

ADC-LTSN
Art Design and Communication
Learning and Teaching Support Network

LEARNING AND TEACHING

PROJECTS SUPPLEMENT, WINTER 2002

PROACTIVELY SUPPORTING STUDENTS
WITH MENTAL HEALTH DIFFICULTIES

DEVELOPING THE INSTRUCTIONAL
ROLE OF ART AND DESIGN TECHNICIANS



POSITIVE LIFESTYLES

The number of Higher Education students showing mental health difficulties has increased markedly over the last decade. Meeting the needs of these students requires a philosophy of inclusion that proactively promotes a learning environment conducive to positive mental health.

With an increasingly diverse student population now entering Higher Education and the recent legislative changes coupled with QAA guidance on good practice, Higher Education Institutions are having to look more closely at their professional practices and provision to ensure that they meet the rights of disabled students. The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001, for example, outlines a wide range of provision to be addressed. Practices that promote positive mental health constitute not only a proactive approach to this legislation, but also help create learning environments in which students with difficulties can confidently approach their studies...

STARTING in 2001 University College Worcester (UCW) began evolving a project focusing on the mental health needs of Art and Design students. The project was a collaboration between the Art and Design team, the Equal Opportunities Centre, the Disability Co-ordinator, the Counselling Service and the Learning and Teaching Centre. It was further strengthened by agreed collaboration with the London Institute Disability Team who provided useful feedback throughout.

Dr Val Chapman, the Head of the Equal Opportunities Centre at UCW, explained that the project 'emerged from a feeling, both at Worcester and elsewhere, that the mental health of students is of growing concern. On a national level in Higher Education the number of students with mental health difficulties is really increasing. The Association of Managers of Student Services has brought our advice on mental health provision and other studies have been supported by HEFCE in previous rounds of disability funding. So the problem is beginning to be widely recognised.'

In 2001 Dr Chapman wrote UCW's 'Mental Health Policy and Code of Conduct' in which the term 'Mental Health Difficulties' is defined in two broad groupings:

People with a pre-diagnosed psychiatric condition for which they may, or may not, be receiving medical or psychological treatment.

People without any diagnosed condition who experience the onset of emotional or psychological difficulties that significantly affect their capacity to function.

There are many factors that can lead to mental health difficulties for students. The abolition of grants has left many students feeling very worried about the debts they accrue, and taking on work to offset these debts can create additional pressure on top of coping with the demands of their course. Being away from home for the first time can be very stressful and the 18-24 age bracket is known to be a very vulnerable period when, for example, the development of schizophrenia is most common.

Widening participation has seen a large increase in mature students entering Higher Education who often face difficult domestic arrangements fitting their studies around family commitments. At University College Worcester 49% of the students fall into the 'mature' category.

Being aware that mental health was a pressing issue, Dr Chapman made approaches to colleagues in different roles within the Institution. This was very important, she explained, because if a student has a mental health problem that has lasted, or is likely to last 12 months then it comes under the heading of 'Disability'. In this case the Equal Opportunities Centre is responsible for the welfare of the student. However, specific support like counselling operates out of the Student Information and Guidance Centre. There are different points of responsibility, and it was important to approach the project holistically. Involving the Learning and Teaching Centre was also very important as Dr Chapman explained. 'When I looked at course documents I could see many statements that students with mental health difficulties would find really hard to meet. For example "effective communication" or "the ability to empathise with others and work as a team". The very nature of some mental health difficulties would make it very hard for a student to achieve these criteria. The initial stage of the project development began, then, with focus group discussions involving Art and Design staff, the Learning and Teaching Co-ordinator, a Counsellor, the Disability Co-ordinator and myself as the Head of the Equal Opportunities Centre. These discussions helped to raise awareness about mental health, particularly with the Art and Design staff who had their own field of expertise but who you would not expect to be overly confident in issues of mental health diagnosis or provision.'

Peter Hill, UCW's then Disability Co-ordinator, recognised early on that creating an environment for positive mental health was different from dealing with other areas of disability. 'With mental health you may not achieve a resolution. Problems can go on and on, and your best hope is to support a student to go through the course successfully.'

PROJECT AIM

To ensure the most appropriate and effective support for students with mental health difficulties undertaking the Art and Design programme of study at University College Worcester, and to share good practice between UCW and the London Institute.

OBJECTIVES

To raise Art and Design tutors' awareness of the individual needs of students with mental health difficulties in relation to learning, teaching, assessment and the development of transferable/employability skills.

To evaluate the learning and teaching process in Art and Design in relation to how individually of response to learning and assessment is facilitated or disabled.

To develop effective strategies, including revision, to practice and assessment methods, to ensure that students with mental health difficulties can fully and effectively engage with the curriculum.

To collaborate with the London Institute's Disability Team in the development of staff training material, and awareness raising material for students, relating to mental health.

