

# The Importance of Arts and Design in post COVID-19 Recovery

7<sup>th</sup> June 2021

## Introduction

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This roundtable was held at what is still a really critical time to come together and mobilise on how to best advise the government, especially as conversations in the UK shift to COVID recovery and the threat of the proposed OfS cuts to arts and design higher education funding. This session was chaired by Barry Sheerman MP.

## Barry Sheerman

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**Barry Sheerman MP** is the Labour and Co-operative Member of Parliament for Huddersfield and served since being first elected in 1979. A former Chair of both the House of Commons Select Committee for Children, Schools and Families and the Education and Skills Committee, he is co-chair of the APDIG and a member of the Design Commission. He is a long-running campaigner for greater use of design thinking in public policy formation.

- We need to learn that design permeates every part of our society, and is therefore something we must take seriously, for instance, the lack of success of poorly manufactured products shows this.
- This is a timely event – we have spent a lot of time opening minds to the diversity of design and bringing design companies together as well as trying to insinuate into every aspect of UK activity the importance of arts and design.
- We have come a long way, but the recent announcement for arts and design education, has come as a tremendous shock to most of us – and shows that the government is absolutely determined to cut back art and design teaching at universities and colleges as well as the number of places they can offer.

## Speaker: Lord Ed Vaizey

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**Lord Vaizey** is a Conservative Member of the House of Lords for Didcot and assumed this position in 2020. Previously to this, Lord Vaizey was a Member of Parliament for Wantage from 2005 to 2019. During his time as an MP, Lord Vaizey served as Minister of State at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills from 2014 to 2016, as well as serving as Parliamentary under Secretary of State for Culture, Communications, and Creative Industries from 2010 to 2014.

- Quality of design of our products is key, good design is about good function. Design can operate anywhere – healthcare, education, town and city planning. Good design can make our lives better and easier and should absolutely be centre stage of policy thinking.
- It has taken years and years to get people to understand the value of the creative industries and the creative economy – to understand we have global architectural practices, global videogame, global

television, fashion, film, and design industries, all of which not only add to our soft power abroad but also make substantial contributions to our economy.

- On the latest proposed cuts to [arts and design higher education funding by the OfS](#), is another downgrading of the importance of arts and design in our higher education curriculum. This is completely bizarre considering the world leading institutions present in the UK such as Kingston University, the Royal College of Arts, and so on. These are world leading institutions and there are students from abroad that are beating down the door to attend, yet we do not seem to invest in them.
- We have completely lost sight of the fact that we have a massive head-start on many other economies around the world, all of whom want our insight and expertise in this area. For instance, during the GREAT campaign, we turned to the creative and cultural industries to personify modern go-ahead economically successful Britain, yet we never seem to translate that into proper solid policy that gives a substantial foundation going forward to these important industries – the number for which would be a rounding error within the overall government budget.

## Speaker: Sarah Munro

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**Sarah Munro** is the chair for the Contemporary Visual Art Network (CVAN), a sector support and advocacy organisation working regionally and nationally. She was also appointed as Director of BALTIC in 2015, an organisation that aims to create greater understanding of the world through experimental and inspiring contemporary art which has power and meaning for individuals and communities.

- Arts and Design graduates in the UK [contribute £8.4 billion to the UK economy](#). The economy is critical here, as the sector clearly [contributed £111 billion](#). This is a significant amount from small to mid, to some larger scale organisations.
- One of the key things that people started doing in the first lockdown to help with their mental health was creative work, this is a massive public health emergency. Arts and creativity are absolutely critical as a holistic sense of who we are. Art and culture is fundamental to who we are as humans, how we make sense of the world around us, it is how we share and connect with others.
- The educational process involved in the arts and creative thinking involves trying out ideas to learn and requires resilience in the face of heavy criticism asking them to rethink and rebuild their ideas. Graduates will benefit from this resilience when they start working in any sector.
- The challenge is the strategic downgrading, as seen with the proposed OfS cuts. With 30 years of experience here, I have witnessed the transformation of lives, businesses, and communities because of their access to creativity. The £111 a billion industry relies on the talent pipeline.
- The other thing that is so critical going forward is to diversify our thinking and understanding of this area, for instance many of our problems in IT have come from a very particular type of white, fairly affluent educated males who have been doing the coding. Art subjects generally have a much higher number for interest from people with disabilities and from diverse backgrounds.
- Understanding how to create a society where the world around people with disabilities supports them in functioning and contributing is key, to remove the arts, for that group alone, feels that we are reducing down our opportunities.
- There is not a single private school in this country that is not increasing its investment in the creative subjects, because it understands how profoundly impactful it can be on the future opportunities and choices of young people. We have the responsibility to ensure that young people are also getting that education in our local authority schools.
- The arts is the most critical instrument the government should have right now in its levelling up agenda, we just need to find more ways to influence government on this issue.

