

## Connect>Create: From 20th century docks to 21st century games environments.

### Keywords

*Historical Research, Heritage, Environment, Architecture, Game Design*

### Collaborating institutions

Hull Museum Education  
The Ferens Art Gallery  
Hull School of Art and Design  
together with: Hands on History Museum, Hull Maritime Museum, Hull Museums curatorial team, Hull College of Further Education, Wyke Sixth Form College, East Riding College of Further Education.

### National & regional context

Prior to the project, there were no specific resources or provision for post 16 students at Hull Museums. College staff tended to bring groups themselves with limited input from museum staff. Connect>Create was set up in 2007 as a partnership between Hull Museum Education, The Ferens Art Gallery and Hull School of Art and Design in order that Curators, Museum Education staff and Hull School of Art and Design staff could work together to develop an exciting model of collaboration, making museums and galleries relevant and accessible to the next generation of artists and designers.

### Museum/gallery description

Hull is very fortunate in having seven excellent museums and a superb gallery which attracted 435,568 visitors in 2004-5. This service has been recognised by the Audit Commission as 'good' two star with promising prospects for improvement. Its collections have been recognised by Government as being of outstanding significance.

Partnership working with a wide range of organisations in order to develop and deliver learning programmes is intended to take advantage of the excellent collections and develop quality learning experiences which can demonstrate the power of both museum based and outreach learning opportunities.

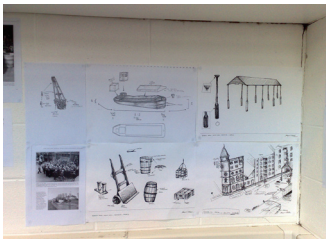
### HE subject and context description

The prime imperative of the Connect>Create project, based in Hull in the UK, was to engage with a new audience of post 16 students who do not normally use Hull Museums. For the purpose of this case study the focus is primarily on work produced by the BA (Hons) Games Design students at Hull School of Art and Design.

Games Design owes much to prior and adjacent cultural forms, representing a convergence in both communications media, and in different entertainment media. Computer games in particular have been singled out as one of the most visible of the new modes of representation to involve 'interactivity' and it is this notion or defining attribute, which is seen as signaling what is different (or special) about games.

The BA (Hons) Games Design at Hull School of Art and Design focuses on the design, rather than the technology, of computer games, exploring the notion of play in interactive digital media on all platforms, within a conceptual framework called gaming/playing. The curriculum introduces game play, game genre and relationship to previous forms, interaction, screen design and conventions, narrative and narrative development, characterisation, storyboarding, and their integration within the context of a non-linear game environment. Technology is essential in a successful game, but so too is immersion through 'stage', character, 'plot', storyline and interaction. 'Interactive' sound and movement are considered within the context of gaming.

Students work on games concepts for a range of platforms, combining independent self initiated practice, and commercially oriented client-led practice. Their final portfolio will reflect professional directions and ambitions, an understanding of design and production, an understanding of the industry and their



Objects and buildings - drawing and research



Drawing and research

### Project goals and ambitions

### Project description

particular 'niche', and an understanding of the broader context.

Connect>Create project aims:

- To use museum collections as a stimulus for creative work
- To engage with a new audience of post 16 students
- To develop and sustain partnerships with post 16 providers
- To increase access to collections for post 16 students and community groups
- To provide relevant live project opportunities for students using museums
- To provide professional exhibition opportunities for project participants
- To create sustainable learning resources for Hull Museums

The Connect>Create project provides opportunities for students to utilise Hull Museums and the Ferens Art Gallery collections as an inspirational starting point for course-integrated work. The intention has been that academic staff develop assignment briefs in response to identified collections, which will then form part of the curriculum to encourage and inspire new course-integrated artwork. Staff and students have a unique opportunity to visit the museum and archive, accessing a wide range of non display collections, during this process. Outcomes are then entered into a selection process for an exhibition and used as case studies in learning resources for future educational visits.

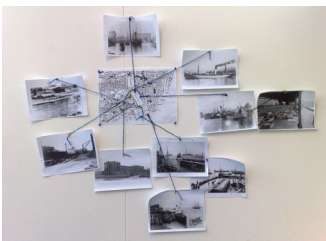
In previous years the Madame Clapham collection has inspired fashion, film and graphic design students. Post war and Contemporary Art has been explored through photography. The focus of the most recent project, 'Ink or Swim', is the Hull Maritime Museum collections and Maritime paintings at the Ferens Art Gallery. Themes explore voyages and life onboard ship, Hull maritime history and its shaping of the local area, and the weird and wonderful objects collected by travelling sailors. The project draws together students from a range of disciplines including Graphic Design, Art and Design for the Public Realm, Fashion, and for the first time this year BA (Hons) Games Design students

The Games Design curriculum includes a module which develops construction skills using games technology and demands a conceptual understanding of environment. The course team felt that a project requiring a strong historical context would move the students away from 'competitor analysis' towards deep research, and feed into subsequent working practice for other games projects.

