



NCCA

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta
Curraim agus Measúnachta
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Background Paper and Brief for the Review of Leaving Certificate Art

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Introduction

The Senior Cycle Review: Advisory Report (NCCA 2022a) was published in March 2022 following the response from the Minister for Education, Norma Foley, TD. Actions outlined in the Advisory Report include a review of existing curriculum components - subjects, modules, and programmes. In March 2022, the Minister for Education requested that NCCA undertake a series of actions to support the realisation of her vision for a redeveloped senior cycle as set out in [Equity and Excellence for All](#) (Department of Education, 2022.) One key action set out in this plan was that a schedule of senior cycle subjects and modules for redevelopment be prepared for approval by the Minister.

NCCA subsequently prepared a schedule of subjects for review, which was organised into a number of tranches. The redevelopment of Art is included in Tranche 4, which will be completed in 2027 for introduction to schools in September 2028.

This paper provides a context for the review of Art and has been informed by the views of teachers, school leaders and students gathered through school visits conducted in a representative sample of schools. It begins by considering the background of Art with Section 1 presenting an overview of the current context, including consideration of relevant policy developments. Section 2 sets out how Art related education is currently provided for within the Irish curriculum while Section 3 provides an overview of the insights gained through the school visits conducted and the lived experience of schools, teachers, and students. Section 4 considers similar education opportunities internationally and presents an overview of four different jurisdictions. Section 5 draws on the previous three sections to categorise and briefly discuss some issues identified for consideration in the redevelopment of Art before finally setting out a proposed brief for this work in Section 6, which will guide the work of the development group.

Background and Context

This section sets out some of the significant developments in Art since its initial introduction, before focusing on the education and broader policy landscape which are important contextual considerations for the review and redevelopment of Art.

The current specification was introduced in 2019 and replaced the Leaving Certificate Art syllabus, introduced in 1971. This syllabus presented a very narrow approach to curriculum in its focus on defined outputs. However, changes to the examination structure over time kept it relevant as approaches to Art education changed over time. It is worth noting that a revised syllabus was developed between 2004 and 2007 but was never introduced. This revised syllabus sought to equip students with a visual language enabling them to communicate knowledge, emotions, ideas and insights in a visual medium and to understand and engage with the artistic work of others. It also described visual language as having four dimensions; Creative, Aesthetic, Critical/Historical and Cultural. The syllabus, divided into three sections, was designed as a cohesive unit where all sections were viewed as interlinked for teaching and learning purposes: Section A, Drawing (observational and life); Section B, Studio Work (Craft, Fine Art and Visual Communication); and Section C: History and Appreciation of Art and Design.

The current Leaving Certificate Art specification was published in 2019 but not introduced to schools until 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, the first cohort of students followed the new specification which was examined at both higher and ordinary levels in 2023.

From a policy perspective, the publication of the [Arts in Education Charter \(2012\)](#) set out an approach to Arts integration across all sectors and levels of society in the country by articulating a vision that places the Arts at the core of the formal and informal education system and which is intended to inform future policies.

The Arts Council saw funding increasing from €75m to €130m in 2021, and its use has been addressed in their [Making Great Art Work Plan 2022-2025](#), which sets out plans to ensure artists are supported, their work valued, and spaces and places are made available to facilitate artists to make and showcase their works. This plan includes a €3 million yearly investment in the Creative Schools project in partnership with the Department of Education and Youth, which has reached 831 schools and engages 80 creative associates (artists, practitioners and teachers) to work in those schools.

The [Creative Ireland Programme](#), which developed from the Decade of Centenaries' celebrations, is currently in its second 5-year long programme. Its focus is on 5 key themes: Creative Youth; Creative Communities; Creative Health and Wellbeing; Creative Climate Action; and Creative Industries. The [Creative Youth Plan \(2023-2027\)](#) looks at the connections between creativity and wellbeing, focuses on creativity and inclusion and developing student voice, and explores the role of creativity in the classroom through the curriculum. This policy focuses on how the future development of curriculum should consider how creativity can complement all subjects and support embedding creative practices within all aspects of teaching, learning and assessment. Both the [STEM Education Policy Statement \(2017-2026\)](#) and the [Digital Strategy for Schools to 2027](#) are noted in relation to the opportunities they could provide for engagement, innovation and creativity. The [Bringing Live Arts to Students & Teachers \(BLAST\)](#) initiative of the Department

of Education and Youth (DEY) will, in the 2025-2026 academic year, support 425 new residencies in schools alone as part of this work, bringing together creative practitioners, teachers, students, schools, Youthreach Centres and the wider community in creative work.

[OIDE Creativity](#) (formerly Arts in Junior Cycle), the DEY professional learning support service for teachers, offers a series of professional learning experiences to support engagement with the arts and learning. Based on partnership and collaboration with key elective partners across the arts and education sectors, OIDE aims to support arts-makers to create professional learning experiences for teachers. The vision is for all teachers to value, enjoy and be enriched by the arts and creative practices and to see creativity and the arts as integral to teaching and learning.

The [Digital Creative Roadmap \(2024-2026\)](#) sets as its priorities the promotion of creative people, skills, businesses, spaces, innovation, and knowledge creation, and enhancing Ireland's place in an international marketplace. It was developed from the [Audiovisual Action Plan \(2019\)](#) and outlines Ireland's strategy for the production of film, television drama and animation. The Digital Creative Roadmap identifies three main target sectors: Design, including industrial, UI/UX (User Interface/User Experience), service and strategic design; Digital games sector; Content creation sectors, including advertising, commercial, social media and AR/VR/MR (Augmented/Virtual/Mixed Reality). It notes that creative skills are very resilient and essential to a future economy and points towards the challenge of skills shortages in these rapidly developing creative industries.

The priority action areas of the [Education for Sustainable Development to 2023](#) policy reference transforming learning environments by giving students opportunities to acquire the knowledge, skills, values and dispositions needed to promote and experience sustainable development within their schools. Further priorities include building the capacity of educators to foster societal transformation and empowering and mobilising young people by supporting them as agents of change. This can be achieved by supporting more inclusive principles and practices within learning environments, suitable pedagogies such as inquiry-based learning, creativity and design-thinking and problem/challenge-based learning.

It should be noted that many galleries and museums across Ireland also continue to support local schools with their own education programmes and look to connect the exhibitions they plan and run with the curriculum and local needs.

Section Summary

- The 1971 Art syllabus, more narrowly focused on product, was replaced by the current 2019 Art specification, which brought a more holistic approach to the subject and a renewed focus on process and learning.
- The 2012 Arts in Education Charter was the document which inspired the developments and focus on the arts in education in Ireland both within schools and in wider society.
- The Arts Council has funded the Creative Schools initiative and brought arts experiences to 831 schools through 80 Creative Associates since its inception.

- Creativity, wellbeing and inclusion are all important parts of the Creative Youth plan.
- *Creativity* has been linked strategically with *innovation*, as demonstrated by the STEM and Digital Strategies for Schools policies.
- Creativity and innovation have been further recognised and supported in the design, digital games, and content creation sectors through the Digital Creative Roadmap.
- Education for Sustainable Development brings a focus on inclusive principles and practices within learning environments, suitable pedagogies and design-thinking and problem/challenge-based learning.
- Recognition is due to many galleries and museums across Ireland for their continued outreach and support of schools, teachers and students in their local areas.

Art in the curriculum

This section provides an overview of the opportunities for learning related to Art currently available to students within both the junior cycle and senior cycle programmes. It then focuses on student participation rates in Art, outlining the nature of uptake of the subject and exploring inspection reports from the DE/DEY and the most recent State Examinations Commission Chief Examiner's report.

Art in junior cycle

The Junior Cycle Visual Art specification (2016) places students at the centre of the experience of Visual Art. It encourages students to make a greater connection with their learning by focusing on the quality of learning, and by offering engaging and enjoyable experiences which are relevant to their lives.

Visual Art, through the three strands of art, craft and design, involves experiences in artistic techniques using a wide range of media leading to a specific outcome, e.g. an artwork, a design, an architectural study, an installation or an event. These experiences are further emphasised using the cross-cutting elements: Critical and visual language; Drawing, Visual culture and appreciation; Art elements and design principles (AEDP); and Media. Making art develops the student's imagination through developing an idea or concept and allows them to exercise personal responsibility for specific tasks.

In Junior Cycle Visual Art, there is an emphasis on learning within the safe space of the art class and engaging in practical, hands-on acts of creativity to develop self-confidence, inquisitiveness, imagination, creativity and the ability to engage in real-world problem-solving. Students develop a capacity to work, over time, both on their own or in groups, as they research, plan, design and execute artistic and aesthetic tasks. In doing so, students develop the visual literacy, critical skills and language necessary to engage with contemporary culture, which further contributes to their understanding of the rich and diverse roles of art, craft and design in historical and contemporary societies and cultures.

The table below shows the participation rates in Junior Cycle Visual Art based on the number of students who took the examination since 2022. It should be noted that although the new specification replaced the syllabus in 2019, there were no formal examinations until 2022 due to the Covid 19 pandemic.

