



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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Interviewer

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10.30 – 9/05/2006 – summary

Perceptions of research and what it means to the interviewee

David Mackintosh is a contemporary Fine Artist who defines his personal research as permeating and influencing all aspects of his role as a lecturer. His research is defined as double stranded with the main aspect of this being drawing in contemporary art. Separate, but inextricably linked is the role of the artist initiated project both in the university and in the public domain and defined thus as part of practice and research.

His historical role in supporting the building of an artist infrastructure in Manchester is described as a model of how an individual artist can be an activator for other artists who need to develop a skill base and understand opportunities in making things happen.

“There has to be in one way the physical making exercise, making the work and a parallel activity is of networking and professional development.”

and

“ Research means everything that I do that is art related. Anything that is developmental. If, for instance I am working on a new module or how to make the professional practice module exciting then that is researched. If I stood with a group of students having a conversation in a gallery then that is research. If anyone in our studio paints or makes a drawing you spontaneously have a discussion which is also research.”

Research underpins the pedagogy of new modules. As an artist he believes that it is his business to be interested in developing both personally and keeping himself informed which impacts on his role as an artist and as a teacher and the links between work/research/life which permeates this approach is synonymous of the art world within the art school.

External, collaborative research, informal clusters based around activities linked to individual practice in the region, where the discourse about

contemporary art continue to be a fantastic experience as the life and baggage within a departmental role are left behind. As a member of the National Association of Fine Art Educators there are opportunities to attend talks, events related to learning and teaching in Fine Art and to be part of a national network.

“For me it is developing my role and the excitement in making something new.”



Perceptions of individual support for research

Time to undertake personal research was viewed as good until recently as David's role at UCLAN was part time. Less time now is linked to a permanent 0.8 post in the university which makes time to undertake research more difficult. This is a key reason for not wishing to work full time in order to ensure time is available for personal research. Teaching and other university

commitments are normally managed over a pattern of 3 and 4 day weeks ensuring that there is some flexibility. The expectation of being research active was an explicit part of the discussion at interview for the post and this is also a personal factor in ensuring currency and an external profile.

Perceptions of relations between learning and teaching

Both research activity and external experience is brought into the curriculum and supports the student experience at UCLAN. It is the external experience that has been key in developing a professional development module for level 3 (HE6) students, a lecture series by professional artists and case studies and how this input impacts on their own work. The development at level 2 (HE5) of a professional development strand delivered by practising artists and art professionals and the link between their experiences and the students' own thinking about how they prepare themselves for graduation and a possible future in fine art.

Level 2 students can take an elective module,

“where as part of what they do they organise an exhibition for an event outside the university.”

This has two benefits for the students, one is presenting work to the public and the other is approaching potential funders by taking work to a range of different public bodies. This has meant in their levels 2 and 3 experience that students are making and understanding the transition from a surrogate art world to the real world on graduation.

Personal research is embedded as part of the practical workshops at levels 1 and 2 (HE4/5) and this input has impacted on the focus of the course which is becoming more fine art drawing based. Level 1 students are encouraged to experiment more at this stage rather than choose a particular pathway painting, sculpture etc., and this is done through experimental drawing projects lasting 2 days.

At level 2 electives this approach to drawing is further developed over 10 weeks where different approaches to drawing in contemporary fine art is encouraged through further experiment with approaches and use of materials. This approach is underpinned pedagogically through sharing personal and other research. Good line management in developing and supporting student learning was an important factor.

Collaborative research with a member of staff into practice on art works and exhibitions is embedded in course development through professional practice and offers students a broader outlook to inform their approaches.

“A maker and writer coming together to talk about practice and issues of teaching in two diverse subject areas”

The exposure for students to young, practising artists, event/exhibition organising and looking at art in context are key activities and make the link between personal input and experience as an initiator and infrastructure builder into learning opportunities inside and outside the department.

Support for integrating research with learning and teaching

As a member of the research cluster in the Fine Art area there has been good support from the Head of Department to fund travel to attend shows in the UK and overseas which are important in informing personal research and he has used opportunities when available to do this. Research in the department is co-ordinated by a Research Professor in Contemporary Art.

Funding through Arts Council England to support a collaborative image/text project dedicated to his work is to be presented as a publication. This is taking place with a member of staff at the University of West of England (UWE). The commitment of funding to support the research from UCLAN has not yet been made available. This is causing some tension and friction as UWE have already funded their member of staff. This has raised a question about the support for research active staff in the University. There is a different

relationship with the Arts Council and the galleries who have agreed to take the exhibition of the work which will be in the publication. The commitment to ensure a final outcome for the project may mean subsidising the work and using the small contributions promised from the exhibiting galleries to ensure completion.

“I think there are questions to be asked about the way in which research active staff are supported here. If you are a university with a progressive ethos doing research why aren't you supporting research active staff?”

Discussions are on-going with the Dean of Research and Head of Department to try and resolve the funding issue to complete the project. Whilst acknowledging his lack of experience at pinpointing opportunities and managing the financial side of projects he believes that guidance on how and where to apply for funding and knowledge of who (research administrator) to talk to in the department and University could have helped reduce the personal tensions in managing the research. Much of what he has known has been discovered through serendipity but this has proved helpful in providing clarity for future activity. He believes that there have been excellent opportunities to undertake research in the department,

“I think we have had it good. We have a very good relationship with the Dean of Research, but I think this is about to change.”

The position is less clear at present because of restructuring and the need for focusing on broader areas of subject research.

Reflection on the impact of research and dissemination

Self reflection is seen as a vital and wonderful opportunity to re-assess constantly.

“I look at work all the time and I have a kind of rigid system for doing this. At the same time I give talks to students about my work here or

somewhere else and that is a reflection. You are forced to talk about the work to people as they talk back to you and as you are doing that there is nothing more self reflective than being critical.”

He described a rigid process of elimination of his own work because of the quantity and speed at which he produces drawings. This is also a part of how he works in the teaching situation where being critical and self critical is about reflection and changing opinion as a part of this.

External conversations with friends as artists, brainstorming how physical can the idea in practice and teaching become are part of the process of review. Ideally he would take students to his own show in Chicago so that the discussion and reflection actually takes place with the work to better help students understand the experience of setting up, opening an exhibition, interviews with the press as a real experience rather than the surrogate situation in the department.

Reflecting on how his own work impacts directly on the student experience, the continuous learning through making and criticising work is directly articulated to the experience he brings to UCLAN.

The message about being a researcher and therefore not working full time was transparent.

“I would never work full-time because I want to commit to my own practice and that has always been the case.”

The reconfiguration of staff in the department is, in his opinion, offering an opportunity to re-structure the curriculum which is a challenge relating to researching how this will be managed.

Plans for continuing research

Continuing and completing the work on the collaborative research project with the member of staff at UWE is a priority.

Working with the research administration team to access support for future activities including and an ambitious plan to tour with the collaborative project.

Summary of key points

- Personal research permeating and influencing role as lecturer
- Research underpinning pedagogy of teaching and learning and excellent opportunities to undertake research in the department
- External networking and subject association links important as part of research development
- Expectation by the university of research activity
- Departmental support for travel and conferences to support research but tensions when funding for research activity not delivered
- External funding enables broader collaborative research across disciplines
- A need for explicit support and guidance for staff to understand internal mechanisms to access funding
- The role reflection has on research and its impact on the student experience