QUALITY BY DESIGN

THE CASE FOR A
BRITISH QUALITY MARK

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The UK design industry is the largest in Europe and is of growing importance to the economy, delivering £2.5 billion a year. The industry employs 166,000 people, and employment is growing at a rate of 16 per cent per annum, a much higher rate than for the economy as a whole. But the contribution it makes goes beyond its direct contribution to GDP. Investment in good design delivers concrete value to companies. But how can companies, both in the UK and overseas, find out which agencies can provide "good" design?

There are a large number of organisations that have a role to play in supporting the design industry (listed at the end of this document). Some run initiatives that support and reward quality, through members' registers and awards. The government has also taken an increasingly proactive role in developing the sector and the educational standards within it.

However, there are no consistent standards in place. Evolutions in software mean that, unlike other professions, anyone can set themselves up as a designer with no training and no experience. These untrained and unskilled designers can undercut the professionals and devalue the reputation of the industry. This creates problems for buyers of design, particularly overseas buyers, who struggle to make informed choices.

Some members of the design community now believe that there is a need for a clear mechanism to be introduced to safeguard standards and drive the growth of this increasingly important but poorly understood industry. One suggestion is that this mechanism should take the form of a quality mark.

There are three drivers for this:

- To co-ordinate fragmented industry bodies
- To champion quality and level the playing field for smaller designers who might not be able to afford to buy into existing registers
- To modernise how agency-client expectations are managed in line with other sectors.

The quality mark would need to be clear and transparent, applicable to agencies of all sizes, client-friendly and robust.

There are challenges in making this work, particularly: who awards and polices these new standards, and how practical is this in such a fragmented sector? However, internationally, there are examples of schemes that have worked and resolved some of these issues. One of the most difficult things to measure is creativity, but the D&AD awards have proved that this is possible.

Many of the elements for this scheme are already in place, but are currently distributed across different bodies. A consensus would therefore be required to produce a co-ordinated response that combines and uses existing work to create a single assurance mechanism.

This paper aims to provoke a conversation about the potential value of a UK design quality mark to protect and promote this increasingly important economic sector. It does not aim to be prescriptive; it seeks only to provoke debate in an effort to build support behind the broad principle that the right time for change is now.

INTRODUCTION

The UK's design industry:

- Is the largest in Europe
- Is globally recognised for excellence and professionalism
- Has a long track record in delivering highly original creativity to commercial partners

It also benefits from influential trade bodies, a design education system considered world-class, and a "design aware" society.

The sector is a crucial pillar of the creative industries whose contribution to the UK's economy has been recognised by the government.

- In January 2014 the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) published statistics to galvanise a drive by government and business leaders to boost the role these industries play in our economy.
- As part of an international trade development strategy, UK Trade & Investment (UKTI) has established a creative industries "taskforce" of the country's top 100 creative sector small and medium-sized enterprises. This has set itself the target of winning £500 million-worth of high-value overseas contracts in the next three years.
- The Creative Industries Council has launched a website (thecreativeindustries.co.uk) to promote British talent on the global stage. They predict that this country will become the world's "creative services hub" by 2025. Creative industries will also play a key part in the 2014 GREAT campaign, promoting British excellence that builds on the UKTI strategy.

A 'WILD' INDUSTRY

The British design industry does not have the profile of other sectors in the creative industries and it has not benefited from a central strategic vision to propel its growth.

The design sector remains a wild frontier of creative energy. It lacks the formal quality standards, accreditation and regulation that would be expected in other industries. While considerable work has gone into creating world-class training and qualifications, there is no industry-standard mechanism for distinguishing quality and protecting talent.

Almost anyone can set up as a designer in an increasingly overpopulated marketplace, often undercutting and weakening bona fide players.

One reason for this is that the contribution of designers to Britain's creative economy has long been understated, largely because of the difficulties of measuring design output.

The institutional landscape in which the UK design community has evolved is highly fragmented, and mechanisms to help potential clients identify and access the right agencies are limited if not absent.

Together, these factors have conspired to blur any effort to provide a strategic vision for the UK design sector, condemning it to a perpetual cycle of wasteful pitches and repetitive award ceremonies.

This situation may be stunting the growth of a sector that all the evidence suggests has considerable untapped potential.

In short, the mechanisms used to promote design in Britain need, well… redesigning.

THE VALUE OF DESIGN WITHIN THE CREATIVE ECONOMY

The design sector is a major and growing contributor to our prosperity. It is a key pillar of the knowledge economy that underpins innovation.[1]

In January DCMS revealed that the UK's creative industries as a whole – which include TV, film, music, design, crafts, fashion, games and advertising – are worth £71.4 billion a year and generate £8 million an hour for Britain.[2]

These industries grew by almost 10 per cent in 2012, outperforming all other sectors of UK industry. More importantly, their combined GVA – the value they add to the economy – has increased by 15.6 per cent since 2008 compared with 5.4 per cent for the economy as a whole.

GROWTH

Within the creative industries, the design sector is a particularly dynamic source of growth.

- Design shrugged off the recession and one estimate suggests that £23 billion is spent on design in the UK annually.[3]
- Design – classified by the government as comprising product, graphic and fashion design – now adds at least £2.5 billion a year in value to the economy.

However, buried within the DCMS figures is an even more exciting story:

The annual average increase in GVA of design in the period 2008-12 was 8 per cent (hitting a high in 2011 of 22 per cent) – the highest of any creative sector (including advertising and marketing, architecture, publishing, film, television and music) and more than double that of the creative industries as a whole.

As a proportion of the overall contribution made by our creative industries to the economy, design now accounts for 3.5 per cent of creative GVA.[4]

Design remains one of the smaller arms of the creative economy when compared with:

- IT, software and computer services (43 per cent)
- Film, TV, video, radio and photography (13.7 per cent)
- Publishing (13.6 per cent)

But design has grown consistently since 2008 – while the contributions of architecture, crafts, film, TV, video, radio, photography, and publishing have all declined.[5]

