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Current unremunerated positions

Visiting Professor, Glasgow School of Art
Member, Creative Industries Advisory Group, The Scottish Government
Creative Industries lead, Glasgow Economic Development Board
Creative Industries lead, Glasgow Partnership for Economic Growth

Previous unremunerated positions

Governor & Vice Chairman, Glasgow School of Art
Trustee, National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA)
& Chairman, NESTA £20M Investment & Innovation seed fund
Member, Creative Industries Advisory Groups, UK and Scottish governments
Member, Creative Industries Advisory Group, British Council
Trustee & Chairman, The Lighthouse – Scotland's International Centre for
Architecture, Design and the City
Member, Advisory Board, V&A Dundee

Over the recent months and years I have tried to make sense of the two tragedies that have reduced the Mackintosh Building to a blasted hole in the ground with some casting Glasgow School of Art (GSA) as aloof, incompetent and irrelevant. While I am emotionally involved—GSA was where I became an adult and a professional designer, and Garnethill my home for many happy years—I am alarmed by the ill-informed and thoughtless commentary by some that threatens the independent future of one of the world's finest working studios and a globally-recognised symbol of Glasgow's pre-eminence in creative education. The exceptional value to Glasgow, Scotland and the rest of the world of an independent GSA, and a working Mackintosh building, is blindingly obvious to anyone with an ounce of understanding of the Creative Industries and their potential to transform Scotland's economy.

The myth of the ivory tower

Firstly let me deal with preconceptions some have that GSA is an aloof institution.

In order to widen access to Higher Education GSA works with disadvantaged young people as identified by Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) postcodes, particularly those from schools in SIMD 20/40 areas that are the two highest quintiles for multiple deprivation in Scotland.

By 2030 The Scottish Government wants 20% of students in Higher Education to come from disadvantaged areas. In 2016-17 22.3% of GSA's students came from these areas, exceeding the 2030 target and giving GSA the second highest figure for social inclusion in Scotland. By comparison, in the same period, only 14.2% of Scottish university students came from SIMD20 areas.

GSA was, and is, socially inclusive and it could become more so if the government were to provide appropriate support for its programmes. Through its many activities in S4, S5 and S6 it runs summer schools, taster weeks, portfolio development programmes, application support and mock interviews to help potential students from all backgrounds study at GSA, and other creative institutions.

In 1980 I entered GSA as an 18-year old undergraduate design student from Dumfries. I was the first in my family to gain a degree. Five years later I became the first in two generations of my family to incorporate a business. For over three decades my Glasgow-based design business has worked in around 40 countries, employed numerous GSA graduates, paid taxes and invested in the local community. It has also incubated and mentored many other creative businesses in what, since 2000, is now called the Creative Industries (CI) sector.

My father, apprenticed as a plumber at 14, latterly a council pest control officer, had fought with the Black Watch at the battle of Monte Cassino while my academically-talented mother worked in the Woman's Land Army before reluctantly succumbing to life as a housewife. Access to education was a prize for which they were willing to fight. While that opportunity passed them by, I benefitted from it in unimaginable ways.

While the prospect of me attending 'art school' was beyond my parents' experience and fraught with uncertainty, comforted by the GSA's reputation they encouraged me to go. Supported by a full grant, my education at GSA profoundly transformed my life and helped me to contribute to society. It also brought me into contact with people from diverse backgrounds and gave me enduring specialist skills that are highly regarded and future-proofed today, in this Fourth Industrial Revolution, which is Digital.

Research by NESTA and other organisations confirms that designers, architects and artists are predisposed to behave entrepreneurially. Furthermore they behave in ways that are inherently 'circular'. Both characteristics that should be useful given Scotland's moribund business birth rate and Glasgow's ambitions to become the UK's first Circular Economy city.

The Mackintosh Building – the world's finest creative workplace

Secondly, the Mackintosh Building must be rebuilt and used as a working school because, far from being irrelevant, it is essential for the education of world-class architects, designers and artists.

