

How does the Graphic Design Community Support the Career Development of Junior Designers?

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Abstract

Junior designers beginning their careers as they enter the graphic design community face an abundance of challenges. The purpose of this investigation is to highlight the existing support structures that are available towards junior designers and measure the success they have on developing upcoming designer's careers. Additionally, the purpose of this investigation is to examine areas in which juniors are not receiving adequate support and explore how this can be changed. The research and data collected for this study was qualitative, collected through online sources, books, and interviews. Further research into organizations, charities and key players showcased the different methods in which support can be provided including mentoring, networking, and training and evaluate the levels of success they had on developing junior designer's careers. These findings indicate the need for an increased amount of support from the graphic community and encourages the creation of new structures that can aid juniors on a global scale.

List of Contents

Introduction	Page 1
Contemporary Graphic Design Community	Page 2
What is support?	Page 4
Career development	Page 5
Junior Designers	Page 6
Context	Page 7
Case Study: Design and Art Direction	Page 8
Case Study: Key Players	Page 13
Conclusion	Page 16
Bibliography	Page 17

List of Figures

Figure 1: T-Shaped designer Page 4

UX Beginner. (2018). *I, X, and T-Shaped designers: What's the Difference?* [online]. Available from: <https://www.uxbeginner.com/i-x-and-t-shaped-designers/> [Accessed 13 January 2022].

Figure 2: Graphic Design Career path and progression (Fifteen, 2016) Page 6

Fifteen. (2017). *Graphic Design Career path and progression*. [online]. Available from: [Accessed 13 January 2022].

Figure 3: Summary of junior designers Page 7

Figure 4: D&AD New Blood Shift Instagram Post (D&AD, 2021) Page 11

Design and Art Direction. (2021). *D&AD New Blood Shift Class of 2020*. [online]. Available from: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CLUoSEGJ1OI/> [Accessed 13 January 2022].

Introduction

In a digitally evolving, fast-paced world, the efficiency and effectiveness that the younger generation can provide is growing ever more important. Passing information using graphic design is becoming more vital and complex with new technology allowing designers to take their work to the next level, and 'in a society that's hurrying all the time, visuals play a huge role in transmitting a message' (Mika, 2020). Graphic design can be found everywhere, from Evian water bottles to Google's homepage. The importance graphics has had and will continue to have on our society is significant, and there are 'endless opportunities for graphic designers to make their mark' (Shillington, 2021).

Graphic design has become more complex since its original hand-crafted methods due to the continual technological advancements that has occurred over the past few decades. Junior designers (creatives at 'an entry-level position' who has between 'zero and three years of commercial design experience' (Sagar, 2019)) are often expected to cover a large portion of graphic work; advertising, animation, branding and more. Anurag Gupta explains the importance of staying updated 'with the technological advancement that's taking place in the outside world', stating that 'every year new designing software and application surface in the online world and the designers have to adopt

these changes in time to stay in the race' (Gupta, 2017). There is a need for a young generation of designers to bring sustainable, inclusive, and innovative ideas that can solve the issues occurring in our current climate.

This study 'How does the contemporary graphic design community support the career development of junior designers?' investigates the different types of support that the graphic design community offers to junior designers, as well as studying the different methods, schemes and structures used to present support and their accessibility to a new generation of designers. Furthermore, this study examines the different needs, opportunities and experiences junior designers will likely face as they begin their careers in industry.

There are a range of different types of activities and provisions that offer support towards junior designers by the graphic design community, including online programmes, night classes and software classes. This study will analyze the different elements of support that can be used by junior designers to assist them in finding support for themselves. When asked 'Is there enough existing support out there for junior designers who are entering into the industry?', Tony Currie, award winning designer at Imagination, answered 'Post-Pandemic I would say no, but I do believe that will change' (Currie, 2021). This shows that in the current industry, junior designers are lacking both support and opportunities – enhancing the importance of this study as it is more relevant than ever.

