



werkhouse

Industry-led design learning



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Independent Creative
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Managing Director,
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Mark Dearman
Creative Director,
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Werkhouse – an idea that took shape

Like many other professions, the design industry is changing rapidly and is highly competitive. Portfolios of work have to be exceptional and stand-out, but there are other sides to studio life that are just as important for winning work.

Getting experience of dealing with short deadlines, unclear expectations and the fast pace of team working (not just with other designers, but with client teams and account managers) can be difficult to achieve in a university environment. But the consequences are that many young designers face quite a shock when they try to enter the industry. Too many graduates do not have a grasp of what it's like to work in a commercial studio – the pace, the way real projects get managed and the need for negotiation with clients.

It is in this context that a small group of design professionals from Bristol and Bath got together to deliberate, but with a view to do something about it – Werkhouse was born.

Our first step was to create a weekend workshop to explore our assumptions. With this document, we share the experience and our learning from that event. From here, we are exploring next steps to adapt and develop what was achieved.

32 young creatives,
18 design professionals,
1 weekend...

Werkhouse 1.0

Bristol, June 2017

A weekend workshop, in a commercial studio, with some of Bristol and Bath's most respected design industry professionals. Creative directors, strategists, designers and account managers took students and recent graduates on a deep dive into the creative and interpersonal skills needed to succeed in a design studio. They revealed how they rapidly develop concepts for clients and sell the impact of ideas. All done within a project scenario, five teams and some realistic time pressure.

This was not a design competition or a portfolio review. It was about being better prepared for the business of design. Creative thinking, design process, team working and exceeding client expectations – which are needed in all design studios.



The weekend structure

The Werkhouse weekend

Werkhouse is neither a test of technical nor executional skills in a specific design discipline. Werkhouse is about the business of design and always remembering the importance of the customer perspective, while focusing on what the client needs to achieve.

- Doing the research, challenging a brief, collaborating with account managers and creating multiple ideas.
- Working together to make informed decisions and develop propositions.
- Getting a design idea through – selling the potential, telling the story, convincing your audience.

The delivery expectations

Participants work in teams, each led by a designer. Senior professionals rotate throughout to provide their input and ensure that all participants get time with everybody involved. Day 1 is about exploring the client situation and generating ideas within teams.

Day 2 is about filtering, visualising and then sharing team ideas with the whole group.

Participants share ideas, process and thinking. They do not create finished designs or make formal pitches. The expectation is that everyone contributes and collaborates, shares ideas and listens to others. Ask lots of questions, feel free to challenge, learn from each other and have fun.



Team leaders & specialists



Carl Godfrey
Mytton Williams



David Gordon
Hello



Matt Tuffin
Specialist



Ollie Ware
True Digital



Dan Hardaker
Proctor + Stevenson



Ed Robin
Mytton Williams



Sam Edwards
Taxi Studio



Sam Rowe
Illustrator



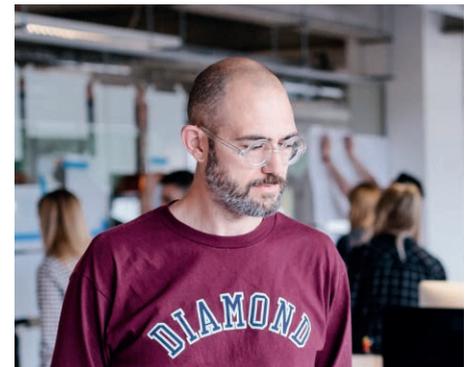
Emma Hopton
Taxi Studio



James Caig
True Digital



Sophie Mackenzie
Proctor + Stevenson



Tim Ward
Prophecy Unlimited



Participants

Adrianna Bilas
Aimee Harpur
Alice Penner
Allie Couch
Baibin Downey-Orr
Cai Burton
Christopher Makin

Eleanor Rathbone
Erik Aremyr
Felicity Burfoot
Gayatri Bhudia
Harry Wyld
Holly Broome
Inita Drava

Jordan Pledge
Joshua Thorley
Katie Fisher
Kesia Hemming
Kirsty Dalton
Laura Martin
Laura Martins

Lui Jia Yin
Louise Russell
Maria Centola
Matthew Pick
Nicholas Darby
Pip Burrows
Rosie Grant

Sam Miller
Scarlet Victoria Roberts
Stephanie Brennan
Zoe Browning

What happened?



Introductions
Who are we?
Why are we here?
Where are the bacon sandwiches?

Briefing
Time for the real work to begin, and get the low down from the account manager.



Ideas
Embrace the brief, work through the creative process, do your research.