GRAPH:
ANNUAL AVERAGE INCREASE IN GVA - 2008-2012 BY SECTOR

Sector	Value
Advertising and marketing	6.60%
Architecture	0.70%
Crafts	6.80%
Design, product, graphic and fashion design	8.00%
Film, TV, video, radio and photography	4.20%
IT, software and computer services	4.50%
Publishing	1.30%
Music, performing and visual arts	5.70%
Total creative industries	3.90%
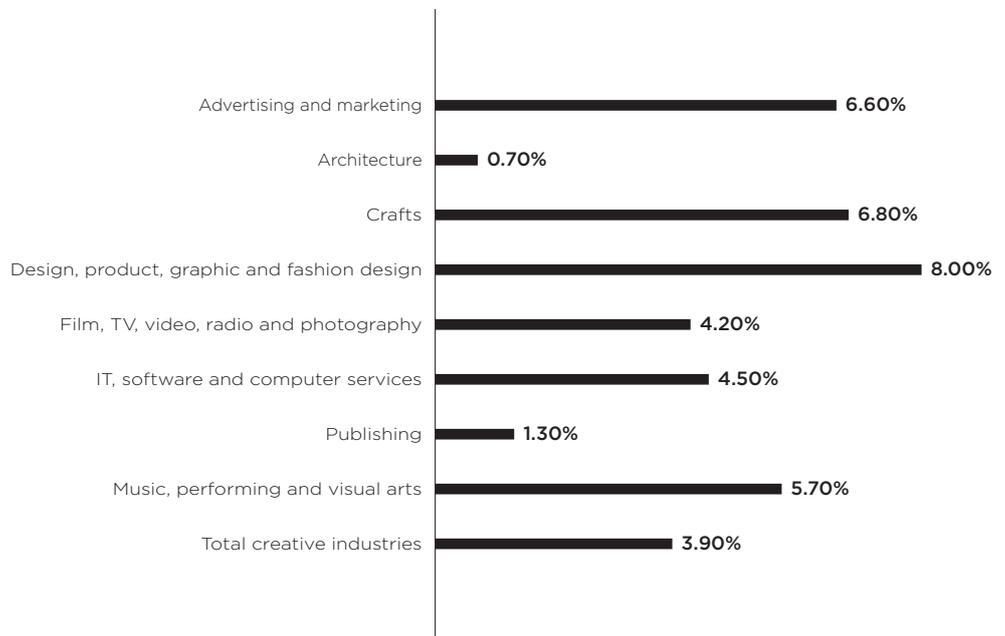
Source: Adapted from DCMS Creative Industries Economic Estimates - January 2014, on the basis of the ONS Annual Business Survey
Notes: 1. Changes are based on current prices (i.e. not accounting for inflation). 2. The ABS does not fully account for GVA of museums, galleries and libraries and these data have not been shown.

EXPERT EXPORTERS

Britain is exporting creativity to world markets. The value of services exported by our creative industries in 2011 was £15.5 billion – an increase of 16.1 per cent since 2009. Design-intensive industries, and in particular specialised design services such as graphic design, play a key role in this success story.

These industries export a significant share of their output. According to the Creative Industries Council, around 50 per cent of UK design output is exported.[6] Design is playing a leading, rather than supporting, role in increasingly globalised supply chains.

A relatively small share of UK design output is sold to other export-intensive industries: they are mostly exported directly in their own right, offering the UK's design industry huge opportunities.[7]

Exports from within the design category (product, graphic and fashion) amounted to £131 million in 2011 – up from £116 million in 2009.[8]

However, despite this rate of growth, the sector exports far less than any other part of the creative industries, strongly suggesting that its full export potential is not being tapped.

HIDDEN VALUE

Alongside its measurable performance, design plays a crucial but often concealed role in other key sectors of the economy.

It is difficult to estimate the full contribution that design makes to economic performance because design-intensive industries are not a single, unified entity and there is a wide range of different activities and companies.

Bodies such as the All-Party Parliamentary Design and Innovation Group (APDIG) are increasingly shifting the debate to this concealed role, in an effort to change perceptions of design from aesthetic factors to acceptance of its strategic value and broader impact on growth, business and social development.

A report by the Design Council published this year highlights quantitative and qualitative ways design adds value to any organisation by:

- Driving innovation
- Opening up market spaces
- Differentiating products and services to attract customers
- Strengthening branding and recognition[9]

Business leaders cited sales growth, increases in market share, cost reductions and enhanced efficiency in production. The more strategic a business's use of design, the greater the benefit.

The Council's Design Index demonstrates how prioritising design boosts a business's share price. The Council says its Design Leadership Programme has yielded concrete benefits:

> *For every pound an organisation invests in design as a result of a Design Leadership Project, the returns include £4.12 net operating profit, £20 net turnover, and £5.27 net exports."*

These results have been replicated outside the UK. The Danish Design Centre found that gross revenues were around 22 per cent higher for companies that invested in design than for those that did not.

Another Design Council research project in 2013, Leading Business by Design, showed that UK firms are attaching increasing importance to design and its positive impact on business performance – including market share, growth, productivity, share price and competitiveness.[10]

As if to underline the unacknowledged role of design in the economy, a recent report by the Design Commission, *Designing the Digital Economy*, argued that:

> *The digital sector – now hailed as a driving force behind the UK economy – will fail to reach its full potential without the strategic use of design." [11]*

EMPLOYMENT

The creative industries now account for:

• 1.68 million jobs

• 5.6 per cent of all British employment.

Creative employment in the UK increased by 8.6 per cent between 2011 and 2012 – a much higher rate than for the economy as a whole (0.7 per cent).

According to the government, between 2011 and 2012 employment in design rose by 16 per cent to 116,000 people. If design roles that are formally outside the creative industries are accounted for, design provides a staggering:
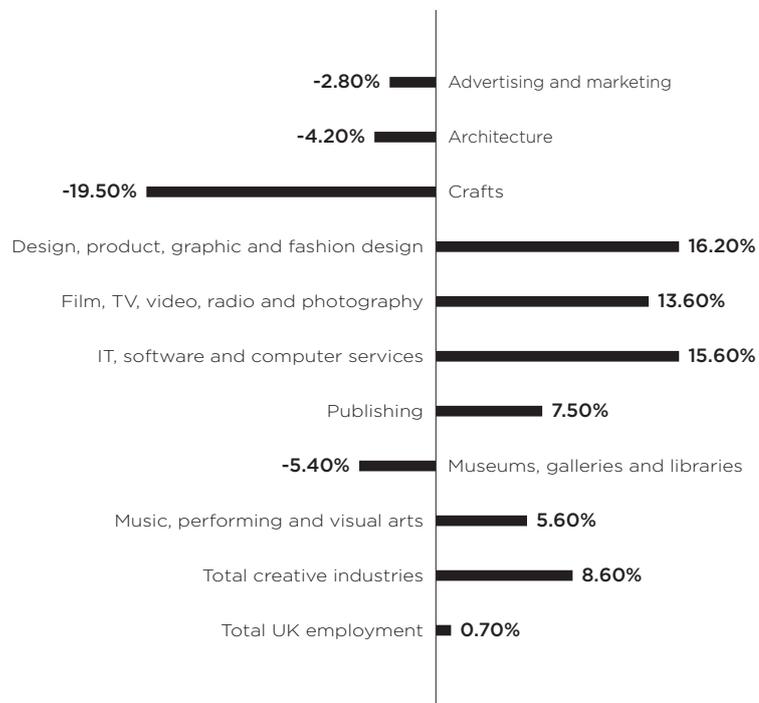
• 166,000 jobs in the UK

These employment figures tell another exhilarating story.

