

BEDA Open Doors Dialogue Summary

Upskilling Designers for the Green Transition

19 March 2025

Table of Contents

Short description	1
Recording Link	2
Summary	2
The Design Council's Green Skills Mission by Rachel Moriarty	2
Embedding Green Skills in Early Education by Michele Gregson	3
Higher Education as a Driver of Change by Sandra Booth	4
Reinventing Consumption in Industry by Mark Curtis	4
Looking Ahead	5
Q&A	5
Participants' reflections	6
Resources/ links shared	7

Speakers

Rachel Moriarty – Director of Skills, the [Design Council](#)

Michele Gregson – General Secretary and CEO, [National Society for Education in Art & Design \(NSEAD\)](#)

Sandra Booth – Director of Policy and External Relationships, [Council for Higher Education in Art & Design \(CHEAD\)](#)

Mark Curtis – Head of Innovation and Thought Leadership, [Accenture Song](#)

Short description

As a frontline green skill, design has the power to place the planet at the heart of our products, places and businesses. But with only 43% of designers feeling they have the capability to meet growing green demands, we need to prioritise upskilling designers for the green transition, and this requires effort across the ecosystem: at school, at university and in industry.

The Design Council UK and industry experts from across design disciplines are highlighting the green skills needed in their sector and the Design Council's exciting new mission to upskill 1 million

designers by 2030.

Recording Link:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1a6bV5ofHjYuPu5k5GU6Jwv-LFWg7mrKy/view?usp=share_link

Key insights: <https://beda.org/news/insights-from-th...green-transition/>

Summary

Introduction by Tom Watts

Good afternoon, everyone. I'm Tom Watts, Head of Design at the Design and Crafts Council Ireland, and I currently serve on the board of BEDA—the Bureau of European Design Associations. This is both a privilege and an exciting opportunity. For some context, BEDA was established in 1969 and is based in Brussels. It is a non-profit association representing over 50 members across 28 European countries. These members include publicly funded design organisations as well as professional and trade associations that promote pioneering design at national and regional levels.

BEDA Open Doors has been developed as a series of dialogues initiated by member associations to share insights and best practices. It also serves as a platform for discussing key European design and design policy issues.

That brings us to today's event—an exciting discussion titled Upskilling Designers for the Green Transition. We are delighted to collaborate with our member, Design Council UK, for this session, which will be led by Rachel Moriarty. Rachel is the Director of Skills at the Design Council and a leader in strategy and design for people and the planet. Among her many achievements, she is the founder and strategic lead of the Earthshot Prize, a global environmental initiative designed to inspire action to repair our planet.

The Design Council's Green Skills Mission by Rachel Moriarty

Rachel Moriarty introduced the discussion on upskilling designers for the green transition as part of the Open Doors series. She highlighted the Design Council's commitment to research, particularly through its [Design Economy](#) series, which examines the economic, social, and environmental value of design in the UK. The 2024 report focused on the green design skills gap, revealing that while 66% of designers had worked on sustainability-focused projects in the past year, only 43% felt they had the necessary skills to meet the growing demand for green design.

To address this, the Design Council launched a mission to [upskill 1 million designers](#) in green skills by 2030, recognising that sustainability is no longer a specialist area but an essential aspect of all

design practices. The initiative begins with defining green design skills, as there is currently no shared understanding within the industry. Core skills such as critical thinking and problem-solving must be expanded to include competencies like regenerating nature, embedding circular design principles, and reducing emissions.

The [World Design Congress](#) in September will serve as a platform to discuss how to embed these skills into education and professional development. The ultimate goal is to equip designers to create sustainable solutions, from energy-efficient homes to circular economy systems and biodiversity-friendly designs. Given that 80% of a product's environmental impact is determined at the design stage, designers play a crucial role in shaping a sustainable future. Moriarty then introduced the panel of experts, starting with Michelle Gregson from the National Society for Education in Art and Design (NSEAD).

