

NAFAE Curriculum Feedback KS1/KS2

The documents and policy notes we have seen remain devoted to a teaching system based on didactics and instruction. The proposed subject content makes use of language that is inappropriate and inadequate in response to processes of creative learning and creative education. The predicted outcomes identified appear to prioritise systems of test-based assessments and the examination of memory (relating to art and design theory) and the examination of pre-determined fine motor control (relating to material handling). The Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 curricular seem to be primarily focussed on the development of literacy rather than experimentation or play with materials. The outcomes ignore developmental and formative learning experiences that may best apply to and assist all learners in their discovery and pleasure in learning. It rather emphasises a distinctive and narrow view of hand-eye dexterity as a core requirement in the skill set of primary years pupils and this is not only wrong for the subject field but would also mitigate against any experience of success and positive outcome for the majority of children. A key role for creative themes in the curriculum is to ensure that creative learning and teaching form a significant purpose in the process of self-discovery that any pupil needs to experience to be able to develop the balance of their intellect and subjective wisdom. Promoting art and design as pursuits with vocational value is a relatively small part of the educational mission; the principal priority needs to be pupil access to a comprehensive range of learning experiences that may respond to and capitalise on the differentiated abilities and aptitudes of the individual in any teaching cohort. That the proposed subject content significantly focuses on the craft manipulation of tools and materials for the sake of painting and sculpture rather overlooks the broader prospectus that Art and Design offers to the whole learning community and completely ignores the attitudinal and behavioural frameworks that creative practice disciplines offer in the development of young people as reflective, critically alert and creatively motivated individuals.

It is not true to say that the subject content favours fine-art as the interpretation of the discipline evident in subject content would appear to depend on a specific rubric that specifically references craft control in the process of artefact assembly. There are some very clear examples of impractical and ill-informed content design in the subject content document. The proposed inclusion of sculpture as a theme of practice based learning as early as Key Stage 1 might prompt concern as to how the term is being used. A desire to promote the pupils understanding mass and form through the exploration of pliant materials is a long way from “using sculpture” as either a theme or outcome. Similarly, “designing and making products” with any degree of success at Key Stage 1 suggests very little need for education in the subject field at Level 2 through to Level 7. Assuming that what is meant is that pupils should encounter material problems directly through handling and experimentation and should undertake simple decision making exercises that encourage their material thinking and engage them in physical engineering through handcrafting and basic assembly; “designing and making” would appear to be a woefully inadequate phrase. The core problem here is that practical and creative learning and enquiry is central to a range of instinctive responses and speculative reflections that build the pupils confidence in self-directed learning. This turns into learning about art practice or design production at Key Stage 3 and beyond. Up to that point the contribution of the subject is much more basic and

essential to all rather than those with a pure specialist interest. The phrase 'mastery of techniques' at Key Stage 2 is tangibly stupid. Basic introduction to a range of techniques or even core techniques in mark-making, image construction and rendering may be the more appropriate phrase but this is only one example of the inadequacy of this piece of work. There are so many examples of poorly conceived outcomes within such a remarkably short document as to render the whole exercise irrelevant. I cannot think of any Key Stage 1 teaching and learning environments where the teaching of sculptural techniques would be either affordable or viable in relation to health and safety restrictions. The idea of teaching oil painting and watercolour techniques to Key Stage 3 pupils is so far out of date in relation to viable cost, relevant experiences and safe use of materials as to cause significant concern about the experience of the document's author. This is a very narrow description of Art and Design and completely unrealistic in relation to developmental learning in the contemporary classroom.

The documents provided for this consultation suggest a basic aversion to creative education as it might be understood by the experienced practitioner. Of course, in reality it is not possible to withdraw from creative education as a practice or habit. People learn through; disruptive enquiry, heuristic testing, speculation, kinaesthetic experience, basic experimentation; etc, even where it is not supported or measured. This is not merely a menu of exotic behaviours exhibited by and expected of deviant art students; this is normal inquisitive creativity; for any child, at any age. To ignore the presence of multiple cultures of learning means to suppress them and that means marginalising the type of active learning that has the greatest capacity for driving our culture and creating new expertise. Worse, unless creativity is celebrated in the processes of education and as a theme for learning in subjects such as Fine Art, we will exclude ever greater numbers from cultural participation or, at least, from participating in the cultural spaces that reflect our national reputation and identity as a society.

Higher Education requires students who are confident in their own processes of learning. We need individuals who are motivated and excited by discovery and capable of seeking and constructing their own learning agendas. We need a positive attitude and an open mind that is not constrained by ill-conceived and narrow ideals but rather excited by possibility. Following Key Stage 3 students should remain open to experimentation and the application of new techniques and this continues to evolve through Key Stage 4 and in the preparation of Level 3 qualifications prior to HE. Experience with a range of materials and processes is a definite advantage though still subject to further development through Level 2 and 3 qualifications. By the time students enter University they need a good awareness of pictorial and graphic conventions, the balance of composition, options in both 2 and 3 dimensional compositional organisation, the relationship of volume and mass in complex 3 dimensional forms and the potential of colour and texture as both pictorial and volumetric devices. These are some of the basic areas of grounding that can be informed through the study of art and design history and theory. By contrast, the proposal for an imposed critical art history following one conventional timeline fits better with a sociological study of art history and does not assist in any specific understanding of art and design principles. Learning how to critically analyse and formally deconstruct images and forms would be far more helpful as the many timelines and philosophies affecting critical and cultural theories of art and design cannot be resolved or matriculated in the school curriculum and certainly not before the age of 14 as this would prescribe one world view and could not reflect the diversity of our society. Indeed, attempting such a fate would not help developmental learning or feed the instincts of the individual to pursue their own learning beyond instruction. It is very important that Art and

Design students in Higher Education can feel comfortable with their own ideas and confident in pursuit of their own learning agenda. These habits need to be initiated very early. Students need to be responsive, sensitive and reflective and these habits can only evolve over time. They need to be confident with speculative approaches to making and problem solving. The current proposals do not encourage any of these attributes. Rather, they suggest a counter-instinct and political mission.

Prof Paul Haywood

Joint Chair: National Association for Fine Art Education