

The National Champion for Design

Annual Report 2024/2025



Design Council colleagues and
Experts at the Expert Refresh
Launch July 2024.

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& Chair of the Board of
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About the Design Council



The Design Council is the UK's national champion for the effective use of design for the benefit of the economy, society and the environment. It is an independent and not for profit organisation incorporated by Royal Charter.

The Design Council uniquely works across all design sectors and delivers programmes with business, government, public bodies and the third sector. The work encompasses thought leadership, tools and resources, showcasing excellence and research to evidence the value of design and influence policy. Our Design for Planet mission was introduced in 2021 to galvanise and support the 1.97 million people who work in the UK's design economy to help achieve net zero and beyond.

The Trustees submit this Annual Report for the year ended 31 March 2025 along with the financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2025, which comply with the current statutory requirements and which have been prepared in accordance with the Statement of Recommended Practice: Accounting and Reporting by Charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102), and the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) and the Charities Act 2011.

Foreword

As we mark our 80th year, the Design Council stands at a moment of historic opportunity and responsibility. Founded during a time of national renewal, we are once again called upon to help shape a better future, this time amidst the pressing challenge of the climate and nature crisis.

Over the past year, our work has continued to champion design as an essential skill for the green transition, and a driver of opportunities and growth. This has included launching an ambitious mission to upskill one million designers in green design skills by 2030.

Our Design for Planet momentum is building. We created a refreshed network of Design Council Experts, selected for their Design for Planet knowledge and practice. Our fourth Design for Planet Festival, held in Manchester, brought together practitioners, businesses, and community leaders around

the theme of Planet Positive Business. We announced an impressive cohort of Ambassadors and Design for Planet Trailblazers, remarkable individuals shaping the future of sustainable design, featured in the Financial Times and Observer as part of our countdown to the World Design Congress, which we are set to host later in 2025.

The Congress is set to be a catalytic moment not only for the UK but for the global design community. It has already begun to galvanise support and collaboration. This year we welcomed major partners including Kearney, Zaha Hadid Architects, and Decathlon, whose commitment to our shared mission is enabling us to deliver a Congress with ambition and global relevance.

We've been working to ensure design's influence reaches the highest levels. From

convening a Homes Taskforce to champion sustainable, human-centred housing, to celebrating design leadership at the Royal Garden Party at Buckingham Palace, we are strengthening the voice of design in public life.

The road to the World Design Congress and beyond will involve deep collaboration, new partnerships, and an unwavering commitment to designing for planet. We are ready. And we know there is a growing movement alongside us.



Minnie Moll
Chief Executive

Minnie Moll



William Eccleshare
Chair of the Board of Trustees

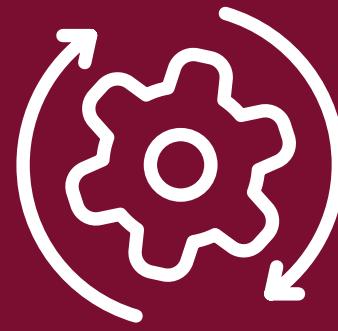
William Eccleshare

Charitable objects

The Design Council is a charity incorporated by Royal Charter.

We are guided by four key objectives.

1



3



2



The advancement of British industry and public services by the improvement of design in their processes, products and services.

4



The protection, enhancement, improvement and revitalisation of the natural and built environment (including architecture).
To promote the study of and research into the value of design and to actively disseminate the results to the public at large.

Our vision and mission

We are hopeful that, as part of a global design community, we can truly drive the change we want to see in the world.



Design had a role in getting us to the point when we are taking more from the planet than it has to give, and now design must play a critical and potentially transformative role in the creation of a positive future.

We have published our 5-year strategy as our roadmap for accelerating a societal transition from a consumer economy to a regenerative society.

Design for Planet is not just our mission, it's a call to action, a practice, a movement and a definition of good design.

Vision

Regenerative world for all

Mission

Design for Planet

Purpose

Make life better by design

Values

Powerful Together
Boundless Curiosity
Inspire Possibility

What we do

At Design Council we commission pioneering evidence-based research, develop ground-breaking programmes and deliver influencing and policy work to demonstrate the power of design.

We bring together non-designers and designers from grassroots to government and share with them our design expertise to transform the way they work.



Fundraising statement

Section 162a of the Charities Act 2011 requires charities to make a statement regarding fundraising activities. Although we do not undertake fundraising from the general public, the legislation defines fundraising as “soliciting or otherwise procuring money or other property for charitable purposes”. In relation to the above we confirm that all solicitations are managed internally, without involvement of commercial participants, professional fund-raisers, or third parties.

