

# The Guildford Institute Strategic Plan to 2020



## Foreword

The objects of the Institute are set out in its Memorandum of Association [Article 3]. They may be summarised as follows:

- To promote and advance the education of all members of the community
- To contribute to the educational and cultural life and heritage of Guildford and surrounding area
- By providing educational and cultural activities in a social atmosphere
- By making facilities available for individuals and organisations to provide such activities

As an incorporated charity, we have broadly interpreted our mission as seeking to enhance the lives of those living and working in Guildford and its environs by promoting interest in and enjoyment of education, heritage and culture.

This document sets out our plans for realising these objectives and the strategic direction we intend to take over the next ten years. The plan embodies our fundamental values as an organisation and it seeks to take account of the changing local and regional context in which we operate and of the community we serve. In setting out what we intend to achieve, the plan also outlines some of the measures we will use to gauge the extent to which we have succeeded in our objectives.

The Institute has a distinguished past and we want to capture and carry forward what is best from that tradition. At the same time, we recognise that the nature of leisure and culture, and of education and its delivery, continue to undergo rapid change. If we are to respond positively to such developments and meet contemporary needs, then we too must embrace change and have a bold vision of our future.

## Core values

In setting out our strategic objectives, we have identified a set of core values. They are intended to provide a framework against which the Trustees can audit the objectives they set, the staff and volunteers can plan the way in which they set out to achieve these objectives, and the Members and other users can assess both the service they receive and their contribution to it.

A fundamental aim of the Institute is **the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake.**

This relates to the self-fulfilment that comes from widening the range of one's understanding, skills and experience, and the development of further interests as a result. An implication is that Institute provision should not be determined by whether or not it leads to a qualification, though it is recognised that for some participants it might act as a preparatory stage.

Institute activities should **provide the opportunity for developing and extending social relationships and experiencing a sense of community.**

This has implications for the ways in which users of the Institute relate to Trustees, staff and one another, and how the Institute relates to the wider community, providing a hub in which activities can take place and links develop.

The Institute should have an ongoing **commitment to quality and diversity** in provision, and to optimising accessibility and equality of opportunity.

This has implications for the future planning of activities, facilities and the development of the building.

Acting according to these values will have implications for Trustees, staff and volunteers in ensuring the adoption of:

- An understanding and fair approach towards colleagues and all who use the Institute
- A positive approach towards problem solving and an encouragement of independent thought
- A flexible, non bureaucratic attitude
- An ongoing evaluation of the Board's effectiveness and that of the organisation, and of its accountability to stakeholders
- Responsiveness to changes in the outside environment, and to feedback from users
- Sensitivity to the environment, including efficient and sustainable use of resources, the development of the physical surroundings of the building, and awareness of the aesthetic, cultural and historical heritage of the Institute.
- A prudent approach to financial management, being business-like while giving priority to the core values.

## **Communications and Technology**

The sections which follow relate to specific strategies for aspects of the Institute's organisation and activities. The core values are intended to inform and underpin those strategies. The other generic theme which similarly touches all aspects is that of communications and technology.

We intend to encourage the use of technology in the delivery of courses and to enhance student experience, to support administrative work and in the operation of the Library, and to contribute to the effectiveness of our communications with Members and others. The emphasis will be on investment in technology and systems which are fit for purpose, sustainable, value for money, and which deliver optimum benefit.

We have already begun to improve our publicity (for example, the new brochure) and we are committed to the more general improvement of our communications (with Members, users and the wider public) by all available means. We intend that our communications should be easily accessible, readily understood and transparent.

## Membership

The Institute is a membership organisation, a concept which has long been embedded in its history and which is also reflected in the Memorandum and Articles. We believe there are sound reasons for continuing in this mode.

Members constitute a base of stakeholder support and income, are a potential source of volunteers and Trustees, offer a means of securing goodwill and of building a useful reservoir of local influence and contacts. We will therefore aim to promote and sustain the concept of Membership through engaging proactively with Members and exploring what we can appropriately offer them, while balancing this with the needs of all users.

