

Dr Mike Bindon

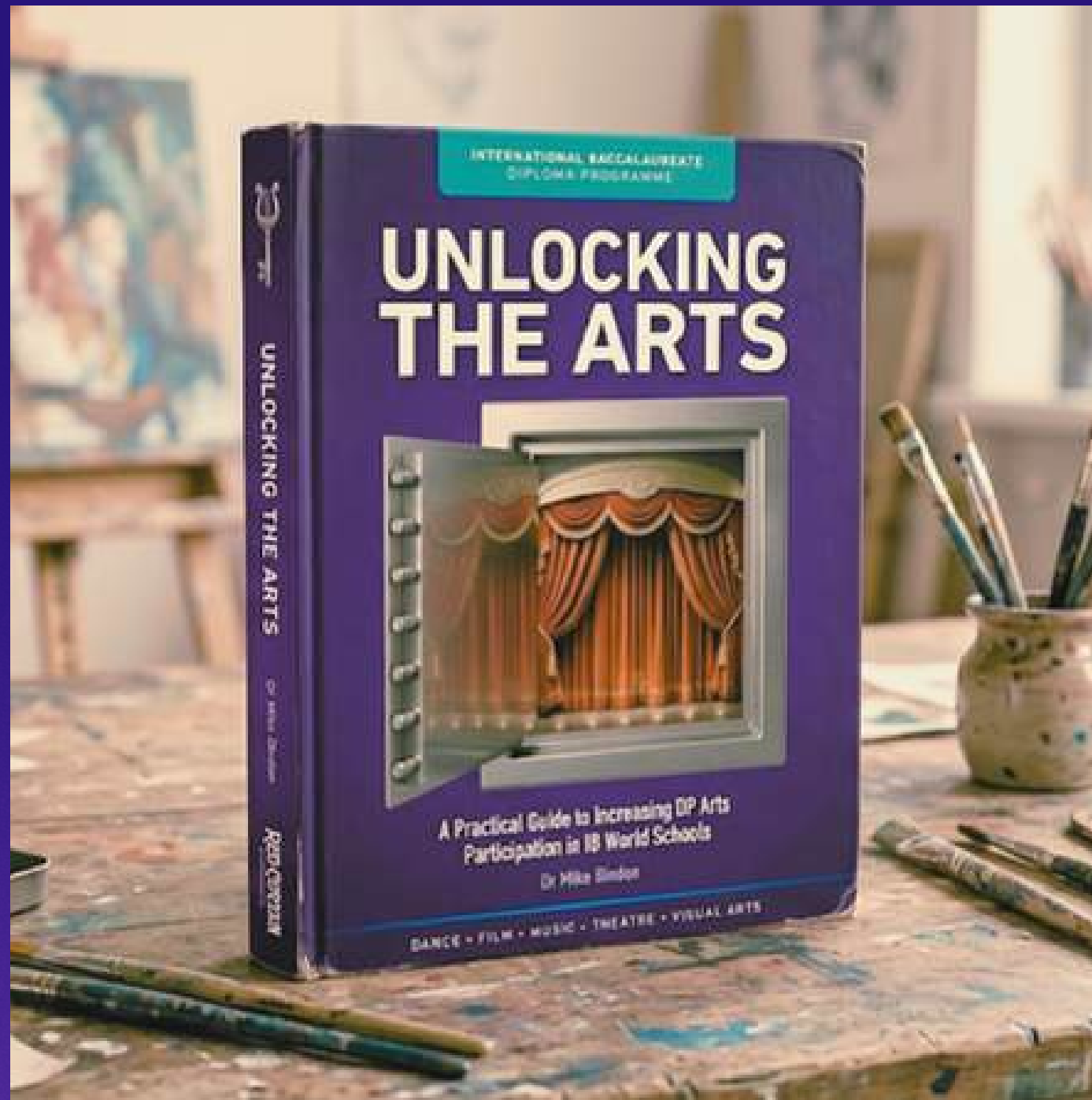
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Breaking Barriers

An Evidence-Based Guide to Increasing
Student Participation in IB DP Arts



Global Learning
Through the Arts



About

This free guide presents the key findings and practical strategies from **Unlocking the Arts: A Practical Guide to Increasing Diploma Programme Arts Participation in International Baccalaureate World Schools**. It has been prepared for arts educators and school leaders as an accessible introduction to the research and a practical starting point for change.

The complete handbook explores the evidence in greater depth and includes detailed case studies, leadership frameworks, conversation scripts, planning tools, and implementation resources designed to help schools turn research into action. Further details are provided at the end of this guide.

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Introduction

If you are reading this, something in your school is probably not quite right.

Perhaps your numbers have been falling. Perhaps a colleague lost their programme last year, or you are having conversations about whether yours is viable. Perhaps you have simply felt the quiet, persistent pressure of a system that treats your subject as optional in every sense of the word: in the timetable, in the options evening, in the director's all-staff address about what makes your school excellent.





You are not imagining it. And you are not alone.

Across International Baccalaureate (IB) World Schools globally, arts participation has been in decline for a decade. The Diploma Programme (DP) has grown by 43 percent since 2014. Arts participation has fallen every year since 2015. The arts are consistently the first thing to lose timetable space, staffing and funding when schools face difficult decisions.

Some colleagues have lost their programmes entirely. These are not isolated incidents. They reflect a structural problem embedded in the design of the DP, in the advice students receive, and in the signals that schools send, often without any intention to cause harm.

