

Transforming research findings: widening participation in Higher Education Art and Design

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Council for Higher Education in Art and Design**

Background

It is well known that research findings are often not used strategically, to contribute to cumulative, systematic development of policy, practice and research (e.g. Davies *et al.*, 2000 a,b; Hudson and Jamieson, 2006; Powney, 2002; Saunders, 2004, 2005). This means that important messages from research can fail to have the impact they warrant and that funding invested in research is not always used to best effect. Maximising research impact, however, takes time and requires, for example, careful consideration of possible options and of how to implement agreed priorities.

Given such issues in maximising research impact, the Council for Higher Education in Art and Design (CHEAD), the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and the Arts Council England (ACE) met in January 2007, to consider how research findings from CHEAD/ ACE commissioned research on widening participation and other relevant work might most effectively be used, to inform the development of practice, policy and research on widening participation in Higher Education (HE) Art and Design.

The CHEAD and ACE research was a multi-method project on widening participation in HE Art and Design, conducted between 2004 and 2006. The research consisted of:

- a literature review of the evidence on widening participation, relevant to HE Art and Design (Hudson, 2005a)

- an analysis of University Central Admissions Service (UCAS) statistics on HE Art and Design (Hudson and Sutherland, 2006)
- a report on a questionnaire administered to all HE Art and Design institutions and departments belonging to CHEAD (Hudson, 2005b)
- qualitative research (Hudson and Jamieson, 2006)
- a literature review on black and minority ethnic (BME) students and HE Art and Design, separately commissioned by the ACE (Malik-Okon, 2006)
- an over-arching project report (Hudson, 2006).

Copies of these reports can be obtained from the CHEAD Secretary, Christoph Raatz (c.raatz@chead.net).

One outcome from the meeting between the CHEAD, HEA and ACE in January 2007 was the decision to hold a one day seminar, to bring together a range of invited stakeholders, to discuss how the findings of the CHEAD/ ACE research and other relevant work should be taken forwards into practice, policy and further research. This seminar, Transforming research into practice: widening participation in HE Art and Design, took place on 24th May 2007, at London College of Fashion. Seminar participants are listed at Appendix 1.

The seminar consisted of two plenary presentations, four workshops and plenty of opportunity for plenary discussion. The seminar agenda is at Appendix 2. In the first plenary presentation, Caroline Hudson highlighted some key messages from the CHEAD/ ACE research, for future research, policy and practice in HE Art and Design. For example, overall there is a lack of high quality research on widening participation (Hudson, 2005a; Gorard *et al.*, 2006). There are gaps in research evidence in relation to, for instance, areas of on-course experience, such as inclusive curriculum and assessment processes; studies tracking Art and Design students across the student life-

cycle; and the student voice. There have been many developmental projects¹ which have lacked strategic coherence and have failed to evaluate the impact of activity. A full account of the messages from the CHEAD/ACE research can be found in Hudson (2006).

In the second presentation, Professor David Haywood questioned a range of assumptions about widening participation in HE Art and Design, raised in the CHEAD/ACE research and through David's broader professional and personal experience. For instance, Art and Design staff can, often mistakenly, assume that they are objective in assessing work; that a student's outcomes are unrelated to his/her background; and that widening participation is an issue for support staff, rather than Art and Design staff, to address. As the CHEAD/ACE research demonstrates, there are mismatches between student and staff perceptions of widening participation in HE Art and Design. Finally, David's paper expressed reservations about the implications of the 14-19 Creative and Media Diploma and the Leitch Review (Leitch, 2006), for widening participation and HE Art and Design. David's paper can be found on the HEA website (*URL to be confirmed*).

The four workshops were on dissemination of the CHEAD/ ACE research and other relevant work, and the implications of this research for future research, developmental projects and professional development on widening participation in HE Art and Design. Suggested discussion questions for use in the four workshops are at Appendix 3.

Throughout the seminar, there was much lively discussion and many thought-provoking suggestions about future activity. The remainder of this paper sums up key points made by seminar participants, under the four areas covered in

¹ ¹ Development projects on widening participation are defined as projects which aim to develop an aspect/ various aspects of widening participation in identified ways, but which are not based on research. Research is defined as evidence which has been systematically collected, analysed and reported.

workshops, with sections on additional observations and the final plenary. It is stressed that points made do not necessarily reflect the views of all seminar participants.