The value of design (£2.49 billion) in relation to the number of design jobs that exist (116,000) means:

The per capita contribution of designers in the UK is greater than that of those who work in music and the performing and visual arts.

GRAPH:
PERCENTAGE CHANGE IN CREATIVE INDUSTRIES EMPLOYMENT 2011-12 BY SECTOR

Sector	Percentage change
Advertising and marketing	-2.80%
Architecture	-4.20%
Crafts	-19.50%
Design, product, graphic and fashion design	16.20%
Film, TV, video, radio and photography	13.60%
IT, software and computer services	15.60%
Publishing	7.50%
Museums, galleries and libraries	-5.40%
Music, performing and visual arts	5.60%
Total creative industries	8.60%
Total UK employment	0.70%

Source: DCMS Creative Industries Economic Estimates - January 2014, on the basis of the ONS Annual Population Survey (2011 & 2012)
Note: Limitations in the industry coding mean the employment for crafts on an industry basis does not fully cover the sector

UNDERSTATED SECTOR

A key reason why the full contribution design makes to our economy has been understated is the methodological challenge posed by economic classification. This is not a trivial issue. Nesta, for example, has argued that there are inconsistencies in the definitions used by government economists of occupations, and hence classifications in the creative economy may exclude large segments of the labour force, particularly among new digital creatives.

As a result, despite the wide acceptance that design is important to the economy, these challenges of classification, and the very nature of the businesses, make it hard to analyse and develop clear, consistent policymaking. Design more broadly plays a major role in different industries, spanning both manufacturing and service sectors, and each of these operates differently and derives value from design in its own way.

Design Council (2014) research based on interviews with company leaders has suggested that no company among those surveyed had a robust method for assessing design's impact on performance – especially its financial impact. This report also identified a paradox: the greater the requirement for design to prove its contribution upfront through detailed analysis, the more conservative the approach taken – resulting in lower impact on performance.

BLURRED LINES

The economic evidence is clear: the accelerating growth of the design sector makes it one of the most dynamic areas within Britain's creative industries. Our designers are implicitly at the heart of the high-profile strategy being led by UKTI to tap the full potential of our creativity.

Yet at the same time the sector appears to be something of a poor cousin when it comes to how the creative industries are measured – a status that confines it to being an afterthought for policymakers or a comparator to be viewed alongside less dynamic, but more discernible, creative sectors.

It is, to use the words of MBC's Group's CEO, Robin Horrex,

" *A serious industry that often doesn't get taken seriously".*

There is a lack of clear metrics that can be easily understood and disseminated by people both within and outside the sector. This has created a blurred status and may help to explain why the bodies that have evolved within this sector, to promote and defend design, have found it challenging to move forward strategically.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the absence of a clear customer-facing initiative to safeguard standards and drive growth. There is no transparent and effective mechanism to provide clients of the estimated 11,000 design consultancies operating in the UK with an assurance of quality and professionalism.

THE CURRENT LANDSCAPE

Britain has a wealth of organisations that are enthusiastic champions of design and there are a number of initiatives to promote and reward quality (see Appendix).

These have tended to take the form of:

• A members' register that provides potential customers with access to listed design houses and may filter them according to certain criteria;
• High-profile awards that provide peer-reviewed quality recognition; or
• Government-backed initiatives and collaborations that focus heavily on promoting British design in key overseas markets – in particular product design – or on skills development.

Prominent bodies include:

• Design Council
• The Design Business Association (DBA)
• The Recommended Agency Register (RAR)
• D&AD (Design & Art Direction)
• The British Industrial Design Association (BIDA)
• The Design and Technology Association (DTA)
• The Chartered Society of Designers (CSD)

A range of smaller organisations also exist, such as the Design Pool (a joint venture created by three membership organisations), the Institution of Engineering Designers, the Institute of Materials, the Crafts Council, CHEAD, CIKTN, PDR/Design Wales and the Sorrell Foundation.

A number of high-profile awards for design are handed out across the sector both in the UK and internationally by the Design Council (Design Challenges), DBA (Design Effectiveness Awards), Design Week, RAR, The Drum (Marketing Awards) and Transform. The D&AD Awards, Transform Awards and Cannes Lions all reach international audiences.

Other industry initiatives that recognise design quality also exist, including the Made in Britain consumer and business campaign promoting British manufacturing, which hands out a Made in Britain logo. This was launched in 2011 and a member-funded organisation was created to promote and support a new standardised mark that companies can apply to use to highlight the provenance of their UK-made products.

The ISO 9001 quality management criteria exist to define, establish, and maintain an operational quality assurance system for manufacturing and service industries. However, many designers see this as of limited relevance to what they do and as outdated.

GOVERNMENT EFFORTS

The government has also taken an increasingly proactive role towards design in recent years and a number of government-led initiatives have been launched to develop the sector and educational standards within it.

These include:

• Creative & Cultural Skills (CCSkills), one of several Sector Skills Councils

• The Creative Industries Council, a joint forum between the creative industries and government

• UKTI's Design Partners, the joint industry/government body that works to increase the UK's international design trade

• The All-Party Parliamentary Design and Innovation Group, a forum for debate between parliament and the UK's design and innovation communities

• The Design Commission, an industry-led body that seeks to drive thinking around design policy

• The Design Special Interest Group (SIG), an arm of the Technology Strategy Board, reporting to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills

The Design Mark is a quality standards framework developed by the Design Council with the Design and Technology Association and the former Department for Children, Schools and Families. It is intended as an aspirational badge awarded to schools that demonstrates excellence in design teaching.

European initiatives also exist to promote design quality and best practice, including the:

• Bureau of European Design Associations (BEDA)

• European Design Innovation Platform (EDIP)

• Design For All Europe initiative (EiDD)

• European Trade Mark and Design Network

TIME FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

The absence of a clear customer-facing mechanism to safeguard standards and drive growth has convinced some members of the design community that the sector could be better co-ordinated by rallying behind a standardised quality assurance mechanism. There are three principal reasons for this:

1. TO JOIN THE DOTS

The increasingly crowded landscape of trade bodies, charities, non-profits and government agencies, all talking and promoting "quality", is outlined above. It is highly fragmented and the membership of these bodies can be restricted and exclusive, limiting the extent to which they co-ordinate their efforts and influence.