But the research also shows something else. In schools where the arts are thriving, where students choose arts subjects in significant numbers and departments are treated as equal partners in the curriculum, the difference is rarely about resources.

It is about choices: deliberate, sustained choices made by people at every level of the school, from the head of school who reviews the language in the options booklet to the theatre teacher who stops a Year 10 student in the corridor and asks, "Have you thought about what you're doing next year?"

I have spent more than twenty-five years working as an arts educator and curriculum developer, including over a decade as Curriculum Manager for DP arts at the IB. During that time, I have seen how decisions about timetables, staffing, guidance, and school culture shape the opportunities available to young people, and I have watched the same barriers to arts participation emerge in schools across four continents. My doctoral research set out to understand why. Conducted across a diverse range of IB World Schools, it explored not only the barriers that limit participation but, more importantly, what the schools that were succeeding were doing differently. This guide is an introduction to those findings.

It is written for the arts teacher who is already doing everything they can. It is also written for the DP coordinator who has never thought about the language in the options booklet, the counsellor who has been steering students away from the arts on the basis of advice that is a decade out of date, and the school leader who genuinely believes in a broad and balanced education but has never connected that belief to what happens in the subject selection meeting. Change requires all of them. But it nearly always starts with one person. That person does not have to carry it alone, and does not have to be a head of department to start. *The table on page 20 shows how responsibility is meant to be shared.*

The evidence, diagnosis and strategies are all presented here. What happens next is up to you.



The Data: A Quiet but Persistent Decline

The DP has grown significantly over the past decade. Between 2014 and 2024, the number of full diploma candidates worldwide rose from 67,524 to 96,758 annually. That is growth of 43 percent.

More schools, more students, more reach. But if you work in DP arts, that growth will not have felt like good news. Because the arts have not grown with it.



25.2%

Arts participation, 2014

Proportion of full DP candidates taking at least one Group 6 subject

21.8%

Arts participation, 2024

The lowest participation rate on record. A fall of 3.4 percentage points over ten years

