



Consultation Response

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GCSE and A level reform

Responder: John McMahon, Head of Learning & Talent Development, Crafts Council.

The Crafts Council is the national agency for craft. As such the review of the subject content for GCSE Design and Technology, a qualification through which many young people build skills, and progress to higher level study and professional practice in, craft and making, is of interest to us.

As noted in *Our Future is in the Making: An Education Manifesto for Craft and Making* (Crafts Council, November 2014), and in *Studying Craft 2* (Crafts Council November 2014), the UK is a world leader in craft. Craft skills generate £3.4bn for the economy. 150,000 people are employed in businesses driven by craft skills.

However, this status is at risk if declines in craft education, the result of recent years' policies, continue. In five years, 2007-2012, student participation in craft-related GCSEs fell 25%. Within the three relevant subject endorsements (Resistant Materials, Textiles Technology, Graphic Products), there was a 36% fall in participation over the same period, from 181,620 to 116,180.

It is crucial that the revised Design & Technology GCSE has both the appeal to reverse this trend, and the rigour, rooted in practical experience of making, necessary to safeguard the skills required to maintain and expand this economic contribution.

There is much we welcome in the proposed changes to GCSE design & technology. The requirement for all pupils to develop a broad theoretical and practical knowledge of materials across disciplines is positive, as are the embedding of an 'explore, create, evaluate', iterative understanding of the design process; the room provided for young people to take, and learn from, creative risks; the expectation to work to briefs, sometimes in design teams, as reflects the reality of professional practice (and the importance of

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communication and justification within this); and the development of a critical understanding of design processes, accompanied by insight into their historical, social, ecological and economic context.

However, there are other important elements that, although potentially implicitly present, the Crafts Council suggests should be made explicit within the subject content, in order to prevent their omission in the classroom. The practical and technical understanding of materials and processes is central to the new proposals, but we think that the development of tactile understanding and haptic skills in the design and making process should be acknowledged through the inclusion of opportunities to explore materials and fashion products by hand.

Most critically, the removal of the current range of specialist titles (Electronics; Food Technology; Graphic Objects; Resistant Materials; Systems and Control; Textiles) into a single awarded subject (Design and Technology) with the opportunity to choose an 'Area of interest' (Fashion; Interiors & Furnishings; Advertising & Promotion; Consumer Electronics; Leisure; and Mechanical Systems) is of concern. The Crafts Council opposes the removal of the discrete subject endorsements. We believe that such a shift would lead to a reduction in the level of specialist skill attained by pupils undertaking the qualification.

There is also a risk arising from the fact that the current endorsed pathways are often taught by specialist teachers (eg Textiles, Graphic Products). These professionals may require initial support to extend their skills and knowledge in order to teach the new, broader content. It is also crucial that schools do not reduce their pool of specialist staff in design and technology, as expertise lost in areas such as textiles and resistant materials could not be easily rebuilt, and would in turn jeopardise the transmission of important skills and knowledge to pupils. Rather, specialist teaching capacity must be retained to enable excellence in the teaching of the overall qualification, and to avoid dilution of learning in the individual areas of interest.

To enable teachers to teach to the new, broader qualification, additional CPD will be required. However, recent National Society for Education in Art and Design (NSEAD) research indicates that availability of both time and funding for CPD for teachers in creative subjects, and indeed across the curriculum, declined considerably in recent years, and continues to do so.

It is possible that some additional support capacity for specialisms could be through sharing of expertise between schools in local clusters or through academy chains, or found through industry partnerships. However, the availability of these would depend on the availability of partners in a given locality and the capacity of schools to forge the necessary connections, and so in reality may be variable across schools in England. Rural schools would be at an especial disadvantage in this regard.

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It is vital to avoid impairment of the development of specialist materials knowledge and technical and practical skills for GCSE pupils, in a way that would challenge their ability to pursue (and reduce the overall number of pupils pursuing) these specialist areas in sixth form, FE and at University. We are concerned about whether changes might reduce the flow of talent into craft and making, eroding the professional skills base not only within the craft sector but in the very many other areas of the economy where craft skills make a substantial contribution.

Within the new proposals, we are especially disappointed to see the complete removal of Textiles and Resistant Materials, and the subsuming of Graphic Objects into the other new areas of interest. Accordingly, we object to the new proposals and assert the need to retain these specialisms as full, endorsed pathways.

