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Design history on the periphery of design practice

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INTRODUCTION
Design History on the Periphery of Design Practice Education in the UK

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Introduction

This paper aims to explore the possible threats and opportunities that face the delivery of design history (and indeed any contextualising/theorizing element) within art and design practice courses in the light of a number of developments in higher education, and in the discipline itself over the past few years. The paper concludes with a case study of changes that have taken place over the last year in the curriculum of design practice courses at the University of Huddersfield.

The thoughts, comments, observations and information presented in this paper arose from the experience of teaching design history as a supporting subject across a number of design practice disciplines at the University of Huddersfield, and from reflection on and analysis of the curricula of the School of Design Technology in the light of feedback from an external subject quality assessment and internal School review processes.

It in no way purports to be an accurate representation of the state of design history within Art & Design higher education globally, or even nationally. The observations may, however, be indicative of a number of institutions, and further exploration across other art and design courses is suggested.

Background

The Design Department at Huddersfield resides within the School of Design Technology, which originally consisted of two departments: Architecture and Textiles. The Design Department was created in 1996 by the transfer of established courses in Interior Design from Architecture, Fashion and Surface Pattern from Textiles and Product Design from the School of Engineering. Over the next six years these were augmented by new courses in Transport, Industrial Design, Creative Imaging, Fine Art & Installation, and Multimedia. The overall remit of the department being to run courses in design practice supported by strong market awareness. There are no specialist courses in Design History or Design Studies. Consequently, the department has largely drawn its academic staff, almost all acting as pathway leaders, from industrial backgrounds. Staff therefore have a wide range of professional experience, but a lower level of academic experience than is the norm across the University.

In January 2000, the School was visited by the Quality Assurance Agency for a Subject Review. This experience involved gathering a variety of material to justify the quality control procedures in place. Despite a healthy score of 21/24 being achieved, the process of undertaking the QAA Review highlighted a number of issues which we, as a School, wished to address.

The report was on the whole favourable and complementary. However, certain points raised for consideration were in keeping with our own observations regarding areas for improvement within our delivery. The following points were highlighted:

- *Curriculum Design, Content & Organisation*

Lack of consistency in the delivery and support of the placement module, room for improvement in visual research outputs

- *Teaching, Learning and Assessment*

Variable practice in the extent of recording and quality of formative and summative assessment feedback

- *Student Progression and Achievement*

Poor retention and progression rates from year 1 to year 2 of pathways

- *Student Support & Guidance*

Variable practice in the documenting of student tutorial support

In addition, issues for consideration highlighted and discussed with staff during the compilation of evidence were as follows:

- a definite lack of parity in teaching, learning and assessment in common modules other than the placement module i.e. history of design & business studies

- complex assessment procedures and evidence of over assessment

- mismatch between assessment feedback and required assessment outcomes as stated within module documents

- a fragmenting of the learning experience brought about by a perceived over use of the 10 credit module

  - demonstrable evidence of and concern expressed about a high incidence of surface learning taking place within pathways.

Role of design history in Art & Design higher education

In order to anticipate the future position of design history in design practice education, it is useful first to reflect upon the current state of affairs. The clearest recent statements on the position of art and design education have come from the Quality Assurance Agency in their attempts to achieve a level of parity in higher education across the UK. Guidelines for institutions have been produced covering a wide range of subject areas. The QAA Art & Design subject benchmark statements, published in 2002, discuss the role of historical study in supporting the study practice-based vocational design courses in the context of it being one of a wide range of critical and contextual dimensions:

> *In the 20th century, a knowledge of the history of art and design was deemed essential for students primarily concerned with their own practice in an art or a design discipline. This component of their course was frequently taught and assessed as a separate subject. Many programmes continue to attach great importance to students' acquisition of knowledge and understanding of the historical development of their discipline(s). Latterly, institutions have explored a range of alternative ways to engage practitioners in the historical, theoretical and critical dimensions of their discipline(s). Other contextualising and theoretical constructs have been introduced into programmes of study alongside the historical to achieve the appropriate integration of practice and theory required to reinforce practitioners' critical and intellectual engagement with their subject. Many art and design programmes have*

also broadened their curriculum by the inclusion of, for example, business, marketing, modern languages and other professional contextualising subjects.[1]

This appears to understand historical context will be taught <u>alongside</u> a wide range of other contextual subjects, rather than being <u>replaced</u> by those subjects. The document lists these informing areas as *'business, cultural, economic, environmental, ethical, global, historical, political, societal, and/or theoretical contexts'[2]*. An alphabetical, not hierarchical, list which nevertheless reflects the emphasis placed on the subjects in some of our pathways.

