



Royal College of Art

DESIGN. DIFFERENT

HELEN HAMLYN CENTRE FOR DESIGN

Vol. 6 November 2025

'Next year is the 40th anniversary of the original New Design for Old exhibition, which I curated in the Boiler House at the V&A in 1986. It was here that the seeds for HHCD at the Royal College of Art were sown and the gauntlet for 'Designing for our future Selves' was thrown. It is extraordinary to see what the Centre has achieved and the impact its pioneering work in inclusive design has had globally.

This annual Design.Different magazine gives an insight into the breadth of my Centre's work and its fundamental focus on human-centred design with inclusion, diversity and equity firmly embedded in its heart and process.

As we move into this fourth decade, this year brings further evolution and progress for the Helen Hamlyn Centre with the appointment of the new Co-chairs, Professors Paul Chamberlain and Claire Craig, and the recent arrival of Professor Hua Dong as the new Director to lead the Centre into its next chapter.

I look forward to the continued growth and development of the Centre in advancing inclusive design to create a more equitable and just society.'

- Lady Helen Hamlyn, CBE

In this edition of Design.Different, we are showcasing the innovative work of Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design from October 2024 to October 2025. Our focus spans four pivotal themes: Age & Diversity, Healthcare, Inclusive Design for Business Impact, and Inclusive Design for Social Impact. We collaborated with industry leaders and academic partners to tackle a diverse array of projects. Our Executive Education courses and PhD supervision are designed to share our knowledge, ignite new learning, and drive real change by challenging perspectives and expanding experiences.

Contents

- 1** THE YEAR IN REVIEW
- 14** AGE & DIVERSITY
- 26** HEALTHCARE
- 34** INCLUSIVE DESIGN FOR BUSINESS IMPACT
- 54** INCLUSIVE DESIGN FOR SOCIAL IMPACT
- 68** EXECUTIVE EDUCATION
- 76** PHD STUDENTS
- 84** AWARDS
- 94** LASTING IMPACT
- 104** ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Welcome

Dr Emma Wakelin, Pro Vice-Chancellor Research & Innovation

The 2024/25 academic year saw a number of major changes at the RCA, and at the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design. With our new Vice-Chancellor, Professor Christoph Lindner, in post, we welcomed our new Helen Hamlyn Co-Chairs of Design, Professor Claire Craig and Professor Paul Chamberlain, who joined the Centre in March 2025.

We also said farewell to Rama Gheerawo, who stepped down after nearly a decade as Director of the Centre, and over 25 years at the College. In August, we announced the appointment of Professor Hua Dong as the new Director of the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design.

We are grateful to both Rama, and to Professor Jeremy Myerson, former Helen Hamlyn Chair of Design, for all that they have done for the Centre over many years, and we look forward with excitement to working under the leadership of our new Co-Chairs and Director.

Alongside these changes, the Centre's work has remained focussed on inclusive design, with the team delivering projects addressing inclusive healthcare and wellbeing, architecture and accessible environments, working with partners in business, charities, governments and community groups, as well as in collaborations with other universities.

Please join us in celebrating the Centre's achievements over the past year, and in looking forward to the exploration of new opportunities in the year ahead.

'This is an incredibly exciting time for the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design, the very heart of the RCA's research and innovation ecosystem. We are delighted with the appointment of our Chairs, who bring invaluable expertise and visionary thinking, alongside our new Director, who will lead and galvanise the Centre's team.'

These appointments mark an important and transformative step in positioning the HHCD for future success and ensuring its continued relevance and significance in a world faced with increasingly complex challenges related to healthcare, age and ability.'

- Professor Christoph Lindner, President and Vice-Chancellor of the Royal College of Art

'With immense excitement, I joined the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design in October 2025, after Roger Coleman, Jeremy Myerson and Rama Gheerawo who had directed the Centre and built its solid foundation as the global leader in inclusive design. We deeply appreciate the support of the Helen Hamlyn Trust. With the new RCA strategy in the making, I look forward to meeting and collaborating with all of you.'

- Professor Hua Dong, Director of the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design

Overview

Dr Melanie Flory, HHCD Associate Director, Research

The academic year 2024/25 has been marked by significant changes and achievements. Dr Katie Gaudion and Gail Ramster have made notable achievements through the College's Impact Fellowship funding scheme. Katie received an impact fellowship to develop and expand on a previous project in collaboration with Autism at Kingwood to create a sensory design tool for everyday environments. Gail's fellowship in partnership with Age UK will explore public toilet provision to inform future policy and change.

After four years of research, the Centre's AI for Wellbeing project, which was part of the Laboratory for Artificial Intelligence in Design, a collaboration between the RCA and the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, concluded in June. Led by former Director, Rama Gheerawo, the project focused on using AI to help reduce back pain. Researchers Tom Stables, Dr Narges Pourshahrokhi and Tong Lo developed a prototype of an app that utilises AI to create a personalised understanding of posture.

This summer, we wrapped up the redesign of the Royal Free Hospital's Major Haemorrhage Protocol. Researchers Tom Stables and Tong Lo guided the visual and content redesign to enhance timely clinical intervention and improve patient outcomes.

This year also marked the completion of two innovative architecture projects. The Enhancing

Future Community Connectivity for Ageing Well in Place initiative designed solutions to boost connectivity for older adults. Meanwhile, the Space in Mind project delved into the experiences of neurodivergent staff and students in public spaces at the RCA, highlighting the need for inclusive environments.

Our partnership with Tata Consultancy Services on the Vocal Accessibility project resulted in new vocal accessibility standards published in collaboration with the British Standards Institute. Released on 31 March 2025, they were celebrated at a launch event at TCS Pace Port London.

Congratulations to Professor Jo-Anne Bichard and Gail Ramster on the publication of their book, Designing Inclusive Public Toilets: Wee the People. The book offers a deep dive into UK public toilet design, backed by two decades of research with over 500 participants. A must-read that sets the standard for inclusivity!

The Centre is committed to the ongoing development of empathy-based approaches that create inclusive solutions for people and the planet. Our goals include enhancing personal agency and joy throughout different life stages, improving community connectivity, strengthening health systems, ensuring accessible environments, and promoting fairness in business policies and practices. We are excited about new opportunities and initiatives currently in progress, all driven by our vision of a better future for everyone.

Interview with Chairs of Design Professors Claire Craig and Paul Chamberlain

In March 2025, the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design had the pleasure of welcoming Professors Claire Craig and Paul Chamberlain as co-Chairs of Design. Professors Craig and Chamberlain have collaborated for nearly two decades, co-leading Lab4Living, a pioneering research group based at Sheffield Hallam University, and they bring extensive inclusive design and research experience to the Centre.

As they approach six months in their new roles, we sat down to discuss their backgrounds and experience to date, what they are most looking forward to about working with the Centre and what inclusive design means to them.

Claire: My interest in inclusive design started when I was very young. My aunt had multiple sclerosis, and I could really see how the objects and equipment that she was given, while they gave her some sort of independence and a quality of life, were so far removed from who she was. She found that really difficult in terms of her identity. That was when the inclusive design seed was sown, so, after my BA, I trained to become an occupational therapist, working with people who had had serious injuries or trauma.

It was while I was teaching occupational therapy at a university that I became interested in research. My first research project looked at

how to teach design thinking to other people. I then did a PhD in design, and that was how Paul and I first connected. We went on to direct the Lab4Living, which is an interdisciplinary research space bringing together design and health.

Right from the beginning, my roots were in understanding the power and value of design in remaking life and enabling people to become who they are.

Paul: My background is in making stuff. I always enjoyed the more practical subjects in school, so I went on to do a foundation course in art and design, and then a degree in three-dimensional design. I then had three fantastic years studying at the Royal College of Art where I met Peter Christian (now Head of Executive Education at the RCA). Following our graduation we set up a business together designing and producing furniture, which we ran for ten years. That experience – of running a business, designing things and then commercially realising them – was so valuable.

I went back into education after that. One of the first research projects I worked on was with Derbyshire Health Authority designing equipment, furniture, environments for people who were severely sensory impaired, deaf and blind. Initially, it really threw me, because until

that point, all my experience had relied on the ability of clients to see and then communicate verbally. Understanding how to include those people in the design process was a pivotal point in my career.

Claire: I totally agree. For me, the power of design is that tangibility of working with people to co-create something.

Paul: Sometimes designers or engineers can focus too much on the physicality of the object they are designing, and forget about the people that, ultimately, will be using it. For us, inclusive design is about bringing those people back into the design process.

Claire: Absolutely. Inclusive design is about more than just inclusive products. It's about inclusive methods of engaging people in the process. One of my favourite examples of that was a project called Future Bathroom (led by Paul, funded by EPSRC) which explored how people really use bathroom spaces. That is something people are often reluctant to discuss, so we created playful, creative ways for them to share their experiences anonymously. We designed a public exhibition called the Field Lab, with features like the Bog Blog and a digital graffiti wall, to encourage honest and informal contributions. We wanted to make our data collection more engaging, participatory, and reflective of real-life needs, while challenging conventional ideas of how inclusive design research should be done.

Paul: Design should be about more than just solving a problem. It should be about adding enjoyment to life, and part of that is making the design process fun.

Claire: For me, the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design has always been a kind of shining beacon showing that there is a different way to do things. When I started my career, learning about the Centre really inspired me to think about new ways to design, to challenge the norm. I'm really excited to join the Centre and help continue that legacy.

Paul: It's a very exciting time to join, because the Royal College of Art has this incredible platform for design, and, as Claire says, the Centre has an amazing legacy of over thirty years. But, the world is very different now than it was thirty years ago. So for us, the challenge is how to help bring those ideas into today's world, and really address some of the issues that are more pressing now. And we're really excited to do it!



From left to right: Lucy O'Rorke (Director of Projects, Helen Hamlyn Trust), Dr Melanie Flory (HHCD Associate Director, Research), Professor Claire Craig (Helen Hamlyn Chair of Design), Professor Paul Chamberlain (Helen Hamlyn Chair of Design). Credit: Chris Lee

A Year of Events

OCT 2024

Innovation/Inspiration: The Grand Challenges for London Boroughs in Responsible AI, Climate and Smart Cities

RCA Battersea | Gail Ramster



NOV 2024

Panel discussion hosted by Crown Paints which reflected on design and neurodivergence

Manchester Material Source | Dr Katie Gaudion

'From WHAT we are designing to WHO we are serving?'

Presentation delivered at RCA's Sodexo Project Launch: "Eats & Algorithms: Digitising Food Consumer Experience for a Sustainable Future"
RCA Kensington | Dr Ninela Ivanova

FEB 2025

Design Dialogues #04 Inclusive Innovation in Water Services

Guest lecture
University of Southampton
Dr Ninela Ivanova

'Creating inclusive public toilets' for Arup Access and Inclusive Environments

Online | Gail Ramster

MAR 2025

Inclusive Design for Business Impact

Presentation delivered at RCA's Wandsworth Chamber of Commerce event
RCA Battersea | Dr Ninela Ivanova

Launch of Vocal Accessibility Standards (PAS 901:2025) in collaboration with TATA Consultancy Services and British Standards

TCS Pace Port, London | Dr Chris McGinley

Masterclass on Cognitive Reframing with The Design Village

Delhi, India | Dr Melanie Flory

Design.Different Symposium and Magazine Launch

RCA Battersea | HHCD Team



APR 2025

Cambridge Workshop on Universal Access and Assistive Technology

Cambridge | Tom Stables, Tong Lo

Designing Neuroinclusive Workplaces with HoK

London | Dr Katie Gaudion

Presentation on Design and Autism

Portfield School, Dorset
Dr Katie Gaudion

MAY 2025

Panel discussion at the 'The Office' (a leading workplace culture and employee wellbeing conference and exhibition), where we explored what it means to design neuroinclusive workplaces

Barr Gazetas, London | Dr Katie Gaudion

Healing Environments - Can Spaces Truly Promote Wellbeing

Online, IE University's Master in Interior Design | Dr Katie Gaudion

Navigating the Emotional and Sensory Experience with Colour

(Clerkenwell Design Week)
London | Dr Chris McGinley

Panel Discussion: Inclusive Design: Space, Light + Perception

A collaborative event between Stio Zaha Hadid Studio and ERCO in partnership with Arc Magazine and hosted at Zaha Hadid Architects Gallery.
(Clerkenwell Design week)
Zaha Hadid Gallery, London | Dr Katie Gaudion



JUN 2025

London Festival of Architecture

Panel discussion on how to make buildings fully accessible: listen, respond and push for change
London | Dr Katie Gaudion

How Does a Paper Clip Make You Feel?

Reflections on inclusive design and meaningful collaboration with neurodivergent communities at the 2nd ACM Europe Summer School on accessible and inclusive technologies
University of Borås, Sweden | Dr Katie Gaudion

Crown Paints and The RIBA Journal Webinar: Designing for Neurodiversity

Online | Dr Katie Gaudion

British Society of Gerontology 54th Annual Conference. Community Connectedness: co-design conversations for preferred futures

Session: BSG Creative Ageing Symposia 2: Seen & Heard: Creative Conversations about Ageing Futures
University of Surrey, Guildford | Dr Chris McGinley

JUL 2025

Parliamentary Drop-in Briefing for MPs and Peers called 'Public Toilets: An Economic Essential for Communities

Houses of Parliament, London
Gail Ramster, Jo-Anne Bichard

Forum for the Future of Community Connectivity in Later Life

RCA Battersea | Dr Chris McGinley, Beatrice Sangster

Great British Toilet Map and the Public Toilets Research Unit

BBC Breakfast | Gail Ramster



Wee the People

Gail Ramster and Professor Jo-Anne Bichard

This July, the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design hosted a launch event for *Designing Inclusive Public Toilets: Wee the People*, a book by Professor Jo-Anne Bichard and Gail Ramster. Held at RCA Kensington, we were joined by a diverse audience from industry, charities, retail, campaign groups, architects, former researchers – even a politician – for an enjoyable evening, raising a glass to this milestone in the Public Toilets Research Unit’s development.



Jo-Anne and Gail at the Wee the People book launch. Credit: Anthony Shepherd

Public toilets might not seem particularly exciting. They often go unnoticed in our day to day lives,

but they are crucial – and making sure they’re designed to be inclusive benefits us all. Professor Jo-Anne Bichard and Gail Ramster, who initiated the Public Toilets Research Unit, have dedicated years to researching how to design inclusive public toilets and they have consolidated that research into a book, *Designing Inclusive Public Toilets*, published by Bloomsbury.

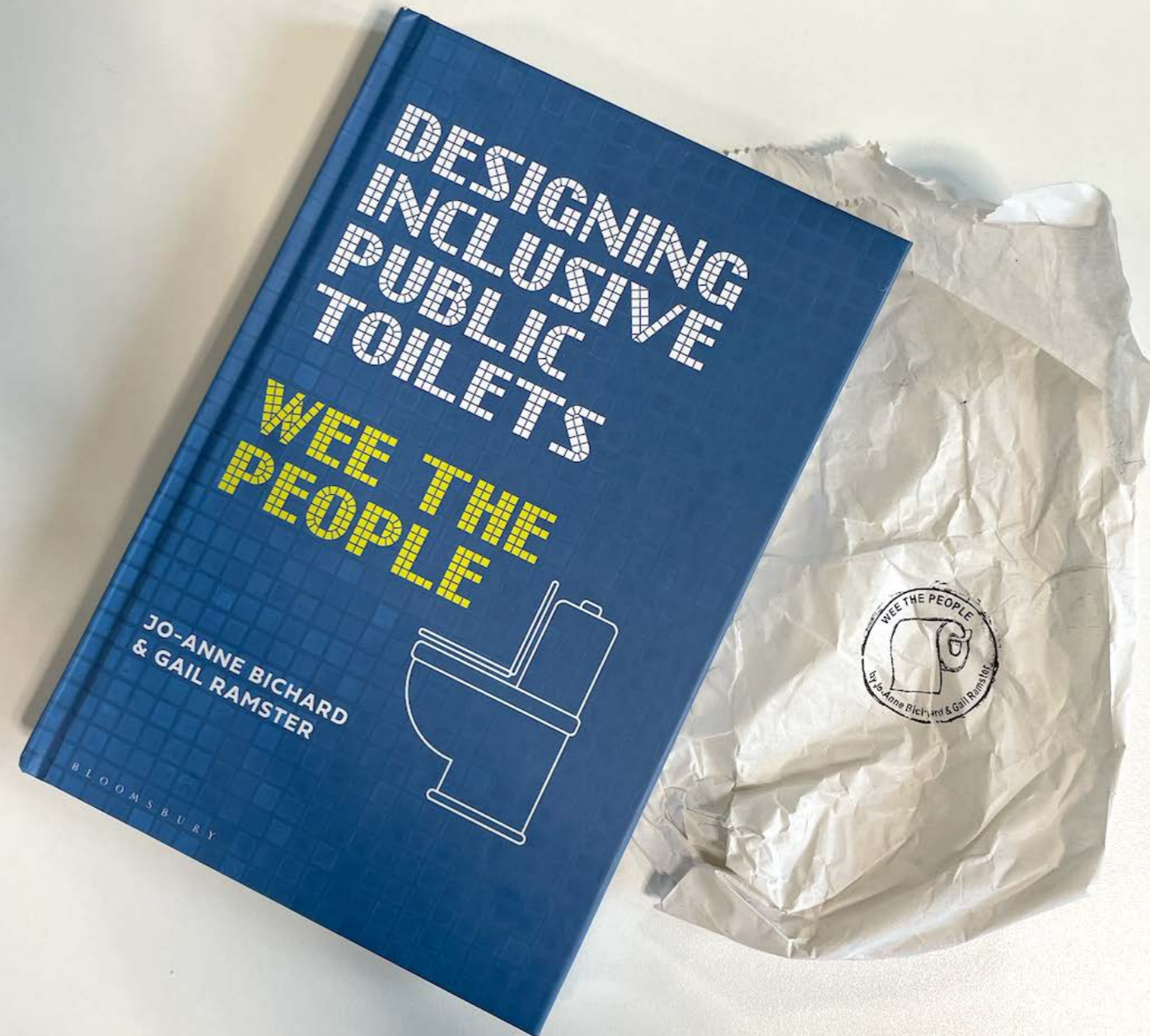
The book covers all aspects of inclusive toilet design, from the entrance to the toilet paper holder, the walls, floors and locks, and serves as a manifesto for the inclusive toilets of the future.