Year	Common Level Visual Art Total Candidates	Total JC candidates	Total Visual Art candidates as a % of total JC candidates
2022	20,856	67,130	31.1%
2023	22,278	70,727	31.5%
2024	24,117	72,828	33.1%

Table 1: Number of students sitting Junior Cycle Visual Art at Common Level 2022-2024/5

Art in senior cycle

The current specification for Leaving Certificate Art was published in 2019 and introduced to schools in 2020. It placed the student at the centre of their educational experience where they would be enabled to be resourceful, confident, engage actively in society and develop an interest in learning and the skills of lifelong learning. The specification embeds the key skills of Communicating, Being Personally Effective, Working with Others. Critical and Creative Thinking, and Information Processing within the learning outcomes.

As the specification states, in the rationale, Art is ‘the language we use that gives our ideas form’ and it ‘promotes creative and critical thinking, supports the development of problem-solving skills, and strengthens the learner’s ability to communicate ideas through their own work to an intended audience ...’ It states that art encourages students to ‘develop a respect for their fellow learners and the wider community; to become more empathetic.’ (DES, 2019: 6).

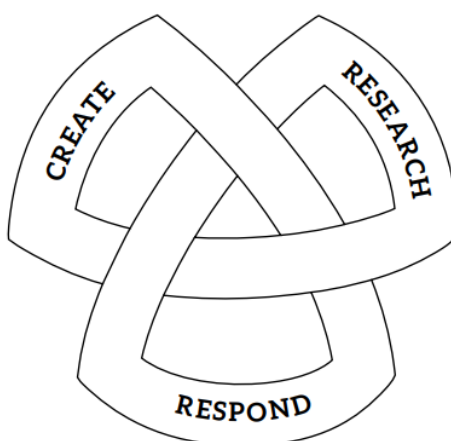


Figure 1: The structure of the Leaving Certificate Art specification

The specification is presented in three strands: Research, Create and Respond, with each dependent on the other two and all being interconnected and supportive of the artistic process. It also builds on the previous learning in Junior Cycle Visual Art. The specification also replaced the Art History and Appreciation section of the 1971 syllabus by introducing an updated version called Visual Studies, which employs a framework approach to better integrate both students’ practical work and their understanding of contemporary and historical art. The aim of the specification is to, “develop in learners the knowledge, skills, understanding and values needed to bring an idea to realisation and to respond to, understand, analyse and evaluate their own work and the work of others while developing their own skill set in a personal way.” (DES, 2019: 7)

Art in focus

This section explores participation rates in Leaving Certificate Art drawing on statistics from the State Examinations Commission (SEC) and provides an overview of assessment for certification, and insights from DE/DEY inspection reports.

Student participation

Year	Higher Level	Ordinary Level	Total Candidates	Total LC candidates	Total LC Art candidates as a % of total candidates
2019	7622	1563	9185	56,071	16.4
2020	8112	1504	9616	57,668	16.7
2021	7925	1417	9342	57,952	16.1
2022	7716	1531	9247	58,056	15.9
2023	7642	1502	9144	58,006	15.7
2024	8451	1408	9859	56,791	17.4

Table 2: Number of students sitting Leaving Certificate Art at higher and ordinary Level 2019-2024/5

Assessment for certification

Leaving Certificate Art is examined at both higher and ordinary levels for assessment purposes by the State Examinations Commission. There are three assessment components in total.

Assessment Component	Weighting
Practical Coursework	50%
Practical Examination	20%
Written Examination	30%

Table 3: Assessment Components in Leaving Certificate Art and their weighting

The Practical Coursework component is designed to test the student's ability to use the knowledge, concepts and skills developed in their study of Art to produce a realised work, from a stimulus, over an extended period. Students receive the SEC coursework brief at the beginning of Term 2 in 6th year, which outlines the time (12 weeks) in which students will realise one piece of work and plan and develop work for the realisation of a second piece of work, which is completed during the Practical Examination. This examination takes place as soon as possible after the completion of the practical coursework component and is completed within 5 hours of a single day. Students also include an artist's statement to explain what they have created, how it was created and why was it created.

The written examination has a range and balance of question types (short and long form) suited to the three Content Areas of Visual Studies: *Europe and the wider world*; *Ireland and its place in the wider world*; and *Today's world*. The written examination assesses the students' ability to think critically, to analyse and evaluate information and to form reasonable and logical arguments based on evidence. It also tests their ability to process information and articulate a personal understanding while making use of appropriate visual language and terminology. The written examination paper is 2.5 hours duration.

Insights from Inspection Reports and the Chief Examiner's Report

Inspection Reports

Thirteen [Inspection reports](#) relating to the subject of Art for the last three years were researched for this Background Paper. In summary, the school Art departments mentioned in them were found to be vibrant, supportive, and student-centred, fostering creativity, technical skill development, and student wellbeing. In turn, they received strong support from school leadership, and Art was afforded a high profile within the schools. Teaching took place in an atmosphere of mutual respect, where students were encouraged to work independently and take ownership of their learning. The physical spaces, artroom and wider school environment, celebrated student achievements. Opportunities for students to engage with Art beyond the curriculum were also noted. Students demonstrated technical skills and showed good engagement with the subject and were supported by effective formative assessment practices, including high-quality verbal feedback. The students themselves expressed their enjoyment of Art and appreciated the classroom environment and their relationships with their teachers.

A key recommendation emerging from the reports was the need to improve the consistent use of primary sources through observational drawing as a foundation for student work. It was noted that at times there was an over-reliance on photographs. Instruction in developing technical skills was good but needed to be coupled with students also developing their creative and critical thinking skills. It was noted that the 2019 specification called for more integration of visual studies with practical work and the Inspectorate observed that planning should ensure they became an integral part of students' creative processes. Students should be encouraged to research artists who inspire them and make direct links between their own work and visual studies. While the Leaving Certificate, by its very nature, examines each student individually the reports proposed that more opportunities for collaborative learning should be introduced.

Chief Examiner's Report

An [Information note for three Leaving Certificate subjects with new subject specifications](#) was issued by the State Examinations Commission (SEC) in 2024. It reviewed the coursework in Art, Classical Studies and Applied Mathematics as these components were either new or substantially revised elements in each of the subjects. Introduced into schools in 2021, they were first examined in 2023. The information note was provided to assist students and teachers in their engagement with this coursework. As they are interlinked in Art, both the Practical Coursework and written examination were reviewed.

The information note noted that when students treated the two components as part of a coherent whole project, based on the same theme in the issued brief, it led to better work. The students' projects were also richer when their work was developed in a personal, meaningful and significant way, which demonstrated their ability to visually communicate concepts and ideas. Many students showed they had a good understanding of the range of both materials and techniques they chose to use in their Visual Journals and realised work. The choice of theme that enabled the students to find suitable and interesting primary sources also produced better work across the different stages of the examinations.

Conversely, the use of secondary sources by students as a basis for their work led to a lack of personal, rich and meaningful development. The use of a wider range of media led to richer research and better options for realised work. The link between relevant references from Visual Studies and their practical work, based on in-depth research by the students, had a very good influence on this work and helped to better define the realised pieces. These pieces were also much better where students demonstrated a familiarity with the art elements and design principles as outlined in the specification. Students were also advised to consult with their teacher about the work they wished to create and to plan effectively, keeping in mind that two realised pieces were required.

Section Summary

- Junior Cycle Visual Art is experienced by students through the three strands of art, craft and design and the cross-cutting elements of Critical and visual language, Drawing, Visual culture and appreciation, Art elements and design principles (AEDP) and Media.
- In Junior Cycle Visual Art, the focus is on practical, hands-on acts of creativity to develop self-confidence, inquisitiveness, imagination, creativity and the ability to engage in real-world problem-solving. Students learn to work independently over time and learn about the rich and diverse roles of art, craft and design in historical and contemporary societies/cultures.
- The Leaving Certificate 1971 syllabus was replaced in 2019 with the current specification, which consists of three strands: Research, Create, and Respond. Each strand is dependent on the others and interconnected and supportive of the artistic process.
- The Visual Studies Framework is a support for teaching and learning and is structured around 6 elements: Context; Artists and Artworks; Analysis; Art Elements and Design Principles; Media and Areas of Practice; Innovation and Invention.
- Three components form the assessment structure of Leaving Certificate Art: Practical Coursework (12-week project); Practical Examination (1-day, 5-hour examination); Written Examination.
- DEY inspection reports found that positive practice included: support from school leadership of Art and students within and outside the school; Art departments being supportive of their students, fostering their creativity, technical skill development, and wellbeing.
- Challenges identified by the Inspectorate included the need: to improve the consistent use of primary sources through observational drawing; for students to develop their creative and critical thinking skills; for Visual Studies to be more integrated into students' practical learning; for opportunities for collaborative learning.
- The SEC Information Note found that students' Coursework and Practical Examination pieces were richer when their work: was developed in a personal, meaningful and significant way; demonstrated a good understanding of a range of materials and techniques; based on a choice of theme that led to suitable and interesting primary sources; linked with relevant Visual Studies references; treated the two practical

components as parts of a coherent whole project, based on the same theme in the issued brief.

