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SIX CHALLENGES FOR DESIGN EDUCATION

Design education is failing to equip students with the necessary skills to work in public services if it remains solely focused on product and industrial design, according to a new paper published today by the RSA. The paper – *Social Animals: tomorrow's designers in today's world* – says that design education is not keeping pace with the growing demand for new design professionals able to operate in a range of service-based environments.

The paper argues that design education is still largely predicated on industrial principles. Students need to be equipped with a broader range of research and communication skills, alongside their more traditional design skills, and encouraged to think more laterally about the sites and spaces where these could be used.

The report outlines six challenges for design educators:

1. Design courses should do more to encourage students to immerse themselves in the moments of interaction between a person and a service and translate this research into actionable insights.
2. When working with people on co-design projects, students need to recognise that participation will have an impact on those people's lives. There needs to be an ethical code of practise to prevent designers treating participants insensitively or instrumentally.
3. Prototyping the design of new services requires significant further development as part of any future design curriculum. Students must learn how to move from research, to actionable insights, to a process of prototyping potential solutions.
4. Students need to be taught how to appreciate the 'bigger picture' – taking into account multiple stakeholders, and wider social, political and cultural forces that shape what is possible. A public service context demands that students find new ways of making these forces integral to their solution.
5. Design education must build students' skills in articulating, both visually and verbally, their service propositions, enabling them to communicate their ideas in terms of benefits to users, providers or society more widely. Currently, students are not

familiar with the language or visual methods of practising public service designers and do not know how to turn their ideas into propositions in which people might invest.

6. Students must learn how to become 'problem finders' as well as problem solvers – helping organisations define the nature of the problem as well as how to respond to it. As budgetary pressures grow so will the pressure to find fundamentally new ways of delivering public services. Designers must know how to work 'upstream' and be confident of the distinctive value they can bring to strategic design in public services.

The paper concludes that young designers are increasingly questioning the idea that design is primarily about material culture, or the business of making things. They realise that they risk missing out on a massive expanding market if they do not apply their skills to services as well as goods and products: in a globalised economy, services touch every part of our lives with over 20 million of us working in the service industries.

Author of the report, Sophia Parker, said:

"Service design is concerned with finding new ways of empowering people to take action themselves – designing people *in* to solutions, rather than ignoring their significance and designing them out; it is about seeing the social fabric of local communities as the site and source of solutions rather than the destination to which public services are delivered."

RSA Head of Design, Emily Campbell said:

"As the market for design has expanded into service innovation, and as young designers have become increasingly anxious to embody social or ethical value, some design schools have incorporated the study of social science into design education and placed a greater emphasis on user research. Our student design awards scheme, with its heavy social emphasis, has been great for these schools. But Sophia's paper has revealed how many are still unsure how to provide a complete education to emerging professionals."

The paper concludes that:

- design education should review grading and marking systems in order to create a mechanism that assesses some of the key components in service design – like user and stakeholder engagement, journey mapping and the complex dynamics between different users of a service

- more should be done to build relationships with local councils, government agencies, and charities to broaden opportunities and contexts in which design students can test themselves

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. The observations and conclusions made in the report emerged in response to a brief set by the RSA for students as part of its Design Directions scheme: *Design a service or other solution around the experience of the prison visit and the challenges of maintaining meaningful family relationships with partners and children.*
3. Design Directions is the RSA's annual design awards in which students are challenged to address intractable social problems through innovative new design.
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. 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.