



# The secret of creative innovation

Introducing The GCA Graduate “Open Call” Initiative

Geoff Sanderson



# I want to tell you a story

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- **Who am I, why am I here and what is my secret?**

- I'm Geoff.
- I'm here to bring focus to a couple of long blogs which you may or may not have read.
- Either way that's cool. I'll take a step back and elaborate further and hopefully give you a succinct top-line view of the initiative we're calling Open Call. Which I hope will jump from my desk to your in tray after you've heard my pitch.
- FYI. The blogs offer a deep dive into the background and opportunities I've considered to date, if you have time to read later.
- Today, I want to talk more about my personal experience that has driven my long-term commitment, as well as show some pertinent quotes from a series of helpful members, publishers, and educationalists who feel the same.
- All in all, I hope to help frame the opportunity and get you onboard.
- <https://www.gca.cards/the-most-valuable-secret-in-creative-innovation-and-succession-planning/>
- <https://www.gca.cards/gca-graduate-open-call-2022/>

# I want to tell you a story

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- **Who am I, why am I here and what is my secret?**

- I'm an Illustration/graphic design graduate who gets the marketing / consumer needs of the category and also one who loves greeting cards, gifting and licensing.
- On my journey from drawing board to boardroom, I eventually became the creative / marketing director of a number of business's and within these roles have centred my studio teams around graduates. Hence why I have accumulated 30 years of experience and involvement in sourcing & developing design graduates.
- Simply put. I see the development and recruitment of art and design graduates as the key to a healthy creative process, and a way of building a diverse and dynamic team.
- If managed well it can help develop your competitive edge and put innovation and re-invention of the category (sometimes by accident) front and centre.
- It also has some simple benefits like cost effective recruitment, mid-long term succession planning, helps get the day to day done and a is a mutually rewarding experience when graduates are mentored effectively.
- Hence, my career is indebted to this process and I see a massive missed opportunity that I'd love to be more widespread in the industry.
- I believe that when you/we engage, it gives a interlinked set of opportunities for the GCA, industry, academia and the graduate .. and ultimately the retailer and consumer.
- It's also a process that can be done no matter your scale or size... it can also drive growth.

# I want to tell you a story

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- **Who am I, why am I here and what is my secret?**
- Yes growth. In all it's definitions.
- In terms of it's most dramatic impact on me, it has led to the growth and expansion of a number or multi million pound category leading business that I've had the pleasure to be a part of.
- Story 1 - Whilst creative director of M&S Tigerprint/Hallmark
- Story 2 - Whilst design director of Moonpig.
- Story 3 – Whilst director of my own consultancy.
- So where is this all heading?

# The Opportunity

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- **The opportunity for our Industry**
  - To tap into the amazing creative art and design talent that the UK produces.
  - Innovation of the category.
  - Cost effective ways of developing creative teams, structures and getting the day to day done.
  - Putting something back. Show our best side.
- **The opportunity for art and design education and the graduate**
  - To engage with a sleeping giant of a category that offers a simple pathway into employment, as well as allow us to right the many miss understandings that exist.
  - Work opportunities and learning in very difficult times for graduates.
- **The opportunity for the GCA**
  - To be the connection, the linkage and the respected body.
  - Help promote our efforts and positive news stories.
  - Potential new revenue streams to help our funding.
- **How can we bring these opportunities together to benefit all?**

# The Open Call initiative

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- GCA Graduate Open Call is being launched to support recruitment into the industry and to raise the profile of greeting cards with the designers and senders of tomorrow!
- The aim of this project is to develop a pathway for graduates wishing to come into the greeting card industry i.e. work placements, set advisory benchmarks, industry information and standards to engaging with both art and design academia, pre and post graduates and for GCA members to be able to connect with new arts graduates.
- To tell our story and market the results to the consumer, retailer and wider media alike.
- Help in part, give the industry some of the respect and kudo's it deserves,
- So what could that look like?

