Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy 2012-16

Revised version, December 2012.

The LTAS 2012-16 identifies our aims in the design, delivery and management of Goldsmiths programmes, highlighting our established areas of strength and new aspirations. It is a framework from which we can develop previous achievements, respond to national initiatives and embrace our evolving research culture.

Goldsmiths’ Mission is to offer a transformative experience, generating knowledge and stimulating self-discovery through creative, radical and intellectually rigorous thinking and practice.

The student learning experience is embedded in our Values: to encourage intellectual curiosity and individuality, to offer inspiring opportunities for personal and social development (including the life skills of employable and enterprising graduates) and to ensure a responsive and collaborative learning environment that nurtures talent.

By maximising the interactions between teaching and research we can continue to cultivate a unique and creative approach to all our subjects, that builds on our diverse strengths through interdisciplinary imagination.

Our graduates should be equipped with the skills, knowledge and understandings that prepare for careers and life. We are committed to a continuing relationship with our graduates, through active engagement and support. Our students leave Goldsmiths as part of a global network of fellow graduates, tutors, professional colleagues and employers with whom they have engaged during their studies.

There are 7 Strategic Aims in the LTAS 2012-16.

Dr Michael Young, Pro-Warden (Students and Learning Development)
1. Research-informed and practice-based teaching

Widely acknowledged as a kite-mark for excellence in higher education, the integration of research with teaching ensures curriculum value, innovation in learning and a high quality student experience. Enquiry mindedness, critical engagement and high-level communication skills are developed through this experience. In this sense, we are all learners: researchers and students alike.

We should encourage sharing and dissemination of research output to students, researchers, participants, policy makers and the public, to provide support for strengthening learning in a research-rich environment through Goldsmiths Research Online and support for Open Access to research.

Research as knowledge production is fundamental to postgraduate and research programmes, but it can be less obvious how research enters teaching at HE levels 3-6. At all levels of learning and teaching, the qualities associated with research practice should be well represented:

a) **Learning and assessment methods should mirror research processes** whenever possible, getting close to ‘what staff do’. Students are participants, engaged in inquiry-based student-centred learning, with clear ownership of tasks and involved in peer review of outcomes. This is particularly evident in final year undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, but should be embedded at every stage.

b) **Students should understand the nature of research and knowledge production in their subject**, beginning at the first stages of their programme. Critical analysis of research presents knowledge as created, uncertain and contestable.

c) **Teaching should offer a balance between research-led and research-orientated activities.** Although the curriculum should represent current research and faculty expertise, often delivered through the transmission of information only, students should also learn about research methods, explore first-hand the processes by which knowledge is produced, and staff should foster a research ethos through their teaching.

d) **All students should be inducted into the research activities of their academic department**, and individual staff activities whenever possible, to understand how research is produced, organized and disseminated in their subject and profession. We should always emphasise the positive consequences for students of staff involvement in research and make clear to them the employability elements of research.

e) **Curriculum design should strongly reflect Goldsmiths’ strategic research aims:** to build a collaborative, interdisciplinary culture, maintain linkage between theory, practice and societal impact, and promote internationalism.
2. Assessment cultures

Assessment is central to learning. Goldsmiths offers many innovative learning experiences in curriculum and delivery, and assessment methods should be equally ambitious, integrated with research and practice-based methods when possible.

We should encourage innovative approaches to assessment that are transparent and engaging, and which ensure the learning experience is coherent within and across taught courses. This entails prompt and constructive feedback, whether delivered in written or other forms, in response to assessment activities. We should always actively support and monitor early career academics and visiting tutors as they develop expertise in assessment.

a) **Assessment for learning, not just assessment of learning.** The integration of formative and summative assessment ensures that students have opportunities for preparation, with constructive feedback before they are summatively assessed. Assessments should be linked within and across modules, in order to ensure a coherent progression through the programme (irrespective of the diversity of options available to each student).

b) **Develop students’ understanding of assessment processes.** Accurate assessment depends on complex professional judgements based on associated criteria and standards, understood within each discipline and its methodologies. Criteria and standards are best demonstrated through active discussion with students around exemplars, appraising assessors’ responses to previous work. Although explicit criteria are essential, these cannot capture all the different aspects of quality.

c) **Deploy self- and peer-assessment methods** to enable students to learn more about themselves as learners, the value of collaborative activity, as well as about the way they can be assessed. A common understanding and sense of validity and trust can be fostered through collaborative activity. Interdisciplinary and collaborative work is increasingly part of student experience, related to graduate and postgraduate attributes that should be properly developed and appropriately assessed.

d) **Use a comprehensive range of assessment methods** to ensure the diverse abilities of students can be demonstrated. We should provide opportunities free from barriers and bias. Methods other than the essay and the unseen exam should be explored. Reliability is not the only factor when selecting an assessment type: it should be best method to address both immediate goals and the longer term learning experience. This may entail, for example, students’ input into the type of assessment and the criteria that are applied. A wide range of skills, including transferable and employability skills, should be developed and directly assessed alongside disciplinary knowledge. A programme-wide perspective on the range and scheduling of assessments is therefore necessary.
Devise assessments in which students demonstrate the intended programme outcomes, not just specific aims of individual modules or tasks. So programme outcomes should reflect what students can achieve: they should be fit for this purpose.