Insights from school visits

School visits were conducted as part of the scoping work for this background paper. A representative sample was selected from the 29 schools that expressed an interest in becoming involved in Art curriculum developments. The six schools were selected using criteria relating to DEIS status, gender, school size and type. Visits to these schools took place in May 2025 and involved focus group meetings with 52 senior cycle students, 11 teachers of Art and 7 school leaders. The following section provides an overview of the insights gathered through these visits.

Teachers

Art teachers were of the view that any new specification for Leaving Certificate Art should instil a passion for the subject in students and develop in them a lifelong love of art, art-making and culture, and visiting galleries/museums. Art should encourage students to grow in confidence, prepare them for the world of work, develop their capacity for critical thinking, develop their appreciation of art, and help them to be inquisitive about the world around them. Art students need to be able to experiment with technology, media and real-world digital applications and future pathways need to be identified for them. The teachers see the Artroom as a relaxed and productive environment that contributes to student wellbeing.

The teachers echoed the school leaders in their support of Art through displays of student work and involvement in Creative Engagement and local school innovation events. It was noted that more female students than males take Art as a subject for Leaving Certificate and some teachers suggested that invoking digital art and animation could help attract more male students.

Teachers mentioned that both junior and senior cycle curriculums were now better aligned and welcome the similar layout of examination booklets for each. Teachers noted that it can be difficult for students to bring primary sources to class and it seemed to them that students' imaginations were not as valued in their Leaving Certificate examination.

The Practical Coursework component (50%) is seen as a positive, but teachers commented that the length of the coursework impacts on teaching time. Managing the 12-week long coursework is seen as challenging and it was noted that students can become protective and cautious about their work, instead of experimenting more. It was suggested that their Visual Journals could become more like open sketchbooks to counter this. Issuing the brief in September of sixth year to give students more time to complete their work was also mentioned as a way to alleviate the time pressures.

The 5-hour Practical Examination (20%) was seen as a positive part of the assessment, where students can focus on a different area of practice from their Practical Coursework. It was considered that there is enough time to realise a piece of work, and represented a good change from the longer project, as it was seen as having a focus on execution rather than creativity. Some teachers mentioned that this component could run slightly longer, either for the full school day or for two school days.

The Written Examination (30%) is based on the Visual Studies section of the specification. While the written language of Art (understanding the terminology and how to use it) can be difficult,

teachers felt that it was important for students to know, understand and use it to analyse artworks, including when discussing their own ideas/work or that of their peers. While it was recognised that Art is mainly a practical subject, it was considered that the written examination should be retained, as it allows students to demonstrate their knowledge in a different way and asks them to form and defend opinions using the evidence from artworks studied.

The teachers stated their students find modern periods of Art more interesting. The Visual Studies section “Today’s world” is more open-ended and promotes discussion with students and allows learning from working with local artists or from visiting galleries/museums to be used. A few teachers suggested the weighting could be reduced to 20%; however, none suggested it go above 30%. Some alternative approaches to the Written Examination included: a section of “Today’s world” examined at the end of fifth year for 10%; or some marks gained through writing about their Practical processes and realised work; or a research project completed between September to December, just before the Coursework begins, but based on the same theme from the SEC brief.

The current weighting of practical exam work to written exam work of 70:30 is supported by most of the teachers, as teachers perceive this as being an honest and appropriate reflection of the work expected from students. There was a worry that when other projects/AACs come on board, it might prove stressful for students to manage multiple submissions. The apparent difficulty students seem to have in achieving a H1 at Higher Level was mentioned, and coupled with the points race, was seen to deter some students from taking up Art after Junior Cycle.

The Key Competencies were seen as a very positive feature of a new specification. How teachers and students work and interact within the Artroom was considered very conducive to their application. It was noted that students are constantly thinking and solving problems in all stages of work as well as naturally being creative and that they think about how to communicate ideas and feelings and communicate with their teacher and peers in class. It was noted that students work with others in group projects, and that by looking at and discussing world events through Art, students are participating in society. It was further noted that Art cultivates wellbeing and students learn to manage their learning and selves through their Coursework in sixth year; and that Art prepares students for lifelong learning.

Teachers expressed their concern over classroom space and storage space (and lack thereof) in some of their classrooms, which can make it difficult to make some craftwork and impede storage space for project/examination work. They also expressed the desire for more digital technology for Art in schools.

Students

Students enjoy the feeling of freedom the practical side of Art offers them. They like the wide range of choice and like being able to experiment with ideas, different materials and techniques. Art is a different way to learn new skills and techniques and for thinking outside the box. The weighting of the marks in favour of practical work over written (70:30) is seen as a positive. This makes Art different from other classes, a welcome break in a very sociable, fun environment.

The students saw the connection with Junior Cycle Visual Art and better understood what they learned then. However, they felt if they hadn’t taken art as a subject for Junior Cycle they would be limited in the skills and techniques that they needed to learn ahead of Leaving Certificate Art.

For the Practical Coursework examination, students like that they can focus on creating a piece that demands more time from them and can plan for a less intensive piece for the 5-hour Practical Examination. Students stated that the Practical Coursework is manageable once they watch their time and keep to their plans. Some find the Coursework to be quite intense and can find it difficult to develop techniques properly when there is so much to be done. Some students feel rushed to move on to the next stage of their work at times and struggle to get it completed in time. Longer time on Coursework is preferred, 15 weeks instead of 12; there were suggestions that the brief could be released earlier in November or even September of sixth year; and that the Coursework demand be reduced. Some noted that there are often several deadlines due around the same time for other subjects, which they found stressful. However, having 70% done, during class time, ahead of the written examination is welcomed.

When it came to discussing Visual Studies, students focused on examination requirements in most of their responses. Visual Studies is appreciated by the students as it gives them more knowledge to inspire their own work. They appreciate that it is a smaller part of the overall course as, generally, they prefer the more creative aspects of the course. The students noted it was important to understand how artworks in the past were created and that it is important to be able to visit a gallery and appreciate and critically think about the work on display. They agreed they need to be able to speak about their own work in the context of the movements of artists and ideas from Art that inspired them. There is a lack of female role models and their inclusion in future specifications is seen as important.

Most students are in favour of retaining the written examination and suggested there could be just one long question instead of two and some short questions. However, a very small number of students said they would prefer no written exam and instead they could show what they learned about art history through their own work or making something inspired from a previous period. Some find abstract art hard to understand while others would like to be able to delve into its history more. Generally, they agreed that learning two content areas is enough, and that “Today’s world” is a section of the course that they like engaging with. They also stated that the examination could ask them to reflect or review on exhibitions/galleries that they visited. Students felt the integration between theory and practice needed more emphasis in class.

Students were of the view that the impact of AI on creating a physical artefact was limited. They noted that an over-reliance on AI would set a student up for failure and learning an entire AI generated essay is the same as rote-learning. Some students stated that their schools didn’t have adequate resources for using digital technology to create artworks and they would like to see more technology in class. While not necessarily digital, photography was suggested as something to be supported as an art form, as it is accessible through mobile phone technology and a great way to teach composition and light.

Reflecting on primary sources, some noted that focusing on these sources can limit their imagination and stifle their creativity and while necessary, it can be difficult to find primary source materials/objects. They wanted to see less reliance on primary sources and said that drawing on their imagination was also important.

School leaders

School leaders noted the success of Leaving Certificate Art in their school and the positive connections to the wider community, including engaging with local artists and projects, stating how the creative elements of Art allow students more choice after junior cycle. They pointed out how their Art teachers did amazing work under all conditions, pointing to the high level of quality in the artwork around the school developed for occasions like graduation ceremonies or national competitions. Their Art teachers were instrumental in developing local projects with the community and bringing back past students and inviting artists to talk/work in the classroom.

Supports and resources for schools was a concern for school leaders; including struggles with access to digital devices, which some saw as more relevant than books. On Additional Assessment Components (AACs), school leaders referred to the rollout of CBAs as a similar model and overall were positive about the inclusion of AACs, noting that they would settle into school life over time. Leaders were of the view that as the number of AAC's increases clear indications on submission timelines and guidelines for the AAC's would be welcomed. Echoing the views expressed by teachers, school leaders have concerns on the physical space needed in classrooms for students and for the storage of their project and examination work.

School leaders were also concerned broadly on the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI), specifically on the equity of access to AI for all students across the school system. School leaders stated that clear guidelines are needed for both teachers and students in the use of AI in teaching, learning and assessment.

Section Summary

- School leaders, teachers and students all agreed that the creative elements of Art are central to this subject, allowing students choice after completing Junior Cycle. Students enjoy the practical work, creative freedom and problem-solving aspects of Art.
- All three groups of respondents commented on schools celebrating the subject with displays in the school and local art projects with the community.
- Project work can be extensive and some students find it a challenge to complete the project within the timeline. Teachers and students were of the view that there could be more time for the Practical Coursework.
- The terminology used in the Written Examination can be difficult for some students. Teachers and students agreed the written exam is important to test student knowledge and understanding through making and defending their opinions. One suggestion was that some of the marks could go towards a research project, possibly conducted in 5th year. Some remarked that more female artists be included in Visual Studies. Today's World is a popular option for both teachers and students.
- Photography should be recognised as an Art form in its own right and training to support it should be introduced.
- School leaders and teachers are concerned about the implications of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Equity of access for all students, and clear guidelines and training for

teachers and students are necessary. However, students were not as worried about AI and saw its effects as limited for their work in Art.