# The Open Call in a nutshell – How it could look

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- **An annual showcase**
  - GCA Graduate Open Call would be as a minimum an annual graduate showcase, offering a curated set of portfolios, sourced and selected by the industry from the multitude of degree shows locally and nationally in the UK. Focussing on those we think offer a specific aptitude for the category.
  - This could be a virtual portfolio as well as physical showcase hosted by the GCA.
  - From here graduates can be contacted by members for placement or other projects.
  - Universities, graduates or publishers who want to collaborate can be listed and connected.
- **Give Information and set standards**
  - Developed by a GCA steering group of members to help, the publisher, academic or graduate.
  - Inc. Industry breakdowns, historic facts n figures and design, best practice on graduate placements, mentoring, rates of pay and fee's, IP, licensing etc..
  - This has a value and is a possible revenue stream for the GCA
- **Awareness, marketing and tell our story**
  - Tell the story. From all POV's, we try to open ways of making the most of your success's.
  - Improve and increase the profile of our products and industry.

# The Open Call – What it's not & and is!

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- Interfering with existing process's and plans. Hopefully complementing.
- Telling anyone how to suck their creative eggs. Hopefully help hatch a few new.
- About putting anyone in competition with each other or giving away secrets.
  
- Its hopefully, fun, symbiotic and collaborative
- Its about us all chipping in and helping all the work for the benefit of all!



# It's not just me

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- Let's hear the stories from others...
- Publishers
- Art & Design Education
- Graduates

# A retailers point of view

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- **Jo Bennett – Studio Manager - Card Factory**
- *“The greeting card industry has a long way to go to improve the perception within the graduate world....being seen as a low pay, low brow industry. The only way to break down these perceptions is to get involved, to nurture & support the great British talent we have on our doorstep, which ironically is valued more across the world than it is here”.*

# A publishers point of view

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- **Martin Powderly – Partner, Pigment Publishing**

- *Attracting talent to our industry is more difficult than previously so this is a welcome initiative.*
- *Although this is something we already do up to a point, I'd be keen to give Open Call interns a slot in our studio.*
- *I see this initiative as a useful recruitment tool.*
- **From those experiences Martin also discussed some of his requirements...**
- *Not just illustration but graphic, compositional and typographic skills are good.*
- *Maybe we can feed these requirements back to the universities.*
- *Local is good.*
- *I think we should pay the interns a fair fee, to help them financially and to be clear on issues re IP.*
- *In the main we just need enthusiasm, and an innate interest /passion for paper products.*

# Creating pathways – with Poet & Painter

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- **Lucy Creed – Director, Poet & Painter shared a recent successful experience**
- *Recently we made a conscious decision to work with an illustration graduate for a few clear reasons.*
- *We wanted a young, fresh mind to bring a youthful experience and energy, and who would be open to learning from our experience in the industry. Tech wise we wanted someone who was super quick on photoshop and In-design so that we could focus on growing the business.*
- *We advertised on the local Uni and art school websites we were inundated with applications. The applicants who stood out were those with a rich portfolio, an enquiring mind, a positive attitude and a sense of humour. I've learned that with any recruitment you are committing to the person rather than the CV.*
- *Ness was flexible with hours as she was building her own portfolio and design practice, so she worked on a freelance basis around 3-4 days a week which gave us all flexibility.*
- *I was conscious to involve Ness in meetings with stockists and business development meetings so she could develop her professional experience.*
- *It was wonderful to see her grow in confidence and ability over her time with us both creatively and professionally, and we also learned from her as she brought a fresh perspective to our design planning, a couple of Ness's designs have become some of our top sellers!*
- *Consequently we also offer work experience to graduates, which has given us a chance to see them in action and in most cases we will their keep details on our books for freelance work and it gives the graduate a useful addition to their CV.*

