

Notes from a Playground

The Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment resident at
Acland Burghley School, London.

What is wrong, what we did, how it works and why you should do it too.

A Call to Action

Social and operational challenges: what is wrong with where we are in the **arts** and **education**.

**We knew we had
problems.**

Financial Crisis for the Arts

“Arts finances in worst state for five years.”

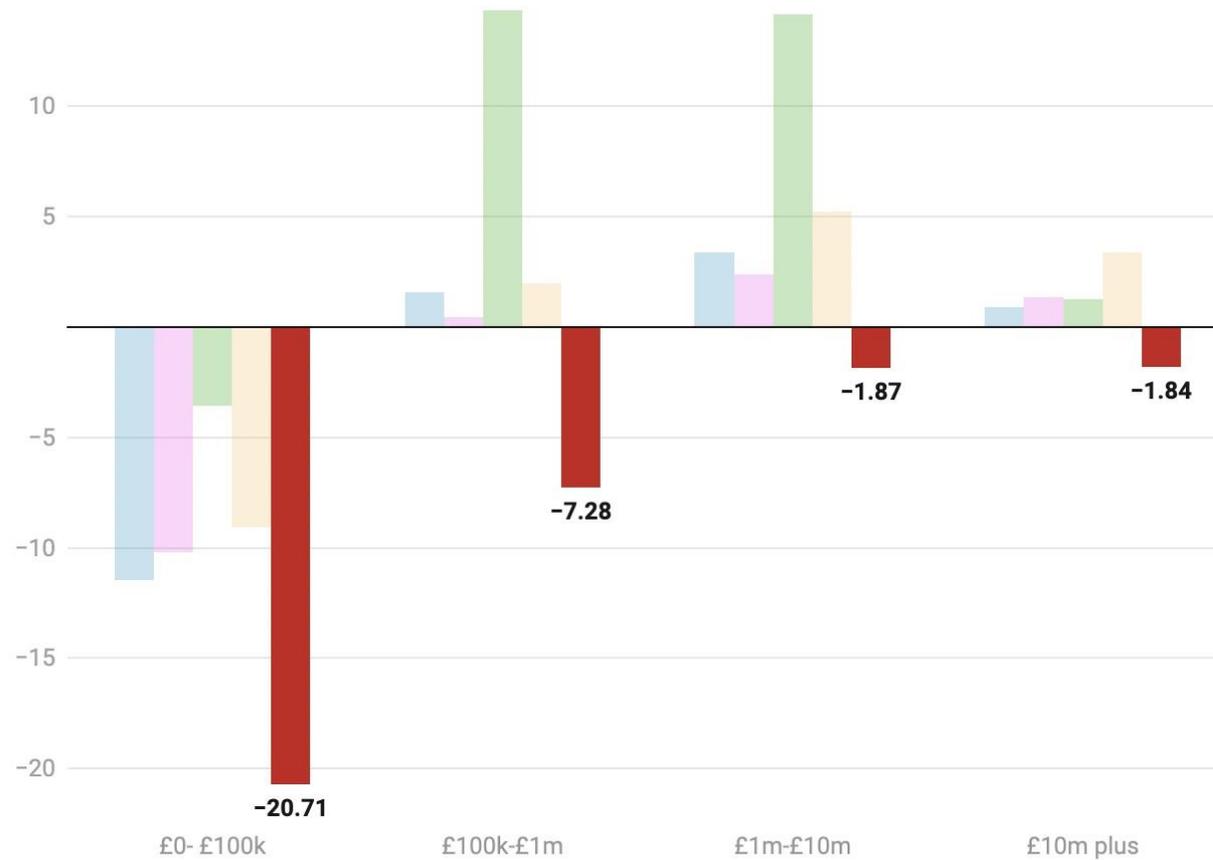
Arts Professional, 20 June 2024

Profitability of UK arts and culture organisations by income band



Percentage profit/loss of a constant cohort of 2,800 arts and culture organisations across UK including National Portfolio Organisations

2019 2020 2021 2022 2023



Number of organisations in each income band fluctuates from year to year: Up to £100,000 (1,204 to 1,307); £100k to £1m (1,101 to 1,138); £1m-£10m (353 to 385); £10m plus (51 to 77)

