

THE MAKING OF A DESIGNER From Curiosity to Career

**Talent Exists Everywhere.
Opportunity Doesn't.
PriestmanGoode Presents:
"The Making of a Designer"**

"The Making of a Designer: From Curiosity to Career"
brought together around 60 students, teachers,
designers and industry peers to explore how we
can create clearer pathways into creative careers.

London, 06 October 2026 – Every designer starts somewhere. For some it's a teacher who spots their potential, a workshop, a studio visit, the first time they make something real. For others, that moment never comes. Even when it does, the route from that first spark to the next step is rarely clear.

That gap is what PriestmanGoode set out to explore in *The Making of a Designer: From Curiosity to Career*, an exhibition and event held at its studio on Friday 18 September. Around 60 students, teachers, educators, designers and organisations from across creative education came together to ask how the industry can build more connected pathways for young people to discover creativity, develop their skills and start their career.

What happens when young people get the chance

This year, 15 students spent a week each in the studio over six weeks, alongside two teachers on the Teachers in Residence programme, organised with the D&T Association. Students and teachers alike worked on a live brief: to imagine how people might move through Manchester in the years ahead, shaped by a future scenario. Drawing on expertise from across the studio, each developed their own solution through research, sketching, modelling and prototyping.

The scenarios varied, but the process was the same: understand a problem, think about people, explore possibilities, make something tangible. That is what turns work experience from a line on a CV into a real sense of what a creative career involves.

Why access matters

That way of working is in demand well beyond design studios. The Design Council's *Design Economy 2026* found that the UK design economy generated £136.7 billion in GVA in 2023, 5.5% of the UK total, and employed more than 2.27 million people in 2025. Growth is fastest outside the traditional design industries. Employment of designers in other sectors rose 20% between 2020 and 2025, against 6% inside design industries, as healthcare, finance, energy and the public sector bring design in-house. The skills behind that growth are the ones the future of work will demand.



The skills behind that growth are the ones the future of work will demand. *The Skills Imperative 2035*, a five-year research programme led by the *National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER)*, names six Essential Employment Skills: communication; collaboration; information literacy; organising, planning and prioritising; problem solving and decision making; and creative thinking. It estimates that 3.7 million workers in England already have substantial deficiencies in them, rising to around seven million by 2035 without action. Designers practise these skills every day.

Yet the way into the industry is narrowing. The Design Council reports 68% fewer students taking design and technology GCSEs over the decade to 2024, and calls it an urgent question for the industry.

Discover, Develop, Launch

At the centre of the exhibition is a simple framework of three connected stages. *Discover* creates access, sparks curiosity and reveals possibility. *Develop* builds confidence and skills through doing. *Launch* opens pathways, supports progression and creates lasting connections.

PriestmanGoode works across all three. It has delivered National Saturday Club masterclasses for over a decade. It runs live briefs with Central Saint Martins, Nottingham Trent University, the Royal College of Art and Kookmin University in Seoul. It also offers work experience, placement-year and live-brief internships, mentoring and ongoing professional development. The exhibition draws on partnerships with the Design Council, the Design & Technology Association, National Saturday Club, the Design Business Association, New Designers and GreenGrads.

Hosting work experience isn't always easy, particularly for small businesses, which make up the majority of design consultancies in the UK. One of the objectives of the framework is to demonstrate that there are many ways to take part, from a talk at a school or university, an offer of mentorship, right through to hosting students for work experience. All opportunities are equally valuable, and one action can lead to another. The independent *Young People and Work* review, makes the same case, arguing that work experience needs broadening and that volunteering, projects, mock interviews and taster sessions can have the biggest impact. By simply mapping the activity that exists already and communicating that, we would be widening access to the opportunities without even trying. What matters is that the industry makes clear what it is already doing, and makes those experiences meaningful.

Curiosity is there. The map isn't.

The exhibition is designed to listen as well as show. An interactive board invited guests to add a card: a moment that shaped them, a skill they bring, or a way they support the next generation.

The cards told a remarkably consistent story. Almost every one described a person: a sister who introduced them to product design, a parent or teacher who encouraged a creative path, a tutor who helped them change direction, a first National Saturday Club masterclass that drew a room

of young people out of their shells. Small moments, and they mattered.

What the cards rarely mentioned was guidance. Few pointed to clear, official information from schools, exam boards or careers services about what creative education can lead to, or how to get there. For most, finding the way in came down to luck: the right teacher, a relative in the industry, a workshop at the right moment. The *Young People and Work* review points to the same gap. It finds that work experience is too often an afterthought in schools, with students frequently left to find their own placements, so those without the right connections are the ones who miss out.

The interest is there. The map isn't.

From exhibition to what comes next

There is already a great deal of good work happening across schools, universities, charities and studios. It just isn't easy to see. So rather than launching another standalone programme, PriestmanGoode wants to help make what exists more visible, so that schools can find studios, studios can find schools, and every experience points clearly to the next one.

