

Design MRes

Application Process 2021/22



Northumbria
University
NEWCASTLE

How do I make an application?

Your application to study for a postgraduate degree at Northumbria University comprises an:

- **Online Application**
- **Personal Statement**
- **Research Proposal**

When you apply, you will be required to submit a Personal Statement as part of your application. For this programme, you are also required to upload a Research Proposal as part of your application.

You should upload both of these documents in the Personal Statement section of the application form. You will receive an email from Northumbria University confirming receipt of your application.

The following slides will give you guidance and course specific details on compiling your Personal Statement and Research Proposal.

How do I make an application?

The key milestones in the application process are as follows:

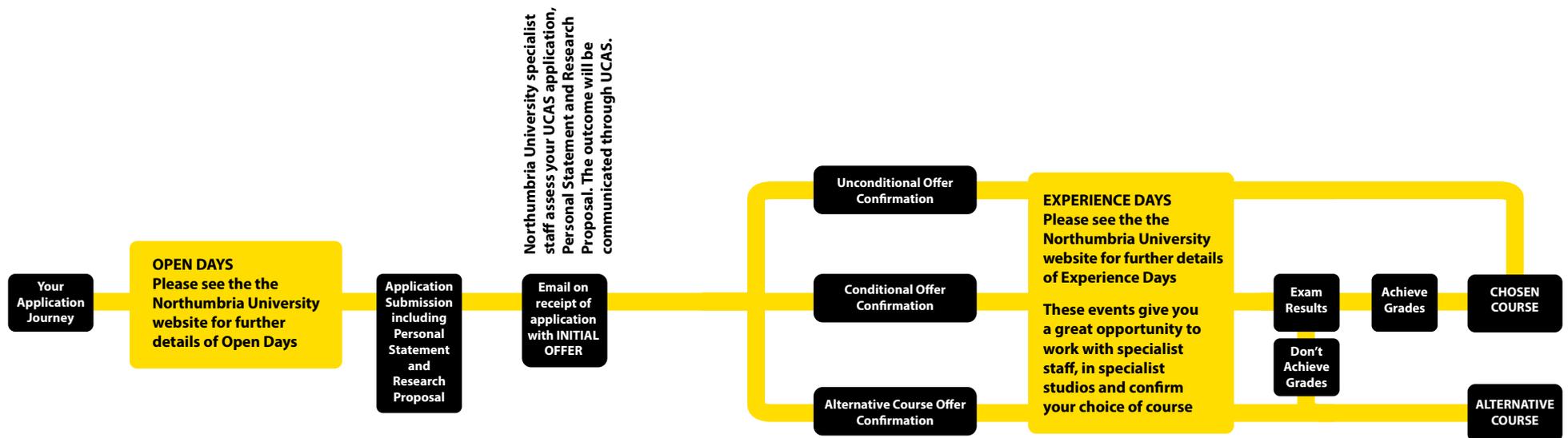
- 1 - Apply through the online application form
- 2 - Northumbria University specialist staff assess your application, Personal Statement, Research Proposal and references. We may then invite you to have an informal chat if we have further questions.
- 3 - Receive the outcome of your application.

The decision to offer a place will be based on your completed application form, Personal Statement, Research Proposal and references.

This will be communicated through our admissions team and will be one of the following:

- **Conditional Offer**
- **Unconditional Offer**
- **Alternative course offer**

What is the application journey?



What should be in my Personal Statement?

A Personal Statement should also be submitted in support of your application.

Your statement should fit on 1 page. It should provide an insight into your professional skills, expertise and ambitions, and explore the rationale for why you are applying for the MRes Design course.

Consider covering the following points:

1. A short biography encompassing main professional endeavours, qualifications and skills.
2. What skills and experience do you hope to gain by coming on to MRes Design?
3. Why do you think MRes Design is a good 'fit' for you?
4. What is your objective in doing MRes Design?
To pursue an academic [teaching/research] career, a particular route in industry, a Ph.D?

The Personal Statement should be submitted as an A4 document, saved as a PDF (maximum file size 15 MB).