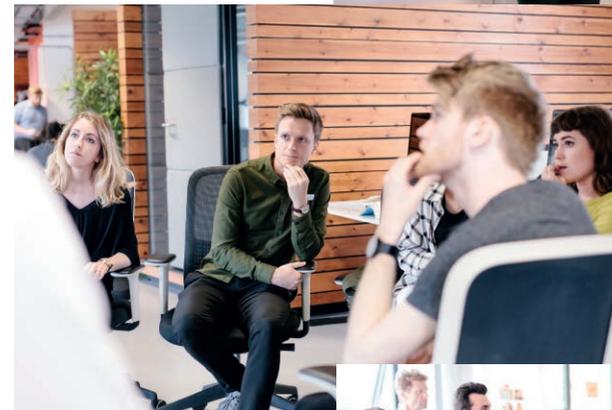


Concept
Time to filter, focus and concentrate on a winning idea.



Prep for presentation
Distil a day's worth of work into a few minutes of talking.

Present to account manager
Real pressure, a real audience and some fantastic concepts.



Feedback
What would 'the client' think? How could the concepts be improved?

Feedback
What did everyone think of Werkhouse? How can we do better next time?



What people said



James Caig @jamescaig
Genuinely impressed at the ideas generated by [@WerkhouseBRS](#) teams. Privileged to play a role of brief owner. Well done all involved.



Allie @allie_design
THE most amazing first day on the [#werkhouseBRS](#) weekend. So thankful for industry professionals giving their weekends to help us grow



Emma Blackburn @TheRealEmmaB
So impressed with the hard work & creative thinking of our [@WerkhouseBRS](#) cohort today. Can't wait to see their fleshed-out ideas tomorrow



Katie @ktfisherdesigns
Thank you to all the amazing creatives who gave up their time to make [@WerkhouseBRS](#) happen! What an amazing weekend, didn't want it to end!



Jordan Pledge @_JordanPledge
Genuinely quite sad to see [#werkhouseBRS](#) come to an end, so many fantastic ideas that it's a shame to have to leave them behind.



Aimee Harpur @Aimee_Scarlett
Day one complete! Creative juices are fully flowing. It's brilliant to be surrounded by such talent and creative minds [#werkhouseBRS](#)



Ben @BenSteers
Great to see/hear so much positivity coming out of the [@WerkhouseBRS](#) weekender. A really great initiative for young designers



Rosie Grant @rosiejgrant
Such an amazing weekend with an incredibly talented bunch of people [@WerkhouseBRS](#)! Thank you again to [@taxistudio](#) & everyone who hosted!!!



Sam Rowe @_samdraws
More about [@WerkhouseBRS](#) – what a weekend. Total privilege to be involved and see all those killer ideas come together. [#talentedbunch](#)



Kate Lenton @tannerrrr
32 talented young things, 2 days, 1 brief. So proud to be part of this great initiative [@WerkhouseBRS](#)



Joshua Thorley @JoshuaThorley
I'm still astounded by how good [#WerkhouseBRS](#) was this weekend. Thank you so much for the time, effort and knowledge you gifted. Invaluable.



Fizz Burfoot @FizzlesBurfoot
Brilliant first day at [@WerkhouseBRS](#) met some lovely people and learnt so much, all in the awesome setting of [@taxistudio](#) [#werkhouseBRS](#)



Our learning: design education

An important part of the Werkhouse weekend was an open conversation about design training. The group shared and compared the experiences they had at a variety of university courses across the UK, as well as overseas. And some explained how they had found a self-taught route to a design career.

A clear message was that university design courses vary. Some are excellent, and students revealed just how much they had learnt, and how much experience they had been able to gain. Others raised issues about unmet expectations or a lack of facilities or industry connections.

There was a sense that design courses carry a message of 'the grade is not the focus'. Instead, developing a portfolio and adding the 'extras', such as work experience, collaborative projects or working on real briefs, is said to be more valued by the industry. But the situation also seems to reflect that the assessment process is not suited, and sometimes even prohibits, the ability to award marks for team projects, work experience or extra curricula effort.

Given that all courses are priced at similar rates, it was also felt that it can be hard to choose or know exactly what to expect. Website information can be vague and some felt they had 'gone in blind'.

The true cost of courses was also highlighted, as it was felt to be hidden or not communicated clearly. 'We never see or touch the course fees, it's like they don't exist. And then you start to pay them when you have a job and you go WOW, that's a big investment.' Would they have felt differently if they been asked to sign a cheque for £27,000 before starting? 'Yes' one Werkhouse participant said, 'if the cost had been clearer, I would have thought about it more'.

But Werkhouse didn't set out to criticise courses. Everyone involved appreciates that resources are tight and expectations can be too high. Universities can't provide everything. They are not there to spoon-feed. And they cannot guarantee anyone a job – it's competitive out there!



What any of us gain from a learning experience is proportional to the effort and commitment we put in. We need to recognise opportunities and step forward to take them. As one participant put it 'It was only after I left university, and got a job, that I realised just how much I had been taught and how relevant it had been. In hindsight, I wish I had taken more advantage of the resources that were available.'

