

Consultation Report on the Background Paper
for Junior Cycle Art, Craft, Design

Contents

Introduction	4
Online questionnaire and invitation to make written submissions	4
Focus group meetings	5
Focus of the consultation	5
Consultation findings	7
Creativity	7
Experiences of Art	14
Reviewing the current Junior Certificate Syllabus	15
Suggestions for Junior Cycle Assessment in Art, Craft, Design	19
The importance of continuity in learning, teaching and assessment	21
Evaluation of the current Junior Cert Art, Craft, Design syllabus	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Other developments impacting the new specification	25
The Arts in Education Charter	25
Views on the Artistic Performance Short Course	28
Use of Reflection Journals	29
Use of portfolios	29
Use of ICT in the new Junior Cycle specification	33
Views on assessing ICT-based work in Art, Craft and Design	35
Education for sustainable development (ESD)	36
Wellbeing	36
The Brief	37
Student Voice	38
Conclusion	41

Introduction

The background paper and brief for junior cycle art, craft, design was approved for consultation by Council in June 2015. The consultation began in July 2015 and concluded on the 16th October 2015.

The consultation consisted of a number of different elements:

- an online questionnaire (153 responses)
- an invitation for written submissions
- two focus-group meetings.

Online questionnaire and invitation to make written submissions

In total, 153 respondents completed the online survey, which also included submissions from a number of groups. These groups include:

- Art Teachers Association of Ireland
- The Arts Council
- National College of Art and Design
- Irish Film Institute
- Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board.

Requests to complete the survey were circulated in several ways: a direct request was sent via an email network of education partners involved in Art education, a general announcement was posted on the front page of the NCCA website. The Art Teachers' Association of Ireland (ATAI) made a number of direct requests via their email network. The social media outlets Twitter and Facebook were used to extend the reach of the call to consultation with the Art Teachers' Swap Group featuring prominently over the months the consultation was open. The new Arts in Education portal (<http://artsineducation.ie/en/2015/07/27/consultation-on-new-junior-cycle-art-craft-design-specification/>) featured the consultation in their News section and also in their e-Newsletter on the 31st August. The Arts Council e-Newsletter sent on the 5th August also promoted the consultation (<http://newsletter.artscouncil.ie/v2xev730kmu1jz9zu4icjy?email=true&a=1&p=49070166&t=28179889>).

Of those who responded to the online survey, 123, or 80% were Art teachers. The breakdown of respondents are presented in Table 1

Table 1: Breakdown of respondents

Art teacher	80%
non-Art teacher (Post-primary)	2%
Principal/ Deputy Principal (Primary)	1%
Second level student	1%
Third level student	4%
Parent/ Guardian	2%
Teacher educator	1%
Third level lecturer/researcher	2%
Other	7%

Focus group meetings

Two focus group meetings were held, as follows:

- 25th September, 2015: a focus group made up of groups including the Arts Council, Teacher Education Colleges, IFI, RIAI and representatives from the Education Centres
- 10th October, 2015: a focus-group meeting with a group of 15 Art teachers.

Other organisations held consultation meetings internally to inform their responses to the consultation which they entered through the online survey itself.

Focus of the consultation

The main areas of focus of the online survey and focus group meetings were:

- Creativity across the lifetime of a child as they progress through the education system, with sub-sections about creativity in Art and other subjects
- Responses to elements of the current Junior Certificate Art, Craft, Design syllabus
- The continuity in what a student learns in Art as they progress from primary school into post-primary school

- Other developments that impact the new specification such as the Arts in Education Charter and the National Strategy for Sustainable Development
- The use and integration of ICT into the subject of Art, Craft, Design
- Student Voice.

These areas will be covered in detail below, beginning in each section with the online survey information followed by the responses from the focus groups.

Many of the submissions contained detailed comments and suggestions for the development of the new curriculum and assessment specification for junior cycle art, craft, design including submissions containing further feedback in the "other comment" boxes at the end of most questions.

Consultation findings

Creativity

The online survey responses clearly indicated the importance placed on creativity.

90% of respondents see *'creativity as very important across the lifetime of a child as they progress through the education system'*, 8% see it as important and 2% see it as very unimportant.

When asked how important Creativity is in other subjects at Junior Cert Level

46% of respondents see it as important in all other subjects

27% see it as important in most other subjects

26% see it as important in some other subjects and

1% sees that it is not important in other subjects.

Subjects where creativity is seen to be important included: Music, English, Irish essay writing, Home Economics, Business Studies, Physics, CSPE projects, History, DCG, IT, Maths, Construction, Languages, Geography, Woodwork and Technology. This would seem to point to the connections that can be made by teachers working together across subject boundaries in a cross-curricular way. However, the passion of the teacher and interest amongst the students can impact in a positive and a negative manner on whether or not creativity is developed or used in these subjects.

The importance of key skills such as problem solving, thinking independently and drawing logical conclusions within all subjects was raised as was the need to foster *'divergent thinking'*.

A number of comments related to the ongoing prevalence of rote learning for the Junior Certificate and the content heavy nature of the curriculum, across all subjects, was highlighted as a challenge to developing thinking creatively and critically.

I feel creativity is rare in other subjects that follow a strict curriculum and are looking for set answers the only subject I see creativity are practical ones, woodwork, metal work etc and English.

Within the focus groups, there is a clear consensus that creativity is of central importance across the lifetime of a child as they progress through the education system but it was felt that *'creativity is not always valued'* and that there is a need to *'foster respect for creativity'*.

Creativity is seen as central to Art, Craft, Design as a subject but is also important in other subjects although some might have *'less space'* for creativity than others. Creativity is important because it is

seen as a *'life skill'*, a way of developing the ability to *'take-risks, problem solve and experiment'*. Through risk taking and experimentation *'creative confidence can be developed'*. The failure that is part of the experimentation process helps develop the important skill of *'resilience'*.

Within Art, Craft, Design creativity helps *'communication in the visual world'* and the development of an *'openness to the visual'*.

Everyone is a consumer of art and culture and creativity can assist with appreciating these, it is important to make Art, Craft, Design *'relevant to all not just those going to art college'*.

What is creativity in the arts?

It was felt that this needs to be explored and that creativity is *'different according to whether it is Art, Craft or Design'*. It was also felt that *'creativity within the arts is different to other areas'* but not *'only owned by the arts'* and that there needs to be a differentiation between *'the arts and creativity'*. Creativity experienced through art can have a far-reaching impact.

Art teaching can inspire your life choices and your way of thinking

Art needs to be recognised as being more than simply a cathartic, enjoyable subject.

A clear vision about why art is important needs to be *'clearly expressed'* within the specification and this vision should emphasise the importance of *'art in society'*.

The importance of *'visual intelligence'* was highlighted and an emphasis on the need to bring this to the fore.

Art can be used to understand the world and environment around us

Fostering children to have confidence in their personal processes

Developing the ability to depend on their own processes and different ways to get to an outcome or a view.