In discussing teaching, learning and assessment, the document states (quite rightly): *'Theoretical, critical, historical and contextual elements of art and design are either integrated into practical projects or units, or are delivered through discrete but complementary units of study[3]'* allowing large degrees of freedom to deliver the contextual areas in innovative ways. It then goes on to state: *'Art and design programmes …. require students to undertake significant and sustained periods of independent study. Typically, this takes the form of a major project and a dissertation presented in the latter stages of the programme.'[4]* Yet for a variety of reasons a number of pathways at Huddersfield have opted to drop dissertations altogether in favour of 'technical' reports or 'market reports'.

In some ways then, the QAA document can be seen as not being overly protective of the historical context. The threshold standards of achievement are unspecific, stating only that they will be *'evidenced by some knowledge and understanding of the broad critical and contextual dimensions of the student's discipline(s).[5]*

Popularity of design history

Assessing the popularity of design history as a subject per se is problematic. Trying to find details on course closures without time-consuming analysis of past UCAS handbooks is particularly difficult as the UCAS statistics refer only to these courses under the general descriptor 'History of Art', the popularity of which would seem to be buoyant:

> *'History of Art is, like Art and Design, a bit of a misnomer, in the sense that the overall title can cover a multitude of disciplines. Many univerities offer degree courses in History of Art, but certain departments also offer degree courses in History of Art and Architecture, History of Art and Design, History of Art, design and Film, History of Modern Art, History and Theory of Art, Visual Culture, and many other configurations. In addition, there is an array of courses in which Art History (or History of Art and Design, Visual Culture, etc) can be studied together with other subjects, in joint, combined, or modular degree programmes.*
>
> *According to the latest university admissions figures, in 2001 there are 61 departments or institutions offering a total of 839 courses in which History of Art (or one of the types of courses listed above) was featured, either as the single subject studied, or in combination with other subjects. This figure will rise to 867 in 2002. A total of 33 departments or institutions offer single-honours degrees in History of Art, Art History or Visual Culture.'[6]*

Despite the closure of well-known undergraduate and postgraduate History of Design courses (Teesside and Middlesex amongst others), new courses have started – such as the MA courses in History, Theory and Culture of Fashion at the London College of Fashion, and in Curating Contemporary Design at Kingston University (with the Design Museum), which appear to back up the move towards more specialised, and applied courses discussed later in this paper. It is possible then that the field is merely changing rather than declining or growing.

Definition of discipline

So – is there a crisis of design history or merely misunderstanding? As design history as a discipline develops it becomes more unclear, not less.

After the 2001 DHS Conference 'Representing Design 1400-today' was held at the V&A/RCA, the Editorial of the Design History Society Newsletter asked about the scope of design history:

> *'One issue which did strike me at the conference centred on the title of the event: Representing Design – 1400 to the present day. As design historians we are presented with an ever increasing range of subject matter and theoretical perspectives from which to analyse it, as the discipline develop and matures and crosses the boundaries of neighbouring disciplines such as anthropology, sociology and psychology to name but a few. Can such interdisciplinarity be sustained effectively, or are we in danger of losing focus? Where are the boundaries of the discipline, and where should they be? Should there be any? Should we address these issues before what to many outsiders is already an opaque subject area becomes incomprehensible, and we find ourselves completely marginalised?'[7]*

This sentiment was echoed in a review of the same conference by Stephen Hayward in a later issue of the newsletter:

> *'What is design history? Where has it been and where is it going? At a time when the official idea of culture has been stretched to include everything from Bhangra music to ballet, is it appropriate, or 'politically correct', to promote a special area of cultural expertise? When some of the most prominent designers style themselves 'purveyors of moods and promises' should we – the historians – continue to concentrate our efforts on the analysis of tangible objects? These were some of the questions that I took to the 2001 conference. Interestingly enough, the October issue of this newsletter voiced similar concerns. In the pursuit of inter-disciplinarity was design history losing its identity and purpose?[8]*

Guy Julier in 'Design Cultures' noted the benefits of this blurring of boundaries between design history and a number of different disciplines:

> *Design history and design studies have taken their place as discrete academic disciplines in universities with their own scholastic journals, conference circuits and key figures. At the same time, academics from other disciplines in the humanities and social sciences have, though often tentatively, stepped into design territory. This has stemmed from discussions of consumption in cultural studies, anthropology and geography …Some sociologists and economists have recognized the importance of design in a wider global economic growth in the first world of 'cultural goods' and creative industries within this. In either case, they have provided a wealth of theoretical frameworks for the investigation of design.[9]*

And highlighting the complexity of these relationships, in Education Guardian Beth Williamson discussed the different methods of enquiry that are employed within the general field of Art History:

> *The variety of different degrees available shows the number of different ways in which the subject can be approached. These range from a more traditional concern with a developmental History of Art, studied through a canon of great artists and great works, to more critical or theoretical approaches, which involve the consideration of art, architecture, design objects, films, fashion, photography, and*

many other visual forms in their social, cultural and political contexts, using a wide variety of methods and modes of enquiry, including feminism, psychoanalysis, post-colonial theory, and many, many more. Most departments offer a range of approaches within their teaching, and students have opportunities to study the subject from a variety of points of view.[10]

With all of this in mind, it is not surprising that the subject of design history can appear opaque to people operating outside the discipline. Due to its very nature, the subject lays itself wide open to misinterpretation and consequently having its relevance to design practice questioned. This may be especially true if course leaders of vocational courses are drawn from industrial practice rather than academia. It is likely that many of these course leaders' exposure to design history is limited to an outmoded study of an historical canon based on early models of art history popular in the past; and a resistance to prioritise the subject when under a variety of pressures is therefore not surprising.

