

**Platform
& Incubator →
Helping
realise creative
entrepreneurship**

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“I was never really able to relate to the business world before and this had been a sticking point for me, but this initiative **has renewed my enthusiasm.**”

→ Design student

Executive summary



In 2001 the ICA and the Design Council came together to create **Platform**, a series of networking events designed to help design students prepare for life in a commercial world. The scheme was launched in 2002 and, in the following year, it spawned a more concentrated programme, **Incubator**, specifically aimed at helping young designers start up their own businesses.

Platform and Incubator were created because the ICA and the Design Council had identified (through their ongoing dialogue with design practitioners) a clear and growing need for design graduates to have more effective business understanding. The two organisations wanted to find ways in which the entrepreneurial spirit might be nurtured among design students and introduce them to the

experiences of existing creative businesses. They also wanted to respond to calls from the design industry for new designers who are able to set up their own business successfully or are ready to work with business.

Further, the ICA in particular felt that some creative people, though they may not know it, have the capacity to be entrepreneurs with a natural business sense. The ICA wanted to help bring these latent skills out into the open and help them blossom. Platform and Incubator were designed to try to find these naturally creative businesspeople and nurture their commercial know-how.

Certainly, designers are particularly well placed to develop entrepreneurial skills. They are by definition





creative thinkers who in their training often think about and work with the products of business – consumer goods, engineering products, buildings, communications, graphics, etc. They come to the business table from a different angle to most business students in that they come from the creative side, but that’s all to the good, because creativity has never been more important in business than it is today. A designer with a good head for business is very likely to make a good business person, especially capable of generating powerful new product and service concepts and business ideas.

As the first Incubator pilot draws to a close, it is clear that the dual scheme has provided a useful model for helping young design entrepreneurs, and has further highlighted the benefits that accrue to design students if they are exposed early and in an engaging way to business training. But there is resistance to business training in design education. Many design students have no immediate desire to start their own business, and many other students consider business training to be either irrelevant or boring. This may partly be because such training is rarely embedded and assessed as part of core design activity. Some design teaching staff share the same negative view of business teaching, feeling that college work should concentrate on developing students’ creativity and improving their conceptual thinking.

Proponents of business education in design schools argue that creative training in design education is obviously vital, but that it should be given a business context since business is most likely to be its end use. Many art and design schools offer business modules. The trick is to make them engaging and useful. Platform and Incubator may help show how this can be done.

One of the most important features of Platform has been that the students receive the opportunity to network and to learn to network with peers across all design disciplines, with peers from other design schools, with practising designers, and with mentors, industry gurus and potential employers. It is now becoming well established that when students engage with people outside the confines of their own school of study, their learning is amplified, and that breaking down the barriers between the various design disciplines is generally beneficial.

One of the most important features of Incubator has been the students’ discovery and development of entrepreneurial skills. There is a case, it can be argued, for introducing Incubator thinking into business modules and even core courses, so that students can more readily engage with design’s commercial context, even if they have no plans to start a business of their own. But more of that later.



“The social side is important. I’m very interested in making contacts”

→ Design student

Platform Background



How Platform Was Born

The idea for Platform grew out of a conversation in 2001 between ICA Director Philip Dodd and the Design Council's Design Learning Manager, Lesley Morris. They were looking to find a way to improve business awareness among young artists and designers. As Philip puts it: "Platform came about through a belief that we needed to get business and cultural imaginations talking to each other inside the same person at an earlier age."

The conversation between the ICA and the Design Council grew from another project, which itself emerged from the ICA's identification of Britain's "binary" system of arts and business. "If you are a profit-making enterprise, you are not always easily accepted as part of the arts world," says Philip.

"Consequently architects and designers have always been a problem for the arts community. The same is true for the business community. Designers and architects don't behave like traditional manufacturing businesses. So neither the Arts Council, nor the IOD nor the CBI really caters for this sector. We felt there could be room for a new club, the Cultural Entrepreneurs Club. And we quickly found there was an immense hunger for it."

He explains: "Platform is partly about finding young, creative entrepreneurs and helping them develop. Britain has a long history of such characters, from William Shakespeare, who was a very successful businessman as well as the world's greatest writer, to Damien Hurst, surely one of the most commercially successful artists of modern times. There has been a





recent history of separating commercial talent from creative talent. Platform is partly about showing the two can exist in one person, and encouraging it to happen."

The ICA (with the Demos think tank) had already commissioned research into the creation of entrepreneurs in Britain. Charles Leadbeater's book, *The Independents: A Study of Cultural Entrepreneurs in British Cities*, indicated that more business training was needed for undergraduates. As the ICA talked to the 500 companies in its Entrepreneurs Club, it quickly discovered confirmation of Leadbeater's views - that many designers and architects had left college with only the simplest ideas about business, unprepared for the cut-and-thrust of the commercial world.

The Design Council's motivation emerged from its Design Unity forum, in which it facilitated a meeting of minds between design professionals and the academic world. It quickly revealed that design practices were increasingly demanding design graduates with better business skills, who already understood the basics of negotiation and client liaison, and who also understood the commercial context of design. And so the Design Council and the ICA collaborated to create Platform, a series of networking and seminar events designed to help young designers learn business skills.

Lesley Morris: "The good news is that new design education courses teaching business skills are emerging all the time. But it still remains the case that business-skill teaching is rare on core courses, and business skills are rarely assessed as part of a designer's qualification. It is still very common in design schools to have a year group working on one subject and not really crossing any boundaries between other groups of students. For example, a typical 3rd year Graphic Design student is likely to do project work only with other 3rd year Graphic Design students. For us, Platform is about helping students meet different design disciplines from different colleges, as well as giving them direct networking experience with design practitioners. We particularly wanted to expose them to the realities of design consultancies and design in business, so they had a greater sense of connection to what was really going on. And we wanted to help them develop their networking skills."