To develop a framework for effective liaison between the Art and Design team, Equal Opportunities Centre, Counselling staff, and Learning and Teaching Centre which can be implemented elsewhere in UCW and other Higher Education Institutions.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES HAVE BEEN ABRIDGED

'With something like physical disability provision can often be made to help a student in obvious ways, like constructing a ramp. But with mental health creating this support structure means dealing with prejudices and stigma. Early on, I sensed that some people were flagging up academic issues almost as a front to hide their own prejudices. If you feel uneasy about working with someone with a mental health difficulty, it is easy to say we can't have that person because they can't meet these academic criteria. But when you dig more deeply you find an underlying prejudice, which is really the problem.'

Maureen Gamble, the Curriculum Leader for Art and Design, explained her motivation for involving her staff and students in the project by describing past experiences with students. 'Often people go into art because they see it as a cathartic experience. They don't consciously think they will approach the course as art therapy, but part of the point of the course is about self-expression. So it touches the personal and the individual in ways that some other subject areas won't. We find that mature students see us perhaps as equals rather than staff and disclose things like breakdowns. Of course, on the enrolment forms these things are not declared. Many people, indeed, don't even think they have any mental health issues until they begin to emerge. Their degree course can be the trigger because it either creates the creative environment for inner things to be expressed outwardly, or because it creates pressure and stress that triggers mental health difficulties. In one module, for example, a mature student went through



ABOVE: Peter Hill, involved in the Mental Health Project in his capacity as UCW's Disability Co-ordinator.

a relationship breakdown which significantly influenced the work produced, starting with roses and sunshine and ending up with something presented in a rat-trap. Another student based her work around personal issues. She had never done art before and she found it was a really amazing thing to get into, opening up her inner self. However, she got very emotional when the academic staff and her peers assessed her work as a 'C' when she thought it was worth an 'A'. We sat in a peer group and she was in a terrible state. In fact, she got so emotional that she actually left the course over it. This was very upsetting for us and was one of the things that led me to get involved in this project.'

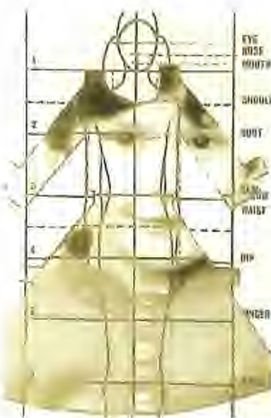


LEFT: Dr John Peters juggling student needs with learning and teaching approaches.



FRONT COVER: Richard Whiteaker and Peter Harris relax during a break at University College Worcester.

RIGHT: Dr Val Chapman, Head of the Equal Opportunities Centre and co-ordinator of the Mental Health project.



A selection of Awareness Postcards developed by students showing a range of mental health problems. The back of each postcard contains information about the 'warning signs' and 'ways of managing' each problem.

CLOCKWISE, TOP LEFT: Stress by Allison Clarke; Self-harm by Kasia Billisch; Depression by unknown artist; Eating Disorder by Jane Glover; Managing Anger by Rachel Thadde; Alex Gordon; Homophobia by Rachel Thadde; Self-esteem by Alex Gordon.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

When the Project Team held focus group discussions other concerns became clear. Staff were increasingly spending more time supporting students pastorally and fewer students seemed able to manage their own learning programme without support. Evidence showed students were increasingly requesting extensions to submission dates, individual mitigation claims had risen and attendance in modules had been less consistent overall. Traditionally Art and Design staff spent a lot of time talking with students on issues that come out of their work, but which then developed in more personal areas. Often students wanted to talk but didn't want to go to a counsellor. The staff felt ill-equipped to deal with students when mental health difficulties emerged, and they found it hard to know how to respond when a student's attendance dropped off for no apparent reason, or when they failed to meet deadlines with no explanation. Staff identified areas they thought sometimes caused problems for students, including working independently, progression through a course, self and peer assessment and working with others in teams.

Dr John Peters of the Learning and Teaching Centre helped the Art and Design staff to reflect on art modules and talk through what might be stress-producing elements. According to Dr Peters an obvious example was negotiated assessment one hundred per cent at the end of the module. 'From a Learning and Teaching point of view this is questionable practice because both staff and student

would want to have an indication of progress at intermediary points and not just the end. This was happening informally, but not formally in terms of feedback to students. Peer assessment is a very stressful thing for many students anyway because it brings an unfamiliar dimension of judgement into relationships between students.' Another area of concern for Dr Peters was the inflexible use of deadlines. 'Our job is to support students so that by the time they leave college they can handle the pressures and rigours of professional life, but that doesn't mean that in first year we throw them in at that level and see if they sink or swim. We need to support students through the process, so they can move towards this end result. So for students submitting work we have to be aware and responsible with the forcefulness with which we impose deadlines. A student is not making the most of a learning opportunity if the pressures of a deadline mean he or she cannot develop the potential of creative ideas. Even in professional life there are situations when timetables are re-adjusted in response to the unexpected, or in response to a changing situation. So if you structure an educational experience in first year to help students learn to deal with things like deadlines, over the next few years you can slowly take away the scaffolding and support so that by the time they leave they are able to function autonomously.'