Dissemination of CHEAD/ACE and other relevant research

- There should be central strategic co-ordination and dissemination of widening participation activity. This could help to celebrate and maximise good practice. Activity could be centrally co-ordinated through a national steering group facilitated by, for example, the HEA, with regional sub-groups.
- Relevant research and developmental activity on widening participation in HE Art and Design should be synthesised. This synthesis should be regularly updated and should be accessible to a wide range of Art and Design staff. Methods of presenting information, such as use of audio and visual formats, were discussed. Ongoing synthesis of widening participation activity, which would incorporate appropriate caveats about methodology and status of claims made by individual projects, would be one mechanism in quality assuring a wide range of widening participation activity.
- Dissemination should target a wide range of audiences, including senior management; part-time staff; admissions staff; staff who do not perceive that widening participation is an issue; organisations which are not higher education institutions (HEIs) but which have a remit in widening participation in HE; and parents. Different methods should be used with different audiences.
- In dissemination activities, staff motivations to access research findings on widening participation should be targeted. These might range from, for example, needing research findings to help address specific problems to, for instance, building the use of research findings into appraisal processes.
- Dissemination should include a focus on the student's voice, as a potentially powerful tool to help develop practice.

- Dissemination mechanisms could span national and regional conferences, seminars and workshops, and web-based resources. The feasibility of using forums such as Teachers' TV could also be explored.

Future research

Methods

- Both quantitative and qualitative research should be conducted.
- Qualitative research should include detailed case studies and biographical narratives.
- Where appropriate, quantitative research should make use of existing large data sets, whilst making relevant methodological caveats about any weaknesses in the data sets.
- The importance of ensuring that research on widening participation in HE Art and Design has methodological and theoretical rigour was also emphasised.
- The impact of widening participation activities should be evaluated, as a regular practice.
- To help maximise research impact, strategic partnerships should support the development of large research projects, in which research across different local contexts is connected coherently.

Areas for research

- As above (p.4), a regularly updated synthesis of widening participation research and development activity was considered a priority. It was suggested that a synthesis could incorporate other relevant areas, such as sociology, whilst maintaining a focus on Art and Design.
- A quantitative and qualitative tracking study was considered another important priority. The first stage of this should be a feasibility study.
- Suggested specific areas for research included:
 - points of transition (for example, between A level and the Foundation Diploma and the Foundation Diploma and Level 1)

- why students do not apply to HE Art and Design, do not take up HE Art and Design places, and drop out of Art and Design degree courses
- student perceptions of widening participation issues
- staff perceptions of widening participation issues
- literacies (reading, writing and speaking and listening) in relation to widening participation in HE Art and Design
- curriculum development, in relation to widening participation
- assessment processes, in relation to widening participation.

Future projects

- It was stressed that future projects should be clearly defined, to avoid a plethora of activity which lacks strategic co-ordination.
- Three categories for projects were suggested:
 - pre-entry and admission
 - retention and on-course experience
 - staff development.
- Within the category of pre-entry and admission, projects could focus on:
 - the interview process
 - progression routes and guidance
 - applicants' cultural capital
 - barriers to post-graduate study.
- Within the category of retention and on-course experience, projects could focus on:
 - the linguistic conventions of Art and Design and the potential mismatch between these and students' use of language
 - inclusive curriculum design
 - assessment processes.
- Suggestions for professional development are included in the section on professional development below.

Professional development

- In taking forward professional development on widening participation, audience should be considered carefully, so that staff can overcome any fear of change and potential cultural barriers to professional development; are not patronised and alienated; and have ownership over professional development.
- Professional development materials should disseminate research to staff in ways which are engaging and which relate to staff experience. There should be a strong focus on using reflection to address specific problems experienced by staff.
- Learning and teaching co-ordinators should be closely involved in taking forwards professional development on widening participation. If feasible, widening participation should be incorporated into their job specifications.
- A sub-group should develop materials to support widening participation in relation to specific aspects of Art and Design, such as interviews, portfolio support, and the language of Art and Design.
- Professional development materials should include DVDs and podcasts.
- Professional development materials should be regularly updated.
- Where appropriate, professional development on widening participation should be integrated into or connected with professional development in other areas, such as quality assurance or teaching and learning. For example, interview monitoring could focus on widening participation issues.
- The following need careful consideration:
 - where materials would be held
 - funding for the development of materials
 - funding to support staff time to attend professional development.

Additional observations

Additional observations made by seminar participants included:

- The use of language. The appropriateness of the term 'widening participation' was discussed. Some participants suggested that 'inclusion' might be more appropriate. Some participants considered that the all-embracing implications of widening participation, spanning, for example, social and economic status, learning difficulties and disabilities and mental health, can be unhelpful in developing knowledge about widening participation or in targeting students.
- The balance between focusing on widening participation issues, whilst not pathologising students, can be difficult to attain.
- It is important to assess systematically what is sector-specific to Art and Design and what is generic about widening participation issues.
- A judicious balance between national, regional and local activity is important but not always straightforward to attain. For example, widening participation activity should be tailored to local contexts. At the same time, local contexts should be part of a broader, national context, to avoid duplication.
- Staff needs in relation to widening participation should be given greater attention. For example, it was stated that the percentage of Art and Design staff who are dyslexic is not known.

