

CHEAD welcome the opportunity to comment on the content of the National Curriculum in England, and the structure of accountability and assessment methods.

**CHEAD the Council for Higher Education in Art and Design** is the national charity for arts, media, design and related discipline in the higher education sector. Our response to the DfE's Curriculum and Assessment Review is informed by our experience supporting art, craft, media and design in the creative sector and the wider creative economy, and our track record of working with creative educators, practitioners, researchers, policy makers and students to deliver creativity in the curriculum. Working with others to develop a [Creative Education Manifesto](#) we have engaged closely with our network of 70 higher education providers and c1000 individual creative educators and practitioners. We have also taken part in roundtables and shared common themes and concerns with colleagues from across the creative education sector, including the Crafts Council, Design Council, University Alliance, UAL, Creative UK, the Design Education Stakeholder Forum, Creative Education Coalition, NSEAD, Shape North and the Design Technology Association. Our response draws on quantitative and qualitative evidence from across the sector and in some cases, we specifically acknowledge, and reference recommendations made by key reports. Our main points are incorporated into our response to question 31 and 39.

### **Q 31 Opening remarks**

**Creativity** sets us apart from pure knowledge acquisition. Imagination is more important than knowledge in a world dominated by AI, large language models and machine learning. Creativity is cognitive, multi-sensory, imaginary, interdisciplinary and transformational. Creativity generates social change.

There are nearly 2.5m jobs in the UK creative industries – up 15% between 2019 and 2023. The sector's GVA contribution is around £125bn annually. The Creative Industries are recognised as a priority sector with high growth potential within the new Industrial Strategy. The creative industries and creative jobs in the wider creative economy offer opportunities for high value, high skilled, hugely rewarding careers. These opportunities can only be offered equitably across our society if creative education is valued, nurtured and available to all young people. However, currently, access to creative education is unequally distributed which leads to lower access and participation and which perpetuates sub-optimal 'opportunities for all' citizens to reach their full potential. This is a social justice issue.

This could be achieved by embedding creativity across the national curriculum and by maintaining specific subjects as core and options within a 'broad and balanced curriculum'. Should all STEM subjects incorporate creativity? Should students taking a STEM heavy pathway be encouraged, if not mandated, to select a creative option?

The uniquely human skills that a creative curriculum can develop are extremely relevant for student success in the future workplace. The Work Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Survey: Insights Report (2023) highlighted creative thinking as one of the most important skills for workers, with 73% of responding organisations saying that this was a top priority for the future. Pearson [cultivating-a-creative-curriculum.pdf](#)

**Craft Education** develops haptic and fine-motor skills that are important throughout our lives. Craft develops skills that are applicable across the curriculum, including oracy, maths, science and spatial skills. Craft techniques help to develop understanding of abstract concepts through practical learning. Craft practice embraces both traditional and new technologies, with craft

skills today applied in such diverse fields as engineering, medicine, technology, architecture, film, theatre, fashion and design. Despite the importance of craft and making skills, opportunities for hands-on making are rapidly disappearing from our schools. Uptake of **Expressive Arts** subjects has dramatically declined since the introduction of the Ebacc and Progress 8. The current curriculum includes Art and Design and Design and Technology – and whilst ‘craft’ and ‘making’ are referenced in both subject areas, in reality neither craft or making are part of children’s learning in the classroom. Delivery of craft and 3D making as a strand within Art and Design has been squeezed by a combination of factors (lack of reference to craft within the Art & Design curriculum at Key Stages 1-3, time and budget constraints, lack of space in classrooms and workshops, and lack of teacher expertise). (Crafts Council Response)

The new government’s curriculum review is a once-in-a-decade opportunity to strengthen design education - tackle the UK-wide 68% decline in Design and Technology (D&T) GCSE since 2010 and address growing concerns for art and design, which is also in a state of decline. Design skills are a valuable contributor to the UK economy and creative industries, but the rapid decline in **Design and Technology** puts education provision and the UK’s talent pipeline at risk. There has been a dramatic decline in GCSE entries in England between 2011-23, teacher numbers have halved in the last decade, and there is a diversity gap which carries through into the design industry. To secure a strong future for design qualification pathways, and the future of the design economy, we need action to:

- Place sufficient value on design subjects in school performance frameworks
- Update and improve the D&T curriculum
- Strengthen and clarify design competencies within the art and design curriculum
- Support teachers to deliver the best design education with relevant and continuing CPD
- Embed design thinking and design skills across the broader curriculum

(Design Council Response)

**Creative subjects** should be a valued part of young people’s education across all phases. Creativity is important in its own right to develop cognitive, functional, foundational and transferable skills, whilst also developing self-expression, positive mental health and wellbeing, and additionally supporting learning outcomes across the curriculum by developing ‘skills for learning’ including practical learning, kinaesthetic, material and visual literacy, resilience, experimentation, confidence and collaboration.