3. Internationalism, diversity and widening participation

We have a collective responsibility for supporting academic literacies for all students, on all programmes, and at all levels.

Goldsmiths is committed to widening participation (as outlined in our Access Agreement) and to develop our international profile. Success in recruitment means recognising the diversity among both our potential applicants and our current student body, while also fostering the shared purpose expressed in our Mission and Values.

a) Engage with the diverse range of needs and abilities of our students in our learning and assessment methods, with knowledge of students' prior experience and learning. This includes addressing the needs of Visiting and Exchange Students. This will also entail producing resources and teaching materials accessible to students from many cultures and backgrounds.

b) Provide academic support that is both proactive and responsive, both in normal teaching contexts and on demand, particularly for students with identified needs, such as disabilities. We must ensure our admissions and retention processes provide data that supports oversight of student progress, and that students who require additional support (e.g. after a delay in progressing from one level to the next) are monitored and receive active guidance from their academic department.

c) Support the international student learning experience, particularly through English Language provision and professional services activities.

d) Develop curriculums that reflect our world-reach: our offer should reflect the global agendas in our research and address the needs and interests of the best applicants from our local area, and nationally and internationally.

e) Respond quickly to changes in demand in both curriculum and mode of delivery and find ways of making participation in educational activities available to a wider public, wherever feasible. This might be achieved, for instance, through the wider use of e-learning, and wider engagement with iTunesU and MOOCs.
4. Graduate employability

Graduate and postgraduate employability is a key priority in national policy. Goldsmiths must demonstrate how its unique portfolio across the creative arts, social sciences and humanities brings significant benefit to both the private and public sectors, demonstrating our commitment to higher education’s role in economic growth as well as social and cultural development. Students should have opportunities to develop deep understanding of social responsibility and global awareness such that they can contribute locally and globally to future social, economic and ecological well-being.

The success of our graduates measures the impact of our programmes and learning and teaching methods. ‘Employability’ involves a continuous process of reflection, evaluation and decision-making that uses self-management and career building skills, with self-awareness of dispositional factors. Through these processes students can demonstrate generic and discipline-related skills relevant to the workplace and beyond. Academic departments should balance induction into an academic discipline with equipping students for life and employment.

a) **Ensure students develop a wide range of attributes and skills that lead to academic achievement and offer a foundation for career success.** The creative, entrepreneurial, critical, reflective and social skills, as well as the information and digital literacies developed while studying are also essential abilities that employers value highly. Academic departments should guarantee that skills relevant to discipline-related career opportunities are directly taught and assessed.

b) **Increase the proportion of students participating in Careers Service (CS) activities**, including one-to-one consultations, group projects, talks and events and employer-facilitated opportunities (Fairs, industry panels, placements, off-site visits etc.). Academic departments should collaborate with the CS to create shared 'employability' schemes, either extracurricula events or, preferably, a coherent series of activities integrated within an accredited course.

c) **Devise effective personal development programmes that attract sustained student engagement.** Students should be aware of graduate career opportunities from the earliest stages of their academic programme, and the range of skills these may require. Students should develop their capacity for self-appraisal and independent goal-setting, in order to map their developing abilities to those skills requirements.

d) **Enhance academic programmes so that career-related experiences are offered, validated and supported**, preferably with accreditation where feasible. This could include work placements, community-based volunteering, integration of academic study with ongoing paid employment, sandwich courses. Academic departments should consider the Higher Education
Achievement Report as a model for validation and recognition of students’ learning and achievements outside of normal assessment procedures.

e) **Further develop partnerships with external organisations** – community-based, industrial, commercial and third sector etc. – in order to create new learning opportunities for our students.

5. **New resources and approaches for teaching and learning**

The Goldsmiths Learning Enhancement Unit (GLEU) is responsible for providing all staff with scholarly and principled guidance about learning and teaching, to encourage debate in pedagogical theory and practice, and offer support for individual projects in teaching development (e.g. through the fellowship scheme). Academic departments should facilitate and encourage staff to engage in applied pedagogical research that enhances their own teaching practice and may contribute to the H.E. teaching research agenda.

