



**RSA**  
Academies

---

**Being part of the RSA  
Family of Academies**

---



---

**Royal Designers  
for Industry and  
RSA Academies**

---

---

# Foreword

---

Working as part of the RSA Family of Academies gives pupils and teachers the opportunity to work with Royal Designers for Industry (RDIs). The RSA established the title ‘Royal Designer for Industry’ (RDI) in 1936. Only 200 can hold the title which is awarded annually to designers who have achieved ‘sustained design excellence, work of aesthetic value and significant benefit to society.’

The RDI is the highest accolade for designers in the UK and represents an expanding and evolving design profession including; engineering, graphics, interaction, product, furniture, fashion, interiors, landscape, and urban design. RDIs are responsible for designing the world around us from the jet engine, Routemaster bus, Millennium Bridge and iPhone to the mini-skirt and Harry Potter films, among thousands of other things.

The partnership between the RDIs and the RSA Academies sits within a wider programme of design education initiatives including the RSA Pupil Design Awards, the Manual of Modern Making with Black Country Atelier and RSA Fellow-led projects such as the jewellery competition with Weston Beamor in Birmingham.

Introducing professional designers to schools helps to nurture creative thinking, and multi-disciplinary approaches to problem solving, which are skills that are increasingly sought after in the workplace and will become more critical in our rapidly changing world.

To date, the RDIs have worked exclusively with secondary aged pupils, but as our RSA Family of Academies increases, RDIs and the schools will work together to develop projects for primary aged pupils too.

---

# Contents

---

Introduction	2
How we work together	4
Case study 1: Stephen Jones RDI and Whitley Academy	6
Case study 2: Mike Dempsey RDI and RSA Academy, Tipton	7
Case study 3: Ben Kelly RDI and Arrow Vale RSA Academy	9
Case study 4: Geoff Kirk RDI and RSA Academy, Tipton	10
Case study 5: Malcolm Garrett RDI and Arrow Vale RSA Academy	11
Case study 6: Sarah King RDI and RSA Academy, Tipton	12
Case study 7: Charlie Paton RDI and RSA Academy, Tipton	13
The full story so far	14
Pupils inspire a design classic!	18
The Academies	20
Looking towards the future...	21

---

# Introduction

---

---

**Robin Levien RDI**  
**Former Master,**  
**Royal Designers**  
**for Industry.**  
**Product designer**  
**and partner,**  
**Studio Levien.**

2011 marked the 75th anniversary of the Royal Designers for Industry. We celebrated this by asking the RDIs to give 75 days of their time to support RSA projects. This resulted in more than 75 days being pledged, some of which were given to the RSA Academies. Teachers were connected with individual RDIs to develop exciting interventions that would enrich their students' design education. You can read about some of these in this booklet.

I was lucky enough to get hooked up with the RSA Academy in Tipton. I adopted a game show approach and set a design project called 'Design, Make & Communicate' to two teams of six students. It was launched 'live' on the stage in the school hall in front of a packed audience of students, tutors, and parents.

The core challenge was to successfully communicate a design non-verbally. Each team, a group of engineers and artists respectively, designed and built a model of a trophy for a single-handed around-the-world yacht race. They then had to make a drawing of their design which was passed to the rival team who built a model of their team's design. The winners were the team whose drawing resulted in the model most similar to the original one. Besides the communication element of the project there were many other learnings, from brainstorming, designing, team-working, model-making to drawing.

The winning prize was a visit to my office in London for a tour and a discussion about what we get up at Studio Levien, followed by lunch and a visit to the Design Museum. Although both teams did brilliantly, the audience voted that the engineers had won. Their design was



relatively simple and easy to draw. The art team had designed a small boat perilously being tossed on huge waves; it captured the emotions but was difficult to draw. The art team looked so dejected that the Principal announced that both teams could share the prize to London!