While maintaining absolute confidentiality, Elizabeth Hewitt, the College Counsellor was able to provide additional information and statistics about

the types of mental health difficulties that students needed support with. Records showed that during 2001 no student with a pre-diagnosed mental health difficulty had requested counselling support. This echoed an audit of applicants to Art and Design courses at Worcester over the previous four years that revealed only one student out of 120 had declared on their UCAS form that they had a pre-diagnosed mental health difficulty. However students developing mental health related difficulties during their degree were certainly coming forward. The counselling service noticed that their busiest time was around assessment and hand-in periods, but that most students came because of relationship breakdowns or other personal difficulties rather than for academic reasons. It also emerged that first semester was the one that students found most stressful and it had the highest drop-out rate.

STRUCTURED DISCUSSIONS WITH STUDENTS

Having come this far, the Project Team then began a series of three Focus Group Discussions with a voluntary representative group of students undertaking a Fine Art Theory and Practice module in Level One. According to Maureen Gamble it was very important that students' experiences were listened to. 'It allowed us to explore students' perceptions of the degree course, and to look at where they had come from, their concerns and aspirations. We could see how the student experience actually developed, charting it through feedback. The first discussion took place in the second week of the semester and revolved around lifestyle management, expectations and apprehensions of degree level study. The second discussion in week seven asked students more specific questions about their initial experiences of the academic and pastoral support systems within UCW and the Art and Design programme. The final interview was conducted at the end of the semester and focused more heavily on individual reflections of the module in relation to learning and teaching, assessment and the development of transferable skills.'

LESSONS LEARNED

Art and Design Team
According to Maureen Gamble the project has helped her, and the Art and Design staff, to think about managing the student experience, trying to anticipate problem areas, and altering delivery accordingly. The use of Learning Journals has been made more private and students can now ask that a selected tutor only read their journal. A range of alternative approaches for students to develop Learning Journals have also been explored, with one student using a large-scale mood board that developed into an annotated collage, and others alternatives include box files of collected material and objects. Regarding peer assessment, this is now done at mid-points in the semester and there is no peer assessment at the end of the module.

Learning and Teaching Centre

Dr John Peters feels that important lessons have been learned about working with diverse student groups. 'When your students have different abilities and needs you are going to have a range of issues to help students overcome. We have some very highly qualified students coming here because they want to



ABOVE: Maureen Gamble, Curriculum Leader for Art and Design, teaching a student group of mixed ages and backgrounds.

stay close to home, and some students coming from a long way away because they have had a bad experience of education and, as a University College, our entry requirements are lower than other Universities. Our mature students have very different needs in their own right. We have a lot of students for whom a pass at degree level is a great achievement. Very often a third class degree is given out to those students who have not bothered to work or turn up, but here many of our students work to their absolute limits to attain that level of degree. One of the reasons they can achieve this is the support structure that we provide. We do it by treating people as individuals recognising where their strengths are and getting them to work together and help each other. This project has emphasised the importance of Student Support Groups where students work on their own projects but are part of a team of peers who relate to each other. Students can help each other using their diversity as a strength, where everyone works towards what they can contribute. I wouldn't have any problem if someone looked at what we were doing here and said this is great for student retention rates. The project didn't set out with raising retention rates as an aim, but of course it cannot help but contribute to this.

For me this project has reinforced how important a small project can be in influencing the way academic staff go about learning and teaching. I feel that small

projects like this are the best way of taking learning and teaching forward and of conducting staff development, where they can get some time and money to explore their own concerns and ideas.'

Equal Opportunities Centre

Although the project has talked mostly of student needs, actually supporting students with mental health difficulties can be very stressful for staff if they don't have sufficient guidance. Some mental health behaviour can be very scary if you don't understand why it's happening. This project has not tried to turn academic staff into counsellors, but has helped them develop awareness. It has helped to give staff comfort levels, knowing exactly how and when to respond to mental health difficulties as they emerge.

Dr Chapman reflected that the project has reinforced the importance of starting with learning outcomes that are accessible to all students involved. 'We are very focused as an institution on starting with learning outcomes, and then looking at the strategies you use to enable students to reach these outcomes. If that means changing your teaching strategy and assessment methods then change them. It is just good sense!' Talking of creating a supportive environment Dr Chapman continued, 'non-disclosure of a mental health problem by a student can be due to a perception that they will be stigmatised. However, it is only when their behaviour becomes



LEFT, TOP: Ron Egginton who previously worked as an engineer, and who decided to develop his interest in sociology and Art and Design by returning to formal education.

LEFT, BOTTOM: Annette Elies exploring three dimensional relationships that are constructed in two dimensional fine art painting.



Russell Charles was involved in the mental health project, taking part in the series of Focus Group Discussions. He talked about his route into Higher Education and his perception of the mental health difficulties that students face.