- Overall, the weighting of 70:30 for the practical and written examinations respectively is preferred by teachers and students.
- Teachers called for the new specification to instil a passion and develop a lifelong love of arts and culture and enjoyment in visiting galleries and museums in students. It should prepare them for the world of work, and develop their critical thinking, appreciation of art and enable them to be inquisitive about the world around them.

International trends in Art education

This section considers the art education landscape internationally and looks at the teaching and learning of Art as offered to students in the Netherlands, New South Wales, New Zealand, and Singapore. It briefly covers the place and purpose of the study of Art in the senior secondary phase and provides a short overview of curriculum content and of how the subject is assessed.

The Netherlands (VWO)

Students in senior secondary education in the Netherlands follow one of three pathways (from age 12+): four-year pre-vocational secondary education (VMBO); five-year general secondary education (HAVO) (which usually prepares students for higher professional education/applied courses); or six-year pre-university secondary education (VWO). Each pathway leads towards the respective VMBO, HAVO and VWO qualification.

This section focuses on the pre-university VWO pathway. The study of [Art and Culture \(CKV\)](#) is compulsory for students taking VWO and concludes with a school examination in the subject. The current [CKV examination programme](#) was introduced in the 2017-18 school year with the aim of enabling students to actively experience art, and was designed for 160 hours of class contact time.

Senior secondary students may also choose an arts subject as an optional exam subject for the VWO, e.g. [Art \(general\) VWO](#); [Music VWO](#); and [Drawing, Crafts, Textile Design VWO](#). The core objectives and examination programmes for all secondary subjects are currently being [updated](#). The draft core objectives for the art and culture learning area (available in Dutch only) were published in November 2024 and are being tested. The advisory report from the review included a concept subject structure for the arts subjects which formed the starting point for the update of the examination programmes.

Curriculum

The study of Art and Culture (CKV) for the VWO aims to enable students to actively experience art through artistic expression in real-life professional contexts. To enable students to actively experience art, the CKV programme aims to develop an open, creative and inquisitive attitude, alongside the required knowledge and skills. Art reception and reflection are an active, constructive and productive process: experiencing and contemplating art requires students' active involvement, commitment and ability to apply relevant knowledge and skills, and as a creative process, which requires an open and inquisitive attitude. CKV relates to art in the broad sense of the word – the art of today and the art of the past, present and future.

The CKV programme includes a range of art disciplines including visual arts and design, dance, drama, and music, and now also includes architecture, film, new media, theatre, and combinations of disciplines, and students are encouraged to experience this diversity both inside and outside school.

The Art and Culture (CKV) VWO examination programme consists of four domains:

- Domain A: Explore – students describe their own experience with art, their artistic interests, their knowledge of and views on art, and reflect on them and record the result in a documented manner.
- Domain B: Broaden – focuses on the way in which art is presented and experienced in our time and on art outside the 'comfort zone' of students, and offers VWO students the opportunity to consider the content, form and meaning of expression in at least four art disciplines. (Schools, teachers and students make their own choices from the disciplines.)
- Domain C: Deepen – students develop the knowledge and skills needed to be able to investigate artistic expressions in their own context. They make use of the art-theoretical and/or cultural-historical knowledge acquired under Domain B and critically analyse and contextualise this knowledge.
- Domain D: Connect – students make connections between the experiences and insights gained in domains A, B and C with regard to artistic processes and appreciate the significance of this for their own artistic and cultural development.

There is no fixed number of cultural activities in which students must participate to experience the four domains; this is a matter for individual schools. Collaboration with local cultural/heritage institutions and providers (galleries, museums, film houses etc.), with local artists, and with national providers such as national galleries and museums, is regarded as indispensable for the teaching and learning of CKV.

Assessment

Art and Culture in the VWO is assessed through a school examination which relates to Domains A-D of the examination programme and the domain attainment targets which are summarised here:

The school exam is summative and takes place mainly in the final year of the VWO. School examinations usually include two or more tests for each subject; these may be oral, practical or written. Individual schools determine the programme of assessment (PTA) for the school exam (based on guidelines/the examination programme from the SLO, the Netherlands institute for curriculum development). The PTA sets out, for example, the period of the school year in which the tests for the school exam will take place; the attainment targets from the examination programme to which the school exam relates; an overview of the subject matter on which the school exam may be based; the form of test and its duration; options for retaking the school exam; the number of tests to be included; and how marks will be calculated.

SLO guidance states that a good PTA contains a limited number of final (summative) school exam tests, and makes clear which attainment targets and subtasks from the examination programme are being tested. Schools are required to submit their school exam syllabus/PTA to the Inspectorate, and also to submit the results from the school exam. The CKV VWO course results in a grade that counts towards the combined mark for the VWO. This combined mark is determined by the headteacher for each individual student, and is the average of the marks a

student has achieved in the school exams and the national exams for the VWO . To obtain a leaving certificate, students must generally have achieved an average mark of 5.5 for all examination subjects. Marks are awarded on a scale ranging from 1 (very poor) to 10 (excellent).

New South Wales

Students in senior secondary education in New South Wales work towards the Higher School Certificate (HSC), usually over two years (Years 11 and 12). Students select courses for their HSC that align with their abilities, passions and future aspirations, and must have satisfactorily completed Years 9 and 10 of school prior to entry to the HSC. The HSC aims to provide a flexible structure within which students can prepare for further education and training, employment, and full and active participation as citizens. Successful completion of the HSC requires that students complete at least 12 units of Preliminary courses (usually in Year 11), and 10 units of HSC courses (usually in Year 12). Most HSC courses are worth 2 units, and each unit involves class time of approximately 2 hours per week (60 hours per year).

A range of creative arts [Board Developed Courses](#) (and Board Endorsed Courses/Content Endorsed Courses) are available for the HSC, including Ceramics (CEC); Creative Arts Life Skills; Dance; Dance Life Skills; Drama; Drama Life Skills; Music; Music Life Skills; Photography, Video and Digital Imaging (CEC); Textiles and Design; Textiles and Design Life Skills; Visual Arts; Visual Arts Life Skills; and Visual Design (CEC). This section focuses on the Visual Arts HSC Board Developed Course/Syllabus (Stage 6). Board Endorsed Courses/Content Endorsed Courses (CECs) count towards the HSC, but do not have a HSC exam and do not contribute towards the calculation of the [Australian Tertiary Admission Rank \(ATAR\)](#).

The [Visual Arts HSC Syllabus](#) completes the Kindergarten to Year 12 continuum of learning in the Visual Arts. The study of visual arts is mandatory during these earlier years and, in Years 7-10, in addition to the mandatory Visual Arts course, there is an elective course which provides further extension and depth of study in the visual arts. The knowledge, understanding, skills, and values developed in this elective course provide a sound foundation for students electing to study visual arts in Years 11-12.

The knowledge and skills developed in the course can also be applied across a range of career pathways, including arts and recreation services; education and training, and information media and telecommunications.

Curriculum

The Visual Arts HSC syllabus aims to enable students to gain increasing intellectual autonomy in their abilities to aesthetically and persuasively represent ideas in the visual arts; understand and value how visual arts is subject to different interpretations; and develop knowledge, skills and understanding of how they may represent their interpretations of the world in artmaking as an informed point of view. It provides students with the opportunity to develop their own artworks, culminating in a 'Body of Work' in the HSC course. Students engage in critical and historical study of the artworld investigating artists, artworks, worlds and audiences from a range of cultural, political, historical and social perspectives and use these to inform their own artmaking practices. HSC Visual Arts also develops students' critical skills – analysis, reflection, judgement and

appreciation of the visual arts and the world, which can be applied in a range of contexts. The knowledge, understanding, skills and values gained from the subject aim to enable them to develop conceptual and practical skills which can be applied in art, craft, design and related careers, and other real world contexts.

The course caters for students with a wide range of needs, abilities and interests, including those who have studied the elective course in Years 7-10, and others who have a more limited experience of the subject. It does this through learning opportunities based on a flexible content structure consisting of:

- practice – artmaking; art criticism and art history
- the conceptual framework – a model to be used by students to learn about artists, audiences, artworks and the world, and relationships between these
- frames – subjective, cultural, structural and postmodern – that provide different philosophical/theoretical and interpretive frameworks for understanding the layering of meaning, significance, value and belief in and about the visual arts. Students learn to adopt points of view through using the frames when approaching their own practice in artmaking, and art criticism and art history.

Course objectives are set out for artmaking, and art criticism and art history within the content structure outlined above.

Each year of the course – Year 11, Preliminary and Year 12 HSC – has an indicative study load of 120 hours. It is recommended that 40% of time is devoted to artmaking with consideration of the frames and conceptual framework; 40% is devoted to art criticism and art history with consideration of the frames and conceptual framework; and that the remaining 20% of time is allocated to any aspect of content depending on the interests of teachers and students.