The group was given the name Platform, because, as Philip Dodd put it, "every young person is on their way to other places. It's like they're standing on a railway platform meeting people and reading the destination signs and working out the best route to wherever it is they want to get to."



“It was great to get involved with something outside of college. I thought I might be able to get contacts. And it was great to go out for an evening with likeminded people.”

→ Design student

Platform objectives

As the format for Platform was developed, its objectives were finalised. It was agreed the scheme should (in no particular order):

- 1 support and influence the development of entrepreneurship in students
- 2 raise awareness of design practice issues in students
- 3 create links between design students and design practitioners
- 4 help change student attitudes to business skills and foster an enterprise attitude
- 5 raise awareness in design graduates of the context in which design operates
- 6 provide a forum through which design students can connect with new thinking and engage with design practice issues
- 7 improve students' communication and networking skills

What people wanted from Platform

Platform started off by asking student designers themselves what they wanted out of the project. Lesley Morris, Design Council: "We created a brown paper wall and held sessions in which speakers would facilitate a discussion of design issues. We then asked students to write down what they wanted; what skills, what connections, what inputs. Then we threw everything onto the walls - all opinions, comments and needs. And we captured it and used it to draw up a programme of talks and events."

It emerged the students wanted a range of benefits from the experience:

A → Networking

- 1 Learning how to network
- 2 Face-to-face contacts with people of experience – before they needed them
- 3 Contact with potential future employers – possible work placements
- 4 Contacts and resources to make things real, eg materials, space, funding and access to software
- 5 Face-to-face meetings with people of their own level of experience, across disciplines
- 6 Meetings with young creative people starting up businesses
- 7 Meetings with people who have tried and FAILED – not just the success stories

B → Mentoring and advice

- 1 on specific business ideas
- 2 on specific industry sectors, such as multimedia and web design
- 3 on how to make a living out of creativity
- 4 from people who have recently gone through university into practice
- 5 on how to "move up the food chain without being abused". They wanted to learn how to earn respect.





C → Business Skills

- 1 Business knowledge – learning all about client contracts, IPR, confidentiality agreements
- 2 Business language – the ability to understand and use commercial vernacular
- 3 Business skills, such as time management, dealing with clients and employees
- 4 The design industry – its pitfalls, the truth behind the hype.



“**Graduates are a lot more aware of presentation and marketing themselves than in the past.**”

→ Design practitioner



How useful is Platform?

As a network

The strength of Platform lies in the inspirational talks that spark networking sessions. The logic is easy to see: it is easier to improve your networking skills in a room of people you don't really know, if a) you have been moved by the subject of the talk you've been listening to and b) the people in the room are from a similar background to yours.

The networking side of Platform has been very successful. Young students, often shy, have felt empowered by Platform to break out of their shells and share ideas, criticism, insights, fresh perspectives and enthusiasm. They've also gained a clear sense of their own position in the professional world and how much work they need to do to join in as an effective member of the professional community.

The networking is facilitated by the fact that members have a wide range of experience and knowledge to offer each other from a diverse range of backgrounds, all of which are comprehensible to the members. For example, designers in practice are able to offer valuable advice to students and postgraduates, and, in turn, postgraduates offer useful tips to undergraduates. They are there to network, and to help students to network too. So it is relatively easy for members at all levels to share insights and skills advice.

Platform also encourages collaboration. There have been a number of cases of creatives from different disciplines teaming up. (For example, young fashion designers have found young photographers at Platform events.) This is an essential part of the





Platform process, and encourages entrepreneurial thought: ("Hey, if I could work with that designer from a different discipline, I could start a business".) Such skill-matching is very useful to almost all young designers, whether they intend to start their own business or not. If they can tell their employer/client: "I know where I can find a number of first class graphic designers who should be just right for this project", that is good for the designer and the company they are working for. Of course this already happens to some extent via the social networks within art and design schools, but only to a limited extent. Events like those run as part of Platform break out beyond individual design schools and dramatically increase the social and business network of young designers.

For learning business skills

Students have found Platform immensely useful for learning how the world of business works. It's helped them focus on the realities of life after college and motivated many to take business training more seriously. By mixing in the world of professional operators, students have suddenly begun to see how progress in the design world can only really be achieved with business know-how. Some students say they have begun honing their own initially vague business ideas as a result of the inspirational Platform sessions.

As a forum on design business and education

Platform generates knowledge and learning. This is an important function of the forum. Issues around design, the future of design, design education and design business get discussed in detail. This is perhaps inevitable when you bring together such a pool of business talent, and mix it with young students eager to learn new skills.

Some of the conversations and comments at platform have been recorded. For example, at one event some speakers shared the notion that there should be more business teaching in design courses at universities, while others felt it should be secondary to developing students' creativity, conceptual thinking, and enlightened learning. Practitioners criticised undergraduate education of certain subjects, complaining, for example, that they didn't learn enough about current technology especially in the new media fields.

Talking about Platform itself, some speakers thought the events filled a critical gap by supplying a forum for business thinking and for job-seeking opportunities. Some members thought a more structured format would be beneficial. They thought there should be more 'show-and-tell' from Cultural Entrepreneurs Club members to help students understand the realities of the industry. They also thought one of Platform's biggest values lay in

simply initiating post-college thinking in students – getting them to focus on the realities of life after study. Platform has clearly influenced students to move faster to find work placements.

As the project continues there may be a case for collating these views for circulation throughout the design industry and beyond.