Source: Arts Professional and MyCake investigation • [Get the data](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

**We knew they had
problems too.**

Financial Crisis in Education

“76% of primary schools and 94% of secondary schools – will not be able to afford their costs next year. ”

“Every local authority in the country will see a reduction in real terms per pupil funding, with an average cut of 1.2%. ”

The National Education Union, 20 January 2025

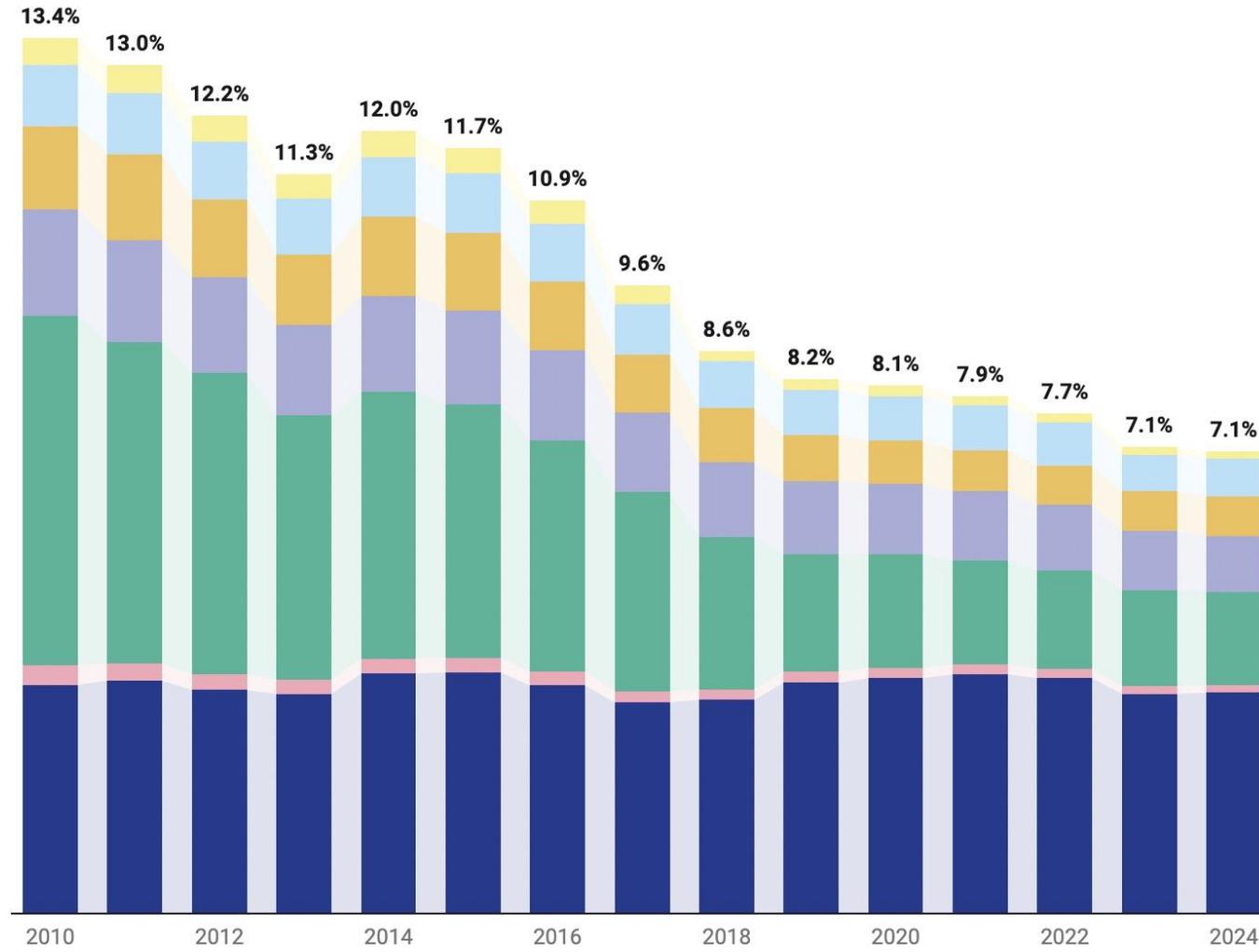
Decline in Arts Education

“Exam results show further collapse in arts enrolment, deepening a 15-year decline”

Campaign for the Arts, 15 August 2024

GCSE arts entries as a percentage of total GCSE entries

Art & Design Dance Design and Technology Drama Media / Film / TV Studies Music Performing / Expressive Arts



All UK candidates.

