

The background features abstract, organic shapes in shades of purple, teal, and white. A prominent teal wavy line curves across the right side, while a white shape with a textured, stippled edge is visible in the lower right. Dark purple shapes are scattered throughout, creating a layered, artistic composition.

Mapping Contemporary Visual Art and Design Education in Scotland

Summary of key findings

Caitlin McKinnon, Anthony Schrag & Rachel Blanche

Mapping Contemporary Visual Art and Design Education in Scotland

Summary of key findings

Caitlin McKinnon, Anthony Schrag,
Rachel Blanche
March 2022

Engage
Bringing people
and art together

Engage
Scotland



**Queen Margaret
University**
EDINBURGH

About this research

In 2021, Engage Scotland and researchers from Queen Margaret University undertook a research project to explore engagement with the visual arts and design in Scottish secondary education. To do this we used surveys, interviews, a focus group and workshops.

This paper summarises the scope of our research before laying out key findings from each section of the full report. It includes an overview of actions that could be taken to strengthen art and design education in Scotland.

The full report (available at engage.org/engage-scotland) goes into more detail, allowing readers to explore the extensive data collected.

Brief and methodology

We focused on:

- Identifying factors that inhibit and facilitate engagement with contemporary visual art and design in the 12–18 curriculum, including the influence of the current primary provision and the transition to secondary school.
- Gaining a better understanding of teachers' confidence in engaging with and delivering contemporary visual art and design education.
- Understanding where schools are engaging effectively with galleries, artists and visual arts organisations, and how that affects attainment.

Our methods included:

- A survey for teachers and educators in the visual arts and galleries.
- A survey for young people.
- A focus group with young people who had recently graduated.
- Interviews with teachers.
- A creative workshop with two secondary school classes.
- Looking at innovative and exemplary partnerships between schools and visual arts organisations.

Summaries of the findings of the different areas of our research can be found on pp.11–pp.18 of this document.



Suggested actions

The full report (available at engage.org/engage-scotland) provides a full list of actions which could be taken to strengthen contemporary visual art and design education in Scotland.

Cultural organisations can collaborate with teachers by providing packs and toolkits, while also debunking the idea that there are 'no jobs' within the cultural sector.

Teachers can join and create networks to share learning and get support. They can explore collaborative working with visual arts organisations such as museums and galleries.

School leaders can support collaborations by streamlining administrative processes around trips and visits. They can advocate for art and design education to parents, highlighting the benefits and variety of career options in the cultural industries.

Local authorities can create and support partnership and network-building opportunities for schools and cultural organisations.

Support bodies like Creative Scotland, Education Scotland and others can make a better case for the contribution that studying art and design makes to wider society, including its economic and social value. They can promote a broader range of potential career opportunities so that a career in the arts and creative industries can be seen as a valid and fulfilling option. They can call on government and other organisations to support targeted research that explores barriers to arts education for traditionally marginalised groups, such as people from ethnic minority backgrounds, as well as working-class backgrounds and remote communities, to ensure their voices are heard in any national discussion on education, curriculum development and content.

Recommendations

In response to this study, Engage Scotland and the authors encourage the visual arts sector, sector support bodies and funders to work together to progress our recommendations:

1 Use the learning from this study to feed into consultation over wider reforms of the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and Education Scotland:

- Liaise with the curriculum unit at Scottish Government and key expressive arts contacts at Education Scotland to ensure that this research is seen in the right places.
- Further collaborative work between the Curriculum Unit at the Scottish Government, Education Scotland, and Creative Scotland to consider the findings of this research alongside those of similar research in other expressive arts subjects. This work should focus on strengthening the value of expressive arts subjects in Scottish schools and recognising their wider importance and impact.

2 Advocate for better resourcing of art and design teaching in schools, specifically:

- The need for better art materials. Explore a national method of allowing teachers to procure resources through suppliers outside of local authority contract providers.
- Managerial support to enable teachers and pupils to benefit from learning opportunities offered by the visual arts, including gallery visits and career-long professional learning opportunities for teachers.

3 Advocate for the value of art and design education:

- Partner with other visual arts sector support bodies such as the Scottish Contemporary Art Network (SCAN) and Scottish Artists Union (SAU) and teacher support bodies such as the National Society for Education in Art and Design (NSEAD), to tackle the undervaluing of art and design education in Scottish schools.
- Work with sector support bodies and the wider arts education sector to present the case for learning in and through the arts, and STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, mathematics) rather than STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics).
- Consider advocacy work with high-profile artists working in Scotland.
- Investigate approaches to bringing professional artists into schools.

