeing, and accreditation outcomes.

YDance also supported teacher development through the Step It Up programme, which delivered 810 sessions to 949 children and 15 Career-long Professional Learning (CLPL) sessions to 208 teachers. The programme focused on building teachers' confidence and pedagogical skills in using dance and kinaesthetic learning to support curriculum delivery.

Teachers transitioned from co-teaching with dance artists to leading sessions independently, reporting increased confidence and a broader repertoire of teaching strategies. The programme also fostered collaborative relationships between teachers and dance artists, with co-planning and reflective practice at its core. Despite challenges such as staff turnover and time constraints, the programme demonstrated strong potential for sustainability, with several schools continuing to embed its approaches beyond the formal project period.

Additional CLPL courses helped secondary teachers deliver SQA National 5 and Higher Dance qualifications. Cultural collaborations with organisations such as Historic Environment Scotland and the National Galleries enabled projects that connected dance with heritage and visual arts, including dance films created by nursery-aged children and socially isolated young people.

To support emerging professionals, YDance ran workforce development programmes and hosted ReCharge training days focused on inclusive and trauma-informed practice. International exchanges with Germany, Ireland, and Estonia further enriched the organisation's global engagement.

A youth advisory group was established to ensure young voices influence programming and strategic direction.

YDance's work is closely aligned with the Scottish education system, contributing to Curriculum for Excellence, supporting SQA qualifications, and embedding inclusive practice in schools. Its partnerships span schools, colleges, local authorities, cultural institutions, and international organisations, reinforcing its role as a leader in youth dance education and engagement in Scotland.

5.3 Professional associations

5.3.1 EIS Instrumental Music Charter (2018) – “Change the Tune”

The Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS) published the updated Instrumental Music Charter in 2018 to reaffirm the right of every child in Scotland to learn to play a musical instrument or develop their singing ability. This Charter builds upon the original 2011 publication and responds to growing concerns about the erosion of instrumental music services due to austerity-driven cuts across local authorities. The Charter is both a celebration of the value of music education and a call to action for policymakers, educators, and communities to defend and expand access to instrumental music tuition.

The Charter sets out a vision for the future of instrumental music in Scottish education, advocating for:

- Universal access to instrumental music tuition, regardless of socio-economic background.
- Recognition of the educational, emotional, and social benefits of music learning.
- Protection of instrumental music services from budget cuts and staffing reductions.
- Valuing Instrumental Music Teachers (IMTs) as highly skilled professionals integral to the education system.

It challenges the paradox that while music plays an increasingly central role in society, its place in education is being diminished. The Charter argues that this contradiction must be addressed through policy reform and investment.

The Charter presents compelling evidence of the benefits of music education, stating: “Learning how to play an instrument boosts pupils’ confidence, mental health, organisational skills, teamwork skills, literacy and numeracy. The benefits are manifold.”

The Charter warns, “The provision of instrumental music tuition has suffered deep cuts in recent years; as austerity bites, local authorities cut back on elements of education not protected by statutory requirements.” It calls on local authorities to reject further cuts and ensure equitable access to music tuition as well as education stakeholders to recognise the long-term value of music education and invest accordingly.

The EIS Instrumental Music Charter 2018 is a powerful advocacy document that highlights both the importance and vulnerability of instrumental music education in Scotland. It presents a compelling case for universal access, professional recognition, and systemic reform, grounded in both educational values and social equity. The Charter urges immediate action to ensure that music remains a vibrant and accessible part of Scottish education for all learners.

5.3.2 NASUWT Creativity and the Arts in the Curriculum: A Report of Policies and Practices in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales

This paper draws on the NASUWT’s 2017 report *Creativity and the Arts in the Curriculum: A Report of Policies and Practices in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales*. The report

explores the role of Expressive Arts education across the UK and highlights its critical importance to young people's development, wellbeing, and the national economy. It identifies concerning trends in curriculum narrowing, declining teacher numbers, and policy frameworks that marginalise creative subjects. The evidence calls for a renewed commitment to arts education as a matter of equity, inclusion, and national interest.

Key Messages:

- Creativity is a cross-curricular necessity, vital for critical thinking, innovation, and problem-solving.
- Arts education supports emotional wellbeing, cultural understanding, and inclusive learning.
- Curriculum reforms and accountability frameworks, particularly in England, have led to a decline in arts provision and teacher numbers.
- Access to high-quality arts education is a matter of social justice, not privilege.
- The creative industries are economically significant, and their sustainability depends on a strong pipeline of arts education.

The NASUWT report defines creativity as a core educational principle, not limited to Expressive Arts but essential to holistic learning. It states: "Creativity is not confined to the arts. It is a vital component of learning across the curriculum and is essential to the development of young people's capacity to think critically, solve problems and innovate."

The report also highlights the broader societal and economic implications of arts education. The UK's creative industries are globally competitive and economically vital, yet their future depends on equitable access to arts learning. It argues: "Access to high-quality arts education should not be the preserve of the privileged. It is a matter of social justice that all children and young people, regardless of background, have the opportunity to engage with the arts."

Country-specific analyses reveal varying levels of support for arts education. Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence and Wales's Foundation Phase both embed creativity more explicitly than England's current framework. Northern Ireland's Entitlement Framework also supports broad curriculum access, though inspection reforms may affect implementation.

Finally, the report links arts education to wellbeing and emotional development: "Arts education contributes to the development of emotional intelligence, resilience and self-expression, supporting the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people."

5.4 Other relevant reports and reviews

5.4.1 Instrumental Music Service and Attainment

There is growing evidence that when children and young people learn instrumental music it can significantly enhance academic attainment, particularly in literacy and numeracy. Drury (2015) highlights that ‘instrumental music learning can positively influence academic achievement, particularly in literacy and numeracy’ with Hallam and Rogers (2016) outlining that young people who played an instrument achieved statistically higher examination outcomes at age 16, with the greatest impact observed in English and Maths. Further research from Estyn (2018) reported that ‘music has been used successfully to develop literacy skills...’, directly linking literacy outcomes with musical engagement. Importantly, these benefits are not confined to learners from more advantaged backgrounds. Initiatives such as the school pipe band programmes demonstrating that learners from the lowest Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) quintiles outperform their peers academically (Scottish Schools Pipes & Drums Trust, 2024) and Congreve and McFayden (2021) indicate that music education can act as a powerful leveller, noting that music activities are ‘associated with narrowing the attainment gap between SIMD quintile one and quintile five’.

With this research in mind, Renfrewshire Instrumental Music Service undertook to collect their own dataset, collated by Renfrewshire Council DSQA (Data, Statistics and Quality Assurance), to examine the academic performance of learners in a local context. The analysis covers attainment for session 2024/25, including equity data, comparing learners who undertook music lessons with those who did not, across four subject areas and levels of qualification: Music, Music Technology, English, and Mathematics at National 4, National 5, Higher, and Advanced Higher. Renfrewshire Council DSQA conducted a detailed comparison of pass rates and gradients of the SQA qualifications, enabling a deeper exploration of how instrumental music tuition may influence attainment outcomes within a Scottish local authority setting.

