

The Snug Sessions

No.4 – The New Workforce

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The Snug Sessions

Introduction

At Derwent London we believe that getting to the essence of places and buildings for people and business in a changing world is as much an art as a science.

The Snug Sessions exist to explore the art – as well as the science and humanities – of spaces and places now and in the future. The aim is to define new directions and forge positive pathways in an intelligent, cross-disciplinary and human-centred way.

‘Poetry is nearer the vital truth than history,’ wrote Plato (it is thought) in around 380 BC. So, to get the heart of the matter we asked modern-day poet Rhael LionHeart Cape to convene conversations with friends and collaborators.

In 2022, six sessions addressing different facets of our built environments were filmed at the Snug in DL/78 in Charlotte Street W1 – a convivial Derwent workplace setting designed for exploring ideas through dialogue.

Buildings and spaces don’t exist in a vacuum, they reflect people, feelings, cultures and expertise. Neither are they static – good buildings need to flex and adapt with the world as it changes. To borrow from the words of visionary thinker Stewart Brand, our buildings and spaces need to learn. Because what we do now ripples into the future.

Welcome to the Snug Sessions No. 4:

The New Workforce

At a glance

- Check out the mentoring principles behind the [Greater London Authority's New Deal For Young People](#).
- Organisations like [Young Westminster Foundation](#) help businesses to **engage with young people and communities** through programmes including [Mastering My Future](#).
- **Social enterprises** like [2-3 Degrees](#) support young people aged 14–25 across the UK into work with workshops and programmes. They also provide training and consultancy services to the corporate sector on **attracting and engaging young talent**.
- **Apprenticeship schemes** like [Multiverse](#) exist to help match young talent with businesses.
- Find out more about [10,000 Black Interns](#).

The Snug Sessions - The New Workforce

In this Snug Session, the spotlight is on how to create more balanced, diverse and fulfilled future workforces. With an emphasis on encouraging and attracting new-generation talent, poet LionHeart is joined by Matira Wheeler – Director of Strategy and Communications at Young Westminster Foundation, Oyin Olaoshun – Programme Manager at 2–3 Degrees, and Helen Joscelyne – Derwent London’s Community & Social Value Manager.

Lionheart wants to know – from the perspective of someone who once struggled to find himself in the world of architecture – how today’s businesses are helping people like his younger self find their feet in the world of work?



Derwent London Youth Engagement event

According to Matira, the current mindset around attracting and engaging talent is best summed up by the African proverb ‘It takes a village to raise a child’. Businesses, she says, are part of a wider social ecosystem and are increasingly aware of the role they play as part of communities. “The charity I work for is all about collaboration around the challenges faced by young people, whether that’s employability, mental health or youth violence. From my perspective, businesses need to be working alongside schools, charities and youth organisations – listening and responding. And what young people are telling us now is that insecure work doesn’t make them feel great – we all need to be listening to that.”

“The industries prepared to listen will be the ones that have the edge in future – at the end of the day we need to remember that happy and healthy workforces benefit everyone”, says Helen Josceleyne

Helen comments that to attract and engage the best young people, businesses need to be listening to what that new generation wants – and that includes a new emphasis on wellbeing and work-life balance. “The industries prepared to listen will be the ones that have the edge in future – at the end of the day we need to remember that happy and healthy workforces benefit everyone,” she says.

Reinventing recruitment

Oyin agrees, making the point that young people want to work and be part of things – just as businesses want to be inclusive and diverse – but they might not yet know how. “A lot of young people need a framework – they may have boundless energy and creativity but they might need the routine and structure of working life to channel it.”

But what about the boundaries created by the hiring process itself? LionHeart asks. Observing that the typical interview format of a three-person panel is a particularly narrow template, he wants to hear the group’s ideas for new ways of attracting diverse strengths – which may come with non-stereotypical communication styles.

Matira believes the onus is now firmly on employers to develop open and inclusive recruitment practices, looking beyond the characteristics of their existing talent pools. “There is a lot of support out there for businesses today in the form of programmes like our Mastering My Future initiative,” she observes. Employers could also be investigating alternative routes in through placements, she says – as well as simple tweaks like sharing questions before interviews or setting tasks. “With all of these steps, the end goal is a more diverse workplace with better ideas – which makes total business sense.”

For Oyin, too, there’s no excuse for not looking beyond the usual channels for talent. She cites an apprenticeship scheme called Multiverse: “The format is that young jobseekers answer a few written questions about themselves, but they also have the option of uploading a video – which is great because it covers different communication styles. One example I saw, for instance, asked candidates how they would make a cup of tea in the most creative way. Rethinking the traditional interview format does take a bit of effort, but I can assure you the results will be worth it!”



