

← S. Lewis

Notes on the Views of Participants at the National Conference



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AWARDS

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Teaching and Learning in Higher Education in Art and Design

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 A second national conference on teaching and learning in higher education in art and design was held to continue the discussions and sharing of experiences which characterised the first national conference.
- 1.2 At the first national conference participants concluded that, in art and design education, learning is enhanced when students take responsibility for their own learning and achieve independence in learning.
- 1.3 Over the two days of the second national conference, participants reviewed the content of the learning which takes place in art and design in higher education, and discussed the effectiveness of the various teaching methods and assessment practices.
- 1.4 Two general points emerge from the debates that the conference stimulated:
 - Students graduating from art and design courses have the opportunity to acquire a comprehensive body of knowledge, a wide range of skills, and a breadth of understanding that prepares them for a variety of career opportunities, both within the art and design field and beyond it;
 - This capability of art and design graduates is not necessarily well communicated, either to art and design students, or to those outside art and design. A wider range of assessment practices might help both to enhance learning and to demonstrate the relevance of a higher education in art and design to a broad spectrum of careers.
- 1.5 This note summarises the many points made by participants at the conference under the headings:
 - The learning opportunities for students on art and design degree courses;
 - Current teaching and learning practices;
 - Assessment practices;
 - Proposals for developments.
- 1.6 The monograph, *Responsiveness and Fulfilment: the value of higher education in the modern world* by Dr Ronald Barnett, published by The Higher Education Foundation in 1989, was used to inform discussion, with the result that many of the comments by conference participants, and therefore this summary, reflect its contents.

2 Learning opportunities for students on art and design degree courses

A graduate (learning outcomes)

2.1 Participants confirmed that a graduate in art and design is someone who:

- has substantial knowledge and skills in the chosen subject areas;
- is professionally competent in the chosen subject areas;
- is able to communicate effectively in written and spoken forms of English;
- is able to evaluate cultural and personal values critically;
- is able to conceptualise;
- is able to form objective judgements;
- has interpersonal and team skills of a high order.

What students can learn on a degree course (learning inputs)

2.2 Participants identified bodies of knowledge; intellectual, practical and social skills; and areas of understanding that students in higher education have the opportunity to acquire.

2.3 Courses offer different combinations of opportunities. It is the major opportunities, particular combinations offered by each course, that provide choices for students, and individual identity for courses.

2.4 The following learning opportunities offered by the courses represented by those attending the conference are not listed in any particular hierarchy, and not all opportunities are offered by all courses.

2.5 A student in higher education in art and design has the opportunity to acquire:

- A up-to-date body of knowledge that is appropriate to the field of study. This body of knowledge includes technical, historical, economic, environmental and political facts, theories, explanations, and a knowledge of the critical models or critical practice usual for the subject;
- A knowledge of the visual language of the artist and designer and the skills of visual communication such as drawing, model or maquette making;
- The traditional and/or contemporary craft skills of the subject;
- Knowledge of the technological developments in the subject and the skill to use the appropriate machinery;