'I grew up locally and then moved away for a job, unlike many of my friends who went to university. I worked in retail and it was not what I wanted to do but it was a job I suppose. I was increasingly unhappy and feeling that I had potential that was being wasted in my life. I am not a very money motivated person, but I did enjoy working with children in creative activities which was part of my job. Unfortunately the job turned sour and I moved back to Worcester and was at a loss for about a year. I always wanted to go into teaching but without qualifications above 'A' level it was not going to happen. I made enquiries here at UCW in July and was told I could start that September which absolutely knocked me sideways with all the financial implications and changes to my life.



'I have learnt a lot about myself during my time at college. I am a contributor and enjoy group discussion. I like seminars not lectures. I worry I am too proactive to the point of running on beyond my allotted time but I really get something out of the artistic freedom that I am given here. I am doing this fulltime course and a job three days a week as well. The university has really helped me plan this and some of my lectures are in the evening finishing at 9.00PM. I also got married seven weeks ago so there is not a lot else I could have change in my life!

'I felt great pressure to perform when I first started. I was worried about the pace, as I had no yardstick about what was expected of me. The first time I handed in a piece of work I had no idea if would get an 'A' or an 'E'. It has taken time to mesh into the methodology of academic learning. Art is hugely demanding from a time point of view. You can cram an essay together at the last minute if you have to, but you really can't do this with a creative art process and all the background work. Fortunately my wife is very supportive of me being at college and travels

with me to London to look at exhibitions and so on. She has even gone through contorted poses for my photography work!

'There are many stresses that students encounter. When I first became involved in the focus groups for this project there were eight of us, and there are now only four left. The others have dropped out of college for a variety of reasons that include having to go back to work because of financial difficulties. One person was very depressed in an introspective sense and could not cope with the open-minded qualities of the course and could not deal with his ideas being questioned, discussed and challenged. He felt at odds with the institution, which made it very difficult for him to seek help.

'Mature students, like myself, struggle with grades that they feel are low and will attack the grading system, rather than reflecting on their own work. I have sat in the canteen and heard people saying "I just don't know what they want from me". Mature students feel they are having responsibility taken away from them. School leavers, on the other hand, have an overload of responsibility and don't know how to deal with it properly.

'I find self-assessment very difficult judging the value of my own work. If a group give me feedback I find it more useful, but I know that other students find peer-assessment very intimidating.

'This whole project was presented to us not as a mental health project, but as a project exploring how students cope with the stresses of being at college. Our focus group discussions were about time management and ways the course could help us out. Assessment was a theme that kept emerging, as was the use of the Learning Journal.

'I think the Student Learning Teams were very successful. These support groups were really just informal teams of students appointed as a support network to meet and chat about work. We would meet the lunchtime before each session so that we could explain our work to each other. This meant that when we were presenting our work in the wider group we know that at least some peers understood what the work was about and could help others understand too. This really did take a lot of pressure out of the group presentation sessions.'



Alternative approaches to the Learning Journal.

ABOVE: A line file compilation.

LEFT: An annotated panel board.

OPPOSITE: An exploration of self-identity by Emma Barber.

very noticeable that we have to be reactive, rather than proactive. The ethos of an institution has to embrace mental health and this is why we are marking World Mental Health Day with an information roadshow from Social Services, a poetry competition, and the launch of a set of postcards describing mental health difficulties that students produced through this project.'

WIDER IMPACT AND THE FUTURE

There will now be formal processes that spread the learning lessons from this project across the college as a whole. Maureen Gamble has already run a workshop at UCW's Annual Learning and Teaching Conference, and a presentation will be made at the SEDA National Conference in November. Peter Hill has given a training day on mental health for the Midland Universities Administrative Consortium, attended by staff across all Midland universities, and he has no hesitation in saying that his involvement in the project at Worcester gave him confidence to approach this training.

Talking about spreading the lessons of this project farther afield, Maureen Gamble emphasised that it cannot simply be replicated. 'It is a question of each subject area looking at mental health in the context of their own student group. At Worcester the framework and support structure is now in place as a result of the project. But it is not a case of other departments or courses taking a ready-made model. They will have to understand how our students have reacted and apply principles to their own student community in appropriate ways that reflect the characteristics of the student group involved. This goes for other HE Institutions as well.'

SKILLBASE PROJECT

Across UK Art and Design Institutions the role of technicians is changing. Resource constraints and pressures on academic staff mean that technicians are increasingly being asked to undertake greater levels of technical instruction, often moving into 'grey areas' that have traditionally been problematic.

Learning support for technical skills development in Art and Design Institutions is frequently provided by people other than academic staff. The integration of this into the curriculum is complicated by a number of issues including role demarcation, funding and a lack of adequate staff development. As the pressures on academic staff rise the effective utilisation of other people in the development of technical skills becomes more critical. Increasingly, newly appointed technicians are graduates with Art and Design degrees who have aspirations to be involved in teaching, and who may well see a technical position as a stepping stone leading to academic lecturing...

DEVELOPING the role of technical support staff is something the School of Art and Design at the University of Staffordshire has been doing internally for a number of years. From this foundation, a project was developed to look forwards to see how other institutions manage technical skills instruction, in order to identify innovation and promote good practice. The Dean of the School of Art and Design, David Weightman, explained why the project was an important and timely initiative.

