

College of Arts Learning and Teaching Plan 2014

1. Headline statement of strategic direction and context

The College of Arts seeks to promote a culture among both staff and students which values inquiry-based learning and imaginative teaching, building on the traditional strengths of an Arts degree in developing graduates who can make a positive contribution to society. It wishes to

- highlight the importance of learning and teaching through incentives and reduction of obstacles;
- build on strengths of research-led teaching, inquiry learning, and the flexibility of the Arts curriculum;
- make student experience and student learning key priorities, through clarity about learning outcomes and graduate attributes, consultation with students, and development of new approaches to learning and teaching which exploit innovative technology.

The College offers instruction in human cultures, past and present, through subjects with a range of practice- and source-based methodologies. Subject identity continues to be strong due to REF, UCAS, and student demand. The Master of Arts degree combines a broad-based introduction in years 1 and 2 with research-led specialisation at Honours. Although viewed as non-vocational, an Arts degree has historically been seen as providing skills in critical analysis and communication required by many occupations. Traditional approaches to teaching and learning, based on lectures, seminars, independent reading, essay-preparation and examinations continue alongside innovative approaches.

2. Progress on previous year's objectives

Recruitment	New RCMO Carin Fyfe has improved Open Day and Applicants' Visit Days, e.g. by use of Arts student ambassadors. Videos about first year courses were shot, with additional material to be added for completion by Christmas 2014.
Employability	GAC Vicky Price and Careers Service organised range of events for Arts students. Ann Duff (Careers) is also working to improve communication with subjects.
Graduate attributes	ENHANCE seminar series ran very successfully in 2013-14, with good student numbers at all events. College champions also submitted a successful LTDF funding bid to use LinkedIn to increase student engagement with GAs.
Placements	New Creative Placements Officer (Pauline Mackay) was appointed with remit of expanding activity beyond traditional subjects for placements.
Staff mobility	Erasmus partnerships were pruned, and Arts model recommended for wider use
Student experience	NSS action plan was followed up with subjects. Focus groups were held with Joint Honours students to identify reasons for lower levels of satisfaction.
Student engagement	Now being addressed at University level.
Assessment	Blueprinting exercise was undertaken using data from KIS-PIP updating exercise. LEAF project report produced and workshop held. Discussions with Writing Centre about expanding activities are ongoing; assessment timetable was provided to Writing Centre to allow bespoke interventions.
Local priorities	Reform of advising system was approved by CMG, for consultation in 2014/15, implementation for August 2015. General degrees were reformed, including amalgamation of two designated degrees, introduction of new generic Level 3 courses, removal of Philosophy requirement, so all students fulfilling 120-credit requirement in L1 and L2 Arts courses should have route to a graduating degree.

3. Priorities for the year ahead (including alignment to University L&T strategy aims)

Student experience (L&T strategy aims 5, 7, 8)	Focus group meetings with undergraduate students at all levels, and close reading of NSS open comments, assisted by a postgraduate intern with experience of oral history interviews, will provide the basis of a report on key factors contributing to student satisfaction and focus groups with mixed groups of staff and discussions in School and subject meetings. Focus on issues of feedback, academic advice, personal development; graduate attributes, and organisation.
Assessment (aim 5)	Identify diversity of assessment within College, i.e. extent to which is based on alternatives to essays and examinations. Subjects to be encouraged to introduce wider range of assessment, including assessed presentations, reflective journals, group work, which develop graduate attributes and confidence in skills. Assessment blue-printing to be piloted in at least one School. Develop approach to circulating exam results to students via email, beginning with pilot in School of Humanities.
Placements (aim 8)	Schools to consult with Creative Placements Officer in order to bring forward proposals for dissertations based on placements. Subjects to develop models of credit-bearing independent work, which may be taken as alternative to dissertation. Creative Placements Officer to collect and disseminate examples of courses and dissertations incorporating placements. Support Archives and Hunterian in identifying demand for placement opportunities in College.
Research-teaching linkages (aim 7)	Establish to what extent research projects are used as basis for student dissertations. Building on these examples, develop models for students to become involved in research projects through their dissertations.
Internat'lisation Mobility (aim 1)	Review subject arrangements for converting Erasmus/JYA marks. Collaborate on building College conversion tables for adoption or amendment by subjects.
E-learning (aims 4, 9)	Investigate availability of support for podcast preparation. Pilot project in which at least one new or current course is developed using podcasts in place of some lectures. School of Humanities to pilot EvaSys examinations module.
Course evaluation (aim 7)	Schools to participate in the pilot of the course evaluation question, using Evasys, in second semester.
Quality enhancement (aims 4, 8)	Support subjects preparing for PSR, encouraging involvement of staff and students. Use previous year's PSR to identify examples of good practice.
Recruitment and Retention (aim 3)	Introduce Arts Applicants' Visit Day in February 2015 for RUK applicants, with focus on activities. Discuss with RIO & RCMO outreach to encourage WP applications. Pilot project to use social media to support Level 1 students.
Advising system (aim 6)	Consultation and implementation of new advising system for August 2015 start.
Degree flexibility	Subjects to amend Honours curricula to encourage interdisciplinary courses, provide options to Single Honours students wishing to take outside courses. Schools to develop courses which can be used to satisfy Level 1 requirements in more than one subject. Review feasibility of amending requirements for progression to Honours.

4. Strategic, university-level issues

The growth in the number of students continues to place severe pressure on Arts courses, although the College intake target was reduced this year. Large classes rely upon videolinks or Echo360 to as many as three additional locations, with a negative impact on the student experience. Some large classes were unable to find suitable rooms at the scheduled times, requiring re-scheduling. Linked lecturing also has a knock-on effect on other rooms. Staff report having to meet the same class in different rooms each day, last minute changes to class locations, and unsuitable rooms. The Learning and Teaching Hub will relieve pressure in the medium-term, but solutions are needed as soon possible.

Teaching incentives: In the current environment, learning and teaching must compete against many other priorities. It accounts for only one of seven headings on P&DR forms, and this would be true even if some means of measuring learning and teaching excellence were found. It is hard to persuade staff to devote time to developing innovative approaches to teaching and assessment, and those who do so may not be acting in the best interests of their careers.

The course approval process through PIP is slow and bureaucratic, representing an obstacle to innovation. The PIP software itself is un-intuitive, more forms are required than in the past, templates have changed, and many staff members do not know how to fill them in. Fear of PIP makes staff reluctant to make changes, e.g. by changing methods of delivery or assessment, since this would involve PIP. The University should consider how to 'fast-track' innovative changes to courses, and whether more decisions could be made at School level.

Support of e-learning technology: The introduction of Talis Aspire and Moodle has relied upon technical support, although more support and IT training for staff is needed. An expanded team to support recording of mini-lectures, in the form of TED-style podcasts, will help staff to introduce these as alternatives or supplements to traditional forms of teaching.

DAS (approved by Arts LTC, 6.11.14)