Key Findings

Music Performance

IMS pupils demonstrated consistently superior performance in Music qualifications across all levels:

- Pass rates: 100% across all levels (National 5, Higher, Advanced Higher) compared to Renfrewshire averages of 88%, 91.7%, and 88.9% respectively
- Grade A attainment: Substantially higher at all levels, with 68.4% achieving Grade A at National 5 (vs 54.3% authority-wide) and 83.3% at Higher (vs 43.1% authority-wide)

Music Technology Performance

IMS pupils achieved perfect pass rates in Music Technology:

- National 5: 100% pass rate (vs 90.5% Renfrewshire)
- Higher: 100% pass rate with all pupils achieving Grade A (vs 85.3% pass rate and 35.3% Grade A achievement Renfrewshire-wide)

English Performance

IMS pupils outperformed the local authority average in English:

- National 5: 90.5% pass rate (vs 85.2% Renfrewshire)
- Higher: 93.1% pass rate (vs 73.4% Renfrewshire)
- Grade A attainment: 50% at National 5 (vs 40.3% authority) and 37.9% at Higher (vs 20.7% authority)

Mathematics Performance

Results in Mathematics showed mixed outcomes:

- National 5: IMS pupils achieved higher pass rates (75.9% vs 67.2%) and Grade A attainment (48.3% vs 35.2%)
- Higher: Pass rates were slightly lower (64.7% vs 68.8%), though Grade A attainment remained higher (41.2% vs 35.2%)

Detailed Performance Tables

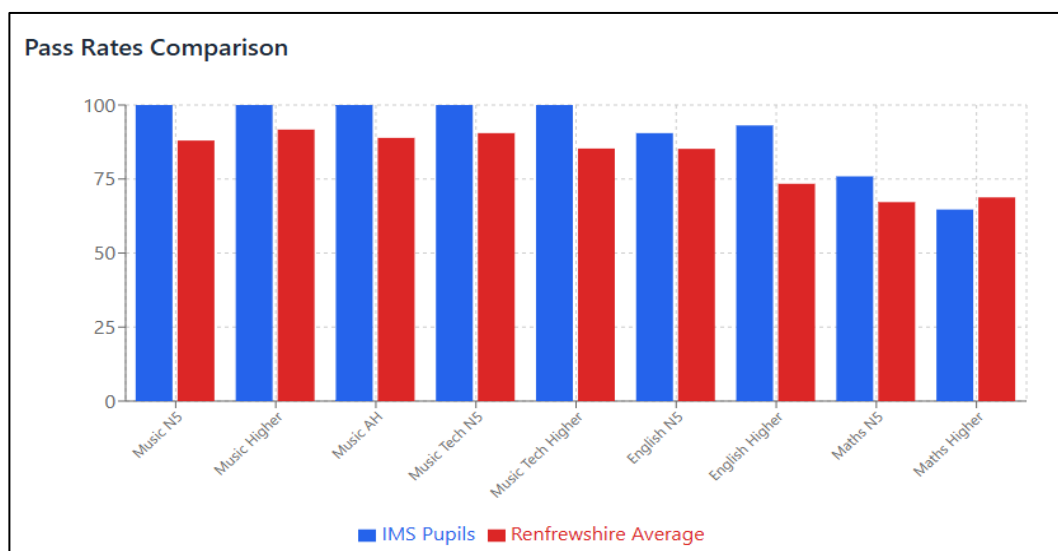


Figure 8 – Comparison pass rates between IMS pupils and the Renfrewshire average across all subjects and levels.

Subject & Level	IMS Pass Rate (%)	Renfrewshire Pass Rate (%)	Difference (pp)	IMS Advantage
Music National 5	100.0	88.0	+12.0	Yes
Music Higher	100.0	91.7	+8.3	Yes
Music Advanced Higher	100.0	88.9	+11.1	Yes
Music Technology National 5	100.0	90.5	+9.5	Yes
Music Technology Higher	100.0	85.3	+14.7	Yes
English National 5	90.5	85.2	+5.3	Yes
English Higher	93.1	73.4	+19.7	Yes
Mathematics National 5	75.9	67.2	+8.7	Yes
Mathematics Higher	64.7	68.8	-4.1	No

Figure 9 - Comparison of pass rates between IMS pupils and Renfrewshire local authority average across all subjects and qualification levels

Statistical Significance and Effect Sizes

The data reveals substantial performance advantages for IMS pupils, particularly in:

- Music subjects: Consistent 100% pass rates and markedly higher-Grade A attainment
- English Higher: 19.7 percentage point advantage in pass rates
- Cross-curricular benefits: Enhanced performance extends beyond music subjects to core academic areas

By positioning this local dataset alongside national and international evidence, Renfrewshire’s analysis shows how the wider benefits of music learning can be seen in real attainment outcomes. Coupled with the research this suggests that the benefits of music education are not just about musical skills, but about wider academic gains and greater fairness in education.

5.4.2 Musical Youth: The Decline of Instrumental Music Tuition in Schools

Music education in Scotland faces significant challenges, particularly in relation to equitable access to instrumental tuition. Taylor (2024) outlines the gradual erosion of free instrumental music teaching across Scottish schools, attributing this decline to persistent funding constraints at both local and national levels. The result has been a postcode lottery, where pupils’ access to music education depends heavily on their local authority’s budgetary priorities.

The article highlights the work of Big Noise, a programme run by Sistema Scotland, which uses intensive music education as a tool for social transformation in areas of high deprivation. Through initiatives such as Big Noise Govanhill, children have been given opportunities to perform internationally and pursue musical careers, demonstrating the programme’s potential to foster long-term social and educational benefits (Taylor, 2024).

In response to concerns raised by the Scottish Parliament's Education and Skills Committee, which emphasised the broad educational and developmental value of music, the Scottish Government provided subsidies to maintain free tuition. However, Taylor (2024) notes that this support remains precarious, with schools continuing to face high teacher-pupil ratios and difficulties in maintaining inclusive access to specialist music facilities.

The article calls for sustained investment and policy commitment to ensure that music education remains accessible to all pupils, regardless of socio-economic background. It argues that music should be recognised not as an optional enrichment activity, but as a core component of a well-rounded education.

5.4.3 The Arts in Schools: Foundations for the Future

Forty years later, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation supported a new report, 'The Arts in Schools: Foundations for the Future', (A New Direction, 2023). This follow-up assesses the current state of arts education and finds that many of the original challenges persist. Drawing on online roundtables with experienced practitioners and a parallel consultation with thirteen young people from across England, the report finds that while the value of arts subjects is widely recognised in theory, this recognition is not reflected in practice within the state education system. Despite clear evidence that arts experiences contribute to improved outcomes for children and young people, developing both skills for life and skills for work, the arts remain marginalised in policy and provision.

This disconnect between evidence and implementation is particularly relevant to Scotland's 3-18 curriculum for Expressive Arts, which explicitly aims to foster creativity, confidence and personal development. The Scottish framework is more holistic than its English counterpart, yet it is not immune to similar pressures. As Taylor (2024) notes, instrumental music tuition in Scottish schools has faced significant challenges, challenges that echo the report's broader argument: that the difficulties facing arts education are not solely subject-specific, but rooted in the wider context of how learning is valued and structured.

The report's findings also highlight the importance of listening to young people's voices. Participants in the youth consultation expressed a desire for arts education that is inclusive, relevant and empowering. This aligns with Scotland's commitment to learner agency and interdisciplinary learning, but it also calls for vigilance in ensuring that these principles are realised in practice. The report argues that systemic change is both necessary and possible, recommending stronger partnerships between schools and cultural organisations, more equitable funding models and a reimagining of accountability frameworks to include creative and expressive outcomes.

In conclusion, 'The Arts in Schools' offers a compelling case for reaffirming the role of the arts in education as essential, not as enrichment. By embedding the arts more deeply into educational policy and practice, Scotland can ensure that all learners benefit from the transformative power of creative expression.

5.4.4 England's Curriculum and Assessment Review: Building a World-Class Curriculum for All

The 'Curriculum and Assessment Review' (Department for Education, 2023) offers a comprehensive critique of England's education system, highlighting the need for a more inclusive, coherent and learner-centred curriculum. Central to its findings is the concern that the emphasis on core academic subjects and high-stakes assessment have narrowed curricular breadth and marginalised creative and expressive subjects. The report recommends removing the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) to restore flexibility and allow schools to offer a wider range of disciplines, including the arts, without penalty.

The Expressive Arts subjects are recognised as essential to pupils' personal development, wellbeing and preparation for life and work. The review affirms that arts education fosters creativity, confidence, communication skills and cultural understanding. Art and Design is valued for developing visual literacy and problem-solving; Drama for enhancing empathy, collaboration and expressive communication; Music for nurturing discipline, emotional wellbeing, and cognitive growth; and Film and Screen, though not explicitly named, as part of the broader creative curriculum that supports digital literacy and storytelling. Dance, specifically referenced within physical education, is praised for its role in promoting physical literacy and self-expression, particularly for pupils less engaged by competitive sports.