Across all subjects including Art, Craft, Design, creativity encourages *'questioning'* and *'critical thinking'*. It helps the development of *'decoding and deciphering'* and provides *'a lens to interrogation e.g. in politics, relationships and religion.'*

Creativity is about being open to the idea of many possible answers and recognising that all responses have a value

Creativity helps critical thinking- to manage critically in situations

Recognising that there are multiple pathways to a situation

Has the potential to be more empowering

Creativity in other subjects

Creativity should be part of all other subjects but the same challenges that 'Art, Craft, Design' faces in developing creativity within the classroom/school will arise. Some views were expressed that the 'space for creativity' isn't always evident in other subjects.

Creativity is important in all subjects but might have different contexts, actions and thought.

The strategies of creativity especially being open to the visual can support other types of learning and other subjects including oral language development, history, geography and mathematics.

It engages the learner in higher order skills

It helps us to cope with ambiguity

It encourages self-reflection

It encourages controversy which is not always a bad thing

It involves deep listening

The importance of teachers of these other subjects having the skills necessary for using or developing creativity was emphasised

Depends to some extent on how creative the teacher is

How can the pedagogical approaches of ACD be transferred to other subjects?

What is meant by creativity?

Different definitions of creativity were proposed but the importance of experimentation was emphasised.

Experimenting, Questioning, asking questions, exploring is actually creativity

The ability to pose questions is as important, not just the answer

They see how the thought process is seen as valuable

Creativity is a life-skill that goes beyond Art, Craft, Design

It brings risk taking, problem solving and confidence

It is about being open to the idea of many possible answers

All responses /answers should be valued

Process is central to developing creativity

The need to focus on the creative process not solely the creative output was stressed by all focus groups.

We need to give them the process to be creative

Process not output is important to encourage creativity

Give them the building blocks for creativity

What is the process that will generate creativity?

Develop strategies that can be used to support creativity

Risk taking, experimentation and failure are important parts of the creative process and must be fostered, developed and supported. The importance of risk taking, experimentation and failure in the creative process was emphasised as were the challenges of facilitating experimentation and allowing failure to happen. The key challenges include the student's own '*fear of failure*', the current assessment process, the lack of space within the current Art, Craft, Design syllabus and the challenges of encouraging and supporting experimentation and risk taking. The centrality of failure and being allowed to fail requires that students also develop resilience, which can only be developed through experiencing failure in a supportive, learning environment.

Failure is part of the process towards successes

Teachers know failure is part of the ongoing process but fear amongst learners that they fail if they don't produce the perfect piece

Students can have a role in the evaluation process, this is important because it allows mistakes and makes it inclusive and builds confidence

Resilience is central to creativity as a process

Teachers must emphasise the process not the product

Creativity comes at a risk- outcomes must facilitate this

Creativity is about innovation and experimentation

Current curriculum had no room for experimentation it needs more space for it to happen

“Everyone should have access to art”

The direct quote above indicates that the consensus was that cross-curricular approaches are important to nurture creativity and more are needed but if they are to be utilised then more space will be needed within both the curriculum and teaching and learning spaces.

Very relevant across the curriculum- there is now status to the word creativity

Primary School Curriculum approach which is cross-curricular is brilliant

It is important throughout education and for life- art has the responsibility to be the leading light in this and to influence others through cross-curricular collaboration

Art education can break down definitions and boundaries between subjects and bring skills that are relevant to art to all subjects

If a cross-curricular approach is adopted there needs to be ... a balance between integrated curriculum and subject specific curriculum

Issues related to learning and developing creativity within the classroom

Creativity needs more autonomy and flexibility from a teaching, organising and assessing perspective.

Integrated curriculum and autonomy for teachers- important to decide what to do in their own environment with their students

If we want autonomy for teachers and developing ‘art’ students we need to find a way to ensure every student has access to art education?

Production line kills creativity at the moment

The GCSE allows much more flexibility in the way you present and prepare for the exam systems- there is more focus on the process and therefore more freedom and more experimentation and more creativity present in the system

If creativity is about young people having original responses then you need to support this and support teachers doing this

Differing views were expressed on where creativity comes from, whether it is something that already exists within an individual or whether it can be nurtured and developed.

Many teenagers don’t see themselves as ‘creative’ they see it has something you have or you don’t have

You cannot impose creativity on people it comes from within

Teaching and nurturing creativity can be challenging for teachers because of the breadth of the art curriculum, the challenges of allowing 'risk taking' within the classroom and the assessment process and their own creative abilities.

In terms of art they are trying to cover a lot

Currently there is too much focus on teacher delivery and the system is overloaded

It's difficult to teach creativity if you are not feeling creative yourself- how do we nurture teachers

Teachers need to be prepared to go in without the correct answer....take risks.

Teachers and students need to trust themselves- linked to risk

Teachers need to support creative confidence

The role of the teacher needs to change

Role of the teacher needs to change to promote this flexibility- fundamental change in CPD

Creativity needs to be nurtured and developed within the teacher training process.

Teacher training is task oriented

It is important to have creativity in teacher training

Teachers need to have/develop creative teaching practices

Networking is important

Teacher shouldn't feel isolated in the classroom; look at the opportunities to bring people in etc.

Assessment and creativity

The current exam system is seen as being problematic for the development of creativity. Thought needs to be put into finding a way to assess creativity. The assessment method will need to find a balance between the tensions of a need for flexibility when assessing what is risk taking and the need for a framework, which can be consistently applied.

How do we assess risk taking? Portfolio, freedom

It's an exam subject- if you are putting teachers at the centre there's a fear of assessment related to consistency

Any framework needs to be flexible

Focus on dispositions and behaviours as well as skills e.g. artfulness

Because the process is as important as the finished product this needs to be captured in the assessment process

Creativity can't simply be measured in the quality of the finished product

The concept can be creative even if the product is technically modest

The role of ICT in relation to art and creativity

ICT is seen as being part of the artistic process but also it was felt that it shouldn't be allowed to take over.

Using ICT (digital medias) as an artistic process itself – as a tool, like a paintbrush', an alternative process

Experiences of Art

Table 2 shows the levels of agreement of respondents on the statements about what students should experience in Art, Craft, Design.

Table 2: Experiences of Art

Art should allow students to	SA	A	D	SD
make personal responses to experiences, emotions, ideas and environment	89%	10%	1%	
develop competence and confidence in a range of artistic skills	91%	8%		1%
communicate through the imagery they develop	79%	21%		
promote confidence within students and enhance their self-worth	91%	8%	1%	
experience and understand the role of the artist, craftsperson or designer in society	72%	26%	1%	1%

SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree

Many of the other comments added in by respondents to this question were in the same vein. Some of these answers to the statement 'Art should allow students to...' include:

- experiment with a variety of materials
- understand the design process
- have time to enjoy making art and have fun
- understand the world around them
- provide an opportunity to experience 'modern art practices' and develop an understanding of the artist/craftsperson/designer roles in society
- explore a variety of crafts, design, and art practices and not be constrained by the teacher
- develop an appreciation of visual art and visual expression and an aesthetic awareness
- make a personal response
- develop an empathy, understanding and awareness of what art is and the creativity of others
- enable creative expression.

Reviewing the current Junior Certificate Syllabus

Respondents were asked to review the Junior Certificate syllabus in relation to what it currently offers students and how well it currently does this. It also aimed to have respondents think to the future based on their earlier responses. As can be seen in Table 3 below, there is a high level of agreement from respondents to the statements related to the majority of these areas. However, these figures were slightly reduced in relation to the areas of support studies and student work overload.