Design agencies are confused about who does what and who is the best judge of quality. Many question why government agencies have not stepped in with workable proposals for co-ordinating the bodies that populate the sector.

Competitions are acknowledged as important tools in promoting design awareness and in helping to develop creativity. The DBA's well-targeted Design Effectiveness Awards are also an intelligent means of recognising the concrete added value that design brings. They are an important way of reaching out to business leaders to demonstrate the value of design to their bottom line.

Awards boost the internal morale of agencies and clients. However, many of them may ultimately be self-serving and are designed to generate income for the awarding organisation with criteria that are purposefully broad in order to maximise applications.

Their growing number also risk generating a form of inflation that progressively devalues the recognition of quality they aim to provide and limits their commercial benefit to designers. This in turn raises the question as to whether the sector would, in fact, benefit more from a single, unified recognition that acts as an "award of awards".

As one established designer said:

> *There are some awards out there that are probably pointless and the organisations that run them are probably pointless but are earning their founders money."*

While databases and registers aim to provide a way of filtering designers for potential clients, they are limited either by an organisation's protocols, membership structure, or even the parameters of the search tool itself: they simply do not provide an instantly recognisable badge of honour.

A comprehensive survey of the design industry conducted in 2009 by the Design Council suggested that most designers are not members of national bodies and rarely join networks, yet are likely to be members of business organisations such as the Federation of Small Businesses and the British Chamber of Commerce.

Conspicuous by its absence in this landscape is a single, iconic design quality mark broadly accepted as an indicator of standards across the industry.

The closest the design industry has come to this is the DBA's PQQ Badge (a green Q symbol), which demonstrates an agency has provided information that would be required in a pre-qualification questionnaire or RFI (request for information). It signals a provider's procurement-ready status. While this is clearly a step in the right direction, it is one limited to certain members of one trade body and based on a single characteristic.

In short, for those outside the industry seeking a clear indicator of quality professional design standards in order to select a provider, the existing landscape of trade bodies, charities, non-profits and government agencies represents a complex maze.

This has implicitly been recognised by the Creative Industries Council, which in January launched a single digital hub linking the industry, UKTI and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) to promote British creative talent on the global stage (see above). Its initiative forms part of a wider strategic shift towards co-ordinating a unified approach towards finance, education and skills, exports and inward investment, intellectual property and digital infrastructure.

A lack of accepted quality standards could be a limiting factor to the potential growth of the design industry precisely at a moment when the strategic value of design and the need for greater co-ordination are being recognised.

The Design Council has, for example, highlighted how design is now becoming a strategic concern for a growing number of businesses and organisations. The Design Commission's recent digital economy report included the demand for some significant interventions from government, by calling for a head of design, who would also be responsible for digital platforms, for each government department.

In a recent intervention in a debate fostered by APDIG about the need for a more precise classification of "design" itself, economist Mark Spilsbury noted government financial support for the car industry – which benefits from greater visibility and a clear classification – amounting to £500 million. He wrote:

> *By being visible, by telling a story of success, the car manufacturing industry has convinced the government to invest hard cash in its infrastructure. But is the car industry so much more important than the design industry?"*

2. TO CHAMPION QUALITY... AND LEVEL THE PLAYING FIELD

The need to safeguard quality within a growing sector of the British creative industries that cannot afford to allow standards to slip might seem obvious. But while Britain benefits from world-class design education, the developments in software and a proliferation of suppliers is enabling new entrants; ill-equipped to meet many clients' complex needs, to populate the sector with relative ease.

By undercutting bona fide creative agencies with a hard-earned track record, they are weakening these established players while devaluing standards across the entire sector.

In other service sectors, such as the law, the longstanding response to such phenomena has been growing pressure for professional regulation to ensure that customers get what they pay for based on clearly defined licensing. These initiatives do not seek to suppress entrepreneurialism or new creative approaches – but to establish a form of professional recognition based on transparent standards.

The requirement for standards becomes even more important in a globalised marketplace where external customers seek quality British design yet lack local knowledge and contacts.

A client's needs are greatly complicated by the proliferation of channels – online, mobile, print, television, radio – that transform design into a highly specialised discipline.

Potential clients face a growing list of questions about who to turn to in an era of shrinking budgets. What they seek above all is credibility – and need guidance with gravitas through a viable industry initiative that will guarantee them a level of security when choosing a design partner.

Yet there is no modern bespoke system of accreditation based on a range of quality and service criteria that tells a potential client "You are safe with us". There is no way for a client to be assured that the agency can produce work on budget and to the standard and specification required.

Safeguarding standards does not mean trying to accredit *creativity* itself – a quality mark could never protect people against bad taste, but it could establish basic standards for production and graphic design that ensure a good working understanding of established design parameters and common specifications. In short, you cannot tell a client how to spend their money – but you can protect them against poor work.

Standards are democratic by nature, and ensure fairness. They offer a means for small and new enterprises to compete fairly with middle to large agencies that have an established record, and to plan ahead with the reassurance that the market failures that can occur in the absence of regulation will not derail them.

Many smaller design consultancies in the UK are already punching above their weight at home and abroad, and deserve a form of industry recognition that will help them to grow their businesses and extend into the international marketplace.

A quality standard could provide an effective channel for the best young talent to rise up by making it fairer for those agencies that invest in education and training to serve as the best arbiters of potential.

3. TO MODERNISE HOW EXPECTATIONS ARE MANAGED

When you go to a hotel or a restaurant, it is very clear from the star-rating what quality of service you are likely to receive. However, there is no comparable means for potential clients to access design agencies that is transparent and resonates in the market to the same extent.

The marketing managers working for British brands and organisations need help to get their comms and design briefs serviced in the right way, so where do they go?

The design sector has moved in the direction of providing filtering services that enable clients to be assured that they can go straight to the agencies best equipped to meet their needs on contracts of a certain size. However, finding a credible quality agency can still be like searching for a needle in a haystack.

Existing trade bodies represent a small proportion of the design establishment and offer only a limited means for clients to gauge the quality of an agency. While award schemes are popular – and make great headlines – they, too, may not be a reliable means of filtering and standards of service.

In this context, the default mechanism for accessing agencies remains pitching, a practice that has come under increasing scrutiny in recent years. The DBA has been at the forefront of a debate about the merits and demerits of pitching, which design agencies are rarely paid for, and many regard as a wasteful mechanism for bringing clients and designers together. The pitfalls of pitching are:

• It is old fashioned and lazy, and there is always the risk that a client will retain the ideas of an agency that does not end up winning the contract.

