

Feedback for the QAA SBS Advisory Group for Art and Design

Overview

Students Organising for Sustainability ([SOS-UK](#)) has been working with the Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges ([EAUC](#)) to support QAA Subject Benchmark Statement (SBS) advisory groups with increasing student voice in their process and integrating sustainability and climate justice into their subject. This is critical and necessary work that will help ensure SBSs are representative and inclusive, whilst providing students with the necessary skills and knowledge to go into green careers and support our collective sustainable future. On 28th November 2024, SOS-UK held an online student consultation to gather views relating to the Subject Benchmark Statement for Art and Design. Current students and recent undergraduates from a diverse variety of UK universities reviewed the current SBS through a sustainability and climate justice lens, finding positive examples and developing suggestions for how the SBS can become more accessible, inclusive, sustainable and forward-facing.

Positive elements of the existing document

- Students noticed that the document is necessarily vague and ‘broad-brush’ but stated that it does a good job of covering the nature and extent of Art and Design within its multidisciplinary context.
- Students were interested in the skills and employability sections, and stated that the document had broadened their horizons regarding the direction that they could travel after graduation.

Suggestions for improvements or amendments

- Students referenced the significant current lack of content relating to sustainability and urged the group to use a forward-looking approach, that safeguards the future of this subject and of our planet. The group discussed the intersectionality of sustainability, and urged the group to also deeply consider justice issues, such as underrepresentation of the global south within the study of Art and Design, and how this can be interwoven into every section of the document.
- Students referenced that Art and Design is a ‘wasteful’ subject, and urged the new version of the document to better address this as an ecological, social and economic issue, and encourage responsible production and consumption during creative processes.
- The group wished that this document better encouraged students to see themselves as global citizens within a global artistic community, and to interrogate their role within this canon.
- Students highlighted that the current document uses complex academic language and is not accessible for those with dyslexia, or younger students considering the subject for study at higher education. They suggested that an executive summary or shorter, bullet-point style document is produced that is aimed towards students in further or secondary education.
- Students stated that the new iteration of this document must address the issue of emerging technologies, especially AI, although there was differing opinion within the group over the role that it should play. Some students particularly reflected on the environmental impact of AI data centres, and the potential negative impact on student knowledge and skills, and others were excited about the possibilities that AI may open up for artists and designers.

The future of Art and Design

- Students were highly positive in regards to the future of Art and Design. They were excited about increasing meaningful representation of student voices within the QAA advisory groups and review process, and wished the panel to know that they were eager for the new Subject Benchmark Statement to be widely circulated to students following publication in 2026.
- Students praised some particular institutions and courses that ‘do sustainability well’, particularly ‘innovation’ courses, and encouraged the panel to carefully consider this pathfinder work.

For more information about this student consultation, including more detailed feedback, please contact Hannah Fitzpatrick, Senior Project Manager for Education at SOS-UK: hannah.fitzpatrick@sos-uk.org.