Table 3: Review of Current Junior Certificate syllabus

	SA	A	DA	SD
Drawing is the foundational skill in Art, Craft, Design	61%	31%	8%	1%
Choice between painting and graphic design is important	26%	46%	25%	3%
Creating 3-D artwork is an important experience for students	67%	31%	1.5%	0.5%
The number of options in the list of craftwork makes sense	39%	40%	16%	5%
Students should be able to choose their own craftwork option	41%	52%	5%	2%
The elements of Art and Design are emphasised throughout all work that students undertake	42%	44%	13%	1%
Support Studies are currently too basic and disconnected from students' work	35%	38%	23%	4%
The approach to Support Studies in the Junior Certificate currently does not help students to develop their critical appraisal and evaluation skills	37%	37%	22%	4%
Support Studies should be integrated across all 3 years as part of a student's learning and development in Art, Craft, Design	58%	33.5%	5%	3.5%
Currently students are overloaded with the amount of work required from them during 3rd year	37%	34.5%	22.5%	6%
Students should have a say in deciding which work they submit for assessments	26%	60%	13%	1%
Students should have become "competent and confident" users of the specific language and terminology of Art, Craft, Design after 3 years of learning	53%	41%	5%	1%

SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree

A number of areas, although not always similar, came out of the focus group discussions on the strengths and weaknesses of the current Junior Certificate Art, Craft, Design syllabus, which are summarized in this section.

Curricular issues

The fact that Art, Craft, Design is project based was seen as its main strength. The very fact that there is a 75:25 ratio between the art project and drawing examination was felt to be a positive. Students receive a number of set themes from which to select one. The Junior Certificate contains and allows for breadth as there *'is scope for personal response'*. It focuses on a broad range of skills. In their craft option, students have the opportunity to construct objects with different materials. However, some focus group members felt that the Junior Certificate Art, Craft, Design syllabus was restrictive and that it doesn't provide for originality or ambition. It is too outcomes based and there is not enough emphasis on process.

It is content heavy and task oriented

It doesn't recognise the role and value of curating and critiquing

Lack of inclusion of design methodologies

Mixed views were also expressed within the focus groups on whether the *'current syllabus is too wide with all three disciplines (Art, craft and design)'*

Drawing

It was felt that, while it is important, there was an over-emphasis on the one skill of drawing and that there was not enough focus on methodology.

Worry that the emphasis on drawing might alienate some students

Project work is only valuable if students are learning lots of different methods and skills

Art appreciation

The approach to art history in Junior Certificate Art, Craft, Design was discussed. It was noted that art appreciation is separated from the practice of art and there is a need to integrate art history at the start of the Junior Certificate art project when the students choose their theme. Some context, an understanding of history of art and the place of art within the wider sphere of culture, was felt by groups to be a strength students required.

Learning and teaching

Junior Certificate Art, Craft, Design was seen as encouraging learning through doing.

Students learn how to focus to create an outcome over a period of time

It encourages research

Definite skills are learned and improved upon.

Observational drawing- it shows what they have learnt and helps teacher assess their skill

One of the subject's main strengths is that it is seen as enjoyable.

Students see the project go from beginning to completion- resilience

The Junior Certificate Art, Craft, Design syllabus is age appropriate. When undertaking it the students do work hard. They are also more involved and engaged than in other subjects. However, on the negative side of this, it was also mentioned that students were not allowed to follow their own strengths and choices.

It was also noted that Junior Certificate art is an 'Assessment driven pedagogy' that 'depends on [the] strengths of [the] art teacher'. The focus groups stated that there is autonomy for the teacher in the loose objectives, but they also noted that this could be viewed as a weakness.

There is the facility to unpack themes across the disciplines

There is the opportunity to look at different dimensions, patterns, sequences, linking different learning

One of great strengths of the Junior Certificate is the opportunity to work in different media and to work in a different scale. Interestingly, the focus groups felt, in their discussions, that there is a disconnect between the role of creativity and artistic practices in the classroom. Part of this, it was felt, is due to the fact that the present system puts pressure on teachers and students to go for 'the marks'.

In their discussions, the groups felt that the current Junior Certificate Art, Craft, Design syllabus doesn't allow for newly developed or developing technologies including digital media, e.g. graphic design and posters. It also doesn't allow for enough differentiated experiences.

The focus groups pointed out that the Junior Certificate Art, Craft, Design syllabus could be more socially relevant. It needs to be more community-based, for example, it should include and involve artists-in-residence, real-life artists and current practices. It needs to be more proactive.

Real world links and use of primary sources is poor

They are learning in a bubble

Although continuity between Junior and Senior Cycle syllabuses has already been discussed in the previous section, the focus groups felt strongly that there 'is a disconnect between the Junior cert

and the leaving cert.' The focus groups also noted that the current CPD structures are a 'one-size-fits-all' and so do not fully supporting teacher development.

Suggestions for Junior Cycle Assessment in Art, Craft, Design

The most popular view on future assessment methods is to include a portfolio of work, retain the drawing examination in 3rd year and have the whole of year three in the Junior Cycle be dedicated to a year-long project as illustrated by Table 4.

Table 4: Rank order for assessment in Art, Craft, Design ranked from most popular to least popular

Rank order	Assessment idea
1	Students should complete a portfolio of work
2	The drawing examination in 3rd year needs to be retained
3	The whole of a student's 3rd year at Junior Cycle should be used in completing a year-long project
4	An understanding of visual culture is important for students and should be reflected in an examination
5	Students need to make an "Artist's Statement" to support any work submitted for examination
6	The majority of work created should be used by students in completing a project
7	Students should engage in art activities in the real world as part of any assessment
8	A piece of work should be completed by students during the latter half of 2nd year
9	Students should complete artworks through a combination of school and community-based work

Looking in more detail at the allocation of time available in the Current Terminal Drawing Examinations as well as a pre-set list of objects in Junior Certificate Art, Craft, Design:

Object Drawing (Higher level): At higher level a small majority, 54%, believe the time is short (24%) or very short (30%). 39% felt that it was just right.

Object Drawing (Ordinary level): At ordinary level a small majority, 57%, believe it as just right 30% see it as short (17%) or very short (13%)

Life Drawing (Higher level): At higher level a large minority, 47%, believe that the time is just right for the life drawing exam; 21% see it as short or very short and 32% see it as long or very long

Life Drawing (Ordinary level): At ordinary level it is almost evenly divided between those who believe it is on the long side 44% (18% long; 26% too long) and those who believe that it is just right 40%.

Regarding the use of a pre-set list when choosing an object to draw for the examination Respondents were almost evenly divided with 53% agreeing that they should not be constrained.

When it came to responses about the Option (Craft) choices, overwhelmingly, 88% of respondents agreed that given there will be a common level in the new junior cycle art, craft, design, students should gain experience in more than one craft option.

Table 5 clearly indicates an overwhelming level of agreement with the statements on junior cycle art, craft, design with the exception of the statement on the desirability of students sitting a formal written exam, with which there was disagreement.

