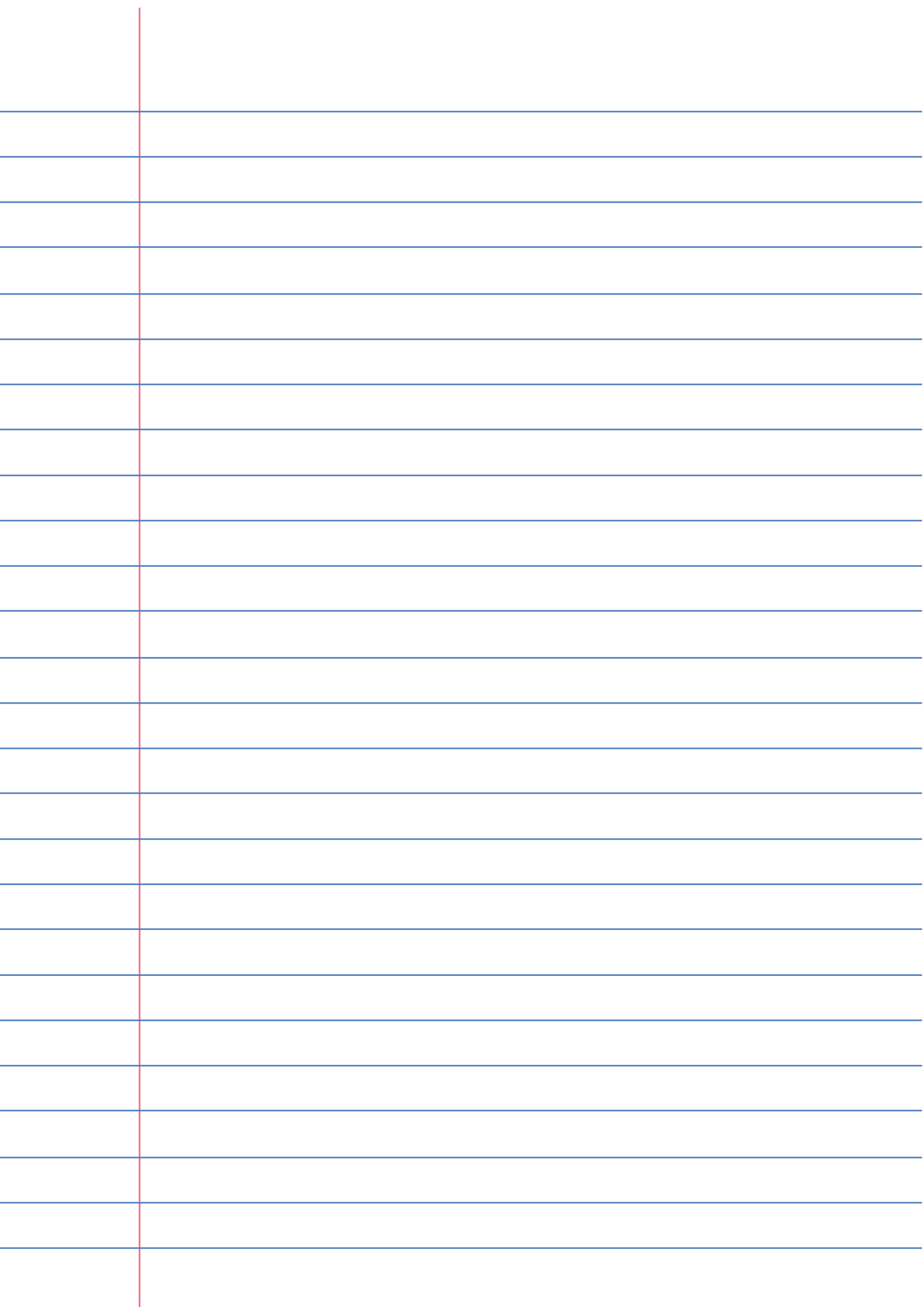# Reflection

Pepper Project

2023

Reflection is a brief encounter of Hannah Rollason's experiences and thoughts of art education in light of *The Arts in Schools: Principles, Practice and Provision*. While limited in words this text is only part of such a larger conversation, that its no surprise if it leaves you, as the reader, with more questions. This being reflective of how the artist has been left with questions as to what art education truly is.

PEPPER PROJECT

This forms the first part of the Pepper Project, a collection of texts, artworks and workshops created by artist Hannah Rollason.The Pepper Project de-constructs, re-imagines and abstracts the pepper both physically and conceptually, exploring the open-ended process of learning and creativity.

The pepper has been chosen as an emblem for this project, as during Primary and Secondary school, the pepper is often used as a subject within Art and Design classes, becoming an introduction to both drawing and creativity. These early experiences of drawing the pepper are an integral part to the young person's understanding of art. The level of their initial success in drawing it, dictating whether they feel they are 'good' or 'bad' at art, further shaping their viewpoints of the subject.

