



WE Party Conference

Kettering 7 – 9 September 2018

Title: From STEM to STEAM

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Type of motion: Policy Motion

Motion text:

1 WE's equal education policy on page 17 states:

2 "All teenagers should study either English or one STEM subject up to the age of 18 through
3 GCSEs, A-levels or other qualifications."

4 We propose:

5 1) to change this wording to:

6 "All teenagers should study a balanced STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering Arts &
7 Design and Maths) curriculum to age of 16 through GCSEs and other UK qualifications."

8 and to add:

9 "The education system privileges and rewards subjects where women and girls are under-
10 represented. The English government's emphasis on STEM puts girls into a deficit situation and
11 further devalues in the national narrative the skills and disciplines in which they often excel.

- 12 ● WE will support and promote all young people in studying sciences and technology and
13 pursuing careers in these areas, and encourage everyone to understand arts, humanities
14 and social sciences not as soft options but as rigorous, challenging and life-enhancing
15 qualifications.
- 16 ● WE will work with schools and training institutions to address their gender bias in creating
17 subject pathway.



18 ● We will require schools to engage with parents about the life chances and breadth of
19 careers open to young people in the 21st century when they study a balanced curriculum.”

20 2) To ensure that education becomes equal, we propose this addition to the Equal Education
21 policy:

22 “The English Government has introduced the so-called E-Bacc which restricts subject
23 choices and student pathways, and encourages prioritisation of resources and teaching
24 posts within state schools to STEM subjects, creating inequality of life chances.

25 WE call on:

- 26 ● the English Government to scrap the E-Bacc* and to introduce a STEAM curriculum
27 in secondary schools to the age of 16.
- 28 ● the Assemblies of Northern Ireland and Wales, and Scotland’s Parliament to formalise
29 a STEAM curriculum to the age of 16.”

30 * Education is devolved in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland

Motion rationale:

31 The English Government has identified the need to promote STEM subjects in state schools. WE
32 have rightly supported the advancement of girls and women in science, technology, engineering and
33 maths.

34 However WE must not do this at the expense of devaluing arts, humanities and social science.

35 *“Disdain for this part of the curriculum is down to patriarchal ideas of what kind of work has*
36 *worth. Humanities students learn skills for life – creativity and communication skills are vital in*
37 *all forms of work – and our cultural richness is as important as, and contributes to, our GDP.*
38 *Adding arts to STEM increases the benefits of traditional science learning for all.”*
39 (Sophie Walker – leadership manifesto 2018)

40 Devaluing arts and creativity is not just detrimental to women and girls who excel in these fields (and
41 their male counterparts), it also discourages boys from developing the intellectual curiosity and
42 empathy that are part and parcel of studying arts and social sciences. It undermines WE’s objective
43 of achieving equality in education and ultimately damages society.

44 Research shows that young people who study arts in their teens enjoy greater opportunities in
45 adulthood. They are 20% more likely to become politically engaged, to empathise with people from
46 other backgrounds and to enjoy better health/wellbeing (38%).¹ Businesses increasingly seek out
47 people skilled in creative thinking and the ability to express themselves.²

48 WE must be seen to support women and girls whose talent and skill manifest in creative endeavours.
49 WE must encourage them to do even better by complementing their skills in science, technology,
50 engineering and maths and vice versa.

¹ <https://culturallearningalliance.org.uk/evidence/>

² https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2017/12/20/the-surprising-thing-google-learned-about-its-employees-and-what-it-means-for-todays-students/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.c314e2d74d4e



51 Arts are good for business and, in the UK arts are good business. Arts Council England reported in
52 2017 that arts and culture industry has grown 10% in a year, contributing £8.5bn to the UK economy.³
53 The wider creative industries sector supports upwards of 3 million jobs.⁴

54 The E-bacc in England works against WEP's core objective of equal education by squeezing arts,
55 humanities and social sciences out of the state secondary curriculum. The impact has already been
56 felt with catastrophic drops (28% since 2010)⁵ in GCSE uptake of arts subjects, and loss of specialist
57 teachers across the country, with similar falls in Scotland.

58 At the very point when Parliaments and Assemblies should be ensuring that every child in the UK is
59 taught arts and humanities by specialist teachers, they are pushing them out of state education
60 (except Wales)⁶ reinforcing inequality. The E-bacc is especially failing children from lower socio-
61 economic groups, children from minority ethnic backgrounds and children with disabilities who are
62 known to have reduced access to arts and culture outside school as compared with other children.⁷

63 Great artistic and scientific endeavour have always been intertwined. Ada Lovelace called computing
64 "poetical science". To achieve an equal education environment, WE need to move from STEM to
65 STEAM.

³ <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/economic-contribution>

⁴ Creative Industries Sector Deal 2017

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/695097/creative-industries-sector-deal-print.pdf

⁵ <https://www.thestage.co.uk/news/2017/gcse-arts-subjects-free-fall-results-confirm-9-decline-entries/>
<https://www.baccforthefuture.com>

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/aug/08/scottish-msps-narrow-curriculum-schools-uptake-creative-subjects-falls>

⁶ The exception is the Assembly in Wales <https://gov.wales/docs/caecd/research/2018/180313-evaluation-creative-learning-through-arts-programme-interim-en.pdf>

⁷ <https://culturallearningalliance.org.uk/evidence/key-research-findings-the-case-for-cultural-learning/finding-2-attainment/>