

# National College of Art and Design

A Recognised College  
of University College Dublin

# FUTURES, BOLD & CURIOUS

Cover image: Photograph from An Túr Gloine archive; Irish Art Archive, ESB Centre for the Study of Irish Art, National Gallery of Ireland.

Their future, our past... a group of students, including Margaret Clarke and Estella Solomons, from the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art, early 20th century. The Dublin Metropolitan School of Art was the precursor to NCAD. Pictured during William Orpen's Anatomy Class in the Life Room, these students were the bold and curious of their generation.



## Foreword



The publication of this strategic plan coincides with the relatively recent appointment of a new Director and new Board. It is thus an opportunity, whilst recognising the invaluable work that has been undertaken by previous Directors and Boards, to chart a direction that reflects the specific ambitions of our Director, Professor Sarah Glennie, her staff and this Board.

This plan is not an iteration of what has gone before, although it does build on the strengths of the College. Instead, its development has come through a forensic review of the role and responsibility of NCAD as a national institution charged with the development of creative, thoughtful art and design practitioners and educators.

As a national institution, NCAD must, and does, play a lead role in the artistic and creative life of our country but, further, must also be a leader in thinking about the way art and design practitioners and educators are developed. I specifically commend the ambitious and visionary approach to learning this plan articulates, with its emphasis on learning by doing and 'dirty learning'. The elegance of the plan is a testament to Professor Glennie, her staff and the guidance from the Board.

In publishing this plan, NCAD, its Board and staff, are grateful to a large number of individuals and organisations who have helped its development. In particular, I wish to thank the Department of Education and Skills, the Higher Education Authority and University College Dublin for their support and encouragement during its development.

Dr Richard Thorn,  
Chair, NCAD Board

# Welcome to NCAD



**“Artists and designers might sometimes feel that they are not in the mainstream,**

but the margins are a great place from which to generate a deep awareness of, and empathy for the whole of society. And, unlike narrowly focused or specialist fields, art and design stimulate a real appetite for the most ambitious and wide-ranging thinking.”

Gerard Byrne,  
artist and NCAD graduate

Futures, Bold and Curious sets out the mission, values and strategic focuses that will shape the next phase of NCAD’s influential and extraordinary life.

In the context of NCAD’s history as a provider of education for more than 250 years, this Strategic Plan considers what it really means to be an institute of art and design in contemporary Ireland. As an institution, we asked ourselves what will the world into which our students will emerge be like, and what can we do to help prepare them to meet that future with confidence, ambition and impact? Such points of critical reflection are vital in the life-cycle of an institution such as NCAD. A year-long process of consultation with students, colleagues and key stakeholders revealed that while our four schools have a great diversity of practice and making, shared beliefs and ambitions underpin all NCAD’s work.

The Board and staff have a shared belief in the transformative potential of an NCAD education to equip our graduates with the bold curiosity and the new thinking which society critically needs. We are ambitious to find new ways to work with each other and the wider community, to continuously redefine and expand the boundaries of creative practice, to make a difference and, as our mission states, to change the world.

This Strategic Plan captures these ambitions. It sets out what we will do over the next five years to deliver on this mission. We are confident that Futures, Bold and Curious will support this generation of NCAD students to play a vital role in shaping society.

Professor Sarah Glennie,  
Director



# NCAD Past, Present, Future

Founded as the Dublin Society Drawing School in 1746, today NCAD offers the richest and most diverse education in art and design in Ireland. Our campus is in the Liberties, an area of Dublin which first developed in the 12th century, and remained outside the city walls. Its name derived from the independent privileges and rights which were enjoyed in the area. For centuries, it has been a district where things are made. From Huguenot silverwork, wool and silk weaving and tanning to whiskey distilleries and beer breweries, and more recently, digital industries, our community is one of makers.

With a diverse population of over 25,000 the Liberties today is Ireland's most densely populated urban area, making it a rich and vibrant context for Ireland's National College of Art and Design.

Making remains at the core of NCAD and Futures, Bold and Curious sets out our vision for a studio-based learning experience that responds to both the digital and material world. NCAD today is an organisation strengthened by close connections to our community in Dublin 8 and partners across the fields of Irish education, industry, culture and social enterprise. We attract students from around the world. Active in international networks, we create new forms of knowledge with research partners across Europe.