Our university colleagues tell us that students are unprepared for study at HE level and lack critical thinking skills and confidence in their independent thoughts. It is vital that we maintain choice and access to a range of foundational qualifications and pathways at Level 3 and 4. FE course leaders particularly highlighted that BTECs were an important pathway to HE for less traditionally ‘academic’ students.

There are aspects of the current curriculum which do succeed in supporting creative education. The introduction of T Levels in Craft and Design, and Media, Broadcast and Production aims to ensure students have access to content that meets the needs of industry and prepares them for entry into skilled employment, particularly in fields like digital design and media production. (Creative UK response).

However, without decisive action from Government, **design education** risks falling into the margins of the curriculum at the very time it is most needed. All young people must be able to

access a comprehensive and inspiring design education. If they are to develop creative problem-solving, material intelligence, and systems-thinking abilities.

In **art and design** there is a need to clarify and set an expectation for design competencies within the curriculum and GCSE specifications. Art practice as well as art theory should be balanced. The national curriculum for art and design needs to shift focus from 'knowing about' the work of others to the development of critical and creative thinking. This would equip pupils to understand complex ideas through the work of others, informing their own design solutions.

The current national curriculum does not articulate the importance of design thinking and behaviours. The curriculum aims to offer a narrow range of practice confined to drawing, painting, and sculpture. Creativity, critical thinking, and design thinking need to be embedded in the learning aims and content of the curriculum at all key stages across both art and design and D&T.

The art and design, and design and technology, craft, film and media curricula need to address sustainability and climate awareness at all key stages and in all art and design qualification specifications, both in terms pedagogy, practice and the development of green skills.

### **Recommendations**

**We call for creativity to be embedded in teaching and learning across the curriculum,** whilst strongly maintaining that creative subjects should be supported in their own right.

**We advocate for planet positive climate education,** green design skills, climate literacy and UN sustainability goals to be integrated across the curriculum.

**Curriculum reform must sit alongside workforce development** for Art & Design and Design & Technology teachers, including investment in ITT, CPD, specialist equipment, materials and resources to allow schools to deliver programmes with meaningful impact.

**Address the deficit** in art and design primary ITE. Invest in subject-specific continuing professional development and create opportunities to engage with industry and cultural organisations for all art and design teachers.

**Recognise creative skills** as a valuable part of multiple career pathways and do not put in opposition with STEM subjects. Whether by the government, industry, schools, teachers, students and parents/carers, this false binary divide between arts and STEM serves no purpose. A signal of support from the Secretary of State would be most welcomed.

**Allow teachers and learners to have agency** and ownership over their independent creative practices and development and to pass this on to students. This is a skill, alongside critical thinking and reflective practice, that would be welcomed for progression to study at higher levels.

**Reduce the role of examined end-point assessment** within KS3 and KS4 Design and Technology. The 50% written examination structure is having negative consequences for teaching and learning quality. We would welcome an increase in project-based applied learning that is coherent with real-world design processes. We need to find new ways to assess students' knowledge and understanding that do not add to teacher workload, while reducing the undue emphasis on written assessment.

**Shift focus within the national curriculum for art and design** to from ‘knowing about’ and being able to write about the work of others to the development of critical and creative thinking. This would equip pupils to understand complex ideas, rather than purely describing and demonstrating acquired knowledge.

*[text for online submission]*

Pressing improvements to design qualification pathways are needed to support young people’s educational progress. Design and Technology (D&T) GCSE entries declined 67% in England between 2011 and 2023. The fall in D&T has destabilised the broader subject area, masking declines in all art and design subjects and devaluing and cutting off a vital pipeline for creative talent into industry.