The day-to-day management of all income generation is delegated to the key management personnel as described within the Structure, governance and management section, who are accountable to the Trustees.

We have received no complaints in relation to solicitations. Our terms of employment require staff to behave reasonably at all times; as we do not approach individuals for funds we do not consider it necessary to design specific procedures to monitor such activities.

Public benefit

The Trustees confirm that in exercising their powers and duties they have had due regard to the Charity Commission’s guidance on public benefit. The Design Council exists for the benefit of people and our purpose is to make life better by design. The Trustees have referred to the Charity Commission’s guidance on public benefit when reviewing the charity’s aims and objectives and in planning its future activities.



Our impact and achievements



Mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burham with Minnie Moll on stage of the Design for Planet Festival 2024 at Manchester Metropolitan, Manchester School of Art.

In numbers

103

Government
ambassadors engaged

50

Speaker platforms

21

Curated events

174

Experts engaged

31

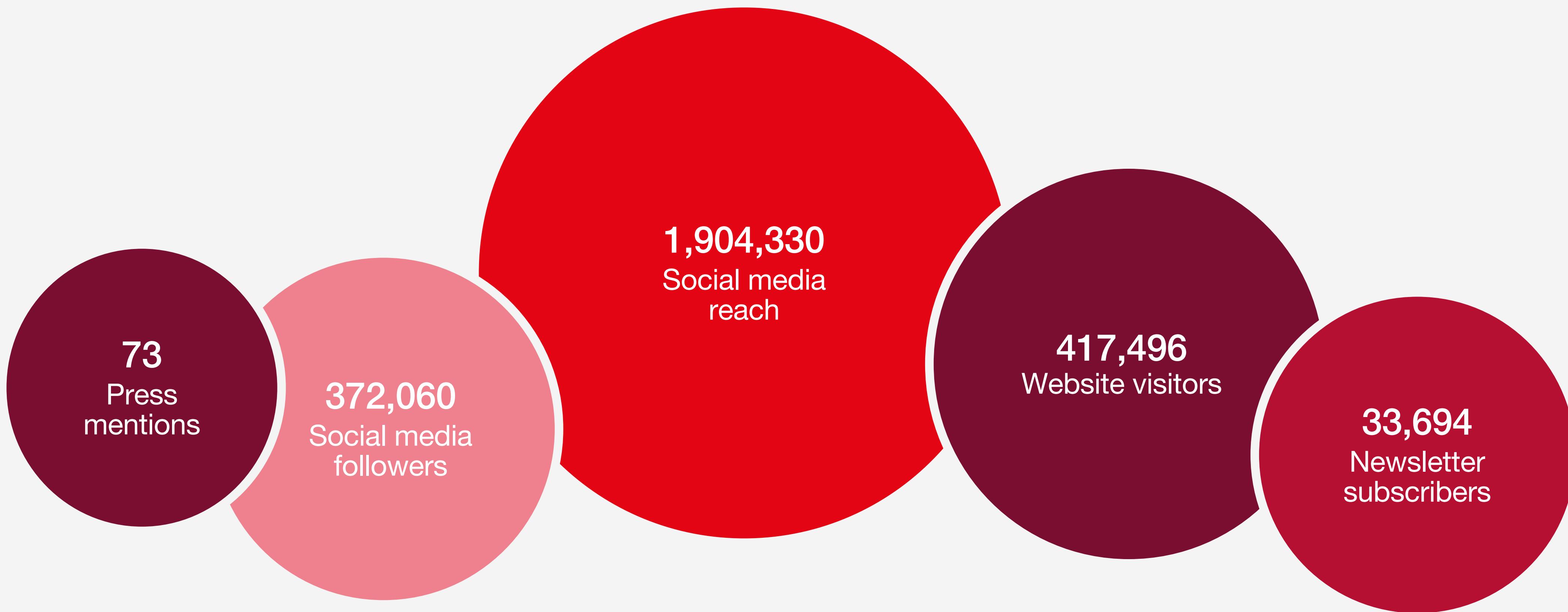
Workshops

40

Expert speakers at Design
for Planet Festival 2024

Raising awareness of design

Achieving our charitable object of educating and promoting the value of design.



In the press

A photograph of a woman speaking at a podium in a modern lecture hall. She is positioned on a stage, facing an audience of approximately 50 people seated in rows. The room has a high ceiling with large, circular, illuminated light fixtures. A large screen behind the speaker displays the logo for 'Upskilling 1 million designers by 2030', which features a green stylized 'U' with a small figure inside it. The audience is diverse, with many people wearing lanyards.

