

# GLAD times

## an interview with David Vaughan

In the summer of 2007 David Vaughan stepped down from the chair of the Group for Learning in Art and Design (GLAD), a post he had occupied since its inception. GLAD had its roots in activities promoted by the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) which had done a great deal to develop teaching, learning and assessment in what was, in the late 1980s, known as the public sector of higher education.

The first national event run by what later became GLAD took place at Liverpool Polytechnic in 1990. The planning of the event was initially led by Cal Swann and Mantz Yorke from Liverpool Polytechnic in conjunction with David Vaughan, but Cal's departure to Australia meant that the leadership of the final planning devolved to Mantz and David. Simon Lewis attended this event, and it quickly became apparent that he and David had been students together some 20 years previously, but had lost touch until that point.

David, Simon and Mantz have been members of GLAD since it was founded, and it seemed appropriate, on David's retirement, for Simon and Mantz to ask David to reflect on GLAD and its achievements during the past two decades.

**Mantz Yorke (MY):** *Why did (what became) GLAD need to be initiated at the end of the 1980s?*

**David Vaughan (DV):** I was at that time Associate Registrar at CNAA, on secondment from Brighton Polytechnic, and set up a CNAA/CHEAD Steering Group for Teaching and Learning. Cal Swann had given an address at a CHEAD meeting in which he set out the need to reconsider the then 'sitting with Nellie' (one-to-one) approach to teaching in art and design. This was against a background of increasing student numbers and no increase — or even reductions — in staff numbers. This was only the start of, and may even have been the catalyst for, serious consideration of the characteristics of art and design education in higher education, the purposes that art and design would serve and how they would be taught in future.

The Steering Group was formed of fearless and enthusiastic individuals from across higher education in the UK who were determined to get an often sceptical (and at times rather hostile) sector to consider the questions.

**MY:** *How prescient was the first conference?*

**DV:** The first Teaching and Learning in Art and Design Conference took place in Liverpool in the Autumn of 1990. It was launched at the Liverpool Tate and was preceded by a series of 'roadshow' seminars around the mainland UK. There was a common message that change had to be considered, not least because of the worsening student staff ratios brought about by the then Thatcher government's decision to increase student numbers without equivalent funding. The prospect of change under these conditions was not well received by many in the sector, who were happy with the way things were done and didn't see a need for forced change. Indeed, members of the Steering Group were regularly accused of being 'Thatcher's messengers' when all we were intent on doing was getting the sector to face reality — well, that's how it seemed to us at the time.

**MY:** *At the first conference, John Stoddart (then Principal of Sheffield City Polytechnic) said that art and design had a good story to tell regarding pedagogic innovation, but that it had not been shouted out loudly enough. Was that true, and is it true today?*

**DV:** Because teachers and managers of art and design had, in general, largely been happy with their lot, they had not really considered what might be particular or even special to higher (and further) education in the widening range of subjects covered.

Unlike many other subjects, art and design has never been taught on the basis of a 'this is how it's done' philosophy but has emphasised individual discovery through question, risk and personal exploration. Projects have always encouraged students to explore their own personal approach — there being no one answer, unlike the situation in many knowledge-based subjects. However, this had never really been thought of as something particular to art and design subjects, and so at that time it was little recognised beyond the subjects themselves. There were many other, taken for granted, approaches that were not recognised within the subjects as innovations in pedagogy. Many of these have now been adopted by other subjects (often because they have been faced with even more difficult change imperatives) but, as with higher education more generally, there has been no great enthusiasm to record and tell the story of pedagogic development, despite a range of initiatives.

**Simon Lewis (SL):** *GLAD events always attracted a high level of participation: why is this?*

**DV:** Since the demise of the CNAAL in the early 1990s GLAD has been independent of any funding organisation, surviving on the voluntary and energetic input of the members of the group and, equally importantly, the enthusiastic attendance at GLAD events and conferences by a wide range of teachers in higher and further education. No GLAD event has failed to attract

maximum numbers or to pay its way. GLAD is seen to be owned by the sector and, as such, can often identify and raise topics that might to others be taboo.

**SL:** *Has the pedagogic challenge to art and design changed over the past couple of decades? If so, in what ways?*

**DV:** The simple answer to the first question is yes. As well as the range of subjects increasing year on year (well beyond what would have traditionally been considered art and design), so have the technologies involved. Applying the basic philosophy of developing the individual through personal exploration and risk taking in a wider range of subjects and career options becomes ever more challenging. We need to pay much more attention to explaining and proving this approach to our students and to the outside world.

**SL:** *In what way has the establishment of the Higher Education Academy (and its precursor organisations) contributed to the development of learning in art and design, and in what way has this affected GLAD?*

**DV:** GLAD has benefited from the support of the Higher Education Academy and its predecessor the LTSN, through an indirect relationship with the Art, Design and Media Subject Centre. However, this has also been a two-way process with GLAD helping to alert the subject community to topics and vice-versa.

The ADM Subject Centre has probably made a greater contribution at shop floor level than the Academy because of its direct relationship with institutions and practitioners and its more specific subject focus.

**MY:** *What are your views of the apparent thinness of pedagogic research output that specifically addresses the particular nature of the teaching and learning environment that art and design education at higher education level in the UK embraces?*

**DV:** Well, is this just an art and design problem? Evidence of pedagogic research is known to be thin throughout higher education in the UK. Apart from teacher educators and those who have made a career out of pedagogy (often presenting other peoples' approaches rather than developing their own!), there has been a dearth of published pedagogic research. Sadly this has not been improved because of the lack of any real incentive from the various Research Assessment Exercises (RAE) that the sector has endured to date. Unfortunately a lot of what is published is often based on 'how to do it' or is so esoteric as to be meaningless on the shop floor. The weakness lies in a disjunction between practice and theory, with adverse consequences for generalisability and transfer.