- Knowledge of the language and practice of written and oral communication in at least one European tongue (at least English). The skills to use the written and oral forms of the language to communicate with colleagues and other professionals (to describe, to formulate a point of view, to promote that view to other individuals and groups, to negotiate and develop thoughts and arrive at a shared understanding);
- Creative skills (the ability, repeatedly and consistently, to manipulate and realign a variety of interdependent thoughts, images, materials towards effective solutions to identified needs/problems/objectives. If the solutions are also previously unknown, the skills could be regarded as skills of originality);
- Self-knowledge and knowledge of how to take responsibility for personal development and determine personal contributions, both when working alone and as a member of a team;
- the skill of self-discipline to complete tasks;
- A knowledge of the nature of competition and an understanding of how to develop a strategy for competitiveness; the confidence to compete as an individual or to choose not to compete when working in a team towards a shared goal;
- A reliable work methodology that includes gathering and selecting information, formulating and developing a view, testing its viability via theoretical analysis and practical trials, 'constructing' the 'product' (for example, writing an essay, carrying out an experiment, making a video, painting a picture), reflecting on the result, reflecting on the process, drawing lessons from experience. It also includes the ability to estimate, allocate and manage time in order to meet deadlines;
- Analytical abilities, including the ability to extract issues of principle from practice and to draw independent conclusions based on a rigorous review of the evidence and argument;
- Objectivity (the ability to conceptualise a problem in non-personal terms, to use a theoretical perspective to develop a judgement that is cognitive and rational and to engage in reasoned argument);
- A critical perspective (a willingness to be constructively critical of self and subject, to accept criticism, to challenge, respond to challenge and deal with controversy by rational debate);
- A knowledge of, and the skill to describe, subject and cultural standards and values, and an understanding of quality and context as the basis for a critical perspective;
- A knowledge of professional protocol and an understanding of how to contribute to the development of the subject within its cultural traditions;

- An acceptance of accountability (the nature of accountability is rooted in the specific values associated with individual subject disciplines, but the preparedness to accept the constraints of accountability is important across all disciplines);
- Flexibility of thought and action and the ability to remain open to new, different or alternative thinking, techniques, technologies, discoveries;
- Respect for knowledge, truth, accuracy and thoroughness.

3 Current teaching and learning practices

- 3.1 Following the identification of **what** might be learnt, participants analysed current teaching and learning practices to identify **how** learning opportunities are provided.
- 3.2 The presentation of the information in categories is not intended to suggest a formula, but provides a way of marshalling a wide variety of participants' views.

Changes observed by lecturers

- 3.3 Participants at the conference noted that students who are now applying to courses include a larger number who want greater course flexibility, more choice, and more opportunities to negotiate all aspects of their student experience. These needs are being met by changes to course structures.
- *Modular structures*, which provide for course flexibility, allow individual students a large degree of choice about the combination of their course subjects;
 - *Unitised structures*, which provide for cohort flexibility, allow students to make choices within a course or subject area;
 - *CATS (Credit Accumulation and Transfer Schemes)*, which provide for individual flexibility, allow individual students to move between courses and colleges.
- 3.4 Financial pressures on students are increasing and art and design is a notoriously expensive subject area. Many students now need paid employment, and they want study programmes which can accommodate their employment.
- 3.5 Both mature students and school leavers have greater expectations of courses, of staff, of institutions and of college environments; they want to be told what will be expected of them, what the staff will do for them, and what the institution will provide.
- 3.6 Previous assumptions about students' knowledge are being challenged as age-ranges, and hence experience, within groups widens. Many students know more, and their knowledge and experience is useful in informing class debate; others are less well prepared for higher education. This diversity is leading to changes in the role of teachers in student groups, and in the power of the student group to support each other's learning.

The learning environment

- 3.7 Students on art and design courses have always been encouraged to take the initiative in project work. Many courses now also teach students to take responsibility for their own learning. Independent learning is not learning without

attention from teachers, but learning without a crutch. Far from the teacher becoming unnecessary, the role of the teacher becomes fundamental to the development of independence, and the relationship with the teacher changes during the process from that of co-initiator to that of academic colleague with whom ideas are debated and judgements tested. Helping students to acquire independence in learning requires a great deal of preparation and planning.

3.8 Participants identified various teaching and learning methods that they had found to be successful and these are included as examples of good practice.

- ****Good Practice – learning to take responsibility***

One way to encourage the transfer of responsibility for learning is to agree with students in advance of any activity (project, lecture, demonstration, etc) what each student will be responsible for, and what the teacher will be responsible for. For instance, prior to a technical demonstration, each student agrees to take responsibility for attending the class with specified knowledge. The teacher agrees to take responsibility for demonstrating the application of that knowledge. Each student arrives with information about a different aspect of the demonstration: one contributes information on the history of the technique demonstrated, another gives relevant physical or chemical facts, another provides the 'voice over' during the demonstration, another defines the issues of principle that apply, and so on. The role of teacher is modified from that of imparter of knowledge towards one of academic colleague with whom ideas can be tried. This only works if tasks are achievable by students, and work loads realistic for the time available.