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Design + Add to myFT

The 'Olympics of design' returns to London with a call to action

In 1969, when the World Design Congress was last in the capital, it introduced us to snowmobiles and cash machines. This time, the environment is top of its agenda

X

f

in

Save

The Guardian

THE TIMES

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RECRUITMENT

Lack of design students threatens crucial legacy

Britain has a proud history of producing outstanding designers, but this could be under threat as educational routes into the industry are not being taken up

Jane Hamilton

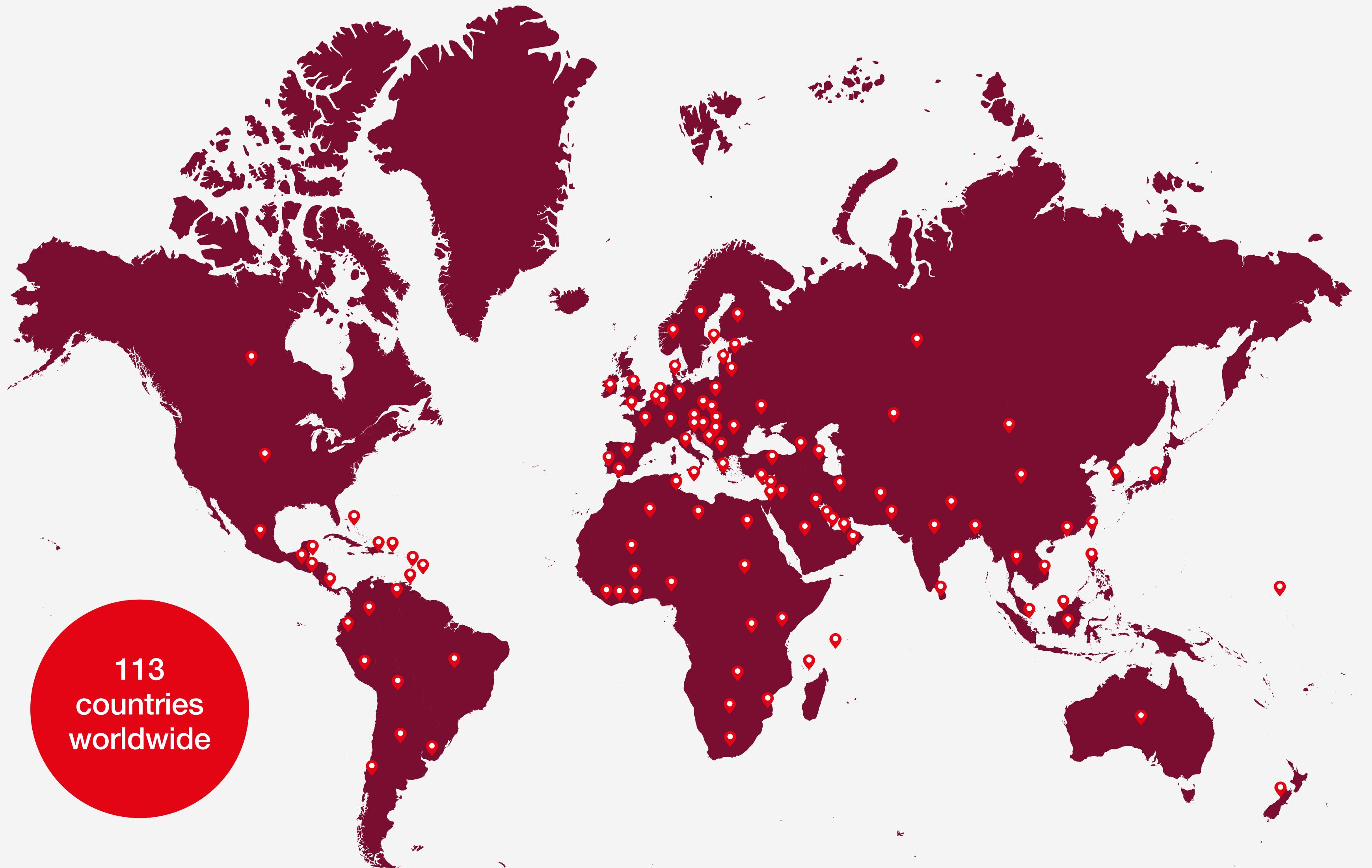
Friday April 26 2024, 12.01am,
The Times

Taking our mission around the world

We have worked hard to engage stakeholders and audiences from across the four nations of the UK through events, design festivals, round tables, steering groups and our UK wide Experts network.

We have extended our global reach through a combination of Design for Planet Festival online attendees (from 113 countries worldwide) and speaking at international events.

113
countries
worldwide



Design for Planet Festival 2024

The 4th edition of the Design Council's flagship event, was held at Manchester School of Art, Manchester Met University to bring together designers, businesses, and policy makers to connect, inspire and help make this year's theme of Planet Positive Business a reality.

