

# Notes on the ACA meeting with Baroness Bonham Carter's DCMS policy group at the House of Lords on Wednesday 13th January



## Purpose of visit

David Wood (Chair) and Vicky Ireland (Vice Chair) were invited to speak to this group, thanks to Patron Baroness Floella Benjamin. Baroness Jane Bonham Carter is the Lib Dem spokesperson for Culture, Media and Sport. Between 15-20 people attended, a mixture of parliamentarians and outside individuals who are invited because they have a particular CMS interest. The aim of the group is to identify policy areas the group can work on and formulate an approach to oral questions in the house.

The aim of our visit was to have a question raised on our behalf, in the House of Lords.

## Procedure

Introductory chat about ACA, its history and its aims, Patrons, activities etc.

Presentation of a list of issues particularly relevant today, including:

- The EBacc situation and its effect on English Primary State Education, with a growing distrust of school time spent on the arts
- The decline in school visits to theatres and other arts events, and the decline in artists being invited into schools.
- The apparent lack of communication between the Department of Education and the DCMS
- The reduction of play in Early Years due to the pressure of learning targets

The group responded with questions, and several issues were discussed.

Baroness Benjamin offered to lead a campaign to have a children's category in the Olivier Awards.

We agreed that Darren Henley and Sir Peter Bazalgette at the Arts Council understood the place of the arts in education, which was a hopeful sign.

There were mixed opinions about why Ed Vaizey is un-willing to press the arts argument with DoE. However, his recent statement was welcomed – 'we're blessed in this country with hundreds of arts organisations which achieve artistic excellence. Their role in education, particularly their ability to inspire and engage, needs to be recognised. Far from being an add-on or a nice-to-have, the role of arts companies in the education of our children is essential and needs as much support as possible'.

Simon Mundy, who some years ago ran the National Campaign for the Arts, spoke extremely well, saying that civil servants were to blame for not briefing ministers properly. His knowledge of previous history, such as the virtual demise of Theatre In Education, when Education cut off their grants and they had to plead for money from the Arts Council was admirable. It was felt that he should be approached to share his arts expertise with ACA.

Lord Dominic Addington spoke about how the sports lobby had succeeded in no small measure in receiving recognition and funding within schools, by appealing to different departments, including Health. He suggested that the arts should do something similar.

It was generally agreed that health and well being is generally recognised as being a valuable by-product of participation and exposure to the arts.

Steve Barnett, Professor of Communications at the University of Westminster asked, 'what do you see as the ideal scenario?'

We pointed out that it wasn't just money we were talking about, it was a change of attitude towards children, childhood and arts for children that was needed.

Another member of the group spoke about the fact that children from 0-5yrs are looked after by the Department of Health, but older children are looked after by the Department of Education. This was another example of how the attitude towards children's development, including the arts, was fragmented and not joined-up enough.

We presented newspaper articles which suggests that other countries were overtaking us in terms of creativity, and expressing concern that the arts were being eliminated from school curricula. Baroness Bonham Carter asked for copies.

## **Our question**

Finally, we provided a question which might be raised in the House of Lords, linked to the Ed Vaizey statement quoted earlier in this report. The question read:

'Can the DCMS re-iterate that it is not the role only of arts organisations in education to inspire and engage but the role of education to encourage children towards the arts, and that the Department of Education needs to be seen to promote the arts in schools and the value of the creative industries, if they are to flourish?'

After our departure, the meeting continued to discuss issues raised and possible future action. We will keep you posted.