



Research in Art and Design: the first decade
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Art and Design Education: historical overview

Art & Design Education is the oldest form of publicly funded education in the United Kingdom. It was started in 1837, as Design Education to meet the needs of industry by providing training for the "artisan" the nineteenth century equivalent of the designer.

The Industrial Revolution had established the United Kingdom as a world leader in manufacturing technology which had allowed British products to gain sizeable markets both at home and abroad. The early nineteenth century was to see those markets starting to be threatened by the establishment of free trade agreements between the UK and mainland Europe which allowed tariff concessions on the exchange of goods. European products began to compete alongside British products with increasing success which was attributed to their superiority in "design" a feature it was felt that British products lacked.

The age of the "foreign competitor" had arrived and British manufacturers seeing their livelihoods threatened became a powerful political lobby with the matter soon receiving Parliamentary attention. In 1835 Parliament called for a Select Committee to, "Enquire into the best means of extending a knowledge of the Arts and the principles of Design among the people, especially the manufacturing population of the country." (1835-6 Select Committee title)

The Committee investigated the situation taking evidence over a two year period 1835-6 with witnesses representing Art, Design, Industry and Education from both the UK and abroad. In 1836 it was to conclude that the successful continental countries were funding Design Education for their manufacturing industries while the UK was not. The Committee were to recommend that Parliament vote £10,000 to establish a Government School of Design in London with further annual funding to establish a network of provincial Schools in the major industrial centres of the country. It was hoped that as the Schools of Design as they became established would encourage the Applied Arts and Design and improve the aesthetic quality of British products thus influencing trade.

Art was soon to become linked to Design, and Art and Design Education established in 1837 was both the first and oldest publicly funded educational venture in the UK. From the beginning there has been an emphasis on practice. Practice is the link between the historical training of the artisan and the current education of the artist, designer and craftsman. Because of its practice base Art and Design has tended to view itself as different to other academic disciplines. Historically this difference has been emphasised by its educational activity being conducted in independent Schools of Art and Design of which there were around one hundred and twenty at the start of the twentieth century. Being practice based and separate, the discipline did not see the need to identify and compare itself with either the academic attainment, or the qualifications of other disciplines. For this reason, it did not initially have the academic status of degree qualifications for its courses.

In fact, it was as late as the 1960s when there was an attempt to introduce degree equivalent status to Art and Design courses with the setting up of the National Council for Diplomas in Art and Design (NCDAD), and the introduction of the Diploma in Art and Design (DipAD), a degree equivalent qualification. The DipAD was to continue until the mid-1970s, when the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) was to take over from NCDAD and the DipAD was upgraded to full honours degree status. Putting the situation into perspective, it is only for the last twenty five of Art and Design's one hundred and sixty three year history that courses have had degree status. This is a very short period compared with other academic disciplines, some of which have offered degrees for over a century.

For the last twenty five years you might say that Art and Design Education has been coming to terms with its undergraduate provision, which it has tended to view as an end in itself. Art and Design has tried to produce a practitioner at undergraduate level while other disciplines have seen the need for postgraduate study.

There has therefore been a tendency for Art and Design degrees to be developed not as a precursor for postgraduate study or research. Postgraduate study in Art and Design practice until the late 1980s was not usually considered to be the norm with the possible exception of the Royal College of Art and a small number of other specialist centres which developed in the 1970s offering Post Graduate Diplomas which under CNAA were to become Masters programmes.

Only with the introduction of degree status did a structure exist where postgraduate study in Art and Design could be conceived and developed and a number of pilot postgraduate courses. These first postgraduate courses were established in the 1970s had limited places backed by state bursaries and certainly until quite recently undergraduate students were not made aware of post graduate study. It was then and possible still is the exception rather than the rule for Art and Design practitioners to undertake postgraduate study.

Unlike other practice based disciplines, such as Medicine and Architecture, we do not see postgraduate study as an essential mandatory preliminary to professional practice. With the advent of the CNAA the postgraduate Higher Diplomas validated by the NCDAD were upgraded to Masters status. The national provision in terms of postgraduate Masters centres was to remain virtually static from 1975 to the early 1990s when the new universities started to review their educational provisions.

In the 1980s under the previous conservative administration education was to become an area of major political reform. The Education Reform Act of 1988 which became law on 1 April 1989 was to bring unprecedented changes to the UK higher education sector. Under

this Act British polytechnics were to gain financial and administrative independence from local education authority control, which paved the way for them to become the "new university" sector in 1992. With university status was to come academic independence from the CNA which was disbanded and the new universities had the right to validate and confer their own awards at degree, postgraduate masters and research degree levels.

