

Design in extraordinary times

BIDA



Webinar 30.07.2020 Interim report #3

Mentoring Designers



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As part of BIDA's ongoing Design in Extraordinary Times webinar series our 30 July event brought together an impressive list of speakers to discuss the important subject of Mentoring Designers. The webinar introduction and each of the guest contributions are also available and [collated on YouTube](#) BIDA Board Director Dr Stephen Green introduced and hosted the event and he provides this summary report below.

Key messages are:

- COVID and remote working have exposed the opportunity for a much needed wide variety of enhanced interactions between industry and the next generation of the profession. The profession needs to work together and with other sectors to reflect society as a whole and the vast range of professional activities with a design ingredient.
- The idea of 'reverse mentoring' highlights the important point that there are benefits for both sides of a mentoring scenario. Also, as Clive Grinyer says: 'Mentoring is not about telling designers how to design' and includes building resilience, confidence and effective communication skills.
- 'The profession is very fractured and needs to come together more' (William Knight). This starts with tackling design in schools which has been demoted in the curriculum and typically not seen as a viable career option despite the UK's world leading strength in the creative industries.
- BIDA will continue to support building mentoring capacity across our profession and welcomes interest in and contributions to our activities.

Stephen's Report

'My day job is Principal Teaching Fellow at Imperial College and I lead the Innovation Design Engineering course in conjunction with the RCA. Therefore, with both 'hats on' I have a strong interest in the future of the next generation of the design profession, especially at this time of unprecedented challenges resulting from the global Coronavirus Pandemic.

We are also all aware of the many issues around the '**cliff edge**' of **graduation** which are heightened as a result of COVID. Just a week ago Dyson announced 900 redundancies, and you can already see many of these newly redundant designers on LinkedIn.

BIDA announced about a year ago, a 'new voice for design' declaration and identified the goal of **Creating a professional support network, by and for young designers. BIDA's interests** are in re-positioning our organisation as 'by and for young designers', the younger generation is highly relevant to the future and therefore BIDA's role as a national network.

In my introduction to the Mentoring Designers event I highlighted that **BIDA can get involved with a number of practical actions to support the topic of Mentoring Designers**

- Report on the mentoring landscape
- Network building: Like today, bringing people together with an altruistic interest in younger designer employability and professional development. Or helping set up local groups of like-minded individuals

- Provide best practice guidance on mentoring (such as portfolio building)

But BIDA's initial aim with the webinar was to open up the discussion and explore a range of views from a diverse set of significant and relevant speakers. I'm very grateful to Clive Grinyer, Kirsty Dias, William Knight, Nicola Westgarth-Flynn, Anna Bernbaum and Michael Hofmann who all generously contributed with thoughtful and insightful contributions.

We also had our largest ever audience for a BIDA webinar – so much so that, unfortunately, a number of people were not able to get onto the link. Apologies for that, and I hope that all those interested can catch up via this summary report and the [video record](#).

I joked that it's a cliché, but true, that our first speaker, **Clive Grinyer**, needed no introduction. But as I mentioned at the time, I am particularly pleased that Clive is now a colleague at the RCA and leading the service design programme into a new era of global impact for design. Clive kicked off by underlining that 'Mentoring is not about telling designers how to design', but about supporting people understanding the context for design and things 'you can't teach'. He also emphasised the importance of helping people have the confidence to be resilient and supporting a transition to Leadership - empowering others to achieve change and innovation. He succinctly summed this up as 'breathing oxygen into the next generation'. Reflecting the altruistic interests of many on the call he name checked the M&C Saatchi backed [Mentoring Black Business](#) initiative he is involved with.

Our next speaker, **Kirsty Dias**, is Managing Director of Priestmangoode, one of a very small number of world leading industrial design consultancies. Kirsty also has many active interests in the future of creative education in the UK through Priestmangoode initiatives working with leading design colleges and her involvement with the Creative Education Trust. Kirsty underlined the value of building networks for younger designers, citing how all the young professionals supported by Priestmangoode over the years become part of that informal network. She also reflected the views of many, of seeing mentoring as a mutual benefit, with benefits of gaining creative insights, fresh understanding of interests and motivations of younger people. At a practical level Kirsty highlighted the obstacles facing young designers such as the cost of living in London and the South East – and how this works against increasing diversity in the profession, the importance of working at schools level – picked up by other speakers, pointing out that the industry can do more to offer opportunities to a wider range of people and that we need to talk more within the profession.

William Knight, the next speaker (William is incredibly well connected in the world of design having been a director of the London Design Festival, 100% design, Clerkenwell Design week and Dubai Design week. As well as having worked at the Design Council and recently established the Design Dialogues network) picked up this theme of stasis (my word) in the profession as a whole, provocatively stating: ‘We’re going through a period when the events and institutions in design are very weak’ and ‘The profession is very fractured and needs to come together more’. William cited [United in Design](#), a mentoring initiative (also tackling diversity issues) in the Interior Design field as a positive example of action. His own [Design Dialogue](#) initiative is exploring the systemic issues in

the profession. Linking with Clive’s point about leadership, William promotes the idea of Design Connectors - people who have the attributes to widely promote design in society as key people to bring about change. It is worth pointing out that these individuals can also be identified amongst recent graduates.

We were very keen that the younger generation of the profession are represented at the webinar. Our next speaker **Nicola Westgarth-Flynn**, impressively set up a successful design consultancy directly from college, and is now at PA consulting in Cambridge as an industrial designer, but also with strong interests in the pipeline for future design professionals including PA’s own mentoring and recruitment activities. Nicola framed her points in relation to her own experiences of attitudes to design within schools and education stating: ‘We need to change how we support younger designers’. Starting at Schools and recognising that design has been devalued and that ‘Design was never viewed as an academic subject’. Unlike William’s view that we are all suffering ‘Zoom fatigue’. Nicola sees that Zoom opens up opportunities and challenges industry to step up to the mark and use the opportunity to easily run projects and group sessions online, to set briefs for students to work on. In our short Q&A session Nicola also mentioned the concept of reverse mentoring – I took this to underline boarder comments from Kirsty and Clive, that mentors have as much to gain as mentees, and that we should avoid the idea that mentoring is about one way knowledge transfer.

Finally we asked two recent alumni from the MEng Design Engineering course at Imperial to talk about their perspectives. First up, **Michael Hofmann** has just graduated this June and fortunately with the good fortune and ability to be starting a position in technology consulting with Deloitte. Michael echoed Nicola's comments on issues with the take up of design in Schools and lack of appreciation of the value of design referencing the significance of the creative industries and key centres for innovation to the UK economy. He also sees the value of live projects and greater opportunities for exposure to industry.

Anna Bernbaum, who graduated a year ago worked at Smart Design in New York and is just starting as an Associate Product Manager at Google in the UK, discussed the student experience of mentoring or interacting with industry. She advocated that mentoring should be more conversational, like a quick comment in the corridor, not a formal set up. Especially now there are less opportunities for informal conversations. She also pointed out that graduates and students are often nervous about reaching out to contact people. She advises that graduates and designers seeking work should use this time effectively – do competitions and work on real briefs – Industry can help with this.

I'd encourage anyone looking at these notes to also check out all the [videos of the event](#), form your own views on the topic and most importantly get involved. In setting up the event I was impressed by the level of genuinely altruistic interest in supporting the next generation, with a number of direct offers to mentor young people. As noted at the beginning, there are a number of actions BIDA can take and we'll follow these up over the coming months. Please get in touch if you would like to get involved.

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