



LEARNING AND TEACHING STRATEGY

This Learning and Teaching Strategy maps out the expectations and ambitions of the Royal College of Art in relation to the quality of its educational provision. It encompasses all aspects of the student experience, from recruitment to graduation and beyond.

Much of the activity described throughout will be channelled through the College's Learning and Teaching, Research and Academic Standards Committees. The strategy is intended to be a companion to the College's main Strategic Plan and other related policy documents. The intention is not to repeat aims that are contained elsewhere, and therefore, where areas of interest overlap, references will be made to other bodies and initiatives.

- The core strategic aims of the Learning and Teaching Strategy are:
- To recruit high quality students from diverse backgrounds on the basis of their ability and potential to succeed at a postgraduate level
- To offer each student a highly focused postgraduate education that encourages and challenges them to reach their potential
- To ensure that all students experience equality of opportunity throughout their studies
- To foster a culture where students and staff can contribute to and benefit from a diverse community of artists and designers at the College
- To optimise the accessibility and use of the College's learning resources and spaces

Each of the aims is accompanied by a short contextual narrative, a set of strategic objectives and targets against which progress is benchmarked.

Background

The Royal College of Art is the only wholly postgraduate university institution of art and design in the world, offering MA, MPhil and PhD degrees across the disciplines of fine art, applied art, design, communications and humanities. The College received its Royal Charter status in 1967. The charter commends the College to '*advance learning, knowledge and professional competence particularly in the fields of fine arts, in the principals and practice of art and design in their relation to industrial and commercial purposes and social developments, and other subjects relating thereto, through teaching, research and collaboration with industry and commerce*'.

The College's Mission Statement states that:

"The Royal College of Art aims to achieve national and international standards of excellence in the postgraduate and pre/mid professional education of artists and designers and related practitioners, as a major contribution to cultural, social and economic well-being. It aims to achieve these through the demonstrable quality of its

teaching, research and practice, through its relationship with relevant institutions, industries and technologies and through the achievements of its graduates and staff in the professional worlds of art and design.”

The College is a partner in a number of national learning and teaching initiatives, including the National Arts Learning Network (NALN), the Centre for Learning and Teaching in Art and Design (CLTAD) and the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching through Design (CETLD).

Benchmark Data

Application Statistics

	MA		MPhil		PhD		Places		Ratio	
	2006	2007	2006	2007	2006	2007	2006	2007	2006	2007
Applied Art	113	127	9	6	6	1	40	40	3.18	3.43
Architecture and Design	521	511	6	15	6	5	114	115	4.68	4.62
Communications	363	377	15	8	2	3	60	60	6.33	6.47
Fashion and Textiles	230	283	3	4	3	1	70	69	3.37	4.17
Fine Art	783	761	21	15	11	8	81	75	10.06	10.45
Humanities	163	163	16	18	8	18	42	42	4.45	4.74
Total	2173	2222	70	66	36	36	407	401	5.60	5.80

Student Entry Profile: Declared Disabilities

	MA		MPhil		PhD		Total	
	2006	2007	2006	2007	2006	2007	2006	2007
No known disability	335	340	28	23	1	0	364	363
Declared dyslexic	30	52	2	2	0	0	32	54
Other declared disability	6	4	0	2	0	0	6	6
Total	371	396	30	27	1	0	402	403

Aims

Aim 1: To recruit high quality students from diverse backgrounds on the basis of their ability and potential to succeed at a postgraduate level

The success of the College depends on its ability to attract a high number and quality of student applications. To date it has a successful record in this regard, with a high ratio of applications to places and a roll call of graduates who have become leaders, innovators and eminent practitioners in the professional communities. The College intends to ensure that this success is sustained through the operation of a clear, fair, explicit, inclusive and consistently applied admissions system that selects the students with the most potential and motivation and is recognised for doing so. At present all prospective MA students are invited to submit a portfolio of work, with the shortlisted candidates being called for an interview.

The admissions process is however only one aspect of student recruitment. The College recognises that the quality and number of applications is also dependant on trends within the schools, further and higher education sectors as well in the creative industries. It intends to play an active role in both promoting the vocational and creative possibilities of art and design, and raising aspirations of potential students through a programme of widening participation initiatives. Ambitions that are already addressed through the Race Equality Action Plan and through the work of the Diversity Committee will not be repeated here.

