

Institution:

London Metropolitan University, Sir John Cass Faculty of Art, Architecture and Design

Unit of Assessment:

UoA 34 (Art and Design theory, history and practice)

a. Context

The Faculty's research impact is guided by and geared towards a 'socially responsible agenda', as stated in the university's mission statement, with the ambition to profoundly improve people's lives through research and enterprise initiatives in art, architecture and design.

At the Cass research staff work closely with our locale: it provides one of our key sources of inspiration and our most immediate audience. We are located at the heart of an extraordinary world city that is mirrored in the diverse cross-section of people and talents that make up our staff and students. Our work is predisposed to addressing a broad community and making it broader still. London is a working city with a rich history. It contains networks of communities: we find a myriad ways of addressing them.

A cross section through our research reveals: socially engaged art and design practices; curatorial practice and installation art; post colonial design histories; the city, representation and the photographic archive; digital design; performance and participation and electro acoustic sonic arts. Research across the Cass is characterised by a reflexive approach that sets out to question the nature, structures and status of theory, history and practice in our subjects. Our research views processes, theories and presentational formats and contexts from a reflexive and critical perspective. This has led to some important innovations that both contribute to the educational and scholarly context of the academic subjects as well as to the wider cultural environment.

Cass research is inspired by and has its most far reaching impact on 'non academic users', for example:

Local and global communities: Mah Rana's ongoing involvement in the AHRC funded 'Crafting Communities' project where she is involved in investigating the positive effects that designing and making can have upon individuals with acquired brain injuries; The East End Archive project that has engaged local communities in exhibitions and discussion about what the East End might be; Mel Brimfield's performance projects that engage local groups across the UK as active participants and experts; Ben Cain's work collaborating with local communities in South Korea on the production of installation work that reflects upon their own material and immaterial labour and craft.

The visiting public: through their engagement in curated exhibitions, screenings, performances, participation in art and design projects and through shifts in the wider cultural landscape that Cass research has enabled. Nicolas De Oliveira's research and curatorial practice has had a substantial impact in relation to the presentation of installation art and collaborative methods of curation. This has had a significant influence on curatorial practices, opening up opportunities for artists and viewers; Susan Andrews work on the Japanese House project, inspired by her research in to the intimate domestic in different cultures, has provided a model of innovative practice in House Museum curation; Patrick Brill's radical-populist approach and output has been influential in opening up art practice and engaging visitors in new ways. His work as an artist board member of the Tate among his other activities has influenced and supported innovation and more creative approaches to engaging the public.

Museums and galleries: through expanding their reach and impact on their locale. Patrick Brill's residency at the New Walsall Art Gallery demonstrated a pro-active and innovative approach to engaging local communities, since used as an important case study by the Arts Council for their 'New Ways of Curating' report. Susan Andrews' project at the Geffrye Museum drew in new audiences and presented new ways of engaging with material through an original use of

photography, artefacts and texts.

Young people: specific research activities have engaged them as participants, for example Bruce Ingman's book illustration workshops with children and performance readings. Susan Andrews' *Shifting Perspectives* project that has gone on to win major sponsorship from Glaxo Smithkline and helped to change perceptions of young people with Downs Syndrome through developing an approach to photography by family members.

Professional practice: in the art and design sector. Dipti Bhagat's work has supported a shift in the narratives related to design history towards more global perspectives and through a re-thinking of 'widening participation' as a tool to change institutional and pedagogic approaches.

Policy: Patrick Brill's advocacy for art and design education through his *Art Party* research project has engaged a wide range of arts organisations and become an important and creative platform where art and design can be both championed and core values discussed and interrogated in an open and inclusive way. Through his *Guardian* articles, engagement with the National Learning Council and many other key organisations he contributed substantially to the climate that supported the reversal of the decision to scrap the GCSE in favour of a new English Baccalaureate Certificate. Charlotte Worthington's collaborative research and production of the award winning and influential documentary *Normal: Real stories from the Sex Industry*, has proved important in exposing the mundane reality of sex trafficking; supporting a more tolerant and understanding approach.

b. Approach to impact

The reorganised Cass Projects office exemplifies the new Faculty's approach to impact. Cass Projects has the specific remit to work as a tool to support an impact based approach. It supports the deployment of research expertise from the faculty as a powerful tool for externally facing projects, advocacy and consultancy.

