

Coronavirus and the Challenges for the Design Sector

APDIG Webinar

14:00 – 16:00 – Wednesday 15th April 2020

Attendees

Name	Position	Organisation
Dids Macdonald	Chief Executive	Anti-Copying in Design
Sandra Booth	Director of Policy and External Relations	CHEAD
Anna Maloney	Director of Membership and Operations	CHEAD
Annie Warburton	Chief Executive	Cockpit Arts
Julia Bennett	Head of Research and Policy	Crafts Council
Leila Al-Kazwini	Head of Creative Services	Department for International Trade
Deborah Dawton	Chief Executive	Design Business Association
Sally Lukins	Strategy and Business Director	Design Business Association
Cat Drew	Chief Design Officer	Design Council
Ambreen Shah	Director of Policy, Research and Communications	Design Council
Dan Sibert	Senior Partner	Foster and Partners
Fiona Warner	Senior Policy Officer	Intellectual Property Office
Martyn Evans	Professor of Design	Manchester Metropolitan University
Jack Tindale	Policy Manager – Design and Innovation	Policy Connect
Ha Smith	Head of Enterprise and Innovation	Ravensbourne
Sarah Bevan	Project Manager	Royal Society of the Arts
Nat Ortiz	Senior Designer	Royal Society of the Arts
Jack Hazeldine	Junior Account Executive	TDC PR
Jocelyn Bailey	Post-Doctoral Research Fellow	University of the Arts London
Adrian Friedli	Programme Director	Yorkshire & Humber Visual Arts Network

Minutes

The webinar began at 2pm.

Julia Bennett opened the webinar by highlighting some of the key issues facing the Crafts Council and the wider craft sector – including the pressures on supply chain, gallery openings, and access to finance from government furlough schemes.

She then invited the participants to introduce themselves.

Jack Tindale of Policy Connect highlighted the ongoing advocacy work of the APDIG and the rest of the public policy teams. He noted a letter was circulated to the Chancellor by Barry Sheerman MP to highlight the immediate steps required by HM Treasury to support the design sector, as well as further co-ordination with other advocacy groups such as the Creative Industries Federation.

Deborah Dawton opened her contribution on behalf of the Design Business Association (DBA). She made it clear that the complexities of the wider design sector made it challenging to adopt a one-size fits all approach to the design sector. She noted that many businesses had been quick to adapt to the sudden shift in circumstances – nothing that the majority of DBA members had been able to adapt to working from home rather than the studio. Although some disruption had naturally taken place as a result of the need to provide machinery and plant-based work. However, the majority of these workers were able to adapt to social distancing within other appropriate measures.

Ms Dawton said that was the firms working in the essential sectors, such as food and healthcare, had responded well to the challenges posed by COVID-19. However, non-essential sectors, not least the built environment, had been much more seriously affected. Those businesses that were already well resourced had struggled as well.

She said that was that government support and the introduction of the furloughing scheme had been essential to help firms adapt to the shift. The DBA had helped to assist a number of businesses in adapting to the change in circumstances. A key pressure for industry was access to funding and the likes of the worker detainment scheme. Not being able to access cash until the end of May would be a major problem for many firms.

A fourth issue is supply costs and rents. Ms Dawton noted that a lack of direct action on rent had affected businesses, and added that many utility firms were struggling to provide clear instructions with regard to the payment of bills.

Student engagement a further cause for concern, where she noted that many firms would need to realise how to cope with the pressures of meeting recruitment and graduate students over the coming years, especially with meeting the expected gap in for three-year experience many firms require for new recruits within the industry. She said that this would feed into the need for relationship building and business development.

The DBA was also investigating how firms and membership organisations could respond to the wider public relations situation. The DBA had been leading on a range of webinars and consultations to help firms respond to crisis-management, as well as wider issues like working from home and financial management.

Finally, she noted that the DBA was in regular contact with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, and other bodies in Whitehall to help feedback concerns between industry and Government. She highlighted one of these key issues being the need to clarify the support and furlough opportunities available to members of staff on Tier Two visas.

In response to a question from Martyn Evans on differences between different design disciplines to maintain continuity and business development. Ms Dawton said that firms needed to ensure that rapid decisions, such as Dyson responding and repurposing factories to make ventilators, did not need to be made in haste unless they were

confident in being able to respond to changes in demands. She nevertheless added that many firms had been able to support such calls for action.

Cat Drew of the Design Council spoke next. She added that the Design Council had also been able to respond rapidly to online working and engagement, but said that the greatest challenge was associated with adapting to user experiences – as many designers require in-person contact. However, she said that many firms had adapted to these changes rapidly, with some interesting innovations taking place along the way.

Design was also effective in responding and visualising changes and helping to assist in the post-design recovery. Ms Drew noted that Design Council had also helped to spearhead the post-war economic and social recovery after 1945, and that this was a historic view to take for the design and the creative industries as a whole. Other actions, like adapting the built environment to facilitate social distancing, walking and accommodating the homeless in hotels, were all cases of showing innovation and the power of design to help develop resilience and engagement.

The Design Council's new strategy was based around helping to use design to reduce inequalities, improve health and wellbeing, and promote sustainability. Design for Recovery is based around several concepts.

First; 'Designing Deeply' – in a post-COVID world, many of the current challenges facing society will remain and have been exacerbated. The need to respond to areas like supporting the high-street, combating domestic violence and reducing inequalities, have all seen a spike in interest as a result of the current crisis.