Objectives:

- To advise on diversity and widening participation initiatives at the College
- To enhance the capacity of the College's outreach programme
- To advise on the allocation of funds through the Planning and Resources Committee

Aim 2: To offer each student a highly focused postgraduate education that encourages and challenges them to reach their potential

The College intends to provide an education that equips every student to succeed in his or her chosen professional career. Each student arrives at the College with different aspirations and experiences, and therefore much of the teaching is focused at an individual level. The College hopes to encourage each student to develop their personal brand of imagination and creativity, and to help them acquire the knowledge and skills needed to realise their own personal ambitions.

Much of the responsibility for this is invested in the 2-year Masters programmes offered through the specialised academic Departments, each of which has its own distinctive vision and voice. The College believes in employing educators who practise what they teach, so students can expect to receive support and guidance from leading experts in their chosen fields. The learning experience at the College is characterised

by one-to-one and small group project work, although the extent to which students work to a given brief or are given freedom to develop their own work varies between Departments. The uniqueness of each Departmental curriculum is considered a strength of the College. The College recognises the value of a creative restlessness in curriculum design, whereby modifications are made within and across academic disciplines to reflect changes in the professional and educational contexts in which they operate. The College also seeks to be proactive in developing new models of practice that help to shape those environments.

At a postgraduate level students should take on significant responsibility for the direction of their studies. They are expected to be able to show initiative in how they engage with their peers and interact with the professions, businesses and industries related to their work. They are strongly encouraged to voice their opinions on their course through their regular tutorials, termly course fora and the annual student survey.

Staff are expected to engage in a range of personal and professional development activities to ensure that the curriculum choices that they make are informed by an up-to-date understanding and awareness of educational theory and practice as well as professional concerns. The College has entered into a partnership with the Centre for Learning and Teaching in Art and Design (CLTAD) to ensure that staff have access to opportunities to do this. New academic staff are expected, as a condition of their probation, to engage with professional development according to a series of thresholds that relate to their FTE status. Established staff are provided with financial and time-based incentives to ensure that they also commit to ongoing personal development in relation to their teaching practice. The majority of teaching staff at the College are part-time.

The College ensures that all of these practices are underpinned by rigorous quality assurance mechanisms that monitor and assess the quality and appropriateness of provision across the College. The quality assurance processes of Departmental Reviews and Validations aim to identify the need for change in academic provision and ensure that there is a continuing effort to enhance the quality of the student experience.

Objectives

- To encourage staff to undertake research into curriculum development, the student experience and academic diversification
- To offer staff opportunities to reflect on their teaching practice and curriculum design and to investigate alternative models and methodologies
- To ensure that all new academic staff complete the necessary staff development activities as described in their conditions of probation
- To ensure that experienced staff undertake continuing professional development related to their learning and teaching practice
- To engage students in a dialogue on their experiences through the College-wide student survey and Departmental consultative fora

- To sustain high levels of contact time between students and staff
- To review systematically Department policies and practices through the Review and Validation processes
- To improve the consistency, quality and reporting of feedback that students receive through one-to-one and group tutorials
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Aim 3: To ensure that all students experience equality of opportunity throughout their studies

One of the challenges in offering an education that is focused on the individual is in ensuring equivalence in the learning experience within and across disciplines. The College is committed to enabling students to make best use of the opportunities available to them through fair and easy access to support, and through the consistent application of policies and practices that have a College-wide remit. For example, a new College-wide assessment scheme was implemented in 2006, following a pilot introduction and associated evaluation that began in 2004.

The College recognises that it needs to take an active approach to ensuring this equivalence, and has developed a range of centrally funded and delivered services that provide pastoral and academic support to students. These are designed either to supplement existing Departmental initiatives or to provide an alternative service where there is no existing capacity. Some of these services, such as the Student Support Office and Students' Union, are within the core remit of the College, and others have been developed when a need has been identified. The Student Support Office offers students advice regarding accommodation, money, benefits and financial allowances, disabilities (including dyslexia), childcare, counselling and immigration issues. They work in parallel with the Students' Union, which ensures that the student voice is represented throughout the College and acts as an advocate for individual students where necessary.