29 speakers, delivered insightful talks and workshops including opening remarks from Mayor of Greater Manchester Andy Burnham, BBC Sewing Bee's Patrick Grant, Sophie Thomas, B Corp, Faith in Nature and many more. Site visits to SUEZ repair centre and a Purcell retrofit site brought the topic to life for in-person attendees.



162

in person attendees

96%

of post-event survey respondents said the event increased their Design for Planet knowledges

5000

online registrations from
113 countries

96%

of event production materials were recycled or reused

Official Media Partner

**The
Guardian**



Student banners made with designer and BBC presenter Patrick Grant at Design for Planet Festival 2024.

“ We should only make stuff from materials we understand the provenance and performance of. ”

Patrick Grant, founder, Community Clothing at Design for Planet Festival 2024

Making the case for design to government



Lord Jo Johnson speaking at the Blueprint for Renewal launch.

In June, we published Blueprint for Renewal, a collective call to government from leading design education voices including the D&TA, Institution for Engineering and Technology, Creative Education Manifesto, Save Our Subjects, and EngineeringUK. The report outlined urgent recommendations to reverse the 68% decline in GCSE design subject uptake over the past decade and garnered cross-party support from senior parliamentarians including Lord Jo Johnson, Lord Jim Knight, Alex Sobel MP, Lord Hampton, and Lord Watson of Invergowrie.

The Blueprint helped shape the Government's independent curriculum review. The Design Council led a coordinated response from over 10 organisations across industry, education, and academia, and continues to play a key role in shaping the review's recommendations, expected in Autumn 2025.

Following the July 2024 general election, the new Government reaffirmed design's value, naming the Creative Industries as a key growth

sector in the Modern Industrial Strategy. In response, we convened nearly 100 sector leaders to inform our submission to the Industrial Strategy Review and delivered tailored departmental responses aligned with ministerial priorities.

In recognition of our leadership in championing design for green growth, the UK Government invited us to join the relaunched Net Zero Council in January 2025. Our role on this cross-sector body supports strategic direction for the Clean Energy Superpower Mission and reflects our ongoing advocacy for design's role in achieving net zero.

We also remained an influential voice through the Creative Industries Council, co-chaired by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, supporting its Taskforce to shape a strong Creative Industries Sector Plan.

Upskilling 1 million designers in green design by 2030

In June 2024, the Design Council launched its Skills for Planet mission, an ambitious call to equip designers with the skills needed to tackle the climate crisis.



The mission aims to upskill 1 million designers in green design skills by 2030 at every level, from the classroom to the C-suite.

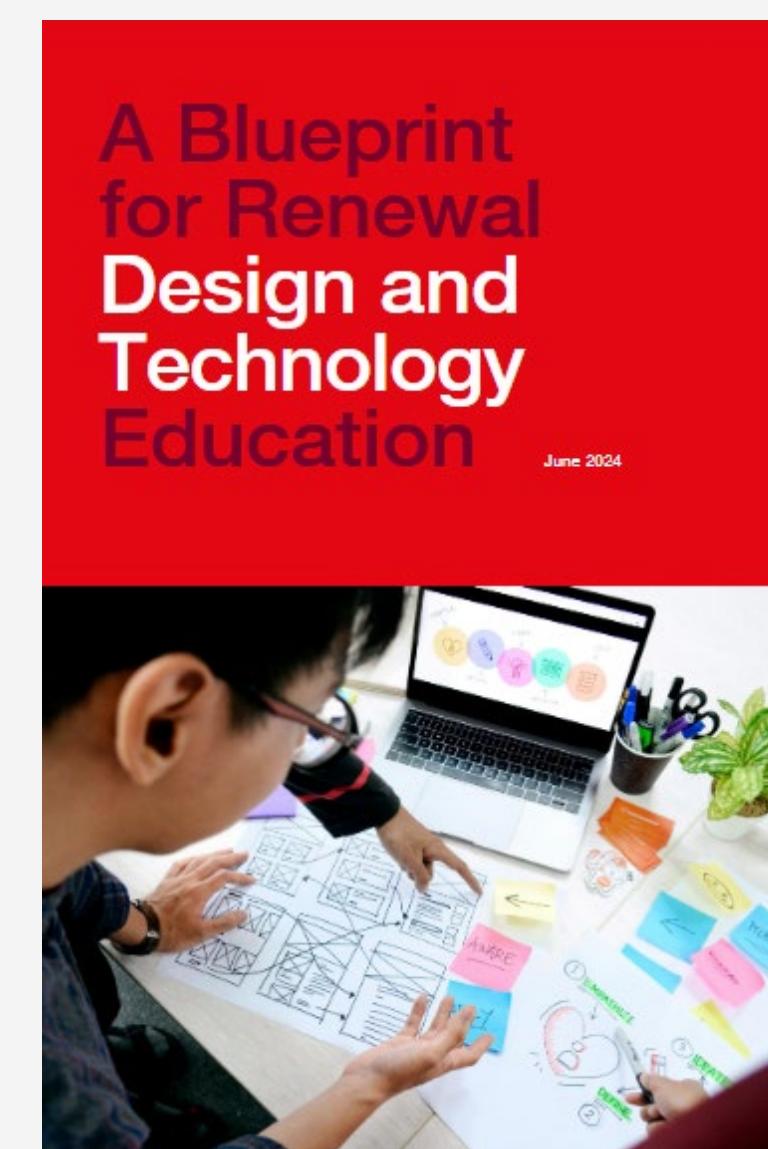
In the lead up to the World Design Congress we have convened partners such as the Design Museum, Creative Industries Council, DBA, AHRC, Innovate UK, and leading universities RCA, Westminster University and the University of Greenwich to co-design how to achieve the mission.