If you are thinking about a degree course in design, here are some attributes that we felt make a good course (regardless of the specific design discipline) and some questions to ask before you decide:

Studio space:

Where will you work and what is the set-up like? Are working spaces designed as 'studios' to encourage shared and open working? Will you get your own dedicated space?

Attendance:

Are you expected to attend every day? Will your colleagues have similar expectations, so you have a shared working experience? Do people disperse when working on projects and only come together at review points?

Review time:

Will tutors be available every day for assistance and motivation, or only at certain times? Will you get the chance to critique the work of your fellow students? How often will peer reviews occur – daily, weekly, monthly?

Work experience:

Will the course involve work experience? Will you be expected to find your own design industry connections and placements or will you be helped with contacts, introductions and supervision?

Facilities:

What other facilities are available and how easy are they to book? Will you be given training for equipment or software, or will you be expected to take advantage of online tutorials and be self-sufficient?

Live projects:

Will the course involve live projects? If so, is there a focus on certain types of clients – small businesses, corporate companies, charities, the public sector or even cross-sector situations? Does the university have existing good relationships with the professional world?

Co-working:

Will you get the chance to work across subjects? What about access to students in other departments? Will you work with others learning the sciences, business studies or other non-design topics?

Client management:

Will the course cover the commercial side of working? Whether planning and pricing your time as an aspiring freelancer, selling ideas, or knowing how to discuss 'return on investment', will there be some grounding in the financial realities of working?

Implementation vs ideas creation:

Design projects all involve a mix of early-stage creative thinking, refining and then execution. Does a course put more emphasis on one aspect more than another? Do you have expectations about learning tangible skills or methods of thinking?

Our learning: design professionals

When the professionals involved in Werkhouse came together, it was on the basis that too many of us had met graduates that seemed ill-prepared for working studio life. In the UK, the majority of design agencies employ less than 20 full-time staff. While they need fresh new talent, they can't afford to take on staff that require a substantial level of additional support before they can fulfil their own junior role.

So, we entered into Werkhouse thinking we would be enlightening the participants with our knowledge, but it quickly developed into a shared learning experience. In the end, we're not sure whose eyes were opened more. Everyone agreed that the professional development opportunity of working together, and facilitating groups of young designers, provided a learning space like no other.

Co-learning

The directors guided the techniques, the designers steered the teams, and the teams shared their ideas. Everyone witnessed how other creatives worked across different roles, and how different agencies approached the same brief.

Pressure

Managing groups that had only just met was a test of people skills. Co-developing the creative direction in multiple teams was also a challenge. But it was a reminder of just what can be achieved when everyone focuses on one brief over two whole days.

Motivation

The energy created from working with talented colleagues and motivated participants was remarkable. The students and graduates had real zest. Hearing their thoughts, and perspectives, created new understanding about the state of design practice.



“It was fascinating to see how the other directors and team leaders work. Everyone had their own style and approaches to learn from.”

Mark Dearman, Creative Director

“Getting to know the students and helping them push their ideas through highs, lows, frustrations and ‘eureka’ moments was incredibly rewarding. I would recommend it to anyone who is looking for something different to challenge and inspire themselves and their designers.”

Kate Lenton, Managing Director



“Werkhouse provided a fantastic opportunity to work alongside my peers, learn different approaches to the design process and to meet new people.”

Bob Mytton, Creative Director

“Collaborative, smart, enthusiastic, ego-free. If this lot are representative, the future of design looks bright.”

Jamie Gallagher, Creative Director



Thank you

The Werkhouse weekend was developed and delivered on a voluntary basis, as a test of the viability and response. Gratitude goes to all the agencies, freelancers and consultants that gave up their time. The collaborative and generous attitude that they brought to the process played a significant part in its success.

Special thanks go to the sponsor companies that enabled us to capture and share the results, and to the West of England Design Forum for partnering and promoting this journey into industry-led design training. And, of course, to the 150 students and young designers that took the time to apply, and the team of 32 that gave up their weekend to participate with a level of enthusiasm, talent and commitment that was beyond expectations.

Werkhouse was under-pinned by a desire to support young designers seeking a career in the industry. The insight and learning gained, and the energy and interest around the whole event, means we are exploring ways to adapt, share and develop what was achieved.

If you would like to know more about the process, be involved in future delivery or explore new potential, we would like to hear from you:

info@werkhouse.co.uk

To stay informed of progress and future events, please join us on twitter
[@WerkhouseBRS](https://twitter.com/WerkhouseBRS)



“A really valuable experience – completely unique”

Werkhouse participant

Thanks to

Design Rally
Hello
Mytton Williams
Proctor + Stevenson
Prophecy Unlimited
Specialist
Taxi Studio
True Digital

Sponsors

Rice+Pixel (Film)
WithPrint (Brochure)

Photography

Mark Dearman

Brochure design

Mytton Williams

Partner

West of England
Design Forum