The effects of widening participation and the expansion of higher education

So what factors constitute these pressures acting on the area of design history in art and design higher education? Perhaps one of the most serious is a resource issue centred on the number and nature of the students themselves. Widening the participation in higher education has been on the political agenda for quite a while now, yet only recently has the first serious report analysing the costs incurred in its implementation been produced. The report, produced by Universities UK, summarised three key points:

- 'Students from non-traditional backgrounds are significantly more expensive to recruit, retain and progress through higher education

- [Figures suggest] a cost premium for institutions of around 35%….The current premium using HEFCE teaching funding formula goes up to a maximum of 10%….

- The study indicates that the widening participation subsidy is coming from academic and other staff time, either unpaid or diverted from other activities including research and scholarship'

These points are now even more pressing. The recently announced plans from the government to ensure that 50% of people between 18 and 35 receive a significant experience of higher education raise a number of problems, many of which have been highlighted in a series of articles in the Times Higher Education Supplement called 'Pushing 50'.

The first of these articles addressed intellectual compromises made by Universities. Bob Brecher stated that *'Dumbing down has become a fact of life'*[11] and pointed out that years of widening participation without the increased funding to support it has proved disastrous. Despite being in favour of the notion of widening participation, the ways in which it has been implemented and the effects it has had on teaching are questionable. A less diplomatic view was taken by Frank Furedi in the same article, who sees widening participation as *''a veritable movement of bureaucrats who are absolutely zealous' in supporting anything that gets more bums on seats, even if it is to the detriment of encouraging critical thinking.'*[12] His belief is that the hard analytical and theoretical elements of courses have been left out or repackaged in order to attract more students, many of who do not really wish to be there.

Another growing problem centers on finding people suitably qualified to teach design history, which is a real issue – one which the new government plans exacerbate. Harriet Swain, in the fourth of the 'pushing 50' series of articles stated:

> 'There are two problems at the heart of the government's aim to have half of young people in higher education by 2010. The first problem is finding the 400,000 new students that the Department for Education and Skills has calculated are needed to meet this target … The second – and more neglected – problem is finding the [22,000] staff to teach them'[13].

This is in the context of an aging staff profile (over 28% of staff are over 50) and uncompetitive salaries, which are not attracting graduates into teaching.

The need for more teachers will lead to the use of more part-time staff (already up from 8% in 1995 to 14% in 2000/01) and more fractional posts. This is likely to have a marked impact on quality of provision, as inspections have revealed that part-time staff are not integrated into departments, have less access to staff development and training, and are less accessible to students. This is particularly pertinent in the light of the fact that widening participation recruits students who *'are likely to need more, not less, staff attention'*[14]. This need for attention is reflected in the growing level of input required by staff outside of delivering subject content. Mary Stuart, Pro Vice-Chancellor at the University of Sussex, *believes 'the first year is now often considered a transition year'*[15], in which we increasingly have to teach students how to learn, while Gill Rowley at the UWE believes that this is not the Universities' role: *'There is a lot of evidence that universities are having to do remedial work in the initial year but they are not qualified to do it. … University is no longer for intellectuals and academics. It is an extended school'*[16].

The effects of Modularisation

Modularisation is another pressure which has arguably had a serious impact on educational standards. Speaking against modularisation, Bob Brecher stated that it is an 'ideologically driven attempt to fragment and commodify higher education' turning information into something to *'consume rather than something to be thought critically about'*[17]. He believes it has been taken on board as a way of reducing the cost of higher education, but has given students a *'fragmented view of knowledge'*[18], and fragmented the student experience and staff input to the extent that it has changed the way we think about teaching: *'People talk about delivering a module, not teaching. It is the wrong conception of what critical education is about. Education is being turned into something you can buy in a supermarket'*[19].

Gus Pennington – associate and former chief executive of the Higher Education Staff Development Agency says that the increase of modular courses and the recruitment of needier students requires a better SSR than has been funded. The answer, he says, is for lecturers to teach groups of *'up to 300 students, in order to free staff for small tutorial groups'*[20]. Yet as anyone who has taught large groups of students is aware, there are huge effects on the dynamics of student/staff interaction in such situations. As class sizes increase interactive discussion decreases, and then stops completely. The lecturer is left delivering material with little or no idea how much is being taken on board, and students end up feeling poorly treated and isolated. This approach is, particularly anathema to student populations in arts disciplines brought up on the interactive, self-managed environment of a design studio.

