

**Institution: Robert Gordon University** 

Unit of Assessment: 34 Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory

#### a. Overview

Research at Gray's School of Art examines the scope for intervention of the artist and designer. This research responds to cultural, environmental and economic challenges, working within sustained non academic as well as academic partnerships. Grays has pioneered methodologies of practice-led, co-creative research over two decades. There are three research groups:

Art in Public (Douglas, Hackett, Matarasso Cat C) seeks to understand and generate new forms of the artist's role in society.

Art in Practice (Blyth, Cranston, Agnew, Hamlyn and Spark) is concerned with the construction of artefacts and meaning representing new perspectives on identity and place.

Design in Society (Harris, Malins, Fairburn, Steed, MacDonald Cat C) seeks to develop design principles within the multiple contexts on which design impacts.

# b. Research Strategy

The ethos of Grays research is to mine the deep knowledge traditions of Art and Design practice and theory. We have built on the vision of RAE 2008, establishing a clear role for Art and Design research to inform a sustainable future, beginning with our locality. North East Scotland does not conform to the dominant models of cultural development of post-industrial urban/metropolitan regeneration. The industries of energy and agriculture thrive and challenge contemporary cultures of art and design to rethink research practices as a collaborative activity.

# Research Objectives (2013-2020)

- To increase the number of research active staff and research students through recruitment to intensively develop our specialisms
- To increase the number, success rate and range of funding applications
- To form strategic partnerships to maximise the public benefit and maintain critical mass

# **Research Implementation**

Grays has built on its substantial research legacy of RAE 2008 by undergoing restructuring to consolidate the best of this legacy, realigning our research with the establishment of Research Institutes (2009). The three faculty based Research Institutes provide leadership and support for research, enabling the university to strategically invest the increased Research Excellence Grant in interdisciplinary activity and to monitor key performance indicators relating to funding applications and awards, public output and research students. Grays has responded to university wide change by

- Establishing a senior team of 3 professors (Harris, Douglas and Malins) responsible for strategic development and implementation.
- Aligning doctoral/postdoctoral research with staff research to expand the research base, while increasing focus and quality (detailed in Research Groups).
- Placing Grays research within Innovation, DEsign And Sustainability Research Institute (IDEAS) supporting and encouraging inter-disciplinarity
- Contributing to RGU's Strategic Implementation Plan: the Cultural Regeneration Group (2013) leading to the Northern Centre for Culture and Design, an international research hub for NE Scotland in Culture and the Creative Economy (launch 2014).

Restructuring involved us in building research around key people resulting in the current research active staff of 13 REF returned staff (6 F/T, 5 P/T, 2 Category C) out of a staff cohort of 36 (21F/T, 15 P/T). This represents a sixty per cent reduction in FTE research capacity from 23 to 9 and involved our unit in a course of action to vigorously address the skills gap that emerged in order to progress positively towards REF 2020. Despite this PhD completion rates that have more than



doubled and a 4.8 increase in average research income since 2008, when the submission size is taken into account within two existing and one new research group.

# **Research Groups**

Art in Public (Impact Case Study 1) has since 2008 considerably strengthened and broadened its thematics of artistic leadership, temporality and improvisation through 6 studentships, international collaborations (Orpheus Institute of Research in Music, Gent 2009; Otis College of the Arts, LA) and funded research partnerships (e.g. AHRC Connected Communities *Time of the Clock, Time of Encounter* (2012-13) (d,e) Douglas (1,2,3,4). Four completed doctorates (2012-13) have developed new thematics in particular in the field of social /ecological art practice: negotiation, empathy and 'imperfect art'. Three current doctoral projects include an AHRC funded Collaborative Doctoral Award in art/organisation relationships, cultural leadership and feminist archives. Matarasso (Category C) has worked closely with this subgrouping since its inception (2000), contributing conceptual models for valuing the arts in particular within the On The Edge (OTE) programme (www.ontheedgeresearch.org). Hackett (1,2,3,4) leads research into public health and marginalized groups, using visual methods with Scotland's NHS; Glasgow Centre for Population Health and related disciplines.

