



## **How well does the art and design curriculum and assessment system support educational progress for children and young people?**

We have identified a number of gaps between the CAR curriculum principles and the existing programmes of study. The current national curriculum does not ensure a high-quality art, craft and design education for all pupils. There is insufficient rigour, vague expectations around core knowledge, key competencies and disciplinary knowledge. Diversity of practice and references are not supported – instead, there is a narrow range of art, craft and design practice in the content and examples given. In schools where curriculum leaders have an insecure understanding of high-quality art, craft and design education, pupils will not experience a broad, ambitious curriculum that fosters imagination, creativity, and deep subject knowledge. Recent research published by NSEAD (*School Art, where is it?*) provides evidence of a narrowing of the curriculum at all key stages. The reduction in teaching of 3D design and sculpture; and the failure to embrace digital media as well as design competencies, are notable. Primary school teachers have insufficient training to be able to recognise the missing content in the programmes of study for key stage 1 (KS1) and 2. At KS3 and into KS4, the curriculum is limited by lack of specialist resources and teachers – the subject has seen a 19% fall in entrants to initial teacher education since 2010, and the vacancy rate has tripled. Whilst teaching hours appear to have risen for KS4, this should be viewed with caution. Teaching

hours for KS4 fell steadily between 2011- 2019. The increase after 2019 is undoubtedly linked to the dramatic fall in teaching hours and GCSE entries for D&T. NSEAD members report that GCSE art and design endorsed syllabuses in 3D design, textiles and graphic design are being adopted as alternative qualification pathways in place of the D&T GCSE. We strongly warn against any complacency – we believe that the teaching hours and take up for dedicated art and design focused pathways (with an emphasis on imaginative expression and critical/contextual learning) may in fact be on the decline.

We know that pupils are leaving formal education insufficiently equipped for progression to higher education and work, with HE Institutions and employers reporting skills gaps – (*Skills mismatches in the UKs-Creative Industries*, Creative PEC, Feb-2025). It is vitally important that we ensure that the national curriculum provides a secure framework to support meaningful progression in art, craft and design.

We suggest that the curriculum could be greatly improved if the following four key areas are addressed:

1. The need to clearly **define the knowledge domains for art and design** and to make core knowledge expectations explicit
2. **Missing content needs to be included** with specific design and craft competencies.
3. A clear expectation of the need to develop **imagination, expression and creative thinking** through a plurality of disciplines and approaches that support personal and divergent learning goals.
4. Ensure **meaningful representation and diversity of practice and references** to support learners' exploration of the world around them historically or through contemporary art and culture.

We make concrete recommendations to address areas where evidence indicates barriers to improving attainment, progress, access, or participation (class ceilings) for learners experiencing socioeconomic

disadvantage, or disproportionately impacting pupils based on other protected characteristics (e.g. gender, ethnicity).

Unless otherwise specified, these recommendations apply across the programme of study for key stage 1, 2 and 3. We consider these essential actions to ensure that pupils are better prepared for qualifications at Key stage 4 and 5 and beyond.

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## Curriculum principles, problem diagnosis and change required

### Rigorous and knowledge focused

#### Problem diagnosis:

Learning in art, craft and design is primarily, although not exclusively, through practical work and experience. Knowledge and skill are accumulated over time through practice.

The current programmes of study provide insufficient steer, and key **content is missing** for all key stages.

Art, craft and design **knowledge** is not well defined within the current programmes of study. In addition, craft and design are not clearly articulated. Consequently, **breadth and balance** across the full scope and requirements of the subject are not always well understood or reflected in school curricula. **Content and delivery** are skewed toward a focus on technical skills and dialogic knowledge with materials. Other

factors have led to a huge reduction in exposure to three-dimensional materials, techniques, processes, and ways of thinking. This has an impact on **rigour** and **relevance** of what is taught and learned.

Change required:

To ensure rigour, **define the knowledge domains** that inform learning in the subject, i.e:

- **EXPLICIT** – Know what (facts & theory)
- **TACIT** – Know how (**experiential learning**)
- **CONCEPTUAL** – Know about (critical & contextual, aesthetics, other cultures)
- **AFFECTIVE** – Know self (self-perception, reflection, metacognition, motivation, feelings & emotions, making meaning)

To ensure relevance, breadth and balance, introduce specific **design and craft competencies**, i.e:

- Designing is integrated into the planning of children's and young people's art, craft, and design outcomes, whether aesthetic or functional.
- The actions of investigating, recording, experimenting, visualising, multi-viewpoint transformations, annotating, scaling, modifying and improving ideas, are all characteristics of a design process'.

