Realising Art and Design Research in Policy Making Decisions

Arts and Design Expertise and Evidence Base: how can we use it?
29ᵗʰ November 2021

Introduction

The purpose of this session was to explore current issues contributing to the underutilisation of existing Art and Design Research and how we can develop existing case studies flexibly to ensure that wider application of these examples works efficiently and reaps the benefits. This session brought together expert academics and organisations to advise on how this evidence can be properly developed into policy making decisions.

Barry Sheerman MP

Barry Sheerman MP is the Labour and Co-operative Member of Parliament for Huddersfield and served since being first elected in 1979. From 1983 to 1988 he was the Labour spokesperson on education and employment; for Home Affairs (as Shadow Deputy Home Secretary) from 1988 to 1992; and for Disabled People's Rights from 1992 to 1994. Between 2001 and 2010, Barry was Chair of the House of Commons Education and Skills Select Committee. A former Chair of both the House of Commons Select Committee for Children, Schools and Families and the Education and Skills Committee, he is co-chair of the APDIG and a member of the Design Commission. He is a long-running campaigner for greater use of design thinking in public policy formation.

- The power of design is phenomenal and can transform people's lives, not only to become more beautiful and wonderful but also more efficient. This session is placed to discuss the power critical importance of design at the heart of the successful and flourishing society.
- We have been in 10 years of cuts across so many services, we have lived in a world of cutbacks, perhaps in this difficult time we have taken the eye off design somewhat, and this is our time to refocus.
- If we want to make change in policy and politics, we must start off with a small number, continue to expand and convert into a campaign that can convince policymakers of the importance of this area. What we have here today is a community with the knowledge, expertise, and passion for this area, which is the perfect place for us to begin.

Speaker: Professor Sally Wade

Professor Sally Wade is Pro Vice Chancellor and Dean for the Faculty of Arts Humanities and Social Sciences at Anglia Ruskin University. She has a long-standing career in art and design, and previously served as Director of the Sheffield Institute of Arts at Sheffield Hallam University. She also serves as Chair of the Council for Higher Education in Art and Design (CHEAD), advocating at a national level, providing opportunities for building research capacity and supporting students. In addition, she sits on the executive for the national Group for Learning in Art and Design (GLAD), promoting innovative practice in creative pedagogy in practice-led arts, design and media education.

- As part of the work CHEAD does with 70 member institutions, the CHEAD Research Alliance has begun to raise and address the questions we will discuss today, to develop and defending our subjects – this is a timely piece of work to explore this issue.
- It is critical to examine the enhanced and strategic use of current art and design evidence base in policymaking decisions, particularly through REF impact case studies. Taking into the idea of impact has really changed how we think about research in our subjects.
- For instance, RCA case study titled *Design for Patient Safety: Creating significant professional, culture, and commercial impact through innovative design in a range of healthcare settings*, is a wonderful example of how our research has become increasingly interdisciplinary
- Anglia Ruskin University's Cambridge Institute for Music Therapy Research also won the Queen's Anniversary Prize for research on enhanced care to over 22,000 people with dementia and their families in the care home and their communities. This is where we have converted our research into informing policy and were invited to contribute to government conversations in this area.
- Now, we are at are at a real crossroads where we have more evidence that will be able to have far more impact if we work together and collectively have a much stronger and louder voice.

Speaker: Professor Martyn Evans

Professor Martyn Evans is the Director of Manchester School of Art, a product designer, and design academic with 20 years research, teaching and leadership experience and is Director of Manchester School of Art. Interested in the strategic role that design commands in a variety of settings, his research explores the approaches designers use to conceptualise and communicate the future. With broad experience of design as future making, he has presented on this and related topics, nationally and internationally. He is a reviewer for a number of research councils and was appointed as a strategic reviewer for the AHRC in 2017.

- We must ask ourselves: how do we land the narrative of the quality of design research better? Because there is a huge amount of evidence in terms of supporting the quality of research that has taken design and cognitive sprint, but is it landing well enough? There are several cases to note that are great examples of rigorous research with depth.
- I have led a Research Council funded project with Cardiff Metropolitan University, with a range of outside counsel, including CHEAD and Design Council, developing a strategic action plan for the use of design in the UK. The evidence for design as a strategic force for economic, societal, and sustainable impact is clear but how do we land that better?
- More recently, an example of the relationship between research and practice as at the Design for Planet Festival was seen at Dundee by Design Council where the stories communicating this were incredible.

