

Learning & Teaching Strategy 2015-2020

1 Introduction

This is the Art School's first formal strategy document to be focused on Learning and Teaching and is informed by the development process for 'Planning Ahead', the Art School's medium term strategy. This document specifically relates to the development of Learning and Teaching over the next five years, articulating our academic and pedagogic principles and ensuring they continue to be embedded in the future development of our provision.

2 Background

- 2.1 The Art School is a small, not-for-profit, specialist institution, which offers students generous provision both in terms of contact hours and working space.
- 2.2 We recognise that all staff and students are crucial members of a vibrant and studious creative community. Students are able to access their tutors and Art School technicians on a regular basis, and one-to-one teaching is a prominent feature of the pedagogy, supported by seminars, lectures, and skills-based workshops. With an academic portfolio developed over many years, course teams have tailored their approaches to teaching in response to developments in their respective subjects, technologies, and cultural sectors – as well as the learning styles of individual students.
- 2.3 We know that the best possible learning experience for our students comprises a combination of formal, timetabled teaching delivered alongside more informal opportunities for discussion. This has led to the development of some new initiatives in addition to some refinement of previous practice, as well as a re-affirmation of our on-going commitment to provide high levels of contact time with our students in order to provide the intensive, specialist skills-based education, which is our primary aim.

3 **The Art School's philosophy of Learning & Teaching**

3.1 ***A distinctive centre of excellence***

3.1.1 At the Art School we have a clear philosophy of Learning and Teaching, which is founded on our mission to be a distinctive centre of excellence in our specialist subjects, where students from all backgrounds are supported and challenged to exceed their own expectations. We do this by:

- Defining from the outset the particular skills that our students require when completing their course, so that they can go on to excel as important practitioners in their chosen field;
- Devising programmes, projects and modules which best support individual students to develop all of these skills to the highest level;
- Employing active and significant practitioners as tutors;
- Distinguishing ourselves from other providers by championing small group and one-to-one teaching;
- Nurturing a creative and effective learning community, where all individuals and their roles are valued.

3.1.2 We also value greatly the range of highly successful professional partnerships which we have nurtured and developed over some years, which have had a profound and beneficial impact on students' learning, and which enable us to deliver validated and approved programmes of study at postgraduate, undergraduate, and foundation levels which are compliant with the Quality Code for Higher Education.

3.2 ***Specialist and experiential learning***

3.2.1 We foster specialist and experiential learning through practice, to ensure that students have a well-rounded, practical grounding and understanding on which to base their creative and professional decisions.

3.2.2 We champion craft skills, the dialogue between the hand, eye, imagination and subject knowledge. Our learning and teaching practices weave together:

- learning through making;
- art history and the history of ideas;
- professional knowledge;
- aesthetic judgement;
- collaborative skills;
- technical expertise;
- the role of imagination;
- critical skills;
- connoisseurship;
- embodied knowledge; and
- materials knowledge.

3.3 ***Employability and preparation for life after graduation***

3.3.1 We believe in the importance of preparing our students thoroughly both for professional practice or further study in their chosen field.

3.3.2 The subjects that we specialise in lead to a wide range of employment opportunities and take many different forms, including freelance practitioners (which may involve working within a team), working to commission, and/or working across a range of different contexts. Art School graduates therefore need to be prepared for an unpredictable and complicated work-life which may entail a mixture of freelance and part-time employment. Our aim is to provide our students with the resilience, flexibility and confidence they will need in order to tackle the challenges of a portfolio career in the arts both now and in the future. We set out, therefore, to equip our students with the important lifelong learning skills that will enable them to continue to develop as practitioners and professionals for the rest of their careers.

3.3.3 Students studying our subjects need to develop intellectual and research skills and substantial knowledge in their chosen subject, with the specialist practical skills that we champion. Alongside this subject-specific focus, students also need to develop important generic skills such as numeracy, literacy, professional practice skills of presentation and networking, communication and documentation, among others. This is a complicated mix of interrelated skills which we believe need to be embedded in the curriculum at all stages to be meaningful and for the courses to have integrity and coherence.

3.3.4 Our intention is to equip students to meet the current and future challenges of employment, self-employment and continuous professional and academic development in the context of uncertainty and change. We do this by:

- Ensuring that professional practice and development are embedded in all Art School programmes of study and modules;
- Providing vocational skills-based training, supported by generic and subject specific professional practice skills.

4 **Strategic and systematic enhancements, 2015-2020**

4.1 Whilst we are confident and clear about our pedagogic mission and principles, we recognise that in order to expand our provision and maintain our position as one of the foremost alternative providers of Art and Craft education in the UK, we need to build up our own organisational and regulatory infrastructure so that we are less

dependent on those of our partners, and improve our physical estate so that we can better support our students' learning and provide equal access to all aspects of the education we provide. In building a new, home-grown framework for our academic endeavours we must ensure that we continue to nurture and promote our values and our ethos, making full use of the communal and collegiate spirit which pervades our activities and is one of the major advantages of being a small-scale, specialist institution.