Chart: Campaign for the Arts • Source: JCQ/AQA • Created with Datawrapper

The Education Gap: A National Inequality

“Disadvantaged pupils are now more than 19 months behind their peers by the time they sit their GCSEs, with the gap having increased at every stage of their schooling aged five, 11 and 16, according to the Education Policy Institute (EPI) thinktank.”

The Guardian, 16 July 2024

The Education Gap: A National Inequality

“There will not be another Sheku Kanneh-Mason coming out of state school if things go on the way they are...”

BBC Interview with mother of Sheku Kanneh-Mason, 28 September 2019

**What we do can
make a difference.**

The importance of the arts in education

“The Commission believes that the arts make an invaluable contribution to the development of creativity in young people.”

The Durham Commission on Creativity and Education, October 2019

The Day 1 Deal

A win-win solution.



It's really very, very simple.

If you are bored, you don't need to read another page beyond the **next one**.

There are no secrets, no mysteries, no unique challenges we overcame in some remarkable trick that only we could possibly understand.

It's a basic unvarnished deal that worked for everyone involved.

It honestly requires nothing else. It works in neutral. No extra effort needed. No batteries required.

All school and orchestra need to do is just exist and the magic works.

You can do it too.

Rent.

The Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment moved into Acland Burghley School. Full time. Lock, stock and barrel. Staff in the playground. Orchestra in the hall. Library next to the Exams Office. Harpsichords behind the soccer pitch.

The Art of the Deal:

1. We get a big discount on comprehensive excellent facilities*. **We spend less.**
2. They get a reliable income. **They earn more.**

*including parking and brilliant new colleagues

That's it. Simple.

(But don't you want to know what happened next?)

Life on Day 2

What happened on Day 2: the gift that keeps on giving.

Life feels good.

Generally speaking, rent goes to a commercial landlord. That's a lot of money on storage and space that goes straight out of the charitable sector. A lot of money is spent by NPOs in commercial rent.

Imagine what it feels like for you and your supporters (oh, and the taxpayer) to know that their gift not only supports artistic activity but also enriches the prospects of young people in state education.

A lot of money is spent on soundproof chambers for our rehearsal. **Imagine** what it is like when your music becomes the soundtrack to the daily life of young people.

Imagine the positive impact when people in the local community know who you are, become your friends and feel inspired by your professional example.

Imagine what it feels like to be reminded every day of the realities of the audience you want to reach and to discover common ground with powerful opportunity for creative growth.

Imagine what it feels like to see young people grow and thrive with that new opportunity.

That is our story today.

**Every penny spent on
art is a penny spent
on education.**



Not just an office. Not just a rehearsal space. Not just an address. A home.



High quality versatile office space that works for everyone.



Free community concerts open our work to an entirely new audience. (Sir András Schiff / Mendelssohn)



A powerful hub for routine local engagement and national outreach.



Access to high quality experience for young people of all abilities and backgrounds. (QEH Community Opera)



Rich creative opportunities in a vibrant community of inspiring young talent. (Rameau Dance GCSE 2020)



We teach students in our Dreamchasing Young Producers programme. They help us make films. (Marquee TV)



They help us produce shows and make costumes. (QEH John Wilson / *Princess Ida*)



And create entirely new public platforms for the music we play. (*Live at the Hex*)



The Year 11 Prom has never looked or sounded better.



Little Shop of Horrors was a whole new experience.



We have lots of great new colleagues. (OAE Drinks - First Friday of the Month)



New work with inspirational student talent is taking us on international tour. (Kim Brandstrup / *Breaking Bach*)

Key impacts: The Orchestra

- We have a home with many new friends and colleagues.
- We have excellent facilities at a discount.
- More people like us.
- More people come to our concerts.
- More people pay attention to what we do and say.
- More people want to help and give us money.
- We have more activity of greater creative diversity.
- We achieve significantly more in our charitable mission.

The bottom line.

(A few notes of detail.)