+43%

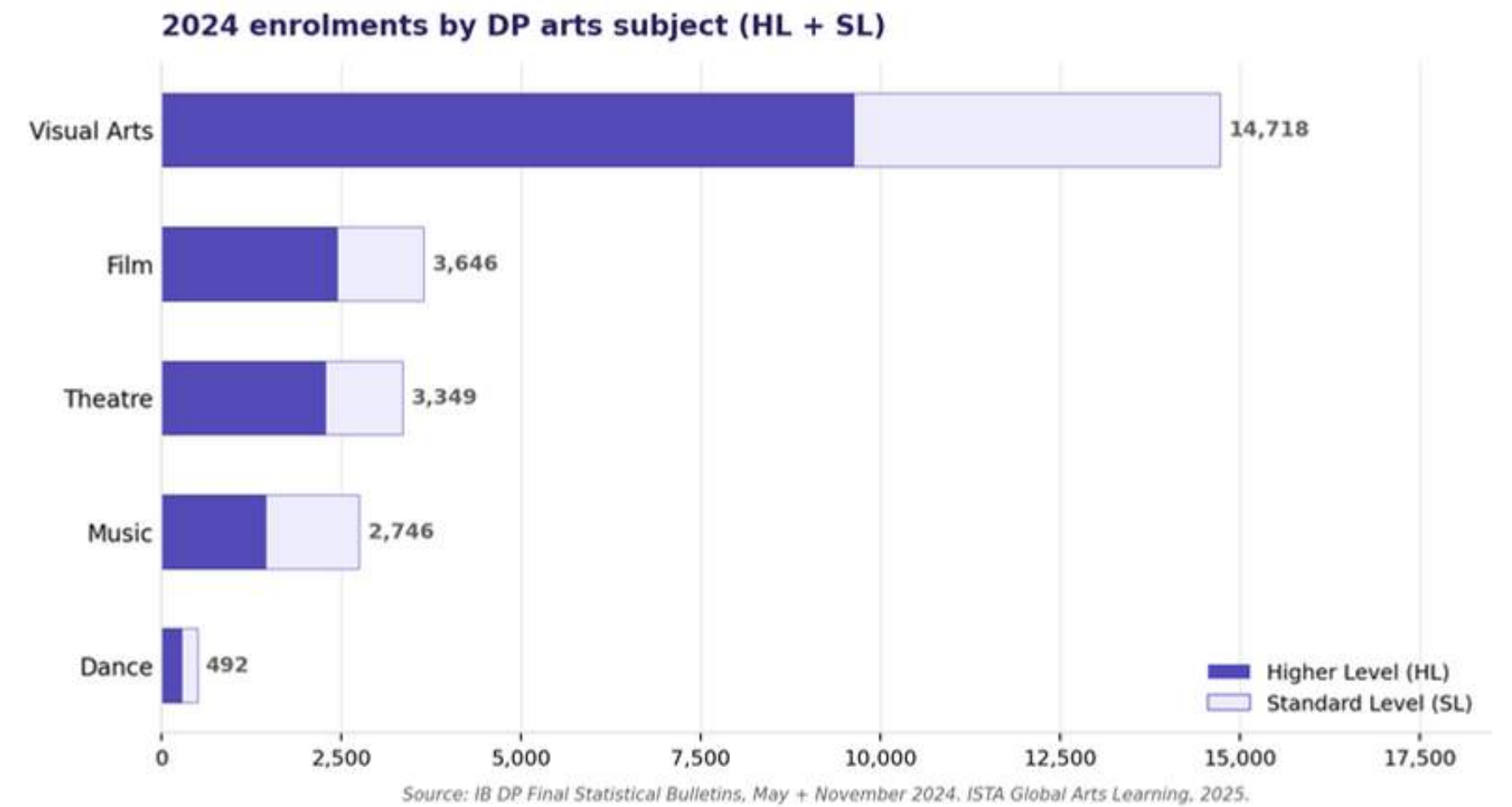
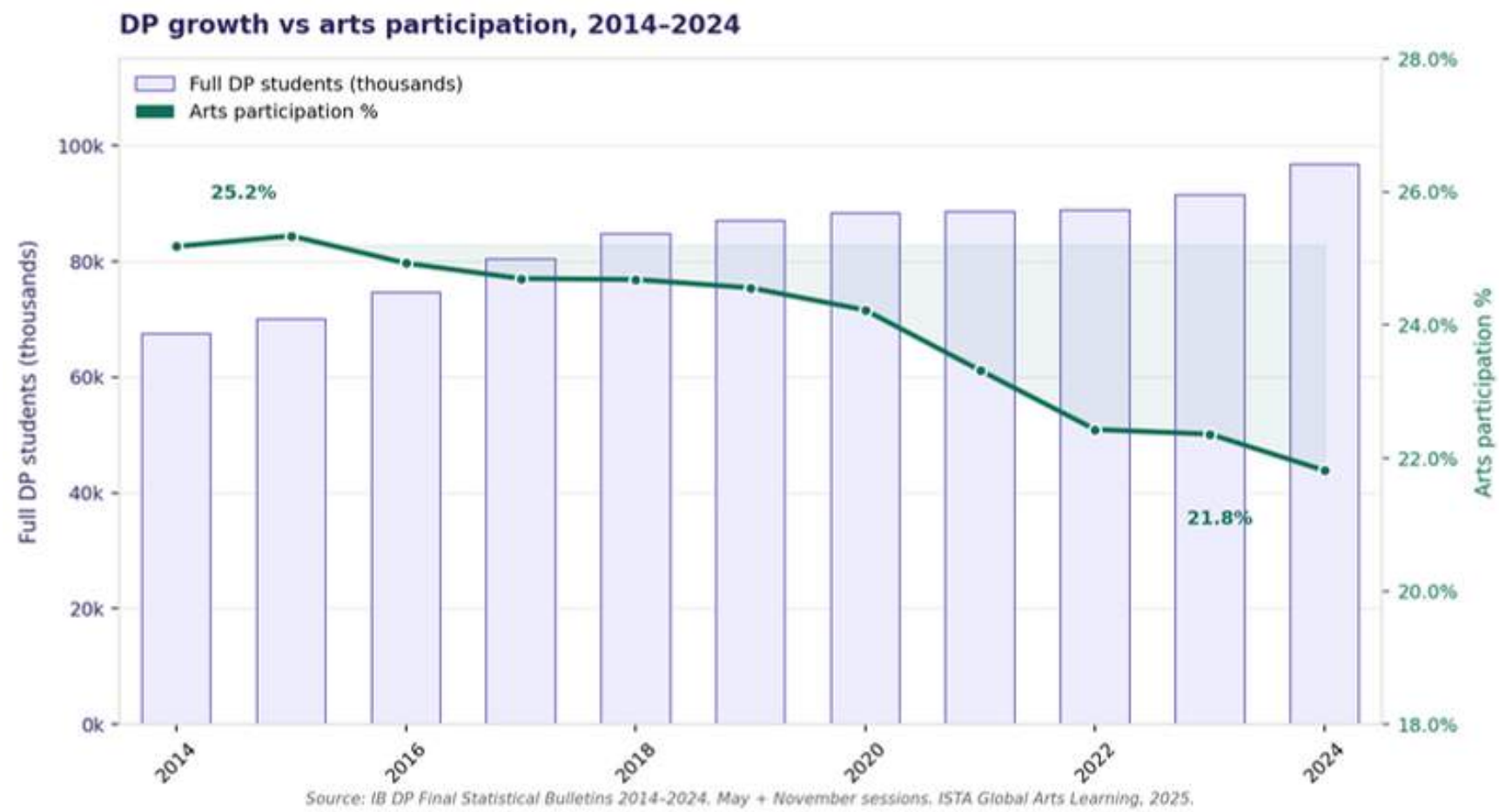
Full DP growth 2014-2024

The DP grew by nearly half. Arts participation grew by only 24 percent in the same period

43%

IB schools with no arts offer

Nearly half of all IB World Schools offer zero provision for DP arts subjects



Source: IB DP Final Statistical Bulletins 2014-2024. May & November session data combined.

At first glance, a fall of 3.4 percentage points over a decade may sound modest. In practice it means that in 2024, approximately 3,300 fewer students took an arts subject than would have done so if participation had simply stayed at its 2014 level.

For those of us who see what arts education gives young people, that number is not a statistic. It is the size of the problem.

The absolute numbers tell a further story. Arts student numbers peaked in 2020 at 21,393, then fell sharply over the following two years, losing nearly 1,500 students between 2020 and 2022 while the DP continued to grow.

That drop happened not because of Covid-related disruption to the May 2020 session, but in the years immediately after. A partial recovery in 2023 and 2024 still leaves participation well below where it should be relative to DP growth.

