BIRMINGHAM CITY University

BCU PSF Application form – Senior Fellow (D3)

Submit this application as one file (including referee statements and any other evidence relevant to your application), by email to psf@bcu.ac.uk

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Role/job title	Senior Lecturer		
Faculty/School	Arts, Design and Media, School of Visual Communication		

Case study 1

This should demonstrate your sustained effectiveness in relation to teaching and/or supporting learning, to meet the D3 criteria. This could focus on an example of leading, managing and enhancing the curriculum of a course in your school, where influence and impact can be demonstrated.

Transforming the Curriculum

In 2012, I re-designed the introductory L4 module *Introduction to Theatre, Performance and Event Design* [A1] This was driven by observing students struggling to make the transition from FE to HE, due to the rigid structure of secondary education where students are told explicitly what to do. Key creative skills of independent thinking, risk taking and play were lacking [K1, V1].The new module immediately demonstrated significant impact and benefit for students, and was held up as an exemplar within VisCom [K2, K3]. Then, in 2016, as part of Transforming the Curriculum, I was asked by my Head of School to develop a School wide
Introduction to Visual Communication. My approach to curriculum design, leadership and mentoring within this process led to a successful roll out of the module into the new Curriculum in 2017, which will now be discussed [V3, V4, K6].

Iteration 1: Appreciative, individual, experimental teaching and learning
The original *Introduction to Theatre, Performance and Event Design* module brief was explicitly solutions focused, seen as a safe way to ease students onto the course. However, challenges included getting students to: engage with the studio culture; use the available facilities; engage with Moodle; develop communication skills; develop collaboration skills. I believed the 'safeness' of the project actually encouraged students to take a step backwards rather than push them forward [K1, K3].

For the first iteration of the re-design, I looked at key progressive educational reformers, including Froebel's pedagogy of learning by doing, experimentation for its own sake and encouraging play (Lerner, 2005) [V3]. I also looked at contemporary discussions on how to challenge introductory modules (Meakin, 2012; Barnett, 2012) [K2]. Focusing on the Bauhaus concept, to 'unlearn students and return them to a state of innocence, a point of origin from where true learning could begin' (Lupton, Miller, 1993), my intention was to take students out of their comfort zone, to 'unlearn' them, to encourage them to think for themselves, to play, to take risks, and to build a stronger sense of community [V2].

The brief became problems-based, with carefully designed challenges working as steppingstones to help students build ideas. Forcing students to collaborate in small groups built

confidence, shared learning and again strengthened the cohort, as learning in small groups supports problem-based learning (Fry, Ketteridge, Marshall, 2008). This approach supports different learning styles, as students can observe their own learning style and the style of others, and adapt to engage more deeply with the tasks (Fry et al, 2008) [V1, K5]. Using experimentation and play with objects to build concepts showed a different approach to the creative process through the self-generation of ideas. Regular progress update presentations to the whole group enabled students to build their confidence in both verbal and visual communication. This re-design demonstrated: a higher level of attendance; a growing studio culture; a strong sense of community; a willingness to engage; a sense of achievement, [A2, K2].

During my first module of the first year, Lara created a very stimulating project, her delivery of which really impacted my first term of the course. [Alumna]

Iteration 2: Collaborating with others

The second iteration, the pilot for *Introduction to Visual Communication*, expanded to combine five subject areas: TPE, Illustration, Photography, Graphics and Film and Animation. Collaborating with a colleague from Photography, we re-wrote the brief, embedding key extracts from the VisCom philosophy [K6]. Grounding this iteration in my praxis, we also incorporated the Bauhaus' belief that an interdisciplinary curriculum would help design generations creatively master future transformations (Lerner 2005) [V4].

Over five weeks, the module introduces students to the principles within their own chosen subject area, but also provides opportunities to meet staff and take workshops in all four other subject areas. Students collaboratively explore and devise ideas in 2D, 3D or 4D, through weekly themed challenges. The module begins with a Magical Mystery Trip, which forms the key stimulus for the project and ends with a School-wide exhibition of the completed projects [A4].

This module is very innovative, it enables students to broaden their visual glossary and allows them to explore the breadth of what VC is. They are also introduced to various staff, which gives them a rich pool of knowledge to dip into when needing support & advice. The end result of an exhibition and the pride in completing such an endeavour should no doubt help the students to bond and help retention and wellbeing. It could been seen as a kind of intense foundation course, opening eyes and being highly experimental and developing lateral thinking skills.
[[redacted], External Panel Member, TTC 2016]

Iteration 3: Augmenting best practice and leadership

For the third iteration, the official roll out of *Introduction to Visual Communication*, I collaborated with a colleague from Illustration. We took comments from staff who taught on the pilot, through both formal written evaluations and informal group discussions, and refined and developed the structure [K5, K6].

One addition, enhancing peer-to-peer learning, was to invite Level 5 students to visit the exhibition and assess the work. L4s presented their work to the L5s, who then provided feedback, assessing against the Learning Outcomes. This proved extremely successful for both L4s and L5s. The L5s took the role seriously, while also reflecting on their learning over the past year. It helped the L4s feel more confident in discussing work, and built a strong sense of community between year groups [K2, K3].

Through the three iterations, I coordinated, supported, supervised, managed and mentored the staff team in relation to their teaching and learning, as well as my own. My leadership style is predominantly placed within the Organic Leadership paradigm (Avery, 2004) with the focus on

the group, sharing sense-making and responsibility. Working to an open brief, teaching across all five subject areas, the module challenges staff in the same way that it challenges students. To support and coach colleagues, I facilitated weekly staff catch-up session and produced a detailed module guide, only to be seen by staff, that explicitly laid out the aims and intentions for every session [V2]. This provided a structure of support for the staff, who then rose to the challenge.

This new structure begins to open the door on possibilities for both staff and students to collaborate, share ideas and exchange learning techniques. [Colleague 1]
It's very easy for us to become settled in our teaching. Working with students from other subject areas, I found the atmosphere in the rooms very different, the way I needed to explain myself was very different, and I needed to think about that, which was very surprising. [Colleague 2]
One of the fundamental aspects I have drawn from our collaboration with this module is the idea of 'play'. This has been a significant reminder to me that to be able to achieve creative success we need to feel that we have the freedom to make work. Many Thanks Lara. What an inspiration. [Colleague 3]

In conclusion, by re-framing the module, I am attempting to re-frame the design school (Dorst, 2015). Through my heroic purpose as a teacher, I believe that to prepare students for an increasingly complex world, we need to provide constructive exploration spaces, use diversity and variation as a resource, embrace collaboration and allow learners to become self-authors (Adams, Daly, Mann, Dall'Alba, 2011). Student module feedback [K5, K6] on best practice includes:

Broadness of subject matter gives creative freedom. Eases students into the course with little stress. [Level 4 student]
Working with other courses and receiving their feedback on your work, as they had a different view on your work with other possible ideas. [Level 4 student]
Collaboration with people from different disciplines, and people with different strengths. [Level 4 student]

The impact of this module has been significant. The last iteration alone has impacted on approximately 350 Level 4 students, 350 Level 5 students, and 26 staff, including Head of School, Deputy Head, five Subject Leaders, and five Level coordinators. I acknowledge that there are opportunities for me to disseminate my practice more effectively outside of my course and School, I have recently joined a Faculty committee for Learning and Teaching and see this as an opportunity to share my practice more widely in the university.

APRIL 2019