GLAD conferences have had some very good, down to earth presentations of real pedagogic practice. Perhaps we need to find better ways to record such inputs and to encourage more of this. GLAD, with the Academy, could perhaps find ways to promulgate and share this with the wider higher education

community. I think that the Academy could act as a repository of 'grey literature' which consists of examples of interesting practice but which lack — for perfectly good reasons — some of the features that would see them being formally published in a journal. There could then be a bank of such material that would be useful as a base for (possibly) some more rigorous study. Otherwise this kind of material is ephemeral, yet it may 'speak to' someone at some indeterminate time in the future.

**SL:** *In England, HEFCE has promoted a number of initiatives that have aimed at improving learning and teaching, such as the Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund (TQEF) and the associated Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning (FDTL), and the funding of a number of Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs). What has been their impact on education in art and design?*

**DV:** From my own experience TQEF has been very beneficial in the development of learning and teaching initiatives in smaller and specialist institutions, but I'm not sure how well it has worked in larger institutions. Although I was a member of the HEFCE Quality Assessment, Learning and Teaching Committee, chaired FDTL 5 (which did not include art and design) and was a member of the assessment panel for CETLs, I have never been convinced that sufficient thought was given to how the sector as a whole would benefit from the outcome of major funded projects like FDTL and certainly not CETLs. For example the FDTL 5 panel argued strongly to HEFCE that the outcomes of all of the funded projects should be shared directly with the sector and not simply through the Subject Centres, as I believe has been the case.

**SL:** *During the life of GLAD, several bodies concerned with teaching and learning issues, and initiatives in higher education, have come and gone, so why has GLAD survived and prospered? Are there things that the sector can learn from this model?*

**DV:** Probably the most significant thing is ownership by the sector rather than any funding, quality, or governmental organisation. Colleagues seem to appreciate GLAD because it doesn't tell them what to do but asks what should be done. They discuss, they share and they take ideas back to their own institutions.

**SL:** *What evidence is there that GLAD has made a difference?*

**DV:** Probably our main achievement has been to identify topics that colleagues need and want to discuss. GLAD events have always been very well received and fully booked. Colleagues are always anxious to know when the next conference is going to be. If we do no more than we currently do, then we need to keep ahead of the game in that respect and continue to throw down the gauntlet to colleagues in the sector.

GLAD has certainly created opportunities and an appetite to consider, discuss and share learning and teaching approaches in art and design.

**MY:** *What challenges face art and design in the next decade, and what can GLAD do to help meet them?*

**DV:** GLAD has recently held a week-long Cambridge residential think-tank conference from which a whole range of challenges have been identified. These are being published in a book and then subjected to a more traditional GLAD conference later in the year.

Alongside this a major challenge for art and design education will be to maintain the well-proven philosophy of encouraging students to discover and develop their individual abilities so as to be able to make full use of creative opportunities that arise in their lives. With a fast developing world economy and ever faster new technology developments, maintaining that philosophy will become more and more of a challenge. Since other developing nations seem to see the benefit of the way we do things isn't it time we had greater confidence ourselves and learned how to explain our approach better? With few exceptions we do not do well in student surveys and we have to get better at sharing pedagogy and explaining our intentions.

GLAD has always appreciated the input of practitioners in art and design teaching. Most of them have been part-time teachers whose main qualification has been their real world practice experience. Changes in employment law make it much more difficult to maintain this crucial input and making sure that those we do manage to employ understand the institutional quality and standards context of their teaching will always be a challenge.

**MY:** *What about the impact of the National Student Survey?*

**DV:** Across the whole higher education sector the National Student Survey has identified concerns from students about assessment and feedback. This has been no less the case with art and design but, perhaps more worryingly, with added emphasis on the student understanding of the learning and teaching approaches and the contact with, and role of, their tutors in the learning process. There clearly remains much to be considered and explained here — or could it also be that we in art and design are successful in rightly challenging our students and in return they rightly challenge us?

Summer 2007

## **John Last** **Chair of GLAD, 2008**

Reflecting on this conversation as the new Chair of GLAD, I am struck by the consistency with which GLAD has been able to engage practising academics in debates that are directly at the heart of their work, namely teaching and learning and how to help improve student learning. In concluding this section, I would like to confirm that GLAD will be continuing in that tradition and to note how much I am looking forward to taking it forward in the future.

However, I would be remiss if I did not also mention some other colleagues who have played such a significant part in the development of GLAD. Key people from the early days (in alphabetical order) were:

**William Callaway** who with Simon Lewis jointly drafted the '*On not sitting with Nellie*' paper for discussion and final agreement of the original GLAD group

**Alan Davies** then at Worcester College of Higher Education

**Barry Jackson** then at Middlesex Polytechnic

**Tony Marshall** Bournemouth and Poole College of Art and Design

**Jan Thorne** of the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA)

**Sylvia Wicks** who administered GLAD having joined CNAA in place of David Vaughan

**Mary Wilson** then at Bradford College.

These colleagues, with Mantz, Simon and David, created GLAD as it is today, and the new group with responsibility for GLAD looks forward to building upon their tradition. Along with myself and David, this group is:

<b>David Clews</b>	ADM Subject Centre
<b>Linda Drew</b>	University of the Arts London
<b>Simon Lewis</b>	Nottingham Trent University
<b>Chris Owen</b>	University of Derby
<b>Eileen Reid</b>	Glasgow School of Art
<b>Sally Wade</b>	University of Huddersfield
<b>Mantz Yorke</b>	Education Consultant

Each of this group would wish to express their personal thanks to David Vaughan for his leadership and commitment over the period he has acted as Chair and to wish him well for the future.