

*on not  
sitting  
with Nellie*

**A MODEST PROPOSITION ON PRESSING ISSUES OF  
TEACHING AND LEARNING IN  
HIGHER EDUCATION IN  
ART AND DESIGN**

A series of seminars planned by a joint  
working party of CNAA and CHEAD

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## **1 The imperatives for change**

**1.1** The rate of change in higher education having quickened in recent years, there are a number of questions, from a range of origins, which demand responses by art and design education if the system is to retain the respect it currently commands. The Working Party is of the opinion that art and design education is at the end of an era, and that radical reappraisal of course content and methods of delivery is demanded.

**1.2** The imperatives for change may be summarised as:

(a) Recognition of the ability of students to learn independently and to synthesise learning from formal situations with that derived from wider experience

(b) Shifts in the structure of higher education associated with new forms of student programmes and with participation by students from a wider range of backgrounds

(c) Financial pressures associated with the retention in some sectors of art and design education of staff-intensive methods

(d) Changed expectations of the specific work-related skills with which graduates should be equipped, particularly those associated with enterprise

(e) Growth in the expectation that graduates will emerge from higher education with broad capability to deal with situations not yet existing and with skills transferable to new tasks

(f) Recognition of the limits to and scope for the commonality of art, design and craft as disciplines

## **2 Proposals for change**

**2.1** Change in response to recognising of the ability of students to learn independently

**2.1.2** A body of knowledge and skills on managing student independent learning exists, including pioneering work in art and design. We believe that recognition of the ability of most students to take responsibility for their own learning, and to learn independently of their mentors, should permeate art and design education. The emphasis must be on enabling students to learn how to learn, on counselling and tutoring, to make students truly independent, rather than the traditional model of dependence on the teachers and on the course.

**2.1.3** The profundity of change in educational approach which independent learning requires is not underestimated, but we believe that it will build upon one of the best aspects of art and design education, the high level of one-to-one contact. That contact should be less an opportunity for transmission from tutor to student and more devoted to negotiation of the direction of the student's investigations.

- 2.1.4 Independent learning is not necessarily a means to reduce demands on resources. Counselling, negotiating and monitoring may require resource equal to the traditional model. The staff activity is, however, very different, and different skills are demanded of staff.
- 2.1.5 The body of knowledge on work experience demonstrates that students are normally capable of synthesising that learning from formal situations with that derived from experience. Perspective and the ability to reflect on experience are frequently noted in students returning from placement. Independent learning takes a further step, in inviting and trusting the student to exercise these reflective abilities throughout the learning experience.

Art and Design education must accept - and develop in the light of accepting - that in future control of the individual student's programme will ultimately lie with that student and not with any one course team or institution, let alone with a single teacher with his or her "own" students.

## **2.2 Change in response to shifts in the structure of higher education**

- 2.2.1 The concepts of credit accumulation and transfer are widely accepted as valid, in almost all disciplines. Credit accumulation is well tried by the Open University and several polytechnics; credit transfer between institutions, though less developed, has been accelerated by CNAAs CATS scheme.

We believe that new approaches are essential to providing an appropriate experience for students who, far from spending 2 or 3 fulltime years unbroken in a single institution, build their programmes over variable periods in several locations. The "credit" model of student experience challenges the "traditional" model, in which the student experience is assumed to depend on development over the whole of a course of set length in a single place.

- 2.2 The natural corollary of credit accumulation and transfer is some form of modular or unit structure for the curriculum (since credit depends on the identification and recording of what is achieved from defined blocks of learning time, which build up towards an award). "Modularisation" or "unitisation" are now commonplace and increasingly involve art and design provision.

Consequently, the continuing role, if any, of the traditional single discipline courses currently the norm in art and design requires redefinition. We must submit that the teaching premise underlying such courses - that the student's whole course time will be dedicated, on a predetermined sequence, to a single discipline as defined by a course team also dedicated - appears less and less defensible educationally. This does not imply abandonment of the various specialisms within art and design; rather the opposite, since defining the subject area and the particular disciplines associated with it is paramount in enabling students to select wisely a personal programme.

- 2.2.3 Clear evidence exists that future participation in higher education will involve greater proportions of students who are mature and will be in receipt of income from working during their course. Some commentators have gone

so far as to suggest that not merely will this imply a massive growth in part-time higher education, but that the distinction between full-time and part-time will cease to exist.

We suggest that teaching methods rooted in the full-time presence of students predominantly entering higher education end-on to school cannot translate unchanged to a situation in which part-time participation becomes normal and a greater proportion of students have prior and continuing experience outside education.

- 2.2.4 Intense pressures and many practical initiatives exist to establish equivalencies for qualifications and to open opportunities for continuing learning.