Table 5: Level of agreement with statements

	SA	A	D	SD
It is important to maintain the continuity of what a student learns in Art at primary school as they move into post primary	27%	54%	16%	3%
The primary curriculum has a focus on "Making Art". This should be developed further at JC level	22%	61.5%	14%	2.5%
The primary curriculum has a focus on "Looking at and responding to Art". This should be developed further at JC level	43%	56%	1%	
It is important to maintain the continuity of what a student learns at Junior Cycle as they move into Senior Cycle	75%	25%		
Grounding appreciation in Junior Cycle Art, Craft Design should prepare students for the Senior Cycle art curriculum	76%	21.5%	1.5%	1%
Students should sit a formal, written examination in Art Appreciation as part of the assessment in Junior Cycle Art, Craft, Design	16%	20%	33%	31%
Broadening the support studies section of Junior Cycle would facilitate the development of a student's art appreciation skills	32%	46%	18%	4%
An understanding of visual language skills should be developed during junior cycle	54%	44%	2%	

SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree

It was felt that, with time being short within the focus group sessions, the area of continuity in a student's learning as they progress from primary school to post and through post primary school was important to address. This relates in particular to the first five statements outlined above in table 6. The focus groups dealt with it through three questions. The first was an overview of student experiences in learning, teaching and assessment from 3-18, followed by a look at continuation in a student's experiences in Art, Craft, Design as they move from primary school into Junior Cycle and then from Junior Cycle to Senior Cycle.

The importance of continuity in learning, teaching and assessment

It was noted that this need for continuity across the education system, from 3-18, is important for society because

Irish culture is not visual it is more oral/literary/music. This requires a high level of arts education throughout education to act as a balance

Challenges to continuity, such as skill gaps, previous learning experiences and closed minds were highlighted as challenges.

The current lack of continuity devalues what has been learnt in the previous learning experience

Dexterity and fine motor skills are not happening as much

Continuity can facilitate student learning.

Can build on former experiences and scaffold going to further experiences

Provides the possibility of nurturing the variety of skills that students have and need

Can embrace the different ways that students learn

Students get a sense of progression

Sequential development is facilitated

Continuity is important for developing a student's artistic identity.

Students need contact with living artists

Students need an awareness of who they are in their own culture, that they are the artists, being 'an artist as opposed to being a student

An artist creates meaning and that are an artist when creating, at that moment

Assessment was also identified as an area where continuity should be both supported and seen as part of the student's natural progression in Art, Craft, Design.

Assessment should embrace support the achievement of the benefits of continuity such as variety of skills developed, different learning methods, and building on experience

Ongoing assessment is important to inform learning

Portfolios should travel from primary to post primary to third level

An holistic approach is needed, which should be encouraged but is currently missing as the learner moves through the education system.

At primary level art is holistic and cross-curricular but it stops dead in post-primary

You can introduce children to art institutions and expose them to places of Art and Design

Children in primary get to meet and experience an artist and learn from them

When asked about their thoughts on maintaining continuity in learning, teaching and assessment of Art, Craft and Design from Primary to Junior Cycle, the focus groups noted that student experiences currently differ between primary and secondary.

In primary students express themselves in secondary they clam up

They felt that there was a need to better link the Junior Cycle curriculum back to that of primary. Unless this is done there will be a disjoint between the two levels the *'eight [key] skills need to be more explicit'*. It was also noted that currently *'the primary syllabus does not encompass contemporary media.'*

Teacher education needs to change to focus on developing continuity of learning. Teachers need to understand the principles underpinning continuity and use them in their teaching and classroom practices. These include:

That prior knowledge is built upon as we progress

That we teach to the student not to the period

Look at their developmental stage

Be open to different styles of learning

The manner in which art teachers are taught also needs to change. Art teachers should be provided with cross-sectoral training not just training that is sector specific. Teachers at post primary level should know how art is taught at primary level. Cross-curricular focus needs to be developed at secondary level similar to that at primary.

CPD should consider the primary experiences the child has had

All children should be doing art

With this in mind the focus groups also mentioned that

Assessment needs to be age and skill appropriate

Practices like AfL are in place and that can add to continuity

In discussions on maintaining continuity in learning, teaching and assessment of Art, Craft and Design from Junior Cycle to Senior Cycle and beyond, the focus group felt that currently there is no continuity. Visual Literacy is central and should be focused upon early in secondary school and then this would allow continuity.

The Leaving Certificate and the points system was also discussed with the groups noting that it, '*is a huge problem on a systemic level with the points system.*' They also said that we will have to

Recognise that any changes will be impacted by external forces beyond any syllabus committee

With regard to assessment

Currently we value what we can measure rather than measure what we value, i.e. the process of creating art

They suggest that the current Leaving Certificate curriculum is problematic in that the focus in fifth year on art history undermines continuity and turns students off the subject. One respondent described the LC syllabus as '*stifling*', and the imbalance between the practical and history was the focus of some negative comment.

The focus groups suggested that the focus of the Junior Certificate needed to change in order to create a necessary bridge to Leaving Certificate.

Junior Cert should be focused on making students more independent and developing their skill sets and should also introduce some art history so that this would link with the heavy content at LC level

To support continuity from Junior Cycle to Senior Cycle, the curriculum at Senior Cycle needs to change through some scaling back of art history and development around assessment.

Use portfolio, journaling, notebooks

Develop a LC curriculum that is closer to the lived experiences of the students and the real-world

There needs to be a better connection between Art History and contemporary practice e.g. in design

Design history needs to be taught thematically not like art history (eras, artists etc.)

The focus groups also looked at the idea of continuity to third level as a natural progression of their discussions on this topic.

Have a greater focus on skills rather than content at Leaving Cert level

Have more focus on actual art being available to look at and local and national art facilities could be used as a tool

A transition programme could bridge the gap

Other developments impacting the new specification

The Arts in Education Charter

There was strong support for the Arts in Education Charter with 81% of respondents in agreement (35% strongly agreed and 46% agreed) that *'Art-in-education, as an experience of the real world of art, should be a part of the new Junior Cycle Art, Craft, Design specification'*.

Respondents were more evenly divided on whether, in *'the new specification, Art-in-education should be a separate strand in its own right'* with 58% in agreement (14% strongly agree; 44% agree) and 42 % disagreement (36% disagreed; 6% strongly disagree).

Table 7 below shows a high level of agreement with the types of real world Art opportunities that should be available to Junior Cycle students.

When asked about how frequently students should visit galleries, museums and artists' studios during the three year Junior Cycle the most common suggestion was once a year but many people highlighted that resources are needed for this and are challenging to get. A number of respondents said that it would be impractical to even try and carry out any visits although they agreed that they should happen. A number of respondents indicated that twice over three years would be sufficient and a small number indicated that a few times a year would be most useful.

Table 6: Should students experience art in the real world?