The 2024 subject breakdown adds important context for those of us working in the performing arts specifically. Visual arts accounts for 73 percent of all DP arts enrolments, with 14,718 students globally. Film and theatre each have around 3,300 to 3,600 students. music has 2,746. Dance has just 492 students worldwide.

If you teach theatre, film, dance or music, the marginalisation your subject faces is even more acute than the headline figures suggest.



‘The DP has grown by 43 percent since 2014. Arts participation has fallen every year since 2015. The two trends are connected.’

Why Students Are Not Choosing Arts

My research set out to explore this question directly through in-person conversations with students, arts teachers, heads of department, college counsellors, and school leaders across multiple IB World Schools on four continents. Three broad categories of barriers emerged.

Structural and organisational barriers

These relate to how the DP is designed and experienced in practice. The arts are the only subject group students are explicitly permitted to replace, which signals from the outset that they carry less weight. Official IB documents can frame the arts as something to opt out of, rather than opt into. Timetabling structures frequently position arts choices as incompatible with other subjects, particularly science combinations, making the arts feel structurally risky.

For many students, the DP model does not look like six equal groups. The arts sit at the bottom, visually and psychologically, as an optional add-on rather than a core element.

Cultural and advisory barriers

These relate to the messages students receive from the adults around them. College counsellors, often drawing on outdated guidance, frequently steer students toward 'keeping options open', a phrase almost exclusively used in relation to arts subjects. University admissions narratives, parental expectations, and cultural perceptions about what counts as a serious subject all contribute to a risk narrative that surrounds the arts but rarely applies elsewhere.

In my research, students shared experiences of parents actively discouraging arts choices, in some cases prohibiting specific subjects like film. These conversations were often protective rather than hostile, but they reflect deeply embedded assumptions about what the arts are for and who they are for.

Informational and experiential barriers

Students and parents frequently lack a clear picture of what DP arts courses actually involve. Misconceptions cluster at two poles: the arts are too hard (impossible to get high marks) or too easy (not academic). Neither is accurate, but both are persistent. And many students reach the point of subject selection having never experienced some arts disciplines at all, particularly dance and film, where pre-DP provision is often absent.

When students have no embodied experience of a subject, they cannot make an informed choice. Uncertainty defaults to the path of least resistance, and the path of least resistance is almost never the arts.

‘Arts uptake is rarely an accident. It is the outcome of systems, signals, and priorities.’

The Four Enduring Tensions

My research identified four enduring tensions embedded in the structure of the DP itself. These are not new problems. They trace back to the design of the programme in the late 1960s. They explain why the same barriers appear in schools across very different cultural and geographic contexts.



1. Value: what is stated versus what is signalled

The IB describes the DP as broad and balanced. In practice, Group 6's optional status communicates from the outset that the arts carry less institutional weight. This gap between stated values and structural signals shapes how students, parents, and school leaders understand the arts' place in the curriculum.

2. Choice: the illusion of free choice

Student subject choices are shaped well before the formal decision point. Timetabling constraints, guidance conversations, peer narratives, and parental expectations all filter and pre-determine the range of what feels possible. By the time a student formally selects their subjects, choice has already been significantly shaped, often away from the arts.

3. Balance: intent undermined by implementation

The Group 6 optionality clause was introduced as a flexibility measure, not a hierarchy. It was intended for students pursuing highly specialised university entry pathways. It was not originally intended as a signal that the arts were less important. Over decades, however, schools have reproduced and amplified the optionality language in ways that position arts as a genuine alternative to core study rather than a core subject in their own right.

4. Access: who really gets to choose?

Access to arts subjects depends on confidence, prior exposure, and the cultural and social permission students feel they have been granted. That permission is unevenly distributed. Guidance, parental expectation, and institutional culture grant access to some students while quietly withdrawing it from others. By the time choices are made, access has already been filtered.

Change Is Possible.

Here Is How It Happens.

The schools in my research that had the highest arts participation were not exceptional places with special resources or unusually supportive leadership. They were ordinary schools that had made deliberate choices, often led by individual arts teachers who had decided to stop waiting for the institution to fix things and had started working with it instead.

What distinguished them was not one big intervention. It was the accumulation of many smaller ones, made consistently over time and across different groups within the school. The research findings are clear: the more strategies a school implements in combination, the higher its levels of arts participation. And the strategies that matter most are not confined to what arts teachers do in their own classrooms. They involve every group that shapes how the arts are perceived, resourced, and chosen.

This section maps those groups and their roles. The full toolkit of 36 strategies, drawn directly from the research, follows in the next section.



School Leaders

Senior leaders set the limits of legitimacy. What they say about the arts, how they describe Group 6, and whether they appear in arts spaces or only at sports fixtures all send powerful signals to students, parents, and staff about what the school truly values.

The most impactful thing a school leader can do is review the language their institution uses to describe DP subject choices. The IB's own 2025 position statement now says the arts are fundamental to the values at the heart of an IB education.

Many schools are still using options materials that say the opposite. Closing that gap is a leadership decision, and it costs nothing.

Leaders can also reshape timetabling structures so that Group 6 subjects do not compete directly with the combinations students are most likely to choose, communicate publicly that the arts are academic subjects rather than enrichment activities, and invite themselves into arts classrooms to build the understanding that feeds genuine advocacy.



Guidance Counsellors

Counsellors are often the last adult conversation a student has before making their subject choices. The language used in those conversations matters enormously.

