

5/2 Lindsay Avenue,
Summer Hill NSW 2130

Secretariat
Review of Australian Higher Education
GPO Box 9880
Canberra ACT 2601

Dear Sir or Madam,

RE: DESIGN MANAGEMENT IN AUSTRALIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

I completed design studies as a mature age student. First came a Graduate Diploma of Design at the University of Technology Sydney and then a Master's degree from the University of New South Wales.

The learning curve during my studies and subsequent independent research quickly developed into an interest for design management. The School of Art and Design at the University of Salford in Manchester offers a one-year full time or two-year part time course in conjunction with their School of Management, which is described in these terms:

"Design Management is a relatively new but rapidly expanding discipline. The course is designed to address the current needs of industry, examining how business and brand strategy can be effectively delivered through design management and how the design and creative processes can best be managed... The course is mainly aimed at students from two types of background: for business/marketing professionals with little or no design training, and for design-trained professionals. Student cohorts will usually be 50% from each group."

This description seems to agree with section 1.2 of your discussion paper, which refers to a "highly productive, professional labour force... appropriate to the needs and opportunities of the economy and its component industries and sectors..."

At the Birmingham Institute of Art and Design the structure of their Design Management course is split into Postgraduate Certificate, Diploma and then a Masters degree. Their subject list includes Commercial Contexts and Markets, Strategic Design Policy, Design Strategy, Managing Design, Research Methods, Team Project and Placement or Case Study. The final year is dedicated to a Dissertation.

In America they offer a combined Master of Design and Master of Business Administration (MBA). As far as I can tell Design Management postgraduate programs are not available at Australian universities though subjects are offered in a general degree. My experience was that this approach lacked coherent or interlocking steps toward a more general appreciation of the business environment. There was no attempt to develop managerial skills along the lines of a design strategy.

I have been a member of the Australian Graphic Design Association (AGDA) and the Design Institute of Australia (DIA). Having served for a brief period on both State organising committees it became apparent that providing sufficient content for continuing professional development programs was a struggle. Most of the seminars I attended consisted of 'show and tell.' An AGDA/ISS Fellowship Report entitled 'Design Management' prepared by Lucy Elliot in 1999 includes the recommendation to "create seminars for clients run through their industry associations..." Surely relegating this work back to individual groups is a mistake?

The key initiative of a design management program is to foster interaction among designers and organisational executives. In my opinion developing a rapport between designers and the business professional creates a common level of understanding or dialogue that should influence the way we do business. Your discussion paper refers to the nation's prospects in section 2.3 and states, "Long run success... will also require a sophisticated capacity to generate extra value from a wide range of knowledge-intensive industries, especially the services sector."

During my studies it was obvious that the majority of students undertaking a postgraduate degree were new to the design world. I asked the former Federal Minister for Education how many undergraduate design students completed a postgraduate design degree but she was not able to provide statistics.

Maybe the low manufacturing base in this country could be helped by giving more emphasis to how good design can contribute to business success - 'Good design makes choices clear.'

Sincerely,

Peter Retallick MDes
June 24, 2008