Second; 'Designing Disruptively' – based around the idea to think radically and to challenge perceptions as much as possible. Concepts like UBI are now being seriously considered for the first time by many policy makers.

Third; 'Designing Collaboratively' – the need to meet systemic challenges by working across sectors, communities and countries. Responding to a shortage of PPE by encouraging people to make their own equipment at home, is a clear example of this.

Finally; 'Designing Democratically' – helping communities to increase their own responses to design and the need to consider design as a 'mind-set'.

Dids Macdonald of Anti-Copying in Design (ACID) opened by noting her other role as Master of The Furniture Makers' Company and the work that they and other City Livery Companies were doing to support individuals in a charitable sense, as well as supporting businesses with loans and other areas with financial support. She added that many companies were also working to provide support such as providing the NHS with beds and mattresses, as well as giving 3D printers to other organisations to use in an effective manner. The sector was also providing a 'Buddy' system to help support businesses and to provide and share support and pool resources.

The IP network had seen a massive increase in the number of designers bringing forward designs. She said that this was down to two reasons. Firstly, people having more time to work from home and develop new ideas, the second was down to housekeeping with the additional time available to them.

Ms Macdonald noted that there had been a regrettable increase in the number of fraudulent IP cases and the long term pressures associated with the recognition of IP rights after Britain leaves the transition period with the EU. She flagged the long-term risk of Artist Resale Rights as also presenting a risk to the wider networks and the ability for creative individuals to have work protected. She reiterated the DBA's point about pressures facing membership organisations and ensuring that such areas needed to be protected.

Julia Bennett opened the webinar for wider discussions and contributions from the floor.

Sandra Booth of the Council of Higher Education in Art and Design (CHEAD) noted the main pressures facing the creative higher education sector. The key risk was the expected decline in international student numbers in the new academic year, as well as the loss of tactile and face-to-face teaching and development for students and teachers. She said that CHEAD had been working hard to bring institutions together and to pool ideas and collaborate on responding to long-term challenges for the sector.

Dan Sibert of Foster and Partners spoke about the perspectives of the architectural and built-environment sector. He noted that as a highly international business, F+P had been able to respond to changes taking place as a result of COVID-19 as a result of their positions in China and Far East. Although a number of commissions and projects had been delayed or cancelled, there was also a level of continuity as well. He said that one of the real risks for the future was the expected bottleneck in projects expected in six months' time, as well as recovering from the inevitable economic recession. He reiterated the challenges also facing students and recently architecture graduates. As a positive outcome, he noted that Foster and Partners had been able to respond to wider calls for action for 3D printers and laser technology, and had helped to develop a printed protective visor for healthcare professionals. A key role for designers was being able to respond quickly to circumstances and to think of creative responses to unprecedented circumstances.

Martyn Evans of Manchester Metropolitan University made two points. He said that the impact of the current crisis on the 'Class of 2020' would be a major one. All universities were cancelling their end of year shows, depriving many students of their traditional graduation experiences and the entry into the wider job market. Universities were responding to the shift as best as possible, but it would likely to have an impact. He also questioned the long-term sustainability of design responding to the PPE-crisis, but that it was positive for these to be met in other ways.

Ha Smith of Ravensbourne reiterated the points made by Martyn Evans, adding that her institution was trailing a range of activities in areas such as digital design and developments such as online shows. She said that student welfare was a vital area for the higher education sector to look into, ensuring that students working from home were keeping people informed online and organising social events.

Adrian Friedli referred to APDIG and the Contemporary Visual Arts Network's (CVAN) on-going research into *Visual Arts as a Global Force* and the role of the visual arts in helping to drive the UK's post-COVID recovery. He noted that CVAN was doing a range of responses to the challenges facing freelancers and individual artists, especially with regard to gallery space and exhibitions, as well as cancelled and delayed commissions. A pilot scheme in the North of England into helping to develop and expanding the Museum and Gallery Exhibition Tax Relief Scheme was continuing, and would be best placed to ensure that organisations were able to respond to the future development.

Leila Al-Kazwini of the Department for International Trade (DIT) said that Government was keen to ensure that the supply chain and export of design and artistic outputs would continue. She noted that the Department was looking to the future to ensure that the sector could respond to export opportunities as the global markets slowly re-open. The DIT's traditional approach to showcasing the UK via fairs and exhibitions would have to adapt to the change in circumstances, but she encouraged all APDIG members to respond to calls for new and innovative ways of engaging with new markets

Fiona Warner of the Intellectual Property Office (IPO) reiterated the DIT calls for engagement with the sector and to keep close links between government and industry. She said that the Office would continue to develop work on areas such as design rights moving into the post-Brexit economy.

Jack Hazeldine of TDC PR said that he was keen to highlight innovative responses by designers to the on-going crisis, noting one set of circumstances by one firm in developing hand-sanitiser fountains.

Dids Macdonald of ACID said that there disparity between design rights between various countries would be an essential part of engagement with the sector and government in the post-COVID landscape. Promoting effective discussions about trade and development would be a key policy for the sector to look in the future, as well as creating a new design landscape.

In closing, Jack Tindale reaffirmed the work of the APDIG in the coming months, including the letter to the Chancellor regarding immediate support for the design sector, as well as a longer term body of work aimed an engaging the wider community in areas such as trade, innovation in healthcare and manufacturing, and international education.

The webinar closed at 15:30.