Art in Practice is concerned with the construction of artefacts and meaning representing new perspectives on identity and place. The group includes Blyth (1,2) working on human/animal relationships using taxidermy; Hamlyn (1,2,3,4) on the ephemeral, (water and light) within public and private space (RGU PhD in Interactivity of Public Art 2012); Cranston (1,2) on narrative fiction depicting the persona of the lone artist; Agnew (1,2,3,4) on confronting the challenge of digital technologies and print making traditions (RGU PhD Digital Print Practices); Spark (1,2) on the apparent polarities of nature and technology. Mentoring between experienced researchers and practitioners has resulted in new forms of output that reveal process and partnerships (Cranston 2, Blyth 1,2, Agnew 1) and 2 PhD completions.

Design in Society, anticipated in RAE 2008, has undergone significant development predominantly through knowledge exchange. The AHRC Design in Action Knowledge Exchange Hub (KEHDIA) aims to reposition Design as a strategic tool for innovation. It builds research infrastructure developing entrepreneurship, participatory design and design pedagogy (Harris1,2,3,4; MacDonald 1,2,3,4). The Centre for Design and Innovation (C4DI), an ERDF and Scottish Government funded initiative (2008-11), developed design methods and approaches for the purpose of supporting innovation within SMEs (Impact Case Study 2) (Malins 1,2,3,4). Both programmes provide models for research knowledge exchange through extensive engagement with stakeholders and also generate theory through practice. Fairburn (1,2) focuses on designing for extreme environments (space). Steed (1,2) explores knowledge traditions in textiles and their potential to inform imaginative responses to changing technologies, contributing to the Second Skin network (Malins, lead). This network develops new advanced textile solutions directed at alleviating chronic medical conditions (d.e). This group currently supports 1 PDRF and 3 PhD students, with 2 PhDs completions since 2008.

#### c. People, including:

#### I. Staffing strategy and staff development

The **staffing strategy** aims to maintain a balance of research staff at different stages of their careers. Our current submission includes 3 Professors, 2 Honorary Professors, 3 early career and 5 independent researchers. Without exception, Grays research across the three groups involves interdisciplinary partnerships.

Researcher Development, Research Leave and Career progression: We support all staff members to apply for IDEAS membership. There are three levels: developing, established and senior with built-in explicit allowances for research time 20%, 40% and 60% respectively. Criteria are applied flexibly in terms of outputs, funding and supervision. The two Senior members (Douglas and Malins) mentor researchers through application at each level of membership. New members of staff may join as probationary researchers in the first 2 years of a teaching contract subject to the agreement of the Head of School. Grays' membership of IDEAS Institute falls predominantly into Probationary (2, 1 returned), Developing (8, 5 returned), Established (4, all



returned) and Senior (2 all returned). Membership has ensured more formal mechanisms of financial support and accountability than RAE 2008, testing a practice-led ethos against research in other disciplines in relation to level of public output, research funding and research student progression/completion. Membership acts in place of a policy for research leave: IDEAS members may apply for support to attend national/international conferences, seminars, workshops and academic exchanges (d). In 2011 and 2013 IDEAS supported two Researchers in Residence to mentor staff in the incubation and development of individual research portfolios. This has resulted in new thematics e.g. participatory method across Art & Design (Harris,1), the role of art in contemporary museology (Blyth,1).

The annual Employee Performance Review (EPR) allows staff to discuss their progress with more senior mentors to identify individual development needs and to develop an action plan. The EPR plans individual academic/research workloads as a single process to ensure appropriate distribution of responsibilities across teaching, research and supervision. In addition IDEAS Executive meets quarterly to set the Institute's objectives for each of its 3 themes, assess progress by evaluating membership, activity, funding, PhD supervision and completions. Grays' researchers on full time contracts may apply for progression to Reader or Professor.