• It is based on guesswork rather than the showcasing by an agency of examples of successful past projects and similar work.

• It is wasteful, consuming the time, resources, energy and grey matter of agencies that receive no guarantees that their creative work will yield a return. Agencies can spend tens of thousands of pounds on a pitch, yet clients may not even disclose the value of a project.

- It weakens collaboration by reinforcing a "them versus us" culture of relationships between agencies and clients, while evidence suggests the best economic yields of design come from close working relationships between designers and business. An experienced designer will tell you that "chemistry" is a crucial factor in generating quality outcomes – and there is no chemistry at work in a pitch.

Finally, and perhaps most seriously for Britain's creative economy, pitching damages creativity, especially when pitches are set up by procurement staff who reduce the creative process to a cost-benefit analysis that may have little to do with quality.

There may continue to be situations where pitching is necessary for certain products or clients, who will always want options. But its star is certainly fading within the design sector itself – strongly suggesting that another industry-standard mechanism for clients to gauge agencies according to transparent criteria, is overdue.

A well-managed quality mark could potentially be more efficient at providing clients with realistic options, without weakening design agencies by generating creative labour that is never remunerated.

HOW THIS MIGHT WORK

The ambition of this white paper is to start a conversation about the need for a quality mark for design and not to make prescriptions about how this could work.

It is clear from a dialogue with industry bodies that such an idea has both already been considered and is well-meaning, but also that the logistical and organisational challenges would make it difficult to manage in a way that would gain consensus and hence relevance.

Principal issues are:

- Who determines awards and then polices quality standards?
- How practical and feasible is this in a sector whose plurality may be an element of its success?

Given these questions, the most constructive way forward is to consider, first, what is already out there both in the UK and abroad, in an effort to find clues to how this might work.

The two existing models within the UK are:

- **Registers:** these are compiled by bodies such as the DBA and RAR and provide potential clients with information about agencies according to a range of criteria. Where such registers or databases exist, they do so by virtue of an organisation's membership or reliance upon client reviews bolstered by performance data.
- **Awards:** these aim to highlight one aspect of an agency's work, from design itself to its effectiveness in adding value to a product or service. Winners of the DBA's Design Effectiveness Awards, for example, provide evidence of the power of design to impact business success. The D&AD awards, across a number of receiving categories, reward creative achievement. Winners of the RAR awards are selected on performance using ratings and references from clients for a broad range of criteria including creativity, effectiveness, strategic thinking and client service. Awards are invariably selected by a panel of industry leaders but in some cases may only apply to agencies eligible by virtue of their membership of an organisation. They usually imply the right to use an award symbol of some kind.

The above are not exclusive of each other and in some cases are combined. Both the DBA and D&AD for example, offer membership and also awards, and both the DBA and RAR operate registers.

INTERNATIONAL QUALITY ASSURANCE INITIATIVES

Internationally, where design quality marks are in existence, they are invariably aimed at product design:

- Japan – The Good Design Award is a comprehensive product design evaluation and commendation system, operated by the Japan Institute of Design Promotion that takes the form of the "G Mark". This logo is a trademark and only recipients may use it to raise awareness of outstanding design of their product and gain status among potential clients.
- India – In an initiative based on the Japanese model and again aimed at product design, a similar quality mark exists in the form of the "India Design Mark" granted by India's Design Council, a statutory body.

Initiatives aimed at recognising design quality more broadly, that are not solely confined to product design, have also been tried in some countries:

- Netherlands – A Dutch Design Quality Mark was launched as a commercial initiative in 2011 by a brand consultancy to offer consumers and clients a guarantee of quality, though there was considerable debate when it was launched about its workability and awarding criteria, and it has not secured a high profile.
- Finland – Has successfully established the "Design from Finland Mark" to indicate the origin of high-quality local design and highlight the value of design to business success. This is a registered trademark administered by the Association for Finnish Work and awarded by the Design from Finland Committee. It acts as a marketing tool to help a company differentiate itself as a business with a great design spirit, and functions as a co-branding label that supports and strengthens a company's own brand.

KEY PRINCIPLES

Potential features of a quality standard mark for UK design would need to combine and rationalise the aims of initiatives organised by existing industry bodies without duplicating or displacing them. It would also need to secure consensus within the industry to channel the energy and ambition of well-established bodies without challenging them. Finally, it would need heavyweight backing from established actors with growth aspirations for the creative industries, such as UKTI and the Design Council, to ensure the accreditation is internationally recognised.

Aims and criteria

The quality mark would need to be:

1. Clear and transparent: there should be objective metrics and forms of assessment.
2. Agency-focused and democratic: it should be applicable to agencies of any size, and not to projects (i.e. individual design products) in order to strengthen their brand.
3. Client-facing: it should aim to provide clients with a clear mechanism for selecting quality providers, discourage pitching and encourage interviews.
4. Robust in safeguarding standards: it would aim to acknowledge excellence in terms of both an agency's quality of output and the service provided – thereby, in the words of the Finnish initiative, recognising an agency's "design spirit" or commitment to excellence. In this way it would aim to protect providers who strive to improve in these areas against those who cut corners, and hence to nurture good practice.

The criteria for existing awards and recommendations fall into two categories:

- The role of design in adding value. This is largely measurable using objective standards (but its not easy to do).
- Its creative merit, a category that is qualitative and subjective.

The measurable elements of an agency's work could include its track record of clients and past projects, the qualifications of its staff, and the effective use of design in adding value for clients or raising their share price. The Finnish awarding criteria are instructive, including the:

- Investment in design
- Benefits gained from a design investment
- Degree to which design is intertwined in all aspects of business operations
- Role played by design in a company's internationalisation
- Patents, awards or recognitions the company has received

Creative merit is arguably a harder dimension of an agency's work to assess, but the D&AD awards have proven that this is possible. An awarding panel comprised of industry leaders as well as peers is capable of determining the creative quality of work, and of introducing an element of democracy into a process that has previously been dominated by the great and good.

Other considerations would need to determine the means by which agencies are selected for assessment. An awarding body could choose to rely on voluntary client referrals or applications supported by volunteered information and case studies. Client referrals and the ability of an agency to demonstrate quality output are already widely used by award schemes and registers in the UK, making these the obvious means by which agencies can be judged according to accepted standards.

