**CURRICULUM FOR EXCELLENCE: a study of art & design and the impact on Higher Education.**

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In 2002 Education Scotland, the Scottish Qualifications Authority and the Scottish Government began the development of a new 3-18 curriculum which was to be ‘a forward looking, coherent curriculum that provides Scotland's children and young people with the knowledge, skills and attributes needed for life in the 21st century’ (Education Scotland 2013). The first Curriculum for Excellence cohort are now entering Senior 4th Year. As they near the point when they leave school the Higher Education Academy Scotland have undertaken a research scholarship initiative to engage subject specialists in higher and further education to examine the impact that the Curriculum for Excellence might have on under-graduate programmes.

Art and design is often undervalued amongst its more academic subjects, but with creativity established as a central theme of CFE, has art and design finally been recognized as an important subject in interdisciplinary learning?

In Scotland the creative industries employ over 64,000 people bringing 3.2 billion pounds to the economy. Pupils who study art and design can go on to find careers in games design, animation, film, television, product design, graphic design, publishing, architecture, advertising, fashion and art and cultural businesses. By the time pupils in Senior 4 have graduated in 2022 there will be many other new careers in the creative industries that have yet to be imagined. How prepared is Scottish education to meet that future?

This study asked the questions:

* Will these pupils be better prepared for art college and university?
* Have they had time in the timetable to develop the necessary skills?
* What technologies are they using beyond paint, pencils and clay?

The Scottish Curriculum for Excellence has been designed to meet the challenges of life long learning, to motivate people to learn independently, take responsibility for their learning, to be active and collaborative learners, and to be able to apply learning and develop their skills to meet whatever demands the future holds.

**What does the Curriculum for Excellence look like in art and design?**

This small study was undertaken in two secondary schools in Edinburgh where art and design teachers were willing to be interviewed on video following a semi-structured questionnaire. At Forester High School and Portobello High School in Edinburgh, art and design teachers are finding that the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) is not so different to their current practice.

We haven’t seen that many changes. It’s really just a matter of now being able to identify areas that were probably more discrete before: talking about numeracy and literacy, health and well-being. These are now part of our consideration when we put our curriculum together.

(Head of Art, Forrester High School)

I think we are fortunate in the art department because a lot of CfE is found there already. We do not have to change and completely reorganize our curriculum, because a lot of what we do is CfE.

(Head of Art, Portobello High School)

There are some differences:

I think the biggest difference is there’s probably more focus on process and actually getting the kids to understand what they are learning from the process…getting them to talk about it, write about it and evaluate their work and learn what works and doesn’t work.

(Head of Art, Portobello High School)

At the time of writing many teachers were still concerned about how to assess CfE work, especially digital moving image media, despite the advice that they should work to existing equivalents as a default: Scottish National 5 is Intermediate 2, Scottish National 4 is Intermediate 1. The effect of increasing assessment on pupils is well documented (Atkinson 2008), and despite the core values of pupil-centred learning some of the most resistant issues that teachers face remain.

Because we are teaching them to get through an exam, and that’s both written and practical work, to get them to go outside the box is very difficult, because we are constrained by time, by resources, by money and also because we have younger kids because we are early presentation.

(Head of Art, Forrester High School)

If they can experiment they can learn something very quickly. It’s not always possible in the timescale but that’s the ideal way.

(Head of Art, Portobello High School)

The perennial pressure on timetabling art and design classes may force teachers to approach student independent learning out of necessity rather than conviction.

**Independent Learning**

We do try to get them to think for themselves, and that’s to me is a lot of what Curriculum for Excellence is about. It’s about being a responsible individual, and being confident as well.

(Head of Art, Forrester High School)

It is important for pupils to develop their skills as an independent learner, so that they can take responsibility for their learning after leaving school, whether in further education or employment. Seeing the bigger picture is critical if pupils are to see the opportunities head and to empower them to make informed decisions about their education, but also to help understand the increasingly mediated world around them.

**Digital Technology**

Digital media has long been established in art and design tertiary education in order to keep pace with industry, is secondary education finally catching up?

When the opportunity arises for new technologies we are very open to it.

(Head of Art, Forrester High School)

There is a democratic principle at the heart of education in Scotland, one that includes a belief that digital technology should be available to all. A recent pilot by Hull University in twenty Scottish schools found that digital tablets had transformative effects on improving pupils’ academic attainment and the working relationship between teachers and pupils.

(The iPad and other digital tablets) are going to change education because we are going to be coming up with lessons that involve a tablet, and that’s going to be completely different. So how do you approach it? Where’s your prior learning? Interestingly they are the ones with the prior learning, and we’re the ones learning. But that’s fine, that’s great.

(Head of Art, Portobello High School)

**Conclusion**

This is a narrow study of only a small sample of Scottish secondary schools. The response and approach to the application of Curriculum for Excellence will vary across Scotland. This study illustrates how existing pedagogies of art and design can embrace Curriculum for Excellence and be enhanced to meet the needs of higher education. There are clearly challenges facing timetables, resources and assessment, but these are perennial issues that will constantly require negotiation and campaigning. It is not just teachers but the health of the country’s economy and culture that require more committed support from art and design academics, creative industry professionals and not least, policy makers.