

# I Executive summary

This project for Creative and Cultural Practice disciplines (CCP) for the Enhancement Theme, Research-Teaching Linkages: enhancing graduate attributes has involved many institutions and many colleagues from subject domains in music, dance, drama and performance, art and design, film and television studies, and media and cultural studies.

It is clear from this report that a wide and representative diversity of creative practice is evidenced by way of the nine case studies. It is also clear that that diversity belies a strong commonality that this project has seen fit to highlight and underline. The reflective and flexible learner called to mind through both the Research-Teaching Linkages Enhancement Theme (and now Graduates for the 21st Century) is readily found in all CCP disciplines.

As the report elaborates, the CCP student is a creative, reflective learner who develops apposite, in-demand attributes founded on critical self-awareness, one who can employ interdisciplinary approaches to study, and one who can accommodate different theories or paradigms of knowledge: these elements are not fortuitous by-products, but intrinsic to the structured degree programmes in CCP domains.

Summary observations and recommendations from the project are:

- the principal common issue across CCP disciplines is the centrality of reflective practice and reflective learning
- reflective learning is seen as a key characteristic of study in CCP subject areas, and something which, colleagues agreed, could be better described and displayed to our collective advantage, internally and externally
- the nature of research through practice in CCP informs the design and delivery of creative studio-based projects, and the skills that we seek to inculcate in our students **through making** are precisely those reflective skills advocated by both the Research-Teaching Linkages and Graduates for the 21st Century Enhancement Themes
- where we know these skills are effectively taught and encouraged in our programmes, we should ensure that our students are fully aware of that aspect of their structured learning
- good practice in respect of the tutoring of research skills based on reflective learning should be seen at all levels of undergraduate and postgraduate study
- many research skills tutored in the higher education institution (HEI) are mirrored for the student by industry placements and work-related learning. Again, the connection of the two domains can be made clearer in curricula
- a greater sense of commonality among CCP disciplines might lead to more effective sharing of good practice with other cognate areas in HE and elsewhere. Central to this is productive and innovative dissemination of the creative products of students and staff in CCP.

## 2 Background

This report continues the work on behalf of CCP disciplines for the Research-Teaching Linkages Enhancement Theme. It follows the sector event held in the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama (RSAMD), Glasgow on 2 November 2009. The report incorporates elements of the event primer document that preceded the RSAMD discussions and was published through the Enhancement Themes website in October 2009. The event primer connected the central tenets of the Research-Teaching Linkages Enhancement Theme to lines of common thinking in the subject benchmarking documents relevant to CCP in HE: art and design; dance, drama and performance; and music. As heralded in the event primer, and as is indicated in the summary analysis that follows, the theme of **reflective learning** is unquestionably a very important common element of learning, teaching and research in CCP.

Delegates at the sector event heard nine case studies from CCP subject domains, including music, drama, dance, product design, cultural studies, film and TV studies, three-dimensional design and fine art. 18 higher education institutions were represented on the day, and some fifty delegates were in attendance following over sixty initial registrations.

Introductory remarks were delivered by Professor Allan Walker, The Glasgow School of Art. Keynote points were given by Professor Andrea Nolan, University of Glasgow. Summary analysis was offered by Professor Alan Jenkins, Professor Emeritus, Oxford Brookes University and a panel discussion to close the day was convened by Professor Ian Pirie, Edinburgh College of Art.

Presentations, questions and discussions addressed the connections between staff research and the undergraduate and postgraduate curriculum, as well as the inculcation of research-like skills through studio-based projects.

### 3 Context for sector event

As a general foreword to the Research-Teaching Linkages Enhancement Theme, with the new Enhancement Theme - graduate attributes for the twenty-first century in mind, Andrea Nolan describes the scope of the Research-Teaching Enhancement Theme and its focus in this way:

This Enhancement Themes project - Research-Teaching Linkages: enhancing graduate attributes - has over the last two years asked institutions, departments, faculties, disciplines, staff and students to reflect on the intended outcomes of HE, and has examined how links between research and teaching can help develop 'research-type' graduate attributes. The 'attributes' in question are the high-level generic attributes that are necessary to allow our graduates to contribute to and thrive in a super-complex and uncertain future where the ability to question, collate, present and make judgements, quite often with limited or unknown information, is increasingly important. These key attributes, it is argued, are necessary for our graduates to contribute effectively to Scotland's civic, cultural and economic future prosperity (Nolan, A (2008)).