We can all remember one or two people who helped us in a key way during our formative years. They are often teachers. When I volunteer to help students I feel I am paying those people back, it also keeps me in touch, not to mention the ‘warm glow’... you have to give to receive. I know that many RDIs feel the same way. What we have to offer is experience, insights and our time. Opportunities to work with students at the RSA Academies is a gift to us and I hope there will be many more.

*Working with an RDI was an exciting challenge for me as well as our Year 12 product design students. Our school entrance hall project was a unique opportunity set by interior designer Ben Kelly. It took everyone out of their comfort zones and really pushed our thinking to a different level. The students enjoyed sharing their creative journey and experiences with someone at the top of their game.*

Paul Taylor, Director of Learning and Standards – Design,  
Arrow Vale RSA Academy

---

# How we work together

---

## 1 – School visits

RDI can give inspiring talks about their work, sharing how they found their design path and career, presenting and discussing their portfolios, suggesting pathways to pupils and preparing them for further education and industry.

## 2 – School projects

RDI can enrich and enliven projects that are part of course curricula. Alternatively, they can set a new, exciting and challenging brief for students and provide feedback on the final outcome.

## 3 – Mentoring pupils

Advising and supporting students on an existing school project by providing a critical response or ‘crit’, either individually or in discussion groups. The RDI can support and work with pupils and teachers, helping to develop ideas and provide inspiration.

## 4 – Workplace insights

Studio visits for pupils at different levels to observe and experience an RDI’s design field ‘beyond the school gate’, and connect with the professional design industry.



---

# Case studies

---

*“It was an honour and real adventure for me visiting and setting a project for Whitley Academy. The students responded to the challenge of interpreting themselves in a hat with studious application and total originality. The results were self-expressive art-pieces and the final fashion show spectacular. Bravo!”*

Stephen Jones RDI

## Case study 1 – Stephen Jones RDI and Whitley Academy

Britain’s biggest name in hat design, milliner Stephen Jones, has designed hats for international fashion collections, as well as the likes of Princess Diana, Beyoncé and Lady Gaga. Stephen set a project to sixth form art and design students at Whitley Academy, challenging them to design a hat that represented their character and interests, enabling them to develop their design skills as well as their confidence and self-esteem.



During his first day working with the group, Stephen gave an inspiring presentation about his education and career. He then spent time with the students, giving each one of them a ‘crit’ on their hats and advising them how to develop and test their ideas. At Stephen’s follow-up visit, during which he helped the students to complete and fit their hats, the finished designs were displayed at a catwalk event in the school hall.

## Case Study 2 – Mike Dempsey RDI and RSA Academy, Tipton

Graphic designer Mike Dempsey challenged a group of Year 9 GCSE graphics students to design a postcard each that they felt best represented their school.

Mike began his graphics session by showing the students how graphic design is used in many areas: advertising, sport, music, film and pop. He also shared his personal journey of how he became a designer, driven by a desire to make a career out of being creative. He then set the postcard project, asking students to reflect on how their school made them feel, and to capture that by using illustration, photography, collage or typography.

Mike returned to Tipton to judge the best postcards, with three selected as the most successful designs. In first place was Jack Freeman's image of two figures riding in a red wagon over a brick building with the words, 'School is like a roller coaster, you just have to stay on track'. Mike enjoyed the freshness and simplicity of Jack's playful text and cartoon. Jack's prize was to see his postcard published in the RSA Journal which is circulated to 27,000 Fellows worldwide. In second place was Holly Hunt's humorous prose about the highs and lows of a day at school, and in third place was Jacob Bishop's photographic image of the RSA Academy with a sun and clouds hovering above it.