It would also need to be determined whether a mark would incorporate "tiers" or a grading structure that either reflect a level of quality provided (much like a hotel's star ratings) or a provider's size (to create a fair means for entry-level or smaller agencies); and whether a mark would have to be reassessed on a periodic basis.

ORGANISATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

How would such an initiative operate? Who would be the awarding body and how would it be financed?

Most of the elements for such a scheme are already in place, albeit distributed across different bodies.

Consensus is needed so that the industry is able to combine the existing work of relevant organisations - and to channel their efforts towards a single, overarching quality assurance mechanism.

Design effectiveness criteria might, for example, be determined by RAR and the DBA, while creative criteria might be determined by D&AD. Infrastructure for processing, awarding and promoting the quality mark could be provided by the Design Council, with funding through the UKTI.

The underlying working principle would be neutrality in decision-making throughout the process. It would need to rise above the individual priorities of existing sector bodies and it would need to find consensus according to the principle of the "sum is greater than the parts".

RECOMMENDATIONS

There are no obvious or immediate answers but the issues need to be addressed and this conversation needs to begin.

Now is the time to launch a debate and, in that spirit, the recommendations of this paper are the following:

1. Encourage the creation of a quality mark taskforce to discuss the initiative, ideally under the auspices of the All-Party Parliamentary Design and Innovation Group, that brings together all the leading design bodies and interested parties around this proposition.
2. Take advantage of the strategic efforts being galvanised by the UKTI's creative industries taskforce to consult with key stakeholders about the merits or otherwise of this proposition.

WHAT THE CREATIVES SAY

CHRIS SEARSON, MBC GROUP

There's a proliferation of suppliers now – from the kitchen worktop to the proper agencies – because anybody that can get a computer can actually say 'I'm a designer'. So how does a client credibly know whether somebody is good?

There are also many channels – digital, online as in web, mobile, a 48 sheet poster, TV, radio. So the whole line of engagement from a client perspective is confused: they are saying who do I choose, where do I put my money at a time when my budgets are also shrinking? If you have got the legitimacy or endorsement of a quality standard – somebody saying 'These are ABC accredited' – that would help enormously. It would have to be something sanctioned by a body like the Design Council, with amazing gravitas.

I think it's a fantastic idea because what we have ended up with is not only confusion – where do I spend my money, quality and credibility, which is a massive issue for clients – but it would also start to create a 'premier league' in the sector. It doesn't mean that you can't do creativity, but would provide a means for a brand or client to justifiably choose a particular agency. I think it would be a really fantastic way of galvanising an industry that is going to face massive challenges and questions about its overall proposition."

ANDY SCARTH, ZONE

The organisations in this industry – the DBA, CSD, and D&AD are design or creative-industry centric and are not particularly effective avenues for clients or corporations. Clients wouldn't really think of going to them to substantiate an agency – they are not really customer-facing which I believe is the missing trick. If there was a customer-facing mark that over time resonated with them like the ratings that hotels and restaurants have, people would find it much easier to decide on which agency they need. It would be a standard that helps them to make a decision on who to engage with.

It's fine to win an award – clients love it – but it's not necessarily an indication of service or indeed value. We need to introduce a mechanism that brands and organisations would look to in the first instance that says who's out there, who's good at the moment, who's been recommended by this particular body, who's hot and who's not."

ROBIN HORREX, MBC GROUP

British design is highly regarded across the globe and Britain as a creative hub attracts business and consumers from all over the world. The idea of a quality mark would be more about managing expectations and raising the profile of design as a legitimate industry: it is a serious industry but often doesn't get treated seriously. We don't want to stop entrepreneurialism or creative designers setting up new shops – but what we do want is some kind of recognition. This would be more than just a kitemark but a way for connecting businesses and agencies, and could help educate potential clients and businesses that pitching is an old-fashioned and wasteful way to proceed."

STEVE LUCKER, INDEPENDENT FILM DIRECTOR

The industry is a little bit loose, a little bit wild, and lacks any kind of formal standard that you'd expect to find in any other industry. And if you consider that the creative industries are worth £8 million an hour to the British economy, it's pretty remarkable that there is nothing of this kind.

Design is one of our best exports now as a country – we don't export much, but we export creativity all around the world – and importantly, this has a profound effect on the livelihoods of millions, so let's look after it. How do we protect the talent in this country? How do we maintain the standards? We need to put some things in place to give clients a process whereby they can find the right partner and spend their money smartly. There should be a basic system of accreditation that says 'You are safe with us, we are a professional outfit, we will deliver things on time and budget, we know how production works'. There isn't a modern accreditation system that applies in the industry when a client is selecting a design partner. It's not about elitism – it's about making it fair for everybody so that the talent can do great work. You can't tell a client how to spend their money, but you can protect them against poor work."

JENNY RIEDE, POINT 6 DESIGN

In principle I would really welcome this initiative. Although I am working for an agency I used to be a client and when I was on the client side I was always struggling with how to actually assess whether an agency, designer, is right and good. What we have now is an overflow of awards that people enter just to get that endorsement – but from a client point of view these are not that helpful: it's seen as an ego thing and for a client something that just means higher charges because an agency has all these great awards. This initiative would be particularly valuable for clients who use design as their competitive edge, with not only a nice design outcome but where good design also indicates a certain intelligence of strategy and value proposition. Good design really drives their success because they believe in good designers. I am very much a supporter of any effort to drive that belief and foster collaboration to change things."

GRANT GILBERT, DOUBLE G STUDIOS

I don't think people are crying out for a mark, but much would depend on how easily it would be given out: do you pay money and get a mark or are you actually awarded a mark for the work that you create? If it's given out just because you are a member, and you can afford to join, then smaller businesses lose out. If it is down to a jury or a group of professionals that people believe in then, yes, it could work. We do a lot of pitching all the time and it's an absolute waste of time and resources. If there was a badge to say 'We don't pitch for free' I would sign up tomorrow because then people know where you stand. If there was a mark saying 'We are not asking you to pay us to pitch but we would prefer it', then that would be on the front page of my website – and I think there needs to be a body that does that."

SIMON GOODALL, OPX

The idea is potentially interesting but it would be much easier to gain traction utilising an existing body or organisation. The DBA already has some form of register of agencies. Without the support of an established body – it could also be someone like the Design Council – I think it would be difficult for the mark to gain enough recognition, particularly internationally."

ASHLEY BOLSER, BOLSER

In terms of industry, design is probably the easiest thing to get into without any qualifications. You couldn't become a lawyer, an accountant or teach at university without training and experience, but you can set yourself up as a design guru today if you want to and there is nothing to stop you doing that. I am not in favour of legislation but it would be fantastic to say as a business that you had been trained for a certain length of time and that your work achieves a certain quality.