- ****Good practice – teaching as a team***

The artist is sometimes characterised as a one who struggles in isolation and fails to achieve recognition during a working life-time; the artist-teacher cannot emulate this model in the class room. By planning the teaching on the basis of teaching teams, with the role of each member of the team clearly defined both to the team members and to the students, valuable practitioners who are less comfortable with classroom debate can make a critically important contribution. It is not necessary for team members to co-teach. The objective is to present students with diverse learning opportunities and teach the students how to choose the most suitable model for the achievement of their own objectives.

- ****Good practice – linked learning***

Evidence from research shows that learning is enhanced if new information can be related to known information. Making the student's own experience the centre from which knowledge is extended can help to improve learning provided that the teacher, as well as centring the learning in the student's experience, at the same time teaches the student to 'face out'. The role for the teacher is to help to prevent the initial personal orientation from becoming self-indulgent introspection by identifying with the student the issues of principle and planning an appropriate programme of work.

Learning opportunities

- 3.9 The project is the most widely used teaching and learning method in art and design. Reflecting on this, participants noted that the project serves as a vehicle for instruction in knowledge, skills, and work methodology; for exploration; for discovery; for encouraging independence; for critical appraisal. As a teaching method, the project carries a heavy burden: it is sometimes expected that, via the project, all students can learn everything specified. This may be true in some cases, but often so much weight has been put on the project that other forms of teaching and learning have been ignored.
- 3.10 Participants at the conference concluded that there is an educational advantage in varying teaching and learning methods. A varied approach makes it easier to accommodate individual learning needs, to reinforce principles in different circumstances, and to facilitate the varying of assessment practices. (Varied assessment practices were thought to be a key to providing a wider range of information about achievement.)
- 3.11 Participants felt that for each learning opportunity the students should be clear about:
- What they will learn (knowledge, skills, understanding);
 - What they will be able to do as a result of the learning (objectives in terms of student learning outcomes);
 - Why they are learning it (relevant course aims);
 - What they will be required to produce (assessment requirements – what evidence will be an acceptable indication of achievement);
 - What the work will be assessed for (assessment criteria – against what will the acceptable evidence be judged?);
 - The date by which the work is due;
 - How it fits with the rest of the course (course structure).
- 3.12 The following are some of the teaching and learning methods discussed by participants. Methods chosen by different courses related to course aims and subject disciplines.
- ***Practice project***
The project is a model of real practice. A particular outcome is specified, usually with a deadline. Students are required to emulate practice by gathering information, analysing it in the light of the project requirements, drawing up their proposal, constructing their proposal, and engaging in a critical appraisal of the result. The body of knowledge and skills needed to complete the project is taught in advance or students are directed to learn selectively as they proceed through the project.

- **Synoptic project**
The synoptic project is conducted in a similar way to the practice project but it is located at the end of a period of teaching and is planned to provide an opportunity for students to display their understanding of, and ability to integrate, previously learnt knowledge and skills. It is often used as a device for integrating the experience of students on modular programmes.
- **Team project**
The team project is conducted in a similar way to the practice project but students work together as a team to achieve the specified result. There are various ways to run team projects. Two approaches are:
 - the **task approach** in which each member of the team has a defined role or task, and a personal responsibility for fulfilling the role or completing the task;
 - the **collective approach**, based on the principle of 'many hands make light work', in which there is a collective responsibility for producing a set volume of work.