# The graduates point of view

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- **Ness Williams – Illustrator , Graduate of Falmouth University and now working with Poet & Painter**
- *“Working with Poet and Painter has been no doubt one of the best opportunities that could have happened to me having had abruptly finished my degree in Illustration BA at Falmouth University during the pandemic.”*
- *“I could not have imagined how far I would progress in my creative skillset and business skills within just over a year being there. Strengthening abilities in line work with being truly authentic to the traditional drawing process in which each card is treated as an individual piece, gaining a better understanding of colours and composition which has strengthened my abilities using the Adobe Suite, as well as acquiring a deep understanding of the greetings card industry with trips to Trade Shows and working with various clients internationally.*
- *“I feel I have been creatively and professionally nurtured my expertise throughout the whole time being there”.*

# Creating pathways – with Hallmark

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- One great example of a business who proactively uses graduate placement as a part of their creative and product development as well as recruitment process is Hallmark.
- Actively sponsoring the New Designers Show for c. 25 years by offering an Award and running an all year around graduate placement process within their HQ, as part of a team known as the future squad!
- **Here are some stats they've shared from over the years?**
- At c. 25 years Hallmark are New Designers longest serving sponsor.
- They work with around 4-5 colleges and universities annually, setting projects - from which their undergraduate placements also come from.
- They have had approx. 20 -25 placements per year. c 350 placements over the last 25 years.
- The vast majority of their design team have some connection with Hallmark via New Designers or university projects.
- Recently we slowed the pace to 8-10 a year, this is to be more targeted and succinct in what we do and this also means we can provide more guidance and nurturing through the process.
- During lock down re ran some university projects projects virtually reaching over 80 students in one brief from the UK, China and Sweden.

# Creating pathways – with Hallmark

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- **Eve Gray - Creative Development Director said...**
- *“During our placements we try to encourage the graduate to think of the connection to what they’re creating, or the “send”, in effect to consider the essence of why we send cards. We like to start with just developing great ideas in an unrestricted way, which we then look to commercialise later. In essence it’s a two way opportunity where we learn about them and their “handwriting” and together we consider how it can be applied, and hopefully from us they learn about the industry and process.’*
- *“We are really proud of what we do in terms of our grad programme and working with colleges, supporting and educating the next generation of talent. Caring is one of our core brand values, so to be able to do something practical that cares for other creatives and is mutually beneficial is just really rewarding.”*
- **Product, Creative & Marketing Director Rachel Goodman added...**
- *“We like to see ourselves as a pathway to the industry. From a placement, to guided freelance to work, to contract or licensing. Within this it’s important to avoid misunderstanding by clearly setting out ways of how you’re supporting them during the placements, paying for their time and work if intend to publish it; and how it works going forwards.”*

# The graduates point of view

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- **Recent Leeds Uni graduates comments re Hallmark scheme**
- *“I was really inspired by the people I met at Hallmark, everyone was really lovely and they made me think differently about my work. I was also really inspired because doing something similar in the future would be what I want to do”.*
- *“I had the perfect amount of feedback sessions. I always find it really helpful to talk about my work with others to bounce ideas off and the feedback sessions really helped direct my project”.*
- *“My placement was motivating, challenging, eye opening”.*
- *“During my time at Hallmark I really felt supported in growing my self-confidence and proved this to myself during the final presentation”.*
- *“I was supported throughout and kept reminding myself that I was on placement to learn - rather than to know everything already. Reminding myself this was useful, it helped ease my worries about whether I deserved to be on placement and get rid of imposter syndrome”.*



# The academic point of view

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- **Ian Whadcock, Senior Lecturer Manchester Metropolitan University BA(Hons) Illustration with Animation Course**
- *“With a growing emphasis on the employability and graduate outcomes of our students, we increasingly recognise industry mentorship often via work placement as the most impactful intervention into the professional practice development of our students and curriculum”*
- **Tracy Allanson-Smith, Visual Communication Employability Coordinator, Birmingham Institute of Creative Arts**
- *”Showcasing the talents of our illustration students and graduates across the spectrum of the UK’s vast creative education spectrum will not just have a huge impact on individual publishers but in potentially reshaping the greetings card industry.”*