Improvement is needed within:

**Subject assessment.** Assess KS3 and KS4 Design and Technology through increased project-based assessment. Significantly reducing the 50% written examined element (from 50% to 30-40%) with a one-hour exam on core content only. Project-based applied learning through the Non-Exam Assessed is more coherent with real-world design processes and would enable greater flexibility for teachers.

**Curriculum content.** Within art and design, there is a need to clarify and set an expectation for design competencies within the curriculum and GCSE specifications (alongside the expressive side of the subject). Within D&T, a move to greater project-based assessment would reduce the ‘explicit’ core content load at KS4 helping to avoid excessive “teaching to the test”. The curriculum should also integrate sustainability and circularity themes at earlier stages supporting KS3-KS4 progression with a greater focus on developing ‘human’ real-world problem-solving skills earlier. References to design as a discipline should reflect the scope and range of contemporary and historical practice, as well as the interdisciplinary nature of art, craft, and design. The emphasis on ‘great’ artists, craftspeople, and designers is unhelpful and perpetuates an outdated view of the scope of the subject and the diversity of contemporary design.

**Qualification pathway coherence.** Establish coherent, sequenced design qualification pathways. Current challenges include discontinuity between D&T KS3 and KS4; a lack of a cohesive design pedagogy across the four separate design T-Levels; and limited incentives for students to study or schools to offer D&T at A-level as it is not a specific requirement for many university design or engineering courses.

**Teacher support and recruitment.** Previous reforms to design subjects have not been supported with appropriate teacher CPD. As a result, many D&T teachers have “side-stepped” into art & design or other qualifications. The breadth of content in D&T requires particular teacher and technician support. Likewise, art and design teachers should be supported to embed design practices and approaches in their teaching.

**School performance measures.** Excellence in creative and design subjects should be as valuable to a school as excellence in traditional STEM subjects. Reform of school accountability measures, including Ofsted’s assessment approach, is needed to successfully achieve this.

**Q 39 Is the volume of assessment required for GCSEs right for the purposes set out above? Are there any changes that could be made without having a negative impact on either pupils' learning or the wider education system?**

The volume of assessment for both assessed components for GCSE design and technology involve a high degree of breadth which impacts the depth of knowledge and skills teachers are able to cover. One issue is the amount of time given to the Non-Exam Assessment component. This impinges negatively on the teaching time available to D&T teachers, particularly given the reduced time it has in key stage 3 due to the unintended consequence of the EBacc measure and consequently more time given to EBacc subjects at key stage 3 and 4. A second issue is the breadth of subject content covered in the written exam component, which currently focuses predominantly on technical knowledge in materials and manufacturing.

Whilst at GCSE, the teacher's assessment of the NEA components works relatively well and allows pupils to demonstrate their development in the context of practical portfolio development and respond to an externally set brief. This should be preserved. However, the requirements of the portfolio component should be reviewed to identify where there may be scope to reduce content and create space for a deeper engagement with a consolidated body of core knowledge.

The current assessment structure and time allocation creates challenges for effective teaching and learning for this component since so much lesson time is given over to the NEA unit. Evidence from examination boards and higher education institutions suggests this time pressure leads to:

1. Formulaic approaches to NEA, where teachers feel compelled to provide rigid scaffolding to ensure students complete all requirements
2. Over-emphasis on evidencing and recording processes rather than developing genuine creative and problem-solving skills
3. Limited opportunity for risk-taking and innovation, which are crucial skills for progression to higher education and industry
4. Schools starting GCSE teaching in Year 9 to accommodate the assessment requirements, potentially narrowing students' broader design education experience

To address this without negatively impacting pupils' learning, consideration should be given to:

- Restructuring the NEA to focus on depth rather than breadth of skills
- Exploring alternative assessment models for both assessed components that better support creative application while maintaining rigor
- Ensuring assessment methods properly reflect the time available within the curriculum

## EDI

We fully support the recommendations made by the Visualise report and in particular the urgent need for better, authentic representation of global ethnic majority perspectives amongst teaching staff and across curriculum content and resources to support a broad and diverse learning experience.