Each approach requires different personal interactions and the need to develop different work strategies.
- **Exercise**
Specific knowledge and skills are outlined and each student practises their application via a specified example, often the same one for all members of the class.
- **Work experience, residencies, industrial placement**
Students spend time in professional practice or industry, occasionally only as observers, but usually as a contributing member of a team. The job description and course expectations are agreed in advance. (CNAA publication *Work Experience* documents good practice.)
- **Exhibition of work**
Students select and display their own work for a known audience, either internal or public.
- **Lecture**
Information, issues, views, interpretations are transmitted to students by a lecturer who may support the points made with audio or visual material.
- **Seminar**
A set topic is presented to, then discussed by, a small group. The presentation may be a prepared paper given by a student or by the lecturer. It is assumed that all participants will have undertaken some preparation for the discussion.

- ***Debate***
Students develop an argument orally and in public to support or refute some specified proposal. Normally particular speakers are nominated, and they prepare their case in advance, taking account of the points that the opposing side might present.
- ***Demonstration***
Technical skills are displayed to students.
- ***Skills video***
Technical skills are displayed to students via a video that enables them to practise along with the video, or re-run it if necessary.
- ***Interactive computer software***
Learning is prompted by screen commands. Progress is made as success is reinforced or mistakes learned from.
- ***Critique***
Work is reviewed by general discussion against set objectives and agreed standards. The critique might be led by the lecturer or by students.
- ***Tutorial***
Personal academic counselling in response to observed or expressed need is given to individuals or groups of up to 4 students. Guidance might be given on improving learning, on course choices, on choosing projects that are intellectually demanding rather than those that reinforce existing abilities.
- ***Gallery visit***
Students are guided through a specified exhibition. Students are often asked to complete work sheets that help them observe and interpret the work on display. Many galleries and museums employ education officers who are able to provide help with particular exhibitions.
- ***Study visit***
An extended visit, often abroad, to study a particular theme. It is common for each student to prepare a seminar paper in advance of the study visit and present it on site to their colleagues as their topic or theme is encountered during the visit.
- ***Report***
A structured account of an event. It will normally include some form of critical appraisal.
- ***Written assignment, essay, dissertation***
A documented argument to support a proposition or answer a set question.
- ***Self-assessment***
The opportunity for a student to test judgements on achievement in personal work of specified objectives against established standards and criteria. Student judgements may be compared with staff judgements with a view to deepening understanding or improving performance.

- ***Peer assessment***
The opportunity for groups to debate and agree judgements on achievement in group work, or of individuals in the group, of specified objectives against established standards and criteria. Group judgements may be compared with staff judgements as in self-assessment.
- ***Proctoring***
The use of a higher year group to teach a lower year group for their mutual benefit. This requires considerable preparation and training of the higher year group.

4 Assessment practices

How do we know what has been learnt?

Reconsidering assessment

- 4.1 From reviewing how learning opportunities are offered, discussion at the conference moved to a consideration of how we know that learning is achieved. Some participants questioned the need for any assessments, but most saw assessment as an integral part of teaching and an aid to learning.
- 4.2 Teachers know from students' work patterns that assessment practices give students particular messages about course priorities and the apparent value of learning some skills as against others. Assessment strategy affects both the teaching and the learning process. Participants agreed that assessment may be the pivot on which the further enhancing of learning turns: to improve the quality of learning we may need to review assessment practices.

The purpose of assessment

- 4.3 The purpose of assessment is to enable students to demonstrate that they have fulfilled the objectives of the course and achieved the standard required for the award. (CNAA Handbook, 1990–91, A 4.8).
- 4.4 Assessment does not aim to provide some all-embracing indicator of the present total life-achievement of the student, or of the student's potential for achievement at some unspecified time in the future.

Principle of assessment

- 4.5 Assessment is a matter of judgement, not simply of computation. Marks, grades and percentages are not absolute values but symbols used by examiners to communicate their judgement of different aspects of a student's work in order to provide information on which the final decision on a student's fulfilment of course objectives may be based (CNAA Handbook, 1990–91, E 1.3).