# How can you get involved and help?

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- **We'd like to paint a picture of what's happening in the current market, understand your views, and current process's.**
- Please contact myself or Amanda if you...
  - Have any ideas, thoughts or queries on this initiative.
  - Whether commercial, creative or marketing related. Re. IP, fee's, legal and other requirements or standards we need to set, or issues to solve.
  - If you offer or would like to offer work placements, or do other forms of work, commissioning, projects or competitions with pre and post graduates or universities?
  - If you have any stories you'd like to share of current success's?
  - We'd love to hear from you to help build a initiative that's realistic, helps all and and builds a picture the GCA can help support and promote.
  - Appreciate your busy, I'm happy to have a chat and take notes.
- Or
- If you'd like to be part of our Open Call steering group please let us know by 14th October?
- We'll shortly be arranging some meetings and calls to this off kick off.
- We're also looking for those interested in scouting and helping select graduates from next years degree and student shows in June/July whether regionally or in London, or generally just being a part?

# Meet the graduates

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- And finally...
- The graduates you may have seen in the reception today are all illustration graduates selected at New Designers show in July. They are from three Universities; Manchester Metropolitan, Birmingham City and Nottingham Trent.
- I'd like to thank them all for taking the time in attending this prototype Open Call event today.
- Hopefully this is the first of many events in years ahead whether physical or online where we can link the industry to the talent as the initiative grows each year.
- I'd also like to thank their lecturers who have also given their time today to support and been invaluable in helping shape this initiative to date in a series of meetings, calls and interviews in the last few months.
- I'd also like to thank the many publishers who have already offered their support, let me know their thoughts and made placement pledges, as well as signing up to help shape this initiative into something that benefits us all going forwards.
- We'll share a full list of all today's graduates (inc. social media and website details) in coming days so you can contact directly if wish, but for those who haven't seen them here's a brief taster.

