

LIFT Lab 2018

Designing assessment:
assessment for sustainability in
our design curricula

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To design is to address a future and to move towards its realisation: a future uncompromised by our present is the only one that *can* actually be realised, in the long term.

This is the challenge, and imperative of sustainability.

It is also a design task: to design the systems, resources, material and immaterial environments, the culture of that future.

This requires a new understanding of the task of design, and of our role as educators.

This requires the ability to address complexity:
a key skill would be

‘learning to manage...a nexus of environmental and citizen behaviour in the context of problems that may have multiple, contested definitions and shifting, contingent solutions’

this is an approach

‘likely to be indispensable to higher education which produces citizens capable of sustainably developing their world – *then the question arises of how such learning is to be assessed*’

The project examined:

- the most recent guidance from Quality Assurance benchmarks for Art and Design Education (2017)
- existing frameworks for enabling staff and students to think critically about embedding sustainable thinking and practices into design teaching and learning
- conceptual and practical guidelines, from design and research initiatives, that could provide models for making sustainability thinking assessable

Having mapped these territories, the project moved to

- research into existing good practice within the School of Art and Design and the wider University
- evaluation of case studies: approaches that could provide frameworks for assessment of design projects discussed and tested with MDes students
- a lexicon of terms for relocating assessment focus: networks, scales, co-creation, circularity
- mapping exercises for contextualised, comparative judgments rather than isolated ones, tested against a design project

networks: can encompass material and immaterial entities, implies connectedness of nodes and systems, human and non-human systems, interdependencies. A system may be closed, networks always look for better connectedness.

scales: to think and act in scales requires understanding and evaluation of spatial scales (local to global), temporal scales (short to long term, deep past to sustainable future), distribution and participatory scales (where, who, how), hierarchical scales (most to least important, critique of priorities). Is bigger better than smaller? Faster better than slower? What is most appropriate and why?

co-creation: designing with rather than for. With whom, with what. Design for sustainability is design for future not just present affordance. The privilege and pre-eminence of the designer's role is re-evaluated.

circularity: a linking strategy that implies no one stage in the life of a designed object can be treated (or evaluated) in isolation. Circularity links materials, processes, environments and actants.

The resulting research report and exploratory exercises could initiate a discussion within the subject group:

could we design a shared approach to assessing EfS?

and might this have wider relevance beyond the subject group?