We are looking to publish the first in a series of resources, the Skills for Planet Blueprint, as a tool for identifying the green design skill areas and announcing the next phase of initiatives in 2025.

Blueprint for Renewal Samsung campaign

In December 2024, the Design Council partnered with Samsung UK's Solve for Tomorrow initiative and the Design & Technology Association (D&TA) to call for urgent reform of the Design & Technology (D&T) curriculum in schools.

This collaboration built on our earlier advocacy, including our report the [Blueprint for Renewal](#).



As part of Samsung's campaign, we co-authored an open letter to the Secretary of State for Education and Curriculum Review lead, Professor Becky Francis, making a strong case for a modernised D&T curriculum. The Design Council ensured green design skills were central to the case, framing them as critical not only to future employment, but also to the UK's wider goals around innovation, digital transformation and net zero. The Government's Curriculum Review, concluding in October 2025, is expected to reflect this agenda.

To amplify the message, we also co-hosted a Skills for Planet broadcast on London Live Radio and BBC Norfolk, which reaches an average audience of 3.7 million.

Improving design in nationally significant infrastructure projects



The Design Council pioneered the use of Design Review, establishing it as a trusted methodology for improving the quality of the built environment for public benefit. Over the years, we've applied Design Review across a wide range of places and building types. Today, our focus is on supporting Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs), where our input is helping shape the future of sustainable infrastructure in the UK.

As government prioritises infrastructure to drive growth and prosperity, our impartial and expert Design Review process continues to play a vital role, enhancing design quality, reducing environmental impact, and shaping a more resilient built and natural environment.



In the past year, we have reviewed:

- Onshore infrastructure for several of the UK's major offshore wind farms
- Proposals for the first new reservoirs in decades
- Design vision and sustainability priorities for major water recycling schemes
- Major road projects, ensuring carbon emissions are minimised in both construction and operation

Building design capability through our Academy proposition

The Design Council has long supported organisations to strengthen their in-house design capability. Building on the success of our Design in the Public Sector (DIPS) programme, we continued to expand our Design Academy offer this year.



In partnership with Network Rail, we launched the Buildings and Architecture Academy (B&AA) in 2022. After piloting the programme that year, we delivered a second cohort in 2023, and significantly scaled up in 2024 with three additional cohorts, delivered in person in London and Leeds.

The training combines classroom-based learning, interactive activities, field visits, and e-learning modules featuring case

studies and foundational theory. Action Learning Sets help participants translate theory into practice through peer-based problem solving.

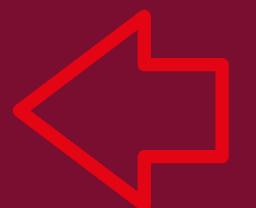
We also convened Network Rail's Executive Team for a full-day strategic design training session, supporting leadership as the organisation transitions to Great British Railways.

Building our partnerships with UK research councils

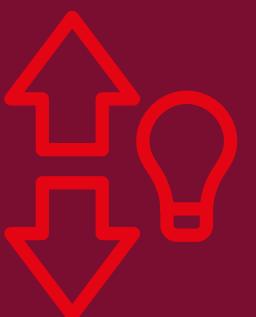
Design partnership for innovation

This year, we were commissioned by Innovate UK Business Connect to identify and scale impactful design support, building the case for more effective innovation at Innovate UK.