Read on for an extract from *Designing Inclusive Public Toilets: Wee the People*.

Everyone has a toilet story

Here is an example of a typical conversation we will have on a weekly basis:

- Q:** So, what do you do?
A: I’m a design researcher, I specialise in inclusive design.
Q: Oh, what’s that?
A: Well, it’s where we involve people in research to hopefully design things that are more accessible for everyone.
Q: Like what?
A: Well ... my specialist subject is public toilets.
Q: [Nervous laughter] [Pause] I remember a toilet I once used...





Once we get past the awkwardness of the subject, we find everyone has a toilet story. And of course, should we win awards for our work, we are always ‘flushed with pride.’

It’s just a public toilet, right?

Well, yes and no.

Public toilets might seem uninteresting but are indispensable. They are a civilizing element of our built environment, but they are also taboo. We are biological beings who excrete but cultured beings who have collectively decided that only in this specific environment will we wee and poo (and vomit and manage menstruation and take a moment to withdraw from public life and get changed and...).

Public toilets are one of the most mundane aspects of our landscapes, in our cities, towns and countryside – it’s ‘just’ a public toilet. Yet public toilets are essential for our movement around and between these cities, towns and countryside. If it’s ‘just’ a public toilet, what’s the big deal?

The public toilet is a place where nature meets culture. With this meeting of body with a design artefact comes a number of cultural considerations. Toilets come with politics, rights of access, social rules and etiquette, hygiene concerns and a bad reputation. These issues push design beyond merely meeting the functional needs of the body. It is more than just a public toilet, it is ‘a highly contested site. It shelters a very intimate activity that takes place in public space in proximity to complete strangers.’

Get toilets right, get anything right

An inclusive design approach will serve us beyond the design of the toilet. Public toilets are the petri dish of accessibility where every challenge of the built environment comes together in one facility. If designers get this right, they can get anything right, which is just as well as the toilet is no use on its own. An inclusive toilet on the high street serves no one if the shops themselves are not accessible. No one is coming to the neighbourhood just to use the loo; it is the infrastructure, not the destination.

But the lessons learnt from designing inclusive toilets can be extended to our wider built environment and the products and services that support it. Maybe we could take a leaf out of New Zealand’s and Japan’s approaches and design amazing public toilets that will make people come to the neighbourhood just to visit the toilets!

Heralding public toilets as the ultimate design challenge could be their saviour, just as their downfall up to now has been from being disparaged, even vilified, and consequently overlooked. We cannot stress enough the importance of talking about toilets. The toilet taboo that affects us in day-to-day conversations continues in professional and policy-making circles. During our research we consistently find that guidance for the high street, urban design, active travel and public health does not mention toilets.

Dr Naoya Tojo

Visiting Fellow

I am a Visiting Fellow from KDDI Research, the research institute of a Japanese major telecommunications operator. I joined the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design in December 2024 for a one year fellowship, during which time I am working closely with the Centre's researchers. My research career to date has specialised in the human-centred design of rehabilitation support systems, design research and participatory design.

Throughout my career, I have conducted people-centred research through community design and living laboratory projects, focusing on democratising technology and design methods, and participants' engagement, empowerment and mutual learning. In these projects, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork, interview studies and workshop design and facilitation; the major findings from this body of work have been formalised into academic papers and patents. Reflecting on my experience as a design researcher, I acknowledge that there has been somewhat of an imbalance between research and practical design project experience. While I have consistently published in academic journals and esteemed international conferences, I have relatively little experience of 'lived' design projects. My interest in the HHCD was driven by their experience with real world projects, both in terms of business engagement and the inclusion of people in their process.

Historically, KDDI has focused on technologies such as telecommunication, computing, security and AI. They are increasingly required to respond to a highly complex business environment and reimagine innovation beyond technology, however, this shift is still in its infancy.

Reflecting on the current status of the company, it is clear that to become an organisation that is capable of innovating and responding to unpredictable futures, it is necessary to move away from the technocentric business models of the past towards inclusive design thinking. During my time as a Visiting Fellow, I aim to learn about the lifecycle of design projects, how they are planned, initiated, progressed, completed and repurposed through people- and planet-centric lenses. I am interested in how the people who work and study in the Centre acquire design knowledge and skills, and the culture, values, and education offered at the RCA.

I have been thinking of my time at the Centre in phases. In the onboarding phase I worked to understand the methods and context of two main projects (Community Connectivity for Ageing Well in Place and AiDLab: Wearables for Personalised Posture) through literature reviews and study of project documents. In the research phase, I participated in projects and collaborated with other researchers. Design ethnography, including interview study and participatory observation, is my primary method for exploring

the realities of the projects and researchers. In the design phase, I worked on the creation of design deliverables, including publications, workshops, educational programs, design interventions and concepts of service experience. I also worked with RCA students on an exploratory scoping study examining and conceptualising future student interactions on campus.

I find the RCA, the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design, as well as the surrounding environment, culture, and history of London and the UK deeply thought-provoking. Here, design and art events take place every week, and there is an abundance of museums and galleries that are open to the public. I feel that this widespread exposure has

fostered a sensibility for design and art among both the city and its people, which in turn contributes to a high level of social receptivity toward design and art.

Before coming to the Centre, I regarded inclusive design as just one of many domains within the diverse design landscape, alongside participatory design, co-design and interaction design. Over the past six months, however, as I have observed how everyone at this centre, the home of inclusive design, engages with people (including me, a visitor), I have come to feel that inclusive design goes beyond approaches and methodologies. It is deeply rooted and related to values, mindsets, and attitudes.



Citizens, community groups, researchers and designers co-created "future story maps" during a co-design workshop organised by Naoya, sharing their hopes and concerns about emerging technologies.

AGE & DIVERSITY

Age and Diversity in Challenging Times

Dr Chris McGinley

Within the Age & Diversity space, we continue to engage with today's challenging times and the complex multifaceted issues they bring, in which championing inclusive design is more critical than ever.

Life expectancy in the UK has increased, however, disparities persist. The UK's older population in 2025 reflects a growing diversity like never before. Over 18% of the total population are aged 65 or older, and within this, ethnic minority communities are experiencing the fastest rise in older demographics. Our elderly population has never been the homogenous group that ageist clichés frequently portrayed in the media would have us believe. We are now better at appreciating that multiplicity, and need to continue to strive to understand the diverse experiences, cultural backgrounds and differing needs that are shaped by life-long histories and systemic inequalities and demand targeted solutions to improve life experiences for all.

There remains a critical lack of inclusive innovation in housing, particularly flexible, later-life and intergenerational housing, and our traditional models are failing to accommodate varied and changing living preferences, particularly non-traditional ones. Older people based in rural locations have been identified as especially vulnerable, facing isolation, poor transport and limited healthcare access, which

is widening the urban-rural divide. Unexpected developments in this space include an increase in intergenerational living, contrary to previous trends and predictions, particularly among groups such as British Asian and African families. This is just one of the current developments that has a multitude of implications, not least for future care, and has yet to be fully unpacked. These shifts have been evident in the research of the Age & Diversity space over the last year; research that has demonstrated the demand for innovative housing solutions.

Inflation and cost-of-living pressures continue to deepen inequality, with older adults and people with disabilities being disproportionately affected. However, the government's focus on health, employment, and prevention presents potential opportunities if designed with real people in mind. Policies promoting lifelong health, equitable work opportunities, and increased productivity could transform many people's experiences, such as those in later life and non-neurotypical people, a demographic that is growing rapidly – approximately 1 in 5 working-age adults in the UK is considered likely to be neurodivergent. However, other policy changes bring new challenges, particularly as the support for disabled people is threatened by proposed changes to Personal Independence Payment.

Technology has been another prevalent topic within the Age & Diversity space. While people seem balanced in terms of attitudes and expectations around digital technology and services, there were nonetheless fears in terms of essential services, worsening loneliness due to new digital norms, and concerns around AI and the potential for disruption to jobs and disinformation.

We need to disrupt ingrained ageism and expand both citizens' and communities' understanding of a healthy lifespan. The scope for equitable, inclusive design remains, to build a fairer future the UK must amplify under-represented voices in policymaking and design, and integrate technology and sustainability into inclusive design conversations. Inclusive design is in a unique position to engage with and act upon these topics through communication and product and experience design based on inclusive insights, to ensure no one is left behind in our rapidly changing world.



Image generated at community workshop. Credit: Ben Connors

Enhancing Future Community Connectivity for Ageing Well in Place: Co-designing Technology and Environments

Dr Chris McGinley, Dr Katie Gaudion, Beatrice Sangster, with Dr Melanie Flory, Dr Gerard Briscoe, Sidse Caroll, PhD, and Dr Rosanna Traina

This project, part of Vivensa's *Creating Suitable Living Environments and Communities for an Ageing Population* initiative, aimed to explore how future community connectivity within social housing might be improved through a better understanding of residents' needs, aspirations, and physical environments.

The fundamental requirement for a good home is that it meets its residents' needs, including strong connections with friends, family, neighbours, and the broader community. Connectivity can be facilitated through various physical, social, and technological interventions.

This project emphasised the importance of designing in ways that meet the needs of older people by involving them directly in the design research process. Working with residents from across three Guinness Partnership's housing sites, the project used inclusive co-design methods to derive a collection of 'Community Connectivity' concepts that would improve residents' lives. It intended to inform future design interventions, conversations, and enhance design research practices by including ageing populations in the process.

Working closely with the Guinness Partnership, we identified homes and participants for the research to capture a diverse range of experiences. The project engaged three Guinness Homes sites across the UK in North, South, and coastal locations, each with its own traits and distinct identity in terms of characteristics, residents, and communities. Within each location, we collaborated with a Guinness Independent Living Advisor, who provided information and support to residents on site, and acted as a conduit between residents and the Guinness Partnership.

By engaging residents in outlining criteria and co-creating future visions, the project sought to demystify what future community connection should look like from the perspective of residents. It builds on themes of 'community cohesion' and 'resident voices' that were identified during an earlier pilot study with the Guinness Partnership.

Through design futuring activities, we explored residents' current experiences and future aspirations for connectivity, creating insight resources and identifying key themes. Insights were gathered first through cultural probes, mapping preferences for spaces, technology,

and social interactions, followed by interviews that deepened understanding of community life and technology use. These informed a co-design workshop aimed at generating ideas to improve connectivity at Guinness. Workshop kits were distributed to three sites, with five residents per location, and remotely facilitated by Independent Living Advisors over 2 hours and 45 minutes of reflective and idea-driven activities.

To generate design concepts, the research team held a design futuring workshop, inviting Design Futures MDes students to participate as future older adults. The workshop explored future

expectations and aspirations around connectivity, from which key themes, design interventions, policy implications, and illustrative concepts were developed. This process engaged students in creating concepts that envision potential futures of community connectivity. This co-design workshop, developed with Design Futures programme staff at the Royal College of Art, involved 12 students selected through a creative brief on ageing and communication. Drawing on research insights from Guinness residents, the students imagined and designed new ideas for community connectivity over the next decade.



Design Futures MDes Students, working with RCA Staff and John V Willshire (Smithery). Credit: Beatrice Sangster

The 10 Futures are illustrated Design Futures concepts presenting visions of potential future connectivity; they are not intended to be definitive or universally prescriptive. Rather, they serve as a source of inspiration and practical guidance for designers, service providers, support staff and policymakers seeking to build more connected, supportive living environments. While not representative of all residents' preferences, the concepts demonstrate how design research insights can be framed as a variety of approaches towards meeting differing, and sometimes conflicting aspirations and needs, and how communal and private spaces might be leveraged to reduce social isolation and enhance wellbeing.

This project placed particular emphasis on the potential of communal spaces to serve as catalysts for inclusive engagement, alongside the necessity for nuanced strategies that acknowledge the diverse experiences of later life. By implementing remote co-design methodologies, initially developed in response to the uncertainties posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the project also contributes methodological insight into how creative collaboration with older adults can be sustained across physical and digital divides.

The final phase of this research, Forum for the Future of Community Connectivity, took place in June 2025. It extended the dialogue initiated here by convening designers, policymakers, and subject-matter experts to explore emerging findings, strengthen collaborative networks, and identify new opportunities for deeper and more inclusive engagement with ageing populations. The event featured expert panel discussions and showcased key findings, future design concepts,

and policy considerations aimed at shaping the future of ageing well in place.

By incorporating participatory research methods, our aim was to empower communities and decision-makers to co-create environments that support both individual and collective well-being. The insights and design recommendations developed within this project are intended to provide designers and policymakers with insights and suggestions for developing adaptable, inclusive, and community-centred spaces that reflect the needs and aspirations of the communities they serve.



Note: This project was conceived during the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the uncertainty at that time the research was proposed to be carried out remotely. This intention was preserved in the project post-pandemic, adding a challenging and complex component to the research process that followed.

Community Connectivity Worksheet



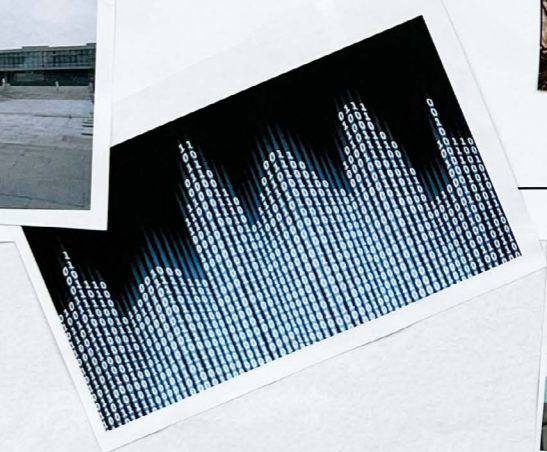
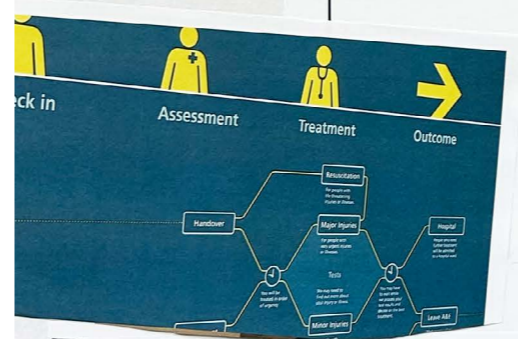
Task: Develop your thoughts & ideas into a future proposition. Activity: Futures Concept Pitch Duration: 15 Mins

Challenge / Problem *GP'S FOR FUTURE*

Goal *PUMP UP GP'S*

Proposal *AI HEALTH INSIGHTS (SPACE)*

Visuals to tell the story



HEALTH!

avoid dislike



Developing a Sensory Design Tool for Everyday Environments

Dr Katie Gaudion

In 2010, Autism at Kingwood began a six-year collaboration with the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design. In 2011, designer Katie Gaudion joined the project. That same year, she and fellow designer Andrew Brand collaborated on the project Exploring Sensory Preferences: Living Environments for Adults with Autism, in which they created a set of sensory preference cards, inspired by their work with some of the autistic individuals supported by Autism at Kingwood.

