



# Can your designs help to shape the world?

by Linda  
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**A** CAREER in design could be your chance to change the world. Everything around us, from teacups to telephones, is designed by product or industrial designers.

Even experiences are now designed. First-class air travel, for instance, may be designed to include your limousines to the airport, the boarding process, menus and how the food is served.

'Product design is about solving problems and very varied,' says Dr Andrea Siodmok, the Design Council's head of knowledge.

'I have worked on the world's smallest X-ray machine which was sent into space by NASA, and a fire control system for cinemas. You can literally save lives.'

Competition to get in is hot, so start planning early.

'Focus on what you want to design and don't be afraid to aim high in order to do it,' says Professor Joseph Giacomini, head of design at Brunel University, West London.

A-levels required vary among courses, some of which lead to BAs and some BScs, but art, graphics design technology, and business are useful. Some more technical design courses, such as those at Brunel, prefer maths and sciences.

Prof Giacomini says: 'Don't be put off by the maths involved. It's not as hard as you may think.'

The main requirement is a good portfolio of your own designs, ideally supported by good presentation to prove you can communicate well in person, and examples of the finished product.

'Start with a foundation year in general art and design,' says Wayne Euston-Moore, product design recruitment specialist at Adrem Creative Recruitment in London.

It should give you a grounding in sketching, the design process, computer skills, graphics, making three-dimensional models, research and business awareness. Then choose a degree course.

There are many, but employers doubt the value of some.

Best-respected for first degrees are Northumbria University; London-based Central St Martins; Brunel; Coventry and Loughborough. A Masters will give you an extra edge — the Royal College of Art MA is well thought of.

The Chartered Society of Designers (CSD), the designers' professional body worldwide, has a course-recognition scheme which gives a guide to courses that reach its standards (see [www.csd.org.uk](http://www.csd.org.uk)).

Check if the course offers work experience — some such as Brunel, Northumbria and Loughborough, include a year in industry — and has good contacts with employers.

'Look for courses that have passionate, industry-aware, innovative lecturers who believe in strong links with industry,' says Mr Euston-Moore.

Placements are hotly fought over because of high demand and scarcity, but relevant work experience will give you the edge.

Jon Powell, co-director of furniture manufacturer modus, says: 'I look for designers with practical experience of the furniture industry and good knowledge of manufacturing processes and possibilities.'

**D**EMONSTRATE your skills by entering design competitions, such as the New Designers Degree Show at the Business Design Centre, London, where companies and consultancies look for new designs and talent.



Check if courses help you enter competitions. Brunel, for instance, has its own Made In Brunel exhibition annually.

Once you graduate, there are jobs in company in-house design teams, design consultancies, where you work on a variety of projects for different clients, or as a freelance.

Your portfolio is the key to a job. 'It should tell the story of the

battle to get a design to market, from initial research through sketches, prototypes, product development, testing, production and evaluation,' says Mr Euston-Moore.

Communication and presentation are also vital — you must sell your design and yourself to companies. Languages, especially Mandarin (much manufacturing now happens in China) can give you an edge.

Overseas work experience can boost your chances of getting a job and help you up the career ladder. Some universities can help you get overseas placements.

'Experience in growth markets such as Asia, where UK designers are sought after, means you will return with valuable cultural and design experience,' says Frank Peters of the CSD.

Reduce competition by targeting growth sectors such as medical or environmentally friendly products, transport design (rail and ships) and service design.

Pay for graduates ranges from £18,000-£24,000, and is much the same in consultancy or company in-house design teams, according to Adrem. After three to six years you could be on £23,000-28,000.

Managers can earn around £55,000 while design directors could be on £75,000-£140,000 according to company size and location.



Picture: JENNY GOODALL