

Royal School of Needlework  
**Goldwork** - Diploma  
Academic year 2025/26

**Goldwork is the embroidery of gold or gilt metal threads onto a variety of fabrics, usually cotton velvet, silk or linen. It is frequently used for ecclesiastical and ceremonial embroidery. As it is not possible to stitch traditional metal threads through fabric, the techniques used focus on different ways of attaching the threads to the fabric surface. Metal thread ends are cut and can be plunged through the fabric and secured on the back. The Diploma module builds on skills acquired at Certificate level, introducing additional materials and new techniques.**

**Aim**

To design, work and mount a piece of goldwork demonstrating an advanced level of technical skill and appropriate choice and use of threads and techniques.

Discuss ideas for this module with the tutor at an early stage. RSN tutors have considerable experience in working this technique and in teaching it. Please listen to their advice.

**Materials and equipment**

There is no starter kit for this module. Students are free to source their own materials. For online students a kit of the materials and padding detailed below can be supplied. Calico, a limited range of silk dupion, a range of gilt threads, metallic kid, needles, mellors and beeswax can be purchased from the RSN. All padding materials ie. felt, carpet felt, soft string and white string, should be purchased from the RSN.

**Fabric:** Calico (medium weight for base fabric 50 x 50 cm (20 x 20 inches).  
Cotton velvet, closely woven silk dupion, cotton or linen 30 x 30 cm (12 x 12 inches).

**Threads:** All thread types used for Certificate Goldwork can be included: Japanese, Pearl Purl, Twist, Rococco, Bright Check and Smooth Purl. The following new materials must also be included.

Many of these threads are available in a range of sizes. Any size may be used if appropriate to the design. A combination of gilt, silver and copper threads may be used. Colours other than gilt will need to be self-sourced.

**Passing** - like Japanese but a more tightly wrapped foil. This is couched down in pairs with a single waxed thread.

**Broad Plate** - a metal 'ribbon' which is couched down with a single waxed thread and bent back on itself to form a zig-zag pattern.

**Metallic Kid Leather** (or synthetic alternative) - gold, silver or copper.

**Wire/Dull Check** - a matt version of Bright Check.

**Rough Purl** - a matt version of Smooth Purl.

Needles: Embroidery 10 and 12. Chenille 20 or 22 for plunging.

Other: A mellor is a gold work tool used to manipulate the threads into place. Embroidery tweezers are used to create crisp corners. Velvet board for cutting chips.

### **Reasonable adjustments**

If there is a reason you may have difficulty completing the module e.g. visual impairment, allergy to some materials, please discuss this with the tutor and the C and D team before starting. Adjustments are possible.

### **Essential requirements**

Design area

- The design must be no larger than 20 x 20 cm (8 x 8 inches).

**The techniques listed below must be included**

#### Padding

- Felt, soft string, carpet felt and white string padding must be included. See below for applications.
- Soft string padding for cutwork must be no wider than 7mm (3/8 in) and one end must taper to a point. The padding should be worked in soft string purchased from the RSN.

#### Metallic kid leather (or synthetic alternative)

- An area with applied metallic kid leather.

#### Couching

Using either Japanese or Passing

- An area of couching, in self-colour, over carpet felt padding, worked in a brick pattern. Additionally a diagonal pattern may be worked.
- An area of couching over white string to create a basket weave pattern. There should be sufficient rows to create a distinct pattern.
- At least one area of Shaded Gold
  - **Or Nué** in which gold thread is couched down in vertical or horizontal lines, or **Italian Shading** in which the couching follows the shape. In each technique for the background the couching is worked in gold coloured thread. Where the gold passes over the design, it is couched with coloured threads at intervals dictated by the design, to make a shaded pattern on the gold.

## Using Japanese

- A turn of precisely 90 degrees, achieved by turning the thread, not plunging. The turn should have at least four rows.

## Using a combination of threads

- An area of couching with a combination of threads over padding, including turns.

## Visible plunging

- One area of couching (any couched thread or combination) should have visible plunging i.e. no outline.

## Couched Pearl Purl

- Some couched Pearl Purl should be included. It may be overstretched for effect. There should be at least one area that encloses a shape which meets seamlessly.

## Cutwork

- Solid Chip Work
  - An area of solid chip work, which must be worked with Bright Check or Wire Check only. Scattered chips may also be worked in either or both types.
- Cutwork Purls over soft string padding.
  - A minimum of 10cm (4in) in total, using all four types of purl: Bright Check, Wire Check, Smooth Purl and Rough Purl.
  - One area must use only Rough Purl and be at least 4cm (1 ½ inches) in continuous length.
- “S-ing”
  - At least 5cm continuous length of “S-ing” using cut Purls. May also include spangles.

## Broad Plate

- An area with Broad Plate over padding, at least 5 cm (2 inches) continuous length, worked in a zigzag pattern. Whipped Plate may be used as an alternative.

## Finishing

- The finished work will be mounted on card and backed with a suitable fabric. Bumf, or similar, will be used as padding.

## Optional elements, including the examples below, will not be assessed.

- An area of couched threads over white string, not worked in a basket weave pattern.
- Embellishments such as spangles, gems or beads as appropriate to the design.
- Extra fabrics can be applied to the background or over padding.
- Coloured metal threads, in moderation, can be included with the required threads.

## **Getting started – before class**

It is not necessary to arrive at the first class with a finalised design, but you should come with some ideas. For examples of work by other C and D students look at the C and D gallery on the website. <https://royal-needlework.org.uk/courses/certificate-diploma/canddgallery/>.

## **Getting started – in class**

### **Preparatory work**

Preparation prior to stitching is an important part of the learning process. Your tutor will give guidance on how to prepare the following:

- A line drawing on tracing paper. The tracing will be photocopied several times and used to create:
- A stitch plan to ensure that all the mandatory techniques are included.
- A padding plan will assist in deciding heights and shapes of the padding.
- A simple shaded plan showing areas of solid and outline gold in yellow to help with decisions about density and openness.
- An order of work
- The original tracing will be turned into a pricking and used to transfer the design to the fabric.

Initial plans can be amended as the embroidery progresses. If you choose to have your work formally assessed, you should submit the preparatory work listed above together with your source material. All this paperwork will form part of the assessment.

### **Things to think about when planning the embroidery**

- Sampling the techniques beforehand will help inform design decisions e.g. with judgements about the space needed for different techniques.
- Cutting metal threads dulls scissors. Set aside one pair of ordinary embroidery scissors just for cutting gold.
- Aim for a design which is bold, with clearly defined areas for each of the techniques.
- Organic shapes with flowing, sinuous lines work well.
- Designs with a mix of open and closed spaces work better than those with lots of solid areas.
- Have a good balance of all the techniques, do not let one dominate.
- Avoid too many small, intricate details.
- Symmetrical designs and perfect circles are harder to achieve.
- Protect the work when moving it by using bubble wrap or some other form of padded covering.

## **Intellectual property**

The final design must be original to you. Use of your own visual media (photographs, drawings) is encouraged. Referencing and interpreting other visual media is acceptable. Copying is not. The intellectual property of others must be respected.

**Additional information**

Additional information can be downloaded from the website.

- Resources - Websites, Books, Suppliers for C&D