As a business, anything that does away with pitching is to be welcomed. Awards do go some way to saying to people, 'We know what we are doing', and there are things like the ISO 9000 codes – but they don't really apply to what we do. I think it would be great to have a personal qualification, almost like a licence to trade based on your experience and quality. But one person's great design is another person's disaster – design is very

difficult to arbitrate and to say, 'Here's a kitemark for great design' – how would you actually do that? The concept is great but how do you actually go about setting that standard? Who would make this judgement, how would they get paid, and who is the arbiter of good and bad design?"

" PAUL BAILES, COHESION

Anything to distinguish professional design agencies from the hordes of non-professional one- and two-man bands and freelancers is a good thing. From my experience, however, being designers we are always trying to create something new instead of working with the organisations that are already trying to promote this.

As a company we are members of the Design Business Association and I am also a member of the Chartered Society of Designers, which required an interview and presentation of my work. In Kent we have Creative Kent and Kent Creative Live. And working across the UK there is the Design Council. So as an industry I wonder if our voice is too disparate as opposed to other industries. We work a lot in the insurance and medical industries: both have one recognisable body that guarantees professionalism and quality. The GMC, for instance, ensures doctors are qualified and fit to practise and the Chartered Insurance Institute provides qualifications and designations for the UK insurance industry as well as providing CPD – which is a requirement to keep your designation. So a quality mark may be a good thing – but it needs to be done in a way that consolidates and involves the main design organisations as opposed to creating another benchmark. For buyers of design, what they are looking for are companies that are members of the DBA, the Chartered Society of Designers."

" MARTIN CARR, TRUE NORTH

Obviously whether this kind of initiative would work would depend on the criteria for participation. The theory is absolutely sound if it creates a shortlist of quality for clients – but awarding this would depend on whose say so? Who would make the decision? There may still be an agenda there to keep some agencies out and to keep others in. There is merit in this idea, for sure, but as a cynical northerner I would still be worried: everyone involved would have to prioritise and the amount of effort involved in breaking down all the different agendas, suggests that this has no chance of working in practice."

" PAUL BAILEY, 1977 DESIGN

There are pros and cons. One of the great things about the design industry is that anyone, a young go-getter, can start up a design business – yet one of the bad things is precisely that anyone can start up a design business and call themselves a graphic designer. In architecture, you have to be registered with RIBA – we don't have that in the graphic design industry. The problem with graphic design is that it is so fragmented – web designers, large format, brochures, it covers a million different things.

My major problem with a quality mark would be who's deciding who's good enough and who's not? As soon as you start measuring something in the creative industries, then what are you measuring? It's a massive problem because it's subjective, it's conceptual. Yes, you could have a quality mark if you are measuring measurable things, like operational criteria: you can measure the profitability of a company; you can measure how long it's been going. But how do you measure how good someone's work is? Who decides who is a good designer and who isn't – where do you draw that line?

We joined the Design Business Association because we felt that we needed something that said we do things properly, we are a proper company, we know how to run a business, we know it's a business function not just designing pretty pictures etc. We felt it is the nearest thing to a quality standard that was out there.

Trying to put loads of structures in place for a fluid, ever-changing industry is a massive problem. It's like trying to get a load of frogs into a box – they just keep jumping out. That is probably the biggest issue, but then again, is it? We want to be a dynamic industry, we want to keep changing, that's why it's so vibrant and so successful – so would putting limitations on it actually hinder the creative industries because part of our vitality is this dynamism?"

AN INTRODUCTION TO MBC GROUP

Agencies in the MBC group have a common aim to deliver business-changing creativity. Proudly British with an international team and global reach.

MBC Group takes a multi-disciplined approach to creativity. Using real insight, it helps brands improve their performance and connect more meaningfully with their customers. It is committed to delivering real value through imaginative design and proactive client service. The group offering can be narrowed to give solutions that are specialised and bespoke – while maintaining the highest creative standards.

AGENCIES

Ever After Brand, Ever After Film and Zone Design – located in London and Berkshire.

CLIENTS

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Specialties include: Strategy / Brand Architecture / Internal Comms & Culture / Identity / Branded Content / Idents / Network packages / Corporate movies / Trade & Channel / Shopper / Advertising / Campaigns / Promos / Websites / Mobile & Tablet Apps / Online Advertising / Bespoke Business Tools / Email Comms

Find out more: www.mbcgroup.co.uk

ACRONYMS

APDIG	All-Party Parliamentary Design and Innovation Group
BEDA	Bureau of European Design Associations
BIDA	British Industrial Design Association
CCSkills	Creative & Cultural Skills
CHEAD	Council for Higher Education in Art & Design
CIKTN	Creative Industries Knowledge Transfer Network
CSD	Chartered Society of Designers
D&AD	Design & Art Direction
DBA	Design Business Association
DCMS	Department for Culture, Media and Sport
DTA	Design and Technology Association
EDIP	European Design Innovation Platform
EiDD	Design For All Europe initiative
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
GVA	gross value added
ISO	International Organisation for Standardisation
Nesta	(formerly) National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts
PDR	National Centre for Product Design and Research (Wales)
PQQ	pre-qualification questionnaire
RAR	Recommended Agency Register
RFI	request for information
RIBA	Royal Institute of British Architects
SIG	Special Interest Group
UKTI	UK Trade & Investment

APPENDIX: ORGANISATIONS AND INITIATIVES*

All-Party Parliamentary Design and Innovation Group (APDIG): This is a forum for debate between parliament and the UK's design and innovation communities that has also taken a proactive role in researching trends and promoting quality. The group is comprised of parliamentarians from across both benches and both houses. It is supported by organisations from across the design field and lobbies for a greater role for design in government. In April 2014, for example, it launched a "Manifesto" at the Design Museum making recommendations to government on behalf of design and designers. Its consultations with industry participants has allowed it to debate the role of design and consider such proposals as the appointment of Chief Design Adviser, with the same status as the position of Chief Scientific Adviser. In December 2013, APDIG published a term paper proposing that design is suffering from a PR problem which leaves it misunderstood and undervalued by government, underused by business, and misrepresented in the media. This aimed to start a conversation about how designers themselves can articulate what they do more effectively.

www.policyconnect.org.uk/apdig/home

British Industrial Design Association (BIDA): This is the trade body representing industrial designers. It is a not-for-profit organisation that is financed by members. A key role is communicating the value of industrial design to the UK economy by championing the industry to government, business and other trade bodies.