RGU supports all research staff through training, in particular grant application and research project management. A three workshop series, Angel's Nest to Dragon's Den, targets research proposal writing including a review of proposals, financial planning, and presentation of the research idea. Project management workshops provide guidance on good practice for a project's lifetime. The Supervisor Training Programme comprises an initial training for new supervisors continued through a CPD event every 3 years irrespective of supervisory experience. In addition, Grays has turned to its advantage its relatively small number of staff researchers and mature research students to create a shared resource and collaborative community: a fortnightly Reading Group focuses on skills in scoping and evaluating literature; a monthly Research Training Workshop addresses publication and dissemination of research, raising research questions, interview techniques and documentation; a monthly seminar programme (DART) provides researchers with the opportunity to test their research with invited expert commentators (www.discussionsart.wordpress.com). These sessions have targeted the conceptual gap between practice and academic research, opening up the creative process to scrutiny (portfolios: Cranston,2; Hackett,1; Blyth,1) and increased cross disciplinary partnerships (Spark,1,2; Hackett,1; Harris,1). The weekly Guest@Grays lecture programme invites high level practitioners and researchers to contribute to shaping our research agenda [e.g.Dant & Urguhart (Agnew,1), Coessens (Douglas,2). Grays staff attend an annual 2 day residential training event, including externally facilitated supervisory training. The number of qualified, experienced supervisors has increased from 5 in 2008 to 10 in 2013. Grays F/T staff may also apply to undertake part time study supported by a fee waiver and 20% researcher time. Two staff members are currently registered for PhD study.

RGU is actively committed to the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers. Research staff development has, since 2006, been one of the University's strategic staff development priorities. Research Assistants and Fellows are generally employed on a fixed term contract if their funding is grant related. However some may also be on a permanent contract if the funding duration and project is for a lengthy period of time or they have 4 years service. With regard to employment rights all staff regardless of employment status have full employment rights once they have the relevant qualifying service

Equal Opportunities: RGU is an Equal Opportunities employer and this is embedded in all our HR policies and processes

(http://www4.rgu.ac.uk/files/Agcas%20Equal%20Opportunities%20policy.pdf). We have a number of family friendly policies which include generous maternity pay and leave above the statutory provision. RGU has a flexible working policy that allows staff once they have enough service to apply for flexible working regardless of their personal circumstance.

#### **Research Students** c. II.

Doctoral and postdoctoral research is key to the vibrancy of Grays' research within RGU. Many of our research students are mature practitioners in Art and Design for whom doctoral/postdoctoral



research provides an opportunity to redefine the trajectories of their practices in response to social, cultural and ecological change. Recent completions (Lacy, Chu, Goto) represent leading edge research into social art practice and art and ecology contributing practice-led models and methodologies that have international reach and significance. Research students take a leading role in the development of our research culture increasingly aspects of the training programme delivered by more experienced researchers and ECRs outlined in c.l. and including an annual 1 day peer reviewed student led symposium.

Grays PhD students are managed through the IDEAS Graduate School to ensure quality control of postgraduate support and supervision and to provide a dedicated point of contact. The Graduate School is actively involved in student recruitment, training, pastoral care, progress monitoring. Since the establishment of a dedicated research student space in December 2012, the Centre for Research in Art, Design and the Built Environment, there has been a noticeable rise in formal/informal collaboration research output. In 2013 individuals presented on average 2 conference papers/ I journal article per annum per student.

Each Grays' research student is aligned with one of the three research groups. IDEAS supports an annual call for studentships to which members of staff can apply as individuals/groups in support of their research. This provides the unit with an average of 2 fully-funded PhD studentships pa, enabling the PhD student community to grow through attracting high quality students. The funded PhD studentship has usually been allocated to a supervisory team consisting of an Early Career Researchers and an experienced supervisor, which has allowed the ECR to gain supervisory experience. Moreover, Grays has been successful in winning 4 AHRC studentships and one MRes within the period.

The quality of research is assured through a number of processes. Students register for MRes/PhD within the first 3 months, formally establishing a supervisory team and setting out objectives. Students transfer to PhD after one year of research after submitting a satisfactory transfer report and performance of a transfer viva. The transfer report and viva are assessed by an independent examiner and the Research Co-ordinator. All PhD students undertake a 2 module 120 credit PG Cert Research Methods Course, aligned with two critical stages in the first 15 months of study: registration and transfer. PhD students are trained on all aspects of research including literature review, project development, critical analysis as well as presentation, time management, career and personal development planning. Module 1 includes the development of a Personal Development Plan and Research Ethics that are revisited within Module 2. The PhD students are supported through a number of events to become part of the research community, including a formal induction shared with the Faculty and a team building residential retreat in addition to Grays' provision.

Students' progress is monitored through an annual research review process independent of the supervisory team. This is in addition to the routine practise of PhD supervision. This has supported our track record of timely PhD completion.