The experience of the forum further argues the case for Platform-style events to be created around the UK. Most regions can boast a thriving design industry, and regional forums based on the Platform format could contribute to the maturing of the design profession in the UK, as well as helping students across the country to become more business-literate.



“Platform helped me to polish my business idea because I was able to network with designers and business graduates and discuss and refine the ideas. 200 people of a similar mind set - that was great! And it was also good because they had different people every month.”

→ Design graduate



“The problem with the system is that there are far **too many graduates for too few jobs**. A lot of work needs to be done to promote the entrepreneurial side of training designers. The problem is you can’t fit it all into a 3 year course.”

→ Design practitioner

Incubator Background

Incubator has come at a time when design consultancies are slower than they have been to take on new blood, increasing the pressure on would-be designers to go it alone if they want to follow their chosen career path.

ICA Director Philip Dodd describes Incubator as an experiment to see "whether you can generate entrepreneurs out of a special programme".

Ian Stewart (co-founder of WiReD magazine, a trustee of the ICA and an important force within the ICA's Cultural Entrepreneurs Club) was chosen to lead Incubator. Ian has spent the last ten years on soapboxes around the country complaining about the lack of business training in UK arts and design schools. For the past seven years he has also been

mentoring design graduates and small creative sector companies.

He pulled together a team of mentors from MBAs at the London Business School from a range of business and creative backgrounds. Some of whom are still studying, while others are recent graduates.

(It is important to note that Ian Stewart has received high praise from all quarters involved with Incubator. Even those students who didn't feel it worked as well as they wanted have nothing but praise for his vision, dedication, experience, inspiration, commitment and his ability to communicate.)

It was thought that at the very least Incubator 'graduates' would become better equipped to make good





employees in consultancies. At best, of course, they would be well on their way to starting a successful business. Either way, there would be a good deal of learning from the process.

How incubator worked

A small group of design students who had promising ideas for business start-ups were selected through an interview process. (See Appendix 2 – Incubator programme). Throughout the programme the mentors supplied the students with expertise and guidance necessary to get their business ideas off the ground.

The students were taken to various leading design practices to see for themselves how businesses are run.

Then they were subjected to a two-part programme. The first was a crash course in basic business skills (marketing, accounting, fund-raising, organising a business). The second was a closely mentored course in developing a business plan and preparing a presentation for business angel investors.



“When you have a creative idea it is quite a leap to convert it into something you can make a profit out of. It requires a different way of thinking. You have to consider numbers, employees, what you have to do on Monday morning...”

→ Incubator student

Incubator final presentations

Four of the Incubator teams presented to an audience of business investors at the Design Council on 20 April 2004. A fifth would have presented but was already busy setting up a business in India (see Incubator Case Studies – Sonya Joy-Francis, page 22).

There was considerable enthusiasm for all of the projects among the audience who were clearly impressed by the ideas some of the Incubator students presented. The students showed a thorough knowledge of their product, their route to market, and the opportunities and the difficulties they faced. They showed strategic initiative and an ability to grasp the financial pressures involved.

After their presentations the students were all given further advice from the mentors and potential investors about markets, marketing, and ways of modifying their ideas to meet a wider audience.

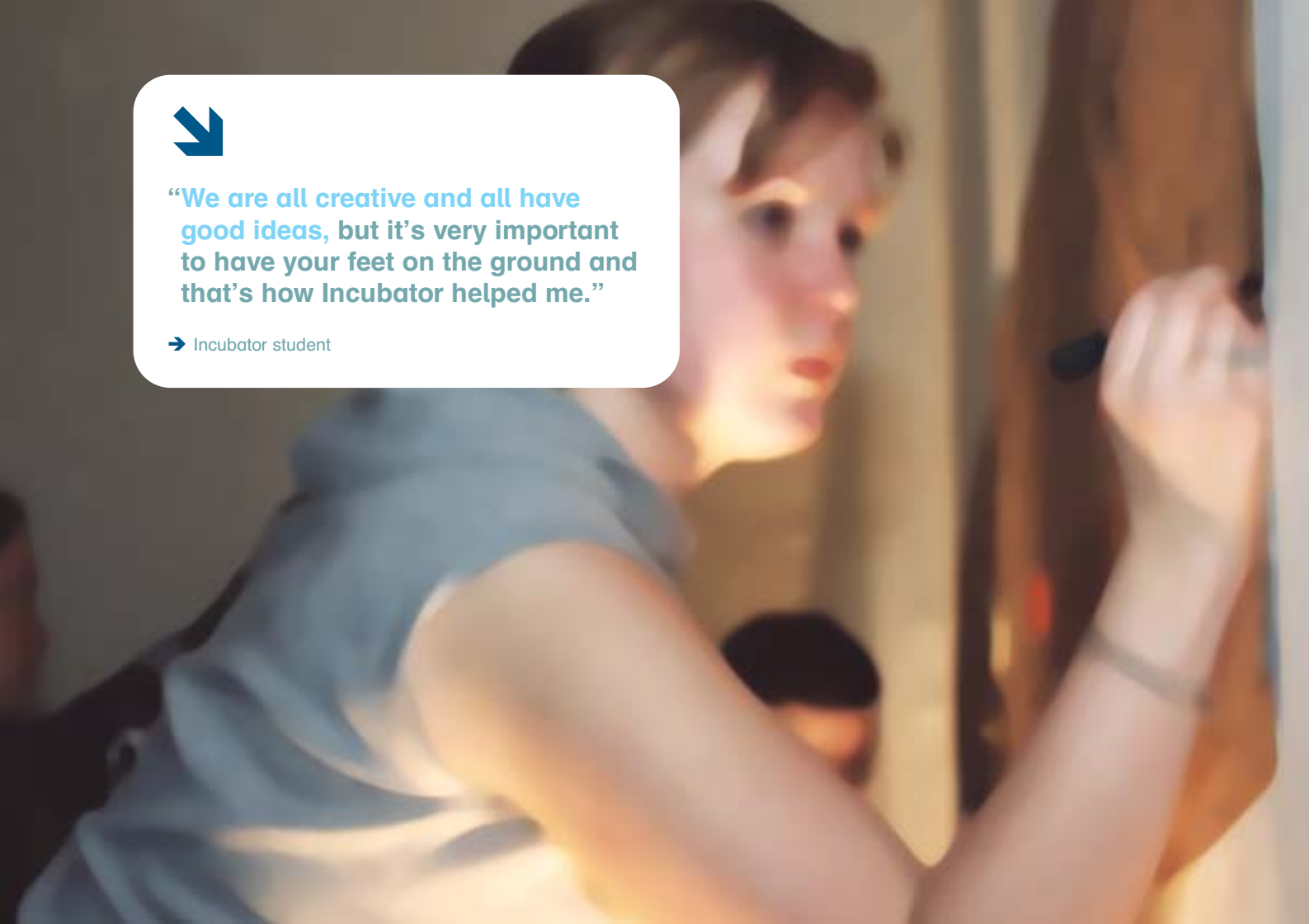
But the presentations highlighted that there is still a need for presentation training. Some of the presentations were difficult to follow and gave the impression that the students hadn't fully worked out important issues. The question-and-answer sessions served to dispel this impression at least to some extent. But, as Ian Stewart has said, presentation skills are paramount if young entrepreneurs are going to convince people to put money into their ideas...