Colleagues in CCP disciplines have contributed to discussions in that timeframe at institutional level quietly confident, no doubt, that research-linked teaching in creative and cultural practices, from music and dance, through design and fine art, to film and TV, is in many ways attuned already to providing the overarching capabilities that Nolan sets out as markedly appropriate for contemporary times.

The graduate attributes which arise from learning **about** and **through** CCP subject areas are not evident only because schools and programmes have turned to meet the new demands brought to HE by contemporary complexity and uncertainty; although CCP areas have indeed usefully done so, as is evidenced by many of the case studies which follow. Rather, claims might be made with some confidence that CCP disciplines prepare graduates for the culture that Nolan neatly describes by way of a systematic inculcation of creative and critical skills.

On that count, the QAA benchmark statement for art and design, for example, offers descriptions that could pertain to CCP disciplines as a whole. One such might be:

'Learning in art and design stimulates the development of an enquiring, analytical and creative approach, and develops entrepreneurial capabilities. It also encourages the acquisition of independent judgement and critical self-awareness' (QAA, 2008a).

The implication throughout this benchmark statement is that the eminently transferable skills to be gained through study in art and design, in addition to core studio and workshop-based practical skills, are in fact vital to the very core of successful art and design learning, so much so that any notion that these transferable skills are somehow generic by-products is likely erroneous. There is a persuasive conjoining, then, of core and 'secondary' attributes in the statement, and something very similar is to be found in other benchmarking work in CCP domains. In their statement, dance, drama and

performance (DDP) make much of the diversity of their practices, and emphasise the qualities which accrue to graduates by virtue of their ability to contend with the fact that:

The practice and conceptual bases of the performing arts are...discrete, diverse and inter-related. They do not embrace a stable body of knowledge and skills but are characterised by changing social, political and artistic values and practices. It is the dynamic nature of these cultural practices and their frequently contested nature that sustains the vitality of the subject areas. (QAA, 2007).

Again, the vitality of fluidity and diversity is stressed as intrinsic to the many DDP disciplines, and the transferable skill of 'awareness of interdisciplinary approaches to study and the capacity to engage with different theories or paradigms of knowledge', speaks clearly of a student graduate's readiness to contend imaginatively with complexity as a primary capability.

This strand of 'strength through creative diversity' is also emphasised in the benchmark statement for music. In no uncertain terms that statement connects the creative, practical engagement with interdisciplinary forms of human expression through music to a liberal education; a sentiment that could plausibly unite CCP disciplines at root:

Music is intrinsically interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary, international and multicultural; it fosters creativity and craftsmanship and practical skills; it provides a liberal education - historical, sociological, aesthetic and analytical (QAA 2008b).

The aptitudes inherent in the above selections are indicative of the common element of **reflexive** learning and making on the part of the CCP student, and that dimension is pinpointed representatively in the art and design statement. With reference to the importance of learning in respect of the 'global, historical, contemporary and cultural' contexts that shape their creative practices, the statement explains that 'students develop and may challenge their own critical disposition in relation to their discipline(s) and even the conventions of the discipline themselves.'

Such critical skills can lead CCP students along a path towards uncertainty and tension as conventions are challenged and paradigms shift. But, that very journey builds the creative criticality conducive to success, personally and vocationally, in the dynamic and diverse social arena characterised by Nolan's preface.

As the sector event acknowledged, that critical disposition shared as it is by staff can lead to a challenging of those assumptions and institutional positions that give rise to and which orbit the various manifestations of 'research' in our HEIs. Of course, we can be certain that many of these debates will continue to be highly contested, but not necessarily productive. The subtext of research proper in our disciplines must not be, as a direct result of anxiety about definition or valediction, over-concerned with the very contestation of the meaning of research in creative cultural practice. Indeed, as is noted below in the introduction to Professor Nolan's keynote presentation slides, a clear, expansive and inclusive definition of research lies behind the Enhancement Theme work.

The reason for this imperative is plain. If our creative and cultural disciplines turn away from their founding liberal traditions and become sterile in their attempts to resolve all conundrums such as the 'intrinsic' differences between research and practice, then CCP might run the risk of siphoning creative oxygen from the very subjects that motivate staff and students to engage with our disciplines in the first place.