A number of seminars and training sessions are arranged for doctoral students on specific issues including developing research proposals, preparation for the viva and teaching through RGU's arrangement with the Open University's OpenPad leading to the professional qualification of Fellow of the Higher Education Academy.

Grays has benefitted from AHRC funding for a research training network 2008-10 (PI Malins) in collaboration with Dundee University (PI Paul).

A recently completed Graduate School Research Degrees Review conducted by University of Edinburgh and Glasgow academics commended highly on the initial and 3-yearly CPD supervisory training course and the students Annual Progress Report process. In PRES 2013, the University outperformed its national benchmarks in the following aspects: induction, formal monitoring of progress, understanding standards and final assessment procedures and response to student feedback, appropriate research skills, self confidence and research integrity during their studies and project management.

RGU 's Equal Opportunities policy includes research students.



# d. Income, infrastructure and facilities

### **Research Funding Portfolio**

The funding data (REF4) evidences a good range of activity across the three research groups of 911k over the complete period. This includes research income through AHRC research awards and AHRC and EU Knowledge Exchange awards (a total award value 2008-13 of 201k), funding from UK central government and local authorities including health (551k) and exhibitions and commissions (151k). There has been a marked rise in research grant income in 2012-13 (175k) indicating a trajectory of significant growth.

Research awards: Time of the Clock, Time of Encounter (AH/J006637/1) (2012-13)(100k, 25k to RGU) in collaboration with the universities of Central Lancashire (lead), Edinburgh and Manchester, challenges perceptions about time in communities, activating alternatives (Col Douglas). It builds on an existing AHRC Collaborative Doctoral award Connecting Communities through the Arts (AH/I024194/1) (Smith) (PI Douglas) (2011-14) that investigates the role of the creative artist in organisational settings with an external partner organisation. Woodend Arts.

Visualising the Invisible: developing innovative approaches to visualisation to help NHS staff prevent and control Healthcare Associated Infection (2011-13) was a 20 month, 90k AHRC/Scottish Funding Council collaboration between RGU (Grays and HealthCare), Dundee University and Glasgow School of Art working with the NHS, to make visible healthcare associated infections (Hackett,3). The project refines visual methodologies of gathering user centred data through focus groups developed in earlier research with Alcohol Focus Scotland, Glasgow Centre for Population Health (11k to RGU) that sought mutual insights into patterns of behaviour of alcohol consumption in 16-30 year olds (Hackett, 2).

Second Skin: Co-design for Advanced Textiles for Health and Well-Being 2013-5 (AH/K000640/1) (PI Malins, Col Steed, Fairburn) (£33,634) is a 2 year AHRC Network grant investigating innovative applications for advanced textiles in the context of chronic disease such as obesity in partnership with the universities of Ulster, Dundee and Urbana-Champaign Illinois and industrial partner Survivetech, It resulted from Future Textile Visions (2011), a 40k Scottish Government funded scoping study examining the potential for technologically enhanced textiles for health benefits which followed on from the Molecular Imprinted Textiles project (2011) funded by the Scottish Academy of Fashion (2K).

EU FP7 ICT STREP COnCEPT (2013-16) (FP7 610725) designs and evaluates prototype software applications that combine advanced information retrieval algorithms with techniques such as mindmapping and the creation of story boards within a 3 year, 322k research partnership between Intrasoft International SA (lead) with Universiteit Hasselt, Technische Universiteit Eindhoven, Teknologian Tutkimuskeskus Vtt, EDG Designlab, Atos, Global Security Intelligence and Virtualware (Malins,1).

Knowledge Exchange Grants: Design in Action (AH/J005126/1) (Col Harris) in collaboration with the universities of Dundee, Abertay, St Andrews, Edinburgh and Glasgow School of Art, is a 4.8m AHRC funded Knowledge Exchange Hub (2012-16) (500k to RGU) to investigate design innovation by interconnecting business, designers and academics. The research establishes research infrastructure, a PDRF, a PDRA and a PhD Studentship to build on the collaborative, participatory methodologies developed by OTE (2000 on) in art and C4DI (2008-11) in design (Impact Case Studies) (Harris,1,3).

