

**eca**

**Learning, Teaching  
and Quality Enhancement Strategy**

## **Learning & Teaching Strategy**

### **1. Introduction**

This learning and teaching strategy outlines the general principles underpinning the approach to teaching and learning within the College. It describes the philosophy and values informing learning and teaching within the College, and while it identifies various approaches as examples of good practice, it is not intended to offer an exhaustive catalogue or inventory of every individual method.

It should also be noted that while the strategy identifies the shared values across the College, consonant with the College's overall aims and mission, student experience will vary from programme to programme. The precise methods of learning and teaching will vary from academic School to School, in keeping with specific traditions and appropriateness to the subject.

### **2. General College Aims**

The overall aims of the College are as follows;

- to foster creativity and innovation
- to develop practical and analytical skills
- to produce high quality learning opportunities
- to provide excellence in learning and teaching
- to engage in creative research at the highest international level

Accordingly, the stated aims of its general learning and teaching strategy are;

- to ensure a student-centred approach to recruitment; learning, teaching and assessment; support and other services, ensuring clear communications and inclusion underpin a constant striving for academic excellence.
- to enhance and professionalise its academic provision in terms of teaching, learning and research to reflect its unique portfolio and to ensure, through interdisciplinarity, a close fit with the creative industries and its professional and academic partners.
- to ensure the highest levels of academic and resource-based support for both students and academic programmes through a customer-focused, proactive approach to enhancing learning, teaching and research.

### **3. Curriculum**

The subject specialisms provided by the College involve;

- the conception, production, promotion and dissemination of designs, artifacts, images and other expressions of contemporary visual culture
- outcomes that prompt both intellectual and aesthetic responses, from aesthetic artifacts to functional products, systems and services

- images, artifacts and designs drawing on a range of 2- and 3-dimensional visual languages
- images, artifacts and designs located within a range of conceptual, aesthetic, cultural and social contexts
- visual practices that belong in a variety of professional and vocational contexts

Accordingly the curricula of all degree programmes contain some or all of the following elements;

- Key subject-specific skills, including knowledge and understanding of material and technical processes, together with design and visualisation skills, such as drawing or CAD
- Key transferable skills, including creative problem solving, verbal and visual communication, numeracy and other business skills, critical judgement and self-analysis, research, skills of self-management and the ability to work both autonomously and collaboratively, C & IT,
- Knowledge and understanding of vocational context and professional practices, awareness of change, knowledge of business systems, public exhibition, entrepreneurial and client negotiation skills
- Knowledge and understanding of relevant aesthetic, historical, theoretical and cultural contexts

Curricula are designed to ensure a steady progression in the acquisition of these skills, in which both the curriculum structures and the learning outcomes are gauged so as to ensure that in the final level of study students have maximum responsibility for managing and determining the direction and focus of study.

Currently only the schools of Architecture, Landscape Architecture and the Centre for Visual and Cultural Studies operate fully credit-rated modular programmes. However, central to the development of curricula at both undergraduate and postgraduate level is the introduction of credit-rated programmes in all other academic schools, in alignment with the Scottish Credit Qualifications Framework.

Whether fully credit-rated or not, programme curricula are structured into units of study (modules) with specified learning outcomes. These units of study may be further subdivided into projects, which enable students to acquire key skills through engagement with processes of problem solving.

Units of study are divided into three basic types;

- Studio and workshop based learning
- Professional practice
- Critical context (visual and cultural studies, subject histories)

The balance between these may vary from programme to programme, and it is usually also possible for students to determine the balance of these elements, within set minimum parameters.

In addition to the specified learning outcomes for individual units of study, all programmes operate according to defined learning outcomes for each level. This permits students both to grasp the shorter-term requirements of individual units of study and also to develop a longer-term strategic approach to their own learning.

Traditionally, the College has prided itself on the specialist nature of its programmes, which foster highly specific skills among small cohorts of students, with small specialist staff teams. It remains committed to the ethos of the small institution, but also supplements the specialist focus with possibilities of cross-disciplinary learning.

Curricula involve a combination of 'core' elements and optional units of study that enable engagement with other, cognate areas of study encouraging interdisciplinary working.

At level 1 interdisciplinarity is built into the formal structure of the curriculum. This is regarded as central to the curriculum, in keeping with the diagnostic function of level 1 studies. An ongoing strategic development is the integration of architecture and landscape architecture into a combined cross-institutional level 1 studies which had traditionally been focused on art & design only.

At higher levels interdisciplinary study is also available either as a 'second subject' option within certain schools, or on the basis of arrangements between academic schools. It is also of the nature of contemporary practice that older boundaries no longer have the significance they once had, and students are encouraged to approach their subject from a wider variety of disciplinary perspective, regardless of whether they are consciously choosing a 'second subject' or undertaking study in another department.

#### **4. Learning, Teaching and Assessment**

Learning and teaching involve a variety of methods and approaches. However, central to the shared values across the College are the studio and the workshop. Learning and teaching methods include:

- individual studio tutorials
- group discussions (the 'group crit')
- workshop demonstrations
- lectures
- seminars
- formative and summative assessment

The College holds that tutorial and smaller group-based teaching are essential to the fostering of learning in art, architecture, and design, permitting sustained, critical dialogue between student and tutor. The College supports the notion that education in art, architecture and design involves a process of personal development leading to the attainment of a mature reflective practice.