It remains to be seen whether any of the teams will receive investment support, but the feeling at the end of the evening was very positive.



“We are all creative and all have good ideas, but it’s very important to have your feet on the ground and that’s how Incubator helped me.”

→ Incubator student



How useful was Incubator? ↙

It was clear that Incubator was very successful in taking commercially 'green' students and turning them into commercially aware potential entrepreneurs. The reaction from almost everybody involved in the programme was very positive.

Benefits included learning:

- 1 How to take a creative idea and turn it into a business idea
- 2 How to analyse your own business idea and find its strengths and weaknesses
- 3 How to develop and hone a business idea
- 4 How to create a business plan
- 5 How to present ideas more successfully
- 6 The importance of marketing
- 7 Financial basics, from accounting to securing multiple revenue streams

- 8 How to structure a business
- 9 How to grow a business
- 10 How to protect yourself from competition

The MBA mentors agreed they themselves learnt a lot from practically applying recent learning to real situations with real people. They found teaching these new skills reinforced their own learning, and all of them found themselves fired up by the enthusiasm of the students for making their ideas successful. It was a valuable learning process for all involved.



“My first impressions were that the students had a general lack of business skills and lacked the acumen to evaluate a business opportunity. So we spent time challenging their ideas, saying ‘How would that really work, who would pay for it and how would you protect yourself from being copied by big business?’”

→ Incubator mentor



“The last event, with three guest speakers - one from Sony, one fine arts teacher just about to teach at Central St Martins, and another who owned his own business - was excellent. They tracked how they came from studying to where they’d got to now. I think this sort of event is very good for helping me navigate my way into the big world, because that’s what I’m most concerned about. It’s really good to hear how people make the transition.”

→ Design student

Incubator case studies

Jimmy Tam
Incubator student. In his first year at LSE studying Social Anthropology. (Previously at The Latymer School in Enfield.)

Working with fellow Incubator student Joy Ekpeti, I was planning on developing a network of young artists who would work together on projects to promote themselves. Drawing on Joy's photography skills, my journalism experience and our extensive youth work, one proposed project was a study trip abroad. We then started thinking about starting a business but realised, after considering - at Incubator - things like revenue streams that our idea wasn't very viable.

So, around Christmas 2003, we began to change the idea. Our mentors helped us identify an opportunity in the world of corporate social responsibility (CSR). Now our business concept involves creating media training programmes for young people in a given area and getting the project sponsored by large corporations with CSR budgets. The idea is to be an effective one-stop shop presenting corporations with pre-packaged, innovative and simple solutions that will help them meet CSR targets.

One of the best things about Incubator was that we were taken seriously. At first we didn't realise what a serious commitment the mentors were making to us. And now we are being given a chance to pitch to potential investors.





I wouldn't have got this chance anywhere else, especially not at this stage of my career. Incubator was a great opportunity and I felt it was a great privilege to have been on it. I am sure that I wouldn't seriously have thought about setting up a business if it hadn't been for Incubator. People need mentors and encouragement.

Kimberley Hill

Mentor. MBA at London Business School, four years in advertising, marketing and brand development activities in the USA and Russia.

Incubator was a great idea, definitely needed. I think that this kind of thing doesn't exist enough in the design institutions.

Fellow mentor Nathan Brown and I decided it would be a good idea to spend time on a feasibility plan before starting work on students' business plans. I think this really helped define what was going to work and what wasn't. Some of our students actually changed their idea almost completely and now have a concept that really could succeed in the marketplace.

It was fun to be involved in new ideas and feel like you can contribute. It was interesting to go through all the different stages with three different ideas at different levels and see what they are learning.

Laia Roses

Incubator student from Barcelona. Graphic designer, studying MA in Enterprise and Management for the Creative Arts, London College of Printing

Incubator really helped me bring my business ideas down to earth and make them more realistic. We are all creative and all have good ideas, but it's very important to have your feet on the ground - and that's how incubator helped me. The fact that I was forced to take into account real world issues like money and making a profit made a big difference.