Students are at the heart of everything we do, and we are continuously proud of the versatility, confidence and imagination of our graduates. They include artists and designers who have changed the face of their fields. Their creative work meets the highest levels of achievement, whether it is encountered in major international galleries and exhibitions, on the catwalk and in the high street, or in the setting of health care or essential services.

The range of the career paths followed by our graduates is an unequivocal demonstration of the value of the education they receive. Experimentation in the studio, learning through doing, deep understanding of materials and processes, as well as the criticality that is embedded across all pathways, prepare graduates to thrive in and beyond the worlds of art and design.

Our era is one of fast and sometimes troubling change, and as a society we face many challenges. We cannot predict the kind of world our graduates will be working in - although it is certain that they will encounter new and as yet unknown opportunities and challenges. Imagination, creativity and critical thinking – central elements of learning at NCAD – are what is required to meet this future.

Art and design education at NCAD stimulates the creativity and imagination we all need to make our environment sustainable, our societies inclusive and all our lives richer.



Our Vision:  
**Changing the world through bold and curious thinking, making and doing.**

Our Values:  
**Bold & Curious Thinking  
Distinction  
Diversity  
Respect  
Relevance.**

Students are at the heart of everything we do. We educate students to be a creative force who learn using imagination and action, through bold and curious thinking, through making and doing. We believe in living our values every day - in class, on campus, in our community.

#### **Bold & Curious Thinking**

We believe in creating space and time for new ideas and creative, agile exchange in the fields of art, design, education, and visual culture. Bold & Curious Thinking is carefully and deliberately embedded in our studio and peer-learning experience.

#### **Distinction**

When creative ambition, risk-taking, questioning and playfulness are enabled, work and ideas can flourish. We value NCAD's distinction in place and education, and are proud to champion a rich and immersive 'dirty learning' experience, in which students learn by doing.

#### **Respect**

We believe in respect: of our shared responsibility to each other, our wider community and the world around us. Robust and responsible, NCAD respects its role as a publicly funded organisation.