After all, to paraphrase the art and design statement, to study within creative and cultural practice as an academic and intellectual pursuit develops a range of cognitive abilities related to the aesthetic, the moral, ethical and social contexts of human experience. As such, the research that leads and inspires our teaching, as is the case below, must be embedded in the above liberal humanist contexts before it is buried in the professional and sectoral debates about definitions as distractions.

As the discussions in November made clear, and as the case studies below evidence, there is increasing confidence among colleagues in CCP disciplines in recognising and celebrating the particular strengths of research undertaken through practice, and also in the ways in which those strengths can be demonstrated and encouraged at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. As Professor Alan Jenkins observed, perhaps the students are not always fully aware of those skills accumulated which are research-like and generated by the methods and approaches of practice-led research in creative and cultural domains.

In summary, it was clear at the sector event that the sentiment of the workshops was concerned with, not 'what is research in CCP?', but rather, accompanied by constructive consensus over definitions, 'how best can we encourage our students to see and enhance their research skills through creative and cultural practice?'

## 4 Introduction to the case studies

The nine case studies set out here were all presented at the sector event, generating stimulating discussions that chimed with the sentiment described above. Attention was paid by each presenter to the research content of curricular activities, as drawn from staff expertise, and to the research-like skills and practices that are developed in the learner through these various courses and projects.

What is immediately striking, reading across these exemplars is that, notwithstanding the diversity of modes of study and production, from the design of a Bluetooth™ wrist-mounted device (Macdonald) to the practice of Lamban Movement Analysis (Penfield)), the case studies highlight the aforementioned commonality; the principle of **reflective learning**. CCP subject areas, including cultural and theoretical studies (as was demonstrated by Atton), are rich in good practice and potential with regard to advancing the student's capacity to understand reflectively their own subject specialism and their institution's educational methods. As indicated above, it is the very nature of research through practice in CCP that enhances this capacity, as ideas and theories are tested through **making** then reviewed, repeated or revised within an evolving reflective process (for example Burnett, Watson, Gray).

A common understanding of reflective practice was established among delegates, and, with reference to a few commentators in this field, a brief recap of the central idea of this concept might be apposite here in advance of the case studies and presentation slides.

Joy Amulya of the Centre for Reflective Community Practice, in an essay entitled *What is Reflective Practice*, offers some grounded definitions of the term. Reflective practice, she clarifies, is the practice of learning from one's own 'actions and experience - in other words to examine that experience rather than just living it' (Amulya, 2001, p 1). This, she says, gives rise to 'purposeful learning', something other than that kind of learning which emerges from ingesting the words and pronouncements of only 'books or experts' (Amulya, p 1). Fortunately, not once does she advocate a false split between 'books' or 'experience'; it is never a choice for the learner between one or the other. Amulya's is a recommendation to learners to trust their lived experience as an important source and inspiration for their acquired knowledge and debate.

Amulya's thinking reinforces what the sector event concluded about the importance of learning through doing. This line of thought is supported by many important commentators on education. Renowned advocates of reflective learning, Anne Brockbank and Ian McGill make reference, directly, to John Dewey in their chapter 'Learning: Philosophies and Models' in *Facilitating Reflective Learning in Higher Education* (2000). With help from Dewey, they explain the deep philosophical reasoning that underlies the privileging of reflective learning for there was a paradigm shift afoot in the work of Dewey when he:

challenged the traditional mind/body split with his insistence that experience should be the initiating phase of thought for the learner, on the grounds that, in

ordinary life, we need an empirical situation (be it an opportunity or problem) to engage our interest and generate action (Brockbank & McGill 2000, p 23).

The whole business of being a living, breathing, **making** human was too far down the hierarchy of knowledge catalysts argued Dewey. Throughout their book, Brockbank and McGill refer to the centrality of lived experience as the means by which data and the theories that they breed can be turned into knowledge proper by the testing of the same through **being a human agent**. This perspective on active learning is reinforced by recent work such as Ron Barnett's speculation on the university in the twenty-first century, a body of work also referenced by Professor Andrea Nolan in her keynote address to delegates, mentioned below.

