



Realising Art and Design Research in Policymaking Decisions

Policy Paper

Introduction

Through two roundtables and a policy workshop, **The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Design and Innovation (APDIG)** and the **Council for Higher Education in Art and Design (CHEAD)** have come together to create solutions for how government and the creative industries can better realise art and design research in policymaking. Art and design research can contribute hugely to tackling society's biggest challenges. To achieve this, the undervaluation of the art and design sector needs to be addressed.

The findings covered the following themes:

1. Creating robust sector networks;
2. Funding bodies recognising the rich value of interdisciplinary work;
3. Embedding sector expertise in government policy; and
4. Embedding sector expertise locally to tackle community problems.

Throughout our research, the APDIG has found a widely held belief that policymaking decisions often do not consider the value of the creative, design, and innovation industries.

Participants at our roundtables felt that current policy does not accurately draw upon examples of existing practice, recommended best practice from experts and overall existing evidence within the art and design sector. As a result, the policy benefits of creative subjects are not being fully realised by policymakers.¹

For example, The Office for Students (OfS) in their recent consultation deemed arts and design courses not “strategically important”. This roundtable series also sought to understand how higher education institutions (HEIs) can be more active in policy and better involved with the wider civic agenda.

The obstacles faced by the art and design sector in gaining recognition are complex. The pressures of the pandemic have intensified some of these barriers.

Experts feel that the value of art and design is being continually overlooked. While there are policies that aid the sector, such as the Cultural Recovery Fund, sector representatives feel that these initiatives often address symptoms of the problem rather than its root causes and are inconsistent across Government departments.²

There are numerous case studies and examples of good practice available that make the case for change. Art and design research is naturally interdisciplinary, focusing on knowledge and technology transfer, engendering a focus on solving the pressing issues of today. A key finding from this roundtable series was the collective need to tackle societal challenges, such as the climate crisis, health and social issues, and opportunities around the use of emerging technologies.

¹ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/8610a7a4-0ae3-47d3-9129-f234e086c43c/consultation-on-funding-for-ay2021-22-finalforweb.pdf>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/culture-recovery-board>



The art and design sector has the potential to provide a large return in both public and commercial investment.

The Levelling Up White Paper set out plans for government to expand the Creative Scale Up Programme as well as the intention to publish a Creative Industries Sector Vision in 2022.³ However, the proposed diversion of future funding from one city to another is not the solution to the problem of this sector being undervalued.

A widely held view in the art and design sector is that the sector requires a radical rethink of how its systems operate and how it interacts with wider society to resolve some of the critical issues causing its undervaluation.⁴ The need to reposition this sector back at the beating heart of decision making and building back better was also reiterated throughout research.⁵ These views emphasised that artists and designers must both work locally and centrally, with government and with local authorities to take this sector forward.

Recommendation 1: Funding bodies need to recognise interdisciplinary value better

Funding bodies need to recognise fully the value of working across disciplines and industry, and the importance of community focus at a local level to produce sustainable outcomes.

Rationale

Our research raised three key points in this area:

1. A high burden of assessment for funding when interdisciplinary work is involved.
2. Current dominant model of monetary value raises challenges.
3. Lack of creative citation.

Our society's challenges and needs are complex, and their solutions sit across various disciplines. Our responses require collaboration and interdisciplinary solutions. Currently, art and design experts find that seeking funding for interdisciplinary work is disincentivised, due to a higher burden of assessment. This is because the review process considers a particular funding application from multiple axes of disciplines.

This burden of assessment makes it harder for sectors that are inherently interdisciplinary to obtain funding. Evidence of this includes the art and design case studies explored in this roundtable series.

One way to address this burden would be to adapt funding review boards to include more individuals with interdisciplinary expertise so that the intricacies of these differences can be properly articulated and not unduly burdened.

