

25 September 2025

Dear Minister

Proposed removal of Art History from the New Zealand Secondary School Curriculum.

We write as representatives of the Art Association of Australia and New Zealand, an organisation that represents hundreds of professional art historians, curators, artists and writers across both Australia and New Zealand. As an organisation we are deeply concerned at the announcement that art history may be removed as a standalone subject from the New Zealand Secondary School Curriculum.

Art history is an important field of study for students, and teaching it at school develops stronger students who will go on to work across a range of important areas in cultural heritage, tourism, teaching, conservation and the arts more broadly. It connects several strands of humanities skills including critical visual analysis, historical research, understanding of sources, sophisticated analysis of theory and argument, and it encourages a deeper understanding of diverse cultures.

Introducing students to art history at secondary school directly supports a more diverse cohort of students to recognise potential future careers in the cultural sector, from galleries, museums, and archives to tourism, journalism and design. Numerous studies also show that introducing school students to the study of art and visual culture, supporting them to visit cultural sites and museums at school leads to a deeper engagement with visual culture across society.¹ They are more likely to engage with arts and culture through their life, and introduce it to their wider family and social networks.

Art history teaches critical skills that are useful for students in a broad range of future careers. Close and critical visual analysis is becoming more urgent with the rise of synthetic media production by AI companies, the increasing use of data visualisation, and the manipulation of visual images by those seeking to spread disinformation. In our contemporary world, art and visual culture are used to inspire, manipulate, heal and document our experiences. Equipping students with skills to be critical about this is vital. The study of art informs future work across a range of disciplines, from social and political histories, media production, cultural studies, computer game design, and early childhood education. Trained art historians and curators use collections to teach medical students about close looking and bias in interpretation, to teach economic histories and to explore politics and propaganda.

¹ For example: Andre, L., Durksen, T., & Volman, M. L. (2017). Museums as avenues of learning for children: A decade of research. *Learning Environments Research*, 20(1), 47–76; *Art and Wonder®: Young Children and Contemporary Art research project | MCA Australia*. <https://www.mca.com.au/learn/early-learning/research-project/> and Wright, D. (2020). Engaging Young Children and Families in Gallery Education at Tate Liverpool. *International Journal of Art & Design Education*, 39(4), 739–753. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jade.12322>

Also, as is underlined regularly by our New Zealand colleagues, teaching art history also provides a foundation for understanding the development of Māori, Pacific, Pākehā and Tāiwi artistic practices, histories and cultures for all students.

We request an urgent review of this decision.

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