Final plenary

Given the wealth of suggestions made by seminar participants, the final plenary session focused on highlighting some initial ways forward.

- The suggested synthesis of widening participation research and development activity and the longitudinal tracking study were underlined as priority areas for action.
- CHEAD, ACE, HEA, National Arts Learning Network (NALN) and Group for Learning in Art and Design (GLAD) are Art and Design

specific groups which could support future widening participation initiatives.

- Potential funding sources beyond HE Art and Design include the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (in relation to, for example, 14-19 and employability issues) and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).
- The scope to involve HEIs such as the University of Oxford Department of Education, the Institute of Education and the University of York was considered.
- Widening participation issues could be included within CHEAD's work on developing a strategy for leadership and succession planning.
- A post would need to be created, to co-ordinate future research, policy and practice activity on widening participation in HE Art and Design.
- CHEAD (Frances Corner), HEA (Carolyn Bew) and NALN (John Last) will meet during the summer 2007, to assess further seminar participants' suggestions. ACE and the Design Council should be invited to this meeting.
- Seminar participants should then meet again in the autumn 2007, to take this work forwards.

Concluding observations

The activity to date facilitated by the CHEAD, HEA and ACE has generated many specific suggestions of how to take forwards widening participation in HE Art and Design. More broadly, the activity reflects processes which attempt to address the complexities, experienced across sectors and disciplines, of how to maximise research impact. Actions resulting from the seminar should be carefully documented, both in terms of outcomes for Art and Design, and for their more generic implications about maximising research impact.

Acknowledgements

In writing this article, I have been most appreciative of the detailed notes taken by Christoph Raatz, CHEAD Secretary, during the seminar.

References

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Appendix 1: seminar participants

Individual	Organisation
Caroline Bew	HEA
Bernadette Blair	Kingston University
Margo Blythman	London College of Communication
Frances Corner	London College of Fashion
Hilary Cunliffe Charlesworth	Sheffield Hallam University
Terry Finnigan	London College of Fashion
Maureen Gamble	University of Worcester
Janey Hagger	Central St Martins
David Hayward	University College for the Creative Arts at Canterbury
Nichola Hebditch	Design History Society, Nottingham Trent University
Caroline Hudson	Real Educational Research on behalf of CHEAD
John Last	Arts Institute at Bournemouth
Jane McKeating	Manchester Metropolitan University
Karen Norquay	University of Brighton
Suzanne Nunn	Cornwall College
Susan Orr	York St John University
Christoph Raatz	CHEAD
Tessa Read	University of the Arts London
Eileen Reid	Glasgow School of Art
Olivia Sagan	University of the Arts London
Ellen Sims	Chelsea College of Art and Design/ CLIP CETL

Appendix 2: seminar agenda

Transforming research into practice: widening participation in HE Art and Design

24th May 2007

Boardroom, London College of Fashion
20 John Princes Street, London W1G 0BJ

10.15- 10.30	<i>Coffee and tea</i>
10.30-10.45	Welcome, introductions and aims of the day Dr Frances Corner, Chair of CHEAD and Head of London College of Fashion
10.45-11.00	Transforming research findings: key issues raised by CHEAD/ACE research Dr Caroline Hudson, Real Educational Research on behalf of CHEAD
11.00 -11.15	Questioning assumptions Professor David Hayward, Deputy Head of College, University of the Creative Arts at Canterbury
11.15 – 12.15	Workshop 1: disseminating research findings on widening participation in HE Art and Design <i>Coffee</i>
12.15-12.45	Plenary feedback from workshop 1
12.45-13.15	<i>Lunch</i>
13.15 -14.15	Workshop 2: from a choice of three workshops on future research, future projects or professional development
14.15-14.30	<i>Tea and coffee</i>
14.30-15.15	Plenary feedback from workshop 2 and future directions David Clews, Manager, The Subject Centre for Art, Design and Media (ADM HEA)

Appendix 3: workshop briefing papers

Workshop: disseminating research findings/ activity on widening participation in HE Art and Design