This study uses qualitative research, allowing for 'direct experiences [from] human beings' (Libguides, 2021) being captured for a realistic perspective of the industry and the support supplied. This research is needed to allow for junior designers to become aware of the different structures that currently exist, making their first steps into the graphic design community less daunting.

Contemporary Graphic Design community

This section aims to discuss the who, what, why and how's of the graphic design community's involvement with junior designers, as well as looking at the need for graphic design and the current challenges designers face.

The professional graphic design community contains those who share 'certain attitudes and interests in common' (Lexico, N.D.), as supposed to the graphic design industry that includes a 'group of companies that are related based on their primary business activities' (Kenton, 2021). The graphic community has been chosen to investigate rather than the industry itself as it involves different players that offer a variety of support towards junior designers.

The 'ability to convey a brand, a message, a story and meaning' is the reason as to why graphic design is essential, 'it serves ideas in an effective yet beautiful way [and] industries exist because their virtual messages are conveyed to the right audience' (Garg, 2019). The foundations of every business are created through graphic design and therefore, in a society in which people are so heavily dependent on businesses, graphic design will always be needed.

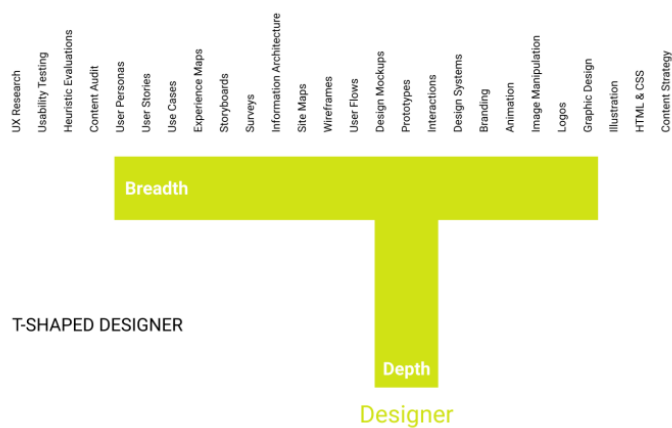


Figure 1: T-Shaped designer (UX Beginner, 2018)

Traditional graphic design, 'referred to as print design like posters, book covers [and] magazine layouts' (Galvan, 2020) has had its boundaries blurred in recent times, with the contemporary industry covering 'all spheres of human life which deal with visual communication, from books and posters to sophisticated mobile applications or 3D animation' (Yalanska, N.D.). This has led to different areas of work for graphic designers by operating across multiple disciplines, which in turn has sub-categorized designers into either generalists or specialists. Figure 1 shows a generic T-Shaped designer, this involves the horizontal line representing the practice and collaboration across multiple disciplines while the vertical stroke represents the depth of skill in their chosen specialty.

This approach to graphic design is challenging for upcoming designers as they are expected to learn new software across all disciplines, while exceeding in an area of their choice. Senior designer Tony Currie talks about 'the [graphic design] industry evolving at a rate I've never seen before with more content types and platforms emerging all the time' (Currie, 2021), showing the true scale of the transition to modern graphic design and the pressure it places on junior designers.

What is support?

What is support and who does it help? This segment investigates the different elements of support offered towards junior designers and how it can affect the career development of the younger generation.

As junior designers have little to no experience, a range of support is necessary in preparation for individual work. Assistance is needed for software applications, business knowledge, job opportunities, copyright advice, portfolio development, networking, client pitching and general guidance.

Support towards junior designers can have many connotations, from nurturing and mentoring to encouraging and promoting. These different aspects are all very useful and crucial for upcoming designers, aiding individuals in unique ways. Mentoring can shape what kind of designer a junior becomes, helping their 'ideas flow better and strengthen cross-functional communications' (Shen, 2018) which together can support a junior's growth and success exponentially. Promoting and encouraging can involve networking, which is critical in a junior's development with Tony Currie declaring 'it's everything' (Currie, 2021) when talking on connections and networking within the design community.