EXAMPLE | PERSONAL STATEMENT

ANDREW THURMAN
APPLICATION FOR MASTERS BY RESEARCH (MRES)
NORTHUMBRIA UNIVERSITY
JULY 2020

PERSONAL STATEMENT

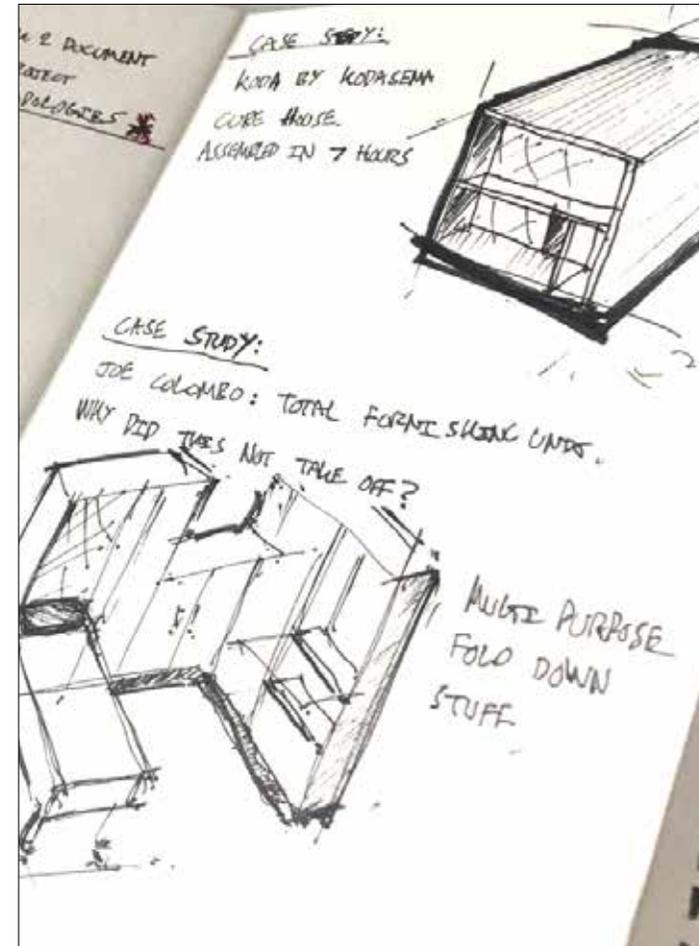
Since studying for a Foundation Diploma in Art & Design as a mature student I have been immersed in design and creativity. My undergraduate studies, over fifteen years of experience in the commercial design industry and nine years working in academia have led me to this application to study at postgraduate level.

I graduated from The University of Salford in 2005 with a BA (Hons) Degree in Spatial and Interior Design. I have always had a desire to return to study. As a mature undergraduate I relished the opportunity to explore my chosen discipline and the wider context of design from both a contextual and practical standpoint. My inquisitiveness with the subject and thirst to investigate, understand and experience how theoretical thinking influences practice, drove my motivation to succeed. I wanted to discover what I was capable of and broaden my horizons intellectually and for my career.

On completion of my undergraduate studies I immediately entered the dynamic and challenging world of commercial interior design. My desire to widen my understanding of the design industry led me to work in several sectors. I have worked in multi-disciplinary design practices, architectural practices, museums, heritage and interpretive consultancy, whilst also making my living as a freelance designer. I have come to fully appreciate that being a designer, or indeed a creative in any discipline, is not just something you do, but an existence. I could relate to this from being a musician, extensively writing, performing and recording my own music for a number of years. I have been fortunate to work on some fantastic projects and have had a very varied career. This has allowed me to develop comprehensive knowledge, understanding, skills and expertise in design and construction along with robust organisation, communication and time management skills. I have developed knowledge in an array of software packages and systems appropriate to the industry. Possibly one of the most valuable skills I have learnt is effective collaboration. A construction project simply cannot succeed without the combined expertise of many specialists.

Alongside my work in industry I became involved with tutoring and visiting lecturer work. This began at The University of Salford as, being an alumni, I had retained strong links with the design school. I found this role enjoyable and rewarding and developed further contacts in Higher Education, going on to lecture at several institutions. This existence between industry and academia allowed me to continue my engagement with the contextual aspects of my discipline, something that shaped me as a designer and influenced my approach to my work.