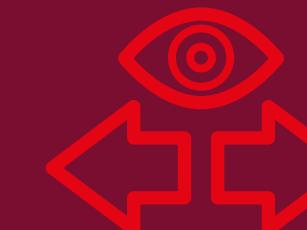
We conducted an audit to assess how design is understood, valued, and embedded across the Research Councils and Innovate UK's portfolio. Our work was grounded in four design principles:



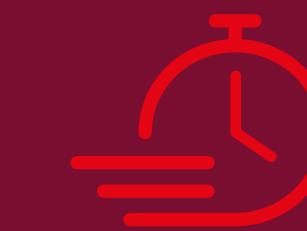
Shift left
Act earlier



Think long
Plan for the long term



Look wide
Take a broad perspective



Act fast with care
Respond quickly but responsibly

In September 2022, the Design Council entered into a new framework agreement with the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). Since then, we've deepened our support across AHRC, Innovate UK, and other Research Councils to embed design and design thinking more effectively into research and innovation systems.

We also analysed current design support mechanisms, identifying barriers and opportunities to improve how they connect and function. Through stakeholder interviews and a review of design support typologies, we're developing a new framework for deploying streamlined and effective design approaches in current and future programmes.

This work marks a step change in the adoption of design thinking across UKRI and is helping to embed design more strategically at scale.

UKRI environmental sustainability strategy



UKRI is a major funder and producer of world-leading science and social science, with significant influence over the environmental impact of the UK's research ecosystem.

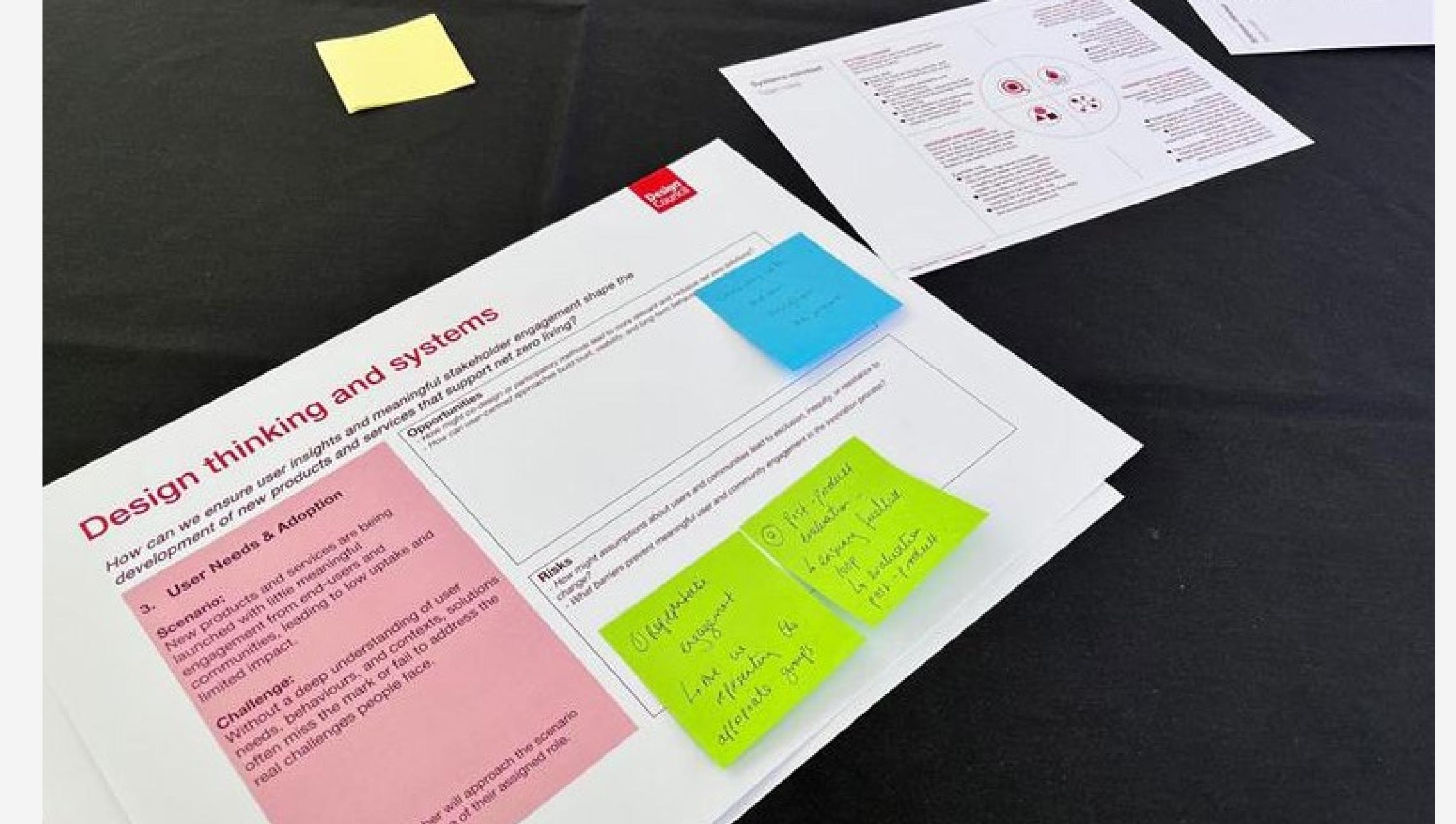
As part of its refresh of the Environmental Sustainability Strategy for 2025–2030, UKRI commissioned Design Council to lead a cross-council consultation to shape the direction of the new strategy.