'There is a general awareness throughout the Art and Design sector that technicians play a role in technical skills instruction. However, it is seldom formally recognised, and technicians are often neither prepared for it nor rewarded for it. The pressures on academic staff and the reduction of academic staff numbers means that technicians are increasingly being asked to undertake instructional roles. We recognised this about six years ago when we began a process of defining technical instruction as something beyond the normal duties of a technician. We developed a "Learning Support Technicians" pilot scheme in which technical staff were encouraged to develop instructional learning support roles, for which they were recognised and rewarded.'

'It was a sensitive pilot project to get going because technical staff wanted to be sure exactly what was being proposed. There was equally a lot of concern on the part of academic staff who felt that the development of these roles was something that took work away from them. However, we found that a lot of this resistance evaporated because academic staff were increasingly under greater pressure and the pilot was seen as an assistance rather than a threat.'

Tim Mancell, Staffordshire's Art and Design Technical Manager, described the pilot project from his perspective. 'We knew that technicians contributed to technical instruction in an informal way which had grown and grown, and they were doing it as kind of a goodwill thing. We wanted to take advantage of this and reward the technicians as well. It had proved difficult to get the university to take the issue of technicians on board and so we

negotiated with the technicians and with Unison, and formalised a pilot scheme to try to show what could be done. The scheme defined what we were asking technicians to do so that everyone was clear, and it produced a rate of pay that was added on to technicians' salaries. It was for a limited time initially because the technicians were hesitant to sign up to something new, and be locked into a new contract that they couldn't get out of. Equally, from the management side it allowed us to change things as well if individuals didn't work out. To understand the pilot project it is important to clarify the difference between technical demonstration and instruction. Technical demonstration is quite simply demonstrating equipment to students. This is a role that technicians have often fulfilled where an academic tutor is present to manage and deliver the session. Technical instruction is different. The pilot scheme allowed us to remove the academic member of staff from instructional sessions that were then run and managed by technical staff, even though the academic staff member was still responsible for the module and content of instruction.'

Using the experience of this pilot project as a foundation, David Weightman and his team secured funding from ADC-LTSN to explore the role of technicians across UK Art and Design Higher Education Institutions. This survey began with a postal questionnaire, and was then followed up with interviews at four institutions.

THE POSTAL SURVEY

Questionnaires were sent out to a total of 81 institutions, of which 41% responded. Just about all of the respondents perceived technical skills delivery to be of significant importance. One respondent even went so far as to comment that 'if funding in real terms falls any further then I doubt whether the University sector will be able to consider skills acquisition part of the curriculum'.

About three quarters of respondents to the questionnaire said they had a strategy in place to deal with technical skills delivery. The most common methods included reviewing and redefining staff roles, undertaking staff development activities and



PROJECT AIMS

To survey current practice in technical skills delivery in UK Art and Design Institutions.

To identify areas of need and opportunities for development.

To identify innovative practice.

moving to school-based open access technical support rather than course-based facilities. A small number of respondents stated using graduate teaching assistants for the delivery of technical skills instruction, but no respondent had considered using peer learning schemes specifically for technical skills acquisition. Some institutions saw value in an instructional role for the development of postgraduate students.

The majority of respondents stated that technical skills were delivered as part of the formal curriculum with technical skills being defined as learning outcomes in module outlines. It was common practice for technical skills sessions to be run in parallel to the rest of the module. Practically all of the respondents said that skills instruction is included in the job description of technical staff but only half of these institutions said that this activity was used as a basis for appraisal.

Following the survey, interviews were conducted at four Art and Design Institutions across the UK representing very different geographic locations as well as institutional characteristics. Reflecting on the survey David Weightman could see similarities between experiences at Staffordshire and elsewhere. 'Ninety five per cent of respondents said that their technicians undertook some form of technical instruction. However, technicians' job descriptions generally use fairly vague terms and the specifics are unclear. Does demonstration include students watching first and then repeating afterwards to show they understand? What level of advice are technicians expected to offer? When you look across the UK, a vast array of practices have been tried involving technicians in activities equivalent to instruction. These include converting them onto the bottom part of the lecturer grade, paying technicians academic part-time hours to run instructional sessions, or paying overtime to do evening workshops. All sorts of ideas have been tried to make the situation work and very few places have been able to sort it out.'

Lorna Paton is a Technician Instructor working in Staffordshire's Ceramics and Plaster Workshop. 'I've worked in the University for over 20 years, starting out in ceramic technology, then in mould-making and plaster working in support of lecturers. In those days you didn't need to know the skills of



ABOVE AND LEFT: Lorna Paton, Technician Instructor in Ceramic and Plaster Workshop, guiding students in the use of plaster lathes.

LEFT: Tim Mancell, Technical Manager and Resources Division Leader, who has been a vital link between academia and technical support staff.



RIGHT: David Weightman, Dean of the School of Art and Design, University of Staffordshire, and Co-ordinator for the Skillbase Project.

the department because it was really a 'tech and carry' role for the lecturers. I found this a bit limiting and took whatever courses that I could so that I got qualifications within the university while I was doing my job. Over the years I have worked with some very highly skilled lecturers and it has been an ongoing training for me.