www.britishindustrialdesign.org.uk

Chartered Society of Designers (CSD): This is the world's largest chartered body of professional designers in all disciplines with members in 33 countries that seeks to regulate and control their practice. A charity, the CSD is governed by Royal Charter and operates accreditation programmes for members and continuing professional development. It is not a trade body or association and membership is only awarded to individual designers who prove their professional competences and can then use MCSD™ or FCSD™ after their name.

www.csd.org.uk

CHEAD (Council for Higher Education in Art & Design): This is the association of 65 educational institutions with degree or postgraduate provision in art and design.

www.chead.ac.uk

CIKTN (Creative Industries Knowledge Transfer Network): This is an interface between the Technology Strategy Board (the UK's innovation agency) and Britain's creative industries that supports efforts to exploit the potential of existing and emerging technologies as a driver of innovation.

connect.innovateuk.org/web/creativektn

Crafts Council: This is the national development agency for contemporary craft in the UK funded by Arts Council England.

www.craftscouncil.org.uk

*Not comprehensive: smaller organisations and other bodies whose work may have a bearing on the design sector, but not exclusively, are not included.

Creative & Cultural Skills (CCSkills): This is one of several sector skills councils established by the government to foster the development of a skilled workforce and bridge the gap between industry, education and the government as well as to give employers influence over education and skills development. CCSkills works with the National Skills Academy for Creative & Cultural – a network of 230 employers – to deliver its aims.

ccskills.org.uk

Creative Industries Council: This is a joint forum between the creative industries and government co-chaired by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. It was set up to be a voice for creative industries and focuses on areas where there are barriers to growth in the sector, such as access to finance, skills, export markets, regulation, intellectual property and infrastructure. Its members are leading figures from across the creative and digital industries. The council acts through a number of taskforces and working groups. In January 2014 it launched a website (www.thecreativeindustries.co.uk) to promote the UK creative industry on the global stage, designed to provide an international trade audience with a single overview and guide to the UK's creative landscape. This for the first time provides a central digital hub linking the industry, UKTI and the FCO as they focus on promoting the sector worldwide.

www.gov.uk/government/groups/creative-industries-council#role-of-the-group

Creative Skillset: This is the creative industries body that supports skills and training for this sector and is a charity whose board membership is drawn from senior employment and stakeholder interests. It works across sectors to help the creative industries develop skills and talent, and influences and shapes policy.

www.creativeskillset.org

D&AD (Design & Art Direction): This was created in 1962 by a group of designers and art directors to raise standards and has been a respected non-profit body in the graphic design and advertising sector since. Its awards to reward, promote and enable creative brilliance in all areas of creative , take the form of coloured "pencils" and are recognised globally for their prestige. It offers creatives and clients training and development.

www.dandad.org

Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS): This is the government department that protects and promotes cultural and artistic heritage and helps businesses and communities to grow by investing in innovation.

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-culture-media-sport

Design and Technology Association (DTA): This supports and champions design and technology education in schools. Its Design Mark is a quality standards framework developed jointly with the Design Council and intended as an aspirational badge awarded to primary, SEN and secondary schools that demonstrate excellence in their teaching of design.

www.data.org.uk

Design Business Association (DBA): This is a trade association in the UK that aims to build bridges between designers and businesses and to champion effective design. Its membership consists of over 400 design agencies and design-led businesses employing in excess of 5,000 staff. It has worked closely with the sector skills council, Creative & Cultural Skills, to support the design industry to reach its economic potential. A key role is to represent the interests of the UK design industry in the wider world.

www.dba.org.uk

Design Commission: This is APDIG's research arm and is an industry-led body that conducts high-level research aimed at driving thinking around design policy in the UK.

www.policyconnect.org.uk/apdig/design-commission

Design Council: Established by Winston Churchill in 1944, the Design Council is the government's advisory body on design, setting the benchmark for promoting the discipline nationwide, and has unrivalled influence and partnerships within the sector. In 2011 it integrated with Cabe, the government's adviser on design in the built environment. A campaigning independent charity, it exists to champion design standards, inspire new thinking, encourage debate and inform government policy.

www.designcouncil.org.uk

Design Museum: This is London's museum of international contemporary design covering product, industrial, graphic, fashion and architectural design.

designmuseum.org

Design Pool: This is a joint venture created by three membership organisations – the CSD, the Institution of Engineering Designers and the Institute of Materials – in recognition of the fragmented nature of the design community and the diverse interests of their members. It aims to help recently qualified designers negotiate their way through the sector.

www.designpool.org.uk

Design Research Society: This is a learned society with an international membership that aims to promote and develop research about design.

www.designresearchsociety.org

Design Special Interest Group (SIG): This is an arm of the Technology Strategy Board – a UK public body reporting to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills – that supports business innovation by building a community of designers and technology innovators, and encouraging the use of design earlier in the R&D process.

connect.innovateuk.org/web/design-sig/who-we-are

GREAT Britain campaign: This is a government campaign to showcase British talent and excellence internationally.

www.gov.uk/britainisgreat

Nesta: Formerly the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts, this is an independent innovation charity that aims to support good ideas by providing investments and grants and by using research, networks and skills to help these flourish.

www.nesta.org.uk

PDR/Design Wales: This is the National Centre for Product Design and Research based within Cardiff Metropolitan University (UWIC).

pdronline.info

Recommended Agency Register (RAR): This is a creative industry database of over 6,000 agencies in the UK and overseas that is used by more than 5,200 clients to find creative partners. It also provides consultancy services to clients to support or lead their agency selection process, shortlisting, briefing and performance data. It is part of the Carnyx Group which is responsible for The Drum, the UK's largest marketing website.

www.recommendedagencies.com

Sorrell Foundation: This was established in 1999 with the aim of inspiring creativity in young people and runs a number of initiatives in schools.

www.thesorrellfoundation.com

Technology Strategy Board: This is the UK's innovation agency aiming to boost economic growth by stimulating and supporting business-led innovation.

www.innovateuk.org

UK Trade & Investment (UKTI): This is the government department that works with businesses to ensure their success in international markets. It has established a creative industries taskforce of 100 leading creative businesses as part of an international trade development strategy for this crucial sector of the economy. The UKTI Design Partners is the joint industry/government body that works to increase the UK's international design business and is a partnership of the main design industry bodies and government departments and agencies involved in supporting British designers and design companies internationally.

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/uk-trade-investment

Awards

Cannes Lions
DBA (Design Effectiveness Awards)
Design Council (Design Challenges)
Design Museum (Designs of the Year)
D&AD Awards
Design Week
RAR
The Drum (Marketing Awards)
Transform

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