The Current Position

Since 1992 we have seen unprecedented changes in the UK higher education sector which have include

An increase in Art and Design provision with a stream of new courses, not just at undergraduate but postgraduate levels. This has been driven by individual institutions finding it necessary to broaden their Art and Design portfolios to capture an economic share of the student market. The student market in Art and Design has in the past been buoyant with more students than places available. Institutions have used self-validation to increase the courses that they offer in the discipline.

Most of the new universities with an Art and Design provision, now offer some form of Masters programmes either as taught courses or through validating independent student programmes. Most of these postgraduate courses are viewed as academic icing on the undergraduate cake.

The concept of post-graduate study and continuing professional development at Masters level is now becoming accepted in the discipline.

However, with the new university status as well as a commitment to Masters courses there has also come a commitment to research driven by government funding and assessed through Research Assessment Exercises of 1992, 1996 and 2001.

The Influence Of The RAE

All disciplines in the new HE culture including Art and Design are now expected to participate in ongoing research assessment. This participation has been driven by government funding equated to research ratings. It is Research Assessment (RAE) assessment that has brought Art and Design into mainstream research. Prior to 1992 and new university status and the first RAE, formal research was not part of the Art and Design culture, and unlike other disciplines. Formal research in Art and Design is a relatively new phenomenon.

Practitioners in Art and Design have always considered practice as the equivalent of formal research in other disciplines that view the research degree as the first stage in developing research profile.

Compared with other disciplines few Art and Design practitioners or educators have undertaken research degrees. By 1989, there were only a handful of completions in Art and Design. During the 1990s these first completions started to increase as research enters the Art and Design culture.

Practice And The Research Degree

Because of the limited experience of taking research degrees by Art and Design educators there is currently a lack of understanding about research, paucity of supervisory and examining experience at research degree levels. There is also a lack of empathy with the research degree process and the support required by research students.

We have a lot to learn about research, but the research activities in the discipline will enhance its academic profile and put it on par with other disciplines that have had many years of research experience. The exciting thing about Art and Design is that it is at the beginning of the process and there are many areas for research to explore. We have to meet the academic requirements of our peers and the research traditions that have been laid down in other disciplines against whom we are being compared.

The research degree experience is a lonely process that requires the stamina of the long distance runner. It also requires the formulation of opinion based on the research process. The experience is not without pain. The researcher cannot sit on the fence but in formulating an opinion has to decide on which side they are to fall. Their choice is the nettle patch on one side or the thistles on the other.

Formal research to research degree level is not easy and in order to be successful and contribute to knowledge, that research whether practice or theory has to be put into context. Therefore, the outcome of practice or theory without it being put into a contextual framework, cannot be treated as research. Setting up research programmes to research degree level is not an easy task particularly for the independent researcher because they need to literally research the research before registering the programme and this is an extremely time consuming process.

The School of Art and Design, at Wolverhampton like many, now has quite a few research students who are completing research programmes but in comparison there are far less staff undertaking such programmes. It will be a number of years before research qualified staff feed through the system and we have research teams in place familiar with the initial research process to research degree level. This cannot be fast tracked. For example, Chemistry the oldest discipline in terms of research. Justin Von Leibig, the German chemist was possibly the first to set up research degrees in his subject and realised the importance of research teams. By the start of the First World War Germany had about five thousand chemists with research degrees while the UK had around twenty. We can see why the First World War was to become the "Chemists' War" with the development by Germany of high explosives, gas, chemical fertilisers and pharmaceuticals and chemical dyes. That was some fifty years after the research culture in chemistry was started. In comparative terms, Art and Design still has a long way to go.

During 1998-9 we had our first PhD completions in Art and Design at Wolverhampton. The four completions had a practice base together with a substantive written thesis that put the practice in context. As an important element of a research degree is to document the research future researcher to pick up on. Putting practice into context is therefore important. We do not believe that we can prescribe or quantify the length of the written element and in all four cases this was substantive and felt to be necessary by these students. In fact they all achieved the 60,000 words of a standard PhD submission as well as producing the practical element of their research.

We seem to have started to establish a new approach to the viva in Art and Design which appears to be part presentation of the practical work and part oral examination. The substantive written element in these cases did not appear to present any problems and only involved minor modification after the viva for spelling and other textual errors. Because the written element is presented in soft binding at the examination stage these

corrections could be easily remedied before the presentation of the final hardbound copy. The practical element of each of these projects was recorded on transparencies or video

The Wolverhampton model for monitoring the student throughout their research project is extremely thorough and includes internal, external and self-monitoring. Before a research programme is accepted for registration there is considerable discussion with the supervisory team and vetting by the School Research Committee. Once the project has cleared the SRC the registration is forwarded to the University Research Committee at which initial registration takes place. Within six months of the initial registration the student has to confirm the project with its aims and objectives, projected research timetable including an outline of work to M Phil stage and to PhD stage. Bibliography and research database also have to be provided. The student has to produce an annual report to the SRC on their progress. Before being accepted on the PhD stage a comprehensive transfer document is required which has to be externally assessed before presented to the URC.