Acting as impartial and experienced facilitators, the Design Council delivered a robust and inclusive engagement process designed to embed

environmental sustainability across all aspects of UKRI's operations and research activity.

We convened over 200 participants from across all Research Councils, uncovering key barriers and co-developing a shared set of ambitions to guide UKRI's sustainability efforts over the next five years.

Net zero living programme



The transition to net zero is one of the greatest challenges of our time, demanding innovation, collaboration, and a deep understanding of user needs. While businesses are developing new products, services, and supply chains to lead this transition, real impact depends on adoption, usability, and behaviour change. That's where design is essential.

From November 2023 to March 2025, the Design Council partnered with Innovate UK on the Net Zero Living programme, supporting 47 businesses through our User-Focused Design initiative. Our Experts

provided tailored 1-to-1 coaching to help businesses understand user needs and barriers to adoption, embedding design thinking to strengthen innovation in the net zero market.

Building on our legacy as the UK's champion for design, and aligned with our Design for Planet mission, we developed the programme blueprint, delivered expert design support, and evaluated its impact, demonstrating how design can accelerate the path to a low-carbon future.

Design Council Experts

Over the past year, we engaged 174 different Design Council Experts (71% of our network) across 372 opportunities. Their contributions have been central to our work, from delivering 10 Design Reviews and co-creating the Skills for Planet Blueprint, to shaping Innovate UK's sustainability strategy, supporting the Design for Planet Festival, and upskilling Network Rail staff.

To strengthen and diversify our engagements, we introduced a new process and EDI matrix for Expert selection, running 17 open calls across the year. This resulted in a significant increase in participation

(from 93 Experts in 2023–24 to 174 in 2024–25) ensuring broader perspectives and expertise are embedded in all we do.

We also convened the network through two all-Expert events, bringing together 141 participants to align around our mission. We co-hosted two Design for Planet Collectives, engaging 75 wider-sector designers regionally, and reinstated our Community of Practice workshops (four held in 2025 alone) where 77 Experts collaborated to shape key programmes and strengthen community ties.



174

Experts engaged

Across 372 opportunities

Royal Garden Party

The Design Council was tasked by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport to nominate 100 key figures from the UK's design ecosystem to invite to Buckingham Palace for the first Creative Industry Royal Garden Party. The event gave us the opportunity to connect, convene and champion a range of organisations including the London Design Festival, Design Museum, V&A, DBA and D&TA as well as high profile designers such as Margaret Calvert, Morag Myerscough, Dick Powell and Yinka Ilori, and design media Dezeen, Design Week, It's Nice That, Wallpaper, the Guardian and Financial Times.



British designers Yinka Ilori, Morag Myerscough and Margaret Calvert celebrating at the Creative Industries Royal Garden Party.

Design Council Homes Taskforce

In response to the Labour government's pledge to deliver 1.5 million homes by 2030, the Design Council convened the Homes Taskforce, a group of eight leading voices in architecture and design, including Sadie Morgan OBE and Sunand Prasad OBE.

The Taskforce set out to shape policy that ensures new housing is not only delivered at scale, but is well-designed, climate-resilient, inclusive, and built for long-term value.

Through a series of roundtables with over 50 experts, MPs, and local leaders, the Taskforce explored policy and design solutions for urban extensions, regeneration, and new towns. Three key themes emerged: the need to prioritise both new builds and refurbishment, the importance of design quality in housing delivery, and the case for neighbourhood-led approaches.

These insights informed Design for Neighbourhoods, a report outlining ten policy recommendations for high-quality, sustainable housing, along with five key questions for future research. Launched in partnership with ING Media at a high-profile event with design and policy leaders, the report has already begun shaping national conversations.

Taskforce ambassadors continue to support our engagement with government and the design sector, informing Design Council's wider work on green skills, design quality, and research-led innovation.



Homes Taskforce New Towns Roundtable, joined by Architect George Clark.