The APPG for Creative Diversity report 'Creative Majority' published in September 2021 found that the UK's creative industries remain unrepresentative of the population as a whole and concluded that a major barrier to sector growth and a limiter of excellence is the growing lack of diversity in the sector. This starts in schools. Increased diverse representation within the teaching profession would provide more culturally competent educators and give relevance and meaning to underrepresented learners which in turn would have a massive impact on subject uptake. <https://www.weareface.uk/see-my-face-survey>

There is a need for increased investment in and commitment to recruitment and retention initiatives for teachers of creative subjects; to diversify the teacher workforce; and to support experienced teachers to stay in the profession. This should include subject bursaries for all subjects, incentives and early-career mentoring of those who are under-represented in the profession.

### End Notes

We support the calls from colleagues across the creative education sector for urgent reform of school accountability measures such as the inclusion of creative subjects in Ebacc and Progress 8 measures. We would go even further and advocate for creativity to be a measure within the PISA Framework.

Both Art & Design and Design & Technology should be maintained as discrete and complementary subjects with distinct pedagogies, practices and processes which support the development of a broad pipeline of creative practitioners, designers, makers and artists.

Whilst we advocate for creative subjects and skills development to be hard-wired into 'a broad and balanced curriculum', we recognise that **enrichment activities** within and without the syllabus leads to better engagement and attainment in other subject areas. We therefore support the Cultural Learning Alliance's call for a minimum four-hour Arts entitlement within the school week to the end of Key Stage 3 that enables high-quality, progressive learning experiences, and provision at Key Stages 4 and 5 outside of exam syllabuses.

**We must work with AI.** There is a need to incorporate AI and virtual production techniques into art, design, film, and media studies at all key stages as appropriate, and this will need carefully thinking through in collaboration with teachers and sector bodies in order to future proof the curriculum and to support progression routes into industry and higher education.

### Inhibitors

**Addressing Teacher recruitment and retention will be a critical success factor in any curriculum review process.**

The curriculum review is a timely opportunity for stakeholders and policymakers to discuss priorities for the direction of policy under the new Government, looking at professional development, staff well-being, workloads, and teaching standards. This comes with the allocation of £1.2bn in additional funding for a teacher pay award and reform of the Ofsted

school inspection process. A Teach First campaign would enhance specialist art teacher recruitment in the same way the *Every Lesson Shapes a Life* campaign has boosted the workforce.

The number of D&T teachers has halved in the last decade, from just under 15,000 in 2009 to less than 6,500 qualified teachers today. There is an annual decline of 6.5%, in line with shortfalls in recruitment, poor retention, and demographic retirement trends. In 2022/23, 21% of D&T teaching hours were taught by non-specialists, rising by 4.8% since last year - the highest rise of any subject.

Primary school teachers only receive between 3-12 hours of art and design training which impacts on the stated aim for pupils to have access to a broad and balanced curriculum

Postgraduate initial teacher training recruitment has continually fallen short of targets for design and technology subjects, with actual recruitment accounting for just 25% of the target in 2022/23. Art and Design Initial Teacher Education recruitment is as low as 44% of target.

### Further evidence

[04-ISM Music-a-subject-of-peril A4 March-2022 Online2.pdf](#)

[British-Academy-report-Subject-choice-trends-post-16-education-England.pdf](#)

A Blueprint for Renewal: Design and Technology Education, 2024

Art Now Report, Access Art

CLA-2024-Annual-Report-Card.pdf [culturallearningalliance.org.uk](http://culturallearningalliance.org.uk)

[Creative Education Manifesto, Art is Essential](#)

Creating Growth: Labour's Plan for the Arts, Culture and Creative Industries March 2024

Design Council, Design Education Group Response

Design Council's 2022 report, Design Economy: People, Places and Economic Value

[See My FACE Survey — FACE](#)

The State of the Arts, published by the Campaign for the Arts and the University of Warwick 2024

Visualise: Race & Inclusion in Secondary School Art Education

[Council for Higher Education in Art & Design | The association of educational institutions with degree or postgraduate provision in art and design](#)

CHEAD provides a voice for and on behalf of higher education art and design in the UK four nations advancing knowledge and understanding in the sector and promoting the sector's interests to others. We carry out research, scan the policy horizon, brief our members, facilitate networking opportunities for senior staff from within and outside HE as well as helping to shape higher education art and design policy on our members' behalf.

Contact [sandra@chead.ac.uk](mailto:sandra@chead.ac.uk)