My MA was about enterprise and management. My business idea started in the MA but was refined further during Incubator. Now it is almost ready.

Incubator made a difference to me. It helped me with networking and got me closer to investors. The mentors were good in a different way - they saw things from a practical financial point of view.

Sonia Joy-Francis

Incubator student from Bangalore, India. Final year MA in Design Studies at Central St Martins (since graduated with distinction)

My thesis was about starting a business in India that could produce customised women's wear, using



“Placements are the key to learning business skills. I used to take on loads of students on placements – they were the gold dust of the company. Up to ten students at one time, committed, energetic and inspiring.”

→ Design practitioner

mass-production technology. I researched the technology to do it and found it was possible. This grew out of the fact that I used to design evening and occasional wear for individual people in India and saw a gap in the market. There’s so much manual input in such work that it isn’t really scaleable. I figured there must be a way to bring mass production techniques to customisation, to produce a quality garment to order in 48 hours.

I did a brief course in business called Setting Up Your Own Business at the London College of Fashion. But we didn’t get down to the nitty-gritty of making a business plan – and I wasn’t really ready with an idea.

Incubator was really good because the mentors were really interested in my idea, and they helped me get up and running. I wasn’t just getting general information, I was being given information specific to my concept.

When you have a creative idea it is quite a leap to convert it into something you can make a profit out of. It requires a different way of thinking. You have to consider numbers, employees, what you will do on Monday morning. At Incubator I learnt to break it down in that type of detail, and that’s helped me convert my vision into a reality.

I now have a business plan that is almost there. I know where I’m going. I’ve done most of the R&D, now I need to start developing a pattern library and finding a retail space.

My only criticism was that there wasn’t enough Incubator! Before it I felt dejected and stuck. Now I feel recharged and re-energised. I loved the programme. Ian’s spirit especially carried the programme forward and gave us life. It needs more promotion!

Mikha Mekler
Incubator student from Stuttgart, Germany.
Graduated from Middlesex University with a BA in fashion design

We have our own fashion label – Plus Schneider (Schneider means ‘tailor’ in German). Our idea was to make the label really work. We didn’t want to change according to the seasonal colour predictions but create classic (but modern) beautiful tailored garments that didn’t have to reinvent themselves every six months.

Incubator changed our way of thinking. We became more business-oriented. In the beginning we just wanted to work creatively. But then we learnt how to find out what the needs of the market are and thought more about finding a market gap. It helped





us take our heads out of the clouds. It's nice to be creative, but fashion is so competitive.

We saw that it was very hard to find companies to manufacture small runs of clothes. We realised there are many small clothes designers facing this problem – they run into great problems when they have to outsource. So we have come up with a business idea that invites them to come to us to manufacture their collections under their labels. We'll give them the quality they want and provide support for newcomers and existing labels.

The lectures showed us so many things that we'd never been taught about, or even thought about. We had never thought: "how should we organise our business?" We never thought about any of these things – ever! We just thought about making clothes. Ian was very good – he pushed us into researching what we were doing. Our mentors were good too, teaching us to look into the future. We'd tell the mentors an idea and they would challenge it from every angle.

It was nice to get some feedback – it helped me think about things I hadn't really looked at. It was very good to have the feedback there. It gave me reassurance and made me stronger. They were very supportive of us. We know they are trying to help, so the challenging was always positive.

For me it was ideal – perhaps it could have been shorter, but I really think I needed the time to develop myself. I've come a long way. There was a lot of development in between the sessions. I feel so different to how I did at the beginning.

Jonathan Sargood
Incubator student. Product Design graduate
from Brunel University 2003

My initial idea was an ultrasonic dishwasher – that was my major project at university and I received funding from the Audi design foundation. But talking to people at Incubator confirmed to me that it was too complicated for a start-up, and we decided to change the idea to another one I had dreamt up.

The new idea is a transparent hard hat that allows the user to see through the peak. This is better for safety, and helps prevent the dangerous practice of people wearing their hard hats backwards for better visibility. Incubator was great at getting me focussed on making it a reality. It's very difficult without some business background to know how to assess the size your market and work out step by step how much it will cost to manufacture, and how best to get it on sale.

When I did my business module at university it was very good but a lot of my fellow designers thought wasn't relevant. Some thought: 'I'm not going to



“The other thing about Incubator is that it made business so relevant. And that made it immediately interesting. You really feel you want to understand it better because it's related to what you are doing.”

→ Incubator student

work as an independent designer, I'm going to work in a big company. I don't need to know about this.' They didn't realise that a lot of design companies are small and that this information was going to be really important.

The point is, they need to understand why you need to know all these things. With Incubator you can see why you need to know about business to be a designer. You learn that there's no point in designing in a certain way if it isn't going to fit the market. If you knew this before you started working at a company, it would be a big advantage.

The other thing about incubator is that it made business so relevant. And that made it immediately interesting. You really feel you want to understand it better because it's related to what you are doing.

Cristina Hasting
Mentor. Full-time MBA at London
Business School

I think Incubator helped [the students] immensely. My first impressions were that they had a general lack of business skills and lacked acumen to evaluate a business opportunity. I suppose we were there as sounding boards to look at new ways of finding information for their particular business idea. So we spent quite some time challenging their business

ideas, saying: "how would that work really, and who would pay for that, and how would you protect yourself from being copied by big business?" And then we helped them structure their thoughts in a better way.

I felt immense satisfaction from the course. They were a fantastically receptive group – very willing to learn, and very appreciative of the support. It was challenging to me to return to first principles. It reinforced stuff I'd been learning at LBS.