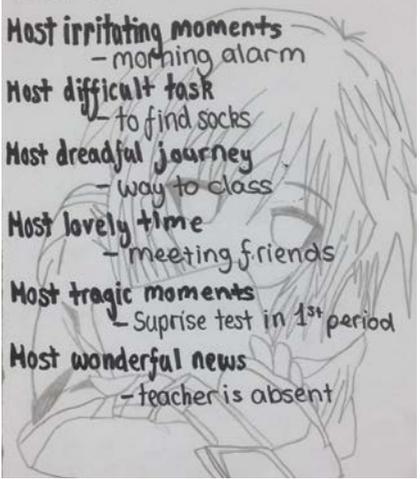


School is like a rollercoaster, you just have to stay on track.



## SCHOOL LIFE ...

- Most irritating moments
  - morning alarm
- Most difficult task
  - to find socks
- Most dreadful journey
  - way to class
- Most lovely time
  - meeting friends
- Most tragic moments
  - Surprise test in 1<sup>st</sup> period
- Most wonderful news
  - teacher is absent



### Case study 3 – Ben Kelly RDI and Arrow Vale RSA Academy

Interior and exhibitions designer Ben Kelly visited Arrow Vale RSA Academy and proposed a radical ‘live’ brief. The initial project for Year 12 product design students was to design an architectural shelving system for the school entrance hall to display student’s work. However, during Ben’s visit and much to the students’ excitement, the brief became a more daring proposition to completely re-design the reception space. Ben challenged the students to “dare to be different”, and to “challenge convention by breaking the rules”. The group developed their design proposal over several weeks, conducting research and experimenting with skills and ideas that which took both students and tutor “out of their comfort zones”.

*“The students are the collective authors of a piece of magic who now need to work a great trick to make it happen!”*

Ben Kelly RDI



Ben returned to give a ‘crit’ on their work and praised the students for the vision and ambition they had shown, encouraging them to continue testing and revising their plans. This project provided a unique opportunity for the students to take ownership of a space that could redefine the character of their school and enabled them to be confident about taking risks when testing their ideas. The students also had the chance to proudly present their architectural model to the RSA’s President, HRH The Princess Royal during her visit to the school in July 2014.

*“Scientists seek to discover nature’s laws, Designers seek to exploit them. Scientists ask why? Designers ask why not?”*

Geoff Kirk RDI

## **Case Study 4 – Geoff Kirk RDI and RSA Academy, Tipton**

Geoff Kirk, retired chief aero-engineer of Rolls-Royce, set a project to Design & Technology students. The brief was to design and build a prototype toy for 5–10 year olds which demonstrated a scientific principle. He challenged each student to research, design and make a prototype.

Geoff was really interested in getting the students to understand the issues around the product and not become too distracted with the aesthetics of it. He wanted them to think about the key questions designers need to contemplate when designing a new product: who is the customer, what is their profile, the costs of making and selling, the materials it would be made with, who would make it, would there be health and safety implications if schools bought it.



*“Working with RDI’s brings an extra dimension to projects. Their knowledge and understanding assists students with thinking about the project in different ways. The enthusiasm and passion that the RDI’s bring is priceless. All of my students have found the experience rewarding and it has given their projects a definite boost.”*

Chris Smith, Lead Practitioner MST, STEM and IBCC  
Coordinator at RSA Academy, Tipton.

*“We all found the day incredibly interesting and insightful and I know it will have a huge impact on their final coursework pieces.”*

Michaela Yeomans,  
Course Tutor

## Case Study 5 – Malcolm Garrett RDI and Arrow Vale RSA Academy

A group of Year 12 A-Level Media students at Arrow Vale were taken on an inspiring and creative journey “from record sleeves to real world design” by the 2014-15 RDI Master, Malcolm Garrett. Malcolm’s skills and experience as a graphic and digital designer were well matched to the students’ set project. Best known for his innovative work in the music industry from the late 1970s onwards, Malcolm was responsible for designing album covers for bands including Buzzcocks, Human League, Duran Duran, and Simple Minds.