- ✓ Lower rent per square foot compared with comparable commercial properties.
(Lower saving estimate **£21,464** upper estimate **£32,515** pa)
- ✓ Lower rehearsal venue costs compared with other commonly used venues.
(Lower saving estimate **£15,840** upper estimate **£18,735** pa)
- ✓ **26%** increase in philanthropy for OAE since residency start.

Key impacts: The School

- Increased revenue
- Improved GCSE Music outcomes
- Received Artsmark Platinum Award in September 2024
- Improved student attendance
- Improved student wellbeing
- Enhanced SEN provision*
- Parental satisfaction
- Improved post-school student opportunity
- Increased external funding **

*c. 25% of 1166 students have an additional education need

** New digital media department created with government funding for T-level programme in which OAE is primary corporate partner

The bottom line.

(A few notes of detail.)

- ✓ **543** of 1,163 ABS students directly engaged with the OAE in 2023/24.
- ✓ In a 2024 survey to year 7 parents, **29%** strongly agreed / agreed that having a resident orchestra was part of the reason they chose the school.
- ✓ In 2023, ABS had the **highest** attendance rate of all Camden, in 2024 the **second highest**.

“It is a reminder of what the job really is to speak to the individual. When we look out at an audience at a big concert hall it’s all too easy to see the mass of faces and play to the audience. But by working with our children at our school we see every single day the impact music has on the individual. It’s important and it changes lives and we are there to change the lives of every individual in our audiences too.. ”

Katherine Spencer, Principal Clarinet

FAQs



What are the new challenges you face as a result of being resident in a school?

Surprising as it may sound, strictly residency related problems have been trivial and infrequent. Really, stuff like not being able to book the hall on a particular day because there is a parents' meeting or there being some building work upstairs in the holidays. Of course, it is a real school environment and sometimes young people do things they are not supposed to, but then so do we! The school is genuinely a safe, positive and supportive place and it runs on rails so it is quite easy to cooperate with that.

The major challenge, and it is a real thing, is stretching to accommodate new opportunity. More work means more to do for the same staff until you recruit, so we feel a degree of growing pain from time to time. Also there is the strain of the new. New work can sometimes be a bit stressful but arts organisations are very used to innovation, so, even the most ambitious of our residency projects, *Breaking Bach*, for example (hip hop dance with the music of JS Bach), has been really just like any other significant artistic ambition.

Is the residency a distraction from your main artistic activity?

The critical reception we have enjoyed since the start of our residency points to a consistently high level of attainment. This corresponds to the general internal consensus that we are working effectively as a team and achieving the artistic goals that we have set ourselves and are agreed by our Trustees. Nobody wants to be complacent, but there is currently no evidence at all of deviation from the artistic practice we thought was important before we moved in.

Also, new income inspired by the residency has increased our rehearsal budget and so we have more resource for our main artistic season than we did before.

Finally, our mission is not quite so restricted. Our charitable objectives state quite clearly that we exist to advance appreciation through **education**. All the new and additional activity that has arisen from the residency is therefore central to our publicly stated commitment which we hope lives up to the example and aspiration of so many of the great composers we continue to represent in our repertoire.

It hasn't stopped us doing Bruckner in Linz, Handel in Glyndebourne and Bach in Amsterdam. It has demonstrably helped us.

Doesn't living in a school involve lots of extra work and complication?

It involves more work, certainly. There are a number of responsibilities that come with being part of a school community. For example, guests must sign in. We all have to wear lanyards and all staff are part of the overall commitment to safeguarding.

So, yes, definitely, more effort, more thought, more care and more attention. All are required in our new life, but we believe that this is centrally important work to delivering our charitable activity and achieving our mission.

So, it is a positive experience to be part of a larger team that is mindful of the wellbeing of young people. The discipline that this implies, behaving responsibly and being considerate of others, would be important in any organisation.

We cooperate happily with the school and in return, they give us a great deal of support in our own charitable responsibilities.

You have been in the school for nearly five years, why aren't they all learning instruments and taking exams?

