

# The Changing Face of Higher Education

The last five to ten years have seen tremendous changes in higher education. This section is a brief guide to recent changes in the UK and the impact on your job.

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## WHAT IS COVERED AND HOW TO USE THE MATERIAL

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This section:

- ❖ **SUMMARISES CURRENT GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES**
- ❖ **INDICATES THEIR RATIONALE AND POTENTIAL IMPACT ON YOUR WORK**
- ❖ **IDENTIFIES KEY INFLUENTIAL ORGANISATIONS AND EXPLAINS THEIR ROLE**

You can use this section to:

- ❖ **UNDERSTAND YOUR WORK CONTEXT AND THE REASON BEHIND SOME OF THE ACTIONS YOU ARE ASKED TO TAKE**
- ❖ **FIND DETAILS OF AREAS WHICH YOU MAY WANT TO FOLLOW UP**
- ❖ **INFORM YOURSELF QUICKLY AND EASILY ABOUT THE LARGER CONTEXT SO AS TO BETTER UNDERSTAND AND INVOLVE YOURSELF IN DECISIONS AND RESPONSES TO THESE ISSUES**

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### CHANGES IN HIGHER EDUCATION INCLUDING ART AND DESIGN COLLEGES

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There have been enormous changes in the sector over recent years:

- RAPID GROWTH OF STUDENT NUMBERS
- A REDUCTION OF THE RESOURCE FOR TEACHING EACH STUDENT
- MERGING OF PROVIDERS OF EDUCATION
- THE GROWTH OF A MORE COMPETITIVE ENVIRONMENT
- CHANGES TO THE STUDENT POPULATION TO INCLUDE A LARGE NUMBER OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Art and design is mainly taught in the new university sector in large faculties or schools which cover a range of the disciplines that make up the subject. It is also taught in some of the older universities and in single subject institutions, as well as in colleges of further education.

The predominant change in the organisation of art and design teaching has been the merger of independent arts colleges with local universities in the 1980s. Since that time government influence on education at all levels has expanded and that includes higher education. This now has a strong influence on all aspects of how institutions operate – including what is taught in the studio or seminar room.

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### KEY INITIATIVES THAT AFFECT YOUR JOB

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The changes which are likely to affect your job relate to:

- ❖ STANDARDS
- ❖ LEARNING OUTCOMES
- ❖ STUDENT INTAKE
- ❖ QUALITY ASSURANCE AND WRITTEN REPORTS ON THE PROGRESS ON COURSES
- ❖ INSPECTION

- ❖ STUDENT REPRESENTATION – THE STUDENT VOICE
- ❖ TEACHING QUALIFICATIONS
- ❖ THE MEASUREMENT OF RESEARCH

These changes are derived from:

- ❖ THE SAFEGUARDING OF STUDENT AND WIDER PUBLIC INTEREST
- ❖ THE NEED TO COMMUNICATE INFORMATION ON ACADEMIC STANDARDS TO EMPLOYERS AND PARENTS
- ❖ THE NEED TO ENHANCE AND MAINTAIN STANDARDS

However it could also be argued that these changes result from the need to control independent institutions of higher education, to make institutions accountable, weed out poor performance and to enforce the relationship with the economy.

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### STANDARDS

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In the past what was taught in an art and design degree was decided by the staff and confirmed during an approval process. Now there is a Subject Benchmark for Art and Design which covers undergraduate degrees. This sets out the topics which art and design degrees usually encompass. It also lays down what a typical student will have achieved by the time they leave, which includes areas of knowledge and skill. New courses being developed and older courses being revised will need to use these statements which identify typical and threshold (a scrape pass) standards. The Benchmark was written by senior colleagues in art and design education, was the result of much consultation, and is taken to represent something of a consensus on art and design education. It was developed by the Quality Assurance Agency in order to provide employers, potential students and parents/carers with an understanding of what an art and design degree actually is. You will find colleagues referring to the Subject Benchmark and whether the course fits with it or not.

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### LEARNING OUTCOMES

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The concern with standards has focused attention less on what is taught, but rather on what is *learnt* by the student. 'Learning outcomes' is the phrase used to describe what students can do and have learnt by the time they complete their studies. Learning outcomes usually

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describe something which can be demonstrated and measured. You will find that your course documents tend to use “learning outcomes” to describe what the teaching is trying to achieve.

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### **STUDENT INTAKE, ‘WIDENING PARTICIPATION’ AND STUDENT DIVERSITY**

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A current initiative of the government is to ‘widen participation’. This means involving more young people from non-traditional backgrounds in higher education. There is no standard definition of this term – in different regions non-participant groups may vary. However the definitions include children whose parents did not go to university and children attending schools which have low rates of progression to universities. There are financial rewards (and possibly social rewards too) for increasing student participants from these groups. You will have heard these issues discussed in the media. There are now numerous projects to increase the interest of non-traditional groups such as short courses, summer schools, mentoring schemes of students in schools etc.