As part of their coursework, the students had to produce a music video storyboard for an imagined artist or band, a CD cover and insert and an evaluation of their work based on their research of the musical genre they were focusing on. Small groups of students showed their draft CD designs to Malcolm, who gave each one a personal crit, asking questions about their concept and approach. There was a fascinating variety of responses to the project, with students coming up with imaginative names for artists and using a striking mix of typography, photography and illustration. After the visit, Malcolm provided some further guidance to the group before the students’ final presentations.



## Case Study 6 – Sarah King RDI and RSA Academy, Tipton

*“From my perspective the whole day was hugely enjoyable and rewarding. The students were very receptive and asked lots of questions. I will continue to collect fabrics for student activities if there is further appetite for textile design projects!”*

Sarah King RDI

Textile designer, Sarah King spent a day with Level 2 BTEC textile students, starting with an inspiring presentation about her work in the fashion and textile industries. The students gathered around a large table loaded with a huge quantity of specialist textiles brought for examination. Sarah showed samples of her work with additional textile samples and off-cuts of exceptional quality, collected from expert manufacturers and interior designers. The students were enthusiastic about the look and feel of each piece and realised that this would begin to inform a physical piece of work.

The fabrics were used as impetus to discuss different fibres, constructions, textures, colour and end-use. Sarah demonstrated some simple techniques and, by the end of the session, everyone had constructed samples in various combinations of fabrics for their course sketchbooks. RSA Academy had six new sewing machines which Sarah helped the students to use. Their appreciation of the fabrics was such that Sarah left a lot of material for the students’ final projects.



## Case Study 7 – Charlie Paton RDI and RSA Academy, Tipton

*“I was most impressed by the team of students. They each demonstrated enthusiasm and passion for their chosen design tasks and they also had a keen understanding of the practical design issues involved in developing their solutions.”*

Charlie Paton RDI

Engineering designer Charlie Paton worked with Year 13 International Baccalaureate students in Design & Technology. The students were working on their final project of the course, to manufacture a prototype of a product and produce a 40 page project, which accounted for 40 percent of their marks. The project ideas were broad, from football dugouts, to portable lecterns, to Romney House lights.

Charlie first talked about his design career, which began in lighting through to his current company Seawater Greenhouses. He then spent time with each student suggesting further areas for their design research and development. This was Charlie’s first visit to a school as a professional designer and he commented on how impressed he was by the enthusiasm and passion students demonstrated for their chosen design.

One of the students reported that “Charlie has enabled me to think of possible design solutions to overcome current and future problems. He suggested many ways in processing different design ideas to target and meet the design specification. Overall, this will improve my project as I have a variety of design ideas.”



---

# The full story so far

---

*May 2008* **Margaret Howell RDI, fashion designer**  
[RSA Academy, Tipton](#)  
A workshop for students to design their new school uniform.

*November 2008* **Malcolm Garrett RDI, graphic designer**  
[RSA Academy, Tipton](#)  
Commission to design a commemorative plaque to mark the school's new RSA Academy status by RSA President, HRH The Duke of Edinburgh.

*June – November  
2008* **Edward Barber RDI, and Jay Osgerby RDI,  
product and furniture designers**  
[RSA Academy, Tipton](#)  
RSA invited BarberOsgerby to review contract furniture options for the new school building. This led to an in-depth study of school furniture and a new chair design.

*May 2009* **Sir Paul Smith RDI, fashion designer**  
[RSA Academy, Tipton](#)  
An inspiring and memorable visit to the Covent Garden office and studios of Sir Paul Smith.

*June 2010* **Mike Dempsey RDI, graphic designer**  
[RSA Academy, Tipton](#)  
A project for pupils to design a postage stamp to commemorate the opening of the new RSA Academy building in Tipton.

*June 2010* **Georgina von Etzdorf RDI, textile designer**

[RSA Academy, Tipton](#)

From Peru to London and beyond, an inspiring design journey explored through a suitcase full of the designer's textile archive.