I began to analyse and question the integrity of commercial design practice. It moves at such a pace that it becomes rather insular. Projects can become repetitive and do not always embrace a true creative process to produce appropriate outcomes. There is a lack of opportunity for professional and personal development and many projects are trend driven. This was almost the antithesis of my own approach to design. An approach centred around putting the user at the heart of the experience, informed largely by primary research. Design should have integrity, encompassing simplicity, longevity and delivering outcomes that are entirely fit for purpose, yet embody an emotional or sensual component. This is an approach that has stuck with me from my undergraduate days studying the 'functional dynamics' ethos of the pioneering German architect Eric Mendelsohn. This ethos captures the notion that design must work for those for whom it is intended, but at the same time it should heighten the experience for the user.



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What should be in my Research Proposal?

This is a 500-1000 word outline of the research project you intend to undertake for the duration of the programme. Consider that the research you propose will ultimately be presented in a 20,000-word written dissertation or, in the case of practice-based students, a body of design practice + 10,000-word dissertation, so it needs to be considered with this scope in mind.

Your Research Proposal should consist of:

- **a synopsis** of the research topic or project
- **three or four specific “research questions”** that distil the aims or critical areas of enquiry of the project
- **evidence of an understanding of current research** in the field. This may include works of design, name practitioners that express similar concerns, mention key critical, theoretical or practical texts and be fully academically referenced (in-text + List of References)

- **any specific practical case studies to be investigated**
- **show an appreciation of what the research entails.** This can include a formal timeline of, e.g. planned workshops, created works, interviews, questionnaires.
- **some understanding of relevant methodologies** is welcomed
- **any technical/practical resources required** for the project

These details will help us to assess your MRes Design application, and identify the most appropriate supervision and resources for successful applicants.

The Research Proposal should be submitted as an A4 document, saved as a PDF (maximum file size 15 MB).



EXAMPLE | RESEARCH PROPOSAL

ANDREW THURMAN

APPLICATION FOR MASTERS BY RESEARCH (MRES)
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JULY 2020

Research Project Proposal: How do we create successful small living spaces for the future?

We are in a time of great cultural, economic and technological change. As our lives constantly and rapidly evolve the spaces that facilitate our day to day activities must adapt with us (Thøgersen, 2017). With lifestyle changes, real estate at an ever increasing premium, sustainability a prominent global agenda and the demand for more housing small space living is becoming more and more prominent (Wilson, 2020). We must ensure that our living spaces are absolutely appropriate for the user and that the design and use of such spaces embodies sustainable principals. This poses several questions:

- Are small living spaces currently effective in their design, construction and use?
- Does small scale, flexible and adaptable living have a long-term place in our future?
- Is there a requirement for the design and construction of such spaces on a large scale?
- Are small living spaces desirable, or is it necessity that drives the demand?

This research will investigate the design, construction, use and success of small living spaces and the importance of this to the future of how and where we live. This will be explored initially through three overarching, themes; spatial characteristics, sustainability and longevity, and permanence.

Spatial Characteristics will investigate the definition of small spaces and their design. It will consider the user experience analysing practical aspects such as spatial arrangement, efficiency and space standards, ergonomics and anthropometrics, and inclusive design. The psychological effects of small space living and sensual aspects such as materials, light, texture, temperature and smell will be examined. It will consider the design challenges of how to make these spaces desirable and satisfying.

Sustainability and longevity will consider construction processes and techniques, material specification, energy and resource consumption taking account of RIBA's 2030 Climate Challenge, BREEAM and WELL Building Standards. The potential lifespan of small space living 'units' will be explored reviewing how appropriate materials and construction methods impact the longevity of a space and structure. New build will be compared with refurbishment and retro fit to appraise the benefits and drawbacks of each.

Permanence will look at the desire or need to be permanently grounded in one place or to be mobile. The notion of home and community will be explored, whether home is a place or if it is the things and people around us and what that this means to different cultures and demographics. It will look at modern construction techniques, such as prefabrication and modularity, and how these might facilitate flexibility, adaptability and customisation with the way we create spaces.

Living space can be anywhere we play out our daily lives; where we work, play, relax or socialise. It isn't just the home. This research will focus on the home as a place at the centre of our lives where all living activities can routinely take place. The initial task will be to conduct a comprehensive literature review of existing research in the field and identify and appraise appropriate case studies. The global context of these living spaces and the factors that drive the need for them will be explored through secondary research and data to build a thorough understanding of current thinking around designing small living spaces and how successful they are. This will identify the key elements that will define the direction of the project.