Alongside this there has been legislation to prevent discrimination against religious minorities and students with disabilities (see Student Support Section in ADEPTT materials). What this all means is that students and their cultural and educational backgrounds are likely to be more varied than ever before – a shorthand term for this is ‘student diversity’. This is likely to affect you since you will need to think about and plan your teaching in relation to these different groups, their expectations and diverse support needs. Also you will probably find Admissions Tutors and other staff devising tactics for increasing ‘student diversity’, or meeting the learning needs of ‘diverse student groups’.

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### **QUALITY ASSURANCE AND WRITTEN REPORTS ON COURSES**

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The work of lecturers in higher education is much more accountable than previously, so there are more checks and balances. The main one you may be aware of is that course tutors are writing detailed annual reports and action plans for their courses. These are written to demonstrate the quality of the education and results to various audiences which probably include the Head of Department, senior management and various inspecting bodies. The production of the report represents an important process of thinking about the course and gathering evidence of what has happened. A central function is the planning of actions - in relation to the coming academic year. You can

talk to your course tutor about this process and how you might need to be involved.

In addition, this emphasis on measuring the quality and collecting evidence of it has led to additional systems being put in place – for example:

- ❖ **STUDENT FEEDBACK BEING COLLECTED ON EACH UNIT OR MODULE OF STUDY**
- ❖ **ANALYSIS OF STUDENT RESULTS**
- ❖ **ARRANGEMENTS FOR OBSERVING YOUR TEACHING**
- ❖ **SETTING TARGETS FOR IMPROVEMENT**
- ❖ **WRITING ACTION PLANS AND THEN REPORTING ON THE PROGRESS OF ACTIONS**

‘Quality enhancement’ refers to changing or trying to improve problems or performance. This is seen as the purpose of quality assurance, although sometimes cynics question the results of all the additional reporting that is taking place.

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### **INSPECTION**

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The growth in writing reports and collecting evidence of the quality of teaching and learning is derived from a regime of inspection (‘audit’ and ‘review’) carried out by the Quality Assurance Agency. Over recent years there have been extensive inspections of art and design teaching at universities and colleges which teach higher education courses. Many lecturers have helped carry these out and are bringing some of this thinking back into their workplaces. You may well hear references to ‘Subject Review’ (inspection by subject) and ‘Institutional Review’ (inspection of whole universities). The effects of these inspections have been widespread across the sector in shaping thinking and increasing quality assurance activities. If you are working in departments which are being inspected then you will probably be aware of the effort and time that has gone into these activities.

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### **STUDENT REPRESENTATION – THE STUDENT VOICE**

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Listening to students’ opinions about their teaching and learning is now given a high priority and you will probably be aware of student representation being sought.

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You may be aware of some of the following being used:

- ❖ STUDENTS SITTING ON COMMITTEES
- ❖ STUDENT SATISFACTION QUESTIONNAIRES
- ❖ STUDENT FORUMS OR FEEDBACK GROUPS
- ❖ STUDENT FEEDBACK ON INDIVIDUAL TEACHING STAFF

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### TEACHING QUALIFICATIONS

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There is currently a shift to the professionalisation of teaching. The Higher Education Academy has been set up with this remit. This body is currently looking at how the basic competence of teachers in higher education might be described and how to register lecturers.

Universities and colleges have also been encouraged to have their own training and qualifications for new members of staff. Many of these qualifications are Postgraduate Diplomas or Masters and can be done part time or in sections for more experienced staff. If you are interested you may wish to ask your staff development unit or head of department. The longer-term trend is for all full time lecturers to have qualifications by 2006. At the time of writing the picture for part time staff is less clear.

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### THE MEASUREMENT OF RESEARCH AND CHANGES IN DEFINITIONS

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Many departments are now engaged in raising money for research activities. The term 'research' now embraces both writing of articles and also the making of artworks and design practice. However, as the term has broadened, the competitive environment has heated up. Many universities and colleges are now in competition through their submissions to the Research Assessment Exercise, which has been run every 4 – 5 years by the Higher Education Funding Council. This Exercise rates research achievement of individuals and departments in a league table and awards money accordingly. If you are a practitioner outside of your teaching, you may find there are ways of valuing this activity within your current job as 'research'.