*July 2010* **Tom Lloyd RDI, product designer**

[RSA Academy, Tipton](#)

A presentation on the realization of live design briefs from trains to planes, and a challenge for students to invent a device to extract the juice from a lemon.

*September 2010* **Robin Levien RDI, product designer**

[RSA Academy, Tipton](#)

'Design, Make and Communicate' live competition team event with talk and Q&A.

*October 2010* **David Hillman RDI, graphic designer**

[RSA Academy, Tipton](#)

Commission to design a new 'RSA Academy' sculptural sign for the school entrance and a commemorative plaque to mark the opening of the new building.



*July 2011*

**Kim Wilkie RDI, landscape architect**

[RSA Academy, Tipton](#)

Ideas shared on how to cultivate a sustainable community orchard and market garden in the school grounds.

*July 2011*

**Stuart Craig RDI, production designer**

[RSA Academy, Tipton](#)

The designer of the Harry Potter films arranged a visit to Longcross Studios to tour the sets of the film, 'Jack the Giant Killer'. The students witnessed the process of film-making from storyboard sketches to live action sequences.



*September 2011*

**Geoff Kirk RDI, engineering designer**

[RSA Academy, Tipton](#)

The engineer of Rolls-Royce jet engine set a project to design and build a prototype toy for 5-10 year old children to demonstrate a scientific principle.

*October –  
December 2011*

**Stephen Jones RDI, milliner**

[RSA Academy, Whitley](#)

A challenge to design and make a hat that represented a student's character and interests; an exercise in building self-confidence and self-esteem as well as design skills.

- November 2011* **Sarah King RDI, textile designer**  
[RSA Academy, Tipton](#)  
An inspiring presentation working in the fashion and textile industries including practical handling of fabrics and construction of samples.
- April 2012* **Peter Clegg RDI, architect**  
[RSA Academy, Tipton](#)  
Guidance and critique on designing a ‘green’ classroom for pupils studying an IB Design project on sustainable architecture and design.
- September 2013  
and March 2014* **Ben Kelly RDI, interior designer**  
[Arrow Vale RSA Academy](#)  
A challenging project to re-design the Academy’s entrance hall to reflect the character of the school and the creativity of the pupils.
- October 2014* **Mike Dempsey RDI, graphic designer**  
[RSA Academy, Tipton](#)  
‘My RSA Academy’: to design a postcard that captured the spirit of their school.
- December 2014* **Charlie Paton RDI, engineering designer**  
[RSA Academy, Tipton](#)  
Support and inspiration for Year 13 students of IB Design Technology who were required to manufacture a prototype of a product and produce a 40 page project.
- January 2015* **Malcolm Garrett RDI, graphic and digital designer**  
[Arrow Vale RSA Academy](#)  
A presentation, inspiration and a crit for Year 12 A Level Media students who produced a music video storyboard for an imagined artist or band, and a CD cover and insert.

---

# Pupils inspire a design classic!

---

## The Tip Ton Chair

In May 2011 RDIs Edward Barber and Jay Osgerby created a new chair – the ‘Tip Ton’. This project was inspired in 2008 following a meeting with the RSA about selecting school furniture for the new RSA Academy building in Tipton. It prompted the designers to study children’s behaviour in class, observing how they sat and moved about in their chairs and which positions were optimal for concentration and engagement in class.

They named the chair after Tipton where their original idea was born. They tell the story as follows in their book ‘The Design Work of Edward Barber and Jay Osgerby’:

*Sometimes, as ideas for new projects unfold, they bring together an unusual confluence of opportunities. The Tip Ton Chair was one such project.*

“We were approached by Lesley James at the RSA to advise them on the furniture choices for a new secondary school academy that they were sponsoring in the Midlands. It was clear to us that there were few compelling options on the market, and few that offered good design and good value. We set about investigating how we could design a chair that was good to use at a desk or table, ergonomic, beautiful, and economical. We quickly realised that there was an opportunity to create a new archetype for sitting, a chair that would allow different seating positions, but unlike expensive and highly-engineered office chairs, have no moving parts or components.