The implication of this line of thought, at its extreme, is that without reflection on theory tested through the **practice of life**, the individual cannot really claim to have acquired **bona fide** knowledge at all. Instead, they might have secured in memory only some data, the purposefulness of which (to borrow from Amulya) remains unclear.

Brockbank and McGill present a consistent and compelling case for the role of reflection through lived experience for the turning of data into knowledge. The artist and writer John Danvers has taken similar ideas, as advocated by Amulya and Brockbank and McGill, and placed them four-square in the domain of creative practice education; his lifelong research interest.

In poetic mode, Danvers identifies and privileges the reflective dimension of creative practice that activates data and finds knowledge therein. This approach lines up with delegates' discussion because it draws attention to the possibility that what reflective practice does, when done well, is imbue the learning situation with the perspective of the human-agent-as-learner. Danvers transposes that idea in this way:

The primary site of knowledge is within the purposive consciousness which inhabits, or, more correctly, is embodied as a particular physiological entity (my body: your body) (Danvers 2006, p 80).

The 'purposive consciousness' is that thing that we can recognise within ourselves as we practice reflection in the face of the products of our respective creative practices. Through effective reflective practice, Danvers implies, in line with Amulya and Brockbank and McGill, we can come to **know** about the reasons, motivations, desires, impulses, failings and skills that make our particular creative thoughts and practices our own. Much of this, especially the issue of productive failing through risk taking, returns in the questions raised at the panel discussion.

Here Danvers moves close to the breakthrough work of Scottish enlightenment philosopher David Hume (and, for that matter, some of the very principles behind the Research-Teaching and graduate attributes Enhancement Themes as explained by Professor Nolan) when he reasserts that knowledge is predicated on the perspective of the observer. Whether focusing attention on an individual or an instrument of measurement, to reflect on the perspective of the observing agent is to know more fully. This is something that Danvers maintains throughout his work, finishing the essay cited here with: 'We also recognise how knowledge is inherently perspectival, an interpretation arising from our participation in the world' (Danvers, p 89). The connectedness of the studio to the world is vital in ensuring that CCP disciplines can affect credible reflective practice and register multi-perspectives. The paradigms of staff research are important in making that aspect of the process transparent to students.

This connectedness, as displayed in several of the case studies (for example, Bruce Macdonald; Davie), is properly served, and equally so, by socially-engaged projects with communities as well as professional skills and work-related learning activity - all of which being strong suits in CCP degree programmes.

Now lest this read like mere adulation among friends, it is the case that some commentators are not persuaded by the claims to reflexivity of those disciplines which reside under the canopy CCP. For example, in his *Why Art Cannot Be Taught* (2001), James Elkins takes a highly sceptical line on the teaching of studio arts. For Elkins this kind of teaching, our kind of teaching to all intents and purposes across all CCP subjects, is inherently problematic for 'the project of teaching art is confused because we behave as if we were doing something more than teaching technique' (Elkins 2001, p 189). Elkins is of course infamous now for his humorous and scathing dissection of the formats and behaviours of the studio-based teaching, and the particularities of the vocabularies used in those circumstances.

But Elkins, and those many commentators who follow his lead, is not generous enough in seeing what the sector event saw, that the teaching within CCP is indeed inextricably linked to the teaching of reflective practice, over and above the technical features of any one subject area. Yes, a form of (dis)ingenuous reflective practice can be tutored by merely relaying to students tips for techniques, but the business of learning reflective practice in **practice** following Dewey and all of the case studies below without exception, is much more than a book exercise or a class on generic research-skills.

Amulya might offer a final observation here - that it is one thing to maintain a series of analytical reflections as one goes about one's practice and research, but the real trick for the reflective learner within CCP disciplines, and beyond, is to stop 'to look across what she has noticed to consider what could be learned by exploring her **patterns of thinking across different situations**' (Amulya, p 2).

Therein lies the ethical dimension within this Enhancement Theme, and others, especially Graduates for the 21st Century: creative reflective practice, born from action and which leads to action, is a vital mitigating factor in the control of lumpen individualistic drives and fundamentalist thinking. This ethical commonality lies behind the diversity of the represented case studies, it was in the foreground during the panel discussion in November, and it was understood with confidence by sector colleagues to be a key component of the skill set of graduates of CCP in the twenty-first century, and tremendous preparation, both absolutely and vocationally, for an age of increasing complexity.

