



10-YEAR ANNIVERSARY



Art History Link-Up

Art History for Everyone A-level and EPQ students
at the National Gallery, 2022. Photo: Ed Hands



FOREWORD

Dame Hannah Rothschild DBE
Chair, the Rothschild Foundation

The Rothschild Foundation supports some outstanding institutions, but one of the organisations I am most proud to support is Art History Link-Up, and I am particularly pleased that we have been able to partner with them from the very beginning.

AHLU is an extraordinary organisation that has achieved many things, including introducing a wide range of young people to a subject they would otherwise not have been able to access. The students' engagement and excitement, and that of the organisations they work with, is truly remarkable.

When I first met Rose Aidin, founder and chief executive, 10 years ago, she had a very clear vision and an absolute determination to take the study of art history beyond a narrow system and make it available to as many state-school students as possible.

Since then, AHLU has partnered with the Wallace Collection, the National Gallery, the Courtauld, Sir John Soane's Museum and Waddesdon Manor. Through these partnerships, AHLU uses world-class collections for what they were primarily intended: first-hand learning and education, accessible to as wide an audience as possible.

AHLU students are already transforming the sector, with alumni studying in every art history undergraduate year group at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge and at the Courtauld. I am thrilled that AHLU is creating new art history qualifications for GCSE-level students and developing them for third-party delivery, with recent successful pilots at Waddesdon Manor, Waddesdon School, the Courtauld and elsewhere.

The arts are worth £124bn a year to our country. The way the arts and arts communities will thrive is by engaging and retaining a broad coalition of interests. It is this breadth of talent that AHLU seeks, encourages, inspires and develops.

That is why I believe AHLU is going to make a material difference to the future of British art and the art world. I have no doubt that AHLU alumni will be among the future makers, curators and museum directors, as well as occupying many other roles across the arts sector.

They will help shape the arts sector for many years to come.

The global cultural sector provides nearly 30 million jobs worldwide, with an estimated worth of US\$4.3tn a year, and employs 2.4 million people in the UK. We have world-class public collections, almost all of which were intended for first-hand study, and to provide education for all. Yet art history A-level is taught in far fewer than 1% of state schools. In addition, secondary school groups across the sector are not often able to visit museums and galleries with their teachers for educational sessions. This is for a range of reasons including timetable restrictions and the cost of cover.

This seemed contradictory to me, so I founded Art History Link-Up by way of an experiment, with a free fast-track AS-level art history course for state students, taught in the lecture theatre of the Wallace Collection on term-time Saturday mornings from September 2016. I didn't know if students would want to apply to do such a thing, but they did, and the course filled up swiftly. I didn't know if they'd stay, but the students kept coming back each week. Almost all sat the final exams and finished the course with a qualification. All but one of our original students identified as minority ethnic, the majority were from widening participation backgrounds, and some found themselves in very challenging situations indeed. All were transformed by their art history studies, and through coming to the Wallace Collection each term-time Saturday to look at and discuss art together.

Then, in October 2016, just a month after our first course started, art history A-level was itself withdrawn by the AQA exam board. Our Wallace Collection AS-level art history students became powerful evidence for the subject's continuation at A-level, and my belief that art history is for everyone. AHLU was mentioned in leader articles in *The Times* and *The Burlington Magazine*, for example, and in parliament debates.

By December 2016, the A-level was "saved", reinstated by the Pearson exam board. By April 2017, AHLU was registered with charitable status. And when we reopened applications in summer 2017, we had twice as many eligible applicants as we could place. The National Gallery generously offered us afternoon teaching space, so we continued with courses in both locations, teaching art history A-level and EPQ (extended project qualification – equivalent to up to half an A-level) courses until all public spaces closed in March 2020, as a result of the pandemic.

We pivoted online, doubled our numbers, extended across the UK, and developed our unique and discursive-based teaching style. AHLU then returned to "real life" teaching in a hybrid format, with our art history A-level and EPQ courses based at the Courtauld, Somerset House, and introductory courses for GCSE-level students at the Courtauld, Dulwich Picture Gallery, the

Art History for Everyone students
at the Wallace Collection, 2016.
Photo: Quentin Newark





Art history HPQ students at the Courtauld, 2026. Photo: Ed Hands

National Gallery, Sir John Soane's Museum, and Waddesdon Manor and Waddesdon School.