- Recently, as part of Design Council's [Design Economy](#) Steering group to show the economic, societal, and sustainable impact of design in the UK, where I said – it is not us because we know design is great, we need to ask: who are the naysayers? Who are the people we need to influence?
- How can we better speak the language of STEM so that we have more equal footing in the contributions of design being recognised as credible and valuable? How can we better influence policymakers? Finally, how can we charm the press? Who are the figureheads who will do this? We need to also make sure that we bring another generation of new people that can take on this cause with creativity and confidence.

Speaker: Ian Thomas

Ian Thomas is the current global Head of Evidence for the Arts at the British Council, leading on the evaluation and research of the British Council's global arts programmes particularly looking at the evidence base around arts, cultural relations, and soft power. Ian's recent work includes the evaluation of Creative Europe funding in the UK, exploring a wide range of social, economic and artistic impacts across the funding programme in the UK and also the evaluation programmes such as the UK's Cultural Protection Fund. Prior to his work at the British Council, he worked for Telford & Wrekin Council in the UK leading the development on a number of cultural and music education programmes. Previously, he worked for Arts Council England. He is a current Royal Society for the Arts Evidence Champion.

- Heading research and evaluation across global arts programs, and particularly focused in knowledge exchange from academic communities to UK policy and more global political institutions as well. This is also done through partnerships with bridging institutions, such as the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre led by Nesta.
- The British Council have focused on art as a research method in its own right, but also how to develop suitable evidence and evaluation principles that are relevant and useful for the sector.
- Another piece of work is on translation and translating research and effort in policy language in policy priorities, for example around UN SDGs and COP26, and published two policy papers, one called the *[Missing Pillar](#)* looking at missing SDGs and also *[Acting Together on Climate Change](#)*, synthesising academic base globally on the area.
- A central theme is convening and knowledge sharing with partners, and having international dialogue in order to synthesise it all. So we must ask, how can we dock in the rich evidence base at the sector and align it to what Whitehall and government departments are after?
- A key instance of learning from international examples include an ongoing British Council programme *[Crafting Futures](#)*, a global programme aiming for a sustainable future through making and collaboration, which has been really successful at working with local and central government in Mexico in particular. Drawing from the programme's international evidence-based research and especially how craft and design has been on the agenda in Mexico, more can be done for the UK if we learn from other countries.

Speaker: Chris Speed

Professor Chris Speed FRSE is Chair of Design Informatics at the University of Edinburgh where he collaborates with a wide variety of partners to explore how design provides methods to adapt, and create

products and services within a networked society. Chris directs the Institute for Design Informatics that is home to a combination of researchers working across the fields of interaction design, temporal design, anthropology, software engineering, and digital architecture. Chris has been involved in 39 research projects since joining the University of Edinburgh, leading on 18 worth a total of £9.9mil and Co-Investigator on 21 projects worth in excess of £55mil. Chris is Director of the £6mil (£5.5Mil AHRC & £0.5Mil SFC) Creative Informatics R&D Partnership, one of the nine AHRC funded Creative Industries Clusters in the UK, and is Co-I to the Next Stage Digital Economy Centre DECaDE led by Surrey with the Digital Catapult. Chris was made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 2020.

- Creative Scotland have championed triple bottom line across economic, social, and cultural, but do we know across the different research and teaching we do what the core values we want to portray all the time, as this is likely to shift beyond these three to EDI, environmental, or other values. If we do not clearly know amongst ourselves what the triple bottom lines are that we will struggle to portray these to politicians and policymakers.
- Software is also eating the world, including art and design – and this is what we have seen in the last decade, because we would not be able to do many things without it.
- Our cycles for reviewing and changing our systems are much slower than software. Where we may work on a 7 year Waterfall cycle, software is doing what our departments do all the time through Agile. We do not currently have the models that would lead us to have the impact at the higher level.
- Are we really moving from Waterfall to Agile, or has out sector got to make a bigger turn?
- So, we need to think about our impacts in terms of activities, outputs, and outcomes as well as triple bottom lines; the methods used to both capture and analyse, including thinking about the point raised on software's efficiency; the various methods that could used to share them; and consider how software can be utilised to have these aims.