Junior designers receive different forms of support from a variety of players within the graphic design community. Training and internships are common practices for junior designers to undertake as they begin their careers as it provides practical knowledge and experiences that cannot be received elsewhere. Imagination, an independent experience design firm, has an 'academy scheme where [they] take about 4 juniors each year. [Juniors] spend about 3 months working and shadowing in one team before moving on to another for the next 3 months. After a year a role is made available to them ideally in the area they excelled in the most' (Currie, 2021).

Befriending and networking plays a great part in becoming a successful graphic designer; with widespread connections allowing designers to broaden their work across different fields, opening opportunities for extensive collaborations. Networking can be carried out by junior designers themselves through meet-up groups, connecting with peers, and following up with existing contacts. However, the graphic community also provides this support, with universities such as Arts University Bournemouth holding an annual network event for graphic design students. Following the 2021

network event Alice Stevens, senior lecturer in graphic design and organizer of the event, commented 'students have received such positive feedback from industry which will help, inspire and guide them in developing their portfolio websites even further' (Stevens, 2021), evidencing the success of events like these and displaying how imperative they can be for junior designers.

Support is offered from a variety of key players and organizations within the community, however the common factor between all those who provide support is that they obtain more experience within the graphic design community, with Brian Mackintosh, design and sales training and development manager stating how his '30 years of experience allows me to help others accelerate their own progress' (Mackintosh, 2021). Brian continues to speak on support commenting that '[Pasquill's] ambitious plans for growth rely on ensuring that all colleagues have the skills they need to succeed and enjoy their job' classifying that primarily, support is offered to encourage junior designers to thrive within their chosen field of work

Career development

This segment studies the different pathways a junior designer can take and how this can alter their careers, while also exploring the meaning of development.

Career development is the evolution and improvement of your work that allows you to progress through roles to achieve career aspirations. Within graphic design, the usual career pathway involves the stages of progression shown in figure 2. This allows designers to advance in their careers once they have gained enough experience, which is one of the most important factors in hiring and the reason for which many interns are offered job opportunities once completed.

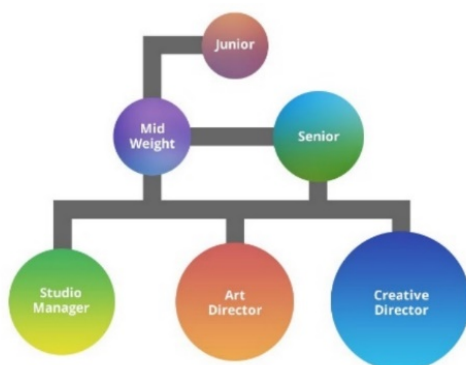


Figure 2: Graphic Design Career path and progression (Fifteen, 2017)

A junior designer’s work will vastly differ in comparison to the work of an experienced designer and in addition their work will be completed ‘under the supervision of senior designers’ as this provides an ‘opportunity for learning and development’ (Fifteen, 2017). This apprentice style learning is appropriate for designers who are just beginning their careers as it is a method that eases them into the graphic industry while developing the designer’s fundamentals in a real-life scenario.

The shift towards more digital work has impacted graphic designers worldwide, with ‘only 15% of seniors believing that universities are providing enough skills-based learning for students’ (Bourton, 2020) and that ‘9% would expect a junior to develop these skills while under their employment’. This lack of responsibility that seniors hold creates new challenges for juniors who are not provided with the skillsets required for the contemporary graphic design community. Tony Currie emphasizes this issue as he speaks up on mentoring within the community stating ‘if you lucked out with a good mentor you learnt loads. Unfortunately, I’ve also experienced not so good mentors where you don’t learn as much’ (Currie, 2021).

