Reflective Report

Throughout this module, I have developed a range of skills that have improved my design expertise and professional conduct. The projects I have undertaken have helped me to understand what is required for different design roles and have given me valuable experience in areas of design I am passionate about. When managing projects and choosing briefs, I was able to select roles and projects that appealed to my interests and would therefore be influential in my career. Working on these professional projects also developed my skill set for working with clients and real-world challenges. The experience gained was therefore valuable and relevant to my field of design.

Before delving into projects, its important to think about how they could relate to my future career and how to get the most value out of them. This ensures the work and skill set links to my professional ambitions. The Ikigai and future job description helped me with this. These two exercises got me thinking about my future and the roles I wanted to explore as a designer. Having previously thought about my direction and future job opportunities, I had a rough understanding of what I enjoyed, what I was good at, and the areas in which I wanted to explore further. However, the Ikigai helped me pull these ideas together and think about what gave me meaning. My purpose and where I fit in as a designer were something that I had never considered but is an important aspect of design and professional life. The future job description was good because it helped me to pinpoint a role that I could strive for. As a very specific exercise, it made me think about the skills I would need to develop and the quantifiable requirements such as experience and academic grades.

The work in identifying my future aims and thinking about career goals was important when it came to starting the first project. I had identified that I wish to take on a UX/UI job and that I want to tackle real-world issues and modern problems. I wanted to join a small company or business and grow professionally as the business grows. Issues such as climate change, connecting people and helping others less fortunate than me were the prominent themes. I uncovered that I would enjoy a semi-managerial job that allowed frequent travel and required creativity. A UX role was an initial preference but I was not fixed on it and remained open minded. I enjoy UX but have previously found myself heavily invested in industrial design projects and model making. Undertaking a UX project would allow me to better my interface design skills and I would be satisfied that the work will contribute to my goals. However, If I undertook an industrial project, I would be focusing on model making and prototyping which I could really enjoy and want to pursue further. Both style of projects was open to me at this point but UX was preferable.

When it came to choosing the first (internal) project, I looked for a problem area that tackled one of the themes I was interested in. Not a lot of information was given about the roles or tasks required in each project, but I knew it would be mainly up to me and my group to delegate job roles and guide the project in a relevant direction for our future goals. I selected the 'collaboration between students' project. I chose this one because it clearly involved improving collaboration and one of the areas that I wanted to tackle was connecting people. I had also considered whether this was a UX project or not and concluded that it would depend on what the client wanted, but UX was sure to have a role in the project as a collaboration interface relies heavily on UX design. When I chose my second (external) project, I initially wanted to work on the 'wellbeing room' because from the information talks, it seemed to involve a more hands-on design process and include physical products. I thought it would allow me to make physical models and work within the UX realm to create a real space. However, this was evidently an interior design-heavy project, which I had no interest in. Also, questions arose as to how much involvement in physical making this project would have. This was a large-scale project that required time and given the current situation, I knew making the space would have to be a future endeavour outside of this project. Instead, I was assigned my second choice project of 'Support Local'. This project appealed to me because the decline of local shops is very much a modern-day problem that can be accredited to the convenience of online shopping and retail giants. It was also clear in the information talk that UI would be a prominent factor to this project. Support Local is a small company which I preferred and there would be an opportunity to manage meetings and control separate elements of the project, which I wanted to explore. Reflecting back, I am very grateful that I was able to take on this project and I think the skills gained are far more oriented to my design pathway than any other project.

Fig.01 - Support Local (2021) Retrieved from:
https://www.facebook.com/supportlocalbrighton/

My aims in terms of development in skills and expertise included improving professional conduct and working with clients, furthering my knowledge of UX/UI design, uncovering if I enjoyed managing people, and learning about social media and promotional material. Throughout the projects, I planned my work and participated in many tasks that helped towards these goals. Some of my aims remain unachieved and require more work but other aims have been targeted, and my skillset developed to meet them. Firstly, improving my professional conduct was a particular focus with my second (external) project. To meet this goal, I made sure to maintain a professional manner from the outset. The first project taught me how important it was to set up concrete communication and project requirements at the start. In the second project, this took the form of Email and an early project proposal. I also made sure to participate actively in all meetings with the client and reflect on conclusions from meetings and communications. As a group we shared out slides, questions, and topics to talk about when meeting with the client. This was a fair way of making sure we all engaged with the client and I am happy with my conduct during client meetings. Ensuring the clients wants and needs are heard was also an important method of improving professional conduct. To do this, we always met after a client meeting to discuss conclusions and occasionally I transcribed an interview.

Fig.02 - J, Dartnell. B, Davies. J, Childs. J, Le Roux. L, Fitzsimmons. (2021)

My knowledge in UX/UI design was built upon in both projects. The first project was vastly UX-based, taking the form of a digital application that better allowed students to collaborate. During this project, I was tasked with researching UX design, ideating possible ideas, and collaborating to develop a solution. The UX design research helped with this project a lot and will also help in my future career because it showed me desirable interface traits and taught me how important considering your user is to create seamless user experiences. Ideating possible solutions also taught me methods that I can use in future professional life. We used the 635 method which is great for creating several designs quickly. I also sketched a design on paper to improve my sketching skills. A knowledge of sketching will be useful to quickly communicate my ideas in a UX context, in future life. Collaborating with my team and drawing our ideas together was valuable for me as it taught me to work with others with a common goal in mind. This will be a useful experience when a group project inevitably arises in my career.

Fig.03 – (2021) Authors own image.

I managed my team during elements of both projects but not comprehensively. I led sessions and took control of meetings occasionally but was never the team leader. When I oversaw the first session of the second project, I made an agenda for the meeting which we were able to follow. I enjoyed helping the team and leading meetings but realised I would not enjoy having that responsibility every day. Overall, I would consider the aim of uncovering whether I enjoyed managing people partially met. However, one aim I did not meet was managing social media. This is because the project took another direction due to time constraints. If I could do the project again, I would try to add an element of social media management, to give me a basic understanding. This would not require many work hours but would give me a foundation of knowledge to build upon. Other than that issue, I think my time was spent productively to inform my future career plans and give me a wealth of knowledge to take into future life.