The impact of learning styles

This brings us closer to the heart of the problem. There is little doubt that the learning styles of design practice students lie outside the norm of other student groups. A history of self-directed learning within projects, teamwork with other students, and *'its hugely different practices compared to other academic disciplines'*[21] including less strict timetabling and unsupervised studio time, actually enable deep learning to take place effectively. It is gratifying to note that other fields of higher education are now looking to art and design (instead of looking down) for answers about how to develop the student-centred learning demanded by the pressures of widening participation and modularisation. A conference held at Liverpool Hope University College[22] explored these issues, and the effects of changing their curriculum to embrace a core discipline of study skills. It transpired that the very things the College was moving to put in place across their provision within their 'Unique Learning' programme were those already very familiar to art and design higher education – developing stronger relationships between tutors and students; encouraging teamwork, tutor groups and students as individuals; developing confident, reflective, autonomous learners; developing better presentation skills; and allowing students to work at their own rate and learn from their own mistakes.

Frank Furedi, however, is known to be critical of such approaches to 'learning': *'Talk of student-centred learning is ideological, … It is not about being student-centred, it is about being bureaucrat-centred. We are not doing brilliant things for students'*[23] Garner & Leon concluded *'clearly academics are divided on what constitutes good teaching in a mass system with limited personal contact between lecturer and student'*[24].

The effects of vocation and industrial demand

Quite outside the effects of government-imposed political agendas on higher education in general, external pressures on art and design practice courses in particular are the result of the demands of the workplace. Sean Coughlan asked *'at what point are courses so diluted by vocational demands that they become training rather than higher education?'*[25] and pointed out the growing popularity of vocational courses:

> *'The application figures for this autumn show there are more students seeking management and business studies courses than chemistry, physics, maths, biology, geography and modern languages added together. There are also more students seeking to study computer science and information systems than English and history put together.'*[26]

This is clearly a money issue – as students pay more for their education, they demand courses which will lead to jobs at a level which will allow them to repay the debt incurred. This in turn is driving the development and context of courses. *'This is a student-driven process. They have a very clear idea about courses and employment opportunities. And universities have to respond to these market forces'*[27]. But should this be a student-driven process?

One of the issues raised in the Curriculum Review case study at the end of this paper ran around the increased need for training in Computer Aided Design. As more and more CAD skills were seen as being vital to a design student's development, other areas of the curriculum began to be squeezed out, and there was a notable reduction in many courses of supporting studies in context, culture and history. Is this industry's fault? In asking for graduates to have application skills that companies could easily put in place themselves, industry puts pressure on graduates' abilities to engage in critical thinking that companies could not instil. This is HND mentality, not Degree – are we in danger of providing very high-grade technicians? It is likely that graduates will be expert users of CAD systems, which will

rapidly become outdated, requiring them to be retrained anyway. Course leaders understandably place great store on the comments of employers in an attempt to achieve good destination statistics at the end of the year, but the fact remains that neither students nor industry are experts in education.

Discussing higher education in general and the growing divide between vocational versus academic courses, Tim Thornton was quoted as saying that it is *'demonstrably untrue that employment chances are improved by vocational courses ... If we're going to be universities we must be absolutely clear that it is higher education and not skills training that we're offering. The moment has passed when we need to prepare people for narrow industrial roles'[28]*. Tony Higgins, chief executive of UCAS, however, believes fears over the growth of vocational courses are *'complete snobbery. ... Times change and courses have to change, it's not better or worse, just different. Universities can't say no to what students want to study'.[29]*

Alongside the demands of students and industry placing pressures on the role of design history in art and design education, the make-up of design education staff is surely playing a part. Certainly at Huddersfield, the majority of course leaders are, as stated, highly experienced practitioners who themselves may be biased towards design practice rather than theory. The staff shortages alluded to above will almost certainly lead to an increased use of practitioners in higher education. *'[Higher Education Staff Development Agency] statistics suggest that the number of academics with no formal qualifications has risen slightly but steadily in the past five years'[30]*. If this figure rises substantially there may be a corresponding degradation of the place of design theory in practice-based courses.

This is a concern, as a recent paper by one of the authors looking at this area cited Edgar Schon as proposing that *'disciplined theory should come first in all professional education, as the student cannot learn the skills without first having the applicable knowledge. Schein even stated that 'there is something disturbing about calling skills knowledge.'[31]'*. The paper concluded that *'If we ignore the importance of nurturing intellectual enquiry in art and design education by over emphasising professional development, we narrowly define the artist or designer as one who endeavours to make a living from their practice'[32]* and raised the question:

> *'Does being an artist or designer mean that we are now confronted with an unprecedented requirement for being adaptable in the context of new professional demands'? If we apply these concerns to education we become unable to rectify a displacement between nurturing 'professional knowledge' and the new increasing demands of what constitutes 'professional education''[33]*.