Embedding Green Skills in Early Education by Michele Gregson

Michele Gregson discussed the importance of integrating green skills into education from an early age, emphasizing that upskilling should begin in schools. She highlighted growing eco-anxiety among young people, with studies showing significant concern about climate change, even among primary school children. According to a [Lancet study](#), 70% of young people aged 16 to 25 are extremely worried about the climate. Addressing this, she referenced Bridget McKenzie's [concept of "possitopialism,"](#) which encourages using imagination and design thinking to tackle climate challenges.

Gregson noted that green skills are already present within the national curriculum subjects of Design & Technology and Art & Design. The art room, in particular, fosters creativity, problem-solving, and flexibility—key attributes for sustainable design. She argued that embracing a concept-driven curriculum could help students develop empathy, citizenship, and a holistic approach to design.

However, challenges remain, including a decline in specialist Design & Technology teachers and a narrowing of the curriculum towards fine art. To ensure green skills are embedded from the start, teachers must be included in the upskilling mission. Schools and colleges are already laying the groundwork, but the goal is to make sustainable design education the norm rather than the exception. Gregson concluded by stressing that young people should not only be seen as victims of climate change but as active agents of change, with the creativity and motivation to solve future challenges.

Higher Education as a Driver of Change by Sandra Booth

Sandra Booth discussed the role of higher education in embedding green design skills, focusing on 18-year-old students entering university. She highlighted that today's design students are already ethically and environmentally aware, often choosing universities based on their sustainability credentials. They seek not just careers but meaningful contributions to social and environmental change, reflecting a generational shift towards responsible design.

Booth emphasised the vast reach of design education in the UK, with over 250,000 students across various disciplines, presenting a major opportunity to embed sustainable design as a core graduate outcome. Universities, as large organisations, also have the responsibility to lead by example, setting high environmental standards in procurement and operations. Efforts are underway to integrate green skills into national degree accreditation frameworks and government-funded apprenticeships, with industry support from companies like Unilever and Nike. The national [Subject Benchmark Statement](#) for Art and Design is being rewritten this year.

Within design degrees, students engage in interdisciplinary projects addressing real-world environmental challenges. Many reject clients with unsustainable practices and are encouraged to challenge design briefs. Sustainable and regenerative design practices, circular economy principles, and climate literacy are becoming standard across institutions. Universities are adopting hands-on approaches, such as rooftop gardens, bio-labs, and the use of organic materials in fashion and fine art.

Despite progress, Booth stressed that efforts must be scaled up. The Design Council's Green Skills Blueprint aims to provide a structured framework for sustainability in design education. She calls for stronger collaboration between universities, industry, and government to ensure graduates not only meet but lead the green transition. Students are embracing design as a form of activism and the sector must support them in disrupting unsustainable business-as-usual models.

Reinventing Consumption in Industry by Mark Curtis

Mark Curtis emphasizes the urgent need to reinvent consumption as the foundation for tackling climate change and biodiversity loss. He argues that while traditional crises like war, religion, and disease have historically caused human suffering, today's primary driver of environmental destruction is unchecked consumption. Rather than advocating for degrowth, which businesses resist, he calls for a redesign of how we consume—rethinking products, services, and business models to align with sustainability. This shift presents an unprecedented opportunity for designers, as virtually everything is up for redesign, from materials and production methods to the way we interact with goods and services.

To achieve this transformation, Curtis challenges the traditional desirability-viability-feasibility (DVF) model used in design, arguing that it has been too focused on individual user needs. He proposes integrating impact considerations—such as planetary and social well-being—directly into design decisions, rather than treating sustainability as an afterthought. By broadening the lens on desirability (beyond individual wants to include ecological responsibility), feasibility (ensuring sustainable production), and viability (aligning economic success with environmental goals), designers can create solutions that work not just for users, but for the planet. He believes this shift will help businesses and consumers move beyond traditional consumption habits and adopt more sustainable behaviors.