Phrases like keeping your options open are almost exclusively applied to the arts, and they carry an implicit message: that choosing an arts subject is a risk. Many counsellors hold this belief in good faith, based on guidance and university admissions information that is years out of date.

The research found that counsellors who actively repositioned the arts as a credible first-choice pathway, and who shared current data on university destinations and entry requirements, made a measurable difference to uptake.

This is not about pressuring students into choices that are wrong for them. It is about ensuring that conversations are honest, well-informed, and fair. Arts subjects should be held to the same standard as every other option, rather than being discounted on the basis of assumptions that are rarely questioned.



Arts Teachers & Heads of Department



You are, in most cases, the person who initiates change. That is both the honest truth and, when it becomes the whole truth, a significant problem.

The research shows that individual arts teachers carry a disproportionate share of responsibility for their subject's visibility, reputation and uptake, often without the formal authority to match.

What the data also shows, however, is that this influence is real. Students frequently cite their relationship with a teacher as the primary reason they chose a subject.

Arts teachers who speak directly with prospective students, who build a visible culture of excellence and ambition in their department, who use alumni and current students as advocates, and who treat their own professional credibility as something worth making visible, do see higher uptake over time.

The key is to act strategically rather than reactively. Not fighting every battle at once, but identifying the one or two interventions most likely to shift things in your context, and pursuing them with patience, evidence, and persistence.

The Wider School Community



Some of the most significant influences on arts uptake are not deliberate at all. The quality and ambition of a school production, the visibility of an exhibition in a public corridor, a visiting practitioner who inspires a Year 9 student, or a film club that runs every Thursday lunchtime without fail: none of these may be intended as recruitment strategies, yet the research found that they function as exactly that. They create the culture in which choosing a DP arts subject feels natural rather than unusual.

This means that increasing arts participation is not solely the responsibility of the arts department. It belongs to everyone who shapes the experience of being in a school: the history teacher who mentions their love of theatre, the deputy head who includes the arts in every speech about the school's values, the librarian who displays arts-related books during options season, or the parent who talks enthusiastically at the school gate about their child's experience in Dance. The ecosystem matters.

In the schools where this works, responsibility is shared and ownership is named. Change does not sit with one person.

But it almost always starts with one person: someone who decided that the status quo was not good enough, built their case carefully, and kept going.

Who	Their most important contribution
School leaders	Set the institutional signal. Review the language. Make the arts visible in leadership communications. Build timetables that do not pit arts against sciences.
Guidance counsellors	Position arts as a legitimate first choice. Use current data to challenge outdated university admissions myths. Ask the same probing questions they ask about other subjects.
Arts teachers	Speak directly with students. Build a visible culture of ambition and excellence. Make professional credibility visible. Recruit allies and advocates within the school.
DP coordinators	Control the options materials and subject choice process. The language they use, and the prominence they give the arts, shapes what students believe is expected of them.
Wider school community	Sustain the arts culture through productions, exhibitions, clubs, trips and visiting practitioners. Normalise arts participation so that choosing a DP subject feels like a natural continuation.

No single role on this list is expected to do all of this. If you are an arts teacher, your job is the 'Arts teachers' row — not the whole table.

**‘STEM may give you a job,
but the arts can give you a
career, creativity, and a life.’**

The Full Strategy Toolkit: 36 Things You Can Try

My research identified 36 distinct strategies used by schools to increase DP arts participation. They are drawn from real schools, real contexts, and real conversations with students, teachers, counsellors and leaders. No single school used all of them, but the data is clear: the more strategies a school implements in combination, the higher the arts uptake.

Use this section as a practical toolkit. Some of these you may already be doing. Others may be the one thing your school is missing. Start with what is within your reach, and build from there.

Most of these strategies cost nothing beyond time. While a handful require additional budget or leadership approval, start with the changes that are free and within your reach.



Part One:

Starting With Yourself and Your Department

Strategies within the direct authority of arts teachers and heads of department. These do not require leadership sign-off.



Part One:

Starting With Yourself and Your Department

1.

Discuss subject choices with individual students

Don't wait for students to come to you. Identify those who might benefit from an arts subject and have a direct, personal conversation. Students frequently cite their relationship with a teacher as the primary reason they chose the subject.

2.

Identify student arts advocates

Recruit your most enthusiastic current DP arts students to serve as advocates to younger year groups. Peer testimony is more persuasive than teacher promotion. Students believe students.

3.

Run arts-specific options events

Create dedicated options events for your arts subjects rather than relying solely on whole-school evenings. An arts-specific gathering, open studio, or taster day gives you the space, the time, and the control to present your subject on your own terms.

Part One:

Starting With Yourself and Your Department

4.

Offer arts taster sessions

Facilitate short taster experiences of DP arts subjects for pre-DP students, particularly for subjects not offered in earlier years. Give students a genuine encounter with the curriculum, the assessment approaches, and the teaching style before they have to decide.

5.

Celebrate key successes in the arts department

Actively and visibly celebrate strong assessment results, notable student work, and staff achievements. Create your own communications, a results announcement, a display, an email to parents, rather than waiting for the school to do it.

6.

Work with arts alumni

Engage ex-students and make their stories, destinations and achievements visible. An alumni board in the arts foyer, a visiting graduate teaching a session, or testimonials on a school website all demonstrate that taking an arts subject opens doors rather than closing them.

Part One:

Starting With Yourself and Your Department

7.