As designers, Katie and Andrew understood how important it was to learn about the sensory preferences – likes and dislikes – of the people they were collaborating with. But this wasn't always as simple as having a conversation. For some, words and spoken language weren't the main way they communicated. So, drawing on existing sensory profiling questionnaires, Katie and Andrew developed visual sensory preference cards to enable autistic individuals to express their sensory likes and dislikes through gesture and eye contact.

The *What Do You Like? Sensory preference cards* is a set of 75 cards, each showing a different type of sensory experience that relates to the home, described in simple words and illustrated by photographs. The cards act as visual prompts for individuals with limited verbal speech to articulate their preferences. Together with a family member, friend or support worker, the

cards are used by an individual to express their likes, dislikes or neutrality about the image. The activity involves autistic adults as active participants rather than relying on other people to interpret their sensory preferences on their behalf. Once categorised, the cards create a visual mood board of an individual's sensory likes and dislikes that can be used for making activity and interior design decisions.

The reverse sides of the cards are colour-coded by six sensory systems (touch, sight, sound, smell, balance and movement), providing a quick visual indication of the participants' preferred sensory system(s) and practical design advice. The *What Do You Like?* cards supported Katie in designing a garden, products and activities. Since they started to be used, the *What Do You Like?* cards have received a growing interest from occupational therapists, teachers, families, designers, psychologists and dementia care facilities in the UK and the US.

Over the past decade, the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design has continued to expand its work in the field of neurodivergence, most notably through the development of PAS 6463, the first set of design standards for built environments that explicitly consider neurodivergent needs. The team's ongoing project, Streets for Diversity, which explores neurodivergent experiences in urban spaces, was recently awarded the Design

Research for Healthy Cities Award at the Healthy City Design Awards 2024.

Thanks to an Impact Fellowship from the Royal College of Art, Katie is now reuniting with Autism at Kingwood to further develop the cards.

The next phase of work invites collaboration with autistic individuals, teachers, speech and language therapists, parents, and designers to trial the cards in a range of real-world contexts and co-develop the next evolution of this inclusive design tool.

The pictures...make what we should be asking more precise, which makes me feel more confident about providing an answer. I also like how the picture cards will help towards involving the people we support. It is about them after all, and it's important to give them the tools to be heard and to contribute opinions and input.

- Autistic Adult Support Worker

I have found the sensory preference cards extremely useful. Although my son is verbal and understands spoken words, he finds engaging with people extremely challenging and will always avoid eye contact. The cards enabled us to get a broader profile of his choice of environment in a non-threatening way. He really enjoyed using the cards.

- Parent of Autistic Son

I use them as a discussion point with parents of children with sensory processing difficulties. I have also used them with people with higher functioning autism to facilitate discussion on what is a sensory preference and when do they impact on function.

The quality of the pictures coupled with the information on the back of the cards has been really useful for both client groups. Other staff members have realised their value hence the purchase of more.

- Occupational Therapist



Katie and participant engaging with the sensory cards

HEALTHCARE

Exploring Healthcare: Trends and Insights

Dr Melanie Flory

The Centre's 2024-2025 healthcare projects focused on leveraging inclusive design principles and practices to drive the integration and innovation of technology-based solutions to enhance treatment delivery and improve patient outcomes.

This trend is set to gain momentum, especially in light of the government's recent policy paper, *Fit for the Future: 10-Year Health Plan for England*. Statements such as 'Today the NHS is behind the technological curve,' and 'The NHS is the best placed system in the world to harness the advances we are seeing in artificial intelligence...' predict the direction of advancement and funding for health care research and innovation in the UK.

Now more than ever, inclusive design research and practices are essential for ensuring that

technology-based health solutions offer equitable access and achieve effective outcomes for all users and stakeholders. Designing for better health and care is as much about health as it is about economics, policy, technology, social and geopolitical factors. This inevitably entails embracing a rich tapestry of viewpoints, living and lived experiences, and other significant influencing factors ranging from ethical concerns of AI-based solutions to global uncertainties. It calls for collaboration, equitable exchange, empathy-driven enquiry, and the co-creation of innovative solutions. These guiding principles of inclusive design are vividly exemplified in the major haemorrhage protocol, AI for back pain, and post-stroke wrist-wearable technology projects, presented in the following pages.



Wearable MedTech testing in the laboratory. Credit: Craig Langran, BBC World Service

Smart Yarns: Wearable MedTech for Stroke Rehabilitation and Recovery

Dr Laura Salisbury, Dr Melanie Flory, Dr Gopika Rajan

Smart Yarns, a Future Leaders Fellowship led by Dr Laura Salisbury with support from Dr Gopika Rajan and Dr Melanie Flory, focuses on rehabilitation for stroke survivors. For the nearly 1.2 million people in the UK currently living in the aftermath of a stroke, the challenges are immense due to the resulting impairment of arm and hand function. Smart Yarns aims to improve this through design-led research focused on co-developing innovative wearable medical technology that could redefine rehabilitation.

At the heart of this work is the PowerBead, a wrist-worn device that delivers paired mechanical and auditory stimuli. The stimuli are precisely timed to give a gentle tap to the patient's forearm, followed by a brief click sound via a single earpiece. This dual stimuli engages neural pathways that remain functional, aiding recovery by bypassing damaged regions and promoting movement restoration.

The PowerBead is specifically tailored for individuals with severe to moderate impairments who may not currently benefit from conventional physiotherapy methods. With consistent use, the PowerBead could help reactivate the brain-muscle connection, enhancing strength, mobility, and coordination in the affected arm and hand, paving the way for more intensive rehabilitation down the line.

Comfort and ease of use are key design considerations of the PowerBead. The latest prototype is crafted with a velcro wristband to ensure easy adjustment and a snug fit. Developed in collaboration with Fiddie Technologies, this prototype represents a significant leap forward in rehabilitation technology.

As part of this project, an exciting study was conducted to optimise the actuator parameters. Using a stationary actuator from Newcastle University, the team explored how various settings like force, depth, and placement affect both stroke survivors and non-stroke participants. This research is paving the way for future improvements in the wearable device. We collaborated closely with Professor Stuart Baker, a movement neuroscientist from Newcastle University. His insights on how we control movement have played a key role in shaping the design and functionality of the PowerBead.

The Smart Yarns Lab is on the brink of a new phase of testing. The team continues to collaborate with significant stakeholders in their endeavours to fine-tune the device and get it ready for larger clinical trials. They actively listen to stroke survivors, caregivers, and healthcare professionals to ensure that wearing one's stroke rehabilitation can be comfortably integrated into daily life, and be inclusive, particularly for those traditionally excluded by current models of care.

AI for Wellbeing: Back Pain in the Workplace

Rama Gheerawo, Tom Stables, Dr Narges Pourshahrokhi, Tong Lo, with Dr Melanie Flory, Sammy Soudan and Luisa Charles

Back pain is one of the most common issues affecting the workforce, leading to decreased well-being, reduced performance, and increased absenteeism.

Back pain often occurs without warning, and the underlying causes can be subtle and develop over time. Multiple lifestyle micro actions influence our back health, including personal body geometry, workstation location and set up, work schedule, and levels of physical activity. This project focused on using AI to map posture behaviours in workplace environments and evaluate how lifestyle and behavioural factors influence health and well-being. It was part of the Laboratory for Artificial Intelligence in Design, a four-year collaboration between the Royal College of Art and Hong Kong Polytechnic University that explored the applications of AI in design.

The rise of blended working patterns has led to highly variable work environments. Traditional offices were designed with ergonomic principles in mind, but now people work from a variety of locations, including cafés, public spaces, kitchen tables, sofas, and even beds. Conventional workplace advice, such as ‘sit up straight’, does not take this new reality into account.

The causes of back pain at work are often more complex than just poor posture. Factors such as movement, workstation setup, and stress also play a significant role. By utilising digital technology to visualise the factors contributing to back pain, the project aimed to assist individuals in making informed decisions regarding their work environment.

The overarching remit of the project was to develop an AI-powered solution that utilises ambiently recorded data to arrive at personalised interventions. These interventions take into account variations in individuals’ natural geometries, as well as the various lifestyle factors that contribute to back pain. Through a multidisciplinary approach that combines inclusive design and machine learning, our team sought to create holistic solutions that cater to everyone’s unique circumstances, leveraging AI effectively for positive outcomes.

The intervention is informed by Inclusive Design Research, an approach that deliberately includes individuals often overlooked by traditional design. It takes into account individual differences in work patterns and locations, alongside variations in geometries, circumstances and habitual behaviours.

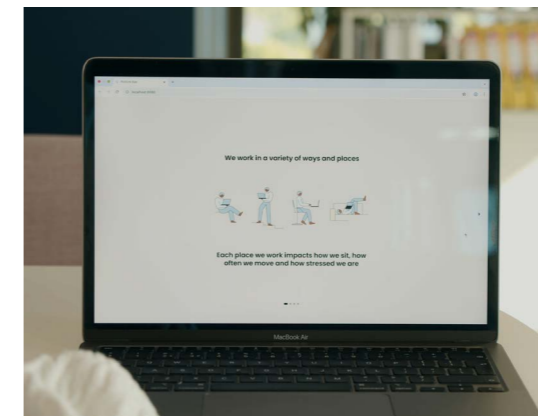
The research activities included interviews and observations to understand the multifaceted nature of lifestyle-related back pain. Interviews with experts in posture and back health provided valuable insights. The project team was able to assess and integrate their specialised knowledge to create a more holistic view of back health. The interviews were conducted with people who are currently experiencing or have previously experienced back pain. The field research involved two age-diverse groups – under-30 and over-60 – which became the project’s lead users.

Observational research provided further insights into participants’ back health-related factors. These research activities yielded valuable and comprehensive insights that guided the design of the digital intervention.

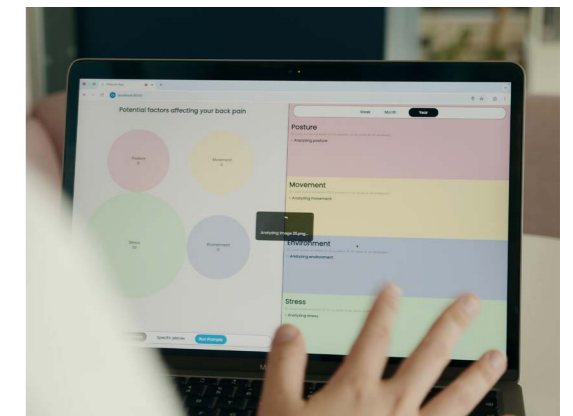
Our findings established that posture is unique to each individual. Therefore, it is important to take a broader approach to back health in the workplace - one that considers not only anatomical characteristics but also a range of lifestyle factors, including environmental and behavioural influences. Our research also

revealed that people’s understanding of the cause and management of back pain varies significantly from person to person and is often based on inaccuracies and assumptions. AI is particularly well-suited for deployment in this context due to its capability to process complex and large datasets, as well as its ability to identify patterns and correlations between lifestyle factors and images that may not be noticeable to humans.

We have developed a prototype for an app that leverages AI to offer a dynamic, personalised and contextual understanding of posture and back pain. The app’s interface is designed to translate intangible behaviours into actionable insights, helping users make personalised, informed decisions about how to manage their back health. This feature allows individuals to identify whether work-related factors may be contributing to their back pain. Additionally, the app aims to enhance communication between patients and healthcare providers, empowering users to take control of their health and lifestyles. By fostering a better dialogue about back health, we hope to equip individuals with the knowledge and tools needed to manage their well-being effectively.



App prototype design. Image credit: Marco Da Re



Major Haemorrhage Protocol: A Rapid Response Visual Guide

Tong Lo, Tom Stables, with Dr Melanie Flory

Major haemorrhage is a critical emergency and a leading cause of mortality worldwide. Effective management depends on clear communication and a coordinated response that aligns with the major haemorrhage protocol, a management approach which differs from one hospital to another. Early management and appropriate intervention improve patient survival and recovery rates, whilst ensuring judicious use of blood products, which in turn leads to a reduction in patient risk and cost to the NHS.

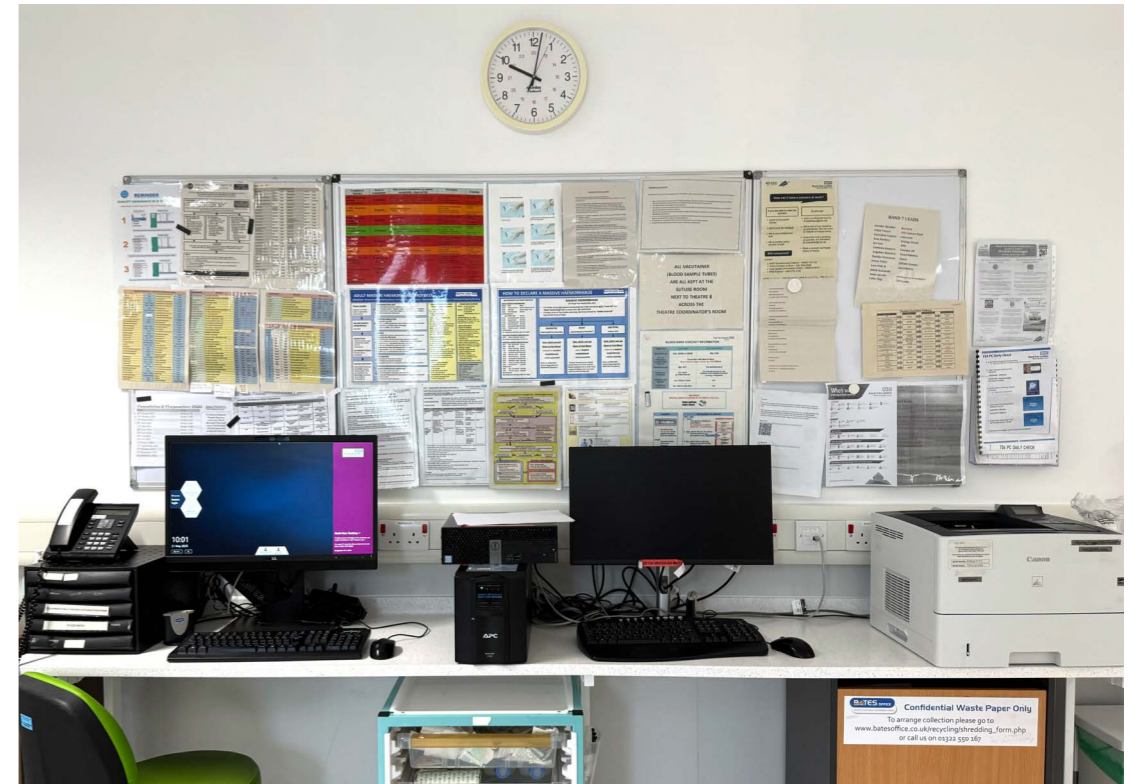
In this project, we partnered with the Royal Free London NHS Trust Foundation, who employ more than 7,000 staff and serve a population of more than 1.6 million per year. The Royal Free Hospital is also unique in having a tertiary liver and renal transplant centre, a vascular hub, a complex obstetric unit and a haematology centre. Patients are thus varied, but have a high risk of bleeding with complex medical issues.

The Royal Free set us the inclusive design remit of redesigning their major haemorrhage protocol with specific attention to inclusion of new staff and/or those unfamiliar with the protocol. They asked us to consider the mix of skills and context-specific issues of responding units, to provide a straightforward and accessible protocol to enable staff to quickly and successfully manage patients with massive haemorrhage.

We began by asking ‘how might design optimise visual communication of the major haemorrhage protocol?’ We met with the doctor who designed the original protocol to learn about its current usage, benefits and drawbacks. We quickly realised that there is an abundance of information, but a lack of visual hierarchy, which is pivotal in communicating complex information. By applying design principles to the use of font, colour, size, spacing and other visual cues, the design intentionally guides the user’s eye to specific areas and elements, making it easier to understand and process information.

The protocol serves two primary purposes – the first being to provide guidance on how to identify and declare a major haemorrhage incident, and the other being communication of the pre-defined procedures and guidelines to manage the incident from declaring to standing down the protocol.

To inform our design decisions, we conducted interviews with seven doctors who have diverse experiences with major haemorrhage. These practitioners ranged from leaders who have shaped the pathway to those actively engaged in various roles within it. By mapping out our discussions, we uncovered the complexities of the response pathway and realised that a straightforward, step-by-step protocol would not adequately capture the reality of the



How might inclusive design optimise visual communication of critical care pathways during major haemorrhage?

collaborative efforts involved in addressing a major haemorrhage incident. Instead, our design must illustrate the non-linear, dynamic relationships between the various departments and professionals engaged in this critical care pathway.