Curtis highlights three essential skills for designers in this new era: understanding sustainability metrics, embracing systems thinking, and driving behavior change. Designers must be fluent in carbon impact measurements and lifecycle analysis to engage meaningfully with sustainability officers. They must also recognize that sustainability challenges are systemic, requiring solutions that account for ripple effects across industries and supply chains. Finally, he stresses that behavior change is the key to sustainable consumption—rather than simply expecting people to adopt greener habits, designers must make sustainability feel intuitive, accessible, and rewarding (according to the [Our Human Moment](#) study). By prioritizing these skills, designers can lead the shift toward a more responsible, circular economy, ensuring that sustainability becomes a natural part of daily life.

Looking Ahead

The panel concluded with a call to action for designers, educators, and businesses to align their efforts in equipping designers with green skills. The conversation will continue at the [World Design Congress](#) in September, where global leaders in design will further explore how to embed sustainability into every aspect of the profession.

Q&A

How do we rethink consumption as long as it's linked to the capitalist economy?

Mark Curtis:

That is undoubtedly a difficult question, but I believe we can dematerialise the things we value. Technology can help businesses shift their value creation from physical to digital, allowing growth without increasing material consumption. Many companies have already done this successfully, and as electricity costs drop with rapid decarbonisation, this transition will accelerate. Within 10 to 15 years, electricity could be nearly free, making digital solutions even more viable.

Another key shift is the growing preference for experiences over material possessions. People are increasingly valuing experiences rather than ownership, and designing sustainable, low-carbon experiences will be essential. As digital content becomes more abundant, its individual worth will decline, while physical experiences—such as concerts, festivals, and travel—will become more valuable. This signals a move towards an economy that prioritises sustainability, shared experiences, and reduced material consumption, while still enabling growth.

Michele Gregson:

Perhaps a hopeful note, but thinking about what Mark said about expanding the lenses in the DRC triangle and moving away from user centered, and what Sandra was telling us about the patterns and behaviours of the student population, the choices they're making and the things that they're demanding. We are seeing a move amongst young people right the way down into schools, away from self centered learning priorities and to more issues centered. A culture shift is happening and perhaps that's a big part of moving away from consumption in capitalist society.

Participants' reflections

François Caspar, Design Thinking and Management specialist, IP advocate, cofounder and Member of Honor of the Alliance France Design

Designers are committed to ethical standards, but there's a disconnect between intent and action when advising clients on meeting Europe's environmental and societal requirements, especially those in the Green Deal. This is particularly true for designers trained over 15 years ago, before sustainability was part of design education.

Designers can be proactive consultants on these issues, but this requires specialized knowledge. Designers without training in ethical and eco-responsible design will become less competitive as clients prioritize these skills.

A coordinated approach is needed, with European authorities setting frameworks, national governments implementing programs, and professional organizations identifying specific needs. Targeted financial support for mid-career designers is critical, as upskilling is costly. This multi-level investment would allow experienced professionals to apply sustainability principles immediately, benefiting industries broadly.

Designers need training in these areas to meet current demands:

- Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) methodologies
- Circular economy principles and implementation
- Sustainable materials, including bio-based alternatives and responsible sourcing

- Digital carbon footprint awareness and optimization
- Inclusive and universal design
- Behavioral design to encourage sustainable consumer practices
- Regulatory knowledge of environmental standards and compliance
- Carbon accounting basics
- Systems thinking for complex sustainability challenges
- Collaborative frameworks for diverse stakeholders
- Impact measurement tools and methodologies
- Business model innovation for sustainability

Resources/ links shared

Design Economy series: <https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/our-work/design-economy/>

Upskill 1 million designers in green skills by 2030:

<https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/our-work/upskilling-1-million-designers/>

The World Design Congress: <https://www.worlddesigncongresslondon.com/>

Lancet study: [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196\(21\)00278-3/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196(21)00278-3/fulltext)

Bridget McKenzie's concept of "possitopialism":

<https://climatemuseumuk.org/2020/10/15/explaining-possitopia/>

Subject Benchmark Statement:

<https://www.qaa.ac.uk/the-quality-code/subject-benchmark-statements>

Our Human Moment study:

<https://www.accenture.com/content/dam/accenture/final/accenture-com/document/Accenture-Our-Human-Moment-8-April-2023.pdf>