How would I make it work better? There is an argument for doing this later in the business development process. The ideas were sometimes a bit raw – especially around the financials and the projections. We couldn't help them too much because the ideas were so undeveloped. I guess another fact is that the groups were at different stages. They were all very early in the process, but all at different stages, so you did have to switch your thinking cap from those who had the beginnings of a business plan and those that were still working on the original idea. It would have been good if they had had a couple more months germination – then we could have helped them more with the financials.



“I am happy to help students by seeing their portfolios or show reels. I give them pointers as to what to do differently and point them in other people’s direction. But most of the time we are overwhelmed with stuff being sent to us that is meaningless.”

→ Design practitioner

Lessons for Platform

Platform has undoubtedly been very successful, but there are some lessons to be learnt, both for its own improvement, and for the benefit of anybody planning to run a similar venture elsewhere.

Platform aimed to communicate the value of entrepreneurial skills even for those who don't intend to be entrepreneurs. The argument is that entrepreneurial approaches are useful in all business contexts, and, indeed, in some general life contexts too. But this approach has led to a little confusion. Some people have interpreted this as a major effort to persuade all Platform members to set up their own businesses, and some have felt that the message is: "Platform isn't for you if you have no such ambition".

It needs to be made clear that Platform is both for entrepreneurs and those interested in learning business skills. ICA director Philip Dodd clearly considers that the primary role of Platform is to encourage entrepreneurialism. The Design Council has wider aims, and is especially concerned not to discourage students who don't want to start their own businesses from attending and becoming more familiar with business thinking.



“The Platform panel discussions have been very good. They teach that there are lots of ways to survive creatively in the long term. It’s really useful to hear these experiences – they help you take risks in your own career. **They give insights that you wouldn’t be able to get otherwise.**”

→ Design student



“I don’t think that business thinking should come as early as undergraduate education. **These three years should be spent learning**, understanding and being critical about different issues, developing the skills that will give you an open-minded point of view like creative tools, writing, reading, drawing, analysing. Premature business education can be narrowing and all about numbers and targets and not enlightened enough.”

→ Design educator

Lessons for Incubator

Incubator was a pilot scheme put together on a small budget using voluntary help from the mentors. As such it was bound to have teething problems, and, in spite of these, it has been very successful, bringing intensive business learning to the students.

Students who produced business ideas and plans that secured the enthusiasm of the mentors, felt that Incubator was superbly run. Others felt it could have been more tightly organised. It is a moot point whether a more formal, intensively structured programme would have worked better. Some people function well in a highly organised educational environment, others less so.

If Incubator were to run again, perhaps there is a case for tightening up the organisation, at least to the extent of ensuring that good printed materials are made available, and, perhaps, intensifying the learning prior to the second phase in which the students create a business plan.

There is also a case for teaching presentation skills more effectively. This is difficult, but very important. If, in Ian Stewart's words, "pig-headed drive" is criterion number one for entrepreneurs, "superb presentation skills" is criterion number two. Some would argue these two criteria are as important as the business idea.



“If you want to start your own creative business you really need a **grounding in business**. Events that give information about how to write a business plan and general business issues like getting funding are very valuable.”

→ Design educator

Conclusion

Platform has clearly been, and continues to be, a success. And, by its own criteria, Incubator has been a success too. While they may not yet have identified creative business geniuses, they have certainly helped students develop entrepreneurial skills.

Key benefits include offering students opportunities to meet people outside their own discipline, to meet future employers, and learn first hand something of the commercial realities of the outside world before they are thrust into it. Acquiring such business knowledge and networking skills gives students a major head start, and, at the very least, gets them thinking about employment before they actually walk out of the college doors.

The truth of the matter is, of course, that it is hard to recreate such courses within a college environment. But it is equally clear from this report that there is a growing need for more inspired business education on design courses. Ian Stewart declares his goal to be: "to convince all arts and technology schools in the country to include a small 'general business' strand within the standard undergraduate curriculum of all degree courses. Not 'Accounting 101', but rather something to provide a real world perspective for the working conditions they will face and the types of roles they might play within their target industry. And, with luck, maybe those independent types within the schools will thus come out better prepared and more enthusiastic about their prospects for entrepreneurial endeavour in companies of their own."





In Incubator there exists a model for inspirational business courses. If, for example, students in their third year (a time at which they are naturally considering their futures) were asked to conceive of a product and then attend courses that specifically addressed the commercialisation of that product, they might be more enthusiastic about learning business skills. In the words of incubator student Jonathan Sargood:

Incubator ... made business so relevant. And that made it immediately interesting. You really feel you want to understand it better because it's related to what you are doing.

There is a lesson to be learnt here: that business teaching in design schools can actually work as an educational motivator. For what better motivator is there than the quiet belief that you can make your design idea into a commercial success that will bring you financial and social reward?

And there are other advantages to high-quality business courses. Business understanding is integral to the design process, and good business courses can help produce better designers, as Jonathan Sargood explains:

Design students need to ... learn that there's no point in designing in a certain way if it isn't

going to fit the market. If they knew this before they started working at a company, it would be a big advantage.

The fact is that, in comparison to the design industry, other professions are well ahead of the game. Science and technology educators regularly run enterprise training modules and business plan competitions for their students, and receive Government sponsorship for doing so. It is often part of their course work to develop full proposals and business plans. The same sort of thing should be offered more often to Humanities students. It has long been the complaint that "there's no point in studying humanities at university. There's no money in it!" Surely it must be of vital importance to show students how to make a living from their learning?

Platform and Incubator show that there is a way of making business teaching inspirational to design students. Of course, emulating these two programmes within the education system will be challenging, and there may even be a case for arguing that it can't and shouldn't be done within the education system. It could be said that the Platform and Incubator models can only really work if they operate across a number of colleges and disciplines, and that there is a big difference between coming up with a business idea you believe in and one you have prepared for academic assessment.