We conducted field research by walking through the theatres, wards, hallways, resuscitation trolleys, and recovery rooms. This exploration helped us to understand the in situ context in which the protocol would be applied. It presented inclusive design-led considerations on the use of colour, fonts and shapes to enhance semiotic meanings of the messages we aimed to convey.

Additionally, it highlighted the importance of presenting the correct information at the right time and place.

Having agreed on the content with key hospital staff, we designed two versions of the Major Haemorrhage Protocols – one for adults and the other for paediatrics. Our aim was to ensure that the content could be easily adaptable for printing and for viewing digitally as a document or app on a range of devices in the future, made possible through a QR code. We are proud to announce that our design of the printable protocol has been accepted by the Royal Free and will undergo simulated user testing exercises.

INCLUSIVE DESIGN FOR BUSINESS IMPACT

Strategic Innovation: Designing the Future through Business Transformation

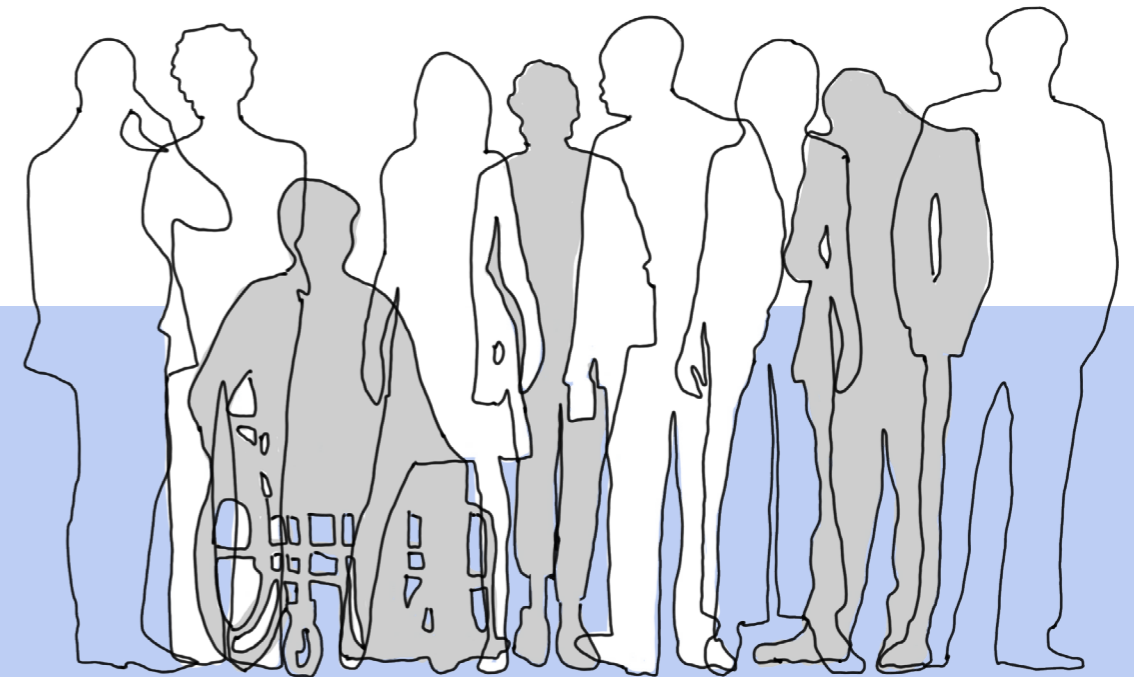
Dr Ninela Ivanova

In the Inclusive Design for Business Impact research area, we focus on exploring how inclusive design enables companies across all sectors to better serve marginalised and vulnerable groups.

At the Centre we have three decades of experience working with the private sector to develop more accessible and inclusive products, services, environments, technologies and organisations. Inclusive Design for Business Impact formalised this legacy to develop models of engagement and pathways to innovation that directly address the complex contemporary landscape of business and evolve the business case for inclusive design. This builds on the work of Professor Emeritus Jeremy Myerson who led projects in areas such as inclusive workplace, banking, energy, and technology, amongst others, and signature projects, such as

improving the wayfinding of Heathrow airport (1999-2002), workplace design for an ageing workforce in the knowledge economy (2006-2008) and improving access to financial services in the digital age (2018).

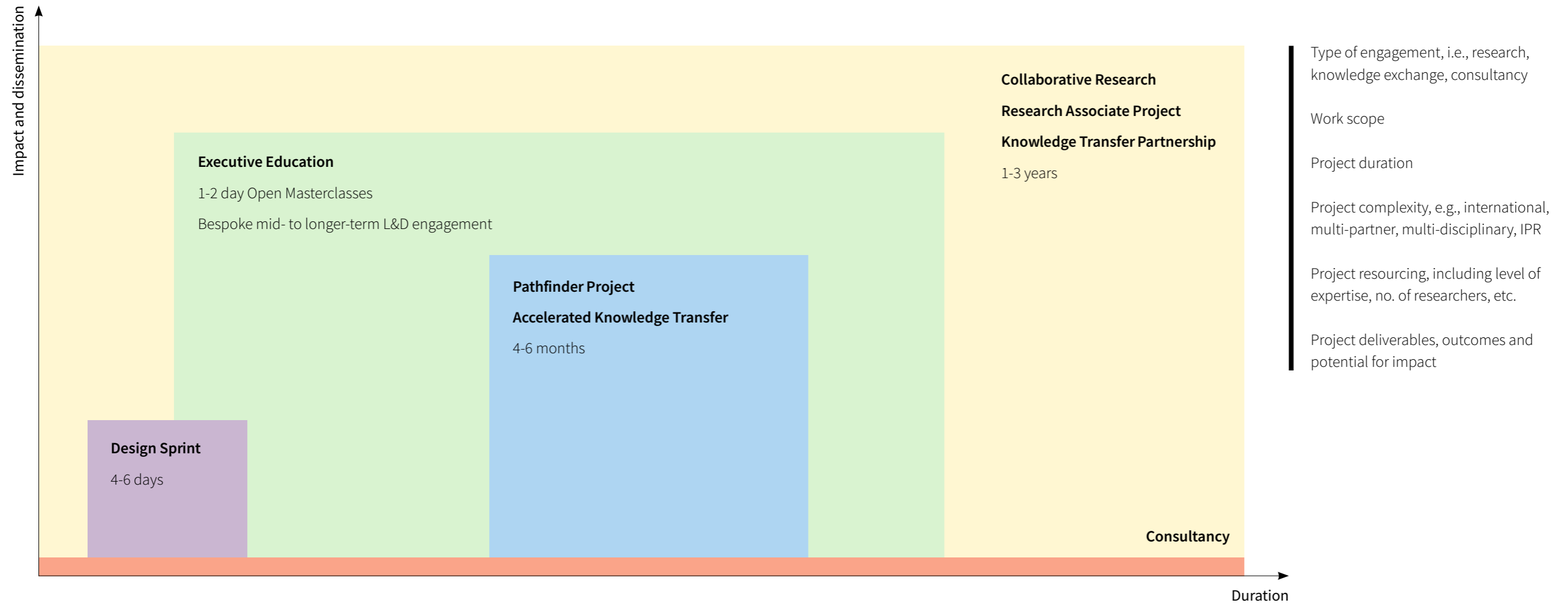
In this issue, we look back over the last seven years of Inclusive Design for Business Impact to demonstrate the mechanisms, outcomes and value of our latest projects with organisations who are at various stages of inclusive design maturity. We have worked with companies, not only to create more inclusive solutions, but to enable them to embed inclusive innovation thinking and practice from within through strategic, people-centred, business innovation and design leadership – an inclusive design transformation that ultimately leads to better outcomes for all.



← access inclusion →

We work across the entire spectrum of access-to-inclusion with companies who are at various stages of inclusive design maturity. Credit: Louise Lenborg-Skajem (RCA graduate, MA/MSc Global Innovation Design)

Models of Business Engagement



Air Control Reimagined

Rama Gheerawo, Juliette Poggi, Ivelina Gadzheva, Gail Ramster,
Dr Ninela Ivanova, Dr Jak Spencer

Project partners

- TATA Consultancy Services
- An international airline client

Dates

2018-2020 (18 months)

Project type

Collaborative industry research

Project aim

This project is exemplary of our decade-long strategic collaboration with TATA Consultancy Services to advance the art of the possible through people-centred approaches to technology innovation. The aim was to improve the operational efficiency of the airline, whilst improving staff and customer experience.

Impact objectives

- Strategic innovation to improve customer experience
- Technological solutions to increase performance and productivity
- Workplace redesign to improve workforce communication and wellbeing.

Project participants

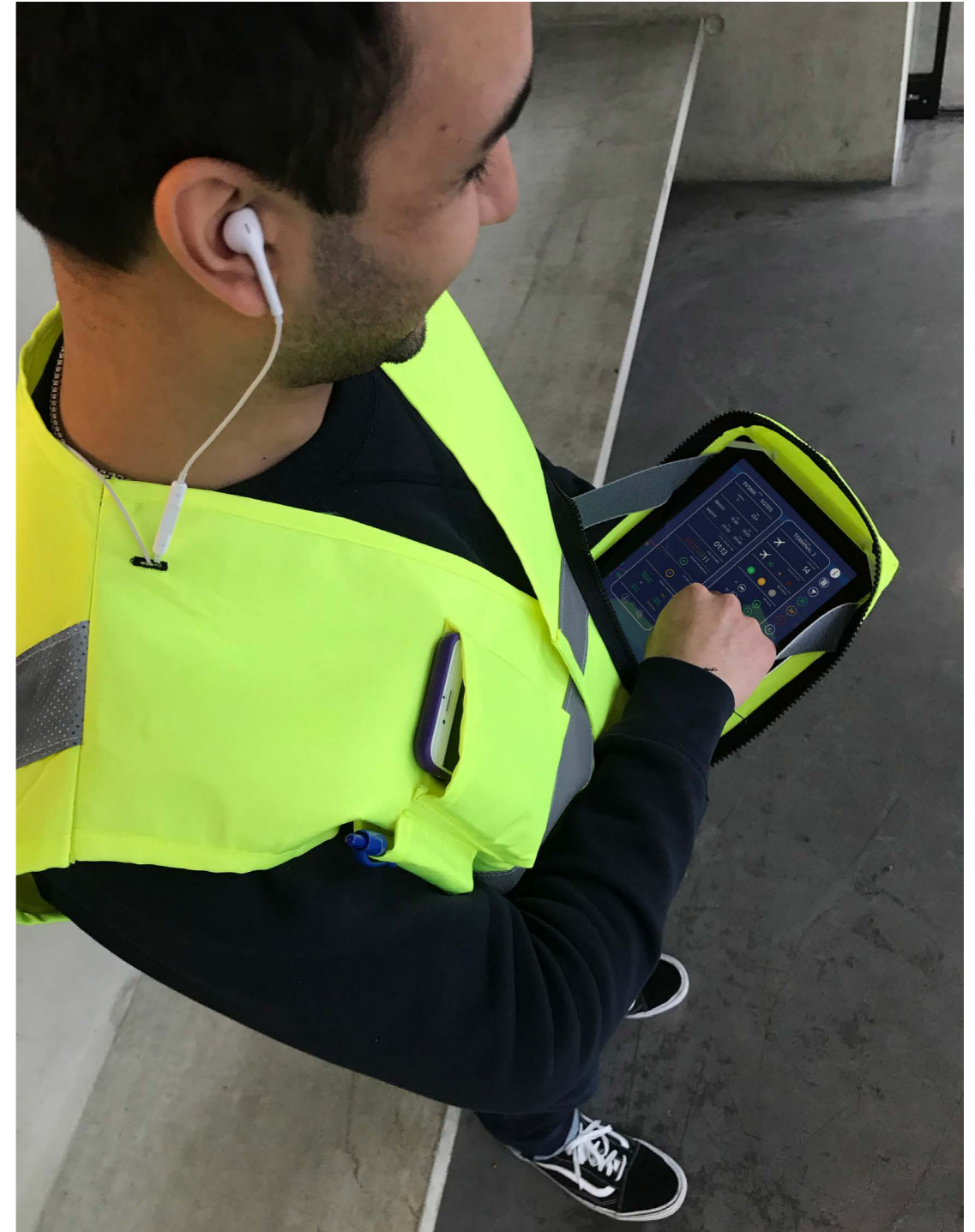
Airline managers and staff

Methodology

Design research activities addressed three discrete, yet interlinked areas of delivery within the airline Operations Control Centre, namely Technology, Environment and People. The Centre's three-part model of Creative Leadership – Empathy, Clarity and Creativity – was used as an overarching framework to the research, delivery and outcomes. Specific methods included interviews with airline staff across functions and departments, ethnographic observation, workshops, design prototypes, and tools for remote feedback and participation.

Outputs and outcomes

- UX design for a digital dashboard and an app that made complex flight information accessible 'at a glance'
- Re-design of the Operations Control Centre office environment to enable better communication and personal wellbeing
- Proposition for evolving key performance indicators into key performance aspirations
- A portfolio of product concepts for improving controllers' wellbeing, performance and fulfilment in the workplace
- 2-minute video on the re-design of the high-visibility vest worn by aircraft engineers
- Insights bank, project report and presentations
- A peer-reviewed case study published in the Proceedings of the 2020 dmi: Academic Design Management Conference (Toronto, Canada).



Re-design of the high-visibility vest worn by aircraft engineers with a dedicated tablet pocket to enable ease of inspection and a seamless handover process

Resilience

Dr Ninela Ivanova, Rama Gheerawo, Dr Chris McGinley

Project partner

OnePlus Technology

Dates

2021 (6 days)

Project type

- Design sprint
- Consultancy

Project aim

The overall aim of the project was to open up new design directions and innovation opportunities for OnePlus by defining what resilience meant for their brand and business, and how next generation technologies could support individual, community and planetary resilience.

Impact objectives

- Strategic innovation to develop more resilient technologies
- Redefine how future generations use technology.

Project participants

- A team of ten HHCD design researchers and RCA Master's students
- Three lead users.

Methodology

The project was delivered via an intensive six-day design sprint to develop a range of people-centred concept designs and prototypes that explored the theme of 'Resilience' in relation to technology design through a creative, inclusive, future-focused and innovative lens. The design sprint followed the standardised four-phase design thinking innovation process, including tools such as design provocations and user journeys. Interviews with lead users enabled the inclusion of technology aspirations, views, and needs of three women who represented key factors of exclusion from mainstream technology design and service provision.

Outputs and outcomes

- The project report captured a portfolio of design propositions across three overarching themes – Sense of Self, Currencies of Resilience, and Resilience of Nature, Emotional Durability and Ethics of Transparency, e.g.:
- Technology applications to support personal resilience
 - New material and packaging propositions
 - Service design ideas that diversify OnePlus' community-centric approaches
 - Higher-level considerations for ethical and sustainable technology design, production and use cycles.



Proposition for a new unboxing experience involving water soluble materials, e.g., solvron. Concept design by Lissy Hatfield (RCA Graduate, MA Textiles)

Inclusive Design for a Virtual Library Pilot: Read, Learn, Connect

Dr Ninela Ivanova, Gail Ramster, Indira Knight, Rama Gheerawo

Project partners

Westminster City Council and Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea

Dates

2021-2022 (2 months)

Project type

- Scoping study
- Consultancy

Project aim

The aim of the project was to outline key inclusive design considerations that would inform the development of a virtual library to complement and advance the service provision of the 19 physical libraries across the two boroughs.

Impact objectives

- Drive equality across the bi-borough communities as the most inclusive library service in the UK
- Enable access to library services for currently excluded groups.

Opposite: Speculative design scenarios for the virtual library pilot based on community needs, user experience requirements, accessibility and inclusivity features, user journeys, and technology specifications. Credit: Louise Lenborg-Skajem (RCA graduate, MA/MSc Global Innovation Design)

Project participants

- Workshop 1. Community: 24 community members from across the bi-borough council
- Workshop 2. Inclusive Design: 20 HHCD / RCA colleagues and experts drawn from our network across inclusive design, accessibility, neurodiversity, service design and technology futures
- Workshop 3. Technology: 16 technology experts working in VR / XR / digital archives and libraries.

Methodology

We ran a three-part series of workshops with the local community, designers and technology experts to blueprint the virtual library and explore a range of propositions for the pilot design. This included user journeys, speculative scenarios, design parameters, accessibility and inclusivity features, terms of engagement, technology recommendations and potential limitations.

Outputs and outcomes

- Design scenarios
- Bank of insights
- Capture of the current state-of-the-art
- Guidance and recommendations for the pilot design.



