

Professor Simon Lewis
Pro-Vice Chancellor and Head of College, Art and Design and Built
Environment; Professor of Painting

GLAD Conference 2008
Monday 8th and Tuesday 9th September 2008
Nottingham Trent University, Bonington building, City campus

In June 1970 the Department of Education & Science published a report entitled 'The Structure of Art and Design Education' [ISBN 112701884, published by Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1970]. The report commissioned by the then Secretary of State for Education and Science, Margaret Thatcher, was compiled by a joint committee of the National Advisory Council of Art Education and the National Council for Diplomas in Art and Design under the Chairmanship of Sir William Coldstream.

The purpose of the report was to map out the future direction and structure of art and design education at a pivotal moment in the development of the higher education sector in the United Kingdom, at a time when the independent and autonomous local authority funded and focused art schools began to be absorbed into the new polytechnics alongside local technical colleges and teacher training provision.

The report that runs to 55 pages and some 166 paragraphs, when read with hindsight, makes for instructive reading and a sense of considerable déjà vu for anyone who has been engaged in the higher education sector for art and design during the last nearly 40 years. The then new diplomas in art and

design (DipAD) introduced in 1965 are reviewed in depth and a series of far reaching educational proposals made for their further development to achieve parity and ultimately conversion to Bachelor of Arts qualifications in the early 1970's. The report focuses on much that is familiar to those who have followed the debates around fitness for purpose; employer engagement, widening participation, regional and national development, the value of creativity and innovation to the national economy, the arts as regional and national economic generators, cultural intervention for the well-being of society alongside the need for greater interdisciplinarity, the need for vocational and technical education training, and much more. The nomenclature has changed but the thrust of the report and the strategic imperatives's identified are little different today from those identified by Coldstream in his 1970's report. This was at a time when fewer than 7000 students in the whole of the UK were enrolled on the diploma for art and design (November 1969 – Fine Art 2987, Graphic Design 1578, Three dimensional design 1293, Textiles and Fashion 1014, Total 6872, Source the National Council for Diplomas in Art and Design).

What has changed out of all recognition is the context within which the education process envisaged by Coldstream is now delivered. (In 2005/06 the following numbers were enrolled on Art and Design BA programmes in the UK, Fine Art 18,015, Design Studies 55,625, Crafts 1635, others in the Creative Arts 5925. Total 81,240; Higher Education Statistics Agency Data). The report makes reference to the far-reaching changes that might result from the

independent art schools becoming founding members of the new polytechnics but is ambivalent on what that would really mean. It assumes a continued place in the sector for the independent art school as specialist provision that would continue more or less unchanged, alongside new hybrids which might emerge within the new polytechnic sector. The report speaks of expansion but has no foresight of the size and breadth of provision that would so rapidly emerge in the polytechnics in the 1970's and 1980's, and the resultant pressure on resources to support the expansion of a complex resource intensive system where learning by doing and making remains a central tenet of art and design education in the United Kingdom.

In 1984 – 1985 a National Advisory Body (NAB) was established under the Chairmanship of Tom Bromley OBE. This body was tasked with, among other things, coming up with a rationalisation of a system of art and design education that was now large, complex and a major part of the polytechnic sector, whose very success was creating ever more pressure on finite resources. The National Advisory Body's solution of differentiating provision between that which was to be designated as specialist and therefore limited, and that which was to be non specialist and thus open to expansion, was a solution that addressed the questions of constrained resourcing. However, it significantly failed to address the ever expanding and developing educational context.

In 1992 Kenneth Clark, the then Secretary of State for Education and Science,

having recognised the success of the polytechnics in delivering their mission and also recognising a public perception of a two tier higher education provision where the University title was perceived as superior, legislated for all higher education institutions who met appropriate criteria to use the university designation.

Alongside this change of title, incorporation also freed polytechnics from local authority control and funding and the close scrutiny of the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) which had had national oversight and responsibility for the maintenance of the quality of all the degree awarding programmes in the non-University sector.

Now in 2008, the art and design disciplines are delivered mainly within the post-1992 university sector, a tiny and ever diminishing handful of independent art schools, mostly in some form of partnership with a large university organisation, and the UK now has two art and design universities, in the University of the Arts, London and the University of the Creative Arts at Canterbury, Epsom, Farnham, Maidstone and Rochester – both of these themselves conglomerates of a number of previously separate art and design institutions.