In addition, the College has also funded initiatives that address particular issues that impact on students. In many cases, where the need for support is ongoing, these initiatives and the people that have been employed to champion them have become a permanent part of the landscape. For example, the College provides individually tailored learning support programmes that focus on English for Academic Purposes (EAP), dyslexia and dyspraxia, as well as employing staff to enhance practice in relation to e-Learning, Professional Practice and Interdisciplinarity.

Objectives

- To enhance the capacity of staff with a support role through the provision of additional project funding
- To improve the opportunities for staff with a support role to share practice
- To conduct a review of the operation of the College-wide assessment criteria
- To evaluate and advise on the progress of centrally funded learning support services

- To identify and act upon issues that emerge through the student survey and other consultative fora to enhance the student experience

Aim 4: To foster a culture where students and staff can contribute to and benefit from a diverse community of artists and designers at the College

The College represents an opportunity for students to reach across discipline boundaries and develop new ideas and relationships that improve their own practice and add richness to the College community. Students are encouraged to show initiative in seeking out these opportunities but there is also a responsibility of the College to ensure that potential barriers are identified and addressed.

As an example of current activity, since September 2006 the College has employed an Interdisciplinary Co-ordinator for a fixed period to promote creative integration between disciplines and to facilitate the Inter-Disciplinary Critical Forum, a series of evening critiques of students work from different Departments within the College. There have been a number of other examples of successful collaborations between Departments, many of which have been funded through the Learning and Teaching Project Fund.

In addition to representing a mix of professional backgrounds and orientations, the College also strives to develop and support a community of staff and students who are diverse in terms of nationality, age, race, gender, and social/educational background. The College has a standing Diversity Committee whose role it is to take an overview on these issues and to recommend and deliver on necessary actions.

Objectives

- To embed for a for students to interact with students and staff from different disciplines
- To review the potential for improving the induction process through additional pre-sessional programmes
- To develop an integrated schedule of Departmental and College-wide events and notices on the College intranet

Aim 5: To optimise the accessibility and use of the College's learning resources and spaces

The College strives to provide students with access to the facilities that they need to develop their skills and imagination. This brings with it a constant pressure to update techniques and technologies while maintaining established ones. The College recognises the value of situating old technologies with the new, both to give students a wide degree of choice and to help preserve valuable academic traditions and techniques that may be endangered. It is for this reason that cutting-edge technologies such as rapid-prototyping units can sit alongside printing presses that date back to the 19th century.

This places tremendous pressure on space, particularly at the South Kensington site, where there is limited room for expansion. The development of the Battersea site, where the Sculpture Department is currently located, will help to free up additional space to meet many existing Departmental needs and enable the creation of new bespoke facilities where necessary. The College intends to ensure that learning and teaching considerations will be key in informing the planning and construction phase of the Battersea development.

In addition to the physical space available to students, the College has been investing time and resources into developing in parallel virtual spaces for students to work and communicate. For this the College has adopted and adapted two Virtual Learning Environments: RCADE (Royal College of Art Digital Environment) for College-wide communication and Masters-level students and the VRC (Virtual Research Community) to facilitate networking, collaboration and information-sharing for research students. To date, RCADE has been used for cross-College notice-boards, as a repository of course materials and as vehicle for a pilot series of online interdisciplinary tutorials, funded through the CETLD. The College intends to build on this work through the development of an e-Learning strategy and the distribution of £40,000 of HEFCE e-Learning money through a dedicated project fund over a two-year period. It is hoped that this will help to both stimulate innovative thinking and to embed existing good practice.