The report warns that narrowing the curriculum disproportionately affects disadvantaged learners, who often rely on school for access to cultural and creative experiences. It calls for a rebalancing of priorities to ensure that all subjects, including those that foster creativity and expression, are valued and supported. This includes advocating for formative assessment practices that enhance learning and teacher development, and for curriculum design that reflects progression, coherence, and relevance across all disciplines.

The recommendations align closely with the research and objectives of the CIC, which promotes continuous reflection and enhancement of curricular design. The emphasis on teacher capacity, professional learning and inclusive curriculum structures reinforces the commitment to equity, creativity and holistic development.

The 'Curriculum and Assessment Review: Building a World-Class Curriculum for All' (Department for Education, 2023) concludes that England's education system requires urgent reform to become more inclusive, coherent and responsive to the diverse needs of learners. It calls for the removal of restrictive accountability measures like the English Baccalaureate, a renewed emphasis on curriculum breadth, including creative and expressive subjects, and a shift toward formative assessment practices that support learning rather than merely measure attainment. The report asserts that such changes are both necessary and achievable and that they will help build a world-class curriculum that nurtures the whole child and prepares all pupils for life and work.

5.4.5 Instrumental Music Services (IMS) Survey Report 2024

The Instrumental Music Services Survey Report 2024 presents a detailed picture of the state of instrumental music services across Scotland, highlighting both encouraging progress and persistent challenges. For the third consecutive year, all local authorities offered free instrumental music tuition and instrument hire, a policy that has significantly boosted participation. In 2023/24, nearly 66,000 pupils, representing 9.5% of the school roll, engaged with IMS, marking a 7% increase from the previous year.

However, rising demand is outpacing capacity. Only three councils were able to offer lessons to all interested pupils, while most maintained waiting lists, some with hundreds of names. Instructor numbers have not kept pace with pupil growth; although full-time equivalent (FTE) posts rose slightly, they remain below 2013/14 levels, and the number of full-time instructors is at a record low. This staffing shortfall is compounded by limited teaching space and financial pressures, with service delivery costs rising by £3 million in the past year.

Despite these constraints, the report shows promising trends in equity and inclusion. Pupils from the most deprived areas now make up 23% of IMS participants, slightly above their representation in the general school population. Local authorities such as Glasgow and Dundee have made notable strides in reaching these groups, though disparities remain elsewhere. Councils are employing creative strategies to improve access, including whole-class instruction, community ensembles, and targeted projects funded through the Pupil Equity Fund and Youth Music Initiative.

Participation in extracurricular music activities also increased, with over 18,000 pupils involved in bands, ensembles and other groups. While most of these opportunities are free, some councils charge for residential placements or specialist sessions. Instrumental diversity remains strong, with strings, woodwind, brass and guitar among the most taught and traditional instruments like bagpipes and chanters prominent in specific regions.

Overall, the report underscores the success of Scotland's commitment to free music education, while warning that sustainability depends on addressing staffing, space and funding challenges. Continued investment and strategic planning will be essential to ensure that all pupils, regardless of background, can access high-quality instrumental music education.

6 Academic research

The Scottish Government recognises the value of the Expressive Arts, stating in Building the Curriculum 1: The Contribution of Curriculum Areas (2006):

“The Expressive Arts play a central role in shaping our sense of personal, social and cultural identity. They help children and young people to recognise and value the variety and vitality of culture in Scotland and beyond.”

Over successive decades working through various educational reforms, the role of the teaching professional has evolved with concerns raised across extensive literature about expectations placed on Scotland’s teachers, competing priorities coupled with a lack of deep learning. What pervades are the complexities and demands now upon the role of Scottish teachers (Donaldson, 2010). The Scottish Government, in response to the independent review of the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), is currently reassessing the aspirational vision of CfE and our evolving society and the key role of education (OECD, 2021).

Consideration of the role of early years practitioners and primary teachers and their limited experiences of learning across the Expressive Arts provided a very uneven opportunity for learners at the point of access. In early years training Expressive Arts training is not embedded as a compulsory module for early years practitioners and training for primary teachers may include introductory sessions in Art and Design, Dance, Drama and Film and Screen, but depth and duration vary. Music has been noted as receiving limited coverage and access to skills development within ITE is patchy and inconsistent.

Within ITE, the Expressive Arts subjects are not a mandatory component however research guides us to question the preparedness and confidence of teachers to enter the profession with a rich and confident knowledge and understanding of how to deliver the Expressive Arts and the extensive opportunities they bring. The Standards for Career-long Professional Learning (CLPL) are clear from the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS): “teachers commit to living the professional values and engage in lifelong learning, reflection, and enquiry, leadership of learning and collaborative practice as key aspects of their professionalism” (GTCS, 2021, p.5). This professional expectation underscores the importance of equipping generalist teachers with the skills and confidence to deliver all curricular areas, including the Expressive Arts.

The research suggests the need to be increasingly inquisitive about the determining factors that affect the context for skill development within the CfE 3-18 Framework, particularly when delivered by primary staff. CfE offers primary teachers considerable autonomy to create curricular content that reflects balance, breadth, continuity and progression across eight curricular areas. However, this autonomy also prompts questions about the extent to which generalist teachers possess the subject knowledge, confidence and expertise to develop and promote all CfE outcomes to the “high standard” required by the National Curriculum (Holden and Button, 2006) and to ensure

learners acquire the necessary skills through embedded curricular experiences and outcomes (Es & Os) to transition seamlessly into secondary school.

Assumptions about early years practitioners and primary teacher efficacy and confidence in delivering Expressive Arts activities place learners in inequitable situations with some staff feeling comfortable teaching some arts subjects, while others rely on specialist support. As a statutory curricular pathway within Scotland's Broad General Education (BGE), the Expressive Arts should be consistently and equitably delivered. Yet, Seith, editor of TES, describes the precarious position of the arts in Scottish classrooms as "an embattled subject with an uncertain future" (Seith, Jan 2021).

International research suggests that many global education systems prioritise the arts (Eerola and Eerola, 2014), which is encouraging. However, it also highlights patchy provision in primary where some staff feel underprepared (APPG, 2019; Devaney et al., 2021; Russell-Bowie, 2009). This 3-18 national entitlement is currently producing perceived inequity, with anecdotal and research evidence pointing to gaps in provision, inconsistencies in teacher confidence, limited resources and uneven prioritisation of the Expressive Arts within CfE planning. The work of the CIC will explore a renewed framework to provide equitable access and high-quality experiences for all learners 3-18 and collaborative approaches to support all practitioners in increased confidence across the delivery of all the Expressive Arts subjects.

6.1 Art and Design

Art and Design hold a central role within Scotland's 3-18 curriculum, offering learners opportunities for creativity, self-expression and skill development. Research shows that both teachers and learners recognise the value of contemporary visual art, particularly in fostering transferable skills such as communication, cultural understanding and mental wellbeing. As one educator noted, "Educators are keen to promote the benefits of studying contemporary visual art and design, especially the transferable skills that can be gained", (McKinnon, Schrag & Blanche, 2022). These benefits extend beyond the classroom, contributing to learners' broader development and engagement with society. Photography, while not treated as a standalone subject, is integrated within both expressive and design strands, particularly in the senior phase, where learners engage with visual storytelling, portfolio development and media experimentation (Scottish Qualifications Authority, 2023).

Robb (2022) draws on the International Society for Education through Art (INSEA) to argue that "visual art education opens possibilities and opportunities for learners to discover themselves, their creativity, values, ethics, societies and cultures." Robb further cites Hickman (2005), who emphasises the role of art in developing 'social utility, personal growth and visual literacy,' and Adams and Owens (2016), who assert that art education "embodies the ideals of democracy and should support people to be engaged and active participants in the world around them." These perspectives reinforce the idea that Art and Design is not merely a creative outlet but a vital curricular area that supports holistic development and engagement of all.

A key strength in the implementation of Art and Design is the strong teacher confidence observed across many Scottish schools. Teachers report feeling capable in their teaching abilities and express a clear belief in the value of art education. “Educators are capable and confident in their skills and are able to pass these on to students competently” (McKinnon et al., 2022). Staff report high levels of confidence in their pedagogical abilities and express a strong belief in the value of art education (Creative Scotland, 2022). Collaborative models of delivery have emerged as a particularly successful approach to enhancing Art and Design education. Case studies involving partnerships between schools and organisations, such as Edinburgh Sculpture Workshop and Gordon Schools, demonstrate the mutual benefits of these collaborations. These partnerships promote long-term engagement, deepen learning and offer valuable professional development opportunities for teachers (McKinnon et al., 2022; Creative Scotland, 2022).