Junior designers

Who is a junior designer? This section defines the meaning of the phrase ‘junior designer’, while further examining their needs, challenges, and role within the contemporary graphic design community.

Who and where?	Why?	Pros	Cons
<p>Junior designers with 0 – 3 years of experience.</p> <p>Located worldwide with every country, city and town requiring new designers.</p>	<p>Visual communication is becoming more present than ever before.</p> <p>New technology allows for design to reach a larger audience.</p> <p>New design trends require innovative and effective design.</p> <p>The need for sustainable design.</p>	<p>Alternate creative thinking can solve new problems.</p> <p>Introduce new design practices.</p> <p>More current, personal experiences that relate to younger audience and current events.</p> <p>More equipped to technological advances.</p>	<p>Lack of experience in real world scenarios.</p> <p>Minimal networking and connections.</p>

Figure 3: Summary of junior designers

Junior designers offer a lot to the graphic design community, providing fresh ideas that align with many clients' demographic as well as having a more relevant understanding of how people communicate. Figure 3 defines a junior designer's job as an entry-level position, stating it as someone who has accumulated '0 – 3 years of experience', however qualifications for this role can vary due to differences between internships, universities, and freelancing.

Inside organizations, a junior graphic designer will partake in 'understanding project requirements and concepts, use various techniques to create drafts, models, and prototypes, produce final design solutions, pitch creative ideas, and collaborate with team members to launch projects' (Workable, n.d.). More advanced positions within companies would involve partaking in the entire design process from concept to finished product. However, roles and positions are interrelated with the ability for senior, intermediate and junior designers to all collaborate on single bodies of work.

Context

This section looks at the graphic community both pre-pandemic and post-pandemic, highlighting significant changes that have occurred within the industry since the COVID-19 pandemic began.

Pre-pandemic, junior designers were able to receive support through methods such as mentoring, in studio internships, and job opportunities. However, these practices have been interrupted with, forcing juniors to obtain the support they require through other routes such as Drew de Soto's 2014 book titled 'Know Your Onions: Graphic Design', which provides readers with 'the experience and ability that normally comes from years on-the-job training' (Drew de Soto, 2014).

When asked 'is there enough existing support out there for junior designers who are entering into the industry?', Tony Currie responded 'post-pandemic I would say no, but I do believe this will change' he then went on to say 'working from home is great once a culture is established but it doesn't create an environment in the studio to nurture and support new talent' (Currie, 2021). This outlines that under the current circumstances junior designers are not receiving adequate support, however there is the expectation that soon the industry will begin to return to normal.

Case study: Design and Art Direction

As this investigation's first case study, D&AD offers a great insight as to what support is already available, with the organization founding its very own 'New Blood' scheme that directly targets junior designers. D&AD has been selected for further investigation because of its influence in the graphic design community, with over 75,000 designers worldwide entering work for their annual awards competition.

Design and Art Direction, commonly referred to as D&AD, is an 'education charity that promotes excellence in design and advertising' (D&AD, n.d.). The well-known organization has been selected as a case study due to their variety of schemes, classes and award programs that are held annually to support the design community and junior designers, but also due to their selfless demeanor which continues throughout each role, with their recently appointed CEO Patrick Burgoyne stepping down due to financial issues caused by the pandemic. These projects encourage designers of all levels and experiences to produce high-end, innovative work either through collaborations or solo efforts.

In relation to the title question, D&AD have evidently targeted junior designers as an important face in changing the future of graphic design and potentially the world in general, with available schemes such as *Shift London Class* and *New Blood Awards* being dedicated towards supporting young creatives, allowing them to advance into the industry with more experience and new connections.

This case study discusses how junior designers can gain a head start in their graphic design careers through opportunities offered by major organizations and how this initial support can be so vital in developing young creatives into professional designers.

New Blood

New Blood, founded in 1980, is a program designed specifically for junior designers to gain insights, experiences, job opportunities and have a chance at winning prestigious awards. There are many elements to 'New Blood', including annual awards ceremonies and digital festivals.