Learning and teaching approaches meet the aim of producing motivated, critically reflective and independent graduates through a graduated approach. In levels 1 and 2 the delivery of programmes is attained by means of structured units of study involving project-based learning, taught through workshop instruction, group and individual tutorials. At these levels learning is primarily tutor-driven.

In higher levels, including post-graduate provision, a much greater emphasis is placed on the student as an autonomous learner. Study is based around a far higher degree of self-directed learning, which in some cases involves student-directed projects and in others individual studio practice negotiated with tutors. Study is learner-centered with an equal emphasis on peer learning.

Postgraduate study is defined almost entirely in terms of self-directed projects and studio practice.

Assessment has two primary functions. It enables students to reflect on their own practice and it also serves as a tool for tutors to gauge students' progress.

Each unit of study has specified learning outcomes which also serve as the assessment criteria. In addition the College has introduced a common assessment and progression system (ECAPS) in order to establish parity of standards across the all programmes and levels within the institution. It is also recognised, however, that such common standards are by nature generic and serve as a framework within which more subject-specific learning outcomes are defined.

The dual purpose of assessment underpins the College-wide policy of employing both formative and summative assessment. Formative assessment (mid-term or mid-year review) is deemed essential where, as is common within the College, units of study can involve extended periods of time, and where students require formal feedback on progress in advance of the final summative assessment.

Feedback from assessment takes a number of forms. Written feedback is common (though not universal across the College) and where written feedback is not offered, feedback is given orally through tutorial meetings.

The College has rigorous procedures for the monitoring of assessment. Student work is usually assessed by at least two tutors, either working as a team or working in parallel as blind markers, Where this is not possible, work is sample marked by a second tutor, and where differences of judgement emerge between tutors, to other senior academic members of staff, act as arbitrators.

Assessment is primarily tutor-led, but at higher levels self-assessment and peer assessment are also employed as means both of enhancing the role of assessment as a *learning* process, and also of increasing student autonomy and reflection.

The College also has a robust appeals procedure whereby students may appeal against the outcome of assessment.

The standards of the provision and of the learning outcomes / assessment criteria are monitored both by external examiners and also by external professional bodies, where relevant.

## 5. Learning Resources

A number of facilities are regarded as key to the support of student learning. These include;

- Studios and specialist equipped workshops
- Lecture and seminar rooms
- Computer and Information Technology suites
- The library

Currently responsibility for operation of studios and workshops lies mostly with individual Schools, but consideration is being given to the some form of centralised provision, where appropriate, in order to maximise access to facilities.

Computer suites are mostly administered by the central department of computing services, but there remain other computing facilities run by individual schools. This is in keeping with College recognition for the need for a generic central provision coupled with more specialist facilities, employing specific hardware and software, which are not appropriate as a central service.

The College has three main lecture theatres and numerous seminar rooms. A recent development has been the installation of networked computer and audio-visual facilities in all lecture theatres, enabling substantial use of IT-based learning. This is part of an ongoing programme designed to draw on the possibilities of C&IT for learning and teaching.

The College Library Service provides information services and study facilities supporting learning and teaching in the College. Library resources support studio- and workshop-based courses; lecture and seminar based courses; and research and information finding activities embedded in taught courses.

The library's physical collections include printed material (books, journals, etc) and audio-visual resources (such as slides, videos and maps). The collections are intended both to support formal course reading requirements, within available resources, and to develop and maintain a rounded, in-depth collection in the subject areas covered by College courses.

As a complement to these physical collections, the library provides access to electronic information such as bibliographic indexes and full text reference sources. These, together with the library's Voyager library catalogue, are organised and made available through the library web page. The library will monitor the developing relationship between physical and digital collections, and the availability and potential of networked electronic learning resources.

The library service recognises the importance of library use and information finding as transferable skills, and aims to offer library use seminars and presentations in support of all taught courses.

The library service currently exists as two physically separate units. The College Estates Strategy envisages their consolidation as a single Library and Information Resource Centre, thereby realising the educational gains of a unified collection and an improved study environment.

The wider resources of Edinburgh as a major European cultural capital are also available to College students. Institutions such as the National Galleries of Scotland, National Museums of Scotland, the National Library of Scotland and other major research libraries, Royal Zoological Society of Scotland and Royal Botanic Garden can all be seen as providing resources for learning in the College, and students are encouraged to take advantage of the possibilities these provide.

## **6. Learning Support**

Learning Support is also central to supporting student learning. As the College meets its strategic goal of internationalising the student body, so specific issues are raised, including language support.

Currently language is provided on a tutorial appointment basis, but as the student demand on the service grows, the basis of the provision may have to change, including formalised English language options as credit-rated units of study and more emphasis on group teaching. No firm proposals have been made yet, but the particular needs of international students are recognised as requiring specific action in the medium term.