Standards

- 4.6 There was considerable discussion about standards, about whether they are improving, and about the variation between subject areas of the number of first class honours degrees awarded. Generally participants were of the view that standards should be those appropriate to the current cultural context and body of knowledge of the subject. Standards cannot be maintained as they were at some point in time past. Such cultural relativity is simply a feature with which higher education has to cope as knowledge expands and theory changes to accommodate the new information.

Assessment strategy

- 4.7 Within art and design courses, the evaluation of a product has in the past been based on the belief that the ability of the student to produce the product implied the possession of a particular body of knowledge, that the quality of the product revealed technical skills, and that the appearance of the product revealed design skills. It was further assumed that consistent production over a period of time revealed a work methodology that implied understanding.
- 4.8 Students who have graduated from art and design courses, employers and teachers in art and design are now questioning whether the product produced at the end of a period of study does in fact reveal all these things for every student. Even if the product does reveal all to those capable of making informed, visual judgements, there are many others, sometimes including the students, who would like to be reassured of the possession of the particular knowledge, skills and understanding and are looking for less mystifying assessment techniques.
- 4.9 The range of subjects in the curriculum is increasing. In addition to studio subjects, art and design history and business studies (or cultural studies and professional studies), computer literacy and languages are now often included in courses. These additions present course teams with challenges to the structure of assessments. Those courses adhering to the 'product reveals all' school-of-thought are in something of a dilemma: if the final project cannot be broadened sufficiently to accommodate the new elements, the new elements will remain unassessed and hence are likely to be regarded by students as discretionary.
- 4.10 Participants acknowledged that the perception of those outside the discipline was important and, while assessment practices appear opaque to others, cynicism about objectivity would remain. Many participants indicated that they are now considering the development of a balanced package of assessment approaches.

****Good practice – assessment as an aid to learning***

There is now evidence that self-assessment helps students to learn how to make judgements. It may be worth expanding the opportunities in courses for students to assess their own achievement, and that of others, provided the opportunity is also included for students to check their judgements against those of experienced assessors.

Studies show that students who take part in assessment practices of this kind quickly develop a good understanding of the purpose of assessment, the criteria for assessment, what must be produced to meet those criteria, and the standards against which assessments are made; that is, they develop the ability to make informed judgements and to discuss the basis on which the judgements are made. Students quickly understand the difference between opinion ('I like', 'I don't like') and judgement ('this is unsuccessful because it does not answer the objectives for the following reasons!...').

Self-assessment requires a great deal of preparation and planning. In order to be able to assess their own achievement, students need to be taught:

a knowledge of the language of description;

an understanding of standards;

the skills to develop criteria;

the skill to judge when the evidence indicates that the criteria have been achieved;

the skill to reflect critically on practice and understand how such critical reflection is represented by a numerical or literal symbol, and that the symbol is not a quantification or measurement of achievement;

- 4.11 A key challenge for teachers is to get students to a position where they can identify weak work for themselves and, through this identification, reflect on practice or thereby improve themselves.

'Big bang' assessment

- 4.12 Assessment of a single body of work displayed publicly is based on the view that the final body of work provides a summary of the student's achievements. Many teachers believe that some achievements (for example, the ability to identify a personal role within a team and make a significant contribution to the achievement of the team's objectives) are not easily successfully demonstrated in the final show of work. In addition, the desire of the student to demonstrate a flexible approach to a theme might be seen by examiners as being intellectually sound but, read in a public exhibition and normally viewed within the context of certain traditions, as being disjointed as opposed to diverse.
- 4.13 The weakness of the degree show as a vehicle for assessment is that monumental presentations, thematic presentations or house-style shows can be persuasive and students see a disadvantage in a broad experimental approach.
- 4.14 The role of the final degree show provoked fierce debate. The public exhibition of work is one of the strengths of art and design courses and it was thought that perhaps it was being jeopardised by unclear and too diverse objectives. It may be time to decide what the role of the public exhibition is. Is it to promote the student, the course, the institution? And who pays? Different objectives require a different approach.