Despite these successes, several challenges in implementation persist. One of the most pressing concerns is the undervaluing of Art and Design within schools and society. Teachers and learners feel that the subject lacks recognition, which can lead to reduced motivation and limited support from senior leadership and parents. “Local and national governments do not value the creative industries, leading to a wider cultural bias against the arts” (McKinnon et al., 2022). This perception is further reinforced by stereotypes, such as the idea of the ‘low-paid artist,’ which continues to influence young people’s views of the subject (Robb, 2022; Creative Scotland, 2022). McAuliffe and Yearsley (2021) argue that the artist-teacher identity is often marginalised within institutional structures, limiting the authenticity and visibility of art education in schools.

Another significant barrier is the misalignment between curriculum and assessment structures. Teachers report frustration with the constraints imposed by the SQA, “There is a general feeling of being restricted by the SQA’s expectations, which ultimately stifles creativity and leads to work that is formulaic” (McKinnon et al., 2022). Additionally, educators believe that the curriculum places much emphasis on technical skills at the expense of creative and conceptual development (Robb, 2022).

A recurring concern across multiple studies is the misalignment between national policy ambitions and the realities of classroom practice in Art and Design education. The ‘Arts in Education Final Report’ found that “policy is often out of step with practice,” particularly in how creativity is understood and supported in schools (Creative Scotland, 2022). Teachers report that while they value creative learning, they often lack the time, resources and professional development to implement it meaningfully. McAuliffe and Yearsley (2021) further argue that the institutional positioning of the artist-teacher is constrained by systemic structures that prioritise standardisation over authentic creative engagement.

Resource inequality and funding constraints further complicate the delivery of Art and Design. Teachers cite a lack of funding for training and classroom materials as well as inconsistent support from local authorities. Professional development opportunities are also limited, particularly in contemporary art practices. Smyth and Davis (2016) found that teachers frequently experience anxiety about teaching art, citing a perceived lack of artistic skill. Similarly, Brooke, MacDonald and Hunter (2024) emphasise that primary teachers often feel isolated and underprepared, particularly in regional contexts, and advocate for collaborative frameworks to build creative

confidence and pedagogical agency. These findings align with Robb's (2022) observation that classroom art lessons are often tied to interdisciplinary topics and vary depending on the teacher's comfort level with the subject.

Robb's (2022) survey of 110 Scottish primary teachers revealed that while most valued Art and Design, only a third felt confident teaching it. Two-thirds reported that their initial teacher education had left them feeling unprepared and the majority were unaware of any formal professional learning opportunities available to them. The 'Arts in Education Final Report' (Creative Scotland, 2022) similarly highlights the need for career-long professional learning and better access to contemporary visual arts training.

Barriers to external engagement, including COVID-19 disruptions, poor communication and administrative challenges, have further impacted the ability of schools to collaborate with visual arts organisations. "From the visual arts sector, one third highlighted poor communication with schools as a factor inhibiting their ability to engage with them," while teachers cited "administrative barriers and lack of 'buy-in' from senior management" (McKinnon et al., 2022). These issues limit the potential for enriching partnerships and reduce opportunities for students to engage with professional artists and organisations (Creative Scotland, 2022). A final challenge lies in inequity and representation within the curriculum. There is a noted lack of materials and content that reflect the experiences of ethnic minorities and working-class communities. "Anecdotally, it is clear that both the curriculum and the materials that teachers are exposed to, or are using, in their classrooms are insufficient in speaking to all constituent parts of Scottish society" (McKinnon et al., 2022). McAuliffe and Yearsley (2021) argue that inclusive practices must be embedded in curriculum design to ensure that all learners see themselves reflected in the subject matter.

Despite these challenges, the impact of Art and Design education on learners is profound. Young people consistently highlight the personal, mental health and pastoral benefits of engaging with art. They also value the classroom as a unique space for personal development and support (Creative Scotland, 2022).

Scotland's approach to Art and Design aligns with international best practices of an integrated approach across Art and Design. Finland, Canada, Singapore and Australia all embed photography within senior education, considering the impact it can have to develop visual literacy, promote cultural awareness and engagement (Barrett, 2019) and on identity and critical thinking (Australian Curriculum Studies Association, 2021). The OECD (2019) supports these approaches, noting that visual arts education, including photography, enhances creativity, innovation and global competence.

While Art and Design is recognised as a powerful and transformative element of the Expressive Arts curriculum, its implementation across Scottish schools remains uneven. Addressing issues of undervaluation, curriculum misalignment, resource inequality and representation will be essential to ensuring that all learners can access the full benefits of art education. Strengthening collaborative models, investing in professional development and promoting inclusive practices will help art and design to integrate creativity, wellbeing and lifelong learning further to support learner development in a global context.

6.2 Dance

Dance is a culturally important element of Scotland's Expressive Arts curriculum and although it offers rich opportunities for creativity, wellbeing and interdisciplinary learning across the 3-18 curriculum, data outlines the limited engagement, especially within the senior phase compared with the other Expressive Arts NQs. It is recognised within CfE as a medium through which learners can explore movement, emotion and identity, while developing physical coordination, confidence and expressive capabilities. Yet despite its curricular status, Dance remains inconsistently delivered across Scottish schools, particularly in the primary sector.

Research by Slattery and Rae reveals that 80% of student teachers on school-based placements were unable to observe any dance lessons, highlighting a concerning lack of exposure and modelling. While the majority of teachers value Dance, nearly half report feeling underconfident in delivering it. Time pressures from an overcrowded curriculum, lack of experience and subject hierarchy contribute to Dance falling below other priorities. Alarmingly, almost half of teachers describe dance education in their school as "almost non-existent," with only 2% identifying a progressive dance programme (Slattery & Rae, 2022).

Dance shares pedagogical space with Physical Education (PE), yet its expressive nature sets it apart. While PE often focuses on performance, fitness and competition, dance invites learners to explore expressive emotion, narrative and cultural identity through movement. This expressive dimension aligns closely with the aims of CfE to develop confident individuals and effective contributors. However, when Dance is subsumed under PE without adequate distinction, its creative and emotional potential can be overlooked. Teachers have noted that the biggest challenge to dance education is time within the busy curriculum, with lack of confidence and subject status also contributing (Slattery & Rae, 2022).

National and international research confirms these challenges. 'One Dance UK' reports that "over the last decade, dance has been marginalised as an educational subject," with staffing cuts, reduced curriculum time and a shift toward knowledge-based performance measures contributing to its decline (One Dance UK, 2023). Although Dance is listed as a compulsory activity within the English National Curriculum for PE, its expressive and creative dimensions are often lost when taught solely through a physical education lens. The Cultural Learning Alliance notes that "despite featuring as a compulsory PE activity... access to dance education is far from a level playing field," with provision varying widely between schools and often lacking artistic depth (Cultural Learning Alliance, 2023). In Australia, Russell-Bowie found that Dance was frequently taught by primary teachers or PE staff with limited arts training, leading to inconsistent quality and reduced confidence. Russell-Bowie argues that "unless teachers are trained and supported to teach dance as an expressive art form, it risks being reduced to fitness or movement drills" (Russell-Bowie, 2009).

Despite these challenges, Dance has a profound impact on learners. It is increasingly used as a vehicle for interdisciplinary learning (IDL), with programmes like 'Maths in Your Feet' and Education Scotland's 'Numeracy in Expressive Arts' demonstrating how Dance can reinforce mathematical concepts in real-life contexts. Becker emphasises that children not only understand

concepts better but retain them longer when the body is involved in the learning process (Becker, 2013). Dance supports holistic development, as Leandro, Monteiro and Melo affirm: “Dance in education can play an unquestionable role in the child’s integral growth... physical, emotional, artistic, social, cognitive and creative development” (Leandro, Monteiro & Melo, 2018).