## 6 Summary analysis and panel discussion

As a preface to the panel discussion, Professor Jenkins summarised for delegates his observations gathered over the course of the day. Based on his moving between the nine presented case studies, and in the light of talks by Professors Nolan and Walker, Professor Jenkins noted the following points and questions and offered them for discussion:

- are CCP colleagues clear about good practice in respect of Research-Teaching Linkages in other cognate areas?
- it is important to establish continuity of experience for students over their respective levels of study
- the students' perspective on the efficacy of institutional responses to Enhancement Themes is always important
- good work has been done in CCP to define research and this Enhancement Theme is building on that
- it is important to impart to students the positions which colleagues and the sector have on research in CCP
- part of the dissemination of definitions of research must be the studio work of students themselves - an underused resource
- advantages to students from studying in environments which encourage reflective practice can be better expressed
- do we consistently tell students that what they are doing is indeed research and research-like when they do that in project work?
- it is important to make research-teaching linkage clear from year 1 of undergraduate study.

Each of the nine case studies presented during the event was followed by chaired discussion in workshops. Each workshop produced a representative question to take to the panel discussion.

The panel, convened by Professor Ian Pirie, comprised Professor Andrea Nolan, Professor Alan Jenkins, Professor Allan Walker and Dr Ken Neil (The Glasgow School of Art).

Discussion stemmed from Professor Jenkins's observations and from the following nine questions and comments:

- with regard to collaborative and networked projects:
  - o how do we balance the interests and expectations of the different players: industry; senior researchers; early career researchers; taught postgraduates; doctoral students?
- with reference to those CCP disciplines, such as music, dance and drama:
  - o how do we articulate and then communicate non-textual and non-material research outcomes?

- related to the above question:
  - how do we get examples of good practice from one area to another, within CCP and beyond?
- concerning the role of theory in CCP subject areas:
  - what might be better done to demonstrate that the practice of theory in CCP disciplines can and should be a creative practice in its own right?
- in relation to the wider context of creative education in HE:
  - what can we do as CCP disciplines to better tutor and encourage our staff and students to reflect upon the conventions and innovations of our educational system through study in CCP programmes?
- with reflective practice in mind as an important goal to achieve in actuality:
  - how central - really - are questions and questioning within teaching and learning practices in CCP?
- connected to the determination to avoid complacency:
  - is there space for us as teaching staff to take risks and even fail in terms of developing art and design practice with students?
- with reference to the importance of continuity of experience across SCQF levels:
  - are we able to identify a difference between undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate (PG) attributes and what might be done to encourage and develop the attributes normally associated with PG students among the UG community?
- with reference to an analytical model presented in one of the case studies (Sweeney):
  - it is suggested that colleagues set aside time to assess their various courses in CCP to take stock of the extent to which the courses are:
- related to current or recent research
- informed primarily by past research
- concerned with craft and/or scholarship.

## 7 Conclusions

There emerged from the day many common issues across the wide range of Creative and Cultural Practice (CCP) disciplines, coupled with a shared desire to convene such a cross-disciplinary event in the future.

- Identified as chief among these common issues is the relevance to the disciplines of reflective practice and reflective learning.
- Reflective learning is seen as a key characteristic of study in CCP subject areas, and something which, colleagues agreed, could be better described and displayed to our collective advantage, internally and externally.
- The nature of research through practice in CCP informs the design and delivery of creative studio-based projects. The skills that we seek to inculcate in our students through making, based on our expertise as researchers through practice, are precisely those reflective skills advocated through both the Research-Teaching Linkages and Graduates for the 21st Century.
- Where we know these skills are effectively taught and encouraged in our programmes, we should ensure that our students are fully aware of that aspect of their structured learning.
- Good practice in respect of the tutoring of research skills based on reflective learning should be seen at all levels of undergraduate and postgraduate study.
- Many research skills tutored in the HEI are mirrored for the student by industry placements and work-related learning. Again, the connection of the two domains can be made clearer in curricula.
- Delegates agreed that a greater sense of commonality among CCP disciplines might lead to more effective sharing of good practice with other cognate areas in HE and elsewhere. Central to this is productive and innovative dissemination of the creative products of students and staff in CCP.

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