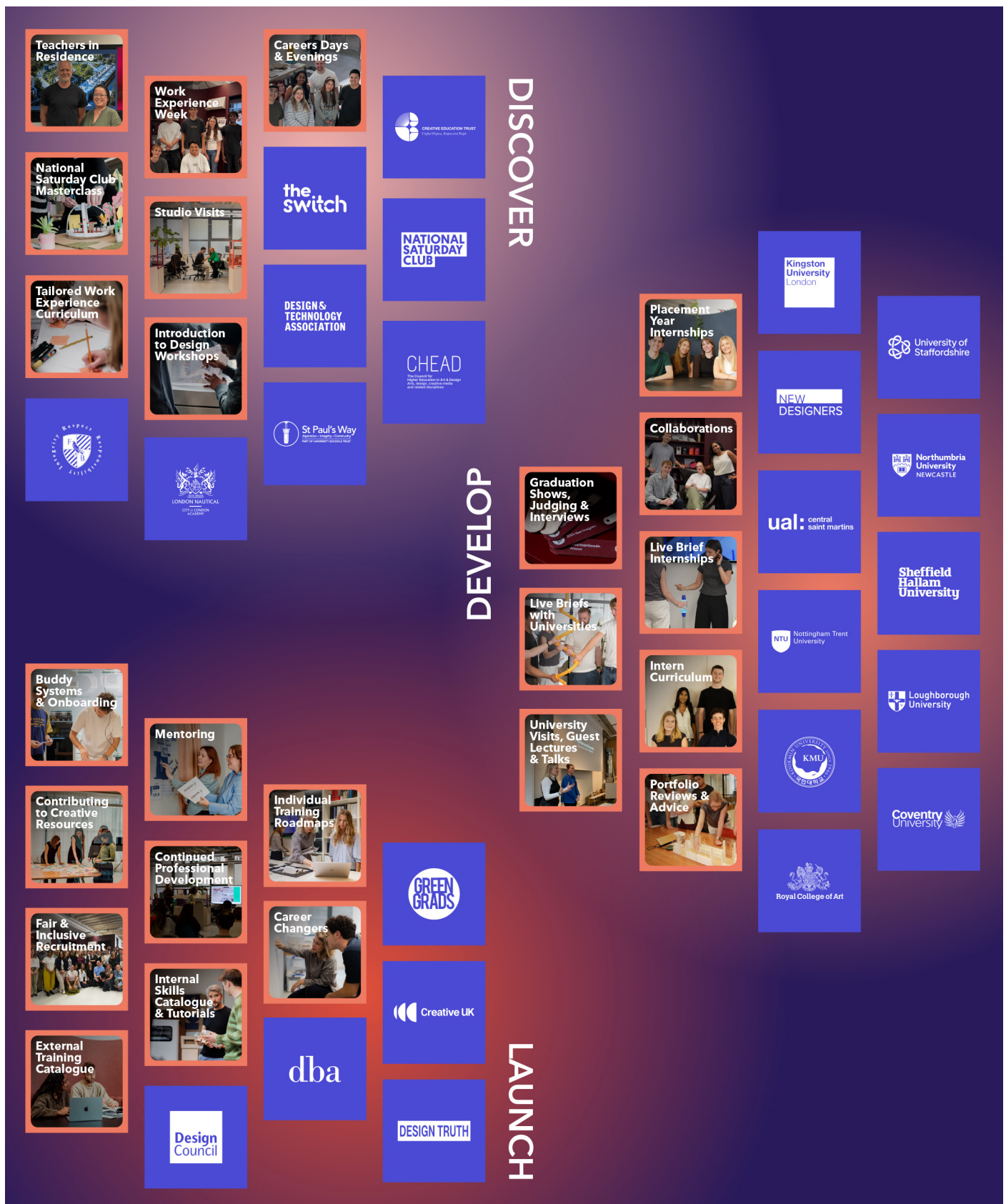
The exhibition is built to travel. Its framework and materials can be shared in other settings, adding new voices as they go.

"There is already so much good work happening in creative education, but it often exists separately. For a young person, knowing that a creative career is possible is one thing. Knowing how to get there is another. We want to help make those pathways visible, and keep learning from the people already doing this work."

Kirsty Dias, Managing Director, PriestmanGoode

Getting into the creative industries rarely comes from one opportunity. It comes from a series of moments: someone opening a door, a chance to try, the confidence that comes from doing, and an opening that leads to the next. The challenge is to make more of those moments possible.





PriestmanGoode's Creative Education Framework. The Journey of Curiosity to Career. Three Connected Stages.

DISCOVER

Create access. Spark curiosity. Reveal possibility

DEVELOP

Build confidence. Develop skills. Learn through doing

LAUNCH

Open pathways. Support progression. Create lasting connection





NOTES TO EDITORS

About PriestmanGoode

PriestmanGoode is a multidisciplinary design consultancy dedicated to a world elevated by responsible, high-impact design. As a 100% employee-owned company, we operate as an integrated design engine across transport, product and branding design, turning visionary ideas into tangible, world-class realities that are used by millions of people every year.

In the rail sector, our expertise spans the entire spectrum of global mobility. We have created passenger experiences for the full diversity of rail vehicles; from light rail, trams, and metros to high-speed, Very High Speed (VHS), and Maglev technologies. Our work is at the cutting edge of the industry; we consistently deliver 'First of a Kind' seating and flexible carriage solutions for major innovation competitions, defining the future of the onboard experience for partners including Transport for London (NTfL), ÖBB, VIA Rail, Brightline, CRRC Sifang, and Amtrak.

At our core, we design for people, from the daily commuter to the maintenance crew. We believe great design must be simple, elegant, and intuitive. This focus on the human experience is a balance. We create bespoke solutions that speed up the design process and de-risk innovation, ensuring that even the most ambitious concepts are grounded in technical excellence, and delivered on time and to budget.

Steeped in a tradition of great design but driven by an ambitious future, PriestmanGoode bridges the gap between the physical and digital, the visionary and the practical, to create a world elevated by design.

PriestmanGoode.

www.PriestmanGoode.com

High-resolution images of are available for download [here](#). Credit: PriestmanGoode.

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