On top of this, there is a widely held view in the sector that our current dominant model of monetary value as a measure of success raises challenges. This model is limiting for disciplines whose value transcends this one measure. While more attention can be given to the Government Green Book's outline on how to evaluate value beyond the monetary, further work is necessary to explore how we may articulate value fully.⁶

³https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1052706/Levelling_Up_WP_HRES.pdf

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/over-100-places-to-see-improved-access-to-culture-and-arts-across-england>

⁵ <https://www.policyconnect.org.uk/research/visual-arts-beating-heart-and-soul-building-back-better>

⁶https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/938046/The_Green_Book_2020.pdf



The final roundtable found that an altered approach to valuation must be developed by funding bodies, one that draws from existing research on forms of social and cultural value.⁷ Attending experts felt that funding bodies must also fund interdisciplinary PhDs to encourage interdisciplinary work. An example of this would be AHRC's funding of PhD programmes but with a larger, interdisciplinary, policy bridging focus.^{8,9}

Creators of ideas are also not appropriately credited. Ideas produced by creatives are well known to be co-opted and championed by other creatives or appropriated by the STEM sector as the source of the original ideation. This is because creatives are unable to produce a citing or protection system for such ideas unless it is in the form of published academic work. This also prevents others from recognising and building upon their work.

There are examples of artists and designers engaging equitably with STEM through interdisciplinary projects, but these instances are not widespread. This shows equitable work is possible between disciplines, but it needs to be fostered through policy.¹⁰ This was a key finding from the roundtables, which also urged funding bodies to develop a system of creative citation as a necessary step to achieving a healthy ecosystem of thought production.

Recommendation 2: Adapting governmental policy frameworks

Government should adapt its existing policy framework to embed art and design expertise, as well as diversity of thought, through embedding artists and designers in policy processes, from conception to completion.

Rationale

The art and design sector is already at the heart of solutions to many of our most pressing challenges, such as tackling the climate crisis.^{11,12}

Well-designed policies not only improve lives but also save money. The art and design sector is exceptional at taking early-stage developments across sectors and utilising them to useful ends. Artists and designers have different ways of conceiving value, for instance, and is the diversity of thought and collaboration that is needed to resolve the problems we face today. The discussed design flaw in the funding system that unfairly burdens interdisciplinary work is just one problem in the art and design sector that could be resolved through consistently embedding art and design expertise within government policy processes.

There are already examples of good practice. Policy Lab, for instance, uses speculative design methods, and a key finding of this roundtable was that there should be an uptake of Policy Lab across government.¹³ Experts noted that Government must also examine current valuation research and launch its own valuation initiatives.¹⁴

⁷ <https://neweconomics.org/2009/12/a-bit-rich>

⁸ <https://www.ukri.org/councils/ahrc/career-and-skills-development/supporting-universities-and-consortia-to-develop-careers/doctoral-training-partnerships-dtp1/>

⁹ <https://www.ukri.org/councils/ahrc/career-and-skills-development/supporting-universities-and-consortia-to-develop-careers/collaborative-doctoral-partnerships-cdp-scheme/>

¹⁰ <https://www.rca.ac.uk/study/schools/school-of-design/rca-x-cern-grand-challenge/>

¹¹ <https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/asset/document/Beyond%20Net%20Zero%20-%20A%20Systemic%20Design%20Approach.pdf>

¹² <https://www.designforplanet.org/>

¹³ <https://openpolicy.blog.gov.uk/>

¹⁴ <https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/news-opinion/design-council-launches-design-economy-2021>



Another suggestion made by experts in this series on how to embed more art and design expertise in government policymaking processes was through the inclusion of policy researchers and government analysts specialising in art and design. They noted that these individuals could work together to begin a process of speculative design at the beginning of any government policy, and they must be present for continual assessment of said policy.

Crucially, experts at this roundtable expressed that this approach must also be supplemented by art and design researchers spending time inside government, as these creative sectors are the central foundation to any project, and so must sit at the heart of government and government's solutions.

One first step to achieving this could be to produce more fellowships and expert advisor opportunities for artists and designers. For instance, interdisciplinary programme leaders noted how being given the space to work across disciplines and time to develop relationships with experts in other disciplines was critical to the success of their work.

Our case studies also showed how art and design can contribute to the civic agenda, creating solutions and initiatives that support their local communities.¹⁵ Collaborative research in medical design, for instance, has shown remarkable results. One example demonstrated the value of art practice in building self-image when dealing with complex health conditions, through a study with young people with scoliosis. This study prioritised art and design from the very start of the research chain.¹⁶

Recommendation 3: Place-based engagement and solutions with the community and education providers

Appoint Chief Art and Chief Design Officers at a local level to work alongside local enterprise partnerships and local authorities to engage closely with education providers and the community to tackle challenges locally.