4.2 Over the next five years, we aim to cement and build on our distinctiveness by systematically enhancing the learning and teaching environment under the following headings, which are each discussed in more detail in the following sections:

- Staff
- Continuous reflection
- Equal access to education
- Assessment and feedback
- Environment and facilities, including Technology Enhanced Learning
- Provision and dissemination of information, policies and guidelines

5 **Strategic Aims**

5.1 **Staff**

5.1.1 *Strategic aim 1: We will enhance our commitment to support staff excellence*

We support staff through a range of approaches, including individual appraisal; staff development support, training and mentoring; lunchtime meetings to share good practice; staff fora; sharing monitoring reports. We are also mindful of the need to support academic staff to work flexibly to enable them to continue to excel in their careers as professional practitioners.

5.1.2 *Action points*

We will improve this support during 2015-2020 by:

- Embedding peer observation as a tool to share good practice both within and across subject areas;
- Through the 'Planning Ahead' development process, developing cross Art School initiatives and events which will engage staff research interests and enhance the curricula, such as pan Art School symposia;
- Providing clear guidance for staff on all aspects of learning and teaching policy, by means of a comprehensive suite of guidelines which capture the good practice which has been built up over time, within a policy framework which is compliant with the Quality Code for Higher Education.

5.2 **Continuous reflection**

5.2.1 *Strategic aim 2: We will engage our students and staff in a reflective and critical approach to our teaching practices and the learning environment through regular dialogue*

We are committed to scrutinising our processes and the effectiveness of our approaches through regular review and reporting, involving input from students and staff. Examples of this include:

- Course level student fora;
- Termly student representatives' forum;
- Sessional tutors' termly lunchtime meetings with the Senior Management Team;
- Course level tutors' meetings;
- Student representatives' engagement in Boards of Studies;
- Online student and staff surveys.

5.2.2 *Action points*

We will increase the effectiveness of our reflective practices during 2015-2020 by:

- Embedding student representation at all levels of decision-making, including the design of the curriculum; and
- Better and more systematic evaluation and use of the information gleaned from student feedback, annual programme reviews, and other data sources such as admission, retention and examination performance statistics to improve the quality and effectiveness of our learning and teaching.

5.3 **Equal access to education**

5.3.1 *Strategic aim 3: We will uphold and enhance equality of access and learning for students of all backgrounds*

Ensuring that we provide an equal opportunity for all students to perform to the best of their abilities is of paramount importance to us. We set out to support students from all backgrounds and are ambitious for all our students. To this end, the Art School has:

- Raised significant funds for bursaries and scholarships;
- Developed a student hardship fund;
- Begun improvements to improve access to our site;
- Established policies and training to support students with hidden disabilities;
- Embedded sessions explaining our teaching methodologies into the induction of new students involving the whole staff team, so that students know how to apply for and access support; and

- Improved its process for identifying as early as possible students with any learning issues to ensure that support is in place and that plans for any necessary adjustments are made in good time.

5.3.2 We are aware that socio-economic factors combined with a general shortage of public funding support will continue to make it difficult for many students and their families to sustain a financial commitment, often over several years, to take full advantage of the specialist education we provide. In addition, the Equality Act 2010 obliges us to re-think our approach not only to our physical infrastructure and facilities, but also to our methods of programme design, delivery and assessment, to ensure that we comply with requirements to make 'reasonable adjustments in all these areas where necessary.

5.3.3 *Action points*

During 2015-2020 therefore, we will

- Agree and implement a policy for Inclusive Learning which builds upon the support already provided and encompasses all types of disability and disadvantage which may impact upon students' opportunities to succeed; and
- Increase our efforts to raise funds to ensure that we can help wherever possible, students in need of financial support in order to maximise their potential for success in the specialist fields that we offer.

5.4 **Assessment & feedback**

5.4.1 *Strategic aim 4: We will embed a comprehensive system of assessment and feedback into the learning and teaching experience throughout all programmes of study*

Assessment and feedback continues to be an area of concern within the Higher Education sector. At the Art School we believe that formative assessment with feedback which fuels improvement should be a continuous process and dialogue throughout a student's programme of study. Summative assessment and its feedback should enable students to analyse their own progress and be reflective about their achievements. We encourage students to engage fully with the assessment process by designing assessment tasks which involve:

- Active participation in assessment through verbal presentations and exhibitions of work produced; through this students are encouraged to pose their own questions about their field of practice; and
- Live projects and presentations to external professionals, which challenge and inspire students to contextualise their work in the wider frame of national and international debates in the field

5.4.2 *Action points*

We will enhance this provision during 2015-2020 by:

- Approving and implementing an Assessment and Feedback policy which reaffirms and builds upon our philosophies of assessment and feedback, and which will provide the framework for future development of the curricula of our programmes of study;
- Providing a suite of comprehensive information and guidance relating to assessment and feedback processes and requirements for both students and staff, which is accessible in a range of formats and media including the VLE and web site; and
- Embedding review of assessment and feedback within annual course review processes.