'My role has changed significantly over the years and now all the instructional and technical skills for plaster modelling and mould-making are done by me. I have produced a basic information handout for the students, but their work is so individual that I work on a one to one basis most of the time. Projects can range from something very basic to something very complicated, and from functional items like a dinner service to a sculptural piece. I am not involved in the assessment of students' work in any formal way. From the finished result academic tutors assess the design of a piece of work. If the student is able to produce a final fired and glazed piece of work then the technical production skills are sort of taken for granted by the assessment tutors.'

'Technicians from industry would probably find it a big shock coming to work in the university environment. In industry technicians produce very high quality moulds because they have to last, whereas we are just producing prototypes for only a few pieces. Also, here mistakes are important. If you take every pitfall out of a student's way they will never understand that problems can happen and never learn how to deal with them. I suppose I sort of straddle industry and education with a foot in both camps.'

Technicians like Lorna Paton are apparently becoming something of a rarity as the profile of newly appointed technicians changes. Tim Mancell pointed out that a lot of newer technicians are graduates from Art and Design degree courses who see the technician job as a stepping stone into an academic post. They are very enthusiastic about having an instructional role and want interaction with students. It is job satisfaction as much as anything, said Tim, because they get recognition and kudos from staff and students alike. It is a big transition time and, of course, the technology itself is moving so fast.

PLANNING FOR TECHNICAL STAFF TRAINING

Recognising all these changes, Staffordshire used their pilot project to respond to the development and training needs of their technical staff. Tim Mancell described how things evolved. 'Some time ago I was approached by two of our technical staff asking to go on an in-house 'presentation skills' workshop. However, afterwards they reflected that the workshop was geared to academic staff in a 'talk and chalk' type situation and was not relevant for technicians in a practical environment. Following this I brought together the Staff Development Officer and our technicians to tease out what was needed. We got three outside training companies to work out a package for our technical instructors, and we then developed a two day course which all our technical instructors went on. The feedback was really good. Elaborating on the training needs of technical staff Tim explained how Staffordshire have developed a

Skills Matrix that defines the skills that specific technical staff need to carry out their roles. 'Technicians were involved in the creation of the Skills Matrix' said Tim. 'We are just starting to use it now and it has really helped to identify and justify what training technicians need, keeping things in reality. We don't want to raise expectations inappropriately, and we need to keep a balance between what development opportunities we can offer technicians and the role they are being asked to perform. The Skills Matrix helps us with Quality audits and with Health and Safety audits where we can show exactly which technicians have which skills and training. It also helps me bid for staff development training funds within the school.'

'Recently one of our technicians asked to go on the University's Post-Graduate Teaching Certificate. This clearly shows commitment and ambition but has been quite difficult to respond to for various reasons. However, I have a date fixed with the Staff Development Officer to discuss developing some kind of equivalent qualification for technicians. This could be run not just for Art and Design technicians but for the whole university, and we could also expand it into local FE institutions too.'

PEER LEARNING AND TEACHING ASSISTANTS

Peer learning and the use of teaching assistants are areas that Staffordshire's project showed to be highly relevant with regard to skills instruction. From his own experiences David Weightman is very clear about the need to develop formal peer learning in technical instruction. 'We can all think of times when we have been helped in technical things informally by a fellow student. But the whole issue of students working in groups is not something that Art and Design has grasped properly. We all talk about it and know that when students go into professional practice the majority of them will work in teams. But we don't prepare people very well for this. Peer learning should be part of this process. I have experience in America of final year students assisting in first year classes and very interesting dynamics occur. We have a version of this in our Media Production course at Staffordshire where second years crew for final year students. It suits a course like this where the jobs of lighting, camera work, sound and so on need to be undertaken by a team of people. Similar things happen in other areas like glass-making too but we have only scratched the surface of how this can be developed across the School.'

The contribution that peer learning can make to technical skills acquisition was echoed by students involved in Staffordshire's Media Production course. Gemma Nissen explained that 'as second years we crewed for final years which was great. Third years told us their projects, contracts were exchanged and crews made up. If you didn't know how to do something another member of the crew would show you and very quickly you learnt. I thought I would have to be passive working with final years, but it was not like that and they really wanted suggestions and advice, working as equals. Then the technicians are always on hand to help as well. If we have any problems on location we can ring them. I have their mobile numbers and have rung at weekends before to get some emergency advice! They must love us!'



'The media centre is open-plan which really helps as you can turn to someone on the next machine and ask for help. Everyone really likes the layout because there is no sense of a first year area or second year area. We are all in there together.' Neill Jones, another Media Production student pointed out that 'new equipment is coming in all the time. When I was in second year we had new editing software arrive which I was able to get to know better than the third year student I was working with, so peer learning can go both ways.'

