



Report from Sharon Hodgson MP



Sharon and Susan Coles (centre), at the launch of the Art Now report in Parliament, on the current state of art & design teaching.

'Art Now' report launch.

This week I hosted the launch of Art Now: An Inquiry into the state of Art and Design teaching in Early Years, Primary and Secondary Education. The findings and recommendations of this report are an important first step on the road to recovery for art, craft and design education after the pandemic and years of underfunding. Our findings reveal the shocking reality that 67% of art and design teachers are thinking of leaving the profession after years of increased workloads, slashed budgets and failing resources. From this worrying reality the report sets out clear recommendations on how to restore art, craft, and design education to the success story it once was and can be again.

The event, which was attended by numerous Members of Parliament and Members of the House of Lords as well as representatives from across the education profession was a remarkable success. To hear from our speakers, share our message with parliamentarians, and get the ball rolling on this campaign to save art, craft and design education was a fantastic experience. Alongside our report, we have launched a petition as we continue to unite and call on policy makers to take heed of our recommendations and

deliver art now! I recommend reading the report, available online, as while the findings may reveal the crisis, the report's recommendations stand as a tool kit through which we can rebuild and restore art and design education.

Mortgage crisis

Home and business owners continue to suffer as mortgage rates rise in response to the Tories' failure to grapple with inflation and, as a consequence, the Bank of England raising its benchmark interest rate from 4.5% to 5%. The truth is, working people will suffer the hardest while the government refuses to negotiate fair pay for nurses and other key workers. The Government has acted too slowly to support millions of homeowners and renters and alleviate the impact of its policies. I support calls for it to bring in mandatory measures, rather than the current voluntary ones which could lead to around one million homeowners missing out on support. They must act immediately to ease the mortgage crisis and halt repossessions, by guaranteeing support from lenders for struggling mortgage borrowers and strengthening the rights of renters.

In particular, I believe the Government should require lenders to allow borrowers to switch to interest-only mortgage payments for a temporary period, to lengthen the term of their mortgage and to reverse any support measures when requested. It should also make repossession restrictions mandatory. In addition, the Chancellor should instruct the Financial Conduct Authority to urgently issue guidance that any temporary switches to interest-only mortgage payments or lengthening of the mortgage period should not affect borrowers' credit scores. Lastly, I believe the Government should introduce a renters' charter that would end no-fault evictions immediately.

Meanwhile, the multi-millionaire PM's advice to the public is to simply hold their "nerve". He's forgetting that it was his predecessor that scared the markets and provoked this crisis. Thirteen wasted years of Tory rule. As much as the PM claims to be solving the problem, new data shows that the average five-year fixed-rate homeowner mortgage has jumped above 6% for the first time since November last year.

School Food campaigning.



In June I was proud to deliver a petition alongside fellow MPs and school children to Number 10 Downing Street, calling for further Free School Meals provision. I signed an open letter by the Mirror and National Education Union, pressing the Prime Minister to overturn the strict eligibility rules that mean more than 800,000 kids living in poverty miss out on free lunches, and then joined school children with their red dinner trays outside Downing Street to take this message directly to the Prime Minister. Similarly, I've been fighting for the Labour Party to honour its conference pledge to roll out free school meals universally. This is on the back of a Westminster Hall Debate on In-Work Poverty on Wednesday 28th June, where I stood and called for increased provision of free school meals so that children who are living in poverty but are not eligible for the free lunch can escape food insecurity.



Earlier in June I visited Soho Parish Primary School to see their Chefs In Schools programme, whereby instead of using an external caterer, schools hire their own chefs. The Chef at Soho (Michael Collins, pictured above) had previously worked with Gordon Ramsay, but wanted to have a more routine life after having his own children, and now makes sure every meal is nutritious and helps

develop the children's palettes, creating a community dining experience. I think more schools should aim for such a high standard of service which just requires a bit of reorganisation and vigour!

Boundary Commission final recommendations.

Last week the final recommendations for the Boundary Commission were published for our new constituency. The previous set of proposals saw the new constituency named Washington and inheriting Birtley and Lamesley wards from the Blaydon constituency, whilst losing St Anne's to Houghton and Sunderland South. I'm sure members will recall the first set of proposals, which saw Redhill become part of Jarrow Constituency as they intended to carve up Sunderland.

The final recommendation sees the constituency name changed again from Washington to Washington and Gateshead South. I find this disappointing as it does not reflect the Sunderland North wards of Castle and Redhill, which were already included in the current name Washington and Sunderland West. It would have been better to include the Sunderland North wards alongside the Gateshead South title or retain it as Washington instead of picking one part over another.

I am sorry to lose St Anne's from the constituency, who submitted evidence to help reverse the madness proposed by the Boundary Commission back in 2021. I look forward to welcoming Birtley and Lamesley wards into the constituency – they currently border the Washington South and West wards.

Baroness Margaret McDonagh, RIP



Lastly, I would like to pay tribute to Margaret McDonagh, whose recent passing has been devastating news for Parliamentarians across the house, past and present. She was the most successful Labour Party General Secretary we've ever had and was the first and youngest woman to hold the post. She steered Labour to two landslide General Election victories with a single-minded focus on the prize; which was winning. She believed there was nothing that couldn't be achieved if planned and organised

with ruthless determination and professionalism. She transformed the Labour Party into an election winning machine and when we won we were then able to transform the country to improve people's lives. Her belief in the need for social justice and opportunity for all is what drove her, day in day out, even during her terrible illness she was still campaigning for access to better cancer treatment for Glioblastoma patients. I truly believe that Margaret's guidance, mentorship and training made me who I am today. We may never see her like again. May she rest in eternal peace. **Here is a link to Margaret's tribute JustGiving page:** <https://tinyurl.com/5zrwnvct>

Sharon Hodgson, Washington & Sunderland West Constituency

Units 1 & 1A, Vermont House, Concord, Washington,

Tyne & Wear NE37 2SQ

Tel. (0191) 417 2000

W: www.sharonhodgson.org

E: hodgsons@parliament.uk

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/@SharonHodgsonMP>