Dance also contributes significantly to mental health and wellbeing. Connolly, Quin and Redding found that contemporary dance interventions improved self-esteem and overall wellbeing in young participants (Connolly, Quin & Redding, 2011). Similarly, Jeong et al. reported decreased mental dissatisfaction among teenagers following dance-based interventions (Jeong et al., 2005). Ritchie and Gaulter further highlight how dance fosters connection and belonging, particularly for migrant pupils, enhancing their positive self-perceptions and social integration (Ritchie & Gaulter, 2020). Participating in dance-based interventions helps pupils feel safe, connect with others and engage meaningfully, all key factors linked to a sense of belonging.

Slattery and Rae report that 84% of teachers felt unprepared to teach Dance following ITE, with confidence largely dependent on prior personal experience. While four major Scottish universities include Dance content in their ITE programmes, the time allocated varies widely from as little as 1-2 hours to 8-12 hours. Furthermore, 76% of teachers say there is no opportunity for CLPL in Dance and none reported access to regular training. With 80% of Dance education delivered by class teachers, this represents a missed opportunity to build capacity and confidence. Over half of teachers (57%) feel underconfident planning and delivering dance lessons (Slattery & Rae, 2022).

Equity issues are also prominent. Teachers working in schools identified as SIMD 1 or 2 report poor-quality resources and equipment (81%) and children in disadvantaged areas are twice as likely to experience little or no Dance education compared to their peers in more affluent communities (Slattery & Rae, 2022).

External partnerships offer a promising route to enrich Dance education. Collaborations with national arts organisations, community groups and centres like the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland can bring specialist expertise into schools. However, only 11% of teachers report working collaboratively with such organisations, signalling a missed opportunity to deepen student experiences and support teacher development (Slattery & Rae, 2022). The enhanced skills and knowledge brought by specialist arts organisations cannot be denied and it is recognised that children have a deeper and richer experience when working with these companies.

The Expressive Arts curriculum, including Dance, has clear strengths in fostering learner wellbeing, creativity and engagement. Yet barriers such as time constraints, lack of training and inconsistent school engagement continue to limit its potential. These challenges are echoed in international comparisons, where countries like Finland and Australia have embedded Dance more robustly into their national curricula, often supported by specialist staff and sustained professional development (Russell-Bowie, 2009).

To fully realise the benefits of Dance education in Scotland, there is a need for systemic investment in teacher training, equitable resource distribution and stronger partnerships with the

arts sector. Dance is not only a curricular entitlement, but also a powerful tool for inclusion, expression and lifelong learning. Addressing the current gaps will ensure that all children and young people, regardless of background, can access the transformative potential of dance.

6.3 Drama

Drama education in Scotland supports learners to develop confidence, creativity and social-emotional skills. It is recognised within CfE as a key strand of the Expressive Arts, supporting the development of the four capacities. Drama offers a unique space for learners to explore identity, empathy and collaboration through imaginative play, role-taking and storytelling.

Claire Hamilton's 2025 study, 'A Framework to Enhance Learner Participation through the Drama Curriculum', emphasises drama's role in fulfilling the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), now embedded in Scots Law (Scottish Parliament, 2021). Hamilton describes drama as "the most emancipatory aspect" of the Expressive Arts, highlighting its potential to promote pupil voice, shared decision-making and inclusive pedagogy. This framework aligns with the UNCRC's affirmation of every child's right to participate in cultural and artistic life.

Research commissioned by Creative Scotland and managed by Imagine (2022) mapped Drama engagement across primary schools, finding that 88% had watched performances and 68% had participated in drama-related activities. These ranged from one-off workshops to long-term artist residencies. Teachers reported that Drama supported health and wellbeing, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and enhanced curricular delivery through interdisciplinary learning. Education Scotland's updated guidance on 'Learning and Teaching in Drama' (2019) reinforces this, encouraging educators to use drama to explore social issues, develop emotional literacy and support literacy and language development through expressive means.

Despite its recognised value, Drama education faces several challenges, including limited curricular time, inconsistent ITE and a lack of specialist support, particularly in early years and primary settings. While some schools benefit from partnerships with arts organisations such as Theatre in Schools Scotland and Eco Drama, these collaborations remain unevenly distributed across regions. The Imagine report (2022) notes that sustained engagement with external partners can significantly enrich both student experience and teacher confidence.

The 'National Plan for Drama and Theatre Education' (DTEA, 2025) offers a strategic vision for equitable, high-quality drama provision across the UK. Developed by the Drama and Theatre Education Alliance, the plan advocates for Drama as a discrete subject with equal status to other arts disciplines, from early years through to higher education. It emphasises that all children and young people should receive weekly practical Drama experiences led by trained educators and be entitled to annual, live theatre visits to foster cultural engagement and personal growth. Baldwin (2011) and Howell & Heap (2013), cited within the plan, advocate for Drama as a subject that demands pedagogical rigour and creative autonomy. At tertiary level, the plan promotes balanced practice-theory courses, interdisciplinary study and clear vocational pathways. Drama is positioned as a driver of social mobility, wellbeing and employability, with calls for reform in funding, apprenticeships and teacher training to dismantle systemic barriers (DICE Research, cited in DTEA, 2025).

In early years education, Drama is framed as integral to child development, with role-play and storytelling recognised as foundational learning tools. The plan recommends enhanced training

for support staff and structured opportunities for story-making and circle time (Readman, 2024, cited in DTEA, 2025). For learners with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), Drama is celebrated for its therapeutic and exploratory potential. The plan advocates for applied Drama practices, sensory engagement and inclusive curriculum design, alongside increased access to specialist CLPL and partnerships with theatre practitioners (Brigg, 2021).

Similarly in the 2025 Curriculum and Assessment Review: Building a world-class curriculum for all Professor Becky Francis states that Drama has a critical role to play in the development of oracy emphasising the strong links to oracy and presenting skills and provides an important introduction to the performing arts. It is a valuable part of a broad and balanced curriculum that builds learners' confidence and prepares them for later life (Francis, 2025). At the same time, the report also warns that there is, from their engagement with teachers, a lack of clarity and specificity in the requirements for Drama meaning that it is not clear how the subject should be taught, what essential knowledge and skills pupils should acquire or what outcomes are expected at the end of each key stage.

The OECD, through its studies and research into classroom Drama education identified links to the development of literacy skills, in particular strengthening verbal skills in children and young people. Schleicher (2022) highlighted the importance of children and young people's participation in classroom drama to build capacity in the ability to express themselves and build efficacy and agency with others. As illustrated, OECD data on classroom drama highlights measurable benefits in verbal skills, strengthening the case for more universal curricular roll out (OECD, 2013).

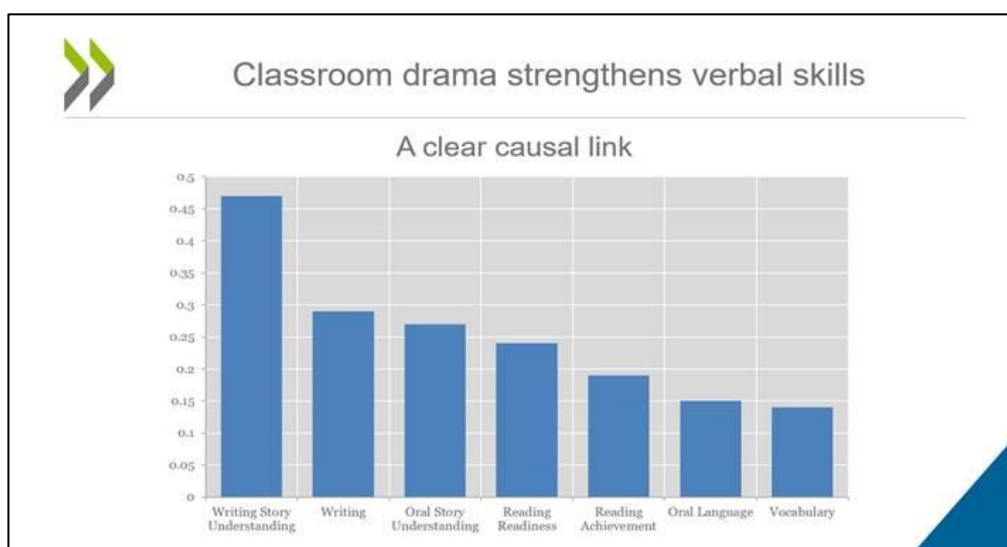


Figure 10 - OECD, 2022

Layton (2025) adds to this discourse by addressing the growing demand for Drama education in Scotland and the systemic challenges in teacher training. Contrary to narratives of decline, Layton notes a strong demand for qualified Drama teachers. However, only two universities, Aberdeen and Edinburgh, offer a Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) in Drama, creating a bottleneck for aspiring educators. Consequently, Drama is often taught by teachers qualified in other subjects, such as English or Music, who may lack subject-specific expertise. To address this gap, the University of the West of Scotland (UWS) has developed CPD modules for GTCS-

registered teachers seeking dual qualification in Drama. These modules require 80 SCQF credits at Levels 7 and 8, combining theory and practice through hybrid delivery. Modules such as “From Page to Stage” engage with key texts and techniques, aligning with the SQA Higher Drama curriculum and promoting inclusive, globally representative content (GTCS, 2024; SQA, 2023; Neelands & Goode, 2000).