Summary

It would appear then that there are a number of threats as well as opportunities to the subject of design history as a contextualising element of art and design practice education:

- Support for the role of the discipline within art and design practice education is acknowledged but its status remains ambiguous

- The popularity of the subject as a discrete discipline may (or may not) be increasing, but the subject itself is clearly going through a process of change as it grows and diversifies, and the remit of the discipline remains unclear

- Academic pressures mean that contact time with students is reduced and staff have to deal with a wider range of student abilities, in the context of a fragmented view of higher education

- While the popularity of vocational courses in general appears to be growing, the situation is not so clear cut across all art and design disciplines

- Market forces mean that within design practice courses themselves, graduate level knowledge may be being reduced in favour of high-level technical skills.

It could be argued therefore that there is a need to make a number of changes to ensure that design history remains valid, up-to-date, vital and relevant to art and design practice education, and that the pressures to 'dumb down' the content are resisted while making sure the subject is presented as attractive to art and design education staff as well as students. There follows a case study explaining some of the changes which have taken place in the School of Design Technology, including changes to the delivery of design history and context as a supporting study.

Case Study

Upon completion of the preparations for the Subject Review, an evidence Base Room was created to provide a snapshot of the practices in teaching and learning conducted across 7 undergraduate pathways in Design and 1 undergraduate pathway in Textiles, at both module and pathway level. A number of modules delivered at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels were common to a number of pathways across the School. For the first time, the School was in a position of being able to evidence any lack of parity in delivery or assessment and clearly demonstrate or provide opportunities to share good practice.

Given the context of design education at Huddersfield as described earlier in this paper, it became evident that staff were struggling with a number of matters pertinent to the issues presented. During the collection of evidence it became clear that:

- It was increasingly difficult to balance the development of professional design skills, historical and contextual awareness and knowledge of the business context within the curriculum

- It was difficult to manage a perceived fragmentation of a naturally 'holistic' process of teaching and learning, the preponderance of 10 and 20 credit modules appeared to be encouraging a 'serialist' approach to delivery and learning

- Too many weighted components within modules were resulting in an immense assessment load for both students and staff

- The semester long delivery of modules was believed to be having an impact upon student retention in Year 1

- The delivery of so many modules within an academic year, be it year 1, 2 or 3, encouraged students to be more concerned with completing a range of tasks rather than learning through the generation and development of ideas

With regard to first year students particularly, many staff held the view that to conduct formal assessments 12 weeks into a programme, when the majority of students recruited were from a widening participation background, was unreasonable. Students were generally not settled into the higher education ethos until at least week 5 or 6.

In keeping with the views of Bob Brecher, staff had often decried the fact that within the current structures there was little time or opportunity afforded to students to achieve a wholly satisfactory depth of enquiry in order to more thoroughly inform their project outcomes and satisfy learning requirements. Questions were raised as to the extent to which modularisation was having an impact upon the ever-increasing burden on students and staff alike.

Through the findings of the Base Room evidence it had become apparent that our pathway structures and module specifications were to some extent overloaded and to some degree reducing the student's opportunity for "reflective observation and abstract conceptualisation"[34]. This in turn had lead, in some cases, to students engaging with the learning process with a 'surface' approach

Saljo & Marton (1976) confirm that students take a surface approach to learning when:

- There's too much material in the curriculum
- The messages about how a student is rewarded aren't clear
- Feedback on progress isn't given frequently enough
- Opportunities for independent learning are not present
- Methods of assessment stress surface learning

The concerns expressed by staff, evidenced through the Base Room and highlighted through the QAA Report, were considered closely by the Senior Management Group. As a result, a planning day was held in February 2000 to consider the outcomes. A representative group from across the school and cross-sites gathered to reflect upon the opportunity and potential remit for a School-wide Curriculum Review.

Findings from the review of the Base Room content described above, were presented to the Curriculum Review Group. Debate ensued with regard to the emerging issues and central University regulations that could not be ignored. Discussion was conducted around three areas of the curriculum - its design, content and organisation. A range of proposals was formulated to present to all academic staff in response to stated concerns. Proposals pertinent to the discussions in this paper were to:

- analyse course structures to reduce overloading of curricula by removal, replacement or amalgamation or integration of modules

- encourage course teams to deliver design modules across two semesters and assess all design projects at the end of the academic year. It was felt that this would provide opportunity for all students to engage with formal formative assessment and give teaching staff and students an opportunity to make connections with the supporting studies of business and design history

- recommend that course teams incorporate design development within design modules whilst also improving the integration of technology