To ensure relevance, breadth and balance make explicit the need to cover a **plurality of disciplines and approaches**, i.e:

- Critical analysis, issue-based learning, the communication of meaning in and through art must be sufficiently integrated and balanced with the acquisition of the craft skills of art making.
- Three-dimensional study – to include the design, prototyping and modelling or making of primarily functional and aesthetic products, objects, and environments – drawing on intellectual, creative, and practical skills.

## Supports proficiency (mastery) and progression

### Problem diagnosis:

The current programmes of study provide the space for teachers to develop and adapt content, however, this has resulted in **missing content** which is a barrier to **progression and** limits the potential for learners to reach their full potential. This creates issues at points of **transition** where limited experiences at (key stage) KS1 and 2 impact on KS3, likewise into KS4.

Ofsted warn that where local curricula is based on a simplistic understanding of what **quality** education in art, craft and design looks like, there is a risk of learning ‘collapsing into a superficial tour of making.’

### Change required:

Re-dress the balance between the need for curriculum freedom and content specificity by **making core knowledge expectations more explicit**, i.e:

- Working with a range of materials and methods, within art and design a wide continuum of practice, including craft
- Experiential learning
- Disciplinary knowledge

Establish an expectation of a clear rationale for which areas of making are included and revisited. Avoid an 'Inch deep, mile wide approach' i.e:

- A locally informed and outward-facing curriculum that explores new and emergent technologies, as well as local/national/global heritage.

## High quality with flexibility for individual needs

Problem diagnosis:

There has been a growing trend in primary settings, for curriculum content to be lifted from 'off-the-shelf' commercial packages, and in secondary, across groups of schools, a centrally directed curriculum that is not tailored to local and individual learner needs. This creates barriers to **inclusion**, with learning that is not **relevant** to individual interests, aspirations, and needs.


Art, craft and design requires individuality, personalisation and meaning at every level of the creative process. However, the current programmes of study do not reference creativity, which is a key enabler for a **learner-powered** curriculum.

Change required:

Provide clear guidance and direction to empower teachers to respond to their pupils' needs and **divergent learning goals**, i.e:

- Risk taking and mistake making – embedded as part of the process of learning
- Play-based learning – at all key stages
- Development of self-expression and self-discovery

Set a clear expectation for the active development of **creative thinking**, i.e:

- Innovation, imagination, learner autonomy, problem identification, intellectual and creative challenge
  - Development of curiosity in the subject
  - Extending creative explorations and original thought
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## Diverse and meaningful representation

### Problem diagnosis:

As noted in the Visualise report (2024), art, craft and design is one of the only subjects that explicitly offers a space for personal exploration, where students are encouraged to respond to the world and their place within it.

A lack of diversity of practice and references are contributing to a growing gap between learners' lives, experiences and cultural heritage and their experience of education. This is a **social justice** issue, with too many learners not seeing themselves within the curriculum.

The current programme of study privileges a received canon ('great artists, makers and designers) at the expense of diverse and meaningful representations, a barrier to **inclusion**.

### Change required:

Clear expectation that curricula will support learners' exploration of the world around them **historically or through contemporary art and culture, i.e:**

- Contemporary – artist, maker and designer references that are relevant to learners
- Represent the plurality of art, craft and design practice and associated traditions
- Present positive role models



Ensure students are learning to select and make informed **choices from a range of artists, makers and designers, i.e:**

- Research, investigation and learning about a range of artists, makers and designers; Articulation and understanding of ‘why’ those artists or artworks were selected.

## Relevant and up to date

Problem diagnosis:

As evident in the standardisation materials produced each year by the awarding bodies for GCSE and A level, and in the findings of recent research (*School Art, Where is it? (2024)*) the content of the curriculum in many schools has not developed in 20 years. A lack of **innovation and relevance** is a direct threat to the **health of the subject**. The gender gap is growing – three times as many boys as girls opting for the subject. The lack of **representation** in the curriculum – for example of disabled, global-minority artists, makers and designers – is reflected in the lack of diversity of art educators and the creative industries workforce.

Change required:

**1. Set clear guidance and expectation for learner-centred content, i.e:**

- Opportunities to collaborate, share and celebrate a multiplicity of practices, processes and people

- Exploring social-justice themes and socially engaged practice

## Prepare for life and work

Problem diagnosis:

The current programmes of study urgently need **updating** to ensure the development of **knowledge and skills for life and work**, including digital media, and green skills.

Change required:

**Update to include missing content that is essential for a contemporary, future-facing curriculum, i.e:**

- Building and application of green skills
- Learning about and applying new and emergent technologies
- Development and understanding of local/national/global heritage
- Building contemporary subject knowledge and understanding
- Development of empathy as a design skill

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