In conclusion, Drama education in Scotland holds significant potential to support learner wellbeing, creativity and inclusion. Theatres are identified as key partners in education, while Drama is framed as central to building a creative, empathetic and democratic society (Heathcote, 2009). However, to realise this fully, greater investment in teacher training, equitable access to resources and stronger partnerships with the arts sector are needed. By embedding Drama more consistently across the 3-18 curriculum and supporting educators with the tools and confidence to deliver it, Scotland can ensure that all learners benefit from the transformative power of Drama.

6.4 Film and Screen

Film and Screen education has gained increasing recognition within the Expressive Arts curriculum in Scotland, particularly following the publication of Scotland's Film and Screen Curriculum 3-18 by Screen Scotland and Education Scotland in 2025. This framework positions Film and Screen as a powerful medium for developing creativity, critical thinking, cultural literacy and technical skills. It encourages learners to engage with moving image texts not only as consumers but also as creators, fostering a deeper understanding of narrative, representation and media production. The curriculum aligns with the aims of CfE, supporting the development of the four capacities and promoting interdisciplinary learning across literacy, social studies and technologies.

Academic research highlights the value of film education in enhancing learner engagement and supporting inclusive pedagogies. Bazalgette (2010) argues that moving image education enables learners to explore identity, culture and emotion in ways that traditional text-based approaches may not. Similarly, Burn and Durran (2007) emphasise the importance of visual literacy in a media-saturated world, noting that film education equips young people with the tools to critically analyse and respond to the narratives that shape their lives. In Scotland, pilot programmes such as Into Film and See Think Make have demonstrated positive outcomes in learner motivation, collaboration and attainment, particularly among learners who may struggle with conventional classroom formats.

Despite its potential, the delivery of Film and Screen education remains uneven across Scottish schools. A 2022 report by Screen Scotland found that while many teachers are enthusiastic about integrating film into their practice, barriers such as lack of training, limited resources and curriculum pressures often hinder implementation. Teachers report feeling underconfident in using film technologies and facilitating critical discussions around screen content. This echoes findings from Burn and Reid (2016), who note that professional development is essential for teachers to move beyond superficial engagement with film and towards more meaningful pedagogical approaches.

Internationally, countries such as Denmark and Australia have embedded film education more systematically into their national curricula. In Denmark, for example, film analysis and production are integrated into language and arts education from early primary through to upper secondary levels, supported by national funding and teacher training initiatives (Andersen & Henningsen, 2015). These models offer valuable insights for Scotland as it seeks to expand and embed Film and Screen education more consistently across the 3-18 continuum.

In conclusion, Film and Screen education holds potential promise for enriching the Scottish curriculum and preparing learners for life in a visually and digitally complex world leading to the £1 billion Scottish economy by 2030. To realise this potential, investment in teacher training, resource development and cross-sector collaboration will be essential. By embedding film education more deeply into CfE and supporting practitioners with the confidence and tools to deliver it, Scotland can ensure that all learners benefit from the expressive, analytical, and creative opportunities that Film and Screen offer.

6.5 Music

In Scotland, continual recommendations for equity of access to a structured programme of music making for all learners has been voiced over many years (Barrett et al., 2015; Broad et al., 2003, 2019; Cassidy, 2008; Moscardini, 2015; Priestly, 2013) mirrored in Australia where an inquiry found “that not all students have equitable access to music education in Victoria” (Parliament of Victoria, 2013). Primary teachers having a broad subject knowledge encompassing eight curricular subject areas compared with the music specialist who, with detailed knowledge of one subject, have the perceived requirements necessary to teach Music only (Welch, 2021). Moscardini et al., (2021) outline that primary teachers are specialists of teaching and learning, they have educational knowledge and skills in many aspects of a crowded curriculum and yet de Vries (2013) believes that if early years practitioners and primary teachers were to develop their skills to incorporate Music teaching, threading music throughout the week in their classrooms, the culture would change and there would be a creation of belief within society that Music is for everyone and everyone considers they can be musical.

APPG (2019) and Wiggins & Wiggins (2008) outline a context across the globe, where schools rely on primary teachers to deliver curricular Music at primary school without ever clarifying their preparedness, skills set or question how they are teaching music-making with learners. Music education in the primary classroom plays a vital role in fostering creativity, emotional expression and cross-curricular engagement. The permeating thread throughout this research outlines that while many practitioners are keen to deliver music, not all feel ‘skills rich’ enough to do so with confidence. A lack of confidence (de Vries, 2015; Holden & Button, 2006), perceived lack of skills (Abril, 2007) and inadequate training (Hallam et al., 2009; Hennessy, 2012) have been consistently highlighted across decades of research (Mills, 1989; Russell-Bowie, 2009). Hallam (2010) suggests that when primary teachers believe they must be “musical” to teach music, they often internalise negative beliefs about their abilities (de Vries, 2015), which can lead to avoidance of curricular delivery, as Bandura (1997) attests. All the research indicates this across all the arts. Strengthening Music education in early years and primary schools can enhance transitions both into and out of each sector. A confident and consistent approach to music in early years settings helps children transition into primary with a shared language of creativity, rhythm and expression. Likewise, embedding music meaningfully in Primary 7 supports smoother progression and transition into secondary, where learners are better prepared to engage with more structured and specialised music education. These transitional benefits underscore the importance of ensuring that all practitioners and teachers feel equipped to deliver Music confidently and consistently.

Recent research points to collaborative partnerships with specialist teachers as a promising solution. Jeanneret & Stevens-Ballenger (2013) propose that specialists working alongside primary staff can support delivery and build capacity. However, it is important to recognise that improving music provision is not straightforward. Financial constraints, time pressures and varying priorities of headteachers and local authorities complicate efforts to establish collaborative working models. The development of cross-sectoral partnerships and draft resources offers a pathway to support learners in achieving musical outcomes, particularly in the Primary 7 context prior to transition to S1. Innovative notations such as Figurenotes, which use colour and shape to represent pitch and rhythm, have further widened access, particularly for younger learners and

those with additional support needs, enabling engagement with fewer barriers, smoother progression into staff notation and instrumental performance within the transition process.

The findings from this research reveal a clear need to develop pedagogy and resources while fostering meaningful collaborations between specialists and early years practitioners and primary teachers. Partnerships can gradually build practitioners' skills, knowledge and understanding, promoting equity in resources and approach. Creating a community of practice where ideas are shared, challenged and embedded is essential to sustaining long-term improvement in Music education. Research also highlights that Music Technology can enhance engagement, creativity and accessibility for learners aged 3-18. Studies show that digital tools, from mobile apps and recording software to bespoke instruments, can improve motivation, support composition and foster inclusion, particularly when paired with effective teacher training and resourcing (Rogers, 1997; Fancourt & Finn, 2019; Chapman, 2023).