As we defined the brief for ourselves, the inherent difficulties in what we were approaching became clear. It was obvious to us that this chair must live as comfortably in a kitchen at home, as in a classroom or at a desk. It would have to be comfortable, and visually memorable. It would also have to be hard-wearing, easy to maintain, stackable, and easy to recycle. We had been in discussions with Vitra for some time, and this exciting project seemed the perfect opportunity. Vitra were keen to take up the challenge, and this marked the start of our collaboration with them. Two years of fruitful and intensive design development and engineering followed to develop the Tip Ton Chair.”

[www.barberosgerby.com/projects/view/Tip-ton](http://www.barberosgerby.com/projects/view/Tip-ton)



---

# The Academies

---

The RSA Family of Academies currently comprises five schools:



## **RSA Academy, Tipton, West Midlands**

RSA Academy, Tipton is a secondary school for pupils aged 11–18 (Years 7–13) and opened to students in September 2008. The school was inspected by Ofsted in January 2014 and judged to be requiring improvement.



## **Whitley Academy, Coventry**

Whitley Academy is a secondary school for pupils aged 11–18 (Years 7–13) in Coventry and joined the RSA Family in July 2011. The school was inspected by Ofsted in December 2013 and judged to be outstanding.



## **Arrow Vale RSA Academy, Redditch, Worcestershire**

Arrow Vale RSA Academy opened its doors in September 2012 and is a high school for pupils aged 13–18 (Years 9–13). In May 2014, the school was judged to be outstanding.



## **Ipsley CE RSA Academy, Redditch, Worcestershire**

Ipsley is a middle school for pupils aged 9–13 (Years 5 to 8) and opened as an RSA Academy in January 2013. In September 2014, it was judged to be good by Ofsted.



## **Holyhead School, Handsworth, Birmingham**

Holyhead is the most recent school to join the Family, becoming a member in September 2014. It is a secondary school for pupils aged 11–19 (Years 7–13) and was judged by Ofsted as outstanding in December 2013.

---

# Looking towards the future...

---

---

**Melanie Andrews**  
Manager, Royal  
Designers for  
Industry, RSA

It has been incredibly rewarding to introduce the RSA's Faculty of Royal Designers to the growing RSA Family of Academies. The relationship began as an engaging series of inspirational RDI design talks and has developed into a significant number of projects and interventions that have had a powerful impact on student skills and confidence, course content and design teaching. In turn, this has had a positive effect on the many RDIs who have participated, and increasingly on the culture, creativity and partnership working of the RSA Academies.

We are currently developing an exciting project with Helen Storey RDI exploring art and science. This will begin at Ipsley CE RSA Academy with the Helen Storey Foundation and the Thomas Tallis School, which we are hopeful will engage all the schools in the Family as never before. We are also in discussion with Holyhead School about a graphics and a ceramic design project.

We have a strong foundation of projects to build on and are looking forward to many more inspiring collaborations with RDIs and primary and secondary schools.

If you would like to know more please get in touch with [melanie.andrews@rsa.org.uk](mailto:melanie.andrews@rsa.org.uk).



**RSA Academies aims to give learners the broad range of skills, qualifications and experiences they need to thrive in their continuing education and the world of work.**



**'Royal Designer for Industry' is a title awarded to designers who have achieved 'sustained design excellence, work of aesthetic value and significant benefit to society'.**



---

8 John Adam Street  
London WC2N 6EZ  
+44 (0)20 7930 5115

Registered as a charity  
in England and Wales  
no. 1148908

Copyright © RSA 2015

[www.rsaacademies.org.uk](http://www.rsaacademies.org.uk)  
[rsa.academies@rsa.org.uk](mailto:rsa.academies@rsa.org.uk)

---