Students should have the chance to.....	SA	A	D	SD
experience art in the real world by visiting an artist in their studio space as part of their Junior Cycle	38%	39%	16%	7%
experience art in the real world by creating art in and for their own communities as part of their Junior Cycle	12%	45%	32%	11%
experience art in the real world through an artist visiting the school as part of their Junior Cycle	45%	47%	7%	1%
gain an understanding of current, contemporary art practices and practitioner	41%	52%	6%	1%
attend galleries, museums, etc.. to gain an understanding of the historical and cultural significance of art	65%	34%		1%

SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree

The focus groups also had their opportunity to reflect their views on the Arts in Education Charter. A range of opinions were voiced around its benefits and limitations and in general the view was that it is a *'great step'* but it could have a *'wider vision'* and represents another example of thinking in a *'silo'*. Some felt that it was a little *'outdated'*. The focus on *'visual arts'* was welcomed but it was felt it needed to be developed further, e.g. *'Visual literacy'*. More information is also needed especially on, *'how to access funding?' and 'how is it to be implemented?'* The importance of *'Equity of access to Art'* was raised and the use of the term *'Art rich schools'* stimulated concerns and questions about whether that means that other schools are *'Art poor?'*

In their discussions around the Arts in Education Charter, the focus groups felt that it *'didn't acknowledge the role of museums in Arts Education, which makes those places very inaccessible'*. They felt that if *'Art is to be located in the Gallery then this can be off-putting for some'*. They also mentioned that the areas of Craft and Design had been omitted from the Charter and it didn't consider architecture, graphic design, product design and films. With regard to accessibility for schools they noted that it was difficult for post primary schools, except in Transition year, to visit galleries and museums. It was felt that this was *'easier'* for primary schools to manage because *'second level still operates in silo's.'*

While the groups felt that the Charter was missing youth arts or non-formal places of learning, they did want to see if it could *'push how non-formal and formal could work better together'*.

On a more positive note, the Arts-in-Education web portal was singled out as a good resource that showcases evidence of good practice. It can be used to form links with the community and to enable networking between schools, teachers and practicing artists.

The portal shows different processes and through the case studies you can see evidence of good practice. This will continually evolve. It is a resource for the sector

The suggestion was made to develop the Portal further as a space to showcase the students' work and also have their voice heard. It was suggested that this was a good opportunity to foster critical thinking into the learning process. However, some participants felt that a *'communication vacuum'* exists and that more guidance is required and a *'document outlining possibilities'*.

The importance of interdepartmental partnerships was mentioned and welcomed, 'A *formal partnership between the Department, Art and Design is very important*'. The importance of 'creative spaces' was also mentioned and included very interesting submissions such as,

Using buildings as venues - bringing art into school buildings

Creative space is important to the creative community as it is to the individual

Mobile galleries

The focus groups also looked at how best the Arts in Education Charter could be integrated into a new junior cycle art, craft, design. In their discussions, they noted that consideration should be given to adopting the Charter as a 'guiding document' but the importance of 'contextualizing it' and not using in a 'mechanistic manner' was stressed. Any integration into the curriculum needs to be 'meaningful' and suggestions include:

- The Gallery as a learning space
- Use of guest speakers
- Integrating it into support studies

Within portfolios it should inform practice, be reflected upon- meeting the artist in their studio or space

There needs to be a better balance between the 'history and cultural' aspects of Art, the 'present and the future', the 'what-if?' 'Creativity and innovation' need to be focused upon as should 'skill development as these are important in any job'.

If the aspirations of the Charter are to be implemented then there is a need for 'leadership and resources', especially 'funding.' 'CPD for Principals' was raised as a way of developing their essential 'support' and 'leadership' in implementing the Charter. As part of their CPD training they 'should have the opportunity to experience art as a student' and experience the difference an 'artist-in-residence' scenario makes.

In implementing the charter at school and Junior Cycle level it was recognised that:

It is of fundamental importance that we get artists into schools and students into professional studios

While the Arts in Education Charter was being discussed, some members of the focus groups saw the conversation opening up further and wider and also noted the importance of including globalisation and art in the conversation as well as the democratising impact of technology on Art.

Art should not simply reflect the white Eurocentric world, it should acknowledge that our world has changed and connect with the wider world. We cannot feel secure about our own sense of the aesthetic

A big challenge was identified as being able to *'help people discern'* because in the future students will be able to *'design more of their worlds and they need the skills to make these choices'*. The example of Netflix was provided, where there is *'endless choice'* but students need to be given the *'skills to help them choose'*.

'Making and Tinkering' is another transdisciplinary approach that helps to make Art accessible. These skills can be developed through practice (model making) but this needs to be financially resourced.

Views on the Artistic Performance Short Course

A range of diverse opinions were voiced ranging from those who welcomed the short course and saw it as something that would enhance learning and artistic development to those who felt that it was *'naïve'* and that performance has no place in the Junior Cycle curriculum and that it is *'too advanced'*.

A big concern to teachers was the issue of resources, timetabling and their own skills combined with the planning and organising challenges it would present. Some expressed the view that a *'short course will be detrimental to Art as it would be seen as a replacement to the complete course which should not happen'*.

The logistical challenges of visiting exhibitions and artistic spaces were highlighted especially if not living in an urban environment.

Those who saw the short course as useful and beneficial highlighted that it would *'promote optimal learning and the development of skills such as planning, communication, team working, leadership, risk taking and analytical thinking'*. Suggestions were made that it should be optional and would be an excellent way to *'expose students'* to artistic interventions and practices.

Guidelines and CPD would be needed to ensure teachers have skills and confidence to teach the course.

Use of Reflection Journals

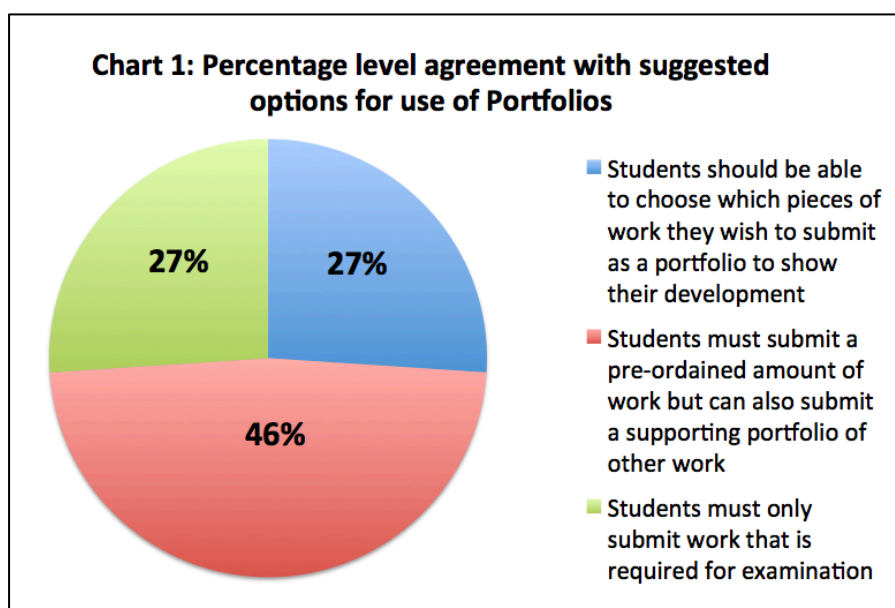
Strong support was indicated for the use of reflection journals by respondents to the online survey. Of the total number of respondents, 75% of agreed (39% strongly agreed; 36% agreed) that a reflection journal should be used by students as a method of recording their thoughts, experiences and ideas of any real-world application they undertook as part of their Art, Craft, Design work.