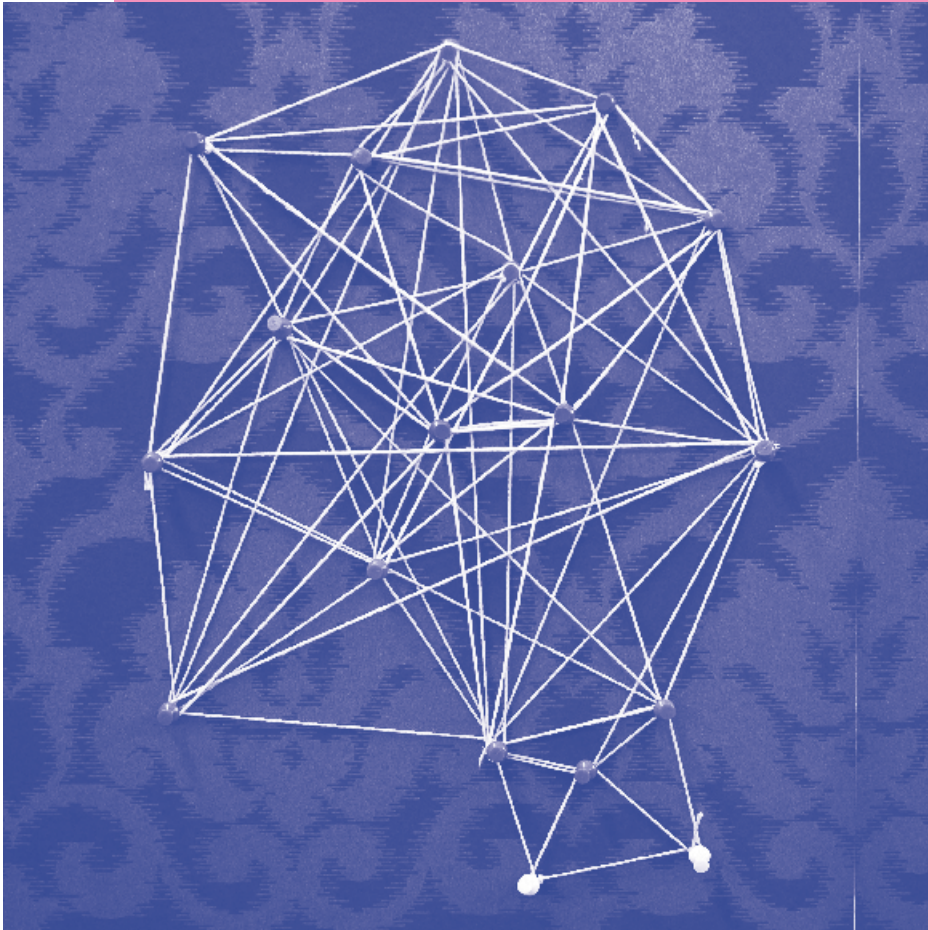
#### **Diversity**

We value diversity of ideas, students and programmes. Offering a dynamic learning choice to create an environment of genuine discovery.

#### **Relevance**

As an institution, we believe NCAD is a positive force for the future. We want our work to be have genuine relevance in people's lives, and we actively build partnerships across society to broaden our impact.

15 learning pathways  
**across undergraduate,  
post graduate  
and doctoral study**



Independent  
and strengthened  
**through our  
partnerships**



**NCAD  
Vision, Values,  
Strategy  
2019–2024**

**“This is  
the time  
of the  
makers”**

Jane Ní Dhulchaointigh,  
designer, creator of Sugru,  
and NCAD graduate



NCAD is distinct in its history, context and position within art and design education in Ireland: we offer the largest range of art and design degrees in the State at undergraduate and postgraduate level. With art and design creative practice at a significant point of flux, the Board and staff regard this Strategic Plan as our blueprint for proactively engaging with this change. By its nature, a strategy must affirm beliefs while clearly setting out aspirations for the future. Student experience and success is at the centre of this Strategic Plan and underpins its delivery. Over the next five years this Strategic Plan will guide our mission to demonstrate creativity in action, and to educate through art and design, rather than for it.

We have identified three areas of Strategic Focus for 2019–2024

## **1. Embed BOLD and CURIOUS LEARNING at our core**

- Underpin learning by a shared academic ethos
- Support bold and curious teaching
- Support and strengthen our research culture
- Develop resources to support learning, making, and digital literacy
- Develop resources to support students' NCAD journey

## **2. CONNECT and be CONNECTED**

- Connectivity at the core of learning and research
- Connect student's and staff's creative practice into a full range of contexts
- A student body that reflects the diversity of society

## **3. An EFFECTIVE ORGANISATION**

- Work together better
- Campus facilities development
- Operational effectiveness and strength





# 1. Embed **BOLD** and **CURIOUS LEARNING** at our core

**Bold and curious learning is agile and responsive. It recognises the power and value to our society and economy of learning through art and design, not for it. We are committed to ensuring every student has access to a learning experience that is dynamic, resourced and transformative. Embedding bold and curious thinking challenges students to innovate and interrogate, and to take risks in their learning.**



**To underpin learning in NCAD by a shared academic ethos.** We will establish a shared framework across the institution, and across teaching and learning. Informing this ethos is the all-staff strategic process which fed into this Strategic Plan, our shared values, and strategic advisors. This critical framework, shaped by our time, will support our teaching and learning for the duration of this Strategic Plan.

**To live our commitment to support bold and curious teaching.** We will develop a Teaching and Learning Action Plan that creates a shared framework of excellence for teaching and learning across NCAD and which reflects best practice and supports innovation. To inform this, we will: undertake an audit of current pedagogical models within NCAD; build the supports and programmes to allow a range of learners to thrive at NCAD; develop annual initiatives to support innovative teaching and unlock the unique potential of NCAD as a site of interdisciplinary learning and research.

**To support and strengthen the vibrant research culture at the heart of NCAD as a learning community.** We will undertake a thorough audit of research activity in all its forms within NCAD in order to build a shared understanding of its potential in the learning environment, and the resources and processes supporting it. With that in place, we can develop a Research Action Plan informed by the audit (and allied consultation process) that recognises the potential of research within creative practice, identifies distinct research directions, and delivers targeted initiatives and supports to strengthen research within NCAD.

**To develop institutional resources that support bold and curious learning, specialist making, and digital literacy across NCAD.** We will review current technical resources and develop a Technical Resource Development Plan in line with this Strategic Plan's academic objectives. We will commit resources that recognise the importance of the NCAD Library and National Irish Visual Arts Library (NIVAL), the national resource dedicated to the documentation of 20th and 21st century Irish visual art and design. We will develop a Digital Learning Action Plan that places digital literacy as a key element of learning at NCAD.