Poppy Loughtman









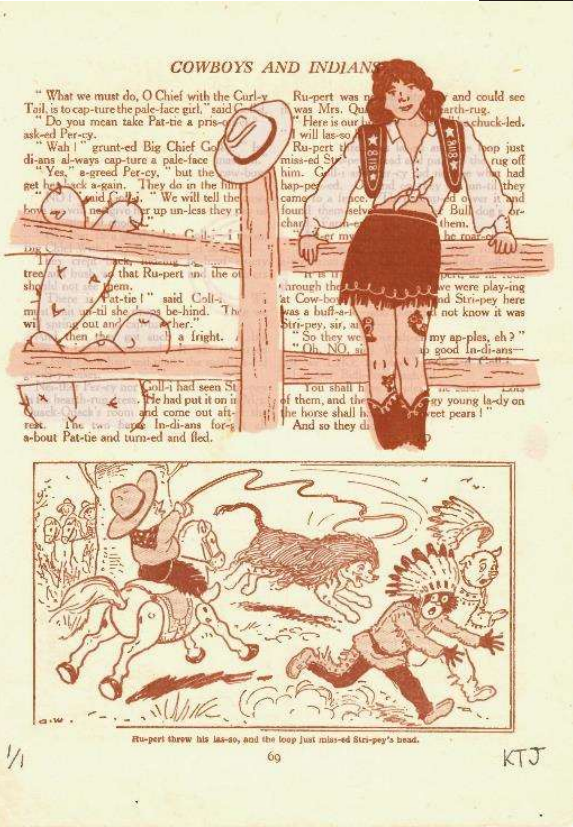


Meg Pratchett

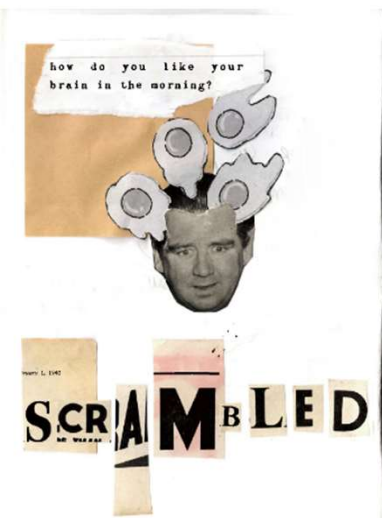




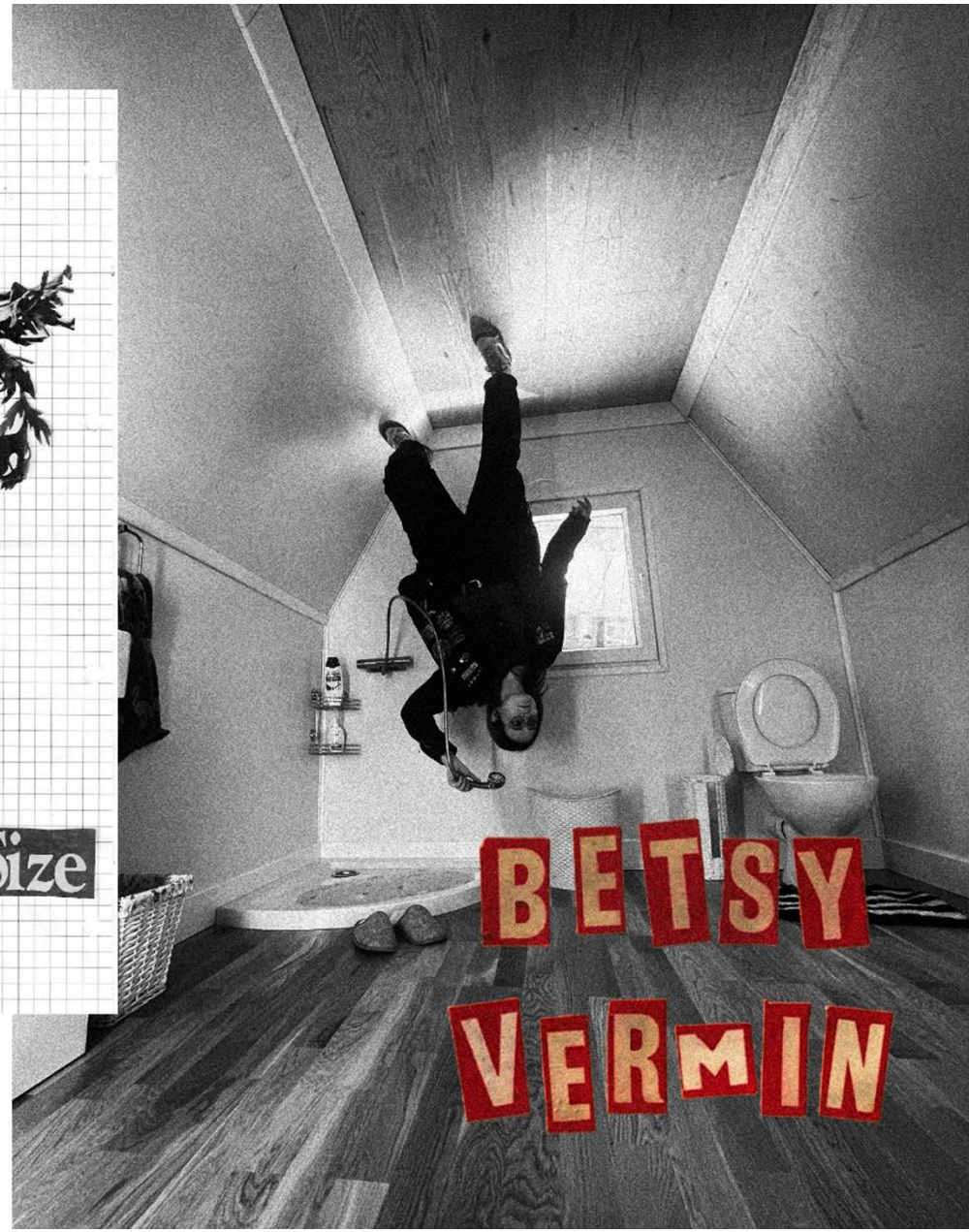
Katie Jones







Beth Vernon





Kirsty Topley