Objectives

- To improve the coordination and availability of existing internal facilities and services
- To develop an e-Learning strategy
- To review the distribution and condition of Departmental computing facilities
- To distribute the e-Learning project funding in accordance with the agreed priorities

Action Plan

Aims	Objectives	Targets	Target Review Date
To recruit high quality students from diverse backgrounds on the basis of their ability and potential to succeed at a postgraduate level	To advise on diversity and widening participation initiatives at the College	Annual reports on the activities of the Diversity Committee and ReachOutRCA initiative at the LTC	To be reviewed annually by the LTC
	To enhance the capacity of the College's outreach programme	For ReachOutRCA to receive an annual payment of £5,000 of TQEF funds	To be reviewed annually by the LTC
	To advise on the allocation of funds through the Planning and Resource Committee	For the presentation of agreed learning and teaching priorities to PRC	To be reviewed annually by the LTC
To offer each student a highly focused postgraduate education that encourages and challenges them to reach their potential	To encourage staff to undertake research into curriculum development, the student experience and academic diversification	For two Teaching Fellows to have been appointed annually	To be reviewed annually by the LTC
		For the outcomes of the Fellowship projects to be disseminated through the Intranet, and the relevant committees	To be reviewed annually by the LTC
	To offer staff opportunities to reflect on their teaching practice and curriculum design, and to investigate alternative models and methodologies	For the full amount of Learning and Teaching Project Funding to be distributed to a range of projects and Departments	To be reviewed annually by the LTC
	To ensure that that all new academic staff complete the necessary staff development activities, as described in their condition of probation	For all new academic staff to have received confirmation of the successful completion of this part of their probation	To be reviewed annually by the LTC
		For at least 5 staff to have enrolled on the PG Cert course offered by the CLTAD	To be reviewed annually by the LTC

	To ensure that experienced staff continue to undertake continuing professional development related to their learning and teaching practice	For at least 10% of experienced staff to have attended related staff development fora each year	To be reviewed annually
	To engage students in a dialogue on their experiences through the College-wide student survey and Departmental consultative fora	For 50% of students to complete the student survey	May 2008
	To sustain high levels of contact time between students and staff	To monitor student/staff ratios to ensure that they remain at agreed levels	October 2008
		To evaluate the student feedback data that relates to access to academic and technical staff	To be reviewed annually by the LTC
	To review systematically Department policies and practices through the Review and Validation processes	To have reviewed the Quality Assurance review procedures	June 2008
		For the implementation of the recommendations of the review	November 2008
	To improve the consistency, quality and reporting of feedback that students receive through one-to-one and group tutorials	To report on the outcomes on an investigation on the issue of feedback to the LTC	May 2008
To ensure that all students experience equality of opportunity throughout their studies	To enhance the capacity of staff with a support role through the provision of additional project funding	To fund at least 2 projects per year through the Learning and Teaching Project Fund that involve staff with a support role	To be reviewed annually
	To improve the opportunities for staff with a support role to share practice	To hold bi-annual away days for staff with a support role	To be reviewed annually

	To conduct a review of the operation of the College-wide assessment criteria	To report on the conclusions of the review to ASC	May 2008
	To evaluate and advise on the progress of centrally funded learning support services	For each support initiative to present annual reports to the LTC	To be reviewed annually at the LTC
	To identify and act upon issues that emerge through the student survey and other consultative fora to enhance the student experience	The publication of an action plan that addresses issues that arise through student feedback	To be reviewed annually at the LTC in November
To foster a culture where students and staff can contribute to and benefit from a diverse community of artists and designers at the College	To embed fora for students to interact with students and staff from different disciplines	To have run a series of Inter-disciplinary Critical Fora that invite tutors and students from all Departments to critique the work of volunteer students	To be reviewed annually at the LTC
		To have presented a plan for launching a new series of staff-oriented interdisciplinary exchanges to LTC	May 2008
	To review the potential for improving the induction process for students through additional pre-session programmes	For the publication of a set of recommendations	May 2008
	To develop an integrated schedule of Departmental and College-wide events and notices on the intranet	Launch of the new system	October 2008
To optimise the accessibility and use of the College's learning resources and spaces	To improve the coordination and availability of existing internal facilities and services	To have published an expanded version of the Resource guide	October 2009

	To develop an e-Learning strategy	For the publication and dissemination of the e-Learning strategy on the College's Intranet and Web site	December 2007
	To conduct a review of the distribution and condition of Departmental computing facilities	For the presentation of the review findings at LTC	November 2008
	To distribute the e-Learning project funding in accordance with the agreed priorities	For the full amount of the e-Learning Project Funding to be distributed to a range of projects and individuals	June 2009