Quick guide to working to a brief

In the past we have been hesitant to encourage students to work to a brief, this was largely due to concerns surrounding the levels of independence a student can demonstrate if they are simply given a brief. However there are some great opportunities for students to base their projects on a brief.

If your students identify a broad topic in which they are interested and evaluate the opportunities available to them to complete a project in that area, they may find a brief or a programme such as the Crest Award that helps them to achieve their aims incredibly valuable. Equally, a brief or a programme might be the springboard for their project leading to the identification of a topic, aims and objectives.

Here are some pitfalls and good practice to help you to guide students who might work to a brief:

Suitable:
• You make your students aware of the support and equipment that is potentially available to them, so they can make an informed decision that leads to a viable project. Please encourage your students to consider other sources of support such as employers and local universities.
• Your students take part in a programme or a competition and take this as a starting point for their project.
• Your students seek out a brief.
• The brief is broad enough to allow students to take their own decisions (AO3) and clearly pursue their own independent research.

Unsuitable:
• you or someone else tells your students what topic to study
• your students take part in a programme, eg Crest Award, or an essay writing competition, and retrospectively fit their project to it
• your students are given a brief
• the brief is tightly prescribed and prevents students taking their own decisions (AO3) or undertaking independent research.

Universities tell us how important it is that students are able to undertake their own independent research. Working to a brief, working as an individual member of a team, using an existing data set, or choosing a project according to their own assessment of the support and resources available are no barrier to this. As long as students are able to make their own decisions and pursue their own independent research, then we see no reason to discourage students from seeking out a brief to work to.
For example:

- a student who wants to research particular aspects of advertising might seek out a real client and attempt to create advertising that fulfils the client’s brief whilst applying all the research undertaken into the chosen aspect.
- Or a student very interested in environmental matters may seek out a brief from local nature reserve and undertake practical research into an area of fauna/flora that would be of greatest benefit to the reserve.
- Equally a student could undertake research into website design and then seeks out real a client with very specific needs for whom to design a website.

In each case the planning should include plenty of time for client feedback. The student should also evaluate whether or not the brief has been followed adequately and consider whether or not the client’s needs have been understood in their reflection.