- establish working parties focussing upon common modules delivered across courses - design history, business & placement preparation - to ensure equity in learning, teaching and assessment

Historical & Contextual Studies Working Party

Of particular relevance to this paper, the working party for the design history area went through a rigorous process of assessment of the issues raised by first of all analysing the delivery of contextual subject matter across all the courses in the School. The first point this analysis raised was that there were an unnecessarily large number of modules being used

Huddersfield - Analysis of Historical/Contextual Studies
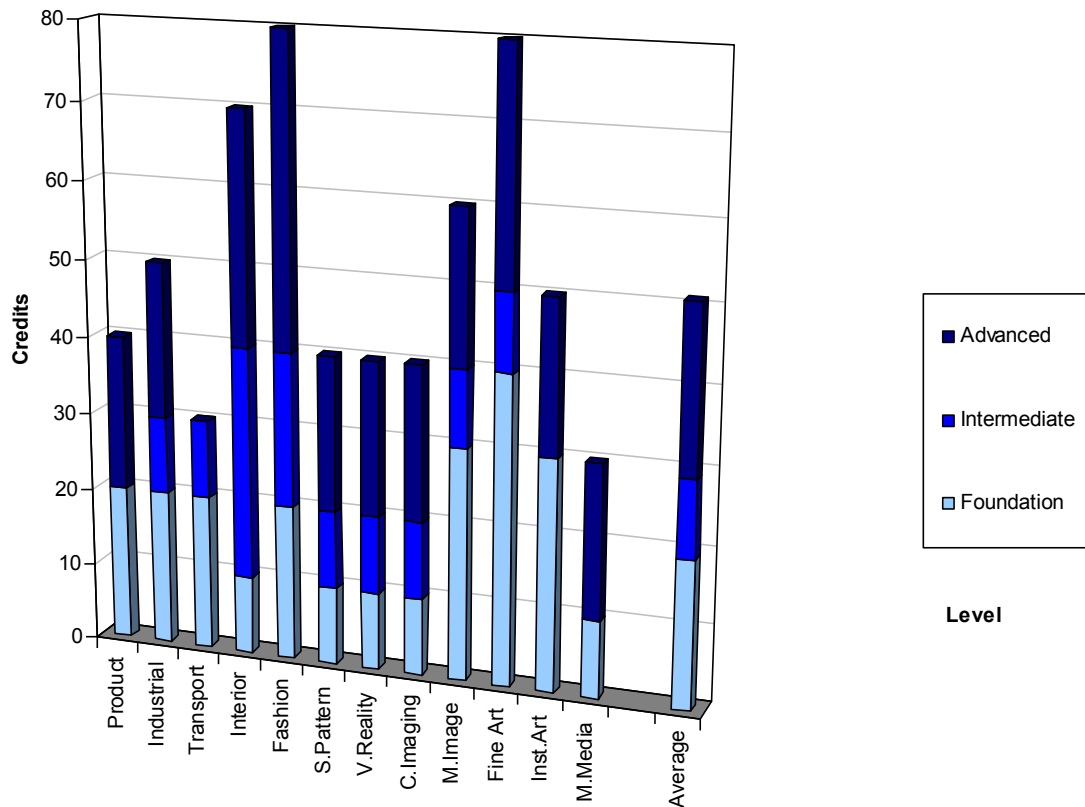
which covered very similar subject topics. The second point highlighted the fact that perhaps because of the way the department had developed, the provision was extremely varied across different courses, with some having as little as 30 credits across the three years of taught input, and others having as much as 80 credits. Some courses had the majority of the contextual input in the first year with no development of the subject, and others had a large requirement for contextual output in the final year with inadequate provision in earlier years to prepare the students.

Visits were then made to three different Universities with a similar provision of design practice courses using contextual and design history as a supporting subject. The first University had so little knowledge of how the subject was delivered across different courses that no useful information for comparison could be gleaned at all.