In recent years, we have been piloting art history HPQ (higher project qualification courses – equivalent to up to half a GCSE) online, hybrid, in person and in school, with great success. In this, our 10th-anniversary year, we plan to share resources and support so teachers and students in any centre, anywhere in the UK, can deliver and gain their own art history GCSE-level qualification. Our charity, which started just as an art history qualification was being withdrawn, is launching a new qualification 10 years on, for a new age group, which will ensure that art history really can be for everyone.

None of this would be possible without the support of our extraordinary funders, our team, our trustees and our volunteers.

But above all, it would not be possible without our students. They consistently astound me with the directions in which they take art history, with their energy, commitment and determination.

We are so proud of all our students, and all they achieve. It is testament to them, and to the power of a small amount of art history taught in an engaging and inclusive manner, that Art History Link-Up alumni have studied the subject in almost every university art history department in the UK, and are entering careers in the sector.

Most strikingly, AHLU alumni have been studying art history at the University of Cambridge each year since 2020, with four AHLU alumni having graduated from the art history department this year, and four others just starting their undergraduate art history degrees there. For the last four years, there has been at least one AHLU student in each undergraduate year group at the Courtauld, and likewise studying art history at the University of Oxford for the last three years.

In all our venues, all our teaching spaces, all our students, one thing has shone through: the power of studying art history, and of close looking and discussion together, to transform young minds, and even lives. We look forward to sharing our story and evidence for this at our art history summit at Christie's in the spring, and to involving you further.

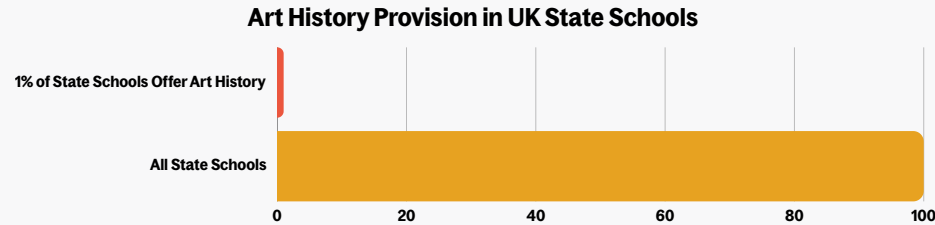
Meanwhile thank you for your support and for helping us to make art history for everyone a reality for as many young people in the UK as possible in the 21st century.

Rose Aidin receiving her MBE, for services to art history and to young people, from King Charles at Windsor Castle, 2025