While literature continues to explore the challenges faced by primary teachers in teaching Music (de Vries, 2015; Hennessy, 2000; Holden & Button, 2006; Russell-Bowie, 2002; Seddon & Biasutti, 2008; Wiggins & Wiggins, 2008), the frustrations felt by specialists during transition phases further highlight the need for solutions. Collaborative partnerships, as outlined by De Vries (2015) and Bremner (2013), offer a way to bridge gaps and encourage participation, while also enabling leadership models that embed music more deeply into school culture. However, challenges persist and teacher confidence varies. Access to reliable hardware, software and training is uneven (York, 2023). Stronger collaboration between secondary music teachers and their cluster primary colleagues could support continuity of skills, ensure early exposure to digital and traditional music-making providing consistent pedagogical approaches. Such partnerships could also help build shared expertise in tools like Figurenotes, instrumental skills, sequencing software and composition, thereby building skills and bridging gaps towards achieving Advanced Higher. Collectively, the evidence indicates that Music education coupled with technology, when embedded intentionally and supported through collaboration, has the potential to transform both participation and progression in school music education.

The research also highlights the need for accessible, music-specific CLPL and earlier investment in music tuition during ITE. Hennessy (2000) notes that confidence stems from prior musical experiences, university courses and placements that allow early years practitioners and generalist teachers to learn in context. Embedding music education earlier within early years and greater ITE teacher training could significantly improve delivery confidence and consistency across Scottish schools.

6.6 Music Technology

Research into Music Technology education has expanded considerably over the past three decades, demonstrating benefits that extend beyond technical musical proficiency to encompass broader cognitive capabilities and transferable skills highly valued in contemporary employment. Music Technology education integrates digital tools, production techniques and contemporary approaches to music creation that reflect the realities of the modern music industry and creative sectors.

Music Technology spans both the BGE and Senior Phase, however it does not have subject specific Es and Os with the CfE framework. During BGE, learners are expected to "use ICT to realise or enhance their composition and performance and to promote their understanding of musical concepts" (Scottish Government, 2009). In the Senior Phase, Music Technology is a distinct qualification pathway through SQA National Qualifications. These courses require candidates to demonstrate competencies in audio capture using various microphone techniques, processing skills including multi-track editing, application of effects, mixing and sequencing skills and creative use of sound and music (SQA, 2024). Assessment comprises both a question paper examining musical and technological knowledge and a substantial production assignment.

Music Technology has been integrated into the National Curriculum in England, while Australia and New Zealand have embedded digital music-making within their arts curricula. The United States has seen growth in Music Technology programmes, with organisations such as the Technology Institute for Music Educators (TI:ME) providing professional development and advocacy for Music Technology integration.

Higher Music Technology entries in Scotland increased 89% since 2018, while National 5 grew by over 60% (SQA, 2024). The United States has experienced substantial increases in music technology course offerings at both secondary and tertiary levels.

Research demonstrates that Music Technology learning develops critical thinking and problem-solving abilities through repeated challenge of situations with no standard answer (Hickey, 2015). Learners working on complex music-related projects such as audio engineering, studio recording, or post-production require musical talent, interpersonal skills and effective project management. The active listening skills cultivated through Music Technology study, involving processing information, retention and application of concepts in different contexts, have been identified as valuable in the technology sector (Gordon, Fehd, & McCandliss, 2015).

Music Technology learners navigate digital audio workstations, understand signal flow, apply audio processing techniques and make creative decisions informed by technical constraints. Music study teaches skills such as focus, perseverance and entrepreneurial thinking (Cheng et al., 2024).

The career landscape for Music Technology graduates has diversified beyond traditional music industry roles. Applications, software and websites require music, sound design, or interactive mixed media, with technology companies seeking musicians to create these elements. Research

from the United States and Europe documents Music Technology graduates finding employment in gaming, film production, software development and emerging immersive media sectors (Mercado & Draut, 2024).

Research consistently identifies lack of adequate equipment and funding as primary obstacles to Music Technology implementation. Music Technology requires initial investment in hardware and software plus ongoing maintenance, upgrades and replacement. International research identifies similar barriers across diverse contexts, including limited technology availability, insufficient technical competence and inadequate institutional support (Uludag & Satir, 2023). Schools in lower-income districts in the United States face disparities in Music Technology access, while European studies document how equipment costs create inequitable provision patterns (Kardos, 2012).

Teacher training represents another significant barrier. Teachers struggle to keep pace with rapid technological change, with new hardware releases and software updates constantly emerging. The rapid pace requires ongoing rather than one-off professional development, demanding sustained institutional commitment. As one study notes, technology is merely a tool, requiring music educators to understand curricular objectives, benefits and limitations of specific technologies, teaching strategies and the context of their class and school (Griffin & Holland, 2008).

Network infrastructure and technical support present additional challenges. Music Technology requires regular maintenance, upgrade, replacement and adjustment; without dedicated IT support, this time-consuming task falls to faculty. The specialised nature of Music Technology hardware and software means generic IT support may be insufficient, requiring either dedicated expertise or substantial additional workload for music staff.

Equitable access remains a concern within Scottish education. Research indicates that exposure to and potential to engage in Music is different for children from more affluent backgrounds compared to those from working-class or economically disadvantaged households (Wilson, 2020), a disparity that Music Technology's equipment requirements may exacerbate. International evidence suggests similar socioeconomic disparities; research from England and Australia documents how Music Technology access often reflects broader patterns of educational inequality (Hallam, 2015).

In concluding, Music Technology education offers distinctive benefits, developing technical competencies alongside transferable skills highly valued in contemporary employment. Its practical, experiential nature and integration of creative and technical thinking position it as particularly relevant for 21st-century learners.

International comparison reveals both that Scotland's challenges are widely shared and that successful models exist. Countries investing in sustained professional development, dedicated technical support and equitable access policies demonstrate that these barriers can be overcome. Addressing these constraints requires investment not only in equipment and infrastructure but

also in comprehensive teacher professional development, technical support structures and equitable access policies.

Understanding how Music Technology education can be implemented effectively within resource constraints and how to ensure equitable access across different socioeconomic contexts, would provide valuable guidance for Scottish schools and policymakers.

7 Future Trends

As Scotland co-creates a future-oriented curriculum, consideration of future trends are important to reference here. The Expressive Arts disciplines, are intrinsically creative and reflective of human experience and are uniquely positioned to respond to and shape the evolving global landscape. Some curriculum areas may have more evidence to include here than others and we do not have hard evidence of what the future holds. However, drawing upon current evidence and predictive insights from megatrends, OECD, UN, academic think tanks and national policy reports, this section aims to use the evidence and predictions available to outline future global trends, relating these to the likely impact on Scotland and its education system.

Given that one of the aims of CIC is to build a future-orientated curriculum through a shared vision, the trends in this section, whilst not certain, offer some insights for consideration.

Some of the challenges facing the world, common to many future looking reports and analyses include:

- Rising global conflict (PWC, 2024; Scottish Government, 2025; OECD, 2025a)
- Climate change, biodiversity loss and reduced food security (Patton et al., 2016; Royal Society of Edinburgh, 2024; PWC, 2024; Scottish Government, 2025; OECD 2025a&b)
- Rise in mental health concerns and obesity (especially in young people) (Patton et al., 2016; OECD, 2025a; PWC, 2024; Scottish Government, 2025)
- Aging populations (Scottish Government, 2025; PWC, 2024)
- Technological disruption and polarisation via increased used of AI and emerging technologies (Royal Society of Edinburgh, 2024; PWC, 2024; Scottish Government, 2025; OECD 2025a;
- Widening inequalities (including concentration of wealth, social instability and health inequalities) (Patton et al., 2016; PWC, 2024; Scottish Government 2025; OECD, 2020; OECD 2025a)
- Rising costs of living (World Economic Foundation, 2025)

Global megatrends suggest a future marked by rising geopolitical conflict, climate instability, mental health concerns, demographic shifts, technological disruption and widening inequalities (PWC, 2024; Scottish Government, 2025; OECD, 2025a). It is also important to note that trends identified are likely to affect children and young people differently, or disproportionately, compared with impacts for older generations. This is, in part, because children and young people must live with the outcomes of identified trends for longer and the long-term future has particular importance for those who are youngest now (Scottish Government, 2025). They are increasingly exposed to conflict, displacement, environmental degradation, and unregulated commercial exploitation, especially in digital and food environments as well as being the first generation to grow up under the 'shadow of climate change' (Patton et al., 2016).