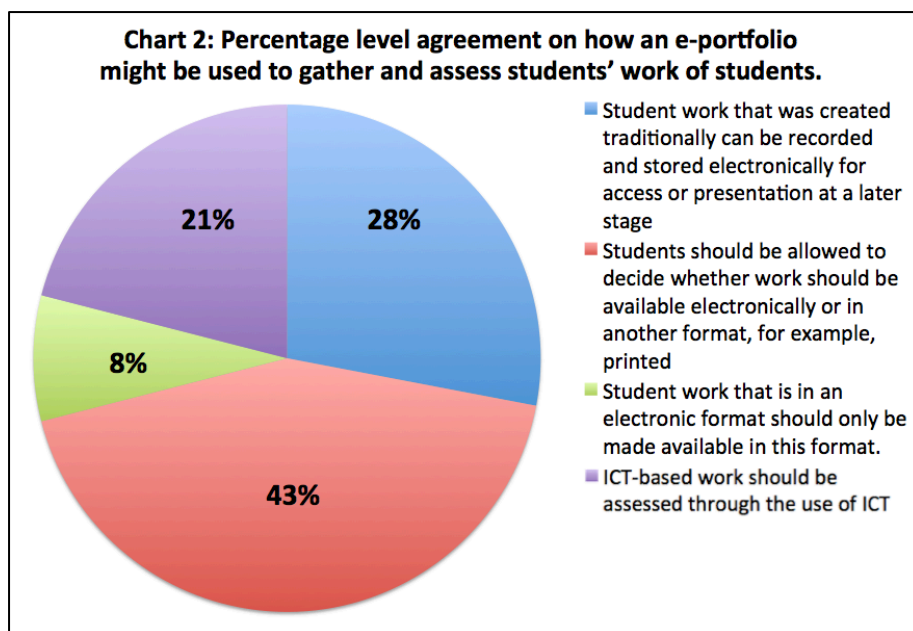
Of those who agreed that a reflection journal should be used as a method of recording their thoughts, experiences and ideas of all work they undertook as part of their junior cycle art, craft, design course, 82% of respondents agreed (53% strongly agreed; 29% agreed).

The focus group also noted that *'socially engaged practice could be recorded in the diary'*

Use of portfolios

In the online survey, respondents were asked to comment on the possible use of portfolios and e-portfolios in the new junior cycle art, craft, design specification. Chart 1 below indicates respondent's views on how portfolios should be used in Junior Cycle Art, Craft and Design. Chart 2 indicates respondents views on how an e-portfolio (page 26 of the background paper) might be used to gather and assess the work of students.





The focus group, having more time to discuss these similar options in a face-to-face environment, generated views on the strengths and weaknesses of Portfolios and e-portfolios.

Personal and artistic development and confidence

The Framework for Junior Cycle, 2015 has been developed to support learning through the eight principles, 24 statements of learning and the eight key skills, which schools will use to design their programme for Junior Cycle for their students. In the discussions of the focus groups, it must be noted that much of the feedback also reflected this approach and connections were made especially with the use of portfolios. Portfolios *'create a sense of pride'*. They *'encourage self-critique and self-reflection'* and with regard to the student's development, they *'feed into the idea of the young person developing their own sense of the aesthetic'*.

Process focused

The portfolio allows you to see the distance travelled

There needs to be clarity about the purpose of a portfolio and what a portfolio means. Both portfolios and e-portfolios enable students to gather, collate and document their research and show the process of their learning. Consideration should be given to using a mix of portfolio and e-portfolios to get the benefit of each format and their suitability to the piece of Art, Craft, Design, etc. One strongly made point was that *'making mistakes needs to be seen in a positive light'*. The focus group members felt that portfolios take *'some focus off the end product'* and allow *'for mistakes to be okay.'* They noted that as a collection of student thoughts and work, portfolios are *'Important for the journey'*. Some members of the groups stated that the *'NOTEBOOK is more important than the*

final product and that it *'documents the evolution of the work'* and as such is *'closest to the artistic process'*.

Some group members noted that there is a more negative side of the current Junior Certificate in that at *'the moment a lot of work gets binned and they only keep their best work.'*

Challenges related to storage and safety were also addressed by the focus group in that physical portfolios *'can be lost'*. Also, *'If it goes home with them it might not be theirs'* when it comes back. Also noted was the fact that *'there are storage issues and you need processes and procedures'*, however, there are procedures in place already around the development and storage of current Junior Certificate work undertaken by students in the final year of their Junior Cycle.

The physicality of the portfolio also means that *'you have to go out to see it'*. Focus group members mentioned this as a challenge related to time and process.

Functionality

The focus group also looked at the functionality of e-Portfolios and pointed out that they allow the recording of a sequence and everything to be kept in the one place. They can *'incorporate text and visuals'* enabling an *'opportunity for an annotated notebook'*

Part of the strengths of an e-Portfolio over a Portfolio is in its *'Portability'*. This was not seen as a disadvantage because students were also seen to be much *'less likely to lose it'*. An e-portfolio was seen as highly responsive in that it made it easier for students to take their work *'from sector to sector'*. While it *'acts as an archive'*, it also *'allows [for a] variety of formats'* where *'all media can be included, including film and animation'*, which helps to *'validate lens based art and new media'*. One extra feature of an e-portfolio over a normal portfolio is that it *'has potential to allow sharing'*. This form of communication and collaboration is important throughout the key skills of Junior Cycle.

While there are a lot of Tools available to support e-portfolios, including Apps, the groups recognized the need to focus on appropriate technologies. In discussing this point, focus group members noted that *'there is a question around the quality of documentation, e.g. how you take a photo when presenting your work'*. The *'quality of work is lost in a digital photo'*. e-Portfolios were also felt to *'Limit a primary interaction with the piece'* of work and although electronic, it was pointed out that there is a *'danger of losing the sense of the material/craft/tactile nature of a physical portfolio if you are solely using e-portfolios'*. The focus group did also acknowledge the risks associated with hosting e -portfolios on a third party site and that they could be lost.

Facilitates learning and allows for project-based work

Portfolios and e-portfolios facilitate development and experimentation. They help students to develop an understanding of learning as a continuum and to develop curation skills. By introducing *'the idea of minimum and maximum'* it also helps students to develop an *'understanding of how to edit'*. While enabling *'diversity of work'*, a portfolio can provide *'an opportunity for students to present orally on it and group critique'*. As such it can be very potent when *'used as a teaching and learning device'*

Regarding the portfolio, there was a *'perception of it being a lot of work'* for the student. The focus groups also felt that it would require more involvement from the teacher in that *'it requires monitoring and ongoing feedback'*.

Assessment

The focus groups noted that while portfolios can *'feed into ongoing assessment'*, the *'criteria for assessing the portfolio must reflect the importance of the reflection process'*. Portfolios are seen as *'good for allowing formative commenting and critiquing of work'*. Portfolios should be *'given credit in summative assessment/final grade'* with *'each student graded on their own'*.

One focus group summed up the use of portfolios as simply

Fantastic as a means of assessment, this is the norm in Art

The focus group were concerned that no feedback would be given with e-portfolios, but also that anonymity might need to be factored in as well as the ability to account for *'cheating'*.