A future direction that David Weightman feels worth considering is to look at combining post-graduate study and technicians' roles. 'A few years ago we

tried positions that were half-time MA and half-time technician. These were sort of equivalent to the American MFA practice where people sign up for a two or three year MA, and do some studio teaching so they develop into lecturing staff over the course of their study. We have thought about something similar to this orientated to technical instruction. If we can link this with an assistant teaching scheme then there are a number of possibilities that could be explored. But I have to stress that these ideas are to develop and expand the role of our technicians and not to replace technical staff with something different. Graduate schemes and the like are quite volatile, with people being around for a few years and then moving on. We need the stability and long-term experience of technicians. Remember also that technicians fulfil many other roles like maintaining and repairing equipment, and these areas are not going to be undertaken by teaching assistants.'

TECHNICAL SKILLS AND THE CURRICULUM

Structuring technical skills into the Staffordshire Art and Design curriculum is an ongoing task being addressed by Brian Griffiths, the Associate Dean and Learning and Teaching Co-ordinator. Although they may sound like 1970's cheerleaders, 'modulettes' are, in fact, a way of quantifying the technical skills component within a module, as Brian explained. 'Modulettes relate to the technical skills expected of students and are really just self-contained



ABOVE: Warren Best, Technician Instructor in 3D workshop teaching angle grinding.

LEFT: Abbey Foxford, Kathy Plaskitt, Gemma Nissen and Neill Jones 'crewing' together as an activity in their Media production course.

LEFT: Darcy O'Bree, Digital Media Studios Manager advising Peter Adams in animation.

CENTRE: Heidi Crabbe, Snr. Technician Instructor in Photo/Digital Print.

RIGHT: Dan Hopkins, Technician Instructor in Digital Media, teaching Protocols editing.

RIGHT: Sue Stinner, Snr. Technician Instructor in Surface Decoration discussing allacreming.

BELOW: Paula Andrews, Snr. Technician Instructor in Glass in the background, as Diling Chong has her first experience in the 'hot shop'.



programmes of technical skills within each module. We have tried to come at it from the students' perspective, laying out technical skill in the modulettes based on the QuickStart series of books. Apart from some cases of awareness, we try to ensure that modulettes only cover skills that students are actually going to use in a module. Modulettes have a standard structure of two hours for 15 students, decided by technicians as being the optimum arrangement; one hour of demonstration by a technical instructor, followed by one hour of students trying out the technical skills involved. Now, this is the standard and of course some are shorter or longer, or run with smaller student numbers. Of course, in a group of 60 students it means that the modulette is run four times. Each modulette has an element of verification at which point a student's competence is checked.

'We did a lot of consultative work on assessing the technical skills involved in the making of a piece of work and we have tried to draw a boundary between technical skill and it's application. We want to make sure that students have technical skills appropriate to their creative work. Towards this end, we recognise different levels of competence. The basic level is awareness, where a technical instructor will simply make a student aware of a process. The student may never actually use the process themselves, but need to be aware of how it functions in their field of work. This is the basic level of skill instruction and has no verification. The highest level of technical skills can be seen in something like oxyacetylene welding, where we specify the making of an artefact that proves the student is competent and can apply all the health and safety points. When a student completes a modulette and is verified as being competent they are 'badged up' and issued with a license to use the workshop on their own. Of course there are many other levels in between. Take the Macintosh Lab, for example, where there are protocols which are really to do with the care of other people's work in the digital environment. Competence in this situation is about being responsible, but not so much about health and safety or blowing up the building! So, we have looked at all areas of technical instruction across the board and set down what we feel to be appropriate expectations and standards.

Now we need to go back and look at our modules and really think about the assessment of technical skill modulettes. In some cases where technical skills are absolutely vital, it may well be that failure of the modulette means failure of the module. This is something that will have to be discussed by each course leader and is really the next step.'

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Looking at the feedback from UK Art and Design Institutions produced by this project, it is clear that problems of technical instruction within the curriculum are widespread. 'It was a much bigger problem than we had at first thought' said David Weightman, 'and it touched universal chords about how students develop the skills they need to do their work. We used to have an 80:20 practical/theoretical ratio but we are building up the theoretical because we haven't got the resources for students to spend so much time doing things that need workshops. How we cope with this is something we are struggling with. If we don't get to grips with it then students eventually will stop making things and that will be a great loss for Art and Design.' Reflecting on the Skillbase Project, David and his team have made three recommendations for consideration:

Exploration of the wider use of Graduate Teaching Assistants and other peer learning schemes.

Greater consideration of the feasibility of using online and other support materials for technical instruction.

Better training and development for people in paracurricular roles to optimise their vital contribution to the learning process of Art and Design students.