In art and design, the most immediate question to be resolved is that of realising the potential released by the recent accord between CNA A and BTEC, which inter alia offers the opportunity for the development of common elements of study or linked structures. Students holding HND qualifications can now be considered for entry at the beginning of the third year of a three year degree course. Such experience as exists suggests that the whole of a degree course accepting large numbers of HND holders needs to change, not just the final year.

## 2.3 **Change in response to the economic imperatives**

- 2.3.1 Art and design education has a powerful pedagogic tradition, with a strong element of action learning through the experience of practical activity. This executive tradition for a long time divorced art and design from other higher education and contributed to its former exclusion from the degree sector. Now, however, the learning methods commonplace in art and design (above all, the project) are much emulated in other subject areas.
- 2.3.2 Various methods of organising this tradition of learning by doing are possible. Although of relatively recent construction, one model has become prevalent, that which requires the student to be tutored in the studio by a staff member overseeing student work as it happens and occasionally demonstrating a skill as if in a master class.
- 2.3.3 Much debate in recent years has centred on maintaining this tradition in the face of reduced staffing and increased student numbers. Much special pleading has been offered for maintaining SSRs in art and design lower than in other subjects, and where SSRs have been forced to match those of other subjects the studio system of tuition has tended to be given priority for such resources as are available. We suggest that a model, equally rooted in action learning but not posited on the normal presence of tutors in studios, is both desirable in terms of the student's responsibility for his or her learning and less staff-intensive in a climate which demands that resources be used with maximum efficiency.
- 2.3.4 Our proposal is, therefore, that the preservation of an inherently expensive system be abandoned in favour of a use of staff time directed to acting as monitor and catalyst in a process centred on the student and the student's control of his or her learning time.

This demands a new type of teacher, with probably a very small core of fulltime staff as academic coordinators, demonstrators to teach skill techniques and processes, and a majority of parttime practitioners as teachers. In the new role, teaching and learning methods concentrate on counselling, facilitating and monitoring.

- 2.3.5 Economic pressures dictate also that staff time be available for activities other than teaching on what are currently seen as mainstream courses. Industry-related research and revenue generating activity of all types (including the marketing of courses of education), far from being a stop-gap, is becoming a normal function of higher education.

Such activity, we believe, should not be viewed as corrosive of the student experience; but it will change that experience in ways which we consider beneficial. Close relations with particular industries - already normal in many courses, particularly in design - will result, as will the exposure of students to an institutional culture increasingly oriented to external social and commercial needs. We do not urge the abandonment of a critical stance, but rather suggest that the development of a self-critical attitude and of abilities to respond are as capable of being developed by such involvements as by the programmes traditionally focussed on a long taught week in the college. A dimension of that selfcritical stance may be a student reaction against the acceptance of vocationalism; we believe that to allow the possibility of such reaction is a valid and proper characteristic of higher education.

- 2.3.6 New working practices - notably, the shortening of the student week and of the academic year - demand new methods. Teaching and learning methods obtaining on courses designed for the 36 week, 35 hours a week student contact prevalent until recently have been found inappropriate to courses offering say 24 weeks teaching on a much reduced week. We do not hold the shortening of the student contact to be universally applicable. It is a characteristic of practice-based courses that the development of certain skills demands time (see 2.6 below).

## 2.4 **Change in response to new expectations of graduate preparation for work**

- 2.4.1 Art and design graduates are increasingly expected to be equipped for early effective performance in work situations, usually in a known industry or sector and most frequently in selfemployment. This pressure may at times seem excessive (NEDO Working Party on Design, Education Recommendations, pointed out the anomaly of expecting that a fully formed professional should emerge, while in other fields training in the first employment after graduation is a normal part of professional formation). But the pressures to ensure that all graduates have the personal skills, the grasp of the workings of the economy and the enterprising attitudes for successful operation in self employment or employment are irresistible.

- 2.4.2 Meeting these expectations means that students must deal with intangibles, often in words; there is considerable potential for conflict with a tradition in which the artefact, and not the invisible process of creating it, is regarded as central in the assessment of the student's progress. Projects with non-artefact outcomes are one modest change we recommend; beyond that, we hold that

art and design courses need urgently (a) to enable students the maximum influences from live work situations, beyond the confines of the institution. Work experience, in its many forms, is widely acknowledged as a dimension which changes both the students' capabilities and their perspectives on their own learning;

and (b) to recognise time spent in college as an experience different from that spent in subsequent work. Much of the time in art and design education is devoted to making, on the often lengthy timescales which learning skills and processes demands. Simulation, as against operating in real time, is not widely used, whereas in other education for the professions - notably business education, but in law and increasingly elsewhere - gaming and simulation is widespread. Methods which collapse the timescales of real life are essential, to achieve that acceleration of experience which is proper to education. If the length of students' courses is to be shorter, intensification of activity will use time most effectively. That time which the student spends independent of formal contact time will facilitate that slower, contemplative development which we believe to be an essential property of higher education. We do not accept the widespread assumption that time for such development need be contained within the formally taught element of a student's programme.