It will be challenging to see how this can be factored into final assessment - an anonymous piece of work

Cheating is possible! Enhancing through Photoshop

*If they assess sketchbooks will they become really neat and beautifully presented?
We don't want that, this is where the continuity comes in and needs to be encouraged*

Can degenerate into a collection of 'best' work not a mapping of the process

By being a collection of a student's own, individual work over time, the focus group fed back that the best way of authenticating a student's work is by *'documenting everything in the portfolio, e.g. sketchbook, notebook, research, etc.'*

Enhance support studies

While the support studies section of the current Junior Certificate was felt to be necessary, the general feeling around this section of coursework was that it could be approached in a much more

holistic way and that the *'portfolio could help support studies be stitched together more than current practice'*

Student centred

Portfolios were noted to *'encourage students to take ownership'* of their work and processes, but also that *'they allow the student voice'*. While *'each portfolio is personal'* and that they can *'Allow personal work outside school to be included'*, the emphasis on the skills required to complete and maintain them are dependent on the student being helped to develop these skills

Student led research - it's up to them to find the information

With regard to their electronic counterparts *'e-portfolios acknowledge how young people communicate. It is in keeping with their world'*.

Resources and Equity

The focus groups raised the point of equity between schools in that *'resources are an equity issue, all schools mightn't feel there is a level playing field'*

Use of ICT in the new Junior Cycle specification

The responses around the respondents views on students using ICT alongside their usual practices showed that 84% of respondents to the online survey agreed that it will enhance student learning. 51% agreed that an ICT-based component should become a separate strand, in its own right and 49% agreed that an ICT-based component should permeate through the whole course as required.

Use of ICT when creating art

Overall, the responses to this section of the online survey were very positive in favour of the use of ICT for creating art. 79% of respondents agreed (31% strongly agreed; 48% agreed) that ICT should be used for creating, experimenting with and manipulating still images in the new Junior Cycle. 73% of respondents agreed (25% strongly agreed; 48% agreed) that ICT should be used for creating, experimenting with and manipulating moving images in the new Junior Cycle. 66% of respondents agreed (20% strongly agreed; 46% agreed) that ICT-based artwork should be assessed through the use of ICT.

Within the focus groups, in general it was felt that as ICT is part of life and in use by everyone it should be used in Art, Craft, Design and *'become commonplace'*. It is important as a life skill and is mentioned in the Framework for Junior Cycle 2015.

‘Without limits or constraints’

The quote above, taken from the consultation responses, states that ICT should be an *‘enabler’* and can be used as *‘a tool and resource’* by the student in their Art but also as a *‘teaching resource and tool for teachers’* and the point was made that when it is used there should always be a purpose, it shouldn’t be about *‘using it just for the sake of it’*. The focus group came up with and discussed many examples to support this point:

- It is a contemporary way of art-making
- ICT is another means of exploration
- Use new media to record, assess, research, create and share
- Skill development is important and this is an opportunity for peer-peer learning
- Animation and film making can be undertaken linking the audio and the visual
- The art of presenting can be developed, an important life and education skill.

However, the focus groups also noted that in addition to these artistic and creative benefits there are also disadvantages in that while it allows for primary source interaction it is not always an authentic experience.

Collaboration

The focus groups mentioned that collaboration, a key skill, is facilitated through ICT both at a *‘peer-to-peer’* level for students but also in that it provides a *‘platform to collaborate and share practice with other schools and teachers, e.g. online lesson plans’*. Currently there is an example of this in a Facebook page for Art Teachers called the *‘Art Teachers SWAP Book’*.

Continuing Professional Development

The focus group noted that CPD will be needed to ensure that teachers have the knowledge skills and confidence to use ICT as a *‘teaching tool’* and as part of *‘making art’*. Teachers *‘need to be taught digital pedagogies’*. There is a need to ensure that it is not perceived as an *‘intimidating term’* or that the teacher feels they *‘have lost control.’ Teachers will need to feel confident in giving guidance, which will also be needed on ‘using ICT to contextualise work’*.

As some members of the focus group reported back, *‘media literacy is what we all have anyway’*.

Resources

One thing that was noted by members of the focus groups was that resources will be important and *'only some schools have digital technologies'*. They thought that this means it may need to be optional.

Cross-curricular approach

The focus group noted that there is a wealth of potential offered by embracing ICT. However, they did point out that the importance of *'future proofing the specification'* was highlighted. The 'MIA' (Moving Image Arts) course in NI was highlighted as something worth exploring.

Views on assessing ICT-based work in Art, Craft and Design

The focus groups then looked at assessment through the perspective of the use of ICT. It is seen as something that will help with the *'storage problem, 'sustainability- it saves on the trees'* and also to *'showcase work.'* It has the potential to showcase work outside the school too.

Echoing points made above, ICT was highlighted as both a *'tool'* and an *'option'* that should be available to students and has a central role to play in *'research'*. It was felt that the digital work should accompany other formats at assessment such as

work in a formative space and learning journals used to document the journey and process. The idea to film work on an ipad was suggested and the suggestion was made that the rationale and context of a piece of art could be captured digitally, a video journal/interview that reflects the process.

It has the ability to facilitate the *'assessment of learning opportunities allowing you to see what the teacher did to help the child and the outcome of that help'*

Finally there was recognition that *'critical media literacy'* is an important skill that should be assessed.

Concerns were also expressed within the focus groups that if assessment *'is through digital processes it can be very outcome based'*. The view was that the assessment process needed to be suitable for both the *'process and the product'*. Other areas of concern arise in relation to assessing all formats of work digitally were expressed but the view was also expressed that, *'if it's made digitally it should be assessed digitally'*.

Software and resources were raised as concerns from the point of view of equity of access and also that *'limiting software would limit students'*.

Education for sustainable development (ESD)

The National Strategy for Sustainable Development in Ireland, 2014-2020, provides a framework to support the contribution that the education sector is making and will continue to make towards a more sustainable future. Table 7 shows that there is a high level of agreement with the importance of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and including it and integrating it into the Junior Cycle specification.

Table 7: Percentage level agreed on building ESD into the new specification

	SA	A	D	SD
ESD should be explicitly built into the Learning Outcomes for a new Junior Cycle Art, Craft, Design specification	23%	52%	18%	7%
Knowledge of ESD is important for students to learn as part of their Junior Cycle Art, Craft, Design course	28%	55%	13%	4%
Knowledge of why ESD is important for students to understand should be part of their Junior Cycle Art, Craft, Design course	24%	52%	18%	6%
ESD skills should be integrated to comply with the National Strategy	23%	56%	15%	6%

SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree

Within the focus groups the National Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development was also discussed and it was noted that it supports the idea of the *'global learner'* and involves seeing Art as a *'social commentator'* encapsulating *'values and attitudes that Art, Craft and Design facilitates'*.

Wellbeing

Wellbeing is one of the principles that underpin Junior Cycle education. Students will undertake learning in this new area throughout the three years of Junior Cycle. Two concerns were raised with regard to the area of wellbeing in the focus groups. Firstly that this needed to be approached with care as, *'there is a need to maintain the integrity of Art, Craft and Design as a discipline not just a methodology'*. Secondly that it is problematic when, *'Art is being used as a way of providing therapeutic interventions to children with special needs'*

The Brief

The brief, included within the background paper, outlines the directions to be taken by the Development Group when working on the new specification. Table 8 below, taken from the online survey, shows a very high level of agreement with the suggestions for the brief. However, it should be noted that while agreement might be high, the percentages can be seen to be lower in regard to cross-curricular work and the use of ICT in both the creation and assessment of student artworks.