4 Commission further targeted research to address data gaps and points for further consideration highlighted here. Priority areas include:

- The art and design education experiences of young people in Scotland, focusing on people from ethnic minority backgrounds, as well as working-class backgrounds and remote communities, as well as those in the lowest percentile of Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) communities.
- The experiences of young people of learning through the visual arts and design in informal settings. Our research suggests that there are missed opportunities for young people to find out about informal career pathways such as apprenticeships, out-of-school experiences and other extra-curricular activities. A targeted study could explore informal access routes to art and design careers.
- Understanding what is behind the emerging trends and fluctuations in the numbers of young people studying Art and Design at exam level and Further and Higher Education level since Creative Scotland's Visual Arts Sector Review in 2016.
- Investigating the perceived gap between the current Art and Design curriculum and exam structure, and the expectations of further and higher education.

5 Support communication and partnership working between the visual arts sector and schools:

- Offer guidance for visual arts organisations and freelance artist educators to support them to better match their learning offers to what schools need.

The background features a teal color palette with various brushstroke patterns. On the left side, there are thick, dark blue, wavy brushstrokes that appear to be layered. On the right side, there are several large, light teal circles or ovals, some of which are filled with a darker teal color, creating a pattern of overlapping shapes.

Research and findings

1. What is the impact of art and design education?

We used a survey to understand how teachers, professional artists and those working in visual arts organisations perceive the benefits and challenges of studying and teaching contemporary visual art and design in school. We undertook a parallel analysis of young people's perceptions.

Key findings:

- Educators are keen to promote the benefits of studying contemporary visual art and design, especially the transferable skills that can be gained.
- Young people recognise the practical skills that can be gained by studying art and design, but also emphasise the personal, mental health and pastoral benefits.
- Both educators and students feel the subject is undervalued at school and within the home. They noted that local and national governments do not value the creative industries, and this leads to a wider cultural bias against the arts.
- Concerns were voiced that a stereotypical idea of a low-paid artist persists among parents and senior management in schools and has influenced young people's perceptions of the subject.
- Many respondents identified the need for action to address the major attitudinal barrier felt by educators and students.

Educators are capable and confident in their skills and are able to pass these on to students competently. Young people recognise the importance of these skills, but also value the experience of the art and design classroom itself as a unique space for personal development and support. There is still a misconception by schools and parents about career options for those studying art and design, and the ways in which studying art and design can contribute to potential for employment within the creative industries and beyond.

2. How is the art and design curriculum perceived?

Our study explored how educators and young people perceive the current curriculum in general, and also looked at how Scottish qualification structures impact teaching. By highlighting emerging areas of concern as well as areas identified as doing well, our findings will help shape a new educational landscape.

Key findings:

- Students and educators feel there is a gap between the current curriculum and exam structure, and the expectations of further and higher education.
- There are inconsistencies in the perception of Broad General Education (BGE) provision of art and design in Scottish schools.
- There is a concern that a focus on teaching to pass exams and the exam structure have led to an overall lack of ability to be creative.
- There is a general feeling of being restricted by the SQA's expectations, which ultimately stifles creativity and leads to work that is formulaic.
- Educators believe that the curriculum focuses too much on technical skills rather than creative or conceptual skills, which creates a barrier to being able to work with more conceptual and challenging art practices.
- Students and educators have a general feeling that art and design is undervalued by not only wider society, but by some schools, too. This can lead to a lack of confidence about making the choice to continue to study this subject.

The curriculum is perceived to be restrictive and to problematically emphasise technical skills over conceptual or creative skills. This leads to a sense that governing bodies and wider society do not understand the economic and cultural potential of the subject or value its social contributions.

3. How is teaching visual art and design supported?

Building on the previous reflections, our study presents the perspectives of teachers on the support available to them, including access to training and career-long professional development courses, as well as resources. It looks at how support for visual art and design educators is perceived, and gives an insight into the training and resources available within art and design education. This section of the study highlights the perceived gaps in support and how they impact teachers' confidence to deliver their educational activities.

Key findings:

- Educators believe there is a significant lack of funding for both training opportunities and classroom resources.
- Educators feel that a lack of time to research and participate in training is a barrier to their own development.
- Among educators, there is generally a positive perception of sharing resources and ideas with other teachers within their own schools or departments.
- Educators believe that there is a lack of awareness from the Scottish Government about the resources that teachers and schools actually need. This leads to teachers feeling devalued.
- There is a major variance in the perception of support from different local authorities, demonstrating a disparity in access to resources and materials.
- There appears to be a lack of knowledge about the support available for educators from external visual arts organisations and galleries.
- There are inconsistent levels of satisfaction with the support provided by the Creative Learning Networks.

Taken together, these findings indicate that there is a general sense of feeling unequipped with most kinds of resources and support outside of basic art supplies. The discrete pressures faced by teachers can be individually addressed, however, it is important to view them as growing pressures that can have significant impacts on their day-to-day lives and their ability to deliver their work effectively.

4.

How does the visual arts sector engage with schools?

Our investigation captures the visual arts sector's perspectives on engaging with young people, as well as teachers' perspectives on engagement with organisations outwith formal education structures. It includes an analysis of the factors that inhibit collaboration between schools and the visual arts sector, as well as some strategies for facilitating better engagement. The three case studies in the full report present a number of useful insights into this topic.