**To develop institutional resources that support students in their journey through bold and curious learning.** We will develop a Wellbeing Programme to support student success and enable all our students to have an immersive, enriching experience.

## 2. CONNECT and be CONNECTED

The best creative practice responds to the time in which it is made. We are acutely aware of the changing nature of creative practice, the relevance of our connection to the world beyond the campus, and the importance of forging connections. We are committed to connecting with local, national and international contexts, and focusing on the needs of society and all our communities.



**To place connectivity at the centre of learning and research in NCAD, ensuring the core of learning considers the place and potential of creative practice.** We will build on NCAD's strong history of creating opportunities for embedded learning beyond the campus across all pathways. Partnerships in Ireland and abroad will enrich the learning environment and connect NCAD to contexts beyond the worlds of art, design and education. We will embed direct experience of contemporary practice across the curriculum through an annual College-wide programme of visiting fellows, lecturers and embedded projects with makers in all disciplines.

**To demonstrate creativity in action by connecting the work of our students and staff to the world beyond NCAD.** We will build research activity that has an influence within NCAD and beyond, recognising the range of research held within the institution. We will build an annual public programme of events and research-driven activity that will build curiosity and welcome an inquisitive audience to NCAD. We are committed to celebrating the work of our alumni and staff and their influence, in diverse ways, across society.

**To undertake selected targeted initiatives to further diversify the age, gender, geographic and socio-economic profile of our students.** NCAD has a strong commitment to welcoming a student body that reflects contemporary society. We will build on our Access Programmes and PATH Project to further understand barriers to accessing art and design at higher education, and seek out strategic partnerships and philanthropic support to further these programmes. We will build a range of flexible routes to learning based on the work and knowledge of our Centre for Continuing Education in Art and Design (CEAD), which already provides opportunities for learning to more than six hundred part-time students annually. We will advocate for and influence art and design education at all levels. We will seek to expand the base of students who want to study art and design at third level.

### 3. An EFFECTIVE ORGANISATION

Every objective in this Strategic Plan has to be underpinned both by solid foundations and by rigorous and efficient application. We are committed to being a cohesive and effective organisation, in which good management and decision making ensure all resources are fully maximised to support NCAD's strategic objectives, and our position as a public-funded organisation is understood and valued.



**To work better together.** We will support our colleagues to deliver NCAD's ambitions and to reach their own potential. We will develop a Working Together Better Plan to underpin how colleagues can work effectively together; support internal communication; promote efficient working practices; foster staff development and training; and share best practice.

**Create a physical and digital environment that meets current and future needs.** A Campus Development Planning Cycle will map capital investment over this strategic period. It will ensure our campus is a safe environment for staff and students, and deliver a phased upgrade of campus facilities - taking into account academic delivery and an enhanced student experience on campus. A Future Needs Development Plan will consider the potential of the site as well as sites within Dublin and partnerships. An Accessibility Audit will contribute to a phased plan towards Universal Design Principles where achievable. We will produce an ICT Development Plan to map out how we use technology and operate in the digital space.

**Build a strong and healthy institution.** NCAD will be informed by effective decision-making, strong organisational structures, business systems and governance models. This process will be driven by senior management development of strong administrative functions to ensure effective, integrated planning of resources, and a rigorous culture of strong governance and assurance across the organisation. Investment in ICT infrastructure and management information systems will support this.

**Build an integrated and ambitious financial plan.** Reflecting NCAD's position as a source of public investment and self-generated resources, clear financial planning will underpin all decision-making.



# In 2024 NCAD will be an institution that:

NCAD's Management Team, overseen by the Board, will manage the delivery of this Strategy. A comprehensive Implementation Plan will map the delivery of the Strategic Plan through a series of strategic projects. Each will have a clear list of tasks, assigned leaders and teams, and key performance indicators through which we can track progress.

## **Demonstrates innovation in teaching practice, flexibility, and trans-disciplinary learning.**

We will be creating a distinctive and transformative learning experience for a diverse body of learners, and delivering a learning experience framed by a shared academic ethos that reflects the contemporary world; and ensures graduates are equipped to make an impact in society.

*Achieved through:*

Completion of the Teaching and Learning Action Plan, delivering an annual programme of teaching supports, cross-disciplinary and transdisciplinary projects.