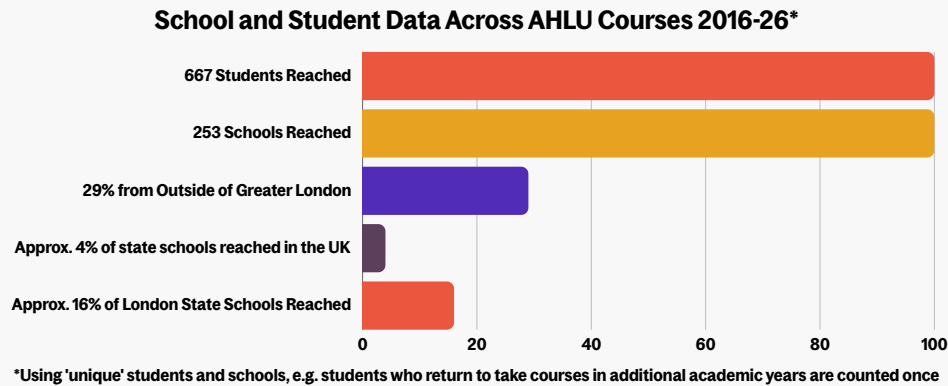


AHLU: THE STORY THROUGH DATA

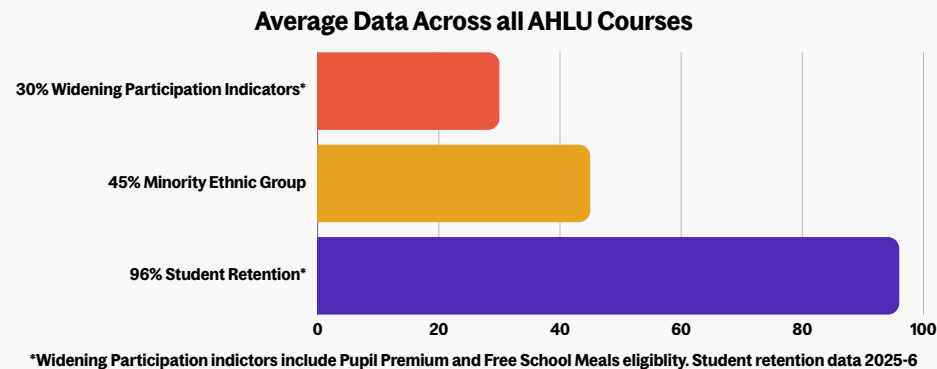
The critical need



AHLU's geographic reach



Demographic data across AHLU's Courses between 2016-26



WIDER CONTEXT

Some schools are spending just £1 per pupil per year on arts.

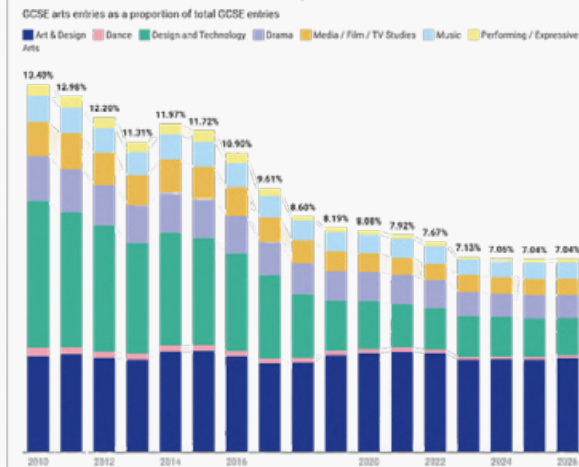
The Times, 2026

Government funding for music, arts and cultural programmes will equate to just £9.40 per pupil.

The Guardian, 2021

Arts GCSE and A Level entries have fallen by 47% and 34% respectively since 2010.

At GCSE, arts entries have declined by 47% since 2010



Source: Campaign for The Arts, 2026

Thank you to all the generous trusts, foundations and corporate donors who support AHLU, listed here, and to the partners and individuals detailed on our website who have made our work possible since 2016, and have enabled us to reach students in over 4% of state secondary schools across the UK, and over 16% of London state secondary schools.

On the occasion of our 10th anniversary, we are especially grateful to the Lovington Foundation, supporters since the pandemic, for their generous support of our anniversary publications, and to Cultureshock for their *pro bono* support of the production and design.

The Lovington Foundation also supported our 10th-anniversary film, made in collaboration with the Rothschild Foundation, Waddesdon Manor, Waddesdon School, the Courtauld, and Chocolate Films.

If you don't already, please consider supporting Art History Link-Up's students and work, and our aim to make art history for every young person in the UK a reality. We have a range of supporter options, including a Young Patrons scheme. Donations are eligible for Gift Aid and other tax deductions as applicable. Gifts and grants are acknowledged on our supporters' pages and in publications unless requested otherwise. Please scan the QR code on the back to reach our supporters' page and to find out more.

And if you are planning on leaving a legacy to Art History Link-Up, AHLU trustee Arthur Byng Nelson, partner and head of art and heritage at Sherrards Solicitors, is generously offering free will-writing or amendment advice and support. Please contact supporters@arthistorylinkup.org for more information about this.

Please let us know if you are remembering AHLU in your will – we don't need proof or details, we'd simply like to thank you. This also allows you to tell us if you'd like your gift acknowledged or would prefer to remain anonymous, and if there are specific areas of our work that you would like to benefit.



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