Table 8: The Brief

The brief should	SA	A	D	SD
be closely aligned to the primary Visual Arts syllabus	9%	67%	22%	2%
be a platform for the study of Art, Craft, Design in Senior Cycle and beyond	61%	37%	1%	1%
enable alignment with the learning outcomes in other subjects	24%	57%	18%	1%
allow for the use of ICT by students in the creation of artworks	35%	50%	10%	5%
allow for the use of ICT in assessing student artworks	25%	37%	28%	10%
facilitate a broad approach to and experience of Art, Craft, Design	68%	31%	1%	
encourage cross-curricular work to allow students to explicitly demonstrate skills	38%	51%	10%	1%
engage students' interest in developing their creativity	83%	17%		
support student learning by providing a wide range of annotated examples of student work, linked to learning outcomes to exemplify what students will be expected to achieve	60%	35%	5%	

Responses to Student Voice

The 'Student Voice' project has worked with groups of students who have reflected on their current experiences of junior certificate art, craft, design. This information was collated and included in the Background Paper in order to give students an input to this process. The online responses to this Student Voice feedback and the learning needs of students are shown in Table 9 below. This table indicates that there is a high level of agreement with the outlined learning needs that must be addressed in the specification. The only place where the agreement was lower was in regard to students bringing their art out into the communities.

Table 9: Student learning needs

	SA	A	D	SD
Student choice in the work they create is important	65%	33%	2%	
All students need to acquire a basic skillset in the first year of Junior Cycle	84%	14%	2%	
While developing skills in Art, Craft, Design is naturally "hands-on", students also need to develop aesthetic understanding and skills	70%	29%		
Students need the opportunity to bring their artwork to their community to give a realistic purpose to their work	25%	39%	26%	10%
21st century tools and skills are important for students to learn and possibly integrate into their work in the modern world	42%	46%	11%	1%

SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree

The focus groups' views on how the student voice can be catered for in the new Junior Cycle, Art, Craft and Design specification were recorded and are outlined here.

There was strong agreement with the summary statements, which emerged from the student voice exercise, and agreement that these should influence the specification. It was felt that it was important that this be communicated more widely. There were also calls for more inclusion of student voices but also that it is important to '*contextualise*' for students before seeking their voice. The student voice can be a valuable '*springboard*'.

Collaborative work

The focus groups noted that 'collaborative work [can be] devalued because it is difficult to measure', However, the suggestion was made to carry out work collaboratively but 'submit it individually whilst still documenting how other's voices influenced their work'.

It is important to allow them develop an understanding of group work and to value it

Stage of development versus student choice

As part of their discussions on Student Voice, the focus groups noted that *'there needs to be a balance between sequential development being necessary and student choice which might not allow for this'*.

Assessment

Assessment practices must reflect what happens in the artistic world where *'the finished product is only 10% of what the artist does so assessment must measure and assess process.'* In saying this, the focus groups also pointed out that *'high standards still need to be maintained.'* Criteria will need to be provided *'for assessment and allow student to choose how they demonstrate that they have achieved the criteria'*. The focus groups recognised that ownership of both process and final product by the students is important.

Students need to be part of the assessment process- and diaries and learner journals are useful for this

They could play a role in discussing and evaluating their own work- maybe an interview or a one to one assessment

Artists and centres of art

Can artists play a role in supporting teaching and learning through modelling their own practice and to do this they would need to play a more integral role in the students learning process?

The quote directly above came from agreement between members of the focus groups. As well as the teacher being seen as a practitioner, the groups also felt that *'meeting an artist in their own studio is important and opens up the area of risk and risk-taking, showing that failure is part of the process'*

The focus groups noted that *'artists in residency would be great'* and encouraged *'more visits to art centers.'*

Skills and practices to encourage

In their final discussions and to sum up their thoughts from the day, the focus groups wanted to *'make sure visual research is undertaken'*. They wanted to encourage *'critical questioning'* and *'thinking for yourself'*. Part of this could be practically handled as students would be *'thinking through making.'*

They finished off the focus group by saying that what is needed in a new junior cycle art, craft, design specification is to *'engage [students] with creative problem solving', 'prototyping and testing' and 'more cross curricular learning'* in order to *'relate art to globalisation and the bigger changing world picture.'*

Conclusion

The overall response to the consultation, both online and through the focus groups, was very positive and strongly in favour of the majority of elements that the background paper and brief for the new junior cycle art, craft, design specification touched upon.

Being Creative is one of the key skills of junior cycle and it was interesting to see that it was identified as a strong component for Art, Craft, Design but also as a factor in many other subjects, which in the spirit of the Junior Cycle Framework allows for more open and cross-curricular links between subjects to be formed.

Throughout the consultation the idea of “process” was identified as very important for Art, Craft, Design. The subject needs to be seen to maintain the way it can encourage risk taking and experimentation while reducing the fear of failure students can sometimes experience. The art room is identified as a ‘safe space’ where these challenges can be met head on and solutions to them facilitated as much by the teacher as the students themselves.

The reflection on Student Voice by respondents was also very positive and emphasised the types of experiences students need to gain during their time undertaking a new junior cycle art, craft, design specification.

Assessment by project, currently the method used in the Junior Certificate, is seen as a strength which could be boosted through the inclusion of portfolios or e-portfolios. Portfolios ‘create a sense of pride’ and ‘encourage self-critique and self-reflection’, while helping the student to develop ‘their own sense of the aesthetic’. Journals or reflective diaries were also suggested as possible additions to this area.

The language of Art, Craft, Design is important to include in any new specification and will help students in framing an understanding of the subject for themselves. Through using this language, students can be enabled to articulate their thoughts about their own work, visual culture and contemporary art practices.

Students need to understand that Art, Craft, Design is more than just a subject and so they need to experience ‘real-world’ settings in order that they see their learning as not just taking place in school or for an examination only. This was reflected in much of the feedback around the Art in Education Charter. Respondents felt that this document is important and view it as pointing to many good resources, such as artists and galleries/museums that are available to teachers and schools.

However, it was also strongly felt that while it is important, and aspects of it should be experienced by students, it should not replace any areas of learning but instead should compliment them.

Art, Craft, Design is seen as an enjoyable subject for young people. It is this positivity which plays a major role in their experience of the subject as well as how engaged and involved students are. This positivity needs to be part of any new specification.

While there is agreement with the need to maintain a continuum of learning from primary, through Junior Cycle and into Senior Cycle, this must be seen in how students interact with and are assisted in developing their skills, knowledge and understanding of the subject itself as well as the visual and cultural language around it. However, while understanding and using the language of the subject itself was seen as important, respondents felt strongly that a formal, written examination in Art Appreciation is not required.

The integration of ICT in Art, Craft, Design was seen as enabling for students. It is recognised as an important life skill by respondents and has been identified in the Framework as an element of each Key Skill. The usefulness of ICT in employing digital methods for researching, creating and manipulating images (both still and moving) and in creating finished pieces of work was also recognised by respondents as an example of real world approaches used by craftspeople, designers and contemporary artists too.

The high level of agreement with the ideas in the background paper and brief, including the authentic discussions around Student Voice positively point towards the future development of a new specification for junior cycle art, craft, design.