Encourage arts staff to engage in meaningful professional development

Students are more likely to be drawn to subjects where teachers are visibly passionate, professionally active, and engaged beyond the classroom. Attending IB workshops, presenting at events, or being an examiner all signal credibility and commitment.

8.

Identify arts advocate colleagues

Find colleagues outside the arts department who believe in the value of arts education and are willing to say so in guidance conversations, team meetings, and options events. Their advocacy carries different weight than yours and reaches students you cannot.

9.

Stage quality curricular showcases and events

Host regular public showings of assessed, curricular work: performances of assessment pieces, examined recitals, exhibition openings, film screenings. This is not just celebration. It is evidence: evidence of rigour, depth, and real creative achievement that prospective students can see and aspire to.

Part Two:

Making the Case – Leaders and Counsellors

Strategies that require leadership decisions or counsellor engagement. These need conversations, evidence, and specific asks.



Part Two:

Making the Case – Leaders and Counsellors

10.

Review the language used to communicate Group 6 optionality

Audit every instance where the optionality of the arts is communicated. Ask: does this language headline the opt-out, or does it foreground the expectation that students choose from all six groups? Small changes to language have disproportionate impact on perception.

11.

Remove or reframe the optionality of Group 6

Some schools in my research removed the opt-out entirely, requiring students to take an arts subject unless they could provide written evidence of a university entry requirement for two sciences. The result was significantly higher arts uptake.

12.

Be flexible with subject groupings, timetables and schedules

Construct the annual timetable based on student choices where possible, rather than restricting choice to fixed options blocks. Intentionally offer Group 6 subjects in their own timetable column, without other groups competing alongside them.

Part Two:

Making the Case – Leaders and Counsellors

13.

Enable students to choose two DP arts subjects

Where possible, allow students to study a Group 6 arts subject alongside a second arts subject in place of another subject group. Offering DP Environmental Systems & Societies (ESS) as an interdisciplinary Group 3 & 4 option can create the flexibility needed to make this possible. Schools that provide this choice send a clear message that the arts are valued as a serious and legitimate area of study.

14.

Offer and run multiple DP arts courses

Offer the full range of DP arts subjects where possible, and commit to running courses regardless of small class sizes. Schools that offer more arts subjects typically see more students opting for at least one.

15.

Offer pre-DP arts experiences

Ensure that all arts subjects offered at DP level have equivalent experiences or feeder pathways in the years before the DP. Students who have encountered a discipline as a timetabled subject before the choice point are far more likely to choose it.

Part Two:

Making the Case – Leaders and Counsellors

16.

Run summer schools

Offer certain required courses (such as a second science) as a short summer programme, freeing up timetable space for a Group 6 subject during the main school year. This removes one of the most common structural conflicts that prevent students from taking an arts course.

17.

Strengthen university and college counselling

Ensure that university counselling sessions include accurate, up-to-date information about arts subjects and their relationship to higher education pathways. Counsellors should position arts as a credible first choice, not a fallback.

18.

Reframe university entry requirements and debunk myths

Ensure that counselling staff refer to current, accurate information about university entry requirements. Many assumptions about the limitations of arts subjects are outdated or based on misconceptions. Identify and share up-to-date evidence and guidance that challenges these myths and demonstrates the wide range of pathways available to students who study the arts.

Part Two:

Making the Case – Leaders and Counsellors

19.

Counsel students with a pro-arts emphasis

Invite counsellors to actively consider whether they ever recommend an arts subject as a genuine first choice for a student. If not, why not? A frank, reflective conversation with counselling staff about their own assumptions is a powerful starting point.

20.

Communicate the inclusivity of the arts

Counter the perception that the arts are only for the highly talented. Actively communicate that DP arts subjects are designed for all students with an interest, not just those with specialist training. Use student data and outcomes to demonstrate this.

21.

Engage with arts lessons and content

Encourage senior leaders to visit arts classrooms, observe teaching and learning, and engage with what the curriculum actually covers. What leaders understand, they champion. What they never see, they undervalue.

Part Three:

Building and Sustaining the Culture

Strategies that build the arts culture of a school over time. Many function as participation strategies without being designed as such.



Part Three:

Building and Sustaining the Culture

22.

Stage quality co-curricular showcases and events

Produce full-scale co-curricular arts events (musicals, concerts, exhibitions, screenings) that are open to the whole school community. These moments are among the most powerful marketing tools for DP arts subjects: they show students what is possible.

23.

Run arts excursions

Take students to galleries, theatres, film screenings, concerts and dance performances. Exposure to professional arts practice in the real world builds aspiration, cultural context, and the sense that the arts are a serious part of the world beyond school.

24.

Run regular arts clubs

Maintain a visible, active co-curricular arts programme. While co-curricular engagement should never be positioned as a substitute for curricular study, clubs and after-school activities draw students toward the arts and sustain enthusiasm in ways that feed through to subject selection.

Part Three:

Building and Sustaining the Culture

25.

Connect with artists and arts organisations

Bring practising artists, theatre companies, filmmakers, musicians and dancers into the school as visiting practitioners. Encounter with working artists gives students permission to imagine themselves in those roles.

26.

Connect with arts departments in other schools

Collaborate with arts departments in other schools locally, nationally or internationally. Joint projects, shared events, and inter-school festivals build a sense of a wider arts community that students want to be part of. ISTA exists precisely for this.

27.