Rationale:

Creating a healthy community and environment is central to a flourishing society.

We must go beyond economic terms to produce multi-layered outcomes that match the complexities of our issues.

Learning from the example of Southampton's Chief Scientific Advisor working with the local authority, it is clear that local solutions need local focus and engagement.¹⁷ This is because understanding of the dynamics and challenges of specific problems present in a particular area is crucial to designing good solutions.

Similarly, Chief Art and Chief Design Officers must also be assigned at a local level to engage between students, regional politicians, higher education institutions, business, and others.

This encourages collaboration designed around specific needs. It would promote co-designing solutions with local participation, producing a collaborative ecosystem. This practice can begin to engage those who would otherwise not be present in community-focused, solution-oriented discussions that produce unified goals.

¹⁵ <https://www.policyconnect.org.uk/news/how-can-art-and-design-research-and-arts-research-methodologies-help-tackle-biggest-challenges>

¹⁶ <http://www.bsr.co.uk/current-research/backbone-interdisciplinary-creative-practice-and-body-positive-resilience>

¹⁷ <https://energy.soton.ac.uk/city-of-southampton-appoints-professor-abubakr-bahaj-as-chief-scientific-adviser/#:~:text=The%20City%20of%20Southampton%20has,as%20their%20Chief%20Scientific%20Adviser.>



Our current examples and case studies demonstrate pockets of art and design local engagement yielding positive results for the community.

There is work happening with Hertfordshire Cultural Education Partnership and Arts Council England on local projects and connecting communities. This work has produced flourishing relationships with the local enterprise partnership and local creative industries.¹⁸ The recommended officers can do guiding work here, offering different viewpoints and alternate use of spaces, such as the successful use of the S.H.E.D. initiative in Derby.¹⁹

There are also rich pockets of this community connection occurring with Yorkshire and Humber Visual Art Network (YVAN) within the Contemporary Visual Art Network (CVAN), where artist networks' resilience is fostered at a local level.²⁰ Universities can also act as an anchor in this programme, as seen with the AHRC's Creative Industries Clusters Programme.²¹

Civic universities and local education institutions can platform those who have less agency, equalising the local ecosystem. They can allow people to break through platform-related barriers, making the institutions more porous and accessible.

Through the implementation of Chief Art and Chief Design Officers locally, such successful examples can be rolled out everywhere in the UK. These will exist in accordance with local problems and need, and will help build communities through economic, social, and cultural regeneration initiatives. This final recommendation is also well linked to the Research and Development Places Strategy, creating opportunities for co-designing local solutions that empower local communities, along with the UKRI Strength in Places Fund.^{22,23}

Notes:

For more information about the roundtables, please refer to their summaries on our website here:

1. [Art and design expertise and evidence base: how can we use it?](#)
2. [Art and design research: applied to the UK's grand challenges](#)
3. [Policy Design Workshop: Embedding Art& Design research methods in UK policymaking](#)

¹⁸ <https://hertscep.org.uk/about/>

¹⁹ <https://www.derby.ac.uk/business-services/innovation-research/shed/>

²⁰ <https://corridor8.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Resilience-is-Futile-2019-C8-YVAN.pdf>

²¹ <https://www.ukri.org/our-work/browse-our-areas-of-investment-and-support/creative-industries-clusters-programme/>

²² https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1004685/r_d-people-culture-strategy.pdf

²³ <https://www.ukri.org/our-work/our-main-funds/strength-in-places-fund/#:~:text=The%20Strength%20in%20Places%20Fund,collaborations%20involving%20research%20and%20innovation.>



ABOUT CHEAD

CHEAD is the representative body for the art and design (A&D) higher education (HE) sector. Its mission is to contribute to the development of the A&D community, its standing and stature as well as its engagement with the outside world. CHEAD provides leadership and an inclusive, cohesive body for and on behalf of HE A&D in the UK, advancing knowledge and understanding in the sector and promoting the sector's interests to others. CHEAD members include all types of higher education institutions (small-specialist, Russell Group, post-92 University, public as well as privately funded, etc.). CHEAD shares with its members the objective of enhancing the student experience of HE in Art and Design and respects the independent and diverse approaches adopted by members in this regard. Correspondingly, CHEAD representatives, in carrying out the business of the organisation, place the wider interests of the sector first.

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, 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.