Human Betterment

Dr Ninela Ivanova, Dr Melanie Flory, Rama Gheerawo, Indira Knight, Madelaine Dowd, Stiliyana Minkovska

Project partner

A global sporting goods company

Dates

2022 (4 months)

Project type

Scoping study

Project aim

Many companies saw the COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity for innovation and developing new ways of thinking about products and services. This sporting goods company approached us to bring inclusivity thinking and design to their strategic work around the future of sport. The specific brief was to investigate how the domain of 'human betterment' – which blurs the lines of sport, fitness, performance, health, recreation and life-long learning – could inform the next generation of sportswear products, services and business models.

Impact objectives

- Strategic innovation to inform the future of sport and sportswear
- Industry leadership towards more inclusive products and services.

Project participants

17 experts drawn from across healthcare, bodywork, psychology, sports, performance wear, technology futures, design for health and social care.

Methodology

This ten-week scoping study included an extensive literature review, case studies and a participatory workshop. This enabled us to define 'human betterment' and to map key concepts, central themes, processes, factors, stakeholders and opportunities for innovation and impact in relation to the future of sport and sportswear design.

Outputs and outcomes

A blueprint for human betterment as relevant to sport and sportswear, including:

- First-level definition of 'human betterment' in relation to sport and sportswear design
- A process framework including a range of internal, demographic, and external factors that would determine an individual's approach to betterment and the role of sport within it
- Design propositions and guidance for products and services that support individual and collective betterment
- Bank of insights
- Project report.

Definition

Betterment is a value, a process and an outcome of individual, collective and societal development. It is inherent in us as human beings. The process starts with observation and evaluation to inform oneself about what and where change needs to happen to achieve a desirable state. In other words, it is a pursuit to exceed the current (self-defined) state of being to a preferable one, to self-realise. In bettering from one state to another, individual components, or a group of components, become the target of thoughts, behaviours, tools and processes for change. Whilst betterment appears goal-orientated, it has the overall objective to seek and create value – the best quality of life one can have at any given point in time. Through the pursuit of individual betterment, one also becomes a conduit for community and societal betterment. The purpose of betterment is to create betterment.

First-level definition of 'human betterment' in relation to sport and sportswear design

Degree: Inclusive Design Guidelines

Dr Ninela Ivanova, Dr Katie Gaudion, Tom Stables, Stephen Douch, Rama Gheerawo

Project partner

Unilever

Dates

2022 (2 months)

Project type

Consultancy

Project aim

Unilever partnered with the Centre to develop a set of Inclusive Design guidelines for their Degree brand (also known as Rexona, Sure, Shield and Rexena). These guidelines evidenced the organisational commitment to accessibility, inclusion and diversity, and aimed to inspire organisations across the sector to join them on this mission.

Impact objectives

Industry leadership toward greater inclusion in personal care products and brands.

Project participants

- Centre experts in inclusive design
- Unilever inclusive design champions and design managers.

Opposite: Select pages from the Inclusive Design Guidelines published by Unilever as an outcome of the project

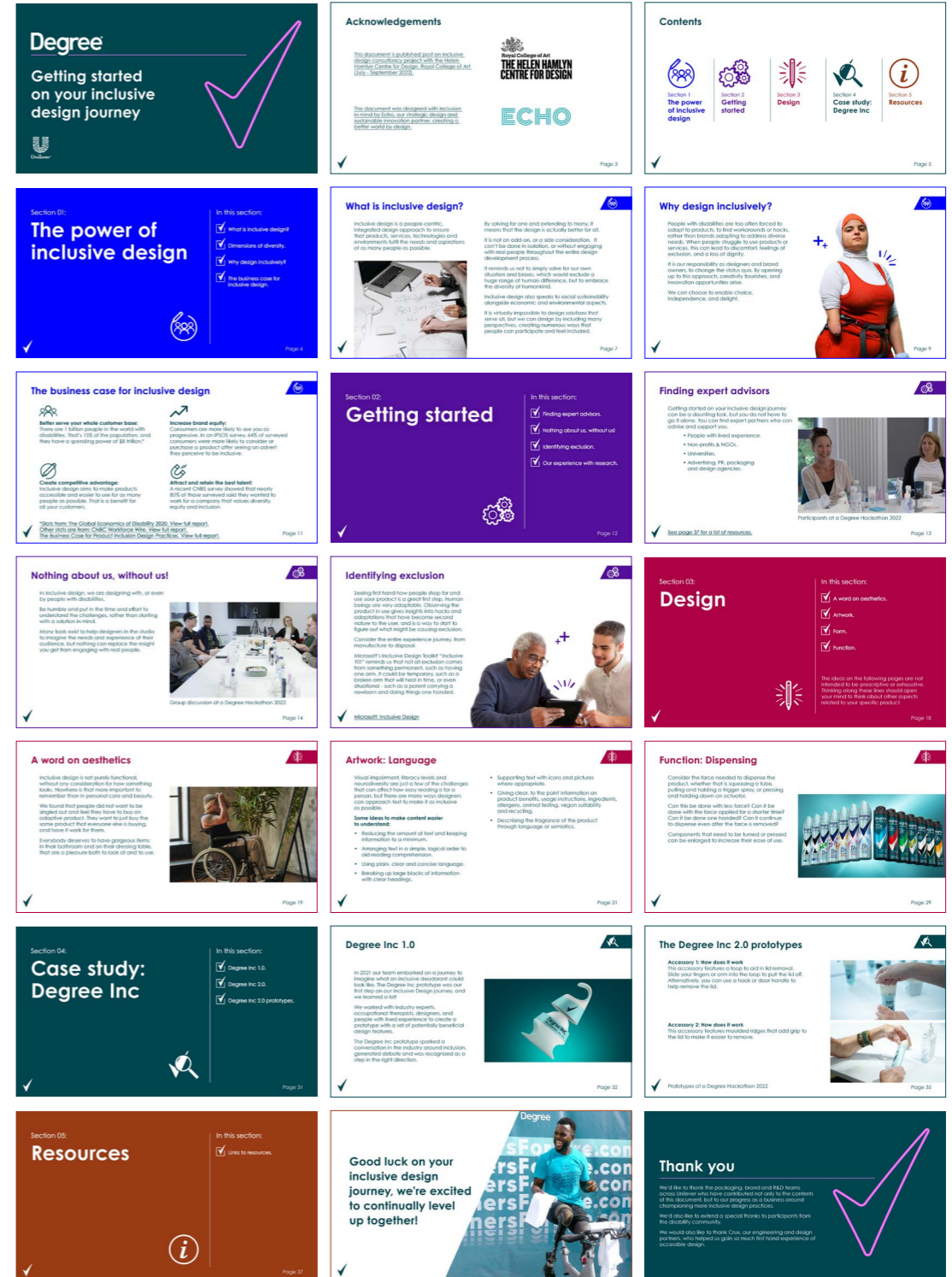
Methodology

Together, researchers from the Centre and Degree's Brand Directors and Managers scoped the possibilities of inclusivity in deodorant product and packaging design, and related industries, to ensure that Rexona's guidelines were at the forefront of this design space. We also conducted a document analysis of existing inclusive design principles to identify the optimal structure, content and framing for maximum audience benefit.

A stakeholder workshop with inclusivity leaders from across Unilever enabled the co-development of the guidelines in a way that strengthened the business case for inclusive design, signalled a cross-cutting and holistic approach for driving the inclusivity agenda forward, and demonstrated industry leadership in this space through practice currently underway.

Outputs and outcomes

- Inclusive Design principles published as an inclusive design guide by Degree (Unilever)
- Bank of insights
- Project reports.



Creative Leadership for Inclusive Innovation

Dr Ninela Ivanova, Rama Gheerawo, Dr Melanie Flory, with Hemal Dias, Ivelina Gadzheva, and Stiliyana Minkovska

Project partner

Northumbrian Water Group

Dates

2022 (6 months)

Project type

Custom executive education

Project aim

This 21-week programme aimed to train 34 of Northumbrian Water Group's innovation leads in our inclusive design, design thinking and creative leadership principles and processes.

Impact objectives

- Advance Northumbrian Water Group's innovation culture and daily practices
- Embed inclusivity thinking within service delivery and ways of working
- Champion inclusive innovation within water services.

Project participants

A select group of Northumbrian Water Group colleagues from across HR, operations, marketing and communications, and engineering, amongst others.

Methodology

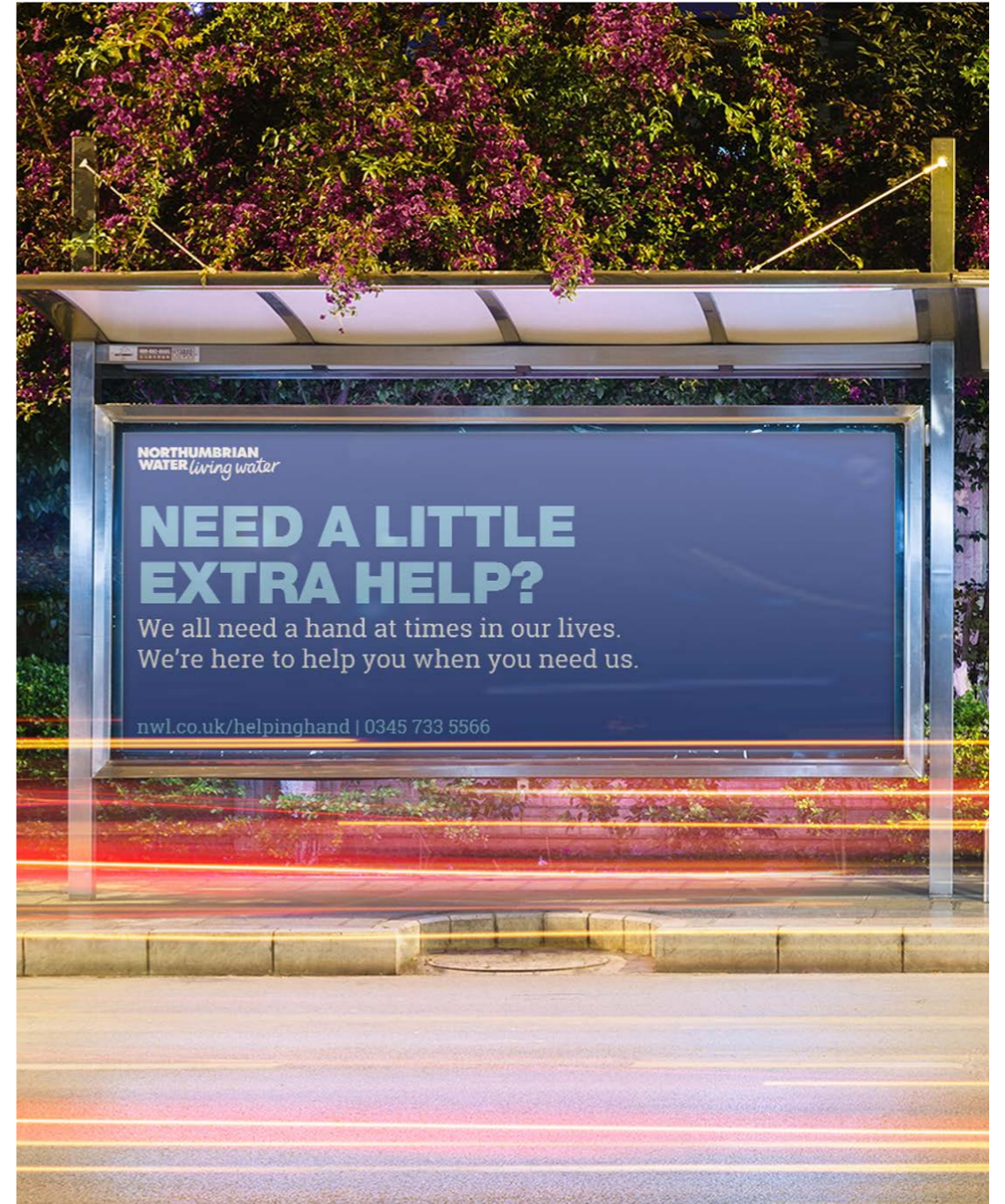
The programme combined live group sessions (online) and independent practice. A core component was a 12-week inclusive innovation challenge. Participants were divided into six teams to address an area of Northumbrian Water Group's work through the principles of creative leadership and inclusive design.

Outputs and outcomes

The six projects spanned solutions to enhance business impact both internally and externally. These included:

- Design solutions to make the transition to hybrid working post pandemic more inclusive and enjoyable
- A programme for enhancing employee experience and career progression
- A knowledge transfer platform
- Solutions to supercharge Northumbrian Water Group's workforce diversity
- Propositions for better gathering of customer data
- Increasing registration to Northumbrian Water Group Priority Services.

Employing an inclusive approach and embedding the values of creative leadership throughout the innovation projects, offered a new way of thinking about work, innovation and impact delivery.



A campaign produced as an outcome of the project to encourage people in vulnerable circumstances to join the Priority Services Register (PSR). Data from 2024 showed that the new campaign led to over 3 million impressions from marketing, 215% overall year-on-year increase in web traffic to NWG's PSR webpages, and 97,418 extra people receiving support. Image copyright: Northumbrian Water Group.

Embedding Inclusive Design in Financial Services Innovation

Dr Ninela Ivanova, Dr Melanie Flory, Dr Emilie Glazer

Project partners

- Lloyds Banking Group
- Funded by Innovate UK

Dates

2024 (4 months)

Project type

Accelerated Knowledge Transfer (AKT)

Project aim

This is a pathfinder collaboration between the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design and Lloyds Banking Group. The overarching aim was to innovate a framework that promotes financial inclusion through an evaluation of internal structures, processes, and behaviours in the design and innovation for financial products and services at Lloyds Banking Group. The vision was to move beyond retrofitting solutions to ensure compliance, to tackling the root cause of systemic exclusion in banking.

Impact objectives

- Develop products and services that fulfil the needs of financially vulnerable and marginalised groups
- Enhance market competitiveness for inclusion in the dynamically evolving financial services industry.

Project participants

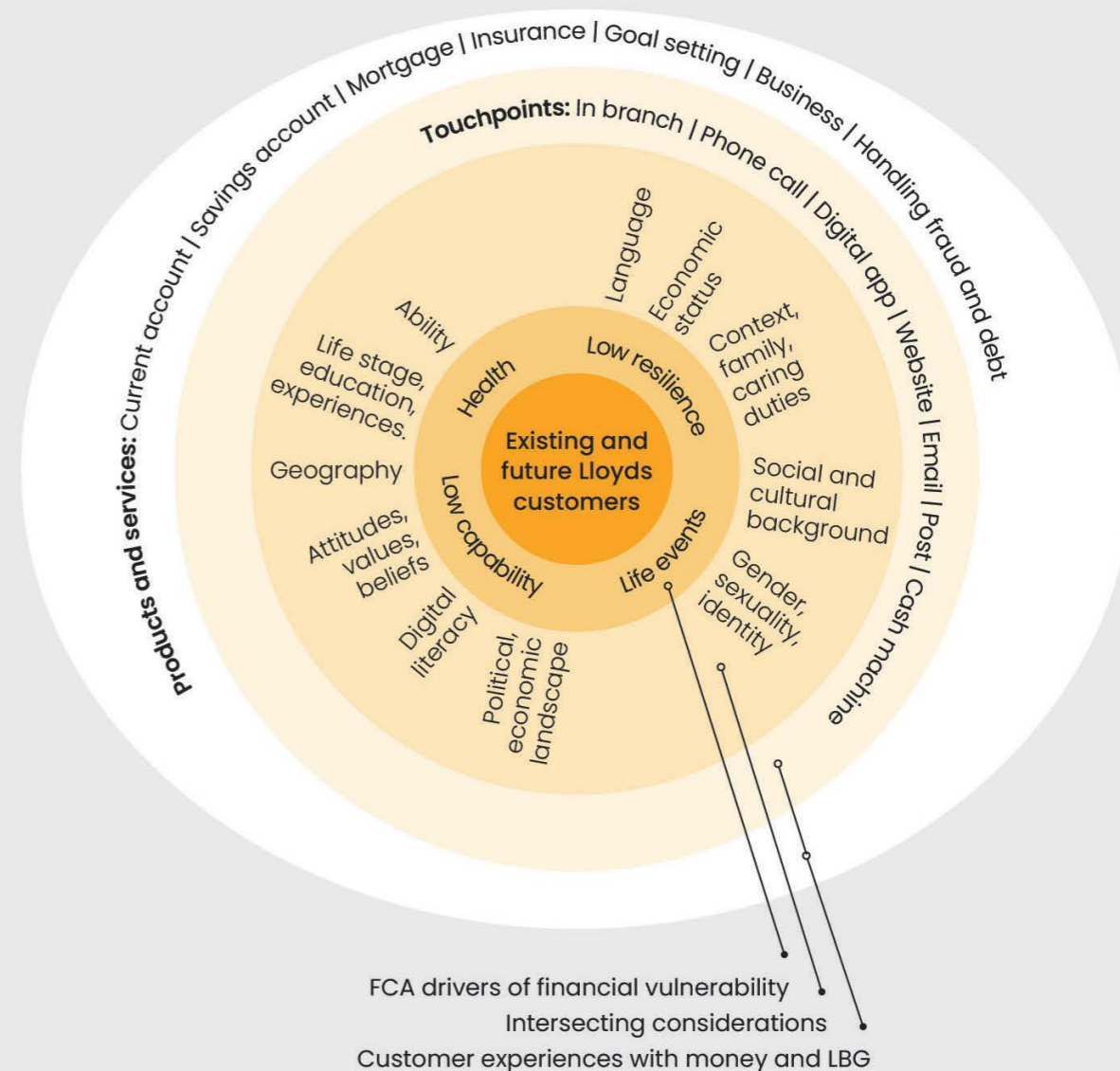
Over 40 members of staff at Lloyds Banking Group who are responsible for the delivery of inclusive financial services and customer experience, e.g., design leads, community of practice managers, designer practitioners, product owners, etc.

