

Designers Northern Alliance

24th & 25th June 2010. The Triangle, Manchester

Event Report & Review

J. Greenhalgh & A. Taylor, August 2010

www.designersnorthernalliance.org

1.0 Concept

The Designers Northern Alliance (DNA) is a recently formed consortium of Northern based Higher Education Institutions which is currently focused within the discipline of Advertising, Animation, Digital Media and Graphic Design. The concept was developed by the BA Graphics course at the University of Salford with the core project team consisting of Joanne Greenhalgh, Tash Willcocks, Hannah Gibson, Julian Tagoe and John Boothe. Project management, funding and commercial support was provided by the School of Art & Design's Enterprise & Engagement team in the form of Andrew Taylor and Paul Haywood.

The group currently consists of The University of Salford, UCLan, MMU, LJMU, The University of Huddersfield & the University of Chester with many other institutions from across the North of England and Scotland also expressing an interest in the mission of the network.

DNA was formed to create a collaboration of partners who would meet to discuss the subject of design and how academia may best be tailored to meet the needs of the local creative industries, and ultimately provide students with high quality, 'real world' experience, which is likely to become an even more important commodity as the ripple effect of the recession is experienced.

In keeping with this, the group wished to propose a high profile exhibitory event that would offer an alternative annual showcase opportunity to those currently offered by predominately London-centric organizations whose participatory pricing structures have become excessive. The group also wished to promote the economic development and regeneration strategies of the North by nullifying the concept that all major design agencies are based in the south, and that the best design graduates must relocate to sustain there practice following graduation.

2.0 Inaugural Event

The 24th and 25th June 2010 saw the first DNA exhibition, networking, and knowledge transfer event take place at the Triangle in central Manchester.

The aim of the event was to provide an opportunity for representatives from industry and academia from the North of England to develop closer links and share ideas on best practice – as well as to showcase the best of undergraduate and postgraduate design communication courses.

The event included:

- An exhibition of the best graduate talent from the newly established design network which includes 7 major Universities in the North of England.

- Keynote lectures from industry and academic partners.
- Roundtable discussion to develop greater collaboration between industry and academia
- Workshops, seminars and portfolio surgeries for students.
- Student awards judged by industry experts.
- Networking opportunities for graduates, academics and industry.
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- Sponsorship for the event was provided by the **Triangle Shopping** centre who provided 4 retail spaces left vacant by the economic downturn. One large unit was utilised on the lower ground floor, whilst the remaining other 3 units housed the other event activities on the second floor. The event was also supported in kind by **GyroHSR** who provided creative marketing and promotional services and **Tayburn** who developed the promotional materials, for the event. Further publishing support was provided by **Leftfield**, whilst **Shape** - a new business start up in the Salford already by two Salford graduates provided support with regards to the development of the website. **The Drum** publication provided coverage of the event by producing two articles, one prior to the event and a further review article. **Business Link North West** provided a small amount of financial support, and the remaining costs were covered by a small educational institution participation fee.

The event was considered to be a success by all. This is perhaps demonstrated by the number of students who attended the event over the two days which was estimated at between 200 – 300 as well as the number of businesses who willingly engaged in the event with 40 businesses, involved, including 'Like a River', 'Dinosaur', 'Computer Code Love', 'Fudge', 'Typocom', 'Vivid', 'Hyper Island', 'Toy', 'KMP' and 'Sever Motion Media' - all major creative employers in the region.

Key opportunities throughout the day emerged as academic staff engaged with professionals in discussion with regards to how the changes in industry should affect changes in the curriculum in education.

The portfolio surgeries were considered a real success and further sessions with engaging organisations were arranged due to the demand. Many students commented how beneficial the advice and feedback was and 5 individuals gained work placements from their session.

Guest speaker sessions ran concurrently with the portfolio sessions and speakers spoke on a variety of innovative subject areas. **Robert Urquhart** gave a thought provoking presentation on his own career and some industry tips on the techniques he felt would aid graduate employment. This was an especially relevant to the audience as a former employer; Grafik Magazine had ceased trading only a few days earlier. Another well received session was that hosted by **Warren Drumm from Gyro:HSR**. Warren discussed information from a more corporate, marketing perspective. He gave a very concise, relevant talk about interview techniques and how to get into the design industry. Sole trader and typography designer and illustrator **Si Scott** - famous for his work with Nike & Umbro captivated the audience and inspired students with his work, and his passion for design came through his laid back style of delivery. The relevance of the presentation provided by **Tony Foggett, John Landor and Wini Tse of Code Computer Love** was for all to see as the huge change in the industry was discussed new digital media

has been embraced over the past few years. This is particularly relevant to the locality as Salford witnesses the creation of the Media City UK in 2011.

The private view provided a further opportunity for more business engagement as further organisations attended the exhibition part of the event. This was supplemented by industry judging of 5 individual student awards. The awards were for 'Best Illustration', 'Best Advertising', 'Best Graphics', 'Best Digital' and 'Best in Show.'

Perhaps the most valuable part of the event was held on the final session of the 2 day event and this was the Question & Answer forum, where students, educators and Industry debated issues around the changing industry and how this should feed into curriculum development, the role of DNA in this processes was also discussed.

3.0 Event Impact Analysis

The academic links developed have been supplemented by an existing demand from businesses operating in the creative industries in the localities surrounding each of the HEI's involved in DNA. In the short time since the event at the end of June, a number of benefits have been experienced from the event including numerous student placements with industry partners, organisations wishing to work more closely with the University in terms of teaching and learning, enterprise and engagement and research activities and additional promotion for the school in the design press.

It is also thought that these links and activities have created numerous opportunities for the University of Salford that will be felt in less immediate terms, and which may include:

- Raising the profile of the University within the local community through promotion of our activities and graduate talent to local businesses, feeder colleges, public and the industry as a whole. This is likely to lead to further benefits for the University as local awareness is raised of our activities and the