Centre for Design and Innovation C4DI (2008-11) (PI Malins,2,3,4) (Impact Case Study 2) established a partnership between RGU, Scottish Enterprise, Skills Development Scotland and Aberdeen City Council to provide innovation support for 300+ SMEs using design led methodologies, funded by the European Regional Development fund (330k) and the Scottish Government's SEEKIT fund (451K).

Trust, Charity and Local Government funding: Harris and Fairburn, working in collaboration with the University of West of Scotland and Glasgow School of Art, grows the successful Cultivating Creativity (Creative Scotland Grant, 30k, 2011) by researching case studies of creative collectives and establishing a set of principles of success including branding, marketing, resource and funding in Cultivating Creative Collectives (80k) (2013) (Harris,4).



Public commissions and exhibitions (not in Ref 4): Turra Coo, a 96K public commission through Turriff Tourism Group, LEADER funding (2008-10) explores human values in relation to animal farming through taxidermy (Blyth,2) leading to a new body of work that critiques 'natural history' within museum settings, Kendal Museum (5K Creative Scotland (CS) award 2013) (Blyth,1). A CS award 2009 (20K) supports Cranston at EAST International 2009 (1) and a second CS award 2013 (15k) with Borders Regional Council £500, supports two linked exhibitions at Royal Scottish Academy and Hawick Museum (Cranston,2); Schwerin Council supports an artist's fee + travel 2010 (3k) (Hamlyn,1) and a Sydney College of Arts Artist in Residence develops an international cross disciplinary exchange on the imagination (5k) (Hamlyn,4); JP Kenny Ltd supports artists Agnew + Blyth in production of A2Z Royal Society of the Arts Edinburgh 2012 Exhibition (6.5K) (Agnew,2).

Scholarly Infrastructure: The University holds an extensive collection of artefacts (paintings, drawings, sculpture, design and craft objects including ceramics, digital work, fashion garments and photographs dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century). The Art and Heritage Collections were awarded Full Museum Accreditation by Museums Libraries and Archives Council in February 2009 and work is procured on an annual basis. The University is participating in the Public Catalogue Foundation's (PCF and BBC) 'Your Paintings' online catalogue and database, and has more than 850 paintings from the collection included in the initiative. In addition RGU library service subscribes to over 85 online databases, including Art Full Text, Business Source Premier, Design and Applied Arts Index and Web of Knowledge and image databases that contain copyright cleared images for educational use: Art Museum Image Gallery and Bridgeman Education, Scottish Cultural Resource Access Network (SCRAN).

Organisational infrastructure: RGU is investing significantly in its three research institutes since they started in August 2009; for IDEAS this is almost £7.5 million including REG income awarded to its four RAE 2008 submissions (£1.2 million pa), a University contribution towards IDEAS members worth ~£550k pa, plus overheads from its research and knowledge exchange grants.

Operational Infrastructure: The roles of Research Co-ordinator and Research Degree Coordinator support individual staff and research students respectively. Grays has two physical centres: a shared dedicated facility with Architecture and the Built Environment and a project specific space (*Design in Action*). Each research student is supplied with a dedicated workstation. internet, library, telephone, print and scanning facilities as well as shared project space. Improved accommodation has resulted in noticeably higher levels of collaboration (co-authorship, participation and pro-active networking). In addition, individuals have been well supported to present at conferences, seminars and workshops, to initiate projects and disseminate research through collaborative projects/exhibitions/websites 2009-13 (70k). Art in Public has benefitted from 4 and Design in Society from 3 IDEAS fully funded PhD studentships (430k). Staff have accessed 2 researchers in residence in 2011 (50k) and 8 research summer studentships since 2009 (8.5K) to support individuals.

### e. Collaboration and contribution to the discipline or research base

#### 1. Academic/Non Academic Collaborations:

Art in Public: Time of the Clock. Time of Encounter develops a new collaboration between Woodend Arts, Orpheus Institute of Research in Music, Gent and Vrije University, Brussels (Coessens) in addition to the academic partners (d). This network also builds on and supports Connecting Communities through the Arts CDA (PI Douglas). In addition Douglas has collaborated in experimental research across art and music with Coessens resulting in co-authored work (Douglas, 1, 2, 3, 4)

Lacy, renowned Los Angeles artist and professor at Otis College of the Arts, was drawn to OTE through our track record in practice led, social/public engagement methodologies related to place and community, completing her a PhD (RGU 2013) leading to a key text with Duke University Press (supervisor **Douglas**).