But the benefits of improving design students' business skills are many, and hopefully this report will help encourage new approaches in this area. At the very least, Platform and Incubator have shown there is a strong argument for trying to create improved networking and business training programmes for design students around the UK.

The Design Council is now looking to help spread the learning from this initiative throughout the design world both via this report and other means, and is keen to encourage similar ventures beyond London. It is currently working with NESTA, the Council for Higher Education in Art and Design (CHEAD) and ADC-LTSN - the Learning and

Teaching Subject Network for Art, Design and Communications to coordinate efforts in researching and promoting the value of enterprise learning for art and design students. They will be surveying what works and what doesn't work within business studies and incubation units, and identifying what design graduates need and what they are currently getting.

The future for Platform and Incubator looks assured. The ICA wants to continue the programme, using it to encourage and guide entrepreneurship not only among students but beyond academia, especially within the Minority Business Enterprise groups in the London area.



“When I did my business module at university it was very good but a lot of my fellow students thought it wasn't relevant. Some thought: ‘I'm not going to work as an independent designer, I'm going to work in a big company so I don't need to know about this.’ They didn't realise that most design companies are small and that this information was going to be really important.”

→ Design student

Views from NESTA

“There is a culture in this country that puts business MBAs in one corner and creatives in another. The MBAs are the people who are organised, who can make things happen, who understand the business world. The creatives have wonderful ideas, but are disorganised, don’t understand business, and need a helping hand to ‘get’ business.

I don’t subscribe to either of those views. I don’t believe creatives do not understand business, or that MBAs are naturally organised. But I do believe that creatives make good business people.

In business schools people are taught about the concept of business being a set of systems that manage risk and create order out of chaos. But this is a fiction – the truth is you can’t really control delivery times, client payment times, etc. Creatives are used to chaos. They daily take ideas out of the chaos. The creative process is about managing chaos. Creative individuals are much better-equipped to set up

businesses than they think they are. No-one is telling them this.

The culture of start-ups is currently owned by accountants; people who know about systems, rather than what it really takes to make an idea happen. Creatives know how to make an idea happen.

For me a business plan is a road-map to make your idea happen. Nothing more, nothing less. I’m not sure creatives should be talking about revenue streams and supply chains when they mean income and a network of friends and contacts in various creative fields. “I met this guy and he knows someone who can help out.” That’s so underplayed and yet it’s so important to successful business. Terms like ‘supply chain’ are only so much alienating jargon.”

*Hugo Manassei
Director, NESTA Graduate
Pioneer Programme*

NESTA, the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts runs the Graduate Pioneer Programme which is a more extensive programme for teaching business to design students

APPENDIX 1: Platform Events 2002 – 2004

Platform provides an ongoing series of events in which leading lights of the design industry skilled in communication lead seminars focussed on helping students gain insight into the profession. The primary focus of the events is the networking that follows the talks.

Who attends Platform?

Currently Platform has more than 200 members from 20 universities and colleges across London coming from a diverse variety of disciplines including:

- 1 3D design; exhibitions, events, furniture, industrial, interiors, product, ceramics, glass
- 2 Architecture
- 3 Business – business management, business studies, business administration, business & marketing
- 4 Communication design – advertising, branding, graphics, labels, music, packaging, photography, publishing
- 5 Design & technology
- 6 Design Management
- 7 Fashion and textiles

- 8 Film, television and broadcast media
- 9 Multimedia – website design, interactive software

Events

- 1 **Launch Event** – 13 March 2002. Approx 90 attendees.
- 2 **Getting Heard** – 22 April 2002. "Hot tips and practical techniques to help you to stand up, grab attention and get heard (especially when you'd rather be doing something else instead)". Approx 150 attendees
- 3 **Ready for Work?** – 27 May 2002. "Making yourself an attractive candidate – from introductions to interviews to what people look for".
- 4 **Tutors Lunch Discussion** – 19 September 2002. Subject: collaboration and creative educational opportunities.
- 5 **Platform Party** – 15 October 2002. Approx. 300 attendees.
- 6 **Creativity at Work** – 11 November 2002. How to harness your creativity to

- get ahead in business.
- 7 **Speakers Corner** – 27 February 2003.
- 8 **Video Games** – 9 April 2003. Career surgery. Approx 35–40 attendees.
- 9 **Interview Workshop** – 27 May 2003. Approx 30 attendees.
- 10 **Networking Event** – 20 October, 2003. Featuring Wayne Hemingway. Approx. 40–50 attendees.
- 11 **Career Choices Workshop** – 2 February 2004. Approx 40–50 attendees.

APPENDIX 2: Incubator Programme

The programme split naturally into two parts. The first concentrated on teaching the group basic business skills. The second concentrated on developing a thorough and credible business plan for their specific business idea.

17 Oct. 2003 - Studio visits to Kibook, Digit and Poke

This was a trip to take the Incubator students to meet creative entrepreneurs and hear their start-up stories, to hear first hand what had worked well and what had been really tough. It worked as a dose of reality and also helped to further improve the Incubator students' networks. "It was a great day that I think the students benefited from by seeing it all in action rather than in a conference room." *Rebecca Finkel, Design Council Incubator organiser.*

27 Oct. 2003 - Basics of Marketing, by Kimberly Hill

Marketing is key for the successful start-up, so Kimberly's presentation

was a professional and helpful beginning point to learn about it. Most of the incubator students reported they found the material very useful, even if they had come across similar material before.

11 Nov. 2003 - Raising Funds, by Ian Stewart

This was a very successful session, and gave the teams a large amount of information and new ideas from Ian's enormous wealth of experience.

