The University of Brighton’s pioneering work in the history of design has changed the way design is taught and the way it is viewed. Professor Cheryl Buckley, editor of the Journal of Design History, the leading journal in this field, moved to the University of Brighton at the end of 2013 because of its “huge impact on the history of design as a national and international discipline.” “There is no other comparable institution,” she said. “Brighton put the history of design on the map, and through its undergraduate and postgraduate work has helped to build capacity in a subject that underpins and reinforces the central position that design has occupied in post-war Britain.”

Studies carried out at the university have influenced the form and content of design courses around the world. For instance, the work by Professors Lou Taylor, Jonathan Woodham and Guy Julier has contributed significantly to the expansion of design and dress history as a field of study since the 1990s at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, with their work becoming one of the mainstays of reading lists around the globe. Research by Dr Louise Purbrick on material culture of the everyday, Dr Paul Jobling on graphic design, fashion and masculinities, and Professor Catherine Moriarty on design curation, has further extended the range and reach of history of design at the university.

But it is not only in the academic sphere that the University of Brighton’s work on the history of design has had a significant impact. It has filtered through to the general public through collaborations with a variety of organisations and institutions including museums across the world. The unique archives the university houses, such as those of the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design, the International Council of Graphic Design Associations and the Design Council Archive, provide invaluable research connections to the design professions.

The latter came to Brighton in 1944 as a result of the research on design and the state conducted by Professor Woodham. His book, Twentieth Century Design, Professor Julier’s The Culture of Design and Professor Taylor’s The Study of Dress History pioneered the redefinition and representation of disciplinary territories, championed the archives, introduced concepts of mapping and design networks internationally, and, in so doing, embraced academics, publics, design practitioners and museum curators.

The recent arrival of Professor Buckley and Professor Jeremy Aynsley adds to the university’s standing as a centre for design historical scholarship. Professor Buckley’s work, which has impacted upon museum curation and design curricula, embraces fashion, ceramics and gender, and focuses mainly on Britain and the United States. Professor Aynsley’s research on modernism in graphics and on design organisations is more European-facing. The two professors have established a new research group – the only one in the world dedicated to international design history – its formation made possible because of the critical mass of researchers based at the university.

Over 20 researchers are in the group, covering countries such as Korea, Brazil and India, where the history of design is just emerging as a discipline. The group will build on the work already completed by the university and burnish its international reputation.

The quality of Brighton’s collections and the excellence of its stewardship of these were important benchmarks for how we would establish and maintain our archives at RMIT. Further to this, the impact Brighton has had on the design professions, particularly in their understanding of how design is produced, marketed and consumed were important considerations for RMIT’s operations.

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