University 2 - Analysis of Historical/Contextual Studies
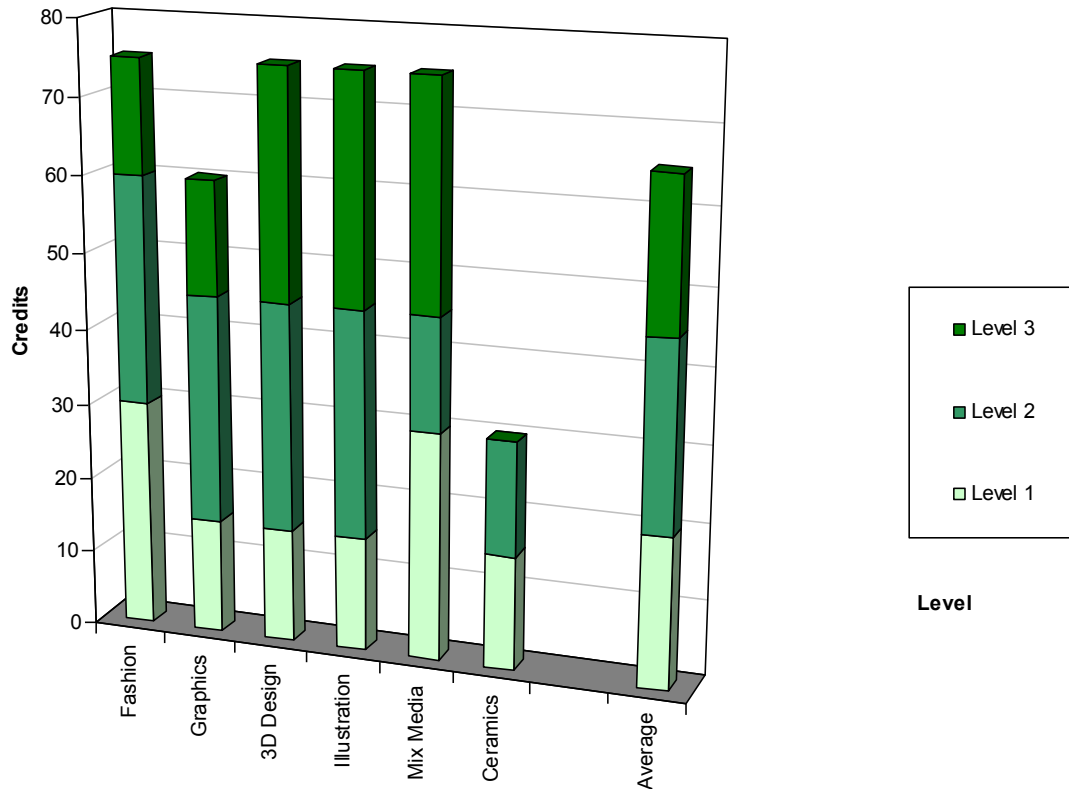
The second University could provide detailed information on the delivery of contextual studies. This proved to be a more simplistic delivery than at Huddersfield, yet showed a far larger element of disparity across their courses. In some cases 30 credit dissertation modules required an 8,000 word submission, while a similar module for 30 credits on another course required 15,000. Yet another dissertation module required a submission of 8,000 words yet only attracted 15 credits.

University 3 - Analysis of Historical/Contextual Studies
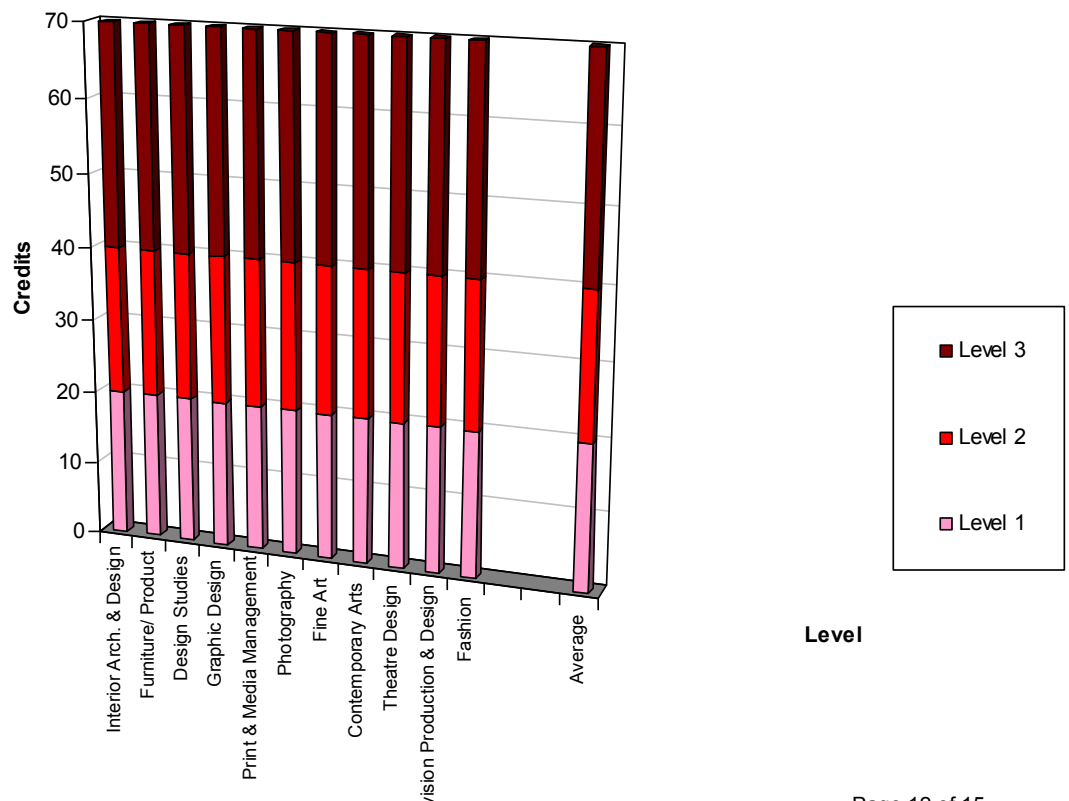
The third University was a model of parity. A decision had been taken at Faculty level that all courses would have the same number of credits at each year level. There was also complete internal parity, in that a module attracting a certain number of credits had a specified variety of submission requirements deemed to equate to the same amount of effort.