Concerns about change

- 4.15 Some participants were concerned that making assessment criteria explicit might lead to a reductionist approach which prevents holistic judgement.
- 4.16 What is required is clarity in the statements of what a student will be able to do as a result of the course (course objectives), what will be acceptable evidence of that achievement (assessment requirements), and against what will the evidence be judged (assessment criteria). This is not the same as deconstructing an activity into its component parts for the purposes of marking the contribution of each part of the activity.

Forms of assessment

4.17 The following methods are widely used in art and design:

- ***Product assessment***
The end result of a project is assessed for its technical merit, and the extent to which it provides a satisfactory solution to the problem set. Detailed criteria will normally be specified.
- ***Design assessment***
The design proposal, presented as a drawing or maquette is assessed for the extent to which it is a satisfactory solution to the problem set. Detailed criteria will normally be supplied.
- ***Methodology assessment***
The students ability to produce satisfactory solutions regularly is assessed by inspection of work sheets.
- ***Written assignment***
Submitted assignments are assessed against specified criteria.
- ***Seminar presentation***
The presentation is usually assessed by a member of staff for content. Sometimes presentation skills are also assessed.
- ***Examination***
Examinations provide a way of testing the ability to recall and apply it to a given problem within a fixed time period. Some people regard them as a reasonable method for testing analytical skills.
- ***Display of work or degree show***
Work completed over a specified period of time is displayed to facilitate the making of judgements. It is usual for product, design and methodology assessments to be carried out at the same time if this method is used.

5 Proposals for developments

- 5.1 Participants identified a number of facilities, services and supports which they would value to support their current work.

A Peer Network

- 5.2 All course teams have three challenges in common: tightening resource constraints; demands to incorporate new subjects in their curricula; and a more heterogeneous student body. Professional isolation, which seems to have been an unforeseen by-product of accreditation, has obliged each course team to develop its own design solution to the problems that it is confronting. This is leading to progressive divergence in course content and structure. With its concern for national standards, CNAA has a potentially important role to play in bringing art and design teachers together so that individuals can learn from each others' experiences. In particular, staff seek reassurance that the way in which they have responded to external pressures is consistent with developments nationally and therefore not disadvantaging their students.
- 5.3 Participants would value a network which enables teachers and course developers to keep in touch with each other in order to discuss the results of studies in teaching and learning in both art and design and in other areas, to suggest developments appropriate for learning in art and design, and to monitor success. Without such a network, which ideally should be driven by art and design staff themselves, any new debate is viewed with suspicion. There is an assumption that there is some 'hidden agenda' that is being promoted. Although in the first instance, these are academic issues, management support is needed to ensure that subject and pedagogical development occurs.

Resources

- 5.4 Conference participants were concerned that there is not a general awareness by resource distributors that clients (students, employers and society in general) expect graduates of art and design courses to be able to demonstrate their abilities and thinking via their own production of artefacts. Production requires materials. Sufficient materials cost money. Failure to produce artefacts might be compared to a failure to produce essays in some other subject areas. Assessment on the basis of proposals rather than production would be like assessing students' notes rather than the final essay. Sometimes essays have to be written: sometimes products have to be produced! Ingenuity occasionally avoids resource problems, but the quality of each individual student's education will eventually suffer if the educational objectives of art and design courses continue to include assessment evidence in the form of products, yet production materials are not available. Additionally, developing (and expensive) technologies are becoming more and more relevant to the field.

Thematic debate across subject boundaries

- 5.5 If students from all subject areas are to have genuine choice about their study combinations, then contacts between the cultures of different subject areas need to be developed and broad agreements established. It is difficult to organise from within subject disciplines and a national, cross-subject perspective may be needed to improve flexibility and choice.

Resources register

- 5.6 A register of specialist resources in UK/Europe is needed to develop alongside increasing interest in CATS. This could take the form of an extension of the database being developed by the education section of the Design Council.

Time

- 5.7 Planned time for reflection for both students and staff was a need expressed by the majority of staff. The conference provided this in some small measure.