

Practising Designer and Teacher in the Department of Design and Technology, Loughborough University

Adrian Dartnall, Designer, Department of Design and Technology, October 2008

This case study describes how a practising designer works as a ‘bought-in teacher’ in the Department of Design and Technology.

Reasons for engagement

Adrian has worked as a freelance designer since 1982 and previously worked for Loughborough Consultants Ltd. (which was a commercial arm of the University) until he started teaching in the department in 1985. He was keen to work in the department as it provided him with a regular salary during a recession which had an affect on the level of freelance work he was offered. Adrian also worked as a part time teacher on the MA in Industrial Design at Leicester Polytechnic (now De Montfort University). He runs his own design consultancy and has designed a variety of products including; televisions, hi-fi and general consumer electronics, medical equipment, Royal Mail sorting equipment, toys for pre-school age children and aids to independent living for the elderly.

The engagement

Adrian works with students on their project work where the module involves design practice. He is bought-in for a number of hours on specific days; he works 6 hours on Tuesdays with 1st year students, 2 hours on Wednesdays and Thursdays with 2nd year students

and for a couple of hours on Thursdays with 3rd year students. He also delivers tutorials with small groups of final year students who are working on design projects. Major projects usually involve designing and prototyping new products. These are exhibited at a Degree Show which potential employers may attend. Students design a ‘product’ and create a prototype and work on this project during their final year.

The final year students can also enter a Royal Society of Arts competition. The RSA established a student award scheme with the aim of linking education with industry and have developed this in to the Design Directions awards scheme. Those students who produce excellent designs are encouraged to enter the competition and the Department have had several who have won RSA awards.

Issues

Adrian believes that students struggle with the manufacturing process and that insufficient emphasis is often placed on the needs of manufacturers. He feels that students need to be aware of how products are made and often manufacturing is not sufficiently understood and so the students don’t

respond well to it. Graduates who achieve a good degree and work in industry might find it difficult to be taken seriously if people on the shop floor know much more about these things than they do. He believes it is important that students understand industry and what is involved in producing products in very large numbers and students should be designing products for appropriate scales of production.

Benefits

The department gains the credibility of working with a practising Industrial Designer who has over 20 years of experience. The students gain from the wide variety of experiences Adrian has had working in industry, including advice on careers and research; often students ask for his advice about starting a design consultancy straight from University. Adrian now spends almost as much time teaching as he works as a practising designer as the availability of consultancy work can be unpredictable.

Unintended outcomes

From time to time Adrian gets involved with projects that other members of staff or PhD students have initiated and this can be very stimulating.

Academic/Industrialist perspective

Adrian feels he gets a lot back from the students, a freshness of approach to design and an opportunity to exchange ideas with students, staff and other practising designers. This is particularly important to him as he often works alone on design projects.

He knows that students 'keep him on his toes'. When his advice or explanations are questioned he is forced to think through again things he might otherwise take for granted and he believes this is no bad thing in a fast changing world.

Reflections

Adrian started teaching in 1985 and now knowing what path British manufacturing was to take he might have pursued a teaching

career. He doesn't think of himself as an academic person, he is dyslexic and it wasn't widely known about when he was at school and college so he feels that he probably wouldn't have achieved that career goal.

Context

Adrian is a freelance designer who combines running his own design consultancy Dartnall Design Associates with his work as a 'bought-in teacher' in the Department of Design and Technology at Loughborough University. He studied design at Guildford School of Art, which was founded in 1870 and is now part of the University for the Creative Arts (UCA). Adrian has designed successful products across a wide variety of industries.

Further information is available on www.dartnalldesign.co.uk