This information was distributed among the working party and used as the basis of a discussion. A variety of points were discussed, including the attitude of course leaders to historical and contextual studies and the perceived lack of relevance of 'history' as a title of the subject area; the effects of a lack of a discernible history of art/design/theory department within the School; and the need for a far more streamlined provision of common contextual modules across the School. The report produced concluded that:

- The historical and contextual studies 'area' should henceforth be referred to as cultural and contextual studies

- There should be a minimum of 20 credits of provision in the area at first year level, 20 at second year and 30 in the final year of all design practice courses

- 'Critical files' or journals should be employed to cement the links between theory elements and design practice and highlight the subject area's relevance

Results of the Curriculum Review

Upon consideration of the proposals with a wider group of academic staff, and taking on board the recommendations of the various working parties, the following framework was devised as a guide for curriculum development:

Year 1	40 credits	Project work delivered across semesters
	20 credits	Cultural & contextual studies (10 per semester)
	10 credits	Study Skills (Semester 1)
	10 credits	Business/management (semester2)
	40 credits	course specific content (including options)
Year 2	40 credits	Project work delivered across semesters
	20 credits	Cultural & contextual studies (10 per semester)
	10 credits	Business/management
	10 credits	*optional*-work placement preparation
	50 credits	course specific content (including options)
Year 3/4	80 credits	Project work
	30 credits	Cultural & contextual studies
	10 credits	course specific content

These guidelines were used by staff to remodel their course structures in order to achieve greater levels of parity across the School, while retaining a measure of individuality and freedom in course design. Deviation from the framework was condoned if course leaders put forward a strong enough argument for a different format, as long as the general principles were taken on board. The amount of credits specified were suggested minimums, not maximum. If course leaders wished, they could use elements of the course specific content to add to any other area.

A later meeting of the (now) Cultural and Contextual Studies Working Party discussed in more detail how these recommendations could be implemented. This included the creation of a number of generic history modules which could be delivered to 'clusters' of courses by a small team of staff, and the creation of 'material culture' and 'visual culture' modules to run alongside the history modules to make stronger links between theory and context.

As a result of this, the history modules were rewritten to meet the above requirements. The suggestion was to focus the content around the major ideological issues in design across the late 18th, 19th and 20th centuries and so were titled 'The rise of Modernism' and 'The development of Post-modernism' as opposed to 'Design History 1 & 2'. New modules combining material culture or visual culture with a shared core of research methodologies to better develop the necessary skills for writing a dissertation in the final year were also created and offered to all courses. The possibility was also discussed of creating a 30 credit dissertation module (as opposed to our usual 20 credit size) as an option for students particularly strong in the theoretical areas, the 10 credit difference coming from an optional reduced project module – although this would present some difficulties in managing course structures.

Conclusions

We believe that the changes to the structure and content of the design practice courses at Huddersfield are beneficial ones which answer many of the criticisms of the QAA report and our own internal observations, and provide a more meaningful curricula for students, and indeed staff.

The changes made to cultural and contextual modules have been well-received by both staff and students, with module evaluation sessions and pathway committee minutes reflecting a high level of acceptance. Any concerns about the changes being perceived as 'dumbing down' or 'repackaging' of content have not been realised, and the addition of material and visual culture modules seems to be helping students to link theory with practice in a far more accessible way than the previous history modules did on their own. However, the situation is far from perfect, with acceptance of new dissertation modules being the next hurdle.

The future of contextual modules supporting design practice courses has a few things to look forward to: Next academic year sees the University of Huddersfield leaving the two semester model behind and returning to a three term system. While courses will remain modular, the 10 credit minimum module size has been ousted and replaced with 20 credit modules spanning a whole academic year, which hopefully signals a return to the more 'holistic' model of education found in 'linear' courses.

While the various threats to design history as a supporting subject raised at the beginning of the paper are recognised, the changes made to the curricula go some way to helping staff deal with the issues concerned. However, we are still investigating further strategies to help staff cope with further widening participation. We are also engaged in further developments to promote a 'deep learning' rather than 'surface learning' environment wherever possible, and exploring further how the study of design history and material and visual culture can contribute to design practice students developing a broader understanding of their own discipline.

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