In the Preliminary Course, Year 11, students focus on the key components and concepts that need to be known in the visual arts using the practice, conceptual framework, and frames content structure. They make artworks in at least 2 forms; use a process diary; and complete a broad investigation of ideas in art criticism and art history. In the HSC, Year 12 course, students focus on more interpretive investigations and relationships through the practice, conceptual framework, and frames content structure. They develop a body of work; use a process diary; and investigate content through at least 5 case studies in art criticism and art history. During the course, students develop skills in the use of both contemporary and traditional technology in the practice of artmaking, and in art criticism and art history. The range of technologies used may include film/video, computer hardware and software, printmaking equipment, and a variety of materials used in the expressive forms.

Assessment

Schools are required to develop an [assessment programme](#) for each Year 11 and Year 12 course. Assessment in Year 11 of the Visual Arts HSC is school-based – artmaking, and art criticism and art history. In Year 12, there is school-based assessment: development of a body of work (artmaking), and art criticism and art history; as well as an external examination: submission of a

body of work (artmaking) and written paper (art criticism and art history). For school-based assessment, teachers use professional, on-balance judgement to allocate grades based on the [Common Grade Scale for Preliminary courses](#).

The Year 12 written examination paper in art criticism and art history lasts 1 hour and 30 minutes (plus 5 minutes reading time) and includes 2 sections of equal value. Section 1 includes 3 short-answer questions. In section 2, students are required to answer 1 question selected from 6 extended response questions (2 questions on each of practice, the conceptual framework, and frames).

The student's body of work (artmaking) is developed during the HSC course and is intended to demonstrate their understanding of artmaking as a practice. It is externally examined and may be produced in one of 12 expressive forms: documented forms, collection of works, drawing, painting, photomedia, printmaking, textiles and fibre, graphic design, designed objects, sculpture, ceramics, time-based forms. For their body of work, students select one or more works at the conclusion of the course, which they submit as evidence of what they know and can do in the practice of artmaking.

Students use their process diary as they develop their body of work. It may include drawings, paintings, sketches, annotated diagrams, notes and ideas, critical comment and reflections, photographs and notes on copyright material they might have used, and can take the form of a sketchbook, folder, container for three-dimensional works, CD ROM, DVD, files on a memory stick or combination of these. The New South Wales Education Standards Authority (NESA) has developed a policy on the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in schools, which falls under the existing rules governing academic honesty and integrity and the use of external reference materials and sources in student work.

New Zealand

Students in New Zealand can study [Visual Arts](#) for the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA), the principal senior secondary qualification available. Other Arts subjects available include Music, Drama, and Dance which are closely interwoven with Visual Arts, each combining creativity, critical thinking, and the potential to inspire and provoke audiences. Other connected Arts subjects including Visual Arts are Design and Visual Communication, Maori Performing Arts, Media Studies, and Art History.

Subject choice for the NCEA which is achieved in the final three years of secondary education (Years 11-13, aged 15-18, and is available at Levels 1, 2 and 3) is generally a matter for individual students. Those choosing Visual Arts will have studied the Arts in earlier school years as one of [the eight learning areas of the New Zealand Curriculum](#). Credits in Visual Arts – specifically in the Practical Art areas of Design, Painting, Photography, Printmaking, and Sculpture contribute as an approved subject for the NCEA and for University Entrance (UE) in New Zealand as do credits from courses in Dance, Drama, Design and Visual Communication, History of Art, Media Studies, and Music Studies also contribute as approved subjects. Students must achieve 14 credits in the subject at Level 3 and 1 credit equates to about 10 hours of learning time (class time and independent study).

The study of Visual Arts at senior secondary level offers a stepping stone into arts education and provides a pathway to teaching art within secondary and tertiary learning environments as a career opportunity. The lifelong skillset developed (e.g. in communicating ideas and information clearly and effectively through a range of media) is also relevant for a wide range of tertiary courses and occupations, ranging from graphic design to production management, to digital content design, art conservation, and fashion and textiles.

Curriculum

In Visual Arts, senior secondary students explore, refine, and communicate their own artistic ideas by responding to how art expresses identity, culture, ethnicity, ideas, feelings, moods, beliefs, political viewpoints, and personal perspectives. The students learn how to discern, participate in, and celebrate their own and others' visual world, and develop visual arts literacy by creating and responding to works using curiosity, collaboration, courage, critical thinking, and creativity. They confidently use iterative and cyclical processes of practising, selecting, reflecting, editing, and refining to create a cohesive and fluent artistic expression or body of work and, by learning to identify visual arts conventions, students understand how these conventions communicate meanings through intention within established practice.

The Visual Arts curriculum is based on six 'Big Ideas' which, combined with 'Significant Learning', provide a [Learning Matrix](#) which can be used by teachers as a tool to construct learning programmes covering the not-to-be-missed learning in a subject. Significant learning is learning that is critical for students to know, understand and do in relation to a subject by the end of each curriculum level. Learning in Visual Arts also provides contexts for developing the Key Competencies of The New Zealand Curriculum (thinking; using language, symbols and text; relating to others; managing self; participating and contributing).

Assessment

Assessment for the NCEA is made up of internally and externally assessed standards, and assessment for externally assessed standards include exams, common assessment activities and submitted portfolios of work. For each of the Visual Arts areas Design, Painting, Photography, Printmaking, and Sculpture there are three levels of externally assessed achievement standards. Each area is worth 14 credits and there are also some internally assessed achievement standards for them, each worth 4 credits.

For the externally assessed achievement standards, students produce a portfolio of student-led evidence consisting of either a physical three-panel portfolio (folio board) or a digital moving image portfolio, representing the requirements of the standard. For sculpture, the evidence is digital only, consisting of either a still image digital portfolio or a moving image digital portfolio. This evidence is submitted to the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) for external moderation. Teachers must verify that the assessment submitted is the authentic work of the individual student.

Students are required to disclose the use of generative AI in the production of their portfolio. This requires a clear and detailed description of how AI has been integrated in the Visual Arts practice including the tools, the role (generating visual elements, assisting with composition, or enhancing

existing artwork), and specific tasks performed by the AI, and the extent to which AI has contributed to the final artwork.

Singapore

The [Singapore-Cambridge General Certificate of Education Advanced Level](#) (GCE A-Level) is a two-year senior secondary course, closely aligned to the Singapore school curriculum. The GCE A Level in Art is offered at H1, H2 and H3 levels. This section focuses on GCE A Level H2 Art. Notional learning hours for H2 Level qualifications are 360 hours (180 hours for H1 Level GCE A Levels).

Curriculum

The [GCE A Level Higher 2 \(H2\) Art syllabus](#) is designed to provide students with an in-depth study in the visual arts, and to cater for a wide range of interests and abilities. The emphasis is on art-making involving the use of a variety of media and technologies, and on the role of art in the development of critical thinking. In addition to practical experiences, students at this level also investigate artistic conventions and concepts through the 'Study of Visual Arts' component, and further develop their visual literacy skills, such as perceiving and responding to visual images, and analysis of visual information.

The syllabus aims to: cultivate deeper understanding and appreciation of visual arts within social and cultural contexts; encourage experimentation and innovation through exploration and creative use of materials and processes; increase proficiency in the use of art and design principles to communicate ideas and concepts; develop critical and analytical skills through research, exploration and creation of artworks; foster self-confidence and a sense of achievement through the practice of visual arts; and lay the foundation for lifelong interest in the visual arts.

The framework for the GCE A Level H2 Art syllabus is structured around three behavioural domains: Perceiving, Communicating and Appreciating, which take into consideration the cognitive, psychomotor and affective dimension. [Learning outcomes for the GCE A Level H2 Art syllabus](#) are also organised under these three behavioural domains. These are interconnected and operate dynamically:

- Perceiving: students respond to and interpret visual images and objects sensitively and informatively and learn to discriminate and make connections between different visual qualities and phenomena through observation and analysis.
- Communicating: students express their thoughts, experiences and feelings in visual, tactile, oral or literary forms, drawing on ideas, organising information, solving problems and expressing intent and purpose through research, exploration and the creation of artworks.
- Appreciating: students value the visual arts as a powerful means of expression; learn to evaluate and appreciate artworks made by themselves and other artists; and are able to see the connection of the visual arts to their lives and better appreciate its significance in the wider context of culture and society.

Syllabus content for GCE A Level H2 Art is organised under two components: Studio Practice and the Study of Visual Arts, which build on the competencies achieved at GCE O Level and are regarded as central to an holistic art education.

- Studio Practice: engages students in the creation of artworks and provides opportunities to acquire a working understanding of various art elements and principles through the use of a wide range of media, and experimentation with different techniques in studio practice. Students acquire skills such as research, experimentation and exploration, idea development, personal reflection and evaluation in the process of creating artworks.
- Study of Visual Arts: emphasises the development of critical thinking skills such as description, analysis, interpretation and evaluation. Content is organised along two broad themes:
 - Visual Arts and Representations provides a broad framework for the investigation of form and content and touches on ideas and concepts underpinning visual representation. It includes the topics Realistic Representations; Abstract Representations; and New Media Representations.
 - Visual Arts and Society draws on the diverse realms of human experience to examine art as a system for the communication of social values, beliefs and opinions. It includes the topics About People; About Society; and About Culture.