Awards

Described as 'Real briefs, set by real clients, judged by the industry's top creatives' (D&AD, n.d.), the New Blood Awards is one of the most coveted awards for junior designers, with thousands of entries for each of their briefs producing a select few winners.

The rewards are signified through five different coloured pencils, with the infamous black pencil being the holy grail. Labelled as a 'fast-track to career kudos' (D&AD, n.d.), there is really no greater opportunity to make a name for yourself. These awards have proven to be successful each year, creating careers for junior designers before they have really begun, showing this type of support from the graphic industry has proven to be essential for recognizing young creatives' potential.

Festival

The New Blood Festival, which has run digitally for the previous two years, consists of talks and insights from the industry's top creatives as well as being a chance for students and universities themselves to showcase and support graduate work, these shared experiences further help the students by gaining a greater knowledge of the industry through peer material. This platform is taken to the next level with 'Portfolio Picks', a competition that helps junior designers 'have their work noticed and stand out to potential future employers' (D&AD, n.d.).

It is evident that by establishing a festival around the 'New Blood' designers, D&AD care about developing and engaging with junior designers, which is backed up by P. Drake, *Foundations Director at D&AD*, as he says 'we, like many within the industry, will continue to provide the support this generation needs' (Drake, 2020). This shows Drake's and the organization's commitment to assisting juniors as best they can, through methods that other key players in industry do not have the tools and background to provide.

Ones to Watch

This area of New Blood focuses on support through employability. Selected 'Ones to Watch' designers are instantly under a spotlight from the graphic design community – allowing juniors to gain opportunities from a variety of sectors within the industry therefore giving them a great advantage in their graphic design careers as well as recognition from top organizations.

For I. Izekor, being part of the Ones to Watch Class of 2020 was vital in changing his outlook and ambitions for what he can do within the graphic design community, with the junior designers saying that it makes other targets in life ‘feel a lot more achievable’ (Izekor, 2020).

Shift

New Blood Shift is a limited space, 12-week program in which young creatives attend a night class with ‘mentorship and paid placement opportunities up for grabs’, making this ‘the ultimate first step’ (Advertising Association, 2020). With the class being free for those who are selected, it allows juniors from all backgrounds to become involved - showing D&AD are aware that some young creatives are not given the same opportunities and are eager to change this and make classes such as *New Blood Shift* more widely available.



Figure 4: D&AD New Blood Shift Instagram Post (D&AD, 2021)

With the constant increase of smartphone usage and the rise of social media platforms, some of the best ways to promote, discover and research are through applications such as Instagram - due to the widespread audience that interconnects globally.

D&AD have taken this in their stride and are constantly aiming to promote junior designers to their large following (285,000 followers as of Nov 2021). Posts such as the New Blood Shift NYC Class of 2020 [Figure 4] will be viewed by agencies, freelancers, and top creatives worldwide - who are likely to get in contact for collaborations, internships and even job opportunities. This direct support towards self-made creatives is unmatched in developing their careers from juniors to mid-weight or higher.

In addition, D&AD have published a highlight reel that is featured at the top of their Instagram page which includes 'Meet the Shifters' – a short video clip that introduces the young creatives that have been involved in the Shift Class. This allows the young creatives to show off their personalities and become more employable to those who are interested.

Pencil awards

The iconic pencil awards are what all designers, in any stage of their career, would love to get their hands on. Those who receive a pencil often lead very successful careers, *such as Naresh Ramchandani*, as it 'will earn your work exposure to millions of people in the creative industries around the world through press coverage, exhibitions, promotion on the D&AD website, social platforms, and newsletters' (D&AD, n.d.).