This context of change within the higher education sector over the last 40 years

has been mirrored by significant change in perceptions of the values of an education through the art and design disciplines, to, not only the national economy, but also the social cohesion and the cultural well-being of the nation. Over the last ten years, and particularly since the millennium, numerous reports from a variety of government ministries and agencies have fore fronted the importance of developing the creativity and innovation of our population as being one of the nation's fundamental strengths and the attribute most valuable to our future national economic success and social well-being. The creative industries mapping document of 1998, All our Futures, Creativity Culture and Education of 1999, Our Competitive Future, Building the Knowledge Driven Economy of 1998, the Cox Report of 2006, the NESTA report of October 2006, 'The Innovation Gap' and the Leitch Report 'Prosperity for all in the Global Economy – World Class Skills' (December 2006) all lay great emphasis on the importance to our future economic health and well-being of the internationally pre-eminent areas of the British economy now referred to as the creative industries. These industries, ranging across all aspects of mass media and innovative design led UK and global companies serving a sophisticated urban consumer society which is now highly conscious of brand and design identity, are populated, served and enabled by graduates of the British art and design education system. These industries, which are mainly composed of dynamic, fast moving small and medium sized enterprises, express views on the quality of these graduates and how that quality might be improved yet further, but none suggest that they would be more successful without this continuous supply of

talent which is now not only driving this important sector of the UK economy, but also being employed by our global economic competitors.

In broad outline this is now the context in which our subject disciplines are delivered. A context of change that has led art and design higher education from peripheral small scale activity, catering to a separatist student community who would characterise themselves as outsiders or educational misfits which found the free flowing, largely anarchic culture of an art school environment with fine art at its centre, a natural and supportive environment in which to grow, to a context of mass higher education of large, resource intensive, technologically sophisticated schools and university faculties of art and design, where a greatly expanded design provision now predominates and fine art is no longer at the apex of the pantheon. The challenges for the delivery of the art and design disciplines in this context are numerous and complex and largely derive from the very success the sector has enjoyed.

So an educational philosophy and a learning and teaching environment which developed within small local authority controlled art school provision developed over a period of some 150 years from the mid 19th Century whose roots were in artisan training for practical work in manufacturing industries where design and craft skills were needed, in textiles, ceramics, domestic goods of all kinds, boot

and shoe, newspapers and book publication advertising etc where the absorption and study of the classical western tradition through the fine arts was a central core to the curriculum has morphed over time into a mass education provision where art and design are subjects that can be studied for their own sake, like History or English, within a context of ever greater interdisciplinarity driven by debates around the postmodern and ever more sophisticated and powerful image based technologies within what is now a global consumer culture.

The world of work and the global context, for which the original national design schools of which this School was one, set up in 1848, appears, at first sight, to be entirely different to today but on closer inspection that world, at base, is remarkably similar, if in general, immeasurably more complex.

At the time of the Great Exhibition in 1850/51 it became pretty obvious to all that Great Britain, then the workshop of the world, although preeminent in technological and engineering expertise and development left a lot to be desired on the visual design front. Made in Great Britain stood for well engineered, good quality, long lasting but not particularly desirable or visually engaging centred on a long cultural tradition stretching back to the Elizabethan age and beyond. This is a generalisation with many honourable exceptions, however, UK manufacturers by the mid-19th century particularly were not

producing the 'wow' factor goods that our French and Italian competitors, in international markets, seemed able to achieve while goods from the Far East, China, Japan particularly were gaining ever more share of the new urban and metropolitan middle class markets, growing rapidly from the wealth creation of the new industrial machine age.

As a result of debates led and instigated by Prince Albert, who you will remember masterminded the great exhibition of 1850/51 a consensus began to emerge that education in the fine and applied arts in the UK needed reinvention and reinvigoration and we began to see the emergence of the recognition that craft skills should be matched with the development of individual creativity and imagination and 'ideas' development as complimentary attributes in an education through the arts and crafts.

From that realisation has grown our current educational philosophy which we characterise as art and design pedagogy which still holds at its centre the idea of learning by doing and making, reflecting on that 'action' learning through to further making which is contextualised by a theoretical underpinning delivered in partnership with the practical student production of a myriad of 'objects' in a dazzling array of medias, guided and supported by lecturers themselves expert in production as design practitioners and artists supported by highly skilled technicians and technical IT and workshop provision of every conceivable kind, in a community of creativity, underpinned by appropriate and challenging

learning outcomes, endorsed by a transparent and fair assessment system well understood by all our students, ratified by expert external examiners transmitted to our students by consistent and timely feedback, all well organised, managed and resourced. Well that's the idea anyhow! How well and how often we achieve this is the subject for several more conferences, but judging from the views expressed by our students in recent national student surveys we are not very successful at managing and delivering the expectations of the current consumers of this exciting educational opportunity.