A more primary and empirical methodology will be employed. Both existing and potential users of small living spaces will be engaged with through interview and observation. Focus or user groups may be formed, and workshops undertaken to clearly understand the needs and desires of users. This information will be used to identify and test best practise in the design of small living spaces. A series of prototype environments will be created. User's behaviour and feedback will be recorded. The testing can utilise both physical and digital environments, virtual or augmented reality may be used as part of this process. 3D making and digital technical resource will be required. Full-scale environments may be required if deemed beneficial and feasible.

The aim is to consolidate and propose best practise for designing small living spaces for the future. This should have a positive impact on the design process of these spaces, the sustainability of them and the well-being of those that occupy them.

Through the initial stage of this research project the following relevant research and case studies have been identified:

Current Research: Kristoffer Thøgersen of the Department of Design at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology has published work on smart solutions for small spaces. His work addresses the fundamental issues that drive the need for small space living.

Current Research: Alice Elizabeth Wilson. A PHD Researcher in the School of Sociology at the University of York researching the Tiny House Movement from a social and cultural perspective.

Current Research and Practise: Dezeen X Mini Living. A collation of projects on how architecture and design can contribute to a brighter urban future.

Current Research: The British Property Federation (BPF) are exploring if compact living can have significant impact on the UK housing crisis.

Current Research: Urbanization. An article by Hannah Ritchie and Max Roser analysing critical statistics in the growth of urban living.

Current Research: Azby Brown, an American Architect and founder of the Tokyo Future Design Institute, is an expert on small scale living having researched and written several books on the subject.

Case Study: The Nakagin Capsule Tower, Tokyo, designed by architect Kisho Kurokawa, completed in 1972. A pioneering scheme for small, modular, prefabricated living.

Case Study: Mountain Refuge, by Massimo Gnocchi and Pablo Danesi. A modular prefabricated cabin house.

Case Study: Hedgehog Housing, Brighton. Self-build sustainable community project.

Case Study: Proposals for modular timber homes in Honduras by Zaha Hadid Architects.

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EXAMPLE | RESEARCH PROPOSAL continued...

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EXAMPLE | RESEARCH PROPOSAL continued...

THEMATIC ANALYSIS

This analysis begins to identify factors within each of the initial project themes.

SPATIAL CHARACTERISTICS	SUSTAINABILITY AND LONGEVITY	PERMANENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Definition of small space living • Micro living, compact living, tiny house • Investigate and review space standards • Building regulations and planning policy • Ergonomics and anthropometrics • Inclusive and universal design principles • Case study analysis of small spaces • Component and furniture based solutions • How do we use our living spaces today? • Spatial and area analysis – optimum size(s) • How much space do we actually need? How consumerism drives the amount of stuff we have. • Spatial psychology – colour, form, mood, materials • User experience – functional with emotional and sensual components • Well-being of occupants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider lifespan of small living spaces • Sustainable construction techniques • Sustainable materials and application of them; Hemp, bioplastics, natural insulation, recycled materials, straw board, FSC timber • Sourcing of materials • Vernacular materials • Honesty and integrity in material choices • Integration of renewable energy sources • Self sufficiency and off grid solutions • New build and refurbishment, benefits and drawbacks • Minimal impact on the environment • Explore passivhaus movement • RIBA Climate Challenge • WELL building standards and BREEM 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home and community. Do we stay rooted or do we move around. What does home mean to us? • Nomadic, people and a stripped-down life • Cultural perceptions of home and how we live • Economic factors that drive housing demand and types of homes • Mobility, flexibility and adaptability. • How can modular solutions create homes that grow with us? • How does planning policy impact diversity of the places and structures we live in?

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THEMATIC VISUAL REFERENCE

SPATIAL CHARACTERISTICS

Well-being / Inclusive / Efficient / Inspiring / Innovative / Texture / Light / Function of Space / Practicality / Simplicity / Effective

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THEMATIC VISUAL REFERENCE

SUSTAINABILITY AND LONGEVITY

Innovative Materials / Honesty / Integrity / Durability / Re-usable / Resourceful / Natural / Lifespan / Off Grid / Self Sufficient

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THEMATIC VISUAL REFERENCE

PERMANENCE

Fixed / Modular / Flexible / Mobile / Adaptable / Nomadic / Innovative / Alternative / Prefabricated / Home / Environmental Impact

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We look forward to hearing from you.



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