Our thematic studio teaching that integrates research and practice, leads to both small and larger scale interventions that impact on local and global communities. For example, through the recent Hayes and Aldgate projects a range of site specific Art and Design research projects were devised that involved participation and engagement of local communities. Projects originally established by the School of Architecture in Mumbai, Sierre Leone, Russia and Japan, are now being broadened to include research contributions from Art and Design studios. In this way the studio system has helped to enrich our research through a wider cross faculty discourse.

Collaboration is a strong feature of research practice at the Cass and contributes to impact by engaging communities as active participants, for example in the work of Mel Brimfield, Mah Rana, Bruce Ingman, Patrick Brill. Collaborations also exist between and across our disciplines for example Elaine Thomasi Freitas' work between live music and live video, Joseph Kohlmeir from the School of Architecture's work with Music and Architecture and also with other disciplines such as Rosie McGoldrick's work on the *Animal Gaze* project with academics from human and animal studies. These collaborations while supporting a wider understanding of academic disciplines and areas between practice also present to the public an increasingly interdisciplinary narrative about contemporary practice, educating the public by questioning assumptions about the differences between disciplines. Collaboration also exists with other institutions and organisations such as the Victoria and Albert and the Whitechapel Gallery. The nature of collaboration is examined through Nicolas De Oliveira's collaborative approach to curation where projects are developed as a close partnership between artist and curator. Through the website collabarts.org, Tamiko O'Brien draws together the key themes and questions raised through collaborative art practice.

Cass' research expertise also focuses on real life solutions viewed from a reflexive and self-critical perspective, this can be seen in Assa Aschuach's research with digital design, Allan Seago's work with electronics and timbre, Steve Follen's project in India designing furniture for local communities as well as Mah Rana's projects.

c. Strategy and plans

Our Faculty policy is based on the understanding that our research impact should have as wide as possible a reach and dissemination, not only to the academic research community, but also to a wider 'public' whose interest in our research outputs is fostered through a vigorous programme of public exhibitions, events, advocacy, publications and articles.

In terms of more conventional research impact the faculty will continue to support research dissemination through Cass projects, funding applications, cross disciplinary discourse, research groupings, and by promoting research development through a strategic approach to staff development.

The Faculty will continue to support staff involvement in the key areas of public research dissemination. Staff engagement in wider discourse is also supported through the organisation and project management of externally facing conferences and symposia, as well as staff contributions to external conferences and events. Wider cross-sectoral dissemination will be supported through the development of a more strategic approach to international networks and partnerships. Staff will continue to engage in public debate related to art and design education, research and practice via blogs, media interviews and television and radio appearances, supported by the Faculty and also engaging the Faculty.

The decision to focus research as a Faculty wide activity, encouraging and funding cross Faculty initiatives that engage in our key areas of impact will ensure that the REF 14 audit exercise will be built upon to further strengthen our approach and reward initiative and innovation, while mentoring early career researchers.

d. Relationship to case studies

The selected Impact Case Studies were chosen from a range of projects because they demonstrate the evolution of our research over the period. Both have roots in our grounded, real-life, local-global London context; both have reached new and international audiences, work with reflexive approaches to practice, have become reference points or benchmarks for effective practice.

They demonstrate our contribution to how people engage with their lives through art and design. The impact we value most is on the ground, back in the lives of the people that inspire it. Similar case studies could have been constructed around the work of a number of our researchers. This approach in general is characteristic of our 'everyday' research and our ambitions around its impact; it allows and encourages a real diversity of content and construction.