We will measure our success by:

- Growth in membership numbers
- Positive feedback from Members through new means of communication

## Activities

One of the most successful and enterprising activities since the Institute became independent of the University has been its programme of courses. These are mainstream non-vocational adult education, focussed on the pursuit of knowledge or skills development for their own sake rather than the attainment of qualifications.

We intend that the provision of courses will remain a key element in the Institute's portfolio and affirm the principle that they should not be qualification- led. This would not preclude hirers of rooms from mounting accredited programmes. Equally, there may be opportunity for the Institute to run preparatory courses linked to award bearing programmes with other providers, or collaborating in shared programmes with other providers.

We will aim to generate some programmes in new areas in order to extend our appeal to a more diverse audience and to generate additional income streams. This will require further examination of niche markets and may need further investment in resources. At the same time, we recognise that a significant proportion of our audience is always likely to be elderly and we shall continue to pay attention to satisfying its needs.

Talks and visits have proved increasingly popular. While Members enjoy special rates for these, they are also open to the public and many non-Members are enjoying them. We will continue to mount as interesting and inviting a programme of talks and visits as possible within agreed parameters of cost and effort. These will be complemented by exhibitions, recitals, social events and similar activities aimed at creating a hub and broadening the range of people who use the building.

The balance of activities is taken up by the Clubs and Societies who meet on the Institute's premises. We value the contribution they make to the general life of the Institute. Alongside

courses, they help to establish the argument for public benefit consistent with para 4.1.5 of our Memorandum (..to provide and make available premises and facilities for use by the inhabitants of the Borough of Guildford and surrounding areas and by voluntary groups and other organisations of the locality...). We will continue to make available our facilities to appropriate Clubs and Societies and will encourage more organisations to avail themselves of the opportunities.

We will measure our success by:

- Expansion in the range of courses
- A greater number and diversity of students
- A continuing high take up for talks and visits
- Additional Clubs and Societies

## **Lettings and Room Hire**

A considerable proportion of the Institute's income derives from rental, lettings and room hire. The most substantial element is the rental for the ground floor space currently occupied by the Royal Bank of Scotland on a 10 year lease. This is a large and critical element of our income and effectively means that this space cannot be considered for Institute use for the period of this plan.

Other lettings and room hire predominantly relate to rooms on the second floor. We believe that this represents good use of that floor space in that lettings are economical of staff time and effort and, importantly, are a means of bringing a varied range of people into the building. This is consistent with our aim of seeking to increase the total volume of activity and usage of the building, not necessarily derived from Members' activities. Unless financial advantage or the need to achieve other strategic aims suggests otherwise in particular instances, we intend that the Institute should follow a pro-active lettings and room hire strategy.

We are mindful that planned increase in activity, whether in running more courses or dealing with more users and hirers, will impact on the workload of staff and volunteers and may require additional resources. These factors will form part of our ongoing consideration of the annual Business Plan.

We will measure our success by:

- The optimisation of room occupancy by outside hirers without overloading staff
- Increased income from lettings and casual room hire

## **Relationship with Other Organisations**

Our Memorandum of Association empowers us to cooperate with other charities, voluntary bodies and statutory authorities (Art 4.1.7) and we have established contact with a number of local organisations with interests similar to our own. We will seek to develop a constructive and mutually beneficial relationship with other organisations, not only to avoid duplication of provision but also for joint ventures. Where appropriate, we will investigate the possibility of

running some Institute activity on other premises and/or using the facilities of other organisations.

We will measure our success by:

- The development of existing active partnerships and the making of new ones

## **The Library**

The Library houses historic collections, including a local history collection of books, ephemera, prints and drawings including the unique “scrapbooks”. As well as the historic reserve collection, the library offers a lending service of modern fiction and non-fiction books for the benefit of members and the reading room has a selection of daily newspapers.

Both the historic and the modern (loan) collections add value to the Institute. The historic collection is part of the Guildford heritage and the modern collection (which contains some out of print material from the 30s and 40s) also provides a valuable service, albeit currently for a minority of Members. There is an operational relationship between the two components and advantage in managing them as an entity.

We therefore intend to maintain and develop both collections, whilst keeping usage of the modern collection under careful review to ensure that it is fit for purpose. The Library is currently staffed entirely by volunteers and, whilst volunteers will continue to be an essential resource, we intend to address the need for appropriate professional staffing in the Library. The increasing application of technology will facilitate improvements in management of the stock and will permit internet access to the Library catalogue.