Assessment

Assessment for GCE A Level H2 Art includes an external examination, accounting for 40% of the overall mark, and coursework accounting for the remaining 60%.

The 3-hour examination (Paper 1) on the Study of Visual Arts includes:

- Section A: Two structured questions, each accompanied by a visual stimulus
- Section B: Two structured comparison questions, each accompanied by a pair of visual stimuli
- Section C: Two essay questions.

Students must answer one question in each section and the three assessment domains applied to the Study of Visual Arts paper are: Artistic Perception and Interpretation, Cultural and Aesthetic Appreciation, and Personal Response.

The coursework requirement is the production of a realised artwork, and the submission of not more than eight A2 sheets of preparatory studies as evidence of the working process. The coursework is internally assessed by schools and externally moderated by the examining authority. Coursework takes place under normal conditions of classroom study, and each submission must be accompanied by a statement from the subject tutor (endorsed by the principal of the school), testifying that it is the authentic work of the student. Students submit one piece of coursework and select from a range of types, e.g. Fine Art (2-D), Fine Art (3-D), Design (2-D), Design (3-D), Textiles/Fibre Art, and Digital/Lens-Based Media.

The five assessment domains (each accounts for 20% of the available marks) applied to the coursework paper are: Gathering and Investigation of Information; Exploration and Development of Ideas/Concepts; Aesthetic Qualities; Selection and Control of Materials and Technical Processes; Personal Response. The GCE A Level in Art (H2 level) is graded A-E where A is high, and successful completion of the A Level can lead to university admission.

Section summary

- **Time:**
Roughly around a similar amount of time is allocated to the subjects as is for Leaving Certificate Art: The Netherlands (160 hours); New South Wales (120 hours); New Zealand (140 hours); and Singapore (180 hours).
- **Subject Aims:**
In each jurisdiction, the different curriculum aims resonate in their use of language: enabling students to actively experience art and develop an open, creative, inquisitive attitude, alongside the required knowledge, skills and understanding (the Netherlands); students learn to represent ideas and value different interpretations (New South Wales); importance has been placed on exploring, refining, and communicating their own artistic ideas in responding to how art expresses identity and other perspectives (New Zealand); an emphasis is placed on art-making involving the use of a variety of media and technologies (Singapore).
- **Curriculum Structure and Approaches:**
The Netherlands places a focus on describing the student experience through the four identified domains of Explore, Broaden, Deepen and Connect. In New South Wales there is an emphasis on students developing a 'Body of Work' and engaging in a critical/historical study of artists and artworks. New Zealand's curriculum sees students developing visual arts literacy and their own practice and creating a cohesive and fluent artistic body of work. While in Singapore, students investigate artistic conventions and concepts through the 'Study of Visual Arts' component.
- **Approaches to Assessment:**
The Four Domains students learn through, in the Netherlands, are also the focus of their assessment, which involves following a centrally devised approach to school-based assessment for national purposes, although schools are free to choose the methods that best suit them. In their final year of school, in New South Wales, students undertake both a school-based assessment and an external examination involving the submission of work, produced in one of 12 expressive forms as well as a written paper. For Singapore, students are assessed through coursework, marked in school but moderated externally and through a written examination.

- **External collaboration:**
It is worth noting the Netherlands promotion and support of school engagement and collaboration with local cultural institutions.
- **Artificial Intelligence:**
In New South Wales and New Zealand policies on the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in schools have been developed, which require students to disclose their use of generative AI in their work.

Issues for Consideration

This section sets out a number of issues for consideration in the redevelopment of Art. These arise from the nature of the subject itself, in addition to drawing on themes emerging in the previous sections of this background paper.

The balance between skills and critical and creative thinking

As noted earlier, DEY inspection reports observe that instruction in developing technical skills in Art was good in schools. However, this needs to be coupled with students learning to develop their creative and critical thinking skills. It is important that students learn that creative and critical thinking skills affect their choices and decisions as they make marks, experiment with media and techniques, work through a project and develop or even re-develop both their ideas and work. The technical skills and the creative and critical thinking skills go hand in hand. Art is an intellectual pursuit as much as it is a physical and at times emotional one.

The SEC also reflect this in their Information Note (2024), observing that students' projects were richer when their work was developed in a personal, meaningful and significant way, which demonstrated their ability to visually communicate concepts and ideas. They observed that where students treated the two components as parts of a coherent whole project, based on the same theme in the issued brief, it led to better work. This is where students best combined their technical skills alongside their creative and critical thinking; they could view both pieces of their practical coursework and examination as no longer separate but part of a whole based on the one theme.

Digital Technology in Art and Artificial Intelligence

The use of digital technology in schools for Leaving Certificate Art is not widespread. It has been used to capture photographs on locations as an *aide mémoire* or to assist in deciding a layout for a realised painting. It has also been more extensively used in creating work such as video/film, which relies more on digital technology throughout the process. Students may be more familiar with the use of technology in everyday situations but still require the assistance of their Art teachers when it comes to using it for the purpose of creating artworks. Teachers and students alike expressed the wish for better access to digital technology for creating artworks. School leaders noted that there is now more of a call for digital devices than physical textbooks.

The use of AI in education more broadly in Ireland is commented on by the AI Advisory Council in their paper of February, 2025, [AI Advisory Council Advice Paper - February 2025 - AI and Education](#). In it they note the benefits and challenges of the use of AI across all sectors in education. As noted by the Minister, the Department of Education and Youth is establishing [guidelines for the primary and post-primary sectors](#). Oide Technology in Education also has a bank of resources to help schools with AI collated under their [AI in Schools Hub](#). As already stated above, New South Wales and New Zealand have developed policies on the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in schools.

Photography

Photography is already a recognised, stand-alone course in the jurisdictions of New South Wales and New Zealand. During school visits conducted in preparing this paper, both teachers and

students mentioned that they would like to make more use of photography for research and as created, realised artworks in their own right. Since the mid-19th century and its invention, photography has developed from a method to document the world and society around us to photojournalism; from the capturing of historical moments to the memorialisation of the mundane; from expressive use by artists to new ways to view the world and the human form; from being informative to being manipulated and creating misinformation. Photography has also developed from a very manual process to one that may be highly digital in nature and has become ubiquitous the world over through the use of mobile phones. However, access to cameras, digital software, etc. would need some resourcing.

The use of photography for and in Art by students may require some attention. As noted by the Inspectorate, there can be an over-reliance on photographs instead of primary source materials. Students would benefit more from meaningful engagement with physical, primary sources from the beginning of their studies.

Primary sources

As defined in the [Junior Cycle Visual Art curriculum specification](#), primary sources are sources, physical or conceptual, that are viewed in their original state and are not filtered through another person's interpretation of them. Students feedback indicates that it can be very onerous for them to have to bring in relatable, physical primary source objects and materials from which to work. Teachers have noted this difficulty but still impress on students that the reason is because their work will be richer for it. The Inspectorate made it a key recommendation of some of their subject inspection reports to improve the consistent use of primary sources, such as real-life objects and observational drawing, as a foundation for student work for this very same reason.

There is a need to help teachers and students in becoming more inventive around their view of how to use primary sources. When exploring and experimenting with media and techniques a primary source can become invaluable and offers up so many possibilities in real time for the student to explore. This is where the learning can truly take place and support their development as an artist in their own right.

Visual Studies

The section of the Visual Studies that was of most interest and enjoyment to the students was "Today's world", which deals with contemporary art and ideas. They commented that it allowed for more open discussion in the classroom than the other two sections of "Europe and the wider world" and "Ireland and its place in the wider world", which deal with more established, historical periods and works of art. However, the students did see the value in learning about these as part of their course. Teachers pointed out that learning the terminology used to discuss art could be difficult initially for students, but that Visual Studies helped them appreciate the subject through a different lens entirely. Both students and teachers suggested other ways of potentially restructuring Visual Studies. For example, students indicated that they would like to see Visual Studies more integrated with the hands on, practical side of their course as well.

It was also noted that a practical, specialised subject, such as Art should include other art-related activities, such as working with a local artist/art group, or a visit to a gallery or museum.

Section Summary

- A focus is needed where a balance between technical skills and critical and creative thinking skills is used to support student learning.
- Recognition of the need to support the use of digital technology in Art as part of the process and in creating a product will be important in a new specification.
- The use of Artificial Intelligence by teachers and students needs to consider ethical and legal issues and the effects it may have on student learning, creativity and thinking.
- Photography may be ubiquitous across society but can lack the application of creative and critical thinking skills in what is produced and can become merely a functional record of work for a student. It could be recognised as an art form in its own right.
- The issues around primary sources do need to be considered in a manner where the value in their use becomes clearer to students.

Brief for the review of Art

NCCA has established a development group to undertake the task of redeveloping a curriculum specification for Leaving Certificate Art. The work of the Development Group is, in general terms, agreed by the NCCA Board for Senior Cycle and by the Council in the form of the brief set out below.

