



## NW Network Group

Universities of Central Lancashire, Chester, Manchester, Manchester Metropolitan and Cumbria Institute of the Arts,

### Case Studies in support of the Support for New Academic Staff (SNAS) Strand 3 project

## Linking Disciplinary Research to Teaching

#### Interviewee

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10.30 — 22/05/2006 - summary

## **Perceptions of research and what it means to the interviewee**

Graeme Brooker is the Programme Leader of the Interior Design BA at Manchester Metropolitan University MMU). His research is related to interior design and remodelling buildings.

*“That takes the form of writing articles, publishing books, and occasionally designing. My research is very much about a variety of things but mainly writing.”*

Research outcomes are both academic and professionally focussed. Graeme believes that interior design education is, to a degree, vocational but advocates the importance of a philosophical as well as reflective approach to interior design processes and practices.

*“We have one foot in the training camp and then the other foot in a philosophical, reflective camp.”*

Research is viewed as an essential part of academic life. The range of research undertaken directly influences the interior design programme. In fact, the content of the third year of the programme is a direct result of research outcomes. Graeme believes that research is invaluable for maintaining links with practice as well as for finding inspiration. Professional journals, conferences, studio visits, exhibitions and study trips all play a vital role.

*“It’s also important to me to find out about my practice as well as keep up with what’s going on in the bigger world—meeting people, making contacts....It’s fundamental...to keep myself thinking and refreshed and alive to what I’m trying to do.*

A significant research output has been the publication of the book, *Rereadings: Interior Architecture and the Design Principles of Remodelling Existing Buildings*, co-authored with Sally Stone, a colleague in the School of Architecture at MMU. Re-readings provides an illustrated analysis of the

design strategies available for re-using existing buildings. It explains the theory behind the way buildings are interpreted and adapted by architects as well as designers and explains the considerable structural, aesthetic, environmental, contextual and programmatic challenges of remodeling existing buildings. Highlighting innovative case studies from around the world, the book aims to value remodeling buildings as a distinct discipline. Re-readings proposes that the complete analysis of the history, fabric and function of a building is the key to designing its successful reuse. This complex process is broken down into a number of straightforward stages that clarify the range of strategies and tactics available to the designer, thereby providing valuable inspiration for students and practitioners alike.

### **Perceptions of institutional support for research**

The expectation to undertake research is not viewed as onerous as this is something Graeme does as a matter of course. There is an understanding that in academic life research, education and practice are intertwined.

*“It’s healthy that there is...an expectation that you should be doing something.”*

The University places an emphasis on research with an RAE focus and there are a series of fast track channels for staff wishing to become research active. Also, there are funds available at the departmental level for work that is not RAE assessable, for example creating an exhibition.

A significant way in which research is supported at MMU is through allocation of time. For example, teaching may be scheduled over two to two and a half days each week. The remaining time is used for administration and research. The interior design team are also important:

*“I’m quite lucky in that I have a good team here as well who are also involved in various things so we can actually timetable and schedule our time quite well.”*

There are two ways in which research is funded at the University — at the department level and through the postgraduate school MIRIAD (Manchester Institute for Research and Innovation in Art & Design). Access to funding through MIRIAD is available to Graeme because of his involvement in running the MA Spatial Design.

### **Perceptions of relations between learning and teaching**

Graeme's research evolved from his teaching. While working at Cardiff University, he realised that there was a shortfall of information concerning current interior design projects as well as a general lack of authoritative publications relating to interior design in general. Historically, interior design has largely relied upon architectural theory to contextualise as well as validate and extend practice. Interior designers have struggled to reflect, rationalise and philosophise on their own processes. In response to this, Graeme started to gather work that eventually became a lecture series used in his teaching at Cardiff University. He went on to develop this work over a number of years. Students played an important role in advancing the research through their continuous feedback on what was and was not effective in helping them develop as interior designers. As Sally Stone, Graeme's colleague in the School of Architecture at MMU, had been exploring similar issues in her work, they elected to pool their resources. The result of this collaboration has been the publication of the book. Its content has influenced the overall programme philosophy of the interior design programme and has become a significant source for the content of the third year of the course. Graeme also delivers a lecture series based on the book.

A noteworthy success from the integration of Graeme's research into his teaching is that students are starting to look at interior design as a particular series of ideas and strategies. Students have stated they have a clearer sense of the processes involved in interior design practice. Graeme considers this to be a major learning outcome.

## **Support for integrating research with learning and teaching**

A substantial source of support has come from the interior design team. Initially, a significant amount of time was spent discussing and reflecting upon ways in which research outcomes could influence the teaching strategy. Because of this initial investment, the delivery is now straightforward, effective and manageable. The vision of the programme has been shaped by the strategies and tactics illuminated in the book.

Graeme notes that there is considerable support for new staff. For example, each new member of academic staff is allocated a mentor with whom they meet at regular intervals. Associate lecturers are supported by the interior design team.

## **Reflections on the impact of research and dissemination**

The publication of the book has elevated Graeme's research profile in a number of ways. One of the most important outcomes of the research is the contribution the book has made to a body of work related to interior design. Also, publishers are now more likely to support future books. His invitations to conferences, to sit on validation panels, and to be an external examiner are a direct result of the book's publication.

Ongoing research is a catalyst for Graeme's self-reflection. His view is that the book is a starting point for defining future research pathways. Reflection provokes new ideas and possibilities. Conference presentations and exhibitions derived from the book have also been constructive in cultivating additional research.

*“Because it (the research) is principle-based it provides a framework for understanding...which can be developed.”*

## **Plans for continued research**

Graeme has an exhibition coming up in Manchester and is seeking funding from the Arts Council. There are also two more books in the pipeline. One is

with the publisher Laurence King. This book is more interior design related and endeavours to appeal to a wider audience. The other book intends to be more academically focussed and will be published by RIBA who published *Rereadings: Interior Architecture and the Design Principles of Remodelling Existing Buildings*. Graeme also regularly gives presentations at conferences around the world. He is considering undertaking a PhD based on his research.

### **Summary of key points**

- The integration of research with learning and teaching has informed the vision of the interior design programme as well as defined the content for the third year of the course.
- The publication of *Rereadings: Interior Architecture and the Design Principles of Remodelling Existing Buildings* has not only given Graeme the opportunity to establish the remodelling of buildings as a distinct discipline, but has also played a significant role in elevating his research profile.

Graeme Brooker's research profile is available at:

<http://www.artdes.mmu.ac.uk/profile/gbrooker/research>