Hackett working with Glasgow Centre for Population Health, Alcohol: Through Our Eyes, formed a cross disciplinary collaboration with health care specialists (Seamon, Edgar) (Hackett,2). This



research informs a second academic collaboration (VisinVis 2011-13) across Art and Health in RGU, Glasgow School of Art, Dundee University and the NHS (**Hackett,3**).

**Design in Society:** Developing the Food and Design thematic in *Design in Action* Knowledge Exchange hub, supports artisan food producers by enabling dialogic design (Beer52, Lovsushi, Scomac Ltd) within a multiple collaboration with the universities of Abertay, Dundee, Edinburgh and St Andrews and their respective non academic partners, including V&A Dundee. (PI **Harris**)

COnCEPT (2013-16) (Grant Agreement 610725)(PI **Malins**) An EU FP7 funded project builds on a long standing collaboration with Liapis, Senior ICT expert, Intrasoft International SA (lead).

Design Master Classes funded by The Design Council (6.8k), (PI **Malins**), supported a series of public lectures and networking events 2011-12, with key design practices involved in the C4DI research (Hemingway Associates, Livework, Seymour Powell).

## 2. Leadership

Research Council: AHRC Peer Review College (Douglas, MacDonald), including Chair of awards panel Care for the Future, 2013 and Challenge Panel member, Communities, Cultures, Environments and Sustainability Connected Communities programme (Douglas); Austrian Research Council (2011) and New Dynamics of Ageing Commissioning Panel (2008-9) (Douglas).

Research Advisory Panels: Learning from the Inside European Research Council Advanced Grant (ERC), PI Ingold, Aberdeen University (2013-18), Orpheus Research Centre in Music, Belgium, (2009-present) (**Douglas**); Board member for Scottish Academy of Fashion (SAF) (**Harris**)

Professional Subject Associations: Academicians of the Royal Scottish Academy: (Cranston and Agnew 2012 -); National Digital Media Industry Leadership Group, Scottish Enterprise/Scottish Government; V&A @ Dundee Content/Product Workstream; Chair of Moving Targets Steering Group; Board of Management for Education, Arts, Culture & Creativity Project Scottish Government; Strategy Reference Group, Creative Scotland 2013; Creative Scotland's Review Panel member for Visual Arts & Crafts (Harris);

#### 3. Quality Assurance and Monitoring of Research

**Doctorate examinations**: Since 2008 **Douglas** has successfully examined 10 PhD doctorates, including Royal Conservatoire Brussels and Melbourne and **Malins** has examined 5 PhD doctorates.

**Editorial positions**: The Design Journal (**Malins** – Member of the editorial board and guest editor) **Board membership** of sound International Music Festival (**Harris**), Woodend Arts (**Douglas**). Scientific board membership for the European Academy of Design (EAD) and the Engineering and Product Design Education Conferences (E & PDE) (**Malins**).

# 4. Scholarly awards and invited keynotes (Esteem)

**Awards**: McGeorge Research Fellowship, University of Melbourne awarded 2013 (**Douglas**); Artist Researcher in Residence, Sydney College of Art, Sydney Australia, August 2011 (**Hamlyn**)

**Consultancies**: to develop Aberdeenshire Council: Cultural portrait 2011-13 (**Matarasso**).

**Keynotes**: Creative Nation, Cultural Summit, Edinburgh, 2008; Developing partnerships with creative industries, Holyrood Conference, Edinburgh, 2009; Ambition Scotland, Dundee, 2010; *Cultivating Creativity Sowing Seeds: Growing Networks* Conference, Aberdeen 2011 (**Harris,4**); AB+ Cultural Conference, Aberdeen 2012 (**Harris**).

National Kaohsiung University, Taiwan Dec 2008; University of the Arts Berne, 2009; University of Leuven 2010; MIRIAD, Manchester Metropolitan University 2011 (**Douglas**).

University of Urbana-Champaign, Illinois, Series of public lectures on the theme of Designing the Future Sep 2013 (Malins).

Queen's University, Ontario June 2011; Sami Cultural Centre Sajos, Inari, Finland April 2012; Helsinki University Dec 2011; ESSEC Business School, Cergy-Pointoise, France April 2008 (**MacDonald**).