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## KEY ORGANISATIONS INFLUENCING ART AND DESIGN EDUCATION

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A number of organisations are implementing these changes such as:

- ❖ **THE HIGHER EDUCATION FUNDING COUNCIL FOR ENGLAND (HEFCE) DISTRIBUTES PUBLIC MONEY FOR TEACHING AND RESEARCH TO UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES. IT IS ALSO DEVELOPING POLICY AND INITIATIVES IN RELATION TO:**
  - WIDENING PARTICIPATION AND FAIR ACCESS
  - ENHANCING EXCELLENCE IN LEARNING AND TEACHING
  - ENHANCING EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH
  - ENHANCING THE CONTRIBUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION TO THE ECONOMY AND SOCIETY
  
- ❖ **THE QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY (QAA) IS AN INDEPENDENT BODY FUNDED BY UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES. ITS MISSION IS TO SAFEGUARD PUBLIC INTEREST THROUGH DEVELOPING SOUND STANDARDS FOR QUALIFICATIONS AND TO ENCOURAGE IMPROVEMENT IN THE MANAGEMENT OF EDUCATION. IT HAS BEEN THE MAIN INSPECTORATE OF ART AND DESIGN HIGHER EDUCATION (SUBJECT REVIEW AND INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW). FURTHER INFORMATION THROUGH [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)**
  
- ❖ **THE HIGHER EDUCATION ACADEMY (HEA) WAS LAUNCHED IN 2004. IT INCLUDES MANY KEY FUNCTIONS:**
  - TEACHING AND LEARNING DEVELOPMENT
  - REGISTRATION AND ACCREDITATION
  - ART DESIGN MEDIA SUBJECT CENTRE (ADM-HEA)

**THIS LAST ONE IS IMPORTANT TO YOUR WORK SINCE THE SUBJECT CENTRE HAS DEVELOPED MANY INTERESTING PROJECTS IN ART AND DESIGN EDUCATION, ISSUES A NEWSLETTER AND HOSTS EVENTS. FURTHER INFORMATION THROUGH [www.heacademy.ac.uk](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk)**

You may choose to become a registered practitioner through the individual entry route and you will find details of how to do this on the website.

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You may find it useful to understand the context you are working in and future developments by reading your institution's strategic plan. This is likely to have been distributed to staff and to be available for you to look at. This will help you to see the emphasis being put respectively on teaching, professional practice and research. Being aware of the emphasis of the institution, future plans and other initiatives may help you to see how you might present yourself and your skills within your place of work.

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### OTHER KEY ART AND DESIGN ORGANISATIONS ARE:

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The **Council for Higher Education in Art and Design (CHEAD)** is a group of senior managers working in higher education in art and design. They are frequently engaged with ministers and on working groups developing aspects of art and design education. Further information from [www.thead.net](http://www.thead.net)

The **Group for Learning in Art and Design (GLAD)** is a group of colleagues from all levels of art and design education. Conferences are organised on current themes of interest to those teaching art and design.

The **European League for Institutes of the Arts (ELIA)** is an independent network of Arts Education Institutes covering all the disciplines of the Arts. Further information from [www.elia-artschools.org](http://www.elia-artschools.org)

The **United Kingdom Arts and Design Institutions Association (UKADIA)** is a group of specialist arts and design institutions from across the UK's higher and further education sectors. Its aim is to promote nationally and internationally, the key contributions of the specialist colleges to the UK's world-renowned visual arts and industries. Further information from <http://www.ukadia.ac.uk>

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### ADDITIONAL KEY POINTS

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The **Framework for Higher Education Qualifications** is an important reference document used when designing a course. It describes in general terms the kind and level of learning to be undertaken within each higher education qualification e.g. degree, MA etc.

The **QAA Code of Practice** is a document that sets out the principles (precepts) by which a university and its staff should conduct themselves. Various sections have been produced which cover topics such as assessment, external examining, and students with disabilities. These are both available on the website [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk).

<p>In what ways do national 'standards' affect my teaching and my students?</p>	
<p>What is my experience of 'learning outcomes'? How might this concept be useful to student learning and my teaching?</p>	
<p>How am I currently involved in quality assurance and enhancement activities?</p>	
<p>What 'quality assurance' material might further help me understand aspects of my work? (and how could this be obtained?)</p>	
<p>What information would be useful in helping to evaluate my performance and the performance of my students?</p>	
<p>What is the nature of the student intake that I am teaching? What considerations might follow in terms of the way I teach and the students learn?</p>	
<p>What are the main characteristics of the department I am teaching in (e.g strong on teaching, research, widening participation)? How does this affect the values and actions of the department and my work?</p>	

## Questions for further consideration

YOU MIGHT LIKE TO THINK ABOUT THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS, OR DISCUSS THEM WITH A GROUP OF COLLEAGUES