Young people may also experience societal transformations differently from older generations because they are often at the leading edge of change or technology adoption. The trends will also have differential impacts for different equalities groups. Intersecting inequalities and disadvantage may reduce resilience or the ability of both households and communities to adapt to future

challenges, or to take advantage of future opportunities. In many cases the trends have the potential to drive and deepen inequalities still further (Scottish Government, 2025). In this context, the Expressive Arts offer a vital counterbalance. They provide a space for emotional expression, cultural exploration and identity formation, all of which are essential for socio-emotional wellbeing and mental health which are areas of growing concern among youth (OECD, 2025a). The arts are aligned to support the design of a transformative curriculum that reflects the lived realities and aspirations of Scotland's young people with competencies such as empathy, moral thinking and navigating complexity, skills increasingly recognised as critical for responding thoughtfully to real-world challenges (OECD, 2020).

Despite these challenges, there are also opportunities for a future-oriented curriculum:

- Curriculum flexibility and personalisation - a modern curriculum that is fit for purpose, meets individual aspirations and delivers a just society that meets climate goals and achieves a strong economic future (OECD, 2020; Royal Society of Edinburgh, 2024)
- Learner agency and co-agency – ownership of their learning and being able to navigate uncertainty (OECD, 2020; Patton et al., 2016)
- Empowerment - Education is positioned as a key driver for enabling individuals and communities to understand environmental challenges and take informed, responsible action (OECD, 2025b)
- Bodies and minds - the need for socio-emotional learning, digital wellbeing, and health literacy across all age groups (OECD 2025a; Patton et al., 2016)
- Transformative competencies - go beyond subject knowledge to include attitudes, ethics, and values allowing learners to create new value, reconcile tensions and dilemmas, and take responsibility (OECD, 2020).

Skills such as AI and big data; analytical thinking; creative thinking; resilience, flexibility and agility; and technological literacy are not only considered critical now but are also projected to become even more important (World Economic Forum, 2025; OECD, 2020) as well as green skills (OECD, 2025b). Film and Screen are rapidly evolving requiring learners to develop new technical skills alongside traditional storytelling skills. Similarly, Art and design, Dance, Drama and Music are increasingly shaped by digital technology that should be embraced and supported in our classrooms.

Continued relevance of human-centric skills amid rapid technological advances - leadership and social influence, curiosity and lifelong learning, systems thinking, talent management, and motivation and self-awareness considered important for this (World Economic Forum, 2025).

Equity and Inclusion - Curriculum design must address widening inequalities (for example via intercultural understanding) and ensure access to meaningful learning for all, regardless of background or circumstance (OECD, 2020; OECD, 2025a).

Broader Educational Goals- Education should promote individual and collective wellbeing, sustainability, and social cohesion—not just academic achievement or economic productivity. Therefore, encouraging society to value all educational pathways and destinations (OECD, 2020; Royal Society of Edinburgh, 2024)

These trends reflect a global shift toward education systems that are necessarily more adaptive, inclusive and future-oriented, principles that align closely with CIC. They encourage co-creation and learner agency as well as reflecting learners' lived realities while preparing them for emerging challenges. The Expressive Arts are integral to a future-oriented curriculum as they offer a unique lens through which learners can interpret the world, express their identities and thrive in a time of profound change.

8 Points to Consider

This CIC evidence paper confirms the narrative that Expressive Arts are central to Scotland's curriculum, with strong contributions to creativity, wellbeing and equity. The research for early years underpins the fundamental role in creating foundations of creative exploration and experimental play, while international studies (OECD, UNESCO, WHO) consistently affirm the wider benefits of arts education, from enhanced cognitive and socio-emotional outcomes to extended health and wellbeing. That said, the provision of Expressive Arts teaching and learning across Scotland remains uneven, with disparity in teacher confidence, resources and prioritisation across the 3-18 settings and between local authorities.

The OECD (2013) outlines:

“Arts education is valuable in its own right; it helps develop creativity, critical thinking, and a sense of identity, and contributes to the social and emotional development of learners.”
(Winner, Goldstein & Vincent-Lancrin, 2013)

Internationally there is a move toward greater integration of the arts within curricular reform. There is a recognition of digital technologies, cultural responsiveness and understanding of the multifaceted benefits of the knowledge and skills developed through the arts. The development of the inclusion of Film and Digital Media in Wales and now Film and Screen in Scotland, the Australian model with an emphasis on making and responding and New Zealand who have developed a culturally responsive Dance education programme, all illustrate how Expressive Arts are being used to connect creativity with identity, critical literacy and future ready skills.

“Arts education is a fundamental dimension of the full development of the individual and is a means of realising a more holistic education that nurtures imagination, innovation, and cultural understanding.” (UNESCO, 2010)

This evidence paper has synthesised with local, national and international research across all the Expressive Arts curricula. Moving forward, it is crucial that the CIC stakeholders encapsulate the excellent practice and curricular reform ideas globally when co-creating and giving shape to the new curriculum framework across all the Expressive Arts areas. The CIC offers opportunities to build a framework to address the challenges and gaps identified while drawing on international learning and perspectives. Scotland can build on existing strengths of CfE, aligning its integrated approach more explicitly with global trends, ensuring clarity of progression, sustained investment in teacher education and consistency of provision. Learning from other countries and their successes and challenges, Scotland is well placed to revise its curriculum so that Expressive Arts offer streamlined guidance and clarity of knowledge and skills, provide progressive pathways and assessment and address barriers to participation to deliver a modern, inclusive and future-orientated Expressive Arts curriculum for 3-18.

“The arts aren't just important because they improve maths scores, they are important because they speak to parts of children's being which are otherwise untouched.”
(Robinson, 2015)

9 Declaration

The content of this document was written by the author, exercising full professional judgement. Education Scotland approved AI tools were used to support review, clarity, and quality assurance. Education Scotland staff retain full responsibility and have reviewed and approved all content.

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Annex A Glossary of Terms/Abbreviations

Acronym	Definition
ACEL	Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Level
ASN	Additional Support Needs
BEd	Bachelor of Education
BGE	Broad General Education
CfE	Curriculum for Excellence
CIC	Curriculum Improvement Cycle
CIDREE	Consortium of Institutions for Development and Research in Education in Europe
CLA	Cultural Learning Alliance
CLPL	Career-long Professional Learning
CLTA	Curriculum, Learning, Teaching and Assessment
CREATE	Creativity and Expressive Arts Transforming Education
DPR	Data, Performance and Research
DHT	Deputy Headteacher
DYW	Developing the Young Workforce
EDI	Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion
ELC	Early Learning and Childcare
Es and Os	Experiences and Outcomes
GIRFEC	Getting it Right for Every Child
GUS	Growing Up in Scotland
GTCS	General Teaching Council for Scotland
HGIOS	How Good is Our School
HMI	His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education
HT	Head Teacher
IMS	Instrumental Music Service
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
LA	Local Authority
LTS	Learning and Teaching Scotland
NASUWT	National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers
NC	National Certificate
NIF	National Improvement Framework
NSEAD	National Society for Education in Art and Design
NPA	National Progression Award
NQT	Newly Qualified Teacher
OECD	The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PE	Physical Education
PG Cert	Post Graduate Certificate

PRD	Professional Review and Development
RSA	Regional Outcome Agreement
SCILT	Scotland's National Centre for Languages
SCQF	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
SDS	Skills Development Scotland
SHANARRI	Safe, Healthy, Achieving, Nurtured, Active, Respected, Responsible, Included
SP	Senior Phase
SQA/Qualifications Scotland	Scottish Qualifications Authority (Qualifications Scotland from 1st December 2025)
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
TIS	Teacher Induction Scheme
TI:ME	Technology Institute for Music Education
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
WHO	World Health Organisation
YMI	Youth Music Initiative

Version History

Version	Date	Detail
Version 1	6 March 2026	First published
Version 2	18 May 2026	The section on National Data Sets p8 – p36 has been updated to ensure the language used is consistent with the language used by Qualification Scotland.
		Addition of Declaration on the use of AI.

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