However, the very 'ideal' I have laid out above, which embodies a complex and expensive educational process poses the major challenge for our disciplines for the future. Not least to find enough professional artists and designers with the subject knowledge and practical skills to deliver in the studio and the leaders to guide the whole, now enormous, enterprise.

I agree fundamentally with the Rector of the University of the Arts, Sir Michael Bichard's view that art and design higher education has entered a 'golden age' in this country. It may not look very golden to some of you at the coal face, but in political, strategic and economic terms our subjects have finally found their place in the sun as recognisably important drivers to the national economy and the social well being of the nation. But that place in the sun also casts shadows and in those shadows lurk several threats to the length of time we remain there. Our disciplines are still very undergraduate centred. Our postgraduate sector

still relatively small and our community of PhD holders still tiny but growing slowly. While research and its development is still very much a work in progress. Our value to large sections of industry still little understood beyond the already converted and, I believe, a considerable educational crisis within the Fine Art disciplines once central to the 'art school' experience but now becoming increasingly marginalised.

So now wearing my 'long experience hat' I will lay out some of the issues you will have to address and those issues spring from the political and economic context that we find ourselves in as part of a massified system of higher education because that massification alongside financial constraint is building severe stresses into the system. It's simple really, we all agree university education is a 'good thing', beneficial to the individuals who participate and the economy of the nation and a force for social good. The more people who can have it the better. But who is going to pay for it? Treasury modelling indicates a call on the tax payer which is perceived as politically unsustainable and thus top up fees have become the solution to financing the system. No serious political party has said it will abandon top up fees or limit demand. And demand for University education is growing exponentially not only here but globally. Not only are top up fees here to stay but one way or another, the purchasers of higher education, whether individual students, corporate buyers or government agencies will pay more for it in future. But in paying more they will also become far more discerning in identifying the value to them of what they are being asked

to pay more for. From around 2012 the cap on top up fees will go, probably gradually and well sugared with bursaries, exemptions and tax breaks. But the principle of a market driven system will have been established and then will progressively take hold, and a market driven system however modified is a very different animal to the centralised, command economy that has funded our University system since the immediate post 1945 education acts of the last century. At the same time we will experience a demographic downturn, or timebomb, as our Vice Chancellor refers to it, as the numbers of 18 year olds dips sharply for the foreseeable future while at the same time the numbers of people of retirement age continues to increase and I am one of many of your current colleagues who will retire in the next couple of years or so. So in market terms we will experience a shift of quite stark proportions in our traditional client groups and this is a shift that other suppliers of 'services', and education is a 'service industry', are already grappling with particularly in the retail industries, so perhaps we can learn from them.

So what's all this got to do with art and design and learning and teaching in the practical world of the studio and the virtual world of the IT lab? Well quite a lot really.

We may not like the reorientation I have described and we may fundamentally oppose it but ultimately this reorientation is an important part of the near future landscape in which our subjects will be delivered. If we examine the appeal of

our subjects to those who have been drawn to study them, in ever larger numbers, in the past decades some things need emphasising. They are subjects perceived as 'sexy', as about 'youth' as hip, as fun, as self fulfilling, as about lifestyle, as about difference, as about individuality, as about exclusivity, as about imagination, and most importantly as about individual creativity, or as a doorway to an interesting and creative 'career'. All these things are laudable and probably why I made the life style choice to go to 'art school' rather than University to study something useful but 'boring' like law or accountancy. But then no one was asking me to pay large sums for my life style choice and in fact were prepared to give me a student grant to pursue it which was a non repayable gift. Equally no-one needs to have a degree in art or design to be successful in related careers and indeed many house hold names both in the visual arts and design have no formal art or design education beyond secondary school, while for civil engineering, accountancy, architecture for example, lack of a degree and thus accreditation by a professional body disbars you from the professional practice of those professions. I am not advocating any form of registration system for graphics or fashion designers for example but I am highlighting the different value propositions that exist between our subjects and many others within a new market orientated context, and that value proposition will impact right into curriculum, its organisation and its delivery against the perceived lifetime benefits, financial, cultural, social that students, dare I say consumers/customers or even investors think they can achieve by participating. Because that is what they will sign up to and pay large

