

Distance Learning

A different way



Chris Hammacott explains the role of a distance learning tutor

A City & Guilds in Patchwork & Quilting has long been held as a benchmark, a symbol of the skills you possess, a sort of, done the samples, got the certificate and will never be bothered by dodgy points again! Unfortunately, through changes in the funding many

colleges have stopped supplying the C&G courses and with even more imminent changes to the syllabuses, more will be stopping soon. So, step in a provider not governed by the external funding issue, distance learning. For some time distance learning has been rather misunderstood, seen as maybe the poor cousin to a college course, but why I wonder?

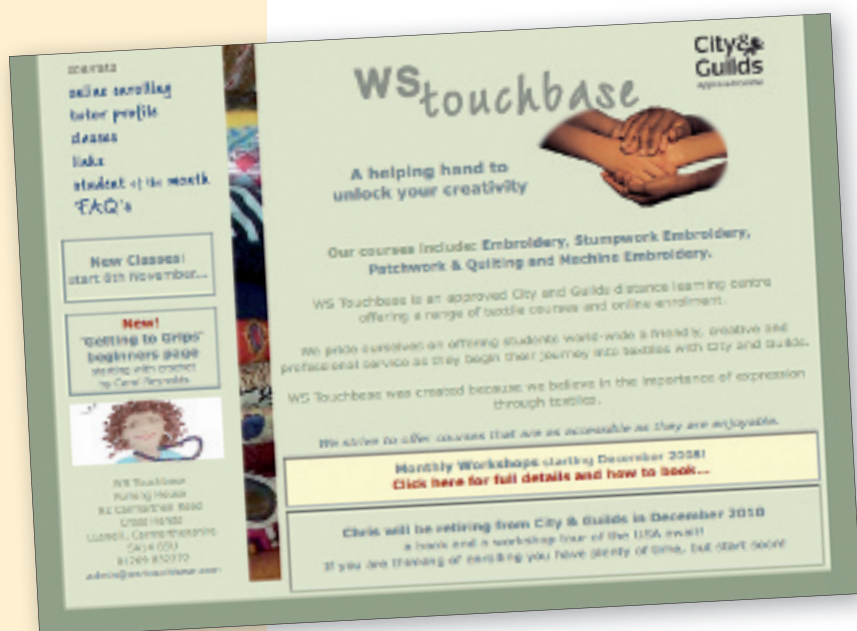
Now at this point I had better pin my colours to the mast (or should that be wave my Dresden plate from the window?). I own an accredited distance learning centre and from it I run the City & Guilds textile courses. Owning a centre rather than just teaching from it, means that I as a tutor must also have all the back up information. Just like any other

college, we have to ensure data protection, write and carry out our equal opportunities policy and a policy of zero tolerance to any form of discrimination. I have run the centre for ten years and along the way have seen the changes which have made distance learning the right option for many students.

So what is involved with working towards that Certificate? Any tutor will have taken the syllabus and broken it down into units, including the design and the practical aspects. Tutors working this way will take the syllabus and present it in the way they feel best, so students studying at different learning centres will be working through in different ways. However, this does make swapping centres rather difficult, should the need arise. Some centres work via the internet and you download the lessons, others like myself work with the postal service, either way you have so many modules to complete. The modules consist of lessons and samples; these allow you to work at your own speed through the course. I should say that it is worth remembering that copyright exists on the lessons and they are for the student's use only.

There are in all the levels of the Patchwork & Quilting elements of design, so you are asked to weld a paintbrush and look at texture, line and the rest. I find that something as simple as looking at colour pairing can really open a student's eyes; coming out of that comfort zone makes many a student redecorate and zing up their wardrobe. You have been warned! The stitched samples lead you through the traditional and the more experimental. As tutors, we have a little leeway to add elements if we feel the students would benefit. For instance, I have been extremely influenced by the quilts of Gees Bend, so I suggest a student may like to have a look. It is not included in the syllabus, so it is not compulsory, just something they may like. I know other tutors do the same with different aspects of the craft we are so devoted to. Of course some of the mechanics of distance learning make life easier:

- ◆ You can in general enrol at any time, none of that rush in September.
- ◆ Payment is spread generally over the modules, and sometimes discounts are available.
- ◆ If you need a break from family commitments, illness, holidays, you have no fear of falling behind as would happen in a class.