Make the most of arts spaces and resources

Ensure that arts facilities (studios, theatres, darkrooms, music rooms) are well-maintained, visible, and actively used. The physical quality and presence of arts spaces sends a signal about how the school values these subjects.

Part Three:

Building and Sustaining the Culture

28.

Actively reinforce interdisciplinary links

Make visible the connections between arts subjects and other areas of the curriculum: history, psychology, language, science. Interdisciplinary framing positions the arts as intellectually serious and relevant to a student's wider learning.

29.

Enter arts competitions and festivals

Enter students into external arts competitions, festivals, and tournaments. Recognition from outside the school lends legitimacy to your programme that internal advocacy cannot. When students bring home awards, the arts become visible to the whole school community.

30.

Establish a specialist arts pathway or academy

Where feasible, develop a specialist arts pathway or feeder strand that engages primary or feeder-school students through workshops, clubs, or holiday programmes. This can build long-term interest in the arts, need not require significant investment or additional staffing, and may even generate revenue. Schools with a visible arts identity consistently see higher levels of DP arts participation.

Part Three:

Building and Sustaining the Culture

31.

Prioritise enjoyment and manageability

Actively communicate to students and parents that choosing subjects based on personal interest, passion and sustainability, rather than perceived university preference, leads to better outcomes. This message needs to come from leadership, not just arts teachers.

32.

Maximise the use of student data

Gather and use data on student outcomes, assessment results, and post-DP destinations to make the case for the arts. Anecdote can be challenged; data is harder to dismiss. Build your own evidence base over time.

33.

Options presentations and events

Facilitate dedicated presentations and events for students and parents that provide information, advice and guidance on the full DP and the available subject choices. Ensure arts subjects are presented with equal prominence and time, not as an afterthought at the end.

Part Three:

Building and Sustaining the Culture

34.

**Published materials:
analogue and digital**

Publish informational materials (printed and digital) to support students and parents in making subject choices. Review all materials for implicit hierarchy: where are the arts positioned on the page? How much space do they receive? What language is used?

35.

**Emphasise balance in
whole-school narratives**

Connect the arts explicitly to the DP's stated commitment to breadth and balance. Push for arts to feature prominently in any school communications about the DP model, not as a sixth option but as integral to the hexagon.

36.

**Clearly communicate
difference between curricular
and co-curricular arts**

Ensure the arts are consistently described as equal academic subjects, not enrichment or add-ons. Challenge any school materials or narratives that position drama club or school productions as equivalent to or replacements for DP study.

"Nothing here requires a single dramatic reform. Real change comes from many small, ordinary decisions, made consistently, rather than one big campaign."

Your next step

Review this list and identify:

- (1) which strategies you are already using,
- (2) which are within your reach to start this term,
- (3) which require a leadership conversation, and
- (4) which cost nothing at all — these are the ones to start today.

Change is most effective when it is informed, patient, and persistent. You do not need to do everything. But you do need to do more than one thing, and do it deliberately.



The Most Important Thing to Understand

Arts uptake is about permission, not persuasion.



Students do not need to be convinced that the arts have value. Most already know they do. What they need is permission from the structures, the culture, and the messages that surround them to choose an arts subject without feeling that they are taking a risk or settling for something less important than other pathways.

That permission is granted or withheld through timetabling decisions, guidance conversations, school documentation, and leadership messaging, often without any conscious intent to disadvantage the arts. The signals may be subtle, but they accumulate, and they matter.

The schools in my research with the highest levels of arts participation were not doing one extraordinary thing. They were doing many ordinary things consistently, deliberately, and in alignment. Increasing arts uptake is rarely the result of a single intervention. It is the product of a culture built over time.

The IB has shifted too. In early 2025, the organisation updated its own language about the arts in the DP. After decades of materials that foregrounded what students could opt out of, it now says something different, something that many arts teachers have been saying for years, often to empty rooms.

The IB has now stated this plainly. What it has not done, and arguably cannot do, is mandate how schools respond. It has left that decision where it has always rested: with individual schools. The responsibility for turning this principle into reality, therefore, still lies with the leaders, counsellors, teachers, and communities who shape students' choices every day.

“The arts are fundamental to developing the values at the heart of an IB education.”

International Baccalaureate
Organization (2025)

How ISTA Supports This Work



ISTA Global Arts Learning is a UK-registered charity that exists to support arts educators, schools, and students internationally. We are a community of practitioners who believe that access to high-quality arts education is not a privilege but a right.

Before becoming Executive Director of ISTA, I spent many years working within the IB and travelling extensively to work with students, teachers, and school leaders. That experience highlighted a persistent challenge: the DP arts subjects are not well served by the wider educational publishing and professional development market.

Because the specialist arts community is relatively small, the resources, training, and professional networks that teachers deserve have often been overlooked, simply because they are not commercially attractive to large publishers or investors.

ISTA exists to help address that gap. As a mission-led organisation, we reinvest everything we earn into creating high-quality learning experiences for both students and educators through festivals, workshops, professional learning, publications, and an international community of practice.

The research in this guide has directly informed ISTA's work. Everything we develop is built on the same conviction that underpins this research: arts educators and students deserve evidence-informed practice, inspiring opportunities, and a strong international community that champions the value of the arts.



ISTA's Offer for DP Arts Educators



IB Workshops

ISTA delivers **IB-accredited professional development** for DP theatre, film, dance and music teachers. Workshops are practical, collaborative, and grounded in real classroom and assessment contexts.