Methodology

A post-doctoral researcher was employed, thanks to funding from Innovate UK, to explore what embedding inclusive design would look like at Lloyds Banking Group. To ensure effective knowledge transfer between the Helen Hamlyn Centre and Lloyds Banking Group, an approach was taken that is itself inclusive, which combined design research and organisational ethnography. We worked with Lloyds' stakeholders to understand their current approaches to inclusive design and identify opportunities to further incorporate and scale inclusive considerations.

Outputs and outcomes

- A framework of interventions for embedding inclusive design principles across the design of financial products and services with recommendation for specific actions and further research
- A bank of research insights and innovation opportunities to inform future work at Lloyds Banking Group.



An indicative inclusive customer view developed as part of the project scoping

INCLUSIVE DESIGN FOR SOCIAL IMPACT

Embracing Diversity: The Importance of Societal Inclusion

Dr Melanie Flory

Inclusive Design for Social Impact addresses various factors that influence how we live, work, and develop within wide-reaching societal systems. These include healthcare, environment, education, employment, and their economic and political aspects, which shape our everyday living experiences and conditions. The main objective is to promote social inclusion, ensuring that all individuals, especially those who are marginalised or vulnerable, have equitable access to resources, opportunities, and participation in society.

The ongoing research and knowledge exchange initiatives in this space aim to tackle social disparities and foster a sense of agency, belonging, and dignity for everyone. By actively incorporating diverse and underrepresented voices into the design process, we can create communities where all members feel valued and can participate fully.

Successful research and knowledge exchange in Inclusive Design for Social Impact fundamentally relies on collaborating with community organisations that have established relationships

with the communities they serve. Partnership is essential for success. Research must be skilfully designed to balance ethical practice and governance with creativity, flexibility, and a willingness to explore new approaches that enhance inclusion-based thinking in practice. This approach emphasises the reciprocal nature of inclusive design in research – it is not just about ‘doing’ research but about working together in ways that benefit everyone involved. Sensitivity to participant diversity is essential and requires respecting individual needs and adapting research methods to meet those needs.

Engaging diverse perspectives at the beginning of the design process is crucial for removing barriers that marginalise and exclude individuals and groups. The projects *Space in Mind* and *The Places We Go*, presented in the following pages, aim to foster greater inclusion, independence, dignity, and empowerment for individuals and groups. Additionally, the *London Loo Alliance* is a regional initiative focused on creating equitable access to a key facet of our capital’s public spaces.

Space in Mind - Capturing the Sensory, Emotional and Social Experiences of Public Spaces in Collaboration with Neurodivergent Staff and Students at the RCA

Dr Katie Gaudion, Gail Ramster, with Beatrice Sangster, Tristan Webber, Anne Toomey, Richard Nash, Alkesh Palmer

About the Project

Space in Mind went beyond the accessibility and functionality of public spaces to explore the intangible - the emotional, social and sensory experience.

In collaboration with neurodivergent staff and students at the Royal College of Art, we visually documented the invisible qualities of public spaces within the corridors, seating, social spaces, and the journeys through them.

Recognising the complexity of articulating feelings and perceptions, the research team used a range of engagement methods including walk & talks around the three campuses, and workshops to create sensory responses through colour and texture.

How could design consider neurodivergent experiences to better design public space?

Space in Mind was designed to complement existing design standards and guidelines such as

British Standard’s *PAS 6463: Design for the Mind – Neurodiversity and the Built Environment*. While standard built environment guidelines provide essential technical advice, they often overlook more subtle, yet equally important, aspects such as identity, belonging, and personal connection to a space.

Those responsible for applying guidelines to a public building can find it hard to understand why certain recommendations are made, while those

I think different public spaces definitely influenced my emotional wellbeing, to the extent that I actively avoided certain spaces, to avoid being triggered or overwhelmed. And there were also places that I visited as frequently as possible, since I felt relaxed when I was there.

- *Space in Mind* participant

experiencing these spaces feel disconnected from the process. To address this, the project took a more inclusive and thoughtful approach by involving staff and students from start to finish. Their input shaped how the project was developed and how it is communicated, ensuring it feels genuine and meaningful.

The outcomes of the project are presented in two complementary documents:

1. Space in Mind: Design advice for public spaces at the RCA.

A practical resource created for architects and designers, this publication distills key design advice from the Space in Mind project. Drawing directly from the insights of neurodivergent staff and students, it offers clear, actionable recommendations for creating more inclusive and supportive public environments.

2. Space in Mind: A co-design journey with neurodivergent staff and students.

Serving as a narrative companion to Space in Mind: Design Advice, this publication documents the process that informed the design guidance. Through stories, creative contributions, research reflections, and lived experience, Space in Mind: A Co-design Journey brings to life the diverse voices behind the project – providing depth, context, and a human-centred perspective.

Takeaways

Guided by the insights and experiences of the neurodivergent staff and students involved, the project identified five key themes to consider:

1. Identity, Belonging, Purpose
2. Social and Quiet Spaces
3. Arriving and Moving Around
4. Lighting, Temperature and Sound
5. Colour, Pattern and Texture

These themes are expanded on in the following pages.



Participants expressing their sensory, social and emotional experiences of public spaces through texture and form

Identity, Belonging, Purpose

When spaces reflect the unique character of the RCA – through materials that tell a story, creative displays, and room for personal expression – they help individuals feel connected to the community and its history.

Inclusive, welcoming environments that support positive social interactions can reduce feelings of being an outsider. Purposeful design, clear signage, and structured areas also reduce sensory overload and support confidence in navigating the space. By celebrating creativity, embracing

quirks, and allowing people to leave their mark, these spaces can move beyond being simply functional – they become places where people feel seen, safe, and part of something meaningful.

I think we should enjoy the fact that we are an art school and all the quirks that that brings, and allow people to have spaces that they can make their own and enjoy.
- Space in Mind participant



Space in Mind collage by Lening Huang, RCASU President

Social and Quiet Spaces

Public spaces meet many social needs: a place to talk quietly, for bigger groups to work or socialise, for chance encounters, and to be alone. These different levels of interaction also have different levels of privacy. We may wish to be alone in public, noisy behind closed doors, or vice-versa. Some spaces are needed spontaneously; some meetings can be planned. A variety of spaces, and consideration behind them, will help everyone to find the space they need.

I really enjoyed being in the library, because the noise level was always quite low, and there were many “nooks” in which I could at least temporarily hide.

- Space in Mind participant



Collage produced by a Space in Mind researcher

Arriving and Moving Around

When arriving and moving around public spaces at the RCA, neurodivergent staff and students value clear, intuitive design that reduces stress and improves navigation. Key suggestions include creating easily identifiable pathways, with consistent wayfinding symbols and minimal visual clutter. Sensory maps could highlight quieter areas, and entrances should feel open and welcoming to reduce anxiety. Familiarity with the space is essential, so design should support exploration and minimise disruptions. Entrances and wayfinding must also work for first-time visitors and the RCA's local communities. The

aim is to create a cohesive, inviting environment where everyone feels welcome and at ease.

The nature of the building is that it changes so constantly. It's the only place I've ever worked where a wall can be put up, and I'm suddenly faced with brand new wayfinding in a way that I haven't experienced before. That can be really challenging.

- Space in Mind participant



Space in Mind collage by Fiona Dorrington, EDI Officer, RCA

Lighting, Temperature, Sound

Neurodivergent staff and students would benefit from environments that offer and invite control over lighting, temperature, and sound, whether that's flexible and adjustable lighting options such as desk lamps, windows that can be opened for personal comfort, or autonomy over local heating systems.

Approaches to sound can be zoned in space or time, such as quieter music-free moments or noise-reducing elements. We all enjoy different levels, which adjust with time, season and

activity. More individual and community autonomy can create a sense of control for everyone, itself another way to enhance wellbeing.

All the RCA campuses are quite echoey and quite open spaces to make big projects and do big things. But it means that going through spaces can be quite overwhelming.

- Space in Mind participant



Space in Mind collage by Tristan Webber, Senior Tutor, RCA

Colour, Pattern, Texture

Colour, pattern and texture play a key role in creating a welcoming and harmonious environment. Soft, vibrant colours bring warmth and inspiration to areas, while carefully chosen artwork and patterns enhance the atmosphere without being overwhelming.

Continuity in materials and colours helps make transitions between spaces feel seamless. The use of textures, such as wood or softer finishes, adds depth and creates a more inviting and comfortable 'lived-in' feel. Homely materials and soft furnishings in communal areas reduce

noise whilst promoting comfort and a sense of belonging. Thoughtful design choices help create a balanced, stimulating environment that respects individual sensory needs.

I love the stair railings. The resonance of the metal ringing underneath a hand, when knocked on, enriches my experience of the space.

- Space in Mind participant



Space in Mind collage by Meredith Gunderson, Artist, RCA

The Places We Go: Designing Toilet Policy with London's Local Authorities

Gail Ramster

London's public toilet problem is acute. In a survey of older Londoners, Age UK London found that 70% of respondents identified toilets in their high streets as inadequate. Our *Engaged* survey with TalkLondon revealed nearly two thirds of Londoners restricted their time on the high street – or avoided it completely – because it had no publicly accessible toilet.

Access to toilets affects how we commute, the jobs we can do, our transport choices, leisure activity and if we can get out to meet friends. Increasing the number of toilets we can use helps us to access high streets, transport modes, social activities and work. This is particularly important

The Places We Go, is an impact fellowship funded by the RCA's AHRC Impact Acceleration Account. In partnership with Age UK London, the project will inform, exchange, capture and share knowledge on how London's boroughs provide publicly accessible toilets. Through workshops and interviews with council officers, *The Places We Go* will produce new guidance on Community Toilet Schemes for the first time since 2008.

The project began in August, with engagement activities taking place in the Autumn. It will conclude in January 2026, with outputs to be shared with councils, regional and national governments.



Above and opposite: providing public toilets alongside local businesses or community groups can revive the high street. Engaged concept designs by PiM.studio Architects. Credit: Engaged/PiM.studio Architects.

London Loo Alliance: Public Toilets Research Unit

Gail Ramster

The Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design is one of the founding members of the London Loo Alliance, a campaign for better toilet provision in London. The Alliance is made up of fifteen charities, trade unions, civic societies, resident and community associations, researchers, equality campaigners and businesses. Our mission is to seek tangible action, by holding local and regional governments, transport providers and businesses to account. We seek more inclusive, accessible toilet provision for everyone, whether London is their home, workplace or travel destination.

The London Loo Alliance launched outside the closed Broadwick Street toilets on World Toilet Day, 19 November 2024. In its first year, the Alliance has informed the new London Plan, tracked TfL's pledges to improve toilets on the tube network, and championed the ongoing campaign of Assembly Member Caroline Russell AM (London Greens). In June, Caroline proposed

a motion to the London Assembly for the Mayor to write to central government, seeking that toilets be made a statutory duty of local councils. The motion, influenced by the Alliance, passed with unanimous support. This powerful moment was watched in the public gallery by researcher Gail Ramster and Professor of Accessible Design Jo-Anne Bichard, joining Alliance members from Inclusion London, Age UK London, Kilburn Older Voices Campaign and Positive Ageing in London.

Gail and Jo-Anne also represented the Alliance, along with Hannah Ward of Crohn's & Colitis UK, at the briefing to MPs and Peers held at Parliament on 8 July 2025. Organised by Bathroom Association and British Toilet Association, they shared research data from their Toilet Map and Engaged projects about the national landscape of toilet provision, helping make the case for local toilet strategies and toilets as a statutory requirement.

Opposite top: London Loo Alliance campaigners with cross-part London Assembly Members, 5 June 2025. Credit: London Loo Alliance.

Opposite bottom: Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design researchers at London Assembly observed Caroline Russell's motion on the need for public toilets.



EXECUTIVE EDUCATION

Introduction

Dr Ninela Ivanova

Alongside our research, knowledge exchange and consultancy work, the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design offers open masterclasses and custom programmes in inclusive design, design thinking and creative leadership which are delivered through the RCA's Executive Education department. These courses enable people and organisations from all sectors and job functions to benefit from the expertise of academics and practitioners at the Centre and the RCA.

The duration of the courses varies from as little as three hours to as long as six months, however, they all offer a well balanced mix of theoretical foundation, practical case studies, and creative tools for self-reflection and group activities, to cater to a range of learning styles and audience needs.

Over the last decade we have run a number of custom in-person and online courses globally,

with organisations such as Northumbrian Water Group (UK), Hong Kong Civil Service Bureau, Kinnarps (Sweden), Stannah (UK), Panasonic (Japan), Newton Business School, and University of Shanghai (China), amongst others. In June 2025 we ran a day-long custom Design Thinking workshop for the University of Roehampton, which aimed to advance the value proposition of Arts & Humanities doctoral research.

We also deliver open masterclasses on Creative Leadership and Design Thinking and Innovation in Practice. Read on for more information about them and forthcoming course dates. Both courses are delivered face-to-face at the RCA's Herzog & de Meuron designed Battersea campus.

www.rca.ac.uk/short-courses
short-courses@rca.ac.uk

Opposite: Participants at RCA Creative Leadership Masterclass, April 2025. Credit: RCA Executive Education



Custom Courses

Design Thinking: Why Fund the Arts & Humanities?

Dr Ninela Ivanova

Shaping the future of doctoral education

In June this year, we were commissioned by Dr Melissa Jogie, Director of Research Culture, Impact and Early Career Development at the University of Roehampton, to deliver a custom design thinking workshop as part of her AHRC-funded project 'Equality, Diversity, Inclusion: Informing technē Doctoral Training Partnership Action Plan.' The one-day session, led by Dr Ninela Ivanova, aimed to develop a proposition

for a new Doctoral Landscape Award (DLA) to raise the value of the Arts & Humanities, better prepare PhD students for diverse careers, and embed vital EDI principles from the ground up.

The power of a bespoke framework

The workshop worked well in demonstrating the value of a tailored, collaborative approach to tackling complex challenges in higher education. Unlike off-the-shelf workshops, this event utilised

a methodology custom-designed for the specific nuances of the Arts & Humanities research landscape. Based on the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design's design thinking approach, the workshop employed four structured activities to guide participants. This enabled us to directly address the unique challenges and opportunities within the field, and ensured that the insights generated were not generic but deeply relevant to the institutional context and the lived experiences of Arts & Humanities researchers and wider stakeholders.

Unlocking unique value and transferable skills

The workshop brought together a diverse group of 15 stakeholders, including professors, students, and external partners from organisations such as Wandsworth Council and The National Archives. This broad representation was essential for a comprehensive exploration of the Arts & Humanities. Participants described the field as "all-encompassing" and "interdisciplinary", highlighting its role for "sense-making" in a complex world. They emphasised that Arts & Humanities doctoral graduates possess a unique blend of subject-specific knowledge and crucial transferable skills, such as strong communication, storytelling, and essential soft skills like empathy and collaboration.

Redefining impact and cultivating flexibility

A key theme that emerged was the challenge of demonstrating value in a quantifiable way to external stakeholders. The custom workshop

format provided the necessary space to collectively rethink value metrics, proposing the use of powerful storytelling and case studies as more effective tools for communicating impact.

Furthermore, the workshop successfully generated actionable propositions for embedding EDI. Participants identified opportunities to create more accessible learning environments, combat bias, and shift power dynamics in traditional supervision models. The proposals championed flexible and customised PhD journeys, advocating for creative approaches to accommodate neurodiversity and support students with disabilities or caring responsibilities.