- ◆ For those at home: carers, those with young children or maybe disabled you can take the time, and work when you can.
- ◆ Of course in these days of high fuel costs and limited public transport, no travelling to college has to be a saving.

Many potential students worry about the lack of stimulation from working alone. I always encourage students to join local guilds and participate in workshops if possible. In common with most providers, we offer students the chance to contact one another. We cannot, with data protection, send out lists of students but if requested we can give students who live close to one another the chance to meet. We also have meetings at all the shows, even if it is just the chance to have a coffee and chat; being able to put a face to the work is brilliant. Lastly, many providers like us have workshops and summer schools where students can meet and have fun. For us, we are lucky enough to use the National Botanic Garden in Wales as a 'play day', workshops take place and the students have more inspiration than you could shake the proverbial at!

Work comes back for assessment. Some centres offer this in digital images, others like mine receive the real thing, we have nine modules for the level 3 course (more of this later) so nine times work is posted back, I assess the work, writing maybe 3 pages of critique. Again in common with all accredited centres, we have an internal verifier qualified by C&G who over sees and makes sure that fairness and objectivity are the watchwords. Once a year, all centres are visited by an external verifier, who checks the systems and samples the students' work, they look for the fact that we assess to the standards laid down by the governing body and that we keep the records of students secure.

Many students worry at first that the work is posted, but I am pleased to say that 99.99% of work has arrived safely and returned the same, even the work from the Australian outback and the heart of New York City got home in fine fettle. So who does this system of study work for? Those who can time manage, make maybe Monday evenings 'college' time may be best. Goats rather than sheep (excuse the analogy), but those who do not need others to start in the class first so they can get ideas, come on you know the types!

Those who like to play with an idea. There is the time to think: "yes that log cabin looked great, but how would it look if I made the centre a hexagon?" The playing means that a distance learning student generally does more sampling than one in a class situation, often exploring ideas to a greater degree. As a general rule I would say this form of study does not work for ditherers, if you are the type who can always put off to tomorrow, you may find the discipline hard to

To find out more about Chris' workshops and courses which cover Embroidery, Stumpwork, Patchwork & Quilting and Machine Embroidery, visit www.ws-touchbase.com.

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A STUDENT'S POINT OF VIEW:

I'm currently using distance learning to take my City & Guilds (7922) Level 3 Certificate in Design & Craft Patchwork & Quilting with Chris Hammacott. For me it works very well as I can fit my coursework around a hectic life, and generally find that evenings suit me best. Not having to attend college is not a hindrance either, as I can always seek Chris's advice either by phone or e-mail. I'm also lucky that I'm able to meet up with Chris at regular workshops or the textile group we both go to. I've found it a good way to learn in a structured way, but at my own pace, which I like. I'm really enjoying this course and openly admit that if the distance learning opportunity wasn't available, I wouldn't have been able to do this. Distance learning opens up a world of learning to those who, like me, don't have the time available to commit to a full time college course. Thank you Chris.

Jo Brookes, Student.

manage and those whose ideas come from others. If you just want to stitch, then the design work may be a struggle, but this would apply to a college course equally.

City & Guilds offer a number of levels of Patchwork & Quilting courses: confusingly these were renamed a few years ago, so let's see what we have:

Level 1 was called 'first steps' in Patchwork & Quilting. This is a short course for complete beginners, great if you have seen a patchwork design, but have never done any before. It was brought in to get students into the City & Guilds mind set.

Level 2 is generally run for students who wish to experiment with techniques; the assessment pieces are not so involved, but if you feel you are already at this level I would always recommend the third choice.

Level 3 is the one that was called the Part 1. This is, I think, the bench mark. It includes design and techniques, the work is intensive and if you want to teach, it is a world recognised qualification.

Diploma used to be called Part 2; for the student wishing to immerse themselves in specific elements. This is the follow on from Level 3.

Whatever you decide to pursue in 2009, I hope this article will help you move in the right direction and make the right choices for you. ◆



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