Encore

ISTA's innovative **on-demand arts learning platform** offers flexible video courses, practitioner-led content, and subject-specific resources for students and teachers, accessible anytime, anywhere.



Resources

ISTA publishes **student handbooks, classroom posters** and other practical resources designed to support teaching, learning, and assessment across the DP arts subjects.



The Wider ISTA Community

Through **student festivals, events and membership**, ISTA connects educators and students in a global community dedicated to high-quality arts education and creative collaboration.

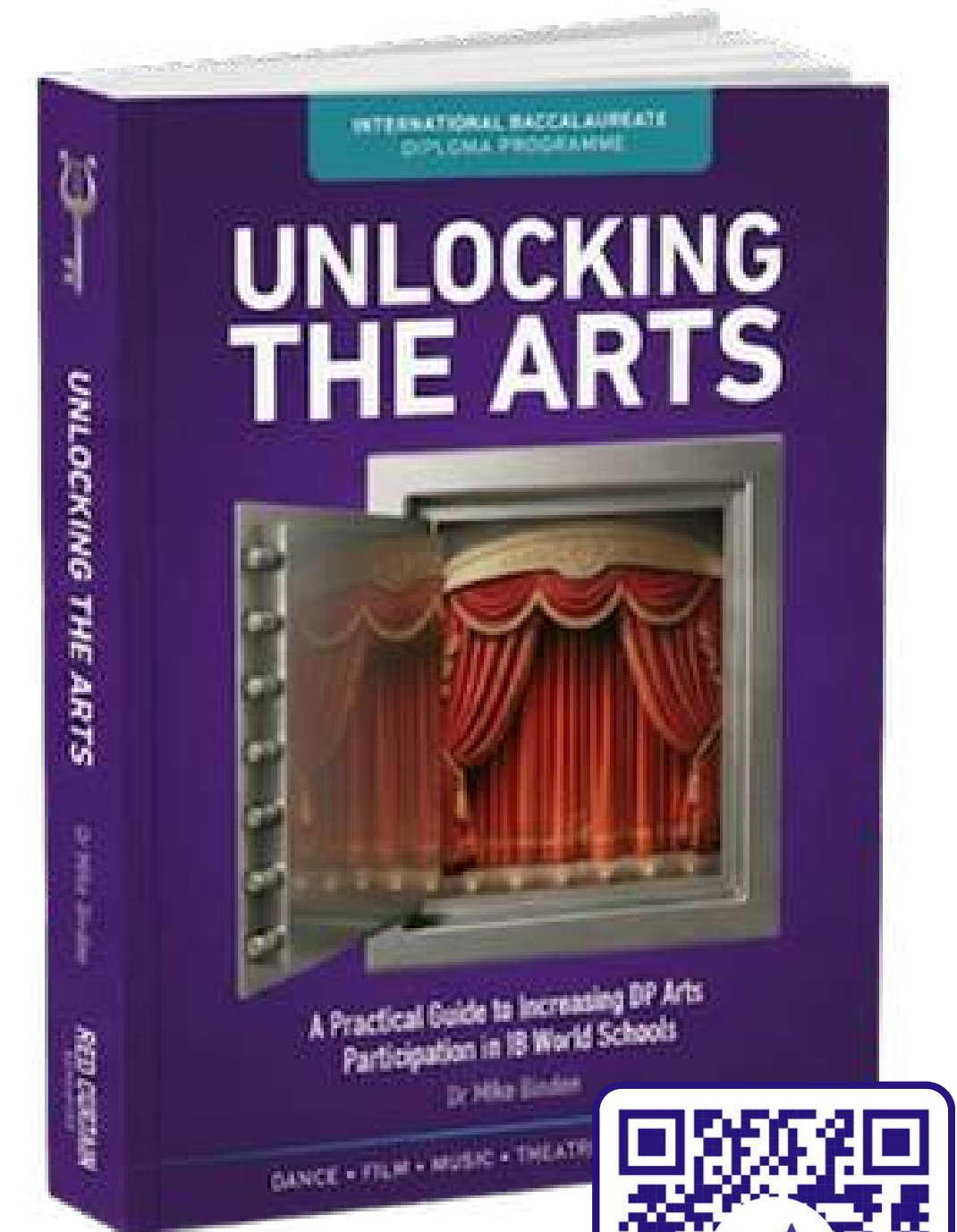
The Book Behind This Guide

This guide was designed to provide a concise overview of the research findings and the practical strategies that emerged from them. It has been extracted from the new handbook for schools, **Unlocking the Arts: A Practical Guide to Increasing Diploma Programme Arts Participation in International Baccalaureate World Schools**, which is now available.

The book explores the research in greater depth, examining the barriers to DP Arts participation, the decision ecosystem that shapes student choice, and the practical strategies that emerged from the nine IB World Schools studied across four continents.

Designed as a working handbook, it translates the research into actions, conversation frameworks, and ready-to-use tools. It addresses:

- The wider context and evidence behind the research.
- Evidence from the nine case-study schools, woven through every chapter.
- Practical frameworks and scripts for the conversations that matter most: with school leaders and counsellors, plus tools for listening to students.
- Templates, planning tools, and action frameworks that can be adapted directly within your own school.



Find out more:
redcurtainstudio.com/unlockingthearts
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‘Not every barrier is yours to remove. Build on the authority you already have, and the ideas of those who have walked the path before you.’

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