

# THE TRANSFORMATION NORTH WEST DESIGN CHARTER

*Signers of THE TRANSFORMATION NORTH WEST DESIGN CHARTER  
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## **ABSTRACT**

The Transformation North West (TNW) Design Charter has been created with the aim of challenging the status quo of traditional design research. Using design-led thinking to actively respond to real-world issues facing England's North West, twelve doctoral researchers have come together to examine how design and innovation play an integral role in addressing the region's economic, industrial and social challenges. Working collaboratively, the TNW cohort identify design and creativity as key drivers for improved economic growth and productivity, highlighting a holistic approach to ecologies of knowledge, relations and people as crucial to their mission. The TNW Design Charter therefore aims to illustrate how design holds the potential to increase connectivity, knowledge exchange and foster new, more participatory ways of working, offering the chance for a true transformation of the North West region, and the country as a whole.

## **PREAMBLE**

Is doctoral design research in the UK fit for purpose? The current economic climate urgently demands a disruptive approach to knowledge creation and application. Transformation North West (TNW) is an applied doctoral research programme in design and creativity, funded by the AHRC, which aims to both challenge existing research methods and encourage increased collaboration between academia and industry. The TNW team is comprised of a cohort of twelve researchers based at the Universities of Lancaster, Liverpool, Manchester, Manchester Metropolitan and Salford. Collectively they are responding to the UK Government's Industrial Strategy (November 2017) to identify the specific challenges facing the North West of England, whilst highlighting creativity as a potential key driver for economic growth in the region.

The TNW researchers work across a variety of disciplines with the overarching aim of promoting a more holistic and inclusive approach to regional growth and productivity. New insights are drawn from research conducted both collectively and individually by collaborating with industrial partners on a series of projects, whilst

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fulfilling the individual aspirations of their own bespoke PhDs.

The following charter therefore aims to provide a starting point for increased dialogue and collaboration between academia and industry to help foster a decentralised, fairer and more balanced economy at a time of great change.

## **DESIGN MANIFESTO**

**Design is integral to being human.** Every aspect of life is designed. Design-led thinking is not limited to specialists or design practitioners. It is a tool that can be learned and applied to all fields of human endeavour. Design offers a holistic approach to cultivating inclusivity, improving economic resilience, protecting the environment and enhancing quality of life.

**Design solves problems.** (It also creates them.) Design plays a leading interventionist role by co-creating solutions to tomorrow's most pressing challenges, including: the future of healthcare, the fair distribution of new technological developments throughout society, and the growth of healthy, interconnected communities. Design doesn't take things for granted; it questions assumptions. We overcome challenges by approaching them in novel ways.

**Ideas are the most valuable currency.** We see design at the forefront of all decision-making. It cuts across silos and acts as a catalyst for interdisciplinary collaboration between industry, academia and the wider public. Design is integral to this process; it is the quest for making things tangible. Ideas spark innovation by inspiring people to take new steps.

Design is ambitious.

Design is participatory.

Design cares.

## **CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

As we enter the fourth industrial revolution, the UK faces a number of challenges. These include: low productivity, uneven growth across the country and changing demands for future skills. Our focus, the North West, is a force to be reckoned with, having the largest economy and the highest level of creative employment outside London. Here, the challenge for further growth is to increase knowledge around the utilisation of design and creative skills for driving innovation, whilst acknowledging existing strengths of the region.

Challenges create opportunities for design. Like the 1990 Munich Charter, we believe that design can be applied to both industrial and social challenges. The use of design skills, however, is not confined to design professionals, but can be utilised across all sectors. We pose three opportunities for the application of design in the region:

'Knowledge' – Design fosters knowledge and skills, both cognitive and embodied. We must recognise that skills are not only taught but acquired in everyday contexts and held as collective knowledge in communities of individuals and businesses.

'Relations' – The provision of infrastructure forms, facilitates and sustains connections within and between communities and can lead to resilience. Design

and the application of technology is crucial for the formation and maintenance of these.

'People' – Creativity is not a buzzword, it is a life skill to be valued and developed, enabling engagement of those who feel left behind. We should embrace design's ability to empower and enliven communities and individuals.

### **NEW SCENARIOS AND HORIZONS**

Progressive research into the ecologies of knowledge, relations and people across the North West region must be situated within this dialogue.

'Ecology of knowledge' proceeds from the reconceptualisation of our educational models in a manner that accepts design and creativity as transferable across all subject areas. Design processes can open a dialogue between technological advancements and the radical changes experienced in society and within the working environment.

'Ecology of relations' proceeds to create an environment in which entrepreneurialism and institutions are connected, knowledge is shared and failure is accepted as part of the dynamics of growth. Design should be used as a tool to creatively connect in a way which enables the North West region to present a more united front, both nationally and internationally.

'Ecology of people' proceeds to ensure that communities are at the heart of all regional growth plans: enhancing and enacting the integration of technology, design, and people.

### **SUMMARY**

Ways of living and working are changing. We are living ever more connected lives and facing global challenges unique to our time. To be successful, society must embrace collaborative, participatory ways of working. Through connected technology, individuals and organisations can transcend professional boundaries to become multi-disciplinary; facilitating a more egalitarian way of collaborating. Design informed by multiple inputs is essential.

We want to see design at the forefront of innovation in the North West. Outward facing, locally driven growth is key to looking beyond geographical boundaries. As the North West is reinvented, improved infrastructures will be required to create connections that support the ambitions of the region and meet specific local challenges. Design will facilitate this radical vision.

Society must be bolstered by academic practice through research that is embedded in the real world. As a multi-disciplinary cohort, we embody the ideals discussed in this manifesto: using our practice to unpack these challenges. We each bring a unique perspective to our collaborations, engendering a culture of sharing, conversation and co-operation.