Discussion

- The earlier we teach children about these subjects and teach them practically in early education, the more impact we can have – even English and Geography can be taught through design and technology.
- Perhaps one of the pressing changes we need is to embed more sustainable focus in early education, such as through the logic of the UN SDGs which can be central for designing the entire curriculum. At university level, we are also beginning to see this happening at universities.
- Especially with the background of COP26, the challenge will be to appeal to politicians and communities to present answers to the problem of climate change and the very big part design plays in that in order for people to better understand its value. Importantly, we also need to think about what non-traditional policy routes can be used to better engagr with parliamentarians but also very locally with communities.
- There are various ways where Art and Design work and offer critical challenges to methodologies and approaches to dealing with societal issues, but do not really have a way to make sure that these are visible to decision makers. Perhaps this requires going back to the beginning to explain from the first principle why there is value in critical thinking embedded within design and art, rather than being able to work in way in which other disciplines work where you understand that its an incremental iterative development of the understanding and application of the knowledge.

- With how increasingly interdisciplinary this area is, researchers also become 'bilingual' where they can 'talk art' but also 'speak' health, STEM, etc on their respective projects, learning the language of other sectors is key to be able to codesign. Equally, speaking the language of STEM, for instance, is complicated by the fact that STEM does not necessarily always understand the language of STEM.
- On one hand, speaking the language of other sectors and have statistics and metrics may be key, but equally there is something so powerful about the anecdote that this sector so commonly uses, and this really has to be balanced.
- In the report *Reimagining practical learning in Secondary Schools*, the authors highlight the importance of design and technology, and 'heads, hands, and heart', a critical way to get learning to stick. There is something significant about the development of whole human being that you can get with connecting with Art and Design, and that can be seen here.
- London Higher also have two reports on this area discussing the importance of Creative HE provision in London and have reports on how London's HE providers are advancing the sustainability agenda.
- The UK Net Zero Strategy outlined how critical it is to achieve scope three, predicated on critical thinking and innovation to drive change, and thinking about a framework being developed for research and innovation – so this is also a critical conversation to have now and engage with government.
- To address the complex issues in our world today, we must take Art and Design as a way to actually understand the question, with other disciplines in a holistic way, and not this area simply being instrumentalised to try and come up with a tangible solution on its own.
- Part of addressing this problem is also adapting the curriculum of Art and Design schools, to encourage more radical creativity in some schools in Finland and Canada, where their model operates through partnering the student with a company for industry-partnered learning.
- There is also a problem of how much of the design agenda has taken up by engineering faculties in midlands, or business schools across the UK, which is part the appropriation of design in whatever context to whatever end, and since the word design covers a multitude of activities, it is difficult to contain its use and thus how we understand it.
- While people also criticise universities, there is also a clear timeline issue to be able to get those skills in at least five years before we see people who have graduated with those skills, so what we need in 2030 is probably what we should ask ourselves. If we are to work towards net zero and a cleaner greener environment, what are the creative skills that design can bring and how can we train designers to work better with other disciplines to learn their language – not trying to become something else but instead learning the language of, for instance STEAM – in order to make our case. So what are the skills and challenges we will face at the end of this decade is a question we must continuously engage with while we also focus on our efforts to appeal to policymakers with what we have now.

About APDIG

The All-Party Parliamentary Design and Innovation Group (APDIG) is a cross-party coalition of Parliamentarians as well as art and design sector organisations that work to: critique existing government decision-making, help the sector better engage with the policy process, and develop new policy ideas that improve the sector.

About Policy Connect

Policy Connect is a membership based, cross-party think tank with four main policy pillars; Education and Skills; Industry, Technology & Innovation; Sustainability and Health & Accessibility. We bring together parliamentarians and government in collaboration with academia, business and civil society to inform, influence and improve UK public policy through debate, research and innovative thinking, so as to improve peoples' lives.

We specialise in supporting parliamentary groups, forums and commissions for which Policy Connect provides the secretariat and delivers impactful policy research and events programmes. Our collaboration with parliamentarians through these groups allows us to influence public policy in Westminster and Whitehall. We are a social enterprise and are funded by a combination of regular membership subscriptions and time limited sponsorships. We are proud to be a Disability Confident, London Living Wage employer and a member of Social Enterprise UK.

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