

# Research Programme Scoping Study

**For:**

**Design Council**

**Arts & Humanities Research Council**

## Executive Summary

**July 2012**

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Arts & Humanities  
Research Council

## **Design Council**

*The Design Council enables people to use design to transform communities, business and the environment for the better.*

*As an enterprising charity, our work places design at the heart of creating value by stimulating innovation in business and public services, improving our built environment and tackling complex social issues.*

*We inspire new design thinking, encourage public debate and inform government policy to improve everyday life and help meet tomorrow's challenges today.*

## **Arts & Humanities Research Council**

*The Arts and Humanities Research Council [AHRC] is a Non-Departmental Public body. Our vision is to be a recognised world leader in advancing arts and humanities research. We have four strategic aims:*

- *To promote and support the production of world-class research in the arts and humanities*
- *To promote and support world-class postgraduate training designed to equip graduates for research or other professional careers*
- *To strengthen the impact of arts and humanities research by encouraging researchers to disseminate and transfer knowledge to other contexts where it makes a difference*
- *To raise the profile of arts and humanities research and to be an effective advocate for its social, cultural and economic significance.*

*The AHRC wishes to target support for design for social purposes and commercialisation, where design can stimulate desired behaviours (e.g. facilitating neighbourly and community interaction) and avoid the undesirable (e.g. crime).*

## Executive Summary

- 1.1 In early February 2012 Madano Partnership was appointed, following a competitive tender process, to undertake a **Scoping Study** for the Design Council and the Arts & Humanities Research Council to inform the **development of a future academic design research programme**.
- 1.2 Design Council and AHRC believe that design plays a key role in economic and social value creation. **Design is key to connecting R&D efforts with innovation thereby enabling the market implementation of new knowledge that is fundamental to delivering economic growth and contributing to social renewal.** Coming together as partners, AHRC and the Design Council wish to build on previous work to develop better evidence of, and therefore a more detailed understanding of, the value and economic and broader impact of design, its contribution to the creative sector and innovation eco-system, the connections between design practice and academic design research, and levels of engagement between design research and business.
- 1.3 The Design Council and the AHRC's joint ambitions are around building a robust and engaging programme of university-led research on the theme of design. The focus of this Scoping Study was fundamentally to answer one question:
- "What research is needed for measuring the role and value of design?"
- 1.4 The scoping study included a combination of **desk research and a consultation process** which has enabled us, in a relatively short space of time, to understand the boulders on the landscape in relation to the existent research evidence base as well as consult with the academic and wider community to capture their views and opinions on the shape of a future academic programme.
- 1.5 Whilst the design research community displays **mixed views on the value of research orientated around the measurement agenda**, there was a good level of engagement with our consultation event and online proforma, resulting in a lot of commentary around the future shape and nature of a research programme.
- 1.6 A future '**open call**' approach is generally supported. However there is a strong desire to **ensure that design stays at the centre** of any such call and does not become side-lined. An open approach is considered to deliver **multi-disciplinary approaches** which whilst considered good, the view is that they **can be tricky to deliver on**.

- 1.7 Likewise there was **endorsement of academics working with businesses and policy makers**, though a wide range of limitations were listed in relation to solely using this approach.
- 1.8 There was a general endorsement that focusing any future funding makes good sense, however there were a **range of suggestions that any future call might cover**, one of which was building evidence on value of design. However, in general the suggestions on where a future call might focus thematically were more lacking than we might have expected. However the two areas that seemed to receive strongest endorsement were that of health care and service design.
- 1.9 There was **no consensus on one most appropriate funding mechanism**, rather a wide range of suggestions were made on ideas that might prove useful. And indeed there was to a degree a plea for a range of mechanisms to be deployed including both large and small scale grants. **Sand-pit approaches seem to be well received**, despite some concerns that they are hard to join and are dominated by established disciplines.
- 2.0 **Capacity building activities were endorsed** by academics to a degree with lots of caveats and feedback on various elements of them. And indeed our analysis suggests that this is a fundamental area of work that needs to be taken forward – the enabling and supporting of design researchers to apply for funding and to lead multi-disciplinary projects.
- 2.1 **Large collaborative grants are perceived to work well for multi-disciplinary work**; however a number of limitations were outlined including a perception that early stage researchers need access to small scale grants. **However multi-disciplinary work is considered as fundamentally the right approach** for design projects.
- 2.2 There was **strong endorsement of Design Council and AHRC working together** with lots of detailed ideas on how they might structure their collaboration, and what themes any future work might include.
- 2.3 It was also acknowledged that any future programme should seek to provide support on the theme of design on a **long term basis** and that any future programme ought to be a **Cross-Council initiative**.
- 2.4 The current evidence base around **design for ‘economic good’ is strongest in relation to design’s role in innovation**, but even here it is the poor relation of R&D in research funding terms, and has received limited attention. For example in the Cox Review design was labeled the ‘link between creativity and innovation’ but this has not been systematically explored. We would suggest that more research is needed on **whether and how design adds value at an individual business level, beyond**

**that of supporting a product development role, and further to this research that better understands the contribution that design makes to the UK economy**, and how this compares to economies across the world. Any further work in this territory we suggest could most appropriately be approached by a combination of designers, economists and business practitioners.