Technical completion of the Technical Resource Development Plan.

Digital implementation of the Digital Strategy.

## **Actively engages with the world.**

Connections will be informed by the wider context, and a visible public programme will connect people to the ideas within NCAD.

*Achieved through:*

Partnerships: a network of strategic partnerships will be in place. International profile: established annual programme of NCAD fellows/associate professors/international guests.

Events: established annual programme of research-driven public events.

Alumni: established annual programme of alumni connectivity.

Contextual learning: ongoing development of opportunities for students to learn in context.

Recruitment strategies: annual targeted recruitment strategies to broaden diversity in our staff and student body.

Access Programmes: funding in place so Access Programmes can make direct interventions to support a more diverse student body.

## **Has a distinct and vibrant research culture.**

With clearly articulated areas of exploration and influence, and innovative models of dissemination and engagement.

*Achieved through:*

Research Action Plan: completion of the Research Action Plan includes establishing the appropriate institutional resources and structures to support research. Targeted annual initiatives will drive impactful research activity.

## **Works together well.**

With a coherent and shared clarity of purpose and culture of respect, and a collective pride in NCAD activities.

*Achieved through:*

Working Together Better: completion of the Working Together Better Initiative includes an organisational review of working practices and internal communications the introduction of a Performance Management and Development System and a mapping of assurance and working towards a culture audit.

## **Has the resources to meet needs.**

Campus buildings, technical resources and ICT infrastructure will meet the needs of students, staff, and academic development in these areas is being actively planned for.

*Achieved through:*

Campus resourcing: completion of the Campus Development Planning Cycle.

Future needs planning: completion of the Future Spaces Plan, with implementation commenced.

Digital planning: completion of the Digital Environment Actions, with implementation underway.

## **Manages resources and people effectively and well.**

Managing resources with clear oversight. Investment into people and infrastructure is impactful.

*Achieved through:*

Financial tracking: robust financial planning, tracking income opportunities, capital investment and operational expenditure.

Management processes: work to build College-wide management processes to ensure effective planning and tracking of financial, staff and facilities resources.



Students and staff in the Design Studio, c.1955. Collection National Irish Visual Arts Library (NIVAL), NCAD, Dublin

“It is vitally important that artists and designers have a hands on experience of making as well as the time to explore the potential of a variety of materials.

**If you’ve had the opportunity to make mistakes, and to discover other new possibilities through making, you’ll think in a different way and problem solving will become part of your process.”**

Róisín de Buitléar,  
artist and NCAD graduate

**“When you bring people from different worlds together, new thinking emerges. Hospital staff say to us that NCAD designers think so differently, and that in itself is so refreshing: a whole new perspective opens up, as well as a great energy and excitement.**

Very real improvements are starting to come out of the project which we are now working on delivering. For me, as we start to ramp up this innovation activity, the work with NCAD designers is becoming the bedrock for our innovation function: it has shown us what design can do.”

Siobhán Manning, Innovation Manager, Mater Hospital Dublin on working with NCAD Medical Devices Design and Interaction Design students







NCAD graduate Frances Neary,  
Principal of Trinity Comprehensive,  
Ballymun, on the Arts Guarantee, a  
programme to bring art and design into  
all aspects of the school's curriculum

“When our students engage with the arts, their experiences become rich and alive. The hands on approach encourages them to become problem solvers and critical thinkers. They become solution focused and develop a confidence to slow down and address the problem so that they have a positive outcome. They can then apply their understanding of this creative process to a solution focused approach to their education.

**The arts encourages you to think in way that pushes boundaries, a skill that is invaluable for moving forward in life.”**

A person wearing a white lab coat is holding a white, rounded ceramic object with a small opening at the top. The background is blurred, suggesting a workshop or studio environment. The image is overlaid with a blue tint.

# **BOLD & CURIOUS LEARNING**

Special thanks to: NCAD Bureau+ design students Conor Smyth and Orla King for their work in designing this strategy document. Thanks also to Matthew Thompson for photography. Further image credits extend to the Irish Art Archive at the ESB Centre for the Study of Irish Art, National Gallery of Ireland, and the National Visual Arts Library (NIVAL), NCAD, Dublin.

**NCAD** DUBLIN  
National College of Art and Design

*bureau+*