The brief was to recreate Hull's City Docks at the turn of the 20th century, a fly through tour built using the Unreal engine (Games 'Modding') to give insight into how the City Docks area looked and what life was like for the people working and living nearby.

From a practical production basis, the students were effectively repurposing a tool primarily intended for interactive games towards visualisation and demonstration. They undertook similar principle phases that any games project would take: the process of ideas generation; storyboarding; concept art development; technical drawing into 3D models; texture and asset collection and production; sourcing and editing, and mapping textures onto models (see Appendix One). The challenge was to undertake detailed historical research to bring accuracy to the buildings and environment, and checking for historical and geographical accuracy formed a vital part of every phase.

Involvement with the Connect>Create project provided the students with subject matter for a production module, working



Research and mapping



Why is your project important and worth reading?



Example development work

What happened?

Would you do it again?  
What would you do differently?  
What did you learn?

with the museums service as a client in a manner which developed their communication, planning & organisation skills as well as their ability to work to a strict deadline. An external web based resource, 'Basecamp', was used for the first time as a tool to facilitate group working within the student team including file sharing, and for client feedback and communication. This resource proved invaluable as an aid to effective group working and will be employed across the wider New Media provision for subsequent projects.

The final challenge was the combined effort of the public exhibition in the widest sense. School wide interdisciplinary collaboration and curation brought together the disparate ingredients. The space was planned and constructed around the products in development, the event promoted and catalogued, and the physical made virtual through an online resource. The students were able to experience their work on display in a public space alongside treasured artefacts; something that is usually difficult to achieve on a Games Design course.

The recreation of Hull's dock areas at the turn of the century is important as a piece of work that captivates and educates viewers of a City's illustrious past. The project has historical and educational value and due to its moving visual and interactive approach, it also has the ability to captivate and inspire young minds as they see how the past has shaped their current surroundings.

The project provided opportunities for students to research primary sources, and live project commissioning offering students real deadlines and real experience. It proves that collaboration extending far beyond the usual client involvement between students and the museums service can benefit both parties equally. A unique opportunity to learn and work together.

Regular tutorial and feedback sessions with the Games students indicated that they really enjoyed working on the reconstruction of the City's old docks; and they themselves admitted they discovered so much about their local area through undertaking the research aspect of this project, learning all the time about what life must have been like at the turn of the century in a major fishing port such as Hull. This detailed research and empathy enabled them to bring the potentially static scene of the dock areas to life through detail, audio and simple narrative.

Involving the students with historical referencing activities has changed the way a number of them will approach future briefs as their primary research methods now include the ability to explore locations and see how the past has shaped its future.

The wider Connect>Create project ('Ink or Swim') increased participation in Museum Education activities by post 16 students, with wider participation from regional colleges providing post 16 art and design comprising 16 courses representing 200+ students.

Hull School of Art and Design students curated, exhibition designed and promoted 'Ink or Swim' at the Ferens Art Gallery (April – May 10). This included the Hull Docks Historic Fly Through set in 1900 produced by students from the BA (Hons) Games Design course which was also repurposed as an online resource for the community and post 16 learners.

From the BA (Hons) Games Design course perspective there have been a number of noticeable differences in learning this year through working with Connect>Create. The students have not only had to develop skills required for industry as an objective of the parent module but also how to repurpose software to better suit



Screenshots from final reconstruction

What advice might you give others and how could others learn from what you have done?  
 What barriers?



Author



Final exhibition

the objectives of a particular brief. Putting these skills to use in a project that focuses on research as well as production has enabled students to learn and demonstrate multitasking and that each of them is capable of adapting to a number of different roles associated with games production.

They have had to learn about the local history of a place they visit every day and even though the majority of the students involved are local, each and every one of them discovered something new about their city to bring to the final piece. Involving the students with historical referencing activities has changed the way a number of them will approach future briefs as their primary research methods now include the ability to explore locations and see how its past has shaped its future.

Working with the Museums Service made a refreshing change from the usual practice of working with commercial clients, the students actually guided the project with client feedback rather than the client taking over and getting really heavily involved. The implementation of the external web based resource 'Basecamp' as a group working tool was a start towards creating new collaboration models and working practices alongside the principles of good communication and regular meetings and this is one area for future exploration.

For the broader Connect>Create project the increased participation from the post 16 providers and courses within these institutions proves that there is a need to carry on to provide further live projects for students. The project has demonstrated that the collections have relevant meaning, not only as a primary historical source, but as a platform to explore ideas, hone skills and shape future events.

Collaboration is the key to a successful project, and collaborations only work when both parties can gain something at a time that is right for each participant. Time and coordination is a major factor for post 16 colleges, therefore the Connect>Create project works in tandem with the college semesters and curriculum planning. As Connect>Create is a year by year funded project rather than 'core funded' offering continuity proves challenging.

From the BA (Hons) Games Design course perspective the project was highly successful, and it was interesting to observe a developing sense of self belief and achievement as student research and production work come together to form something they could relate to visually.

Preconceptions of 'digital' work and how it should be exhibited perhaps resulted in the fly through being shown on a simple monitor and stand; for the future more focus would be placed on the final physical exhibition of the work.

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