

MA DESIGN RESEARCH FOR DISABILITY Degree Show

On Wednesday, 15 November, the two-day MA Design Research for Disability Degree Show opened at the Furniture Works showroom in Commercial Road, City campus, with around 70 people in attendance. The showcase event generated a huge amount of interest among industry professionals from both the design and disability fields.

The show was a culmination of work undertaken by recent graduates of the MA Design Research for Disability course, which illustrates the coming together of two disciplines, design and occupational therapy, to conceive and produce products, environment and equipment for the widest possible consumer base, regardless of age and ability. The integration of designers involved in production, furniture and fashion, and occupational therapists has produced a mutually beneficial exchange of ideas between the sociology surrounding disability and inclusive designs.

The projects on show included a chair for use in the easy access areas of the Royal Albert Hall; a task light for people with visual impairments; a way-finding system designed specifically for Homerton Hospital in Hackney; and an inclusive dining environment for people with visual impairments.

Also on show was an affordable task chair for a wide range of users, of which all of the students were attributed their own part to research and improve on. Currently manufactured by Nomique, the chair is just one example of a successful collaboration between MA Design Research for Disability students and industry stakeholders.

Graduate Lorna Ryan is hoping to develop her task light for people with visual impairments with a view of bringing it to a manufacturing standard. Lorna said of the course: 'London Met was the only institution I found that provides a course which bridges the gap between therapists and designers, and enables students to come up with inclusive designs. The input from therapists to the course has been exceptional and, as a designer, I have been challenged and pushed beyond my comfort zone.'

Representatives from the Royal Albert Hall have heaped praise upon Jackie Brown's chair and would 'love to see it implemented.' Originally a fashion designer, Jackie said: 'The course challenged my preconceived ideas about disability. As a result, I feel I am now better informed and wish to share with others the potential of inclusive design.' Occupational therapist, Catherine Peel, describes



Top: Occupational therapist, Catherine Peel, with a piece of the way-finding system designed for Hackney's Homerton Hospital

Above: Images of graduate Lorna Ryan's task light, which assists people with visual impairments

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Catherine Peel
– occupational therapist

her experience of the course as: 'A fantastic opportunity to develop new skills in design as well as sharing and developing my own experience of working with individuals with disabilities.'

Susie Scorer, also an occupational therapist, who is employed at the National Spinal Injuries Centre at Stoke Mandeville Hospital in Aylesbury, commented: 'The course has enabled a thorough appreciation of the design process and will facilitate the development of any further design based solutions to practical problems associated with patient care or treatment.'

Course leader, Smadar Samson, who provided the impetus and industrial links to revamp the course, concluded: 'I hope that the success of the show would encourage manufacturers to work closely with both designers and health professionals from the very early stage of product development to ensure that user needs are met with well functioned, affordable yet desirable and non stigmatising products.'

Further information about the course can be found at <http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/pgprospectus/courses/design-research-for-disability.cfm>