On reflection I found that within art lessons there was a disconnect emphasised and made apparent within the transitions from Primary to Secondary and then Secondary to Higher Education;

During rimary school, art lessons were scheduled for less than an hour insufficient time to learn about and participate in art. The depth of information limited to names, location, and famous pieces while resources were reduced to paper and pencils. The reason being that certain teachers swayed the attitudes of their classes through either personal feeling towards art, not having a specialism within that field or by skipping lessons. While my knowledge of art was limited at the time, I still had an interest in the subject due to personal development. Highlighting how important outreach in schools is whether that be visiting artists, organising workshops, establishing a relationship with local galleries or participating in art competitions.

Progressing to secondary school came with the added benefit of three-hour lessons as well as an art and design department fitted with facilities such as potters' wheels, kilns, and skylights. In theory this was ideal, in practice it was another story. Yearly budget cuts reduced these facilities to barely being used if not nothing at all therefore providing a limited experience of The Arts. Overall, narrowing people's perspectives as to its potential.

Meanwhile the rigid structure of art classes meant that there was a lack of control of theory and practice in terms of creativity, knowledge learnt and skill development. Limited to birds or portraits, portraits were seen as being harder than birds and therefore can only be drawn by more skilled artists. The emphasis being placed on whether pupils were good or bad at drawing to begin with, without the provision to nurture skills, develop knowledge or push boundaries. However, this lack of flexibility exceeds far beyond the realms of 'serendipity or chance', but this restricts the voice and skill of the artwork so much so that the fear to not conform would result in absolute failure. 'Free expression' is an area which needs to be encouraged as this line in the document can be taken too literately.

Therefore, the structure, negative connotations and stigmas around the subject limits its capabilities; it's not because of a lack of ability to do art but of confidence due to negative thoughts formed by prior experiences of art in school. The emphasis of perfection within art puts pressure on creativity that makes children anxious about a blank page eventually subliminally creating this fear of art in general. In doing so, removing this extra ability to communicate, express emotions and process events or even trauma. Rather than seen as a waste of time, having that room to experiment and test ideas can have a positive effect. Creating a lifelong tool of creativity. Building on self-awareness and social skills as well as adding to employability skills. This understanding of the links between art, education and wellbeing shows how this is a viable subject and career as without art education how can we support the further positive effects.

Focusing back on the potentials of The Arts, if art is a mirror to society, then how does The Arts in Schools reflect this. With culture threaded through art and other subjects then why are we are not given the freedom/ support to explore this at school whether that be as part of a project or our main practice as artists. Given that at primary and secondary, part of the curriculum focus is placed on equality, diversity, and inclusivity. By restricting this especially in a subject such as art limits its potential as a subject and its impact on the wider curriculum. Again, this is not about complete 'free expression' but allowing the tailoring of practices to interests and passions of students adding greater depth to the artwork being produced. Meanwhile allowing art to fully shows its potential as a means to communicate, socially engage people and build on multicultural relationships.

This leading to thoughts about how art can be used across the curriculum while in itself could be supported by other subjects. For example, a cross over between English and Art to help students with art essays. This has the potential to push creativity, communication skills, research and critical thinking. Therefore, inferring the outcomes of English lessons by strengthening literacy and reading skills. Alternatively, History and PSHE as means to help students with context to their work building a body of research stemming from their culture. Their art begins to form into a practice; learning in depth about their interests, its origins and current relevance. To then further communicating this with fellow students and staff through visual and written communication.

As business and engineering became the focus of the school, careers pushed this as an avenue to go down especially as a woman. When mentioning art the conversation came to art teaching with no further help as to other jobs, career paths or further education routes. Following this I visited What Career Live event where I asked about art careers specifying my interest in studying Fine Art at University, there I was told to 'carry on the way you are going.' proving that it is not seen as career to thrive at but is as easy as getting a university degree and stepping into a job. On the other hand, if this is a work sector which requires 'hard work' and working multiple jobs to sustain a living (which what career doesn't) then where is the support.

I feel fortunate enough to have been to university as its only there my insight into the art world has been expanded;

The first question my university asked me was why do you make art? Now I can answer that in its fullest form. Being able to develop a practice, a purpose of my artwork focusing me while allowing me to push my own boundaries as an artist. Four years ago, I was lost becoming institutionalised by my experiences of art in school. But I found that what I have been through isn't necessarily reflective of what The Arts is, that while this path has led me to where I am today many creative people have been left behind. It shows when your class goes from 90 students to just 4 within the space of a summer holiday.

When it comes to questioning my future, University staff have gone out of their way to provide insight or have sourced relevant contacts. Let alone the career departments dedication to supplying information and opportunities. This level of input into career decisions that Universities succeed in needs to be reflected within schools. If necessary, outreach or communicate with individuals and organisations due to the supporting resources and specialist insight.
I realise that the report is aimed at Primary and Secondary schools. But the positive aspects of Higher Education show the possibilities and flexibility that education can take without losing its structure and aims. Yet with so many people not experiencing this proves that this passion for a subject should not be left down to the few institutes alone.

We can change attitudes especially one in particular:

That we as creatives, in our many forms, are non-viable.

We are viable.

This change starts with art education.