2022/23 Derwent London Apprentices

Helen observes that a lot of business recruitment language is about the idea of ‘fit’ – “But does that mean the same as you’ve already got or the bit that’s missing?,” she asks. Describing how Derwent has started to work with different types of recruiters as well as pushing back with existing ones if the same types of CVs keep turning up, she says: “What we’re striving for is more creative ways of finding out if someone can offer something we don’t already have.”

Gamechangers

Everyone agrees that work experience and mentoring are gamechangers on both sides. For businesses, says Matira, the thing to remember is that not all young people have a take on the world of work. In fact, she observes, many young people will have no idea at all about the 100s of jobs and roles taking place behind the walls of the offices and workplaces they walk past.

While agreeing that the idea of work experience is great in principle, LionHeart wonders if for some, like himself, it might prove too prescriptive a route.

“Should there be a culture of more options and more time for young people to try things out?”, suggests LionHeart

From Helen’s viewpoint this is already happening. “I agree that career advice was traditionally very linear, very prescriptive, and that people used to be siloed until retirement by the exams they took at 16 or 18,” she says. “But the good news is that young people today are actively encouraged to experience as many workplaces as possible to find out where they’ll land.” She describes how Derwent now offer 1-day and 2-week placements and are also taking part in the 10,000 Black Interns programme for the first time this year, offering 6-week placements. “Other ways we’re trying to open up our world include sponsoring students through professional studies at The Bartlett School of Architecture and Reading Real Estate Foundation,” she adds.

But for the young LionHeart, it was the experience of having a mentor that really clicked. “When I saw how it opened up my mindset, I wanted as much as possible,” he remembers. “So, how can teenagers nowadays be encouraged to find a mentor – and how can people with experience be encouraged to mentor?”



“If you’re employed by a company or organisation that doesn’t offer the opportunity to mentor in the community, I think you should be asking why not,” says Matira. “Mentoring is fundamental to equality of opportunity and is key to the GLA’s New Deal for Young People, for instance. For young people, the positive thing is that it’s about meeting them wherever they happen to be at – whether that’s discussing a small hang-up or pursuing a big goal. It’s a two-way relationship, with mentors and businesses both learning.”

Helen notes that from a young person’s perspective, those already in the workforce might appear to have all the answers. “In fact, both parties in mentoring are equally likely to be thinking: ‘How is this going to work?’. The things we say to mentees – like ‘give it a go’ – are actually things we need to keep reminding ourselves of too.”

Oyin is keen to acknowledge that both mentor and mentee will need to step out of their comfort zone. “I think you can’t overestimate how much encouragement and repetitive, positive language some young people will need – but they will be persuaded to dive in. I love that aspect of our programmes.”

Give and take

LionHeart is curious to hear about the group's own experiences of mentoring. For Oyin, acting as a mentor in her early 20s was career defining. "I had just graduated and was working in Top Shop – so my life was by no means sorted. But I found that I was good at mentoring, and I think that's because I was just being myself. My mentee was 12 and living in Elephant and Castle and what she wanted to do was to go to the cinema and Nando's. I think the fact that I just showed up on a consistent basis was really important – that's the value for many young people. We're still in touch, and I know I've had a positive impact on her life even though I had very little career experience myself at the time."

Matira, in contrast, talks about the value of being mentored. "The impact of stepping out of my normal working week was quite profound. It was a special space and time that encouraged me to think differently, with one-to-one aspect creating a safe space for exploring ideas. It helped me to realise that there isn't one linear route to a



BCO NextGen event at The Featherstone Building EC1

dream job – there are lots of different routes and things go wrong and things go sideways but that's okay."

Helen says she didn't have a mentor at school but thinks it would have been a huge help. "Sometimes just being able to speak to someone outside of your normal bubble is all it takes to open up thought processes – it's incredible what a little bit of distance can do, and how it can bring a greater sense of perspective."

Advice in a nutshell

To conclude the conversation, LionHeart asks the group for bite-sized advice to both young people and businesses.

For Helen it's 'give it a go'. "To young people I'd say try work experience for a week, two weeks or even just a day as part of a group. It will make a difference and you will start to formulate ideas about your future. In fact I'd say the same thing to businesses – everyone at Derwent London is amazed by how much they get out of engaging with young people and communities."

Matira says her advice to young people is to ask questions and be curious. "I'd encourage young people to engage with what might be going on behind the façades of all those workplace buildings – and to just get into the habit of finding out a bit more about the person next to them. To employers, I'd say please just get involved in mentoring and communities." And Oyin's advice to both young people and employers is to do what you usually wouldn't. "It's so easy not to move out of the comfort zone of our normal week or month – but if an opportunity pops up, take it!"



Group visit to Soho Place W1 from 2-3 Degrees Mastering My Future programme

Click here to checkout the [video](#) or [podcast](#).