Through this project Staffordshire have made strong working links with other Art and Design institutions and the potential to explore these recommendations is certainly there. 'We conceived this project as the research stage of an FDTL 4 bid' said David 'and we have devised a working structure where a group of five institutions work together for the first year and then find another two or three institutions each to work with for the next year so it keeps expanding. We already have interest from institutions wanting to be involved in both the first and second year. This project has clearly shown that academic managers are simply not well enough resourced for academic staff members to be delivering instructional sessions. Increasingly, online or CDROM instruction will become utilised and we saw in Bristol how they sometimes video demonstrations made by technical instructors and Hertfordshire have done more in developing online resources so that people can have access on demand. Having got over the disappointment of not getting the FDTL 4 bid I think we have to go back to our partners to see if we can do something anyway. There is a real need for research in this area that can lead to the development of good practice. Our proposed course for Technical Staff along the lines of the Postgraduate Teaching Certificate is something that our FDTL 4 project would have developed. I think there is a real need for this and we should be thinking about developing further ideas through the ADC-LTSN network. As usual, however, it is a case of finding the financial resources to support developments.'



RIGHT: Brian Griffiths, managing the task of integrating technical skills learning and verification into the curriculum.

'It is important to remember that we started out with a fairly sophisticated "learning outcomes" driven curriculum. Then we developed "learning support" technicians, moving into what we have now which is "learning instruction". Then we looked at early modulettes, and developed to where we are today.

FUNDED PROJECTS

ADC-LTSN LEARNING AND TEACHING PROJECT FUND

- Phase 1 (2000)**
Using Training & Learning Forums with Creative Network
 Critical Discourse: An investigation into the discourse of the 'self' in a design learning environment. The Faculty of Art & Design, Deventry College.
- Phase 2 (2000)**
 BALLBASE (The role of the technician and development of AAO Learning) Deventry University.
- Phase 3 (2000)**
 The development of pedagogy in relation to learning how to learn: The London College of Fashion/London Institute.
- Developing Web based Interactive Multimedia Resources for Art and Design*
 The Robert Gordon University, Gray's School of Art and Design.
- A collaborative approach to ensuring effective and appropriate support for students with mental health difficulties on the Art and Design Programme at Brunel University College Woodrow, Brunel University.*
- Methodologies for Learning, Teaching, and Assessment in Art and Design*
 Nottingham Trent University and Newcastle Metropolitan University.
- Effective Assessment in Art & Design: The London Institute*
 Royal College of Art, Westminster School of Art (ICAD).
- Phase 4 (2000)**
 Developing Professional Studies for Art, Design and Communication Students: The Art Institute of Birmingham.
- Professional Learning Strategies in art and design*
 Kent Institute of Art and Design.
- Understanding Individual Learning Needs as an approach to Self-Developmental Behaviour in Design*
 Creative Students, University of Northumbria at Newcastle.
- Phase 5 (2001)**
 Developing Online Resources for Diploma Students in Art and Design, Gray's School of Art, The Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen.
- Mapping the context between academic, vocational knowledge and academic understanding of Art*
 Department of Design, Fine & Applied Studies, University of West, Aberystwyth.
- Teaching and Assessing an Innovative Creative Skills Learning Programme*
 School of Art and Design, University of Ulster.
- Developing a Research Training Institute Concept for the Web-Enhanced Institute of Art and Design*
 University of Central England.
- Methodology Studies: New Strategies for the Postgraduate Designer*
 School of Art & Design, Brunel University.
- Workshops for Mapping the Material, Material, Theory and Practice in the Learning of Multimedia Content*
 Department of Music Arts, University of Luton.
- Moving from online to learning tools*
 L.O.S. Team, University of Ulster.
- What is happening in Media and Communication research?*
 School of Art and Communication, University of Northumbria, and Liverpool John Moores University.

CULTURAL STUDIES PROJECT FUND - May 2001

- Including culture assessment practice - a strategic approach*
 Sherrill Hutton University.
- Evaluating pedagogy in current media for an enhanced definition of employability*
 Liverpool John Moores University.
- Developing Community Media Practice in the context of Media & Cultural Studies (MCS) at Nottingham Trent University (NTU), Nottingham Trent University.*
- A collaborative project in the research and development of self-directed learning for a new postgraduate media*
 University of Luton, Luton, Bedfordshire.
- Learning by producing student journals*
 Earl Sze University College.
- Evaluation of Cultural Studies Work Placements*
 University of Luton, Bedfordshire.

PEDAGOGIC RESEARCH PROJECT FUND - May 2002

- Personal Commerce for 'Reflection' on Creative Practice*
 School of Media and Performing Arts, University of Ulster.
- Assessing the usability of online resources in Media Studies Professional Studies curriculum*
 Birmingham Institute of Art and Design, University of Central England.
- What's the over-the-top full? Models of theory and practice in art and design undergraduate research*
 School of Art, Media and Design, University of West, College, Newport.
- Evaluating a Web Based Personal Assessment Planning and Assessment Tool for Creative Practice*
 Gray's School of Art, The Robert Gordon University.
- Assessing critical and contextual understanding in the final year of the BA Fine Art Degree course*
 Anglia Polytechnic University.
- Staff and student conceptions of assessment using learning outcomes in Art Design and Communication*
 London College of Fashion, London Institute.

Further details about funds, procedure for application and projects funded to date are available from the ADC-LTSN website - www.bton.ac.uk/adc-ltsn/projects.htm.

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