



UX
Design
Institute

Industry Advisory Council Meeting Minutes

15 October 2020



Industry Advisory Council



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The UX Design Institute's latest Industry Advisory Council meeting took place on October 15th, 2020, remotely.

The aims of the meeting were to:

- Give members a progress report since the last meeting
- Have a roundtable discussion on the user research syllabus
- Have a roundtable discussion on how Covid-19 affects UX practice
- Have a roundtable discussion on transitioning to UX later in your career
- Have a roundtable discussion on job title trends in the UX landscape
- Discuss any other business

The Industry Advisory Council members in attendance were:

Colman Walsh, *Founder and CEO of the UX Design Institute*

Denis Cullinane, *Senior Manager User Experience at Dell Technologies*

Becca Finnegan, *UX Researcher at Facebook*

Goran Peuc, *Principal UX Designer at SAP*

Ronan Costello, *Senior Manager of Digital Platforms and Services at Virgin Media*

Catherine Wilson, *Lead UX Strategy Designer at Aer Lingus*

Brian Herron, *Principal Designer and Director at Each&Other*

Tim Bicknell, *Founder at Deep Cove*

Gareth Dunlop, *CEO at Fathom*

Garry Cleere, *Managing Director at Complivero*

Frank Gaine, *Lead Designer at Frontend.com*

Denise Leahy, *Quality Chair of IAC, formerly Associate Professor of Computer Science at Trinity College Dublin*

Dara Boland, *Enterprise Sales at Hubspot, formerly Associate Director at Morgan McKinley*

Industry Advisory Council members not in attendance:

Tansy Murray, *Vice President at Mastercard*

Ruairí Galavan, *Senior Manager of Customer Engagement at Intercom*

Chiara Henderson, *Senior Manager of Customer Success EMEA at LinkedIn*

Mark Mulhall, *Senior Experience Designer at Verizon Connect*

Lynne Doran, *Senior UX Researcher at HubSpot*



Becca Finnegan
UX Researcher
Facebook



Denis Cullinane
Senior Manager
User Experience
Dell Technologies



Dara Boland
Enterprise Sales
Hubspot



Gareth Dunlop
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Tim Bicknell
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Frank Gaine
Lead Designer
Frontend.com



Garry Cleere
Managing Director
Complivero



Brian Herron
Principal Designer
and Director
Each&Other



Goran Peuc
Principal UX Designer
SAP



Ronan Costello
Senior Manager of Digital
Platforms and Services
Virgin Media



Colman Walsh
Founder and CEO
UX Design Institute



Denise Leahy
Quality Chair of IAC
Formerly Associate Professor
of Computer Science
Trinity College Dublin



Council summary

1. Welcome

Colman Walsh welcomed everyone to the latest Industry Advisory Council of the UX Design Institute and thanked them for their time. It took place remotely due to Covid-19.

2. Progress report

Colman told the IAC that student numbers have continued to grow despite Covid-19.

He announced that the Professional Diploma in UX Design is doing well from a quality perspective too, being ranked no.1 on [SwitchUp](#), an online course review aggregator website.

Colman then moved onto the roundtable discussions.

3. Roundtable discussion - User research syllabus

Colman told the IAC that their feedback informed the Professional Certificate in Visual Design. The UX Design Institute and course creator Brian Herron (Principal Designer and Director at Each&Other) now wanted to get their input on the upcoming user research course.

Brian gave the IAC a description of each module and explained the rationale behind each one.

Finally, he asked the IAC if they had any feedback on the high-level syllabus. Overall, the IAC had positive feedback and offered some suggestions on the structure and content of particular elements.



4. Roundtable discussion

- How Covid-19 affects UX practice

IAC members have been working remotely for more than six months now due to Covid-19. Colman asked them to discuss their biggest challenges, and wanted to learn how their UX practice is faring remotely.

Remote user research is effective but limiting

There were mixed views about practicing remote user research. Some IAC members found it more restrictive because insights gained from in-person research are lacking.

Becca told the IAC: “We’re maybe isolating certain segments or demographics because we’re relying on people having a laptop or a certain type of phone. There are a lot of tradeoffs. I don’t think you get as full a picture as when you’re meant to do full ethnographic research. When I worked at Deliveroo, we were able to sit in peoples’ cars and watch them use our app.”

Missing the personal connection

Aside from missing in-person user research, many IAC members found that they missed working with colleagues in-person too.

While Catherine loves remote working, she finds that important meetings are more impactful in-person. She told the group, “...people start multitasking and putting themselves on mute when people are giving presentations. It’s much harder remotely and when people are getting fatigued with seeing everything online.”

Frank Gaine also enjoys working from home but he’s currently considering renting a co-working space one day per week. He explained that he’s “missing interaction and seeing humanity. I guess designers by their very nature need stimulus, it’s an altruistic human job.”