Design Economy

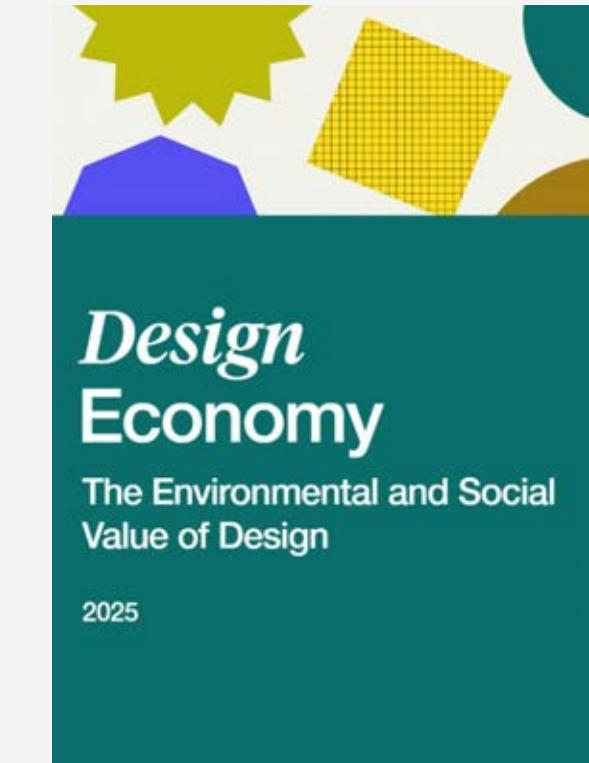
Design Economy is the Design Council's flagship research programme, exploring how design drives growth, innovation, and sustainability.

This year, we published two major reports, collectively read over 6,000 times, that expanded the conversation beyond economic impact to include social and environmental value.

The Environmental and Social Value of Design

revealed that 66% of designers are working on environmental challenges, and 60% on social ones, yet only 19% measure the impact of their work. While 71% anticipate rising demand for green design skills, just 43% feel prepared to meet it. These findings have directly shaped our Skills for Planet mission.

Our research is also influencing national policy. It underpins the government's Creative Industries Sector Plan, contributes to the Circular Economy Taskforce, and helped secure our seat on the Net Zero Council, where we advocate for design's role in putting people at the centre of climate action.



[Public Design Beyond Central Government](#) draws on our deep experience in the public sector. The report informed the UK Civil Service's 2025 Public Design Evidence Review, a landmark Cabinet Office study, and helped drive momentum for embedding design capability into the heart of government. We supported the review's launch and contributed to the expert panel.

The road to World Design Congress



World Design Congress
Design for Planet
London 2025



In the year ahead of the Design Council hosting the World Design Council in September 2025, we laid the foundations for harnessing the event as a catalytic moment for the design sector with early bird tickets selling quickly.

We confirmed the Barbican Centre as our venue partner, situating the event in one of London's most iconic architectural locations and aligning with them on the Congress Design for Planet theme as they undergo their Renewal project to retrofit the building (with Design Council design review support).

We brought on major financial partners including global management consultancy group Kearney, Decathlon and Zaha Hadid Architects, and convened programme, education and marketing steering

groups to gather insight from partnering organisations and experts in delivering a world class event. This helped us in confirming big name speakers including Brian Eno, Thomas Heatherwick, Marianna Mazzucato and Indy Johar.

To build a brand and drive excitement, we formed a panel of World Design Congress Ambassadors as leading voices from across the sector (Tom Dixon, Es Devlin, Foday Dumbuya, Dr Lesley Lokko and Suhair Khan) who nominated 20 "Design for Planet Trailblazers as champions for the Congress messaging which was announced by The Observer.



World Design Congress Ambassadors Foday Dumbuya, Es Devlin, Suhair Khan, Tom Dixon, Prof. Lesley Lokko at the Barbican Centre, [featured in the Financial Times](#) who dubbed the upcoming event the “Olympics of Design”.

A Design Council fit for the future

Towards the end of our 80th year, we undertook a wide-ranging review of our role as well as the commercial model that underpins it to ensure the Design Council remains relevant and continues to thrive for the next 80 years.

The review concluded we need to diversify our revenue base as well as be sharper and more focused on describing our impact, in order to align our programme delivery with potential new funders. The 2025/26 business plan incorporates the first stages of these recommendations which will continue to evolve over the next few years.

In addition to this, the organisation has spent the last 12 months focusing on initiatives to reduce cost and improve operational excellence, through a mixture of restructuring of support functions to make them more efficient and effective as well as focusing on maximising value for money from external service providers.

This builds on the work already undertaken over the last 2 years to standardise our systems and processes, all with the objective of making the organisation more agile, operationally and financially resilient and fit for the future.



Financial statements & Auditor's report



Design Council

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September 2025