A new model for doctoral training

The workshop culminated in three pitches for a new Doctoral Landscape Award that represented a significant shift in doctoral education. They proposed moving from a purely academic model to a more integrated, skills-based approach. The new model would emphasise interdisciplinary collaboration, professional skill development through internships and secondments, and enhanced career support. This collaborative outcome highlights how a custom design thinking approach can empower a diverse group of stakeholders to collectively envision a more flexible, accessible, and impactful future for doctoral education.



Systems maps used to explore the value proposition of the Arts & Humanities with workshop participants. Credit: Ninela Ivanova.

RCA Open Masterclasses

CREATIVE LEADERSHIP



Credit: Ezzidin Alwan

Course dates: 19 & 20 March 2026
Bookings close: 6 March 2026

Learn how creative leadership can unlock inclusive innovation based on over 30 years of research and practice from the Royal College of Art.

Creative Leadership is not merely a strategy. It is a transformational process in which individuals tap into their inner creativity and leadership potential, connecting with others towards realising a collective vision.

This two-day course has been pioneered by the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design to address the need for new models of leadership across job roles, organisational departments and industry domains. It is led by Innovation Fellow Dr Ninela Ivanova and Senior Research Fellow Dr Chris McGinley.

Our Creative Leadership model is framed around three core values – Empathy, Clarity and Creativity – which stem from over 30 years of working with industry, government and the third sector. It evolves the worldview, values, methods and processes that are inherent in inclusive design, to improve life for individuals, organisations, and society at large.

The course is suitable for professionals across all domains who are seeking people-centred, collaborative and creative approaches to traditional models of leadership.

To book, scan here:



DESIGN THINKING AND INNOVATION IN PRACTICE



Credit: Special Projects

Course dates: 26 & 27 March 2026
Bookings close: 13 March 2026

Whatever your level of design interest or expertise, this short course at the world's leading university for art and design will equip you with a robust design thinking model to apply in your own working life.

Design Thinking and Innovation in Practice is led by Clara Gaggero Westaway and Adrian Westaway, renowned inventors, educators and co-founders of innovation and design studio Special Projects. Blending rigorous research with a playful, optimistic approach, they bring delight and a profoundly human quality to a wide range of complex challenges.

Over two days, the course offers theoretical principles and practical building blocks for design thinking, strategies for improving decision-making by reframing innovation challenges, ways to co-create effectively with others, how to drive innovation within a team and global best practices in how other organisations have used design thinking.

The Royal College of Art views Design Thinking as a form of human-centred innovation. By reframing challenges from the user's perspective, we incorporate empathy and real-world engagement with people's lived experience.

Design Thinking is a means of resolving the contradictions between the real world, with its barriers and constraints, and the abstract world of imagination and creative ideas. This design thinking course provides the tools and frameworks to bridge this divide.

To book, scan here:



PHD STUDENTS

PhDs: Making Design Inclusive

Dr Melanie Flory

PhDs that embrace inclusive design are vital for shaping the future of design. These student innovators go on to co-create equitable products, services, policies, and environments for all. At the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design, we partner with RCA Schools and Programmes in co-supervising PhD candidates. This complementarity drives the development of cutting-edge methods, educational tools, and frameworks that tackle systemic exclusion head-on.

This year, we are excited to announce two PhD awards. Congratulations to Dr Ruté Fiadeiro and Dr Silke Hofmann!

Currently, our co-supervision involves four projects from the Schools of Design and Communication. Best wishes to PhD candidates Nick Bell, Sarah Britten-Jones, Muayo He, and Sicong Xiao as they continue their academic journeys.

Nick Bell

(School of Communication)

‘Chatterhood: widening access to participatory civics for seldom-heard voices’

Sarah Britten Jones

(School of Design)

‘The university otherwise: speculative organisation design for inclusive continuous improvement’

Muayo He

(School of Design)

‘The contribution of design to inclusive policy making in China: an example of designing policy to improve museum inclusivity for visually impaired visitors’

Sicong Xiao

(School of Design)

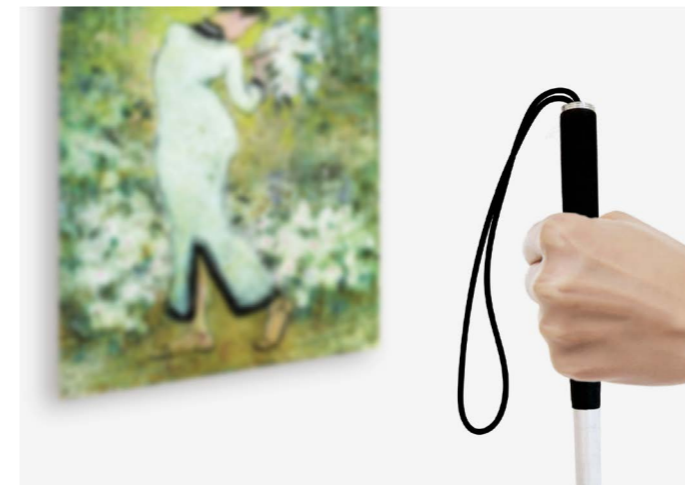
‘Innovative residential care services: AI application in elderly communities’



Chatterhood: widening access to participatory civics for seldom-heard voices. Credit: Nick Bell



The university otherwise: reimagining organisational arrangements for inclusive, effective, and continuous feedback action cycles. Credit: Sarah Britten Jones



The contribution of design to inclusive policy-making in China: an example of designing an inclusive museum policy for visually impaired visitors. Credit: Muayo He



Blueprint for later life care service provocation. Credit: Sicong Xiao

Needs-Based Clothing Design – Exploring Breast Support Clothing Focused on Wearer Expertise in the Context of Breast Cancer

Dr Silke Hofmann

Despite being everyday items, bras remain among the least inclusive garments, particularly for people affected by breast cancer. Silke Hofmann's practice-based PhD explored how clothing design can address overlooked breast support needs, especially for people with different-sized breasts, one breast, or those who 'live flat,' opting out of reconstruction or external prostheses after surgery.

Approximately 13% of people assigned female at birth are diagnosed with invasive breast cancer during their lifetime, with rates rising markedly among younger age groups. At the same time, treatment advances have lowered mortality, with survival rates now reaching 91%. As a result, many live longer with surgery-related clothing needs. Yet, post-mastectomy bras remain based on construction principles of breast symmetry, excluding diverse natural and acquired conditions and leaving most wearers in ill-fitting garments, challenges that become even more acute after treatment and surgery.

Silke's research contributes two innovative approaches to clothing design. The Participatory

Clothing Design Session supports people affected by breast cancer in expressing their clothing needs, while the Needs-Based Clothing Design process involves them directly as expert wearers. Both methods centre the expertise of garment wearers in identifying and shaping breast support designs. The Helen Hamlyn Centre's inclusive environment provided the ideal foundation for developing and refining this methodological framework.

Together, these methods produced working prototypes of modular, mass-customisable breast support garments that depart from conventional bra construction by combining engineered knitting with parametric support structures based on 3D body scans. These garments expand options for people with breast asymmetry, one breast and those who live flat. Such developments have also introduced a unique textile surface structure that facilitates individualised support and is presently tested at the Lab for Biomimetic Membranes and Textiles at Empa as part of efforts to develop it further for future use.

Opposite top: Credit: Ingmar Kurth

Opposite bottom: Credit: Laura Knoop and Julia Lee Goodwin



A Space of Possibilities: Design Addressing Intimate Partner Violence

Dr Ruté Fiadeiro

This PhD examined the growing application of design in contexts related to intimate partner violence (IPV) worldwide, which continues to be a profoundly naturalised part of our contemporary world. Addressing IPV involves carefully considering contextual implications such as safety, trauma, and intimate relationships; which are not dominantly considered in design.

With design's growing application in areas of addressing harm, it thus is essential to explore how these implications demand different design practices. Investigating this under-researched area aimed to deepen designers' and design researchers' understanding of how design may address IPV and its implications. Ultimately, this may lead to a more meaningful engagement with IPV issues.

The research investigated two case studies exploring designers' practices in (i) recovery and response interventions and (ii) prevention with men. It then continued to explore what theoretical or collective space may support new and existing designers to work in these contexts through a workshop and interviews with designers.

The findings outline methodological and practical implications by analysing the rationale designers use to adapt their practices to the circumstances of IPV. From here, six guiding principles emerge from patterns in design practices in IPV. These principles include critical awareness, supporting safety, relational focus, dialogical engagement, encouragement, and making visible. Overall, these findings enhance the theoretical understanding of design within IPV contexts and distinguishes intimate harm as a distinct form of harm requiring designers' attention.

Opposite: Principles of design addressing intimate partner violence



AWARDS

2025 Helen Hamlyn Design Awards

The annual Helen Hamlyn Design Awards recognise creativity in people-centred, inclusive design across all disciplines of the College and celebrate the most visionary, inclusive and innovative RCA graduate projects.

In 2025, four awards were granted: the Helen Hamlyn Award for Creativity; the Snowdon Award for Disability; the Northumbrian Water Award for Inclusive Innovation; and the Clarion Futures Award for Inclusive Communities. Each winning project is awarded £2,000.

The Awards were presented during a ceremony at the RCA's Battersea Campus on 30 September 2025.



Lucy O'Rorke, Director of Projects at the Helen Hamlyn Trust, and Danni Fadeyi, winner of the Helen Hamlyn Award for Creativity. Credit: Chris Lee



Jennie Collingwood, Head of Corporate Affairs at Northumbrian Water Group, and the Care to Share Team, winners of the Northumbrian Water Award for Inclusive Innovation. Credit: Chris Lee



Judie Obeya, Communities Manager for Clarion Futures and Lukman Ipese, Winner of the Clarion Futures Award for Inclusive Communities. Credit: Chris Lee



Helen Saelensminde, Chief Executive of the Snowdon Trust, and Zachary Berry, Winner of the Snowdon Award for Disability. Credit: Chris Lee

Helen Hamlyn Award for Creativity

EMBER

Danni Fadeyi

(MA/MSc Innovation Design Engineering)

EMBER is an augmented-reality headset that provides clear, intuitive navigational guidance when a firefighter's sight is lost. Developed in close collaboration with over ten operational firefighters, its design is a direct response to their needs. By projecting a simple AR path and creating a shared, real-time map for the entire team, EMBER drastically reduces cognitive load and enhances situational awareness. It is a tool designed not just for firefighters, but with them, to ensure they can always find their way.

What stood out is Danni's highly creative, questioning, iterative process, involving firefighters in co-design workshops to make sure it met real operational needs. Her design solution is low-cost and intelligently works with existing gear, improving team coordination, safety, and ultimately saving lives.

- Lucy O'Rorke, Director of Projects at the Helen Hamlyn Trust



Northumbrian Water Award for Inclusive Innovation

Care to Share?

Julie Plovgaard, Sara Gelfgren, Arya Ankale
(MA Service Design)

Care to Share explores the low uptake of Shared Parental Leave which the team discovered was due to a lack of awareness and policy complexity. The team's intervention aims to normalise shared caregiving by making it a visible, accessible, and supported choice. The project reimagines how government services engage with families, helping parents make more informed, intentional decisions and empowering them to advocate for shared care from the very beginning.

As an inclusive employer, Northumbrian Water recognises the importance of the Care to Share project which addresses the low uptake of the Shared Parental Leave policy due to lack of awareness and process complexities. The project adopted a "test and learn" approach and placed accessibility and inclusivity at the heart of the user journey in order to reimagine government parental leave support. We are excited to see what is next for Care to Share and hope to support the team as they continue their journey – congratulations to you all.

- Jennie Collingwood, Head of Corporate Affairs at Northumbrian Water Group

Clarion Futures Award for Inclusive Communities

Kitted for Culture

Lukman Ipese
(MA Visual Communication)

Kitted for Culture is a community-led design initiative rooted in Hackney Marshes that explores identity and the football shirt as a cultural artefact through sport, creativity, and participation. This interdisciplinary project combined graphic design, photography, and editorial storytelling, working with 25 young designers to create high-quality kits worn proudly by the young players in a community fashion show held on the Marshes.

Clarion Futures selected 'Kitted for Culture' for the Inclusive Communities Award because it tackles cultural underrepresentation in sport through creativity, collaboration, and youth voice. By giving young people the tools to design and express their identities through football, the project fostered belonging, pride, and visibility, showcasing how inclusive design can strengthen community and enable opportunity.



Snowdon Award for Disability

Teneray

Zachary Berry

(MA/MSc Innovation Design Engineering)

Teneray translates prosthetic hand finger movement into tactile feedback on the forearm, restoring a sense of finger position for people with upper limb differences. This improves coordination in everyday tasks, reduces fatigue, and decreases prosthetic hand abandonment rates.

The Snowdon Trust was delighted to select a project which provides an innovative and inclusive solution addressing a critical gap in prosthetic hand technology. What truly impressed the judges was not only the potential impact of the prosthetic hand, but the inclusive principles deeply rooted in its development. Teneray exemplifies how empathy-driven engineering can transform assistive technology into human-centered design.



Helen Hamlyn Alumni Award

Each year, the Helen Hamlyn Alumni Award is presented to a former employee of the Centre who has gone on to champion Inclusive Design in the wider world through their work.

This year, the alumni award went to Mikaela Patrick. Mikaela's initial training was in architecture, and after graduating from the RCA she joined the Centre as a Research Associate between 2017 and 2019. She worked alongside Dr Chris McGinley to explore the process of designing and constructing buildings for later life care.

During her time at the Centre and beyond, Mikaela also worked as a freelancer with INTERPRT, working to document environmental crimes and campaigns for legal protection of the environment under international law. She also worked at Stema Health, on community-led solutions to improve health in low-resource

settings. As a built environment expert, Mikaela worked with communities in the Peruvian Amazon, Rural Kenya, Sierra Leone, and Urban South Africa to develop ideas for how space and place could improve health, and quality of life.

In 2020, Mikaela joined the Global Disability Innovation (GDI) Hub as an Inclusive Design Researcher. She was soon promoted to Senior Inclusive Design Researcher, Head of Inclusive Infrastructure and Climate, and in 2024 Mikaela was appointed Head of Research and Delivery at GDI where she leads a team of researchers to advance disability inclusion and innovation. One example of her recent work there is the AT2030 Inclusive Infrastructure programme, a £1,000,000 research project on the current state of inclusive design in cities worldwide, working with disabled people and local partners in Mongolia, Indonesia, India, Kenya, Sierra Leone and Colombia to co-design solutions.



From left to right: Dr Melanie Flory, Lucy O'Rorke, Mikaela Patrick and Dr Chris McGinley. Credit: Chris Lee

Fixperts Award

Fixperts is a free learning programme that challenges university and school students from around the world to collaborate with a Fix Partner in their community. The aim is to apply their creativity to solve real-world problems. A Fixperts project helps students develop skills in design, engineering and practical making. It emphasises empathy, collaboration and storytelling to achieve successful outcomes.

The Centre has been collaborating with Fixperts for 13 years. This year, we had the privilege of selecting from an exceptionally strong shortlist of projects. We were once again reminded of how the values, approach and inspiration underlying the Fixperts Learning programme perfectly align with those of the Centre.

This year's winner of the Helen Hamlyn Fixpert Awards 2025 was Sophie's Knife Guard. The project was led by Fixperts Yuna Shum, Callum Smith, King Chow, Orpheas Kalavana Georgiou, Jadyne Foong and Jiayu Jin, all from Brunel University of London and supported by staff member Tom Higgs.

Their Fix Partner was Sophie Brudenall, who is visually impaired, feels anxious using knives in the kitchen and often resorts to buying pre-cut fruit and veg – something she doesn't like due to sustainability concerns. The Fixperts team designed a custom finger guard to help her feel secure and comfortable preparing food, and happily reduce her use of single-use plastics.



Professor Daniel Charny presenting the 2025 Fixperts Award to the winning team from Brunel University of London, together with Fix Partner Sophie Brudenall. Credit: Chris Lee

Clarion Housing Group: William Sutton Prize for Connected Communities

We were delighted to partner with Clarion Housing Group on the 2025 William Sutton Prize, collaborating to frame a brand new category for 'Connected Communities'. The prizes provide up to £25,000 in funding, along with expert support from Clarion and the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design, to support impactful ideas that enhance social housing residents' physical, emotional, and social wellbeing.

This category focused on fostering community connections and promoting citizen inclusion, both in process and outcomes, to create healthier, more welcoming environments for all.

The Prize called for submissions that centred on one or more of the following areas:

Innovative Technology Solutions: people-driven technology interventions that break down barriers and enable communities to connect in intuitive and meaningful ways.