Receiving a pencil is exceptionally challenging – your work must compete against thousands of other entries to even be shortlisted for one of the renowned pencils, however obtaining a pencil kickstarts careers in an incredible manner. Due to the difficulty, D&AD encourage designers to push boundaries in their designs, which is great practice and experience for working in industry – meaning even if obtaining a pencil award was not successful, designers will have still improved their skillsets and learnt what it is like to work on a live brief from a professional client.

D&AD invest any profits earned due to being a non-profit charity, however they chose to continue to support junior designers by investing into 'education programmes that help new talent prosper and pave the way into the creative industries for more diverse talent' (D&AD, n.d.). This added investment can prove to be crucial in aiding juniors and may assist more designers that are trying to break into the industry.

Naresh Ramchandani

Partner at Pentagram and co-founder of environmental non-profit Do The Green Thing, Naresh has built a career 'on what he calls "communications for the greater good"' (Berting, 2021). This is demonstrated throughout all of his work, with Naresh illustrating his passion for design in an old interview as he states he is 'incredibly proud of the three years' worth of videos and podcasts to date that have made up the inspiration stream for "Do The Green Thing"' (Ramchandani, 2011).

In his new role as president of D&AD, Naresh has stated he will 'amplify and advocate existing programmes as well as champion new routes into the industry for emerging creatives and under-

represented voices at a time when it is needed more than ever' (D&AD, n.d.). This comment verifies both Naresh's and D&AD's commitment to supporting junior designers and shows understanding of the difficulties that the upcoming generation are facing post-pandemic. Naresh also mentions how his new position 'marks another chapter in his mission to change the system from the inside, using the power and influence of the design industry to slowly, but surely, create a better future for everyone' (Brewer, 2021). This clearly captures Naresh's intentions to develop a new system that can be designed and sculpted to support junior designers in the early stages of their careers so that the upcoming generation, like Naresh, can create a better future.

Overall

This case study has a significant in relation to the title question *How does the contemporary graphic design community support the career development of junior designers?* The investigation into D&AD has proved successful as it has highlighted existing support structures within the community that continue to be effective while also providing a comparable platform that other businesses and organizations can use to enhance support of their own.

After analyzing the different methods in which Design and Art Direction support junior graphic designers, it is evident that the education charity uses their influence within the industry to create opportunities for juniors that were previously missing. The New Blood scheme itself demonstrates their commitment to supporting the younger generation which when aligned with the Pencil Awards, shows the organizations differences from the rest of the graphic community as D&AD's support exceeds what is expected of a professional establishment.

Case study: Key players

The second case study consists of key players within the graphic community including creative directors, senior critics, and authors. This study has been selected as it investigates individual support within the community, exploring a range of different methods and techniques from across the industry.

In relation to the title question, all key players have been specially selected due to their support towards junior designers and the impact this has on their careers. These highlighted persons share common views on the graphic design community, believing that junior designers are vital in changing our dying and demanding world and that they deserve support from those with more experience.

Tony Currie

'Creative Director, Storyteller, Experience Designer and VR/AR/MR/XR (Digital) specialist' (Currie, n.d.) has supported upcoming designers through Arts University Bournemouth, appearing as a guest speaker to the third-year graphic design students. His engagement with the students was rewarding, with the senior designer allowing time for a Q&A once his presentation was completed which gave students the opportunity to gain a greater understanding of his work, his role as a designer as well as all the industry insights that Tony has to offer.

Currie continued to show his support towards junior designers as he generously responded to a series of questions in which he speaks about existing support in the community, the support he received as a junior and gives advice on how junior designers can break into the graphic community. Overall, Currie's involvement with Arts University Bournemouth gave students the opportunity to expand their knowledge on the graphic community as well as begin to network and connect with a successful and experienced designer.

Peter Phillips

Designer in Residence at Arts University Bournemouth and Owner of Transparent Product Design, Phillips shares similarities with Currie by working alongside students focusing on education and support, including one-to-one tutorial help with the all-important RSA and D&AD briefs.