PEPPER PROJECT

Produced as part of the Pepper Project, *Reflection* was created by Hannah Rollason in response to *The Arts in Schools: Principles, Practice and Provision.* This was initiated through New Direction whom hosted a series of workshops and roundtable events. For further information please visit: https://www.anewdirection.org.uk/the-arts-in-schools/young-people-respond

Reference:
Robinson, K. (1982) *The Arts in Schools: Principles, Practice and Provision.* London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.

Hannah Rollason: Embracing form, aesthetics, and the manipulation of media to draw out symbolism, Hannah Rollason employs metaphor and myth within the context of the work. With initial inspiration being personal exchanges and everyday visual influences while often drawing in subjects such as history, ecology, and social politics to create an interdisciplinary practice. Exploring the relationship between human and nature, specifically the interactions, connections and disconnections of urbanisation, agriculture and nature.

Currently this has evolved to research how objectified nature is an integral part of understanding historical and contemporary society and the impacts this can have on issues such as climate change.

Developing this passion for art and learning Hannah Rollason is also an arts educator; The chance to educate and engage people to develop their knowledge of art while showing the unique possibilities the art sector has to offer is something that she is enthusiastic about.
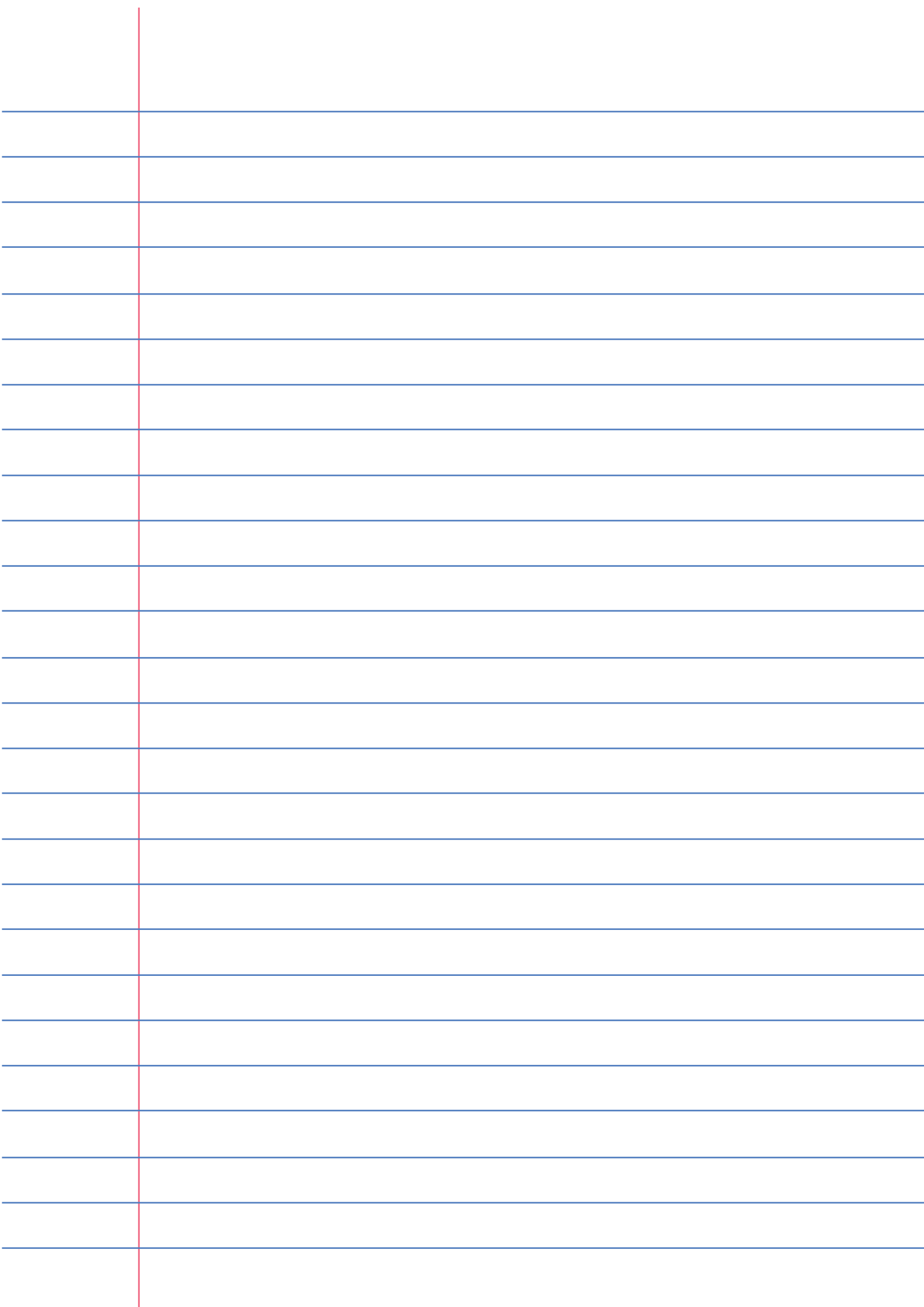
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