Though we do not support the new 'Areas of Interest', if they are to be taken forward, we feel that Textiles should remain as a discrete choice or, at a minimum, that the 'Fashion' area of interest is explicitly broadened to 'Fashion, Textiles and Jewellery' to ensure that participation in these important specialist areas of practice is maintained. Also, if the new 'Areas of Interest' are kept as an approach, it is crucial that ceramics, glass and other specialist decorative crafts are explicitly included, ideally as a 'Ceramics, Glass and Decorative Craft' pathway, although again, at a minimum, the current proposed area of interest could be broadened to 'Interiors, Furnishings and Decorative Craft'.

Resistant Materials was a key aspect of the previous pathways, and covered such a broad range of important skills, not least woodwork and metal work, that we feel it imperative that this subject remains as a separate specialism. This knowledge is crucial for a wide range of practices, from furniture making to engineering, which are of critical value.

Unless these activities are re-emphasised through revision of the definitions for the respective areas of interest, there is not only the risk that pupils will no longer undertake these culturally and economically vital areas of practice in sufficient numbers, but also that the current provision and availability of facilities for disciplines such as woodwork, ceramics and clay, and metalwork within our schools will be compromised, and be likely to suffer further fragmentation, and retirement as a consequence. Such facilities remain a vital part of our infrastructure in maintaining the UK's global status at the forefront of design, craft, engineering and manufacturing, and will not be readily regained if lost.

We further note that it is important to find through the revision of the qualification, expanded opportunity for skilled designers and makers, and relevant businesses, to support both the teaching and potentially the assessment of the qualification, through contribution of skills in the classroom, visits and work-placements, as recommended in the recently launched *Our Future is in the Making: An Education manifesto for Craft and making* (Crafts Council 2014). Although beyond the scope of this consultation and the parallel consultation led by OFQUAL, this would enable professionals to contribute to careers information, advice and guidance; and strengthen the progression routes from GCSE study to employment, apprenticeships, and continued learning in FE and HE.

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References:

Our Future is in the Making: An Education Manifesto for Craft and Making (Crafts Council, November 2014)

<http://www.craftscouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/education-manifesto>

Studying Craft 2 (Crafts Council, November 2014)

<http://www.craftscouncil.org.uk/downloads/studying-craft-2>

Measuring the Craft Economy (Crafts Council, October 2014)

http://www.craftscouncil.org.uk/content/files/Measuring_the_craft_economy.pdf

Q: Do you think that any of the proposals have the potential to have a disproportionate impact, positive or negative, on specific students, in particular those with 'relevant protected characteristics'? (The relevant protected characteristics are disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation) Please provide evidence to support your response.

As noted above, we welcome the broadening of the range of theoretical materials understanding that pupils will be required to develop, but it is important to ensure that this, and the proposed decrease in the percentage of marks awarded on the basis of non-exam based assessment, do not impact upon the appeal of the subject to pupils with protected characteristics such as dyslexia, nor upon the attainment of these pupils whilst undertaking the qualification.

The consideration given to whether some pupils with physical disabilities might be disadvantaged by the material nature of the subject is important. In 4.18, the consultation document emphasises the fact that the proportion of marks available on the basis of practical assessment cannot be further reduced. We support this, although, as noted in our response to OFQUAL's parallel consultation, the Crafts Council recommends that the balance of marks available should remain at 40:60, exam to non-exam.

Q: How could any adverse impact be reduced and how could the subject content of GCSEs and/or A levels be altered to better advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who do not share it? Please provide evidence to support your response.

In terms of making the qualification more accessible, it is important to emphasise the way in which emergent technologies increasingly available in schools, such as Computer Aided Design (which is included in the subject content proposals) and 3D-printing and other forms of digital fabrication (which are not), may help to reduce barriers to the

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development of practical work which may have existed for some pupils in the past. Where an individual school lacks this technology, there may be opportunities for partnership with local Higher Education Institutions, Further Education colleges or even local make-spaces in order to provide such technology for pupils.

We also note that, as design is an internationalised practice, there may be greater scope to encourage the participation of some pupils with protected characteristics on the basis of heritage or nationality, by encouraging the opportunity to explore both historic and contemporary practice and contexts from a variety of cultures.

We note that, owing to the cost of equipment and materials, pupils whose families or carers are unable to afford additional materials and technological equipment/software could, in some cases, be disadvantaged. To prevent the disadvantaging of any pupils on the basis of socio-economic status, it is essential that individual schools ensure, through their own budgets and protection of facilities, and through the partnerships formed with industry, Higher Education Institutions and other appropriate organisations, that every child has access to the resources and facilities needed to succeed in this subject.