The four PhD completions in Art and Design are in Fine Art, Glass, Three Dimensional Design and Illustration.

The Fine Art Research Project investigated the different forms of collaborative association employed for the commissioning and production of Public Art during the growth period of the 1980s in the City of Birmingham with particular reference to the Centenary square Development. This project was represented predominantly by the thesis, which evaluated partnership arrangements employed in commissioning works by public institutions in Birmingham and methodological and conceptual issues of case studies. Some practical work was produced based on a commission that the researcher undertook.

The Glass Project centred its written element on the historical and contemporary process of electro-deposition of metals on glass suitable for small-scale studio production. The practical part of this project comprised an extensive body of tests and decorative artefacts that exploited the aesthetic possibilities of the researched techniques.

The Three-Dimensional Design Project looked at the historical and contemporary significance of the fountain in Islamic culture. Much of the historical research was based on an original manuscript discovered by the student in the Saudi National Library, which had never been translated or published. This dealt with the theory of fountains developed by a number of historic Islamic engineers. The practical side of the project tested some of these theories through the design and production of prototype fountains.

The Illustration Project investigated representations of stereotype in the illustration of children's books 1960-94. The investigation was undertaken from the perspective of the illustrator and as well as a very extensive thesis there was a substantive body of personal illustrations produced as a by-product of the research.

Institutional And National Issues

Being at the beginning of research in Art and Design has both its advantages and disadvantages. The RAE has brought the discipline firmly into the research equation and like other disciplines in the HE sector we are compelled to participate and engage with both institutional and national frameworks. Art and Design has to establish itself.

One of the most exciting advantages is that because of research in Art and Design is new we have vast amount of research to undertake. The array of topics will keep us engaged for the next quarter century. Another major advantage is that we are pioneering models of form of practice based research. We are in a period of experimentation and development with research models. With regard to Wolverhampton the institutional framework for research is extremely supportive and has encouraged what is being done in Art and

Design. Researchers from other disciplines have shared their experience and good practice. In fiscal terms we have been able to bid for institutional funds which have supported a number of research studentships, research and post-doctoral fellowships. A highly efficient University Research Support Unit has helped in monitoring what we do and the administration of our research initiatives. At School level the management of research has been through its SRC which in turn is responsible to the URC. Without this supportive framework we would have found the development of discipline within the institution more difficult.

Post Doctoral Research In Art And Design

Not yet having the expertise at doctoral level post-doctoral research in the discipline is difficult to get started. At Wolverhampton we have been fortunate to recruit several post-doctoral researchers who are working as part of team projects. We also have several people who not having PhDs are employed as research fellows. Several of our completing research students wished to pursue their research at post doctoral level. The researcher undertaking electro plating on glass has been successful in securing an AHRB Post-Doctoral Fellowship to extend her research. The researcher in illustration has secured a John Menzies Fellowship and will be pursuing post-doctoral research in Australia. As there are more PhD completions in Art and Design post-doctoral research will increase and students need to be directed to funding sources to do this.

Practice In Other Disciplines

Our practice base is not totally unique. At Wolverhampton we have similarities with the Schools of Health Sciences and Law. These disciplines are facing similar problems in establishing their research cultures. Like us, the research degree has not been the normal route for post-graduate study and therefore have a paucity of completions and expertise in supervising and examining research.

Beyond Research Assessment

Art and Design research has an exciting future. With the discipline coming into research at a relatively late stage means we have a lot to go at in research terms, but first we have to train the personnel to do it. Residing in the "new" as opposed to the "old" university sector many of the institutions in which Art and Design resides realise that it has potential for future development.

We must be aware of trying to cut corners. The pay out will be long term as opposed to short term if we are to develop quality in what we do.. We can learn a lot from other disciplines in our own institutions who have track records in research. We can adopt and adapt methodologies where necessary and use staff from other disciplines to act as advisors or to bring experience to our supervisory teams.

We cannot develop in isolation. We have to justify what we are doing. RAE's like Quality Teaching Assessment is forcing us to be less isolated and allowing comparisons to be made within our discipline and with other disciplines. At Wolverhampton we are under constant evaluation as are all Units of Assessment within the institution.

Research assessment is predominantly based on staff output. We must make sure in developing our culture that we do not have a research-teaching divide. Having a history of practice we must make sure that our research culture is not just about practice and the

output of practice but is multifaceted and looks at theory, philosophy, history and teaching of the discipline and that it covers both Art and Design and the relationships between the two.

To claim that we already have a research culture in Art and Design would be wrong. The last decade has been a start and we are at present in the adolescent stage. RAE 2001 is now not likely to be the last RAE so we still have time to develop and prove ourselves. We need to take time but not waste time.

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