Key findings:

- Those in the visual arts sector are very confident in their ability to deliver educational activities, but although most are aware of Scotland's curriculum, not all actively use the curriculum's 'experiences and outcomes' in their planning.
- From the visual arts sector, one third highlighted poor communication with schools as a factor inhibiting their ability to engage with them.
- From teachers' perspectives, there are several reasons for their lack of engagement with the visual arts sector, including:
 - The ongoing effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, with galleries being closed to in-person visits, as well as schools not allowing visitors on site.
 - A potential gap between the educational activities the sector is providing and what teachers need in order to include sector visits in their curriculum planning.
 - Issues related to the lack of 'buy-in' from senior management in schools, including administrative barriers.
- All stakeholders (teachers, professional artists and those working in an arts organisation or gallery) identified a desire to work collaboratively to create tailored events and activities.
- All stakeholders recognised that maintaining good communication is vital to ensuring all project partners understand the expectations and outcomes of collaboration.

This would suggest there is a desire from both the visual arts sector and schools to work more closely together for mutual benefit. For the visual arts sector, good communication is essential to a productive partnership, and a significant portion of organisations found this lacking. From schools, barriers include the restrictions of the curriculum and a lack of support from management to allow for engagement with external partners.

5.

What are the barriers to young people's engagement with visual art and design in school and beyond?

Our study captured areas of concern from both educators and young people in terms of students' ability to engage with the subject of art and design in school and beyond.

Key findings: The main barriers reported were financial, practical and attitudinal:

- Financial barriers include a lack of resources for anything but basic art materials.
- Practical barriers include a lack of time in student timetables, as well as other curriculum pressures.

Attitudinal barriers were more widely reported, including:

- A societal undervaluing of the arts, leading to a perception that art is not relevant or useful.
- Lack of focus on the potential of the STEAM approach to learning.
- Lack of awareness that there are careers in the arts.
- An ongoing belief that a career in the cultural sector only leads to becoming a low-paid artist.
- Young people not seeing themselves represented in the curriculum.

While this study did not specifically report a lack of representation within the curriculum of people from ethnic minority backgrounds and working-class people as a barrier to engagement with art and design, anecdotally it is clear that both the curriculum and the materials that teachers are exposed to – or are using – in their classrooms are insufficient in speaking to all constituent parts of Scottish society. Such lack of representation would present barriers to a young person's engagement with the subject and therefore impact any future career plans. These representational issues, therefore, are of wider concern than to art and design education alone, and the authors strongly call for a specific study to research the representation of marginalised communities within Scotland's curriculum and education system.

Most of the focus group respondents felt that the subject is not funded at the same level as other subjects.

6.

What are the most innovative approaches to facilitating engagement with art and design?

Our main report presents three case studies in which teachers and cultural practitioners share stories of their educational activities and reflect on their outcomes so that others can learn from and build on their experiences. The case studies are:

- The Gordon Schools (Huntly, Aberdeenshire)
- Bernat Klein Foundation (Hawick)
- Edinburgh Sculpture Workshop (Edinburgh)

The main innovative approach identified is one of collaboration between the visual arts sector (in this case arts organisations, galleries and artists) and schools.

Key findings from the case studies are:

- Collaboration between organisations and schools can be of mutual benefit to both.
- Respectful collaborations between organisations and schools can ease pressures on teachers, and provide a stopgap for those without adequate funding, but communicating about shared aims and requirements is key to successful engagement.
- The benefits of collaboration between schools and organisations often go far beyond the technical art skills learned, with students being able to practice valuable communication skills within

an environment in which they feel autonomous in their decisions and actions.

- Collaborations with external partners work best when the entire school understands the value of art and design education.
- Collaborative practice between visual arts organisations and schools is most successful when they are geographically close.
- Considering an organisation as a 'resource' for a school often leads to greater, more productive relationships.
- A philosophy of long-term engagement that is built on good relationships can lead to engagement of great depth for students as well as teachers.
- Collaborative engagement can be a space for professional development for teachers.
- Online delivery for both visual arts organisations and schools can be highly effective when developed reflectively.

The mechanisms behind building collaborative relationships between cultural organisations and schools could be improved, for the mutual benefit of both.

This is a summary of
Mapping Art and Design
Education in Scotland.

You can read our
report in full at
engage.org/engage-scotland

Engage

Bringing people
and art together

Engage
Scotland



**Queen Margaret
University**
EDINBURGH



ALBA | CHRUTHACHAIL

engage.org/engage-scotland
Facebook @EngageScot
Twitter @engagescotland
scotland@engage.org

© 2022 Engage

Thanks to Laura Cherry for proofreading and additional copywriting.

Design by After the News
Illustrations by Lucy Grainge



Engage

Bringing people
and art together

Engage

Scotland



**Queen Margaret
University**
EDINBURGH