## Speaker: Steven Spier

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**Professor Steven Spier** is the Vice-Chancellor of Kingston University. Steven joined Kingston University in 2012 as the Dean of the Faculty of Art, Design, and Architecture, which he then led to becoming one of the top providers of design education in the UK.

- The alarm bells went off loud and clear when the secretary for state said that education for the creative industry was ‘not strategically important’ in justifying the OfS funding cuts to higher education. This is a worrying signal that was inconsistent with the claims of BEIS and DCMS.
- Being academics, we did a literature review, and found a voluminous amount of literature on the value of the creative industries on the economy. However, this attempt at showing the value of the creative industries was not getting through, so this time took a tactical approach that looks at skills. To use the government’s own language on them, we asked, what are the skills that enable Britain to be globally competitive as Brexit really settles in and we come out of the global pandemic?
- Built a report, [Future Skills League Table 2021](#), based on conversations with businesses, we asked non-creative industries what the biggest challenges they are facing over the next 10-20 years. This yielded the following results: 56% answered competition from emerging economies; 45% answered tackling climate change; 42% answered attracting and retaining talent; 39% answered for the need to increase productivity.
- Then we asked what skills are needed to tackle these major challenges through YouGov, who went out to over 2000 businesses to ask them that question, and they found that across micro businesses, global business and business across varying sectors, problem solving, a design skill, came out on top at 77%. Other skills included a mix of logical, social, creative, intuitive and analytical thinking skills – forming a portfolio of ‘Skills for Innovation’. These skills are taught in universities, as more than half of creative students study here, and not just specialist institutions.
- This report not only uses this data, but also case studies – such as the case study from Deloitte, which hired a team of creatives to put in with their team of consultants in order to be better as consultants, and one from Kingston University where young people were given seed money and are now developing sustainable products as well as starting up their own businesses.
- This report is making the case for one thing: that the government needs to join up and deliver these skills for industry, and this is linked to the government’s plan for growth and levelling up agenda. We have to approach this issue in a tactical way, as the government is not currently hearing what we are saying.

## Discussion

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- Design is populated by small businesses, individuals, and specialists across the sector, there are very few ‘big’ design companies. This has had an impact on their ability to survive in the past year and they have been hard hit. The ‘big’ companies are those that are able to lobby most easily. There are many big companies that contain arts and design graduates who may have a stake here.
- Understanding fundamental skills in creative practice is key, but it is also important to rethink and understand what employers and the business community need and how young graduates are going to find ways into meaningful careers. Particularly with what lies ahead as we recover from the pandemic and issues with sustainability, it is our young people and students that will help us solve these.

- There are instances, for instance the Government digital services, one of the most revolutionary and impactful design teams that we have ever had, that do not realise that there is a design revolution happening under their noses. There are so many people using design and they should be rooting for it.
- As arts have been removed from schools, a significant amount of this being picked up and flourish under organisations such as Artsmark and BALTIC matching increasing demand, both for children in accredited arts programs and teacher training for artists. It may be more creative thinking is required about putting resources into galleries to do more of this work. Galleries provide an excellent link into artists and their work, as well as the skills, expertise, and pedagogical practice. Those schools linked in with a cultural organisation are finding a huge demand from their young people to take part in these activities.
- Art schools are not just about traditional ways of making art, but the future of art and technology, linked with medicine and health, wellbeing and much more. This change, this cut – levelling down – is chopping off the head when attempts for improvements are made. Now, the STEM subjects will be invested in over the arts. This is not a competition arts and STEM have always been interdisciplinary. It is how we work together in this ecosystem of schools and educational institutions that is key.
- The treasury understand economic, social and wellbeing value of the sector, but they are making an economic decision. The growth of this economy comes from education, and then an artist may spend 10-15 years making work with no income generation from it, the failure to understand that this comes later has devastating effects. Perhaps one way of tackling this is through reaching out to further stakeholders, for instance members of the financial services advocating for the importance of design.

## About APDIG

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The All-Party Parliamentary Design and Innovation Group (APDIG) is a cross-party coalition of Parliamentarians as well as art and design sector organisations that work to: critique existing government decision-making, help the sector better engage with the policy process, and develop new policy ideas that improve the sector.

## About Policy Connect

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Policy Connect is a membership based, cross-party think tank with four main policy pillars; Education and Skills; Industry, Technology & Innovation; Sustainability and Health & Accessibility. We bring together parliamentarians and government in collaboration with academia, business and civil society to inform, influence and improve UK public policy through debate, research and innovative thinking, so as to improve peoples' lives.

We specialise in supporting parliamentary groups, forums and commissions for which Policy Connect provides the secretariat and delivers impactful policy research and events programmes. Our collaboration with parliamentarians through these groups allows us to influence public policy in Westminster and Whitehall. We are a social enterprise and are funded by a combination of regular membership subscriptions and time limited sponsorships. We are proud to be a Disability Confident, London Living Wage employer and a member of Social Enterprise UK.

## Contact Details

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