In addition to the challenge presented by international students, art & design has a disproportionate number of dyslexic students in comparison with other academic fields of study. The College has dedicated learning support tutors for dyslexic students, and again current methodology is similar to the provision for international students. As the numbers of dyslexic students increase, and in particular, as larger numbers of students are diagnosed, so similar kinds of pressures will be placed on the service, leading to parallel shifts in the nature of the provision.

## **7. Student Employability and Professional Practice**

The College regards it as crucial for students to gain experience of the professional contexts within which they aim to work on graduation. The College supports students in a number of ways.

- Most programmes of study involve a formalised professional practice unit of study, in which students are introduced to basic entrepreneurial and business skills of relevance to future professional life.
- Most programmes also host visiting tutors and lecturers drawn from the professional spheres of art, design and architecture
- Students are encouraged to engage in 'live' projects involving collaboration with external and professional agencies
- Students are encouraged to take part in external competitions in which professional standards apply
- Students are supported in seeking professional placements.

With the exception of the formalised professional practice unit of study, students are not universally awarded credit for professional practice-related activities, although consideration may be given to this possibility.

## **8. Staff Development and Research**

The College regards it as essential to the fostering of learning that students should have a respect for research and scholarship. To that end, staff research is seen as integral to learning and teaching. All academic staff are contractually required to undertake research, and academic staff are seen not merely as teachers but also as role models for students aiming to work as active practitioners and researchers after graduation.

Staff are actively encouraged to integrate teaching and research by, for example, using current research projects as the basis for student projects, or by drawing on research activity in determining curricula of theoretical and critical study modules.

At the same time, it is recognised that while research is essential, indeed central to the College's overall aims, research-led curricula have to be appropriate to the programme learning outcomes.

Responsibility for administration of staff development is, on the whole, devolved to academic departments. As small institution, the College is largely reliant on external agencies, including the QAA, for the provision of learning and teaching related programmes of staff development. Staff are actively encouraged to take advantage of such provision. In addition, the College operates a staff development 'week' outside of the taught term, when a programme of in-house training and development is organised.

## **9. Quality Assurance & Enhancement**

The Accreditation Agreement (2002) with Heriot-Watt University delegates maximum responsibility for quality assurance and standards to the College. The College reports to the University on an annual basis by way of an Annual Quality Report. The Report is discussed by a joint Validation Committee whose membership includes senior University and College staff.

The College strives for continuous improvement of its quality assurance procedures, which are regularly reviewed. Academic standards are assured through a series of committees, boards, internal/validation reviews, internal audit and QAA Enhancement Led Institutional Review (ELIR). The systems used for monitoring and enhancing learning and teaching include;

- Student questionnaires (both for individual modules and for programme levels), which enable students to give feedback about curriculum, learning and teaching and learning support in their programme of study.
- The College places considerable importance on student participation in its quality assurance processes. Students are represented on School and College wide committees.
- School management committees, in which operational issues concerning learning and teaching are considered on a regular basis
- Programme committees, in which academic issues concerning the operation of programmes, including, for example, curriculum, learning and teaching methodologies, assessment, are considered on a regular basis

- The main committee with responsibility for quality assurance and enhancement is the Learning and Teaching Board, which meets regularly to monitor issues and approve proposals both in the context of individual programmes, and across the entire institution, including approval of external examiner appointments. The Learning and Teaching Board reports to the Academic Council (AC). The Academic Council has delegated responsibility from the Board of Governors for academic affairs.
- As a condition of the Accreditation Agreement, the College has established a series of validation and internal Review events. Procedures and guidelines are approved and monitored by the L&TB on behalf of the AC. Validation and Review panel membership includes external representation and student representation. The validation/internal review reports are submitted to the University as part of the Annual Quality Report.
- Postgraduate Studies Committee (PGS), which has responsibility for approving external examiner appointments and applications for MPhil and PhD study, and for monitoring postgraduate student progression and achievement. The PGS reports to the L&TB.
- External examiners. The outcome of all programmes are monitored by external examiners. Currently external examiners are formally employed to monitor degree awards, but it is recognised that in accordance with the SCQF it will become necessary for *all* levels to be subject to scrutiny by external examiners
- The Annual Programme Monitoring Review exercise is reported to the validating University as part of the Annual Quality Report. The outcome, or action plan, from the APMR is monitored by the Learning and Teaching Board.
- A series of Thematic Reviews is to be established which will target specific objectives for review on an annual basis. The review themes could align to the QAA Enhancement Themes. The Review panels will include external representation.
- Some schools are required to meet the specifications of external professional bodies. The College sees professional accreditation as absolutely vital to the viability of such programmes, but it is also introducing study options for students not seeking a professionally accredited programme of study.
- The College will continue to embrace a focus on the management of enhancement; a focus on the effectiveness of student learning; the use of a range of reference points including the Scottish Credit Qualifications Framework (SCQF), the QAA Code of Practice and subject benchmark information.
- The College will continue to participate and engage in QAA initiatives and benchmark with sector wide best practice.
- As part of its commitment to assuring standards and enhancing its provision, the college will continue to review this strategy.