In the online article titled *Lecturers must make every effort to support students*, Sue Mayo speaks up on students work at university post-pandemic stating 'many students' learning is impaired in the

current situation, and we must do all we can to mitigate this, within our capacities' (Mayo, 2021). Phillips ensures his expertise are used effectively, offering useful support to students as he 'was a judge on the RSA Competition for 8 years so [has] a few tips that might help' (Phillips, 2021), showing his previous experience within the design community can provide insights and knowledge that helps students with their university work, ensuring they begin their careers as a graphic designer heading in the right direction.

Michael Bierut

Partner in the New York office of Pentagram and Senior Critic in graphic design at the Yale School of Art, Bierut has worked on numerous high-profile jobs including the design of Hilary Clinton's logo for the 2016 presidential campaign.

Bierut supports junior designers through different methods in comparison to Phillips and Currie, using his partnership with Pentagram to offer paid internships for upcoming designers. In addition, Bierut has featured in multiple interviews such as *Young Designers Ask Questions* and *How to Get a Design Job at Pentagram* in which he gives advice towards young creatives about job opportunities and portfolio development – both of which are vital in the career development of junior designers.

Debbie Millman

Best known for her podcast Design Matters, Millman has authored six books that cater towards graphic designers who are trying to develop their skillset, making them a perfect read for junior designers with Google Books describing the publication *Essential Principles of Graphic Design* as a 'must-have resource for students, beginners, and new designers' (Google Books, 2017).

The American writer, educator, artist, curator and designer is best known for hosting the podcast *Design Matters*, which is about how 'incredibly creative people design the arc of their lives' (Millman, n.d.), offering cross-disciplinary insights that support the development of junior designers by informing them on the many different career paths available.

Steven Heller

Heller is currently co-chair of the School of Visual Arts MFA design program, editor of the AIGA Journal of Graphic Design and was previously the senior art director of the New York Times Book Review for over thirty years.

During his career, Heller has written over 130 books on design, including *Becoming a Graphic Designer: A Guide to Careers in Design* which 'covers everything from education and training, design specialties, and work settings to preparing an effective portfolio and finding a job' (Heller and Fernandes, 2010). The book is perfect for supporting junior designer's career development as it includes up-front interviews with leading graphic designers that offer 'invaluable real-world insights on what different industries and positions are really like' (Heller and Fernandes, 2010).

Overall

Investigating a variety of important players has allowed for analysis of individual support, showing a different perspective that offers a more thorough evaluation of support within the contemporary graphic design community.

This case study has signified that designers of all levels can offer support, as well as highlighting the importance that support can have on a junior designer's career development. It is evident that Phillips and Currie aid designers in a small-scale manner – through advice, networking, and portfolio developments where as Heller, Millman and Bierut use their platforms to offer support to junior designers on a global scale.

Conclusion

Research into the contemporary graphic design community, career development and support showcased the needs of a junior designer, the usual career pathways that are undertaken, and what a future looks like for junior designers within the industry. This investigation has covered a variety of elements within the community, studying the different methods of support that can be found and their effectiveness. In-depth analysis of both D&AD and the community's key players produced excellent findings showcasing the current support structures available and how they can be used effectively.

In our current climate, Currie's views on existing support structures are correct and that the quantity and quality of support received by junior designers are insufficient, with designers struggling for job opportunities and the ability to receive in-studio assistance being limited. This is challenged through the work of D&AD and the key players highlighted throughout this study, as their continued support has proved to be fundamental in developing the careers of junior designers, demonstrating the value that support from experienced designers has on the upcoming generation.

To conclude, pre-pandemic support structures towards junior designers were adequate, however with the dramatic changes that have occurred in recent years due to COVID-19, an increase of support is needed for the new wave of designers to succeed. To achieve the level of support required, large charities and organizations will have to produce support programs targeting junior designers in addition to smaller businesses and individuals starting to integrate support into their own work.

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