

RSA

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AFTER THE POST OFFICE – WHAT NEXT?

Friday May 8th

The RSA has awarded a prestigious Design Directions Award to three student designers who tackled issues arising from the closure of local post offices.

For many communities the local post office still plays an important social and economic role in every day life. Following a growing number of post office closures, the RSA asked design students to examine how improvements could be made to the service of existing post offices's and how new services might be designed to those post offices which face closure.

Laurence Kemball-Cook (Loughborough University, Design Council Award of £5,000) focused on the outreach service offered by the Post Office®, a service it provides for communities where a traditional Post Office no longer exists. His research uncovered dissatisfaction with the service by both customers and Post Office employees who need to operate the equipment.

His design, Post Pod, proposes a mobile unit that operates via a wireless connection to a remote internet service. More simple and efficient than the current outreach service, set up times are reduced, and the lightweight Pod is easier for mobile Postmasters to transport between locations. The Pod replaces the seven units required in the old outreach system. With minimal components used in its assembly and its lower energy use, it's also more environmentally friendly.



Matthew Ward's (Loughborough University) design is The HUB – the creation of a new social focal point for village life. Focusing on the outreach aspect of postal services Matthew's plans build on existing village halls – establishing them as a place where outreach Post Office services can operate. Outreach workers can offer a full postal service at times agreed by the Network Change Programme (during which the Postman would collect post), and volunteering HUB helpers offer a basic service at other times, supplemented by the Post Office's online services. Matthew's proposal sees the Post Office® paying the HUB for its use during outreach hours, helping to fund operating costs outside of this use. Other services can be extended online to a website specific to each HUB.



The HUB Online web site is specific to each village HUB. Simple layout and navigation encourages user involvement and participation, appropriate imagery personalizes the HUB to the community that it serves. Helpers can login and access Postal Services as well as administering the site.

The screenshot shows the website interface for 'the village HUB' in Sherborne, Gloucestershire. It includes a navigation menu with 'Home', 'Times', 'Services', 'Links', and 'Contact'. A table titled 'This Week's Times' lists the following services:

DAY	TIME	SERVICE	HELP
MON	3 - 5 pm	Full Post Outreach Coffee Table Tennis	Carri, Emily
TUE	12 - 3.30 pm	Basic Post Coffee	Martin
WED		CLOSED	
THU	8.30 - 12 am	Full Post Coffee Car Share (Bourton) 1hr	Jenny, Jane
FRI	3 - 5 pm	Basic Post Coffee Table Tennis	Carol, Heather
SAT	10 - 12 am	Basic Post Car Share (Craneaster) 2hr	Stewart
SUN		CLOSED	

Below the table, there is a call to action: 'If you can help out or have an idea how to help others click here'. To the right, a blue button says 'To help your village HUB CLICK HERE' with a speech bubble pointing to a postman illustration.

Steven McAllister (Northumbria University, Engine Internship Value £4,000) wanted to improve the Post Office making it less likely that more closures would take place and identifying the opportunities to add value. 'communityconnections' is proposed as a service that brings together key elements of a community via the Post Office, creating a stronger, more effective local infrastructure with the Post Office at its heart. A £5 monthly membership fee brings information about events, groups and activities happening in the area, pre-selected to appeal to the recipient; an exclusive membership card which acts as a passport to numerous local services and businesses; and access to reviews and

ratings provided by residents for local tradesmen, and the opportunity to add your own. A point collection scheme, operating at local and large shops and businesses, offers Post Office vouchers in exchange. Users travelling in the UK would be able to access information about local services that may be of interest by presenting their card in the area's Post Office. Steven describes his service as economic (support of the local economy through local spending), ecological (residents spending and socialising in their own community thereby reducing nonessential travel), social (increased activity within the community boosts well being) and as adding value – the Post Office is connected to a positive social service, protecting it from attack and creating a strong argument against further closures.



Notes to Editors

1. For more information contact Luke Robinson, RSA Head of Media on 020 7451 6893 or luke.robinson@rsa.org.uk
2. A full list of the Design Direction award winners can be found at www.rsadesigndirections.org
3. The RSA developed this project with support from Engine Service Design, the Design Council and NCR
4. Design Directions is the RSA's annual design awards in which students are challenged to address intractable social problems through innovative new design.
5. Design Directions is the UK's leading competition for 'socially responsible' design. The RSA established its first awards scheme for students in 1924 and today this unique scheme identifies, supports and rewards the most promising and creative students.
6. Worth over £60,000 in prize monies, comprising cash and work placements, the awards provide financial and practical assistance to student designers starting out in their careers.
7. This year Design Directions received 800+ entrants. There were 30 winners. There was a choice of 11 briefs to which students could respond, proposing solutions to ways in which design could make useful and meaningful interventions in a variety of situations.

8. The RSA is grateful to the following organisations who supported Design Directions in 2008/09: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation; Garfield Weston Foundation; Kalyx; GlaxoSmithKline; Royal Mail; Home Office; Design Council; Forum for the Future; The Worshipful Company of Tin Plate Workers; Engine Service Design; CIM Charitable Trust; Aircraft Medical; Design against crime research centre; Springetts; Waitrose; NCR; Wolff Olins