While I continue to benefit from the GSA brand that was, and is, a globally recognised benchmark in creative education, GSA, and its traditional system of studio-based learning, gave me an international network of lifelong friends and colleagues. It also gave me a solid studio-based business, a husband who is an architect, and huge pride in Glasgow and Scotland as the globally renowned source of world-class creative professionals in design, architecture and art.

Today, the prevailing dogma in workplace design is the 'studio' where collaboration, or 'co-working', is encouraged for reasons of health and operational efficiency, and employees are encouraged to share desks, ideas and resources in a social setting. As a model of a successful workplace the 'studio' has been exhaustively analysed and proclaimed a resource-efficient and highly productive environment that supports a wide variety of work styles and is inherently flexible, therefore sustainable and cost-effective. While architects, artists and designers have long understood its value the rest of the world is now catching up.

During my eight years' as a Governor of GSA, including as Joint Vice Chairman and member of the Estates Committee, we undertook a long and arduous process to prove to government that the 'studio' was the cornerstone of our education system and one of the things that defined GSA as a Small Specialist Institution. Our case was supported by detailed international research and benchmarking to persuade the Scottish Funding Council to allow adequate space provision in the new Reid Building so that future students could work in a studio workplace designed specifically to support their needs. This was in contrast to their preferred option, which was to compel students to make do with cheaper generic 'classroom-style' learning space as used by the Universities—an outcome that would have undermined GSA's ability to deliver world-class creative education.

In order to present the case for the new Reid Building, GSA's entire estate was professionally surveyed and confirmed as being the worst in the Scottish Higher Education Sector. It had been so for many, many years, such was its value to government. The only building that was actually considered fit-for-purpose was the Mackintosh.

It's depressingly ironic that a building specifically designed for the education of architects, designers and artists, by an architect who also worked as a designer and artist, and which has proven to be useful for well over a century should be deemed by some to be too good for the very people whose education it was designed to support. What signal does this send to those young people considering careers in the Creative Industries? What does it say to our successful creative businesses? What happened to that Scotland whose recent history has been founded on creativity and invention? How on earth did we reach this point where creative people cannot even be trusted with studios that the best of their kind built for them? While some continue to express indignation at the sad fate of the Mack it's worth remembering that Mackintosh himself was compelled to leave Scotland in search of work. And if the tirade of misdirected anger remains unchallenged by facts we are again in danger of losing a generation of creative entrepreneurs at the moment when the Creative Industries—the UK's fastest growing sector—is one of Scotland's brightest hopes for a home grown economy.

Few architects have the luxury of building the same building twice. Most buildings are prototypes that are refined on the hoof as they rise from the ground. As we have the plans for the Mackintosh building, that we know performs beyond the brief, and state-of-the-art digital scans of its entire fabric

down to the nail heads, and a team of craftspeople and apprentices, and the money and the team to rebuild it—I can see absolutely no sane reason to do otherwise. The process of bringing it back to life offers unrivalled opportunities for learning experiences, and the world is watching, and offering to help—what's not to like?

In 1944, Winston Churchill said, *“We shape our buildings, and afterwards, our buildings shape us.”* And he could have been thinking of the Mack when he said those words. Perhaps the rarest thing about the Mackintosh building is the magic it confers on its students by allowing them, every single day, to experience what ‘good’ looks and feels like. This sets the benchmark for what GSA expects of them and it is the reason so many GSA graduates excel to become the talent behind the world's best known creative industries—from Foster + Partners (Gherkin, London's Millennium Bridge) to Grimshaw (creators of the Eden Project), Ford, Dyson, Aston Martin, Jonathan Saunders, Missoni and many, many more. To deny future generations the opportunity to learn and grow in Charles Rennie Mackintosh's masterpiece would be irrational and inexcusable.

The Mack was also a remarkably robust environment. When I was a student at GSA, it and many other of GSA's buildings were used 24/7.