sums of money for. I say large sums of money for two reasons, firstly a large sum of money to a fine art student for instance may seem fairly modest, but in relation to the career benefit that that investment might or might not enable any payment above zero is highly speculative. Where as an investment by a Law Student of many hundreds of thousands of pounds in a prestigious MBA programme at Harvard would represent a sure bet to a lifetime of high earnings and enhanced social standing. Secondly the high costs of delivery of the kind of capital and staff intensive needs of a quality learning and teaching environment in art and design will mean that fee levels will inevitably be high, and quite probably if you do not deliver high quality in all aspects in subjects without obvious and demonstrable life time financial and/or social advantage you will rapidly be driven out of business. Education for low earnings and uncertain employment, but enhanced life style, may be attractive to many but it is not something that purchasers will wish to make much of a personal financial investment in. However, there may be a low value market opportunity there and who knows, the private sector may have ideas in this area, and in my experience both here and abroad the private sector providers will step in if a need is identified and a buck can be made; our very own Nottingham International College run by NTU in partnership with a private provider has proved to be an outstanding success. However, our efforts to work with ASDA Walmart have been less successful but we have learnt a lot from that particular brush with corporate culture! Which leads me to another challenge or opportunity for state funded art and design education and that is the private, i.e.

non state funded sector. We imagine it does not exist but it is more extensive in the UK than one might imagine and very very extensive in Europe and the Far and Middle East and India as well as the USA. In fact, this School of Art and Design, like many you have come from, through franchise partnerships with private providers now delivers UK branded Art and Design degrees across the globe. This market will continue to grow exponentially. It is only a matter of time before UK Private partners come seeking partnerships as well. We now have large numbers of Art and Design students 'offshore'. These programmes are quality monitored and enhanced and branded by UK universities and in some cases are better resourced than we can achieve in the UK and are certainly of equal quality in academic delivery but often with 'interesting' local variations. The reason they succeed is that the distinctiveness of UK art and design pedagogy is internationally recognised and maintaining that in a different cultural context is the thing that is a fundamental attribute and the thing we must protect at all costs. The cultural advantage of delivering programmes across the globe, cannot be underestimated and apart from the considerable sums that can be earned the opportunities we have for learning how others do things and applying that knowledge and international perspective to curriculum delivery here in the UK is invaluable. Equally the opportunity for our students to either study part of their degree in another country or undertake an industrial placement or internship placement overseas is enhanced by these relationships while staff also have enhanced opportunities to work internationally – what we have yet to do is really leverage this international

context to the extent that we could to really take full advantage of the international position UK Art and Design education is carving out.

The market orientated and business focussed landscape I am giving you a glimpse of may seem alien and unsettling and in many ways it is and will be, but strangely enough, the culture of Art and Design, our history of client and industry engagement with student projects, placement, sandwich courses and the practical nature of much of what we do makes our embrace of new opportunities far easier than for many other subject disciplines. Staff and students I know enjoy and respond to close business relationships whether they be with corporate clients or local and central government cultural agencies all of whom are anxious to co-operate with organisations from whom they draw their future graduate workforce. The current government jargon is 'employer engagement' – well we have been doing this successfully for decades. Which leads me to my final observations.

Close co-operation and partnership with the cultural and creative industries not only here but internationally will be an absolute imperative for future success. This is not an easy call and something that has to be worked on continuously. Here at NTU we have made a considerable investment not only in marketing ourselves to prospective students but in enhancing and managing our relationships with our corporate partners across the globe which is one of the main reasons why we enjoy the highest graduate employment record for our Art

and Design students of any UK University. It's the only league table we top and for several others we languish well down the list but for employability of our students we are succeeding well and that is becoming a unique selling point for us. It may not be sexy, it may not be the first thing a prospective student looks at now when making a choice of University but it will become more and more important as time goes by and the financial investment to be made in your education becomes more stark. So recognising a USP or USP's and understanding how that will drive your curriculum and thus the learning and teaching environment required to deliver that curriculum will become the primary strategic aim of any art and design programme in the future. In the past much curriculum design and content and many teaching strategies have been premised on a perception of what might be best for the student in 'our opinion' and delivered on the basis of what 'suits' the prevailing culture of the institution delivering that educational experience. I would suggest that this orientation which first came under serious examination by students in the summer of '68, 40 years ago this year and incidentally, my year of graduation, in many UK Art Schools, not only Hornsey, will receive a far more searching examination from the student 'consumers' who in future will be drawn by the same romance and idealism to get an education in an 'art school' that has captivated so many past generations and led to many of you sitting in this lecture theatre this morning.

It's simple really, the context changes but the questions remain the same, who and what are we here for and what are we trying to do? Who wants to join us in

doing it? Why do they want to join us? How much will they invest in the 'opportunity' we are offering? How do we do what we do better and differently to anyone else and how do we tell the world?

Having asked these questions for your particular context and analysed the answers that best fit with your shared ambition an approach can be identified and a strategy for future success in all aspects of what you do can start to take shape.

Thank you