During the period of the last LTAS 2007-11, the VLE learn.gold has become central to our delivery of programmes, offering a platform for electronic materials, interactive online learning, and online assessment (submission of work, feedback and other class-based communication, and related moderation processes).

a) **Ensure our teaching practice is informed by evidenced-based research and established best practice in the higher education sector.**

GLEU continues to have a central role, to disseminate examples of best practice, facilitate interaction between academic colleagues across departments, support projects in teaching practice development and coordinate the Learning and Teaching Forum. Goldsmiths Research Online, managed by the Library, provides the platform for sharing research in Goldsmiths and more widely.

b) **Deliver a consistent and high quality online presence across all programmes** and modules in order to offer an equivalent, excellent experience to all students. Active monitoring of our online presence is required of both GLEU and host departments.

c) **Continue to develop a range of tools, methods and opportunities for academic staff** to realise their designs for learning that stimulate, challenge, and motivate students. In particular, promoting tools and methods that involve interactive online learning. We should ensure these are well supported, in resources and staff support.

d) **Provide all necessary technical and infrastructure support and resources** to facilitate innovation and experiment in academic and learning development. Renewed development of e-learning resources must be supported by commensurate development in infrastructure and staff support.
We should seek to enhance Library facilities, providing excellent space and resources to create stimulating learning environments.

e) Ensure academic staff and students are fully supported with access to training in the use and development of e-resources, including learn.gold, Mahara, Big Blue Button, electronic journals and e-books and bibliographic software, as well as iTunes U and Web 2.0/social media. We must ensure staff and students can benefit from the global open access movement, by working to promote the literacy and fluency that teachers and learners require to participate in newly diverse forms of academic communication.

6. Recognising and rewarding teaching

Higher education teaching deserves recognition and support, independently of, or aligned with, recognition and support for research careers. Although a basic tenet of teaching excellence is its integration with research, teaching should be informed by a wider understanding of disciplinary scholarship, awareness of proven, effective and creative strategies for teaching, and student-centred thinking. The quality of our teaching is dependent on the engagement and expertise of all staff.

Teaching excellence can be measured by student satisfaction data, but we should seek other measures that enable staff to make evidence-based claims for excellence, as well as ensure we have agile support and monitoring mechanisms which provide confidence that our teaching meets required standards.

a) Support and monitor the teaching practice of early career academics, through enrolment on the accredited Management of Learning and Teaching in Higher Education programme, but also through more informal mechanisms within departments (such as peer observation between colleagues) as well as the Graduate Tutor’s Induction Programme.

b) Provide a comprehensive portfolio of courses, workshops and induction programmes for all academic staff. Departments and the wider institution should collaborate to offer suitable training and developmental activities. Even experienced staff can be challenged by new thinking in pedagogical research and new opportunities provided by e-learning.

c) Encourage academic staff at all levels to seek acknowledgement of their teaching excellence. This can be most readily achieved through the fellowship scheme offered by the Higher Education Academy, based on the UK Professional Standards Framework.

d) Develop our reward and recognition processes by supporting Goldsmiths fellowships and awards schemes. Departments can facilitate
these schemes by encouraging staff engagement and ensuring that fellowship projects are fully supported by release from other activities.

e) **Review our criteria for academic promotion to ensure that demonstrable teaching excellence can be rewarded.** Staff must be facilitated in compiling an evidence-base, analogous to that generated through disciplinary research activities, which can support any application for promotion.

### 7. Effective administrative processes

The consultation process for the LTAS 2012-16 reveals the significance of administrative processes that support the other Strategic Aims. Our objective is to continue to improve the efficacy of these processes, to enable academic staff and students to be supported, ensure effective delivery of our Quality Assurance procedures and facilitate all new initiatives that relate to learning, teaching and assessment.

a) **Encourage both professional services and academic departments to adopt a student-centred, empathetic approach** to all matters concerned with learning, the student experience and academic/pastoral support, as well as in the underlying administrative processes that deliver this

b) **Review our governance and committee structures,** so they are fully responsive to learning and teaching development, allowing agile and creative responses to internal and national agendas. We should ensure that student representation is comprehensively embedded in our structures so that the student voice is actively considered in all decision-making.

c) **Develop our IT services,** in order to enhance the learning and teaching experience.

d) **Develop the Student Centre to ensure we provide excellent support for learners,** from application to enrolment, through to graduation.

e) **Review our internal regulatory framework** to ensure that all student-related, teaching and assessment procedures are clear, functional, accessible and readily implemented.