Prompt discussion questions

- What are the barriers to transforming research findings on wp in HE Art and Design into policy and practice?
- How might these barriers be addressed, so that the impact of research on policy and practice is maximised?
- What might a framework for disseminating findings on wp in HE Art and Design consist of? You may wish to consider factors such as:
 - should there be an over-arching strategic approach to disseminating research findings and activity on wp in HE Art and Design? If so, where should responsibility for this lie? How should an over-arching approach be developed?
 - should there be a national steering group?
 - how might strategic and operational relationships between institutions/ organisations be developed and maintained, about wp?
 - should there be dissemination mechanisms such as a national conference/ regional seminars/ workshops on wp? If so, what might be the format/ content of these events? Who might fund and organise them? Who would the target audiences be?
 - what might be the role of web-based/hard copy materials in disseminating findings on wp?
 - how might findings on wp be used in professional development?
 - how might findings on wp be used to inform the development of future projects?

Guidance

- Use the research on widening participation (wp) as the basis for your discussion.
- Read through the discussion questions below.
- Record on the post-its other questions you think it is important to consider about possible future projects on wp in HE Art and Design.
- Decide as a group which questions you wish to prioritise for discussion in the workshop.
- Use the flip chart to record the main points from your discussion.
- By the end of the workshop, you should have decided which points your group will feed back in the plenary session (five minutes for each group's feedback).

Workshop: future research

Prompt discussion questions

- What should be key priorities for future research on wp in HE Art and Design, in terms of:
 - aspects of wp focused on?
 - methodology?Why?
- How might strategic connections most effectively be developed between:
 - different research projects conducted within HE Art and Design, on or relevant to, wp?
 - research on wp conducted within HE Art and Design, and relevant research conducted beyond HE Art and Design?
- What support do HEIs need, to ensure that, where feasible:
 - development projects* are evaluated?
 - high quality research and evaluation methods are used?
 - findings from research and evaluation conducted within individual HEIs are disseminated effectively within and beyond the HEI?
 - findings from research and evaluation on wp in HE Art and Design are used to inform the development of policy and practice?

* Development projects on wp are defined as projects which aim to develop an aspect/ various aspects of wp in identified ways, but which are not based on research.

Guidance

- Use the research on widening participation (wp) as the basis for your discussion.
- Read through the discussion questions below.
- Record on the post-its other questions you think it is important to consider about possible future projects on wp in HE Art and Design.
- Decide as a group which questions you wish to prioritise for discussion in the workshop.
- Use the flip chart to record the main points from your discussion.
- By the end of the workshop, you should have decided which points your group will feed back in the plenary session (five minutes for each group's feedback).

Workshop: future projects

Prompt discussion questions

- Discuss the following in relation to potential future projects on wp in HE Art and Design:
 - which aspects of wp should be prioritised for future projects?
 - what should be the balance between research and development* activity, in future projects?
 - how should the quality of future projects be maximised?
 - how should findings from future projects be disseminated?
- ‘Spec out’ possible future projects, in terms of, for example:
 - subject area
 - funding required/ possible sources
 - methodology, e.g. action research
 - timescale
 - staff involved
 - dissemination strategy
 - other points.

* Development activity on wp is defined as activity which aims to develop an aspect/ various aspects of wp in identified ways, but which is not based on research.

Guidance

- Use the research on widening participation (wp) as the basis for your discussion.
- Read through the discussion questions below.
- Record on the post-its other questions you think it is important to consider about possible future projects on wp in HE Art and Design.
- Decide as a group which questions you wish to prioritise for discussion in the workshop.
- Use the flip chart to record the main points from your discussion.
- By the end of the workshop, you should have decided which points your group will feed back in the plenary session (five minutes for each group’s feedback).

Workshop: evidence-based professional development on widening participation

Prompt discussion questions

- How important a priority should wp be, in the professional development of staff involved in HE Art and Design?
- To what extent is it important that professional development on wp in HE Art and Design is evidence-based (i.e. draws on research findings and recommendations)?
- What materials on wp should be available to support the range of staff involved in HE Art and Design?
- How should research findings and recommendations be incorporated into materials, so that they are accessible to staff?
- What other factors should be taken into account in developing and disseminating materials?
- In professional development on wp, what might be the role of, for example:
 - conferences
 - seminars
 - workshops
 - action research?

Guidance

- Use the research on widening participation (wp) as the basis for your discussion.
- Read through the discussion questions below.
- Record on the post-its other questions you think it is important to consider about possible future projects on wp in HE Art and Design.
- Decide as a group which questions you wish to prioritise for discussion in the workshop.
- Use the flip chart to record the main points from your discussion.
- By the end of the workshop, you should have decided which points your group will feed back in the plenary session (five minutes for each group's feedback).