This brief is designed to provide the basis for redeveloping Leaving Certificate Art. While the brief is derived from the key insights and issues for consideration identified in the previous sections of this paper, it is also guided by the parameters for the design of assessment arrangements in the development of specifications for all Tranche 4 subjects ([Appendix 1](#)).

The specification will be student-centred and outcomes-based and in general terms, the specification should be broadly aligned with levels 4 and 5 of the National Framework of Qualifications. It will be available at both Higher and Ordinary level, and it will be designed to be taught and assessed in a minimum of 180 hours.

The specification will align to the template, agreed by Council, for curriculum specifications as set out in the [Technical form of curriculum specifications for subjects and modules in a redeveloped senior cycle](#) (NCCA, 2023). The Senior Cycle Key Competencies will be embedded in the learning outcomes.

The specification will be completed for Q2, 2027.

More specifically, the development of the new specification for Art will address:

- making the rationale in the specification for studying Senior Cycle Art transparent and evident to students, teachers and parents while aligning it with the guiding principles and vision for senior cycle education
- the development of technical skills and critical thinking skills together to support students creativity, innovation, knowledge creation
- instilling a passion for Art, including the development of a lifelong enjoyment, interest and love of culture, cultural institutions, art and art-making
- the inclusion of inquiry-based, design-thinking and problem-solving skills to better support student resilience and their approaches to their work
- how students can best develop their work and learning in as personal, meaningful and significant a way as possible
- students learning and understanding of responsible and sustainable practices as they research and create their own artworks
- the further integration of Visual Studies into students' experiences of practical work, encouraging connections be made with inspiring artists or artists whose work/ideas are closely aligned with that of the student

- the provision of multiple, diverse and appropriate opportunities of assessment available to students to achieve
- continuity with the learning from Junior Cycle and progression towards future learning in study and work
- being student-centred in its use and register of language, with a clear focus on what students can learn to develop and demonstrate their knowledge, skills, values and dispositions.

The work of the Development Group will be based, in the first instance, on this brief. In the course of the work and deliberations of the Development Group, elaborations of some of these points and additional points may be added to the brief.

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Appendix 1: Overarching parameters for the design of assessment arrangements in the development of specifications for all Tranche 4 subjects

1. Background

- The Minister for Education announced an update on September 20, 2023, on the approach to be taken to the introduction of new and revised subject specifications including how assessment would be addressed in those specifications. Specifically, the announcement indicated that:
 - Each subject shall have an assessment component in addition to the final written examination.
 - This assessment component (an AAC) will be worth at least 40% of the total available marks.
 - Each subject is to have one written examination; typically marks for the written examination will be 60%.
 - Typically, there should be two assessment components: One written examination and one other assessment component (an AAC).
- More than one AAC or written examination may be justified in exceptional circumstances and after extensive consideration of the overall assessment load on students. Such exception, however, would be based on strong, clear evidence that a second AAC or a second written paper in the final examination is essential to assess student learning which cannot be achieved through a single AAC and a single written examination paper.

2. Introduction

This document outlines the overarching assessment arrangements and parameters to guide the design of specifications for all Tranche 4 subjects which include:

- Art
- Economics
- French
- Gaeilge
- German
- Italian
- Politics and Society
- Spanish
- Technology.

This advice is informed by ongoing work with Tranche 2 and 3 subjects and will be amended, as appropriate, for future tranches which may take account of their subject areas and existing assessment arrangements.

The arrangements as detailed here reflect the policy direction issued by the Minister of Education that all subjects will have an assessment component, to be in a form that is not a traditional written examination, for those components to be set and assessed by the SEC and thereby lead to a reduced emphasis on final examinations in June of 6th year.

Specifically, the arrangements for all assessment components as outlined in this document are framed by the Minister's announcement(s) on March 29, 2022, and subsequently on September 20 2023. Underpinned by the following understandings, the assessment components:

- will not take the form of traditional written examinations
- will be set and marked by the SEC

- will be subject to SEC arrangements for their completion, authentication, and submission.

In developing the arrangements outlined below, the following rationale for moving towards all subjects having another assessment component beyond written examinations is central. This rationale is informed by deliberations on research commissioned by the NCCA and the SEC, and on the assessment literature more generally. From this work, it is evident that these components have the potential to:

- **Reduce dependence** on written summative examinations and therefore provide for a **broader assessment system**; written examinations have an important role but can be seen as a 'snapshot' of learning and can lead to teaching and learning having an excessive focus on examination preparation; other forms of assessment can mitigate the potential for this narrowing of learning by assessing aspects of student learning better and/or more comprehensively than written examinations alone can do; or assess learning that is not readily assessable through written examinations.
- Support and enhance teachers' understanding and assessment of **key competencies** by contributing to a greater understanding of how students' knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions are assessed.
- Provide opportunities for students and teachers to **reflect on student learning**, boost students' motivation to learn and enhance opportunities for formative feedback practices.
- Extend the range and diversity of assessment opportunities; including **spreading the assessment load** over the course of the last two years of senior cycle and thus contribute to a reduction in or spreading of pressure on students.
- Build and develop **teachers' assessment skills and assessment literacy** as teachers support students in working through the assessment activities as detailed within assessment briefs or guidelines.
- Generate student assessment data which can help reduce the vulnerability of the system to future unprecedented or unexpected system shocks such as COVID.
- Allow for assessment opportunities that are more **authentic** than a system relying on terminal written examinations solely.

It is also important to note that a review of the assessment literature more generally also indicates that when introducing other assessment components, it is necessary to consider how to mitigate risks, for example, of:

- over-assessment of students
- over-rehearsal of assessments
- the assessments becoming overly structured, compartmentalised, repetitive, and routine.

As is already the case where other forms of assessment apply, the new assessment arrangements will be guided by the overarching principles of equity, fairness, and integrity.

In addition, at a programme wide level (i.e. taking account of all subjects and modules implemented across schools), it is necessary to have regard to the overall assessment load on students primarily as well as on schools more generally. Whilst it can be expected that SDGs might focus on the approach to assessment in their own subject initially, they are encouraged to be mindful of the overall assessment load across all subjects and modules. Such programme level considerations will also include the methods of assessment being undertaken. As stated above more than one AAC or written examination may be justified in exceptional circumstances and the following section outlines the process for such cases.

3. Process

This section sets out the process through which a variation to the parameters defined in this document will be considered and decided upon; for example, an additional AAC or a second final written examination.

1. Following extensive discussion by the SDG and after exploration of a range of options for a single suitable AAC/single written examination for the subject, the NCCA Executive generates a written note setting out the strong, clear case being made by the Development Group.
2. The written case is agreed and signed off by the Subject Development Group.
3. The written case is discussed with the Board for Senior Cycle.
4. The written case is discussed with the Council. On foot of this discussion, the Council decides whether or not to send the case forward to the Department.
 - a) Having considered the importance of managing and spreading the assessment load for students, if the Council decides that the case isn't sufficiently strong to merit consideration by the Department, the Council requests the Development Group to work on the basis of the previously set-out parameters in this document applicable to the subject concerned.

OR

- b) Having considered the importance of managing and spreading the assessment load for students, if the Council decides that the case is sufficiently strong to merit consideration by the Department, the Council agrees to send the case forward to the Department of Education.
5. In the case of 4b, the written case is sent to the Senior Cycle Redevelopment Programme Management Office (SCRPMO) in the Department of Education for consideration and response.
6. The Department may convene the Senior Cycle Redevelopment Implementation Group (SCRIG) to support its consideration of the request for a variation. The SCRIG is a Department-led structure established to provide oversight and support the co-ordination of work across the key agencies/organisations contributing to the redevelopment of senior cycle. Its members include senior officials from the Department (Curriculum and Assessment Policy Unit, Inspectorate, Teacher Professional Learning [TPL]), NCCA, SEC and Oide.
7. The Department decides to support or decline the request for the variation sought and communicates its decision in writing to the NCCA in a timely manner.
8. The Subject Development Group progresses its work in line with the Council's response (arising from 4a) or the Department's response (arising from 4b and 7).

4. Timelines

The process outlined above will require time. Such time, if involving a number of weeks, could have significant implications for the timeline for specific stages of work on the subject specification and/or the overall completion of the specification ahead of sending it to the Department for consideration. This time factor may necessitate NCCA organising additional online meetings of the Subject Development Group, the Board for Senior Cycle and the Council in order to ensure the development work remains within the overall timelines.

Table 1 below sets out the general parameters and processes to guide the work of the subject development groups (SDG) as they consider the most appropriate assessment for each subject. The specific parameters for each of the Tranche 4 subjects are set out in Table 2.