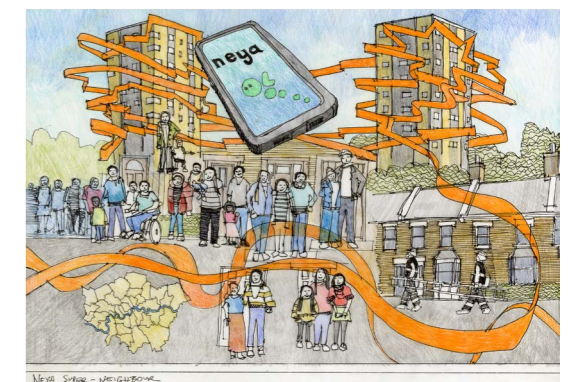
Intergenerational Interventions: scalable new ideas that are desirable across age ranges, with potential to bridge generational divides and promote intergenerational interactions.

Social Inclusion: concepts and projects that engage under-served communities to help them feel heard, build belonging, and community by adopting an intersectional lens.

Community Spaces: proposals that present novel and creative ways to bring communities together within a space to increase social networks, be it physical, virtual or a blend of both.

Two exceptional winners were selected, considering the role of community across the age spectrum, and looking to engage communities with opportunities for meaningful connection and growth. 'Neya AI' is an AI-powered digital 'super-neighbour' to bring communities together, designed by Neighbourly Lab and Neya; and 'Sustainable London' by Motivez, a programme providing pathways into the environmental and STEM sectors for under-represented young social housing residents.

We look forward to continuing our relationship with Clarion, and supporting the remarkable winning projects.



Neya AI - 2025 Winner of the William Sutton Prize for Connected Communities. Credit: Richard Carman

LASTING IMPACT



Professor Claire Craig (left) and Beatrice Sangster (right)

The Helen Hamlyn Archive Project

Professor Claire Craig, Beatrice Sangster

The records of the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design are of national and international significance for researchers and scholars in inclusive design. The materials systematically chart the 30-year history of the Helen Hamlyn Centre and its role as global leader in the field of inclusive design research and practice. They demonstrate how the Centre has responded to societal challenges and provide a strong foundation for future initiatives and research.

The Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design's collection includes an archive of original unpublished papers, photographs and audio-visual material. There is also a library of published material and a small set of prototype objects which are an important aspect of the collection. Multiple physical moves from premises at Kensington, through Hester Road, to the new RCA building at Battersea has meant that the materials have become dispersed, and a key priority has been on a re-ordering and documenting of the materials to make them accessible to staff, researchers and students.

'I have always been fascinated by history, and the multiple stories objects and materials tell. Long before I became interested in design, I studied history at Oxford University and then after this worked at the headquarters of the West Yorkshire Archive Service in Wakefield. Imagine my joy when as newly appointed Co-Chair of the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design I was invited to revisit the rich

archive material of the Centre! The HHCD tells many stories. It tells the evolution of inclusive design through the history of the centre. It also tells of a series of extraordinary individuals with a passion for people and the transformative nature of design who have been willing to challenge societal norms, give voice to unheard individuals and find ways of authentically engaging and designing with people.'

- Professor Claire Craig, Helen Hamlyn Co-Chair of Design

Phase one of the project began on 4 August this year and has focused on gaining an overview of the breadth of the materials, the cataloguing of published books and the transfer of important archival material to the Special Collection housed by the Library at Kensington. The controlled environment and access conditions of the Special Collection will provide the necessary conditions required for optimal preservation of these valuable materials.

During June and July, we met with Natasha Tebbs and Neil Parkinson from the special collections archive in the library. The expertise offered ensured that a consistent and strategic approach was followed and a cataloguing system was developed that was compatible with other systems at the RCA.

At the beginning of August, we were pleased to appoint Beatrice Sangster, previous recipient of the Helen Hamlyn Snowdon Award, for a period

of three months to support in the cataloguing and organisation of materials. Ninela Ivanova has supported throughout with her insights around the digital materials the collection contains.

At the time of compiling this article, significant progress has been made.

- Over 150 published books have been catalogued.
- Three dimensional artefacts and physical outputs have been photographed and catalogued, including outputs and research from the Design Age Institute.
- Key historical archive materials have been transferred to the Special Collection at Kensington for more specialist cataloguing and preservation.

The next phase of the work is planned to take place over the coming year and will involve cataloguing of the extensive collection of publications and reports, the development of a longer-term digitisation strategy and the creation of a permanent exhibition space on the fourth floor of the Rausing Building where the physical objects and prototypes will be displayed. This will provide a fantastic physical showcase for outputs and working methods.

Many thanks to Natasha Tebbs, Neil Parkinson, Jeremy Myerson, Roger Coleman, Yanki Lee and Ninela Ivanova for their input into this work.



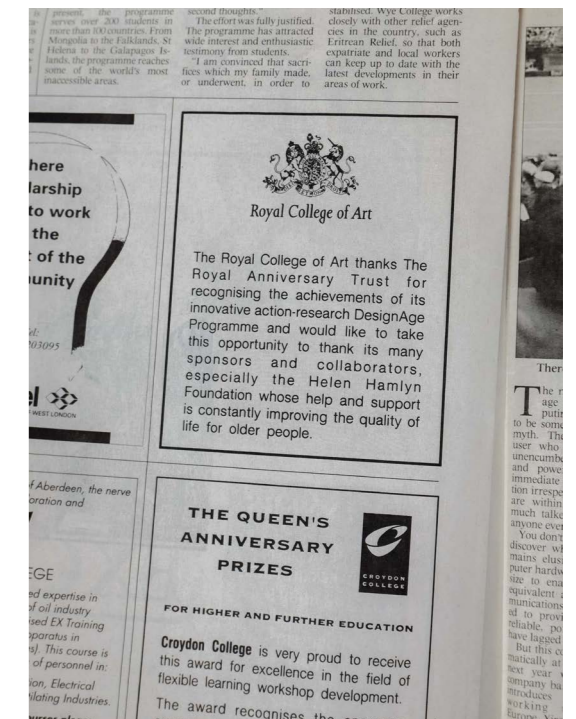
A photograph of Roger Coleman, Founding Director of the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design, receiving the Queen's Anniversary Prize for Higher and Further Education Award from Queen Elizabeth II on behalf of the Centre in 1994

Having joined the Centre as a lived experience research participant and trained into the role of research associate, I have been supported by the instrumental mentorship of Professor Claire Craig and Ninela Ivanova throughout this work. This project offers a unique opportunity to engage with the Centre's archives and the contributions of histories they hold, stories, voices, and practices. Studying inclusive design in this context provides a strong foundation for future research and creative initiatives. With access to education, skills development, and continued guidance, we are eager to build on this significant body of work, contributing to a more inclusive, accessible, and historically rooted approach for future students, researchers, and designers.

- Beatrice Sangster, Helen Hamlyn Research Associate



Invitations to the Queen's Anniversary Prizes event



Reporting in The Times of the Award

Body 2.0

Global Disability Innovation Hub

The London 2012 Paralympic Games were the first Paralympics to sell out and were acclaimed as the most successful in Paralympic history, helping to positively reframe public perceptions towards disability. As with all historic events, attention soon turned to how to build on the positive impact of the Games and ensure its legacy lasted long into the future.

In 2015, the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design ran a project called Body 2.0 in partnership with the London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC), the organisation responsible for ensuring a positive legacy for both the Olympic and Paralympic games. Body 2.0 sought to harness the cultural and technological shifts prompted by the London 2012 Paralympics, as well as the emerging field of low-cost 3D printed prosthetics, which, at the time, was starting to shift understanding of the potential for body modification and the empowerment that it could provide.

The project used the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, site of the London 2012 Games, as a physical and digital location to develop lower cost, bespoke prostheses that extend the body's capabilities for people with a range of abilities. During this time, the Park was being developed into a cultural and educational district for east London, with world leading institutions arriving including: Loughborough University London, University College London (UCL), UAL's London College of Fashion, Sadlers Wells and the V&A.

These institutions, along with the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design would also become founding partners of the Global Disability Innovation Hub (GDI Hub).

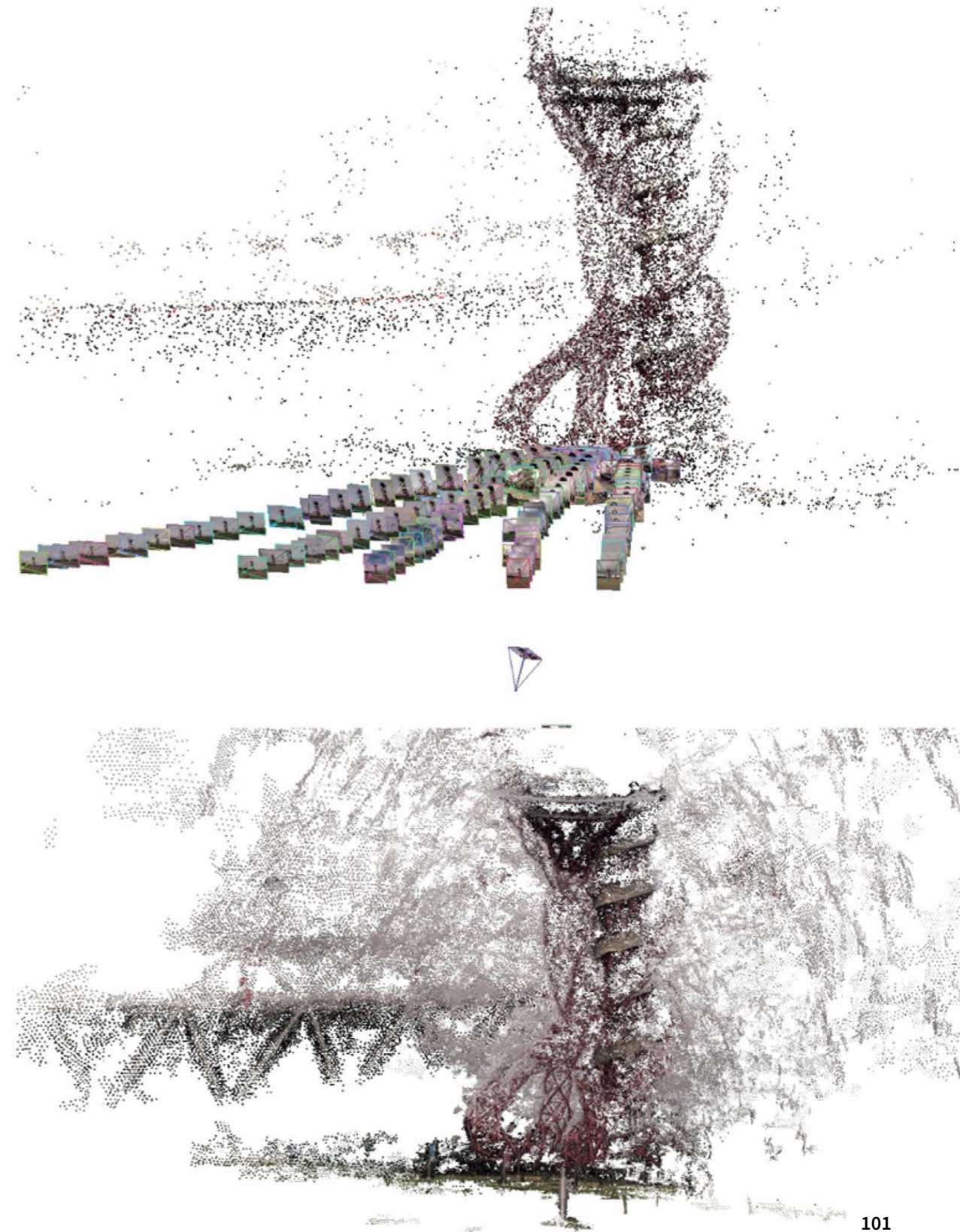
During the second year of the project, partner institutions' specialised skills were utilised to help create three bespoke prosthetic limbs using low-cost, open-source 3D-printing. Co-design workshops were undertaken with end users to explore notions of identity with Body 2.0 creating customised prosthesis designs that illustrate the potential of new technologies to improve lives.

'Global Disability Innovation Hub (GDI Hub) emerged through partnerships – bringing together deep expertise, and a vision that collectively we can do more to amplify disability inclusion globally. As a founding partner of GDI Hub, the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design fostered this vision – both in our collaborative projects and our complimentary research and practice. Together we have been able to push the boundaries of inclusive design and showcase its importance and value.'

Now working across 41 countries, with a reach of 10 million people directly, GDI Hub remains deeply committed to inclusive design. As climate and society changes, we know equality is more important than ever.'

- Iain McKinnon, CEO, Global Disability Innovation Hub

Opposite: Image credit: Jordan Jon Hodgson, Helen Hamlyn Research Associate 2012



Save the Date

INCLUDE 2026

Royal College of Art, London
9-11 September

With Thanks

Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design

Professor Hua Dong – Director
Rama Gheerawo – Former Director
Dr Melanie Flory – Associate Director, Research
Professor Claire Craig – Helen Hamlyn Chair of Design
Professor Paul Chamberlain – Helen Hamlyn
Chair of Design
Professor Emeritus Jeremy Myerson
Professor Jo-Anne Bichard – Professor of
Accessible Design
Dr Chris McGinley – Senior Research Fellow
Dr Ninela Ivanova – Innovation Fellow
Dr Katie Gaudion – Senior Research Associate
Gail Ramster – Senior Research Associate
Dr Laura Salisbury – Senior Postdoctoral Researcher
Dr Gopika Rajan – Postdoctoral Researcher
Dr Narges Pourshahrokhi – Postdoctoral Researcher
Tom Stables – Industry Project Researcher
Tong Lo – Research Associate
Beatrice Sangster – Research Associate
Luisa Charles – Research Associate
Sammy Soudan – Research Associate
Dr Naoya Tojo – Visiting Fellow

Research centres

Michaela Cullen – Helen Hamlyn Administrator
Tatiana Kmetova – Research Centres Administrative
Assistant
Gina Farrell – Research Centres Administrative Assistant
Rosily Roberts – Research Centres Content and
Communications Officer
Anthony Shepherd – Research Centres Manager
Aoife Shanley – Head of Research Centres
Vimal Shah – Head of Research Centres

PhD students

Nick Bell
Sarah Britten Jones
Dr Ruté Fiadeiro
Muyao He
Dr Silke Hofmann
Sicong Xiao

Special mentions

Royal College of Art staff and students
Project participants

Special thanks

Lady Hamlyn and the Helen Hamlyn Trust

Credits

Contributors

Professor Jo-Anne Bichard, Professor Paul
Chamberlain, Luisa Charles, Professor Claire Craig,
Professor Hua Dong, Dr Ruté Fiadeiro, Dr Melanie Flory,
Dr Katie Gaudion, Rama Gheerawo, Dr Silke Hofmann,
Dr Ninela Ivanova, Tong Lo, Dr Chris McGinley,
Dr Narges Pourshahrokhi, Dr Gopika Rajan, Gail
Ramster, Rosily Roberts, Dr Laura Salisbury, Beatrice
Sangster, Tom Stables, Sammy Soudan, Dr Naoya Tojo

Editors

Rosily Roberts, Melanie Flory

Publication managers

Rosily Roberts, Ninela Ivanova

Graphic designer

Emily Wright

Photography

Chris Lee, Rosily Roberts, Anthony Shepherd, Beatrice
Sangster, Katie Gaudion, Craig Langran, Marco Da Re,
Tong Lo, London Loo Alliance, Gail Ramster, Ninela
Ivanova, Ezzidin Alwan, Special Projects, Nick Bell,
Sarah Britten Jones, Muyao He, Sicong Xiao, Ingmar
Kurth, Laura Knoops, Julia Lee Goodwin Richard
Carman, Naoya Tojo

Printers

Full Spectrum: fullspectrumpm.co.uk

© 2025

Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design, Royal College of Art

Design.Different
Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design
Vol. 6, November 2025

This publication is licensed under a Creative Commons
BY-NC-ND Licence. Some Rights Reserved. This licence
permits the copying, reuse and distribution of this
material. You must credit the licensor, you can only
use the work for non-commercial purposes and you
may not create adaptations of the work without prior
consent of the publishers.

Published by

Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design
Royal College of Art
Raising Research and Innovation Building
15 Parkgate Road, London SW11 4NL

hhcd@rca.ac.uk
www.hhcd.rca.ac.uk

Cover image

Space in Mind collage by Meredith Gunderson,
Artist, Royal College of Art



I love it out here. I love the fresh air. I love the shape of me. I love the
the connection, the spaces between the two and all the bikes
know why.

LIBRARY
BOOK RETURN