At that time it was widely rumoured that the Mack was not insured by government. I am unable to confirm if this is true but I would not be surprised if many of the buildings in the Scottish Higher Education portfolio were uninsured as it may have been more cost-effective to rebuild following a disaster than to pay high insurance premiums.

In the 1980s other buildings designed by Mackintosh had fallen into disrepair, or been entirely lost, and the CRM Society, GSA and the late Gavin Stamp (including writing as ‘Piloti’ in *Private Eye*) were isolated advocates lobbying for their preservation. That the Mack was truly loved and cherished by generations of staff and students, and GSA championed and led by its hard working team of volunteer Governors, should be remembered at this time. They have an unimaginably tough task and they should be helped and supported to rebuild the Mack as a working studio environment, not vilified or judged by some to be guilty of negligence, or worse, when the SFRS report had not yet been published. Bad things happen to good people and if we want citizens to give their free time to the onerous job of governing our institutions the least we can do is be civil and thankful.

Glasgow's design school

Thirdly, the Mackintosh building is a globally recognised, tangible symbol of Glasgow's pre-eminence in creative education.

While it is a common misconception that GSA is a remote artists' ivory tower', it is also a misconception that GSA is only a school for artists. This view is exacerbated by the prejudiced views of ‘art’ and the fact that design, architecture and art are subjects given little status in the school curriculum.

Today's GSA is a descendent of the first school of design, and its School of Design is its largest School. GSA's roots go back to 1753 and the formation of the Foulis Academy on Glasgow's High Street. It was the world's first school of design whose purpose was to transform the technical and scientific innovations of the First Industrial Revolution into products that customers would want to buy. Without the Foulis Brothers who founded that prototype institution there might be no GSA, no Mackintosh building, no design-led companies like Apple, and the UK would have had a much less successful Industrial Revolution, and a considerably smaller Empire.

While the practise of design as we know it today has been around since the mid-18th century, it has waxed and waned in accordance with the needs of industry and society. Design is what we turn to in times of calamity and technological upheaval to remake the world in new ways. Since the formation of the Design Council in 1944 design has once again waned, slipping between the ministerial portfolios for Economy and Culture and today finds itself with no advocate, buried amongst the mixed bag of sixteen contradictory sub-sectors that, since 2000, make up the Creative Industries sector.

Creative Industries is the UK's fastest-growing industry sector, contributing £91.8bn gross value added (GVA) annually to the UK, which is more than the Oil & Gas, Life Sciences, Automotive and Aerospace industries combined.

Creative Industries are Glasgow's third largest industry after Finance & Business Services and Tourism. It is therefore vitally important that this sector is encouraged to thrive.

Design is one of the largest sub-sectors within the Creative Industries. The Design Economy, which is those businesses and activities that use design, generated £85.2bn GVA for the UK in 2016. This is 7-10% of total UK GVA and equivalent to the size of Distribution, Transport, Accommodation and Food sectors.

Design was born in Glasgow and design is both an industry in itself and a key element in almost every successful industry. Design is also a key driver for entrepreneurialism and business creation and design jobs are highly sustainable with 87% being resistant to robot-isation.

The blindingly obvious

Finally, by losing the Mack, albeit temporarily, I have gained a deeper insight into its immeasurable value. While I have lost the thing that anchored me to my past, Glasgow has lost the thing that anchored it, and Scotland, to an unquestionably preeminent position in international design, not just historically but at this very moment when design is once again an essential element in ensuring Scotland's economy thrives in the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

If there is to be a silver lining in this dark cloud then Glasgow and Scotland must seize the opportunity to rebuild the Mack and trust Glasgow School of Art to continue the education of new generations of entrepreneurial designers, architects and artists.

It is in our gift to turn tragedy into success and, by doing so, we will benefit from a distinguished legacy in design and renewed pride in creative businesses that will flourish to create wealth and jobs. But right now, the fate of the Creative Industries is balanced on a knife-edge and we have very, very much more to lose than Mackintosh's brilliant building.