



How the arts can support children and young people's development and wellbeing

Social
Biobehavioural
Research
Group, UCL



EVIDENCE BRIEF
THE ARTS PLEDGE
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The Arts
Pledge

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Arts and cultural experiences can contribute to much more than artistic knowledge and skill. This evidence brief from the Social Biobehavioural Research Group at University College London explores the associations between sustained engagement in the arts and important aspects of children and young people's development, health and wellbeing.

The brief is particularly valuable because its findings draw on large-scale cohort studies from the UK and USA, tracking thousands of young people over time. The research links participation in activities such as music, dance, drama, visual art and reading for pleasure with stronger prosocial behaviour, greater self-esteem and self-control, and lower levels of hyperactivity, inattention and some harmful behaviours. It also suggests that developing creative skills may contribute to positive social and emotional development later in adolescence.

As the research is observational, it does not establish that arts participation alone causes these outcomes. It does, however, provide important longitudinal evidence of the relationship between sustained arts engagement and young people's development. Crucially, the authors emphasise the need to make arts and cultural opportunities consistent and accessible throughout childhood—and identify improved provision in less affluent communities as a priority that may help address health inequalities.

For The Arts Pledge, this strengthens the case for arts and cultural learning as an essential part of a broad and ambitious education. Access should not depend on a young person's background, where they live or their family's ability to pay. Every child should have regular opportunities not only to encounter the arts, but to participate, create and develop their capabilities over time.

[Read the Full Evidence Brief](#)

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