5.5 ***Environment and facilities, including Technology Enhanced Learning***

5.5.1 *Strategic aim 5: We will continue to develop our estate and facilities to support excellence and reflect the professional working environment*

The Art School has a rolling programme of development and enhancement to support learning, embracing both old and new technologies. Facilities are designed with students' needs as our chief consideration. Our studio spaces are generous while our technical facilities support the small scale of the Art School and our specialist activities. We have chosen to give prominence to specialist facilities for 'hand skills', working with traditional processes such as stone and wood carving, intaglio printmaking, gilding, bronze casting and drawing. More generic resources, such as IT facilities, that the majority of students have access to, are also available.

5.5.2 In 2014/5 we have invested in the VLE platform 'Moodle', with the intention of using this to enhance the student learning experience by providing teaching materials and a wealth of course information in an easily accessible format.

5.5.3 *Actions points*

We will enhance our estate and facilities during 2015-2020 by:

- Continuing to raise money for investment in our physical estate and implementing successive phases of our Development Plan;
- Investing in the development of Moodle as both a pedagogic tool and as a repository of up-to-date information, and in modernising the Art School's web presence generally; and
- Embedding the use of Moodle throughout the Art School's programmes of study, promoting and encouraging its use

within the Art School's community, and providing guidance and training in its use.

5.6 ***Future-proofing the Art School's academic and pedagogic vision***

5.6.1 *Strategic aim 6: We will develop guidelines and policies, which clearly articulate our approaches to learning, teaching and assessment, incorporating the excellent practice which already exists at the Art School*

The Art School currently relies on the policies and regulations of its validating/approving partners, to provide the framework of its academic-related activities. For areas which do not come under the jurisdiction of our partner institutions, staff have been working with a range of local policies (both explicit and implicit), and have evolved some very good practice. Local policy and practice now need to be shaped into a body of local regulations, policies and guidelines, which articulate in a consistent format our approaches to learning, teaching and assessment and which are easily accessible to students and staff by a variety of media. Undertaking this project will not only enable the Art School to ensure its own compliance with the Quality Code for Higher Education, but will also enable us to ensure that our philosophy of learning and teaching is embedded in everything we do, so that it will easily be transferable into any future expansion of our provision.

5.6.2 *Action points*

During 2015-2020 we will future-proof our academic and pedagogic vision by:

- Developing and implementing as soon as possible a suite of clear policy and guidance documents which are agreed via the Art School's governance system after appropriate consultation;
- Ensuring that all our information is easily accessible to students and staff by developing, enhancing, and promoting the use of Moodle;
- Providing training/briefings to staff and students to enable them to understand and implement each policy effectively;
- Creating an internal communication strategy to ensure the dissemination of policy is consistent and effective; and
- Ensuring that this Learning and Teaching Strategy is accessible to, and understood by everyone in the Art School learning community.

6 Summary of action points mapped to the Quality Code for Higher Education

A summary of the action points, together with an indication of where they fit within the Indicators of Sound Practice for Learning and Teaching (Quality Code for Higher Education Chapter B3), can be found in the table below. Indicator numbers in brackets indicate an indirect benefit in that category.

Action point no.	Section ref.	Section title	Action (summary)	QC,B3 Indicator no(s)
1	5.1	Staff	Peer observation scheme	3,4
2	5.1	Staff	Planning ahead, cross-Art School initiatives	3
3	5.1	Staff	Capturing and disseminating good practice in policy guidance	1
4	5.2	Continuous reflection	Student representation/participation in L&T related decision making, course design etc.	3,5
5	5.2	Continuous reflection	Systematic evaluation of information	5
6	5.3	Equal access to education	Policy for Inclusive Learning	2,6
7	5.3	Equal access to education	Increased provision of financial support	2
8	5.4	Assessment & feedback	Approval/implementation of Assessment and Feedback Policy	2,7,8,9
9	5.4	Assessment & feedback	Information and guidance for students and staff on assessment and feedback, including programme-specific	2,7,8,9
10	5.4	Assessment & feedback	Assessment and feedback strategies included in annual programme review	2,3,5 (8,9)
11	5.5	Environment & Facilities	Investing in physical estate – implementation of Development Plan	2,6
12	5.5	Environment & Facilities	Development of Moodle as pedagogic tool and information repository	(1),2,6,7,8,9
13	5.5	Environment & Facilities	Promotion of, and guidance and training in Moodle	(1),2,6,7,8,9
14	5.6	Future-proofing	Clear framework of policy and guidance documents	1 (et al*)
15	5.6	Future-proofing	Ensuring accessibility of information	1,2,7,8
16	5.6	Future-proofing	Training /briefing on new policies to ensure understanding and implementation	1 (et al*)
17	5.6	Future-proofing	Internal communication strategy	1 (et al*)
18	5.6	Future-proofing	Dissemination of Learning & Teaching Strategy	1

*Other indicators referenced within each individual policy/guidance document.

7 Policies and documents that supplement the L&T Strategy

Peer-to-Peer Teaching Fora

Staff Support & Development Handbook

Staff Support & Development Handbook, L&T Supplement

Development Plan phase 2

Scholarship & Bursaries procedures

Professional Practice Policy

Assessment & Feedback Policy