The school is very well managed, does amazing work and the students are brimming with potential. But realities are realities. 50% of the school population (c. 1,200) might describe themselves as 'white British' but the other 50% would not. 41% * of the school population are designated as 'disadvantaged' with most of them receiving free school meals. (*2024 student roll)

For many of those young people, orchestral music and instruments are entirely new propositions. There are many hurdles to access, some of them financial, for sure, but many others can only be properly understood in terms of a complex social context. It's all very well knowing where you want to go but you also need to know where you are travelling from. That adjustment has enriched us and we have learned a lot too.

We took the school as we found it. Building a creative community starts with listening to others. The choirs and ensembles will follow naturally in a programme that seizes immediate opportunity and potential. Odd as it sounds, we believe that improving the year 11 Prom, for example, will eventually lead to young people learning and enjoying music as we do. We want to build trust, skill, agency, wellbeing and motivation. All the things you need if you to make a good orchestra.

But this is the real world, not the instant magical world of makeover TV. It takes time and daily commitment. We knew that. It is why moving in makes so much sense.

How can this work as a model for others?

It's a fair question. There are other understandable reservations, too: *'It couldn't work for us: we aren't an orchestra, we are too big, too small, we don't know anywhere like Acland Burghley, we don't do the same things as you etc'*

But you are looking at this all wrong. What you should be thinking is, *'how come that bunch of niche musicians, known for their operas on period instruments at Glyndebourne Festival, who study treatises, play on gut strings and won't play the Star Wars theme tune...how come they made a success of life in a North London comprehensive? How come Sir András Schiff liked it? How come John Wilson had such a good time there?'*

When you look at a project like this, inevitably you look at the pictures and see us and not you. But forget all that. Think of the basic deal, the negotiable flexibility of it, the expand-to-fit, grow-as-you-learn freedom of it all. Think of the essential win-win notion that takes others with you, even (especially?) if they aren't in your regular audience.

How could this model make a difference nationally?

The work we do every week with young people with additional educational needs has a material impact on wellbeing, outcome and an indirect, positive impact on immediate family members, teachers, other students and external agencies. That's just one drop in a big ocean but it is real and felt. Imagine if that happened in other schools too, in different ways, *your way*. What would that alone do for the appreciation for the arts, recognition of the place of the artist in society, the investment confidence of central government and the willingness of others to advocate for you and help?

What would it look like, the next time, for example, that there is a proposed round of cuts for our treasured symphony orchestras, if those who objected were not just the usual in-house celebrities, but ordinary folk up and down the country, the greater electorate if you like, who genuinely knew you, valued your work, wanted to protect you and, just like their equally engaged children, know their way around social media?

What's the obsession with residency?

When we set out on this adventure, we went to see the good people of the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie. We met with Albert and his colleagues and the remarkable work they do in the Gesamtschule-Ost, Bremen.

They spoke and lived a compelling message. Yes, you can do one-off stuff but there will always be the here-today-gone-tomorrow risk that mitigates longer term value. Any honest head teacher will tell you that you can destroy a school with workshops.

We saw first-hand how powerful the daily model of routine interaction could be. We were told that you can do those headline-grabbing projects that take a good picture, but it is the determined commitment to young lives, rain or shine, including that dreary Tuesday afternoon when nothing much seemed to happen. That is what makes the difference.

Workshops and one off-projects are great. Don't get us wrong. We do them too. They are an important part of the national commitment, but routine is your ally. Relationships are what make growth. And it's the **day one deal** that drives it all.

Everyone, no matter how much you travel, knows a basic truth
– there is no place like home.

“What’s wonderful about being at ABS is that it’s a place where the orchestra has an immediacy of connection with community, a place where, in contrast to the often necessarily more formal stage-to-audience relationship, casual but meaningful interactions are possible. It’s a place where you know you’ll see the same people again; where we can respond to needs and ideas; where, together with the school, artistic connections and developments can be designed that neither had imagined. It’s so heartening to see our music ripple out in this way. ”

Cecelia Bruggemeyer, Principal Double Bass, Vice Chair

“Engaging with arts professional as well as subject teachers inspires young people – it shows children what is possible and provides them with all-important mentors... Acland Burghley and the OAE have fostered a close relationship that benefits both parties and the local community, with a new financial model that supports both the orchestra and school.”

Arts for All, The Fabian Society, September 2024

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art is a penny spent
on education.**



e Orchestra of the
Age of Enlightenment