Are graduates and juniors at a disadvantage?

Many IAC members are concerned that graduates are disadvantaged in the remote environment as coaching and communication are more challenging.

Goran Peuc's company cancelled their 2021 intern intake "because it's nearly impossible to coach juniors purely remotely. It's doable when you can see if they're struggling sitting behind their computer, and can have a quick five minute session with them. You can't keep continually booking phone calls with them to do the basics."

Brian Herron mentioned that they hired for a number of graduate positions at Each&Other, but "they're more like juniors than interns. I think they're going to excel [in this environment] because they didn't need quite as much very early stage coaching."

Denis Cullinane thinks it depends on the individual: "We've a lot of grads who've started in the last three or four months who we've never met face-to-face, and they're actually loving it. Others you have to put in a lot of effort with communication. You're video conferencing a lot, trying to fill that communication gap."

There isn't one reality about remote working

It was difficult for the IAC to draw one conclusion about how UX is faring in the remote world, it has its pros and cons.

Flexible working will probably become commonplace post-Covid. For Ronan Costello, the industry is now in a phase of "setting up for the future for flexible working, which is a very different thing to rapidly setting up at your kitchen table."

Denis said that Dell was already accustomed to remote working but "50 per cent have signed up for full-time remote working since the pandemic started - they're in it for the long term."

Gareth Dunlop pointed out that UX professionals are the lucky ones: "We could be working in retail or hospitality but circumstances find us in an industry where we can continue to work, get paid, feed families, pay mortgages and so on."



5. Roundtable discussion

- Transitioning to UX later in your career

Colman described how many UX Design Institute students in their 30s to 50s are hoping to move to UX design from other professions. He asked the IAC if these students could avoid starting at the bottom of the career ladder.

Relevant transferable skills are welcomed

The committee agreed that transferable skills and experience are desirable. References to the T-shaped professional model were made throughout this roundtable.

Brian said that “if someone is converting to UX and their T-shaped skill fits in with what you’re doing, that transfer is a lot easier. If you want to continue your career, you’ll need something that fits in with the industry and the digital space in some way. If you’re restarting and rebooting your career then you probably have to adjust your expectations in my opinion.”

Frank is of the opinion that it’s more to do with how you pitch yourself. He advises these UX students that, “it’s almost like you are adding this to your armory rather than redefining yourself completely now as a UX professional, completely forgetting your past experience.” Frank didn’t come from a traditional design background but he wrote about UX to “increase perception of my authority.”

Recruitment can be a barrier

Recruitment practices were flagged as a potential barrier to entering the UX industry.

For Dara Boland, the main issue is that: “there’s a disconnect from what senior levels might say and what actually happens in a recruitment funnel. I think the recruitment model is designed to find the right candidate for the job but it gets there by quickly filtering out and eliminating people from the process.”

This system can sometimes work against older job applicants.

He reckons recruiters should be coached to identify “what a wild card entry might look like and types of people you might consider outside of the norm or job spec.”



Ageism in the tech industry

This roundtable discussed how ageism is a problem in the tech industry as a whole.

Gareth voiced his concerns: “It’s one of the most ageist industries for reasons I can’t understand. We seem to be entirely blind to it. I don’t know why it doesn’t get talked about more or argued about more. We’ve defined it in a way that suits us and there’s an elephant in the room, an attitude towards variety and age.”

40 year old Brian Herron noticed that “60 percent of the clients that hire me are younger than me now but they buy experience from us. There’s a lot to be said for the lived perspective. I think that’s a valuable thing to keep in mind, UX is a good skill to have on top of something underneath.”

Denise Leahy said that “We all have to appreciate the mature person regardless of what their background is. They’re bringing so much.”

6. Roundtable discussion - Job title trends in the UX landscape

Colman told the IAC that many students are confused by job titles in the UX landscape. He asked them what trends they’re seeing in their organisations.

Goran said that at SAP “Research for us is a separate track. Designers will be given more and more responsibilities until they become a full stack product designer.”

Ronan outlined the landscape at Virgin Media: “We lean heavily on agency resources for UX, but we still procure support from specialists. We bring on individual roles for UX designers and UX researchers, so we haven’t got to a generalist or product design type space. We need very specific resources for very specific projects and tasks, this is starting to mirror in our development team as well.”



Denis explained that they are product designers at Dell: “We are product designers, title-wise. It’s a loose term but there are levels. It’s not unusual for designers to “start off in a traditional UX design role and get more into research.”

Colman asked the IAC if a product designer is an experienced generalist.

Denis replied “I think it depends. Sometimes they are, and I can only speak about our organisation, but there are a lot of UX generalists. And even within Dell there are people who are very specialist. I don’t think there’s a single answer here.”

Conclusion

Colman thanked the council members for their time and said that hopefully the next meeting could be held in person.