## **2.5 Change in response to heightened expectations of student capability**

**2.5.1** The distinction between acquisition of knowledge and development of capability in a broad sense is important. Specific skills in technical areas, we suggest, must always remain one of the purposes of higher education in art and design, but we believe that developing student abilities to transfer skills to new tasks and to deal with situations not yet known are an equally valid purpose.

**2.5.2** Even research findings critical of art and design education have acknowledged the strength of the technical skills acquired by students. While questions of how best to teach technical skills remain, there is no perceived problem of failing to deliver on this aspect. We suggest that emphasis should shift to facilitating the development of transferable skills and capabilities, a shift demanding changed teaching and learning approaches.

**2.5.3** Tutorial input, in the changed role of commentator and monitor on the student's learning and reflections on experience, assumes prominence. The passing-on of technical skills, through demonstration and emulation, will of course remain significant. But we submit that the student will be learning as an individual choosing to draw on the service offered, just as the student will draw on other college services as and when required. Reappraisal of the tutor-student relationship is essential. The tradition, abandoned in some institutions but still widespread, of regarding a group of students attached to a particular tutor as studying primarily with that tutor is at odds with the concept of students as responsible for their own learning. The close tutor-student working of art and design is a quality to be respected, and it is admired by other disciplines. We do not disregard it, and certainly do not ask the tutor to withdraw from contact. We suggest, however, a new purpose for that close working, through a different type of contact.

- 2.6 Change in response to recognising the limits of commonality of art, design and craft**
- 2.6.1** The broad educational objectives common to all art, design and craft programmes are a critical knowledge of the subject gained through practical and contextual study; ability to define and evaluate the student's own work and that of others; ability to communicate intelligently in visual and verbal languages; and the ability to relate to markets.
- 2.6.2** We suggest that a common "resource bank" of skills, with different emphases according to the predicted outcomes of the course, can be identified as appropriate to all graduates and diplomates from higher education in art, design and craft. These skills are media skills and techniques; criteria for analysis and evaluation of own and others' work; critical and analytical skills necessary for handling ideas and arguments; written and oral skills to present own work and articulate own critical stances; presentation and exhibition skills; ability to organise and marshal ideas and images and to create own operative framework for writing or interpreting briefs.
- 2.6.3** The skills appropriately contained in art, design or craft programmes depend on future applications, whether as practitioner (artist, designer, craftsperson) or as a promoter or interpreter of these activities. It is unlikely that such diverse outcomes will be served by a uniform structure of teaching and learning. We suggest that, beyond the level of commonality identified above, possible differences should be recognised in the study of art, design and craft.
- 2.6.4** The level of common skills and technical competence required in a programme may relate more to the degree of specialism than to any inherent difference between art, design and craft (eg the potential practitioner in hot glass or patterncutting will demand a higher standard of executive skills than a student wishing to gain more general skills in visual studies).
- 2.6.5** Technological advances, particularly in computer-aided design, now cause us to redefine the manual skills necessary for professional practice, and to reassess the time needed in the course for practical activity (contrast, for example, the timescales of computer-aided design and production of knitted textile with that for life-size sculpture in stone).
- 2.6.6** Where student need to acquire defined technical skills, an element of demonstration is inevitable, and desirable; we believe elements of the "master class" model to have considerable educational strength in skill areas, but suggest that this strength be complemented by an encouragement of student independence in other areas.
- 2.6.7** Evidence of originality remains one of the main criteria for measuring student success at any stage of a programme. Without suggesting that students' creativity be inhibited, we must question how far this criterion, which places the burden of demonstrating his or her individualism on the student, should be prominent in assessment in undergraduate programmes, in which it may be at odds with prospective employers' expectations.



We suggest that there is value in reviving the concept of apprenticeship as a means of teaching craft skills and technical virtuosity, particularly where the output of a course is that of the specialist fine art or craft practitioner. We find no evidence of contradiction between this model of learning and a legitimate encouragement of originality in other aspects of students' work, nor do we believe that it stifles the intellectualism of the subject.

- 2.6.8 Where a programme places personal expression and originality at a premium, that programme can progress only at the rate of the maturation of the individual. In this, there is contrast between such programmes and those which are heavily skill-based, in which the possibility for accelerated learning exists.

### **3 The next stage**

This paper makes no attempt to set out a concerted view of the future for teaching and learning on advanced programmes in art and design. Rather, it tabulates issues widely held to demand attention, and some possible ways forward in relation to those issues. As such, the paper makes no attempt to prescribe any one course of action; it does however seek to demonstrate that far-reaching change is inevitable.

## **CHEAD/CNAA Working Party on Teaching and Learning Strategies in Art and Design**

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