The Library currently occupies a prime location on the ground floor. Part of our strategic plan relates to a review of the use of the Institute building and the prospect, subject to the availability of funding, of redesigning parts of the interior. The Library will be part of that consideration, in the context of seeking to improve reception and access arrangements.

We will measure our success by:

- Continued professional development within the Library
- Increased use of the Library by Members and others

## **The Restaurant**

The Restaurant is a franchised activity, currently run by two separate caterers. Its unique selling points are its vegetarian menu and the particular ambience deriving from its location in the Assembly Room.

We believe it is important to provide food and drink for courses and other Institute users. The restaurant service contributes to this and is also important to the creation of a “hub”, as a meeting place and a facility with the capacity to attract new customers into the building. The Restaurant will therefore continue as a franchised operation, but will not necessarily remain in

its present form throughout the planning period. We must be responsive to changes in eating habits and also to local competition. We will continue to develop a constructive relationship with the franchisees and will explore a more active approach to marketing the facility.

We will measure our success by:

- Optimisation of customer numbers
- The provision of catering services to a good standard to courses and other users according to performance criteria

## Staffing

The Institute employs a relatively small number of paid staff and additionally engages a larger number of volunteers who work principally in either reception or the Library.

The staffing establishment must be contingent on the availability of funding and of what is affordable at any one time within the income and expenditure budget. Within that constraint, it will be determined by reference to what is required to maintain the efficient day to day operation of the Institute, to deliver the Business Plan targets, and to comply with relevant legislation. Risk can be tempered by making short term appointments.

Volunteers will remain a necessary and valued part of the Institute's operation. Our aspiration is to use volunteers *in addition to* (not instead of) paid staff but this is not the current situation and its attainment in future will depend on having sufficient guaranteed funding to increase the cohort of paid staff. Such a position might then enable volunteers to be used more productively and creatively.

We will seek to follow best practice in all aspects of the recruitment and treatment of staff, and to create a safe and pleasant working environment.

For reasons of efficiency, cost effectiveness and feasibility, it is appropriate for some services to be contracted out to external agencies. Such external services will be properly commissioned and engaged with due diligence and will be reviewed at appropriate intervals.

We will measure our success by:

- The efficiency of the day to day operation of the Institute and the delivery of targets in the Business Plan
- The effective and efficient use of volunteers
- Staff satisfaction (expressed through Personal Development Reviews)
- The efficiency and cost effectiveness of outsourced services

## Funding

It is essential to secure a sound financial footing for the Institute going forward. Our approach to funding will therefore be based on the following principles

- A prudent approach to forecasting income and committing expenditure

- Responsible budget setting with regular monitoring
- Active assessment and management of risk
- An explicit policy on the designation of reserves

Any fundraising will be a well organised, coordinated endeavour and related to specific projects (not to general expenditure).

We will measure our success by:

- Operation within a balanced budget
- Adequate reserves
- The extent to which risks have been accurately assessed and properly managed
- The achievement of fund-raising targets

## **Use of the Building**

We have set up a Forward Planning Group to examine the need to redesign and refurbish the interior of the Institute in a managed, ongoing process to enable it to develop through the twenty-first century.

Apart from the ground floor space currently occupied by RBS, we are committed to a full and unfettered exploration of the potential for reconfiguring the remaining space to facilitate that further development. We intend that this should be accompanied by the provision of appropriate furnishings and equipment, including ICT systems. We have retained the services of an architect to support this endeavour.

Any substantial redesign or refurbishment can only be paid for by raising new funds and it is likely, in the present economic climate, that a phased development will be the only way forward. We also recognise that the impact of changes on the day to day operation of the Institute will need careful management to avoid loss of income and to safeguard the well-being of our staff and volunteers.

We will measure our success by:

- The introduction of a phased and funded redesign and refurbishment programme which fits the building for the twenty-first century

## **Review of the Strategic Plan**

**The Board of Trustees will formally review the plan and progress towards its fulfilment every two years, seeking comments from others as part of the process.**

August 2011