- 2.5 Within the design industry itself it is clear that there is growing interest in, and support for the concept of **'service design'**. This is an area where there is very limited academic research and we would endorse this as area worth labeling for future research funding as it has application to so many other areas and is a new and growing area of the industry.
- 2.6 Whilst there seems to be an existent body of evidence on design in healthcare and urban planning, it is very **difficult to find UK studies with strong empirical bases on the value and impact of design interventions**. Therefore we would suggest these as key areas for future development.
- 2.7 The majority of research in the field of design and sustainability focuses on environmental improvement in science and business disciplines. We believe that there are opportunities to develop research on this theme, which more effectively **puts design at the centre of sustainability focused projects** and we believe that it would be interesting to engage this work with the emerging service design sector.

## Key conclusions

- 2.8 On the design measurement agenda we are mindful of the **increased levels of activity in this space internationally**, including in the context of measurement standards, the Frascati and Oslo manuals. There are also recent increased efforts around gathering evidence on design in organisations like the IPO. We believe that it could be unproductive to fund further research on developing the macro-economic value of design in the light of this wider and international activity. Rather our recommendation would be to stay connected to these initiatives and contribute constructively, via UK representation in the international bodies concerned as they develop.
- 2.9 In relation to the UK design industry and the disciplines that we reviewed, we think it would be fair to say that the area that is perhaps most neglected is the developing sector and discipline of **service design**. It was certainly the area most regularly cited as in need of attention across all of the stakeholder research that we have conducted, but also has the potential to make major contributions to innovation and to major challenges such as health and sustainability. Therefore we have suggested it as an area of focus going forward, as we believe it is under researched, is still an emerging field of practice, and is an area that has the potential to deliver both economic and social value. Research work that can better understand, communicate and promote the nature of this developing sector we believe would be hugely

useful and of interest to a wide range of stakeholders.

- 3.0 We believe that it is bringing together economists, design businesses and design researchers in **multi-disciplinary teams** that will generate evidence that can fill some of the gaps currently seen in the literature.
- 3.1 Measuring the social value and impact of design is rather less straight forward, and given the wide scope of design can be applied across a huge range of areas. Our review has focused extensively in this area on the theme of well-being predominantly in a health care setting and it would certainly seem appropriate that further academic research is conducted to **demonstrate the impact that improved environmental / urban design can have on human outcomes in health or broader well-being**.
- 3.2 All of our work suggests that as design is a relatively young and variegated research discipline, **that design researchers need support to get involved with Research Council calls**; they need mentoring to lead bids if the real contribution that design can make is to be realised. This scoping project has not provided the opportunity to flesh out fully the issues that design academics have when responding to funding calls; however, we suspect that spending some time understanding how to support this community best would be useful.
- 3.3 It is also clearly endorsed by the research community, that whilst there are difficulties with managing open calls for multi-disciplinary activity, that Research Councils need to find ways to **bring design to the table as an equal discipline**, and that design researchers need to build the skills to lead bids for research funding and be able to lead research projects that may not focus solely on design but rather be about demonstrating what design can do within a team of disciplines.
- 3.4 There is also an appetite for collaborative work with other stakeholders: business, (design buyers, design suppliers) user groups and policy networks. However any future funding needs to take account of the fact that working collaboratively with these partners can require more time as well as a **strong able leader** who can continually shape the project.
- 3.5 In our view, the collaboration between the Design Council and AHRC represents an **opportunity to do something inspiring** in this space that goes beyond a simple challenge call. For example it may be that there are ways to leverage the Design Council positioning as an intermediary organisation between research, designers and their users, to shape the design research of the future.
- 3.6 Our desk research has been on a limited scale and we would advise that as part of any future funding,

those who receive support are required to **undertake a robust literature review** in their area, so they can build on the existing academic evidence base.

## About the authors

### **Ruth Flood, Partner, Madano Partnership**

Ruth spent seven years as Head of Research and Evaluation at the Design Council. In her role there she developed an effective research and evaluation programme, including commissioning and applying work on the importance of the design industry to the UK economy and providing evidence for a DTI Economic Paper on Creativity, Design & Business Performance and supporting the Cox review of Design Policy. Also at the Design Council she managed a £2 million partnership project with the Technology Strategy Board, leading an innovation challenge for industry on issues related to an ageing population. She has robust experience of design's role in innovation and is knowledgeable on wider innovation literature and practice. Having worked alongside the Design Council's Public Service programme she is acutely aware of the challenges presented when seeking to evaluate, learn from and scale up innovation activities. Prior to this she worked for a number of different research and consultancy organisations including PriceWaterhouseCoopers. In January 2012 Ruth joined Madano Partnership as a Partner. Madano are a strategic communications agency and Ruth is leading the development of their research practice.

### **Ray Lambert, Madano Associate**

A career civil service economist up to his recent retirement, he has worked in areas such as housing, transport and competition policy. For the last 18 years he has been specialising in aspects of the economics of innovation and innovation policy, with special reference to metrics, indicators and modelling of the innovation system; programme evaluation; the innovation infrastructure for the knowledge economy including standards, design, metrology, IP. He has prepared analytical and evidence papers on Design in the economy and has promoted the importance of better design coverage in international standards for innovation measurement. He has recently become an Associate Research Fellow at Birkbeck, University of London and is active in international fora, especially the OECD.