24 Nov. 2003 - Basics of Accounting, by Ken McEnergy

"Ken really helped the group to understand the accounting basics and made sure they resolved to pay attention to this non-arty subject." *Rebecca Finkel*

15 Dec. 2003 - Basics of Organisational Behaviour, by Cristina Hastings

This provided a powerful insight into how to organise a business in terms of social structure and organisational

behaviour. It really brought home to students the reality behind employing people and making a company work efficiently.

26 Jan. 2004 - Pitch your Business

Each Incubator student pitched his/her business idea to the group. Then they received feedback. This exercise let everyone else know what everyone was working on and was rich in cross-pollination. This was preparation for the next stage- preparing the real business plan and presentation.

From January through to March the incubator teams worked with the mentors to develop their business plans.

20 April 2004 - Final Presentations

Incubator students pitched their business ideas to business angel investors and others for comment and possible investment.

People involved in Platform

Thanks are due to all the following people who contributed so much of their time and energy to Platform and Incubator:

The Design Council and ICA teams consisted of Lesley Morris, Aviv Katz, Rebecca Finkel and Katie Kitamura. The Design Council hosted the Incubator sessions while Platform events were held at the ICA.

The purpose of the **Design Council** is to 'improve prosperity and well-being in the UK by inspiring and enabling the best use of design.' It helps people and organisations in business, education, public services and government understand and use the practical power of design as part of their strategy. By working directly with selected businesses, the Design Council is aiming to demonstrate the methods and processes behind design success to a wider audience. Similar initiatives are working to raise design's profile in the way public services are planned and delivered.

The Design Council also increases awareness of design through events, publications and online knowledge. www.designcouncil.org.uk

The ICA is a "post-2000 ideas lab", according to the novelist J G Ballard, experimenting with what counts as culture in the 21st Century and what kind of institution can meet the needs of this culture. It hosts exhibitions, screens films, schedules talks and conferences, stages music and theatre, plus provides education, offering digital training for the socially excluded and rigorous postgraduate courses for the best students from around the globe. Over the last few years, it has also developed networks for bringing together over 500 companies in the cultural economy, and in recognition of the importance of science now has a scientist-in-residence. www.ica.org.uk

Ian Stewart is executive chairman of SevenPeaks Capital Ltd, a private

investment firm focussing on the media and leisure sectors. Ian was formerly Managing Director of a venture capital company within the NM Rothschild group. He is a leading UK authority on technology driven media businesses and was a co-founder of the seminal US magazine WiReD, and its digital offshoots HotBot.com (the search engine) and WiredNews.com (the technology industry news site). Ian was responsible for brokering the relationship between Fujitsu and the BBC which led to Fujitsu funding the £55million development of beeb, the BBC's commercially oriented online service. Ian's team then facilitated the subsequent creation of BBC News Online (team, operational processes and website).





Ken McEnergy trained as an accountant but has moved into general management. Ken managed the launch of BBC FOUR in 2002 and is now working on business systems for TV. Before that he was Head of Finance for New Media. WHAT IS THIS?

London Business School MBA Incubator mentors:

Arvind Ethan David has been (variously): a solicitor, a fringe theatre producer, a dot-com paper millionaire, a graduate student and (currently) Interim Managing Director of Ruby Films, producers of *Sylvia*, starring Gwyneth Paltrow.

Kimberly Hill is a graduate of the Sloan Masters Programme at London Business School, where she recently completed her thesis entitled, *Creating Advantage: Generating Sustainable Value in Creative Businesses*. She has 14 years international professional experience in advertising and brand development with brands such as Chrysler, Kawasaki, Nestle, IBM, Hershey,

Rothmans and Rockwell International. From 1995-98, Kimberly lived in Moscow, where she headed client services for Ogilvy&Mather, and subsequently ran marketing for a major Russian food products company. Most recently, she led the marketing group at San Francisco-based NBC Internet (NBCi), the online division of the NBC television network. In addition to an MSc in Management from London Business School, she holds a BS in Business Administration from Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, USA.

Mario Negri has an undergraduate degree in Mechanical Engineering, with a side concentration in Fine Arts. He has worked as a design engineer/project engineer/consultant in the motorcycle industry for 3-4 years with another 2-3 years as a designer/project manager in a product design consultancy. He also has expertise in graphic arts.

Cristina Hastings is currently studying for an MBA at London Business School, conducting internships at the BBC and AstraZeneca on performance

measurement and culture. Prior to the MBA, Cristina was head of consulting at an entrepreneurial new media consultancy, where she helped develop new processes and structures to support the growing business. Cristina began her career at Accenture where she worked for five years as a project manager with clients including Volvo, GlaxoSmithKline and Selfridges. She graduated from Oxford University in 1995.

Nathan Brown worked as a Global Product Manager for Adidas in Germany before starting his MBA. He was responsible for the design, development, sales, and marketing of Adidas' tennis apparel.

Debbie Hofmeyr worked as a strategy consultant for Accenture, in Chicago and London, specialising in retail projects, before beginning her MBA at London Business School. Debbie is also actively involved with the London Business School community and is the president of the Women in Business club, as well as being a member of the MBA world champion women's touch rugby team.

Nick Skeens, the author of this report, has worked as a teacher, a radio journalist (IRN), and television news editor (TV-am, ITN and GMTV), and is now a writer and media consultant whose clients have ranged from the Design Council to Sony PlayStation. His current writing focuses on issues surrounding design and innovation.

Thanks also to Nick Farnhill and Simon Waterfall of Poke, Stefan Woelwer of Kibook, and Scott Lyons and Dalgit Singh of Digit for hosting Incubator sessions.





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