Table 1: Assessment parameters and processes – general application to tranche 4 subjects

Considerations	Parameters to guide the work of the development group.
Nature	<p>The purpose and nature of the assessment component will be clearly outlined in the subject specification and accompanying guidelines to support the completion of the assessment. Details will be provided on the nature of the component. Existing examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • research project/extended essay • oral assessment • performance assessment • portfolio assessment • creation of an artefact • field study • experiment/ proof of concept/ practical investigation. <p>The subject specification and the accompanying guidelines will articulate clearly what the students are required to do, the form(s) in which it can be carried out and submitted, and the workload expectations associated with the assessment. The alignment of the assessment component to a particular set of learning outcomes from the subject specification will be provided, as well as details on which key competencies and associated learning outcomes will be assessed. This does not preclude the same LOs from being assessed in the final examination.</p>
Weighting	The assessment component in each subject will be worth at least 40% of the total available marks.
Timing	The SDG will advise on the time required for the carrying out of the assessment component across the course of study.
Completion and Submission	<p>While the SDG may suggest when this may occur (as referenced above having regard to the assessment load on students in particular), a final decision will be made by the SEC following consideration of the overall schedule of completion dates for all assessments across all subjects. This will be finalised by the SEC following engagement with the NCCA and DE.</p> <p>The dates for final completion and/or submission of the assessment component by the student will be published by the SEC and this detail will not be included in the subject specification.</p>
Design	<p>The majority of assessment components will result in a completed item that is materially different to a traditional written examination and which tests different competencies being transmitted to the SEC and assessed by the SEC.</p> <p>In some instances, the design of the assessment may require examiners to visit schools to conduct the assessment but manageability at school and system level will need to be considered.</p>
Guidance	Guidelines to support the assessment components will be specific to each subject. These guidelines will be developed collaboratively by the NCCA

	<p>and SEC. They will be informed by the deliberations of the SDG during the development of the specification and will detail:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the purpose of the component concerned i.e., what it is intended to assess. • the nature of the assessment component/activity. • descriptors of quality in the form of a graduated rubric and details on assessment standards at higher and ordinary levels if deemed necessary by the assessment method. • details on the timing of the assessment (its duration and when it could happen). • guidance on the processes that may be used for the administration of the assessment.
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Table 2: Parameters for assessment arrangements for each Tranche 4 subject

Subject	Current arrangements	Parameters for new assessment arrangements
Art	<p><i>Practical coursework:</i> 50% (completed over 12 weeks); In December Year 6 SEC issue a sketchbook and brief with 3 themes and students choose 1. They must create 2 artefacts in 2 distinct areas of practice. 1 artefact is completed in this period and they must engage in planning for the second artefact to be produced in the practical exam.</p> <p><i>Practical Examination:</i> 20% (5 hours); invigilated exam. Takes place 10 days after completion of practical coursework (above). The focus is the completion of the second artefact. Planning for this assessment is included in the sketchbook.</p> <p>SEC visit the school to assess both artefacts and the sketchbook.</p> <p><i>Written examination:</i> 30% (2.5 hours)</p>	<p>Written examination: minimum of 30% weighting.</p> <p>Assessment component: minimum of 60% weighting in response to a brief issued by the SEC.</p> <p>Written examination will be set at higher and ordinary levels.</p>
Economics	<p>Written examination is 2.5 hours duration for higher level and ordinary level students and is awarded 400 of the 500 marks available (80%).</p> <p>Coursework is an individual student research project which is done in response to a common brief from SEC and is worth 100 marks (20%). It is based on the learning outcomes from the specification. The common brief is graded in line with the</p>	<p>Written examination: 60% weighting.</p> <p>Assessment component: 40% weighting.</p> <p>Written examination will be set at higher and ordinary levels.</p> <p>Assessment component would be based on one submission to SEC in response to a brief.</p>

	standards that apply to the level at which the candidate sits the written examination.	
French	<p>Oral examination: HL: 25% OL: 20% Listening Comprehension: HL: 20% OL: 25% Reading Comprehension: HL: 30% OL: 40% Written Expression: HL: 25% OL: 15%</p> <p>Oral examination is approx. a 15-minute conversation conducted over the Easter period Reading and Writing assessment completed during a 2.5-hour exam in June Listening Skills assessment during a 40-minute examination following the reading and writing assessment.</p> <p>No prescribed text.</p> <p>Focus of oral assessment is a general conversation based on the syllabus content and may include a literary work or a project the student has worked on.</p>	<p>Written examination: min 45% weighting.</p> <p>Assessment components:</p> <p>Oral assessment: minimum 20% weighting Aural assessment: minimum 20% weighting</p> <p>Written examination will be set at higher and ordinary levels.</p>
Gaeilge	<p>Higher and Ordinary Levels</p> <p>Written examination with 2 papers:</p> <p>Paper 1: HL 2 hr 20; OL 1 hr 50 (160 marks) Aural (60 marks) Composition (100 marks)</p> <p>Paper 2: HL 3 hr 5; OL 2 hr 20 (200 marks) Reading comprehension (HL and OL: 100m) Prose (HL 30m; OL 50m) Poetry (HL 30m; OL 50m) Additional Literature (HL 40m)</p> <p>Oral Examination: 240 marks</p> <p>For HL and OL:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Introduction: 5m ▪ Poetry reading: 35m ▪ Conversation: 120m ▪ Picture sequence: 80m 	<p>Written examination (inclusive of aural, composition and comprehension): minimum 50% weighting</p> <p>Oral assessment: minimum 40% weighting</p>

	<p>Foundation Level</p> <p>One written paper: 2 hr 20 (360 marks)</p> <p>Aural (120m) Reading Comprehension (150m) Writing (90m)</p> <p>Oral examination: (240 marks)</p> <p>This is divided into 4 blocks as follows:</p> <p>Block 1: Family and Home Block 2: School Matters Block 3: Pastimes Block 4: Holidays, time, weather and work.</p>	
German	<p>Oral examination: HL: 25% OL: 20% Listening Comprehension: HL: 20% OL: 25% Reading Comprehension: HL: 30% OL: 40% Written Expression: HL: 25% OL: 15%</p> <p>Oral examination is approx. a 15-minute conversation conducted over the Easter period Reading and Writing assessment completed during a 2.5-hour exam in June Listening Skills assessment during a 40-minute examination following the reading and writing assessment.</p> <p>No prescribed text.</p> <p>Oral has 3 parts: A: General conversation based on the syllabus content B: Discussion of project or picture sequence C: Role play situation</p>	<p>Written examination: min 45% weighting.</p> <p>Assessment components:</p> <p>Oral assessment: minimum 20% weighting Aural assessment: minimum 20% weighting</p> <p>Written examination will be set at higher and ordinary levels.</p>
Italian	<p>Oral examination: HL: 25% OL: 20% Listening Comprehension: HL: 20% OL: 25% Reading Comprehension: HL: 30% OL: 40% Written Expression: HL: 25% OL: 15%</p>	<p>Written examination: min 45% weighting.</p> <p>Assessment components:</p>

	<p>Oral examination is approx. a 15-minute conversation conducted over the Easter period</p> <p>Reading and Writing assessment completed during a 2.5-hour exam in June</p> <p>Listening Skills assessment during a 40-minute examination following the reading and writing assessment.</p> <p>Option of studying a prescribed text.</p> <p>Oral has 3 parts: A: General conversation based on the syllabus content B: Role play situation C: Picture sequence</p>	<p>Oral assessment: minimum 20% weighting</p> <p>Aural assessment: minimum 20% weighting</p> <p>Written examination will be set at higher and ordinary levels.</p>
Politics and Society	<p>Written examination is worth 80% of the total marks available, and the exam is 2 hour 30 minutes in duration.</p> <p>Coursework is a report on a Citizenship project and is allocated the remaining 20%.</p>	<p>Written examination: typically, 60% weighting.</p> <p>Assessment component: minimum 40% weighting.</p> <p>Written examination will be set at higher and ordinary levels.</p> <p>Assessment component would be based on one submission to SEC in response to a brief.</p>
Spanish	<p>Oral examination: HL: 25% OL: 20%</p> <p>Listening Comprehension: HL: 20% OL: 25%</p> <p>Reading Comprehension: HL: 30% OL: 40%</p> <p>Written Expression: HL: 25% OL: 15%</p> <p>Oral examination is approx. a 15-minute conversation conducted over the Easter period</p> <p>Reading and Writing assessment completed during a 2.5-hour exam in June</p> <p>Listening Skills assessment during a 40-minute examination following the reading and writing assessment.</p> <p>Option of studying a prescribed text.</p> <p>Oral has 2 parts: A: General conversation based on the syllabus content with the option of discussing a literary work B: Role play situation</p>	<p>Written examination: min 45% weighting.</p> <p>Assessment components:</p> <p>Oral assessment: minimum 20% weighting</p> <p>Aural assessment: minimum 20% weighting</p> <p>Written examination will be set at higher and ordinary levels.</p>

Technology	<p>Written examination at both higher and ordinary levels is worth 200 marks (50%). The higher-level written examination is 2.5 hours in duration and the ordinary level written examination is 2 hours in duration.</p> <p>Coursework at both higher and ordinary levels is worth 200 marks (50%). The coursework differs with separate briefs set for higher level and ordinary level. Briefs are issued around 1st October (Year 6) with a completion date of 30th March approx.</p>	<p>Written examination: 50% weighting. Assessment component: 50% weighting.</p> <p>Written examination will be set at higher and ordinary levels.</p> <p>Assessment component would be based on one submission to SEC in response to a brief.</p>
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