

PLACED Digital Academy  
Report 2020





## Foreword

2020 was a challenging year for many, in particular for young people. We witnessed first-hand the uncertainty and precarity young people were experiencing. Our 2019-20 Academy cohort had been forced to quickly adapt to disrupted learning and cancelled exams due to Covid-19 and were anxious about their future.

Our 2019-20 programme demonstrated the ability of the Academy to contribute to the personal, social and professional development of young participants who cared about the places we live. Early in the pandemic, we understood how important it was to continue the delivery of the PLACED Academy.

We quickly embraced digital as a way to continue delivering impactful and meaningful engagement and education programmes, allowing us to successfully deliver the final months of workshops for our first Academy cohort online. The experience led us to develop the Digital Academy, a free to access 10-week online programme about the built environment for 14-18 year olds.

It was important to retain key elements and principles of the first programme that made the PLACED Academy a valuable experience: using the built environment as a basis to increase young people's confidence and

self-belief, developing skills, encouraging collaboration and promoting creativity.

Alongside this, the digital programme continues to reflect our belief in the importance of supporting young people in having their voices heard and enabling them to be active citizens. As with the first Academy, the digital programmes enabled participants to input into live projects in the built environment including policy, housing, landscape, urban design and masterplanning.

It is our priority to support young people under-represented in the built environment in accessing the sector: whether young women, people from marginalised racial and ethnic backgrounds and those from less privileged areas. Only by supporting greater diversity through education can we create better, stronger and more understanding communities who can make a difference. Once again, the Digital Academy saw a diverse intake of participants.

The PLACED Academy brings young people and professionals together, in order for young people to gain a first-hand insight into career routes, pathways and goals. The Digital Academy saw even greater emphasis being placed on individualised support from experts in the field, with incredible support from our Partners, Sponsors and Ambassadors.

The quality of the designs produced by our young people during the programme was exceptional, with compassionate, people-centred projects. The participants' ability to communicate ideas clearly and with enthusiasm resulted in outstanding presentations. This was the perfect example of what difference empowering young people to believe in themselves can make.

We are so grateful that you share our vision, and for your support in enabling us to keep delivering impactful educational programmes.

Thank you. You are really helping to make a difference.



# The Participants

We had almost 200 applications for just 30 places on our very first Digital Academy, reflecting the gap in support, guidance and advice caused by Covid. As a result, we decided to run two programmes. The 10-week programmes took place July-September, and October-December 2020 with a total of 62 young participants.

The digital format enabled the Academy to have a national reach, offering a space for committed young people from across the country to collaborate. Whilst many of our participants came from across the North West, some logged in from as far away as Kent.

Area of Origin	Number of Students	Percentage
Liverpool City Region	22	36%
Greater Manchester	17	27%
Leeds	13	21%
Kent	4	6%
Warrington	3	5%
Lancashire	2	3%
Sheffield	1	2%

PLACED are committed to diversifying the voices in the built environment by championing groups that are significantly underrepresented in the built environment, namely young people, people from a range of ethnic backgrounds, and participants from a range of socio-economic backgrounds. 60% of the group were female with one person identifying as non-binary. 40% of the cohort were from Bangladeshi, Chinese, Indian, Black African, Black Caribbean, and mixed ethnicity backgrounds.

“Seeing the group gel over the six weeks was amazing. The impact on their lives in working and getting together with a variety of people from different backgrounds, religions and regions should be beneficial for their future.”

Sponsor and Mentor,  
Andrew de Silva, DMA

# The Participants' Journey

Sessions were delivered online using a variety of tools that helped the group communicate, give feedback and design together in groups. Participants responded to a range of creative briefs, working collaboratively during the sessions and completing homework independently inbetween. Over the course of the 10 weeks, they became more confident and informed young people able to think creatively to solve problems and develop ideas.

## Skills development

Participants at the start of the programme identified that their main priority was to develop skills specific to a career in the built environment. When they graduated, 91% participants said they had developed these skills.

Importantly, 91% of participants also said they developed broad skills that would help them in school, college or university.

**"Even if you don't end up wishing to work in the built environment, I think this is still a really useful and beneficial experience, working with professionals and new people on fun and unique tasks. It gave me a valuable insight into the life working as a professional in the built environment, as well as learning new skills along the way. I think it is a really beneficial and fun scheme for everyone."**

**- Max**

## Improved confidence and self-belief

**95% of our young people said they had increased in confidence. This is particularly important for those who stated they lacked in confidence on starting the course, 92% of whom said that at the end of the course they were "a more confident person."**

The development in their personal confidence also extended to reaching towards their career goals. At the start of the programme, just over half of them were confident they could work in the built environment. By the end of the programme, 93% felt this way.

**"It's an amazing experience and really helped me to come out of my shell."**

**- Lola**

## Relationship building

This growth in self-belief demonstrates the additional social benefits gained from programmes such as the PLACED Academy, in addition to knowledge and skills gained through active learning with their peers.

One of the main benefits identified by participants was the opportunity to make friends. 81% said they now knew more people they could share their interest in the built environment and design with.

**"Seeing all the opportunities, programmes and improvements going on gave me a better insight into how local neighbourhoods work in cities and the importance of community."**

**- Millie**

## Collaboration skills

A common concern expressed by participants at the start of the Digital Academy programmes were worries about working with others that they didn't know. **After ten weeks, 91% said they felt comfortable working with people they did not know and talking about their ideas in front of a group of people.**

**"The Academy has really helped in improving my communication with people of different ages, allowing me to better express my views and opinions."**

**- Ignace**





### Increased citizenship

PLACED advocates for conscious design which positively impacts on and benefits the individuals and communities that use buildings, places and spaces. Many of our participants considered learning about the environmental and social impact of design to be the best part of the programme.

**By the end of the programme, 76% felt they could help to shape decisions about where they live, with 100% saying they now know how the design of towns and cities can impact people.**

**"I now understand the process behind building a community, and how designs can either benefit or disadvantage the people who live there."**

**- Sharmaine**

### Knowledge of the built environment

Initially, most of the students were unsure how places were designed, what the process was or who was involved. **By the time of their graduation, 94% felt they had a good understanding of these issues - a huge outcome for the next generation of place makers.**

### Supporting young people into pathways

Before starting the PLACED Academy, only 55% of our young people felt the career advice they had received so far from school or outside school organisations was helpful.

**At the end of the programme, 98% of students felt they had a better knowledge of career and education routes and 91% felt they had enhanced their application for university or further education.**

**"It has helped me gain confidence and reassured me I can take what education paths I like and still get a career in the built environment. It helped me realise what I like doing, which career I would want to go into, and what my strengths are."**

**- Abigail**

### Contact with industry

Speaking with those working in the sector is critical in helping to shape young people's understanding of the opportunities out there, and the range of pathways available. **72% said the programme gave them an opportunity to make contacts with professionals.**

Working with a wide range of professionals also increased our young people's knowledge of diverse careers in the built environment. During the Digital Academy, project teams were assigned a mentor who closely and regularly supported them. The guidance provided by a professional over an extended period of time allowed participants to be exposed to new ways of thinking and inspiration.

**"From their (the mentors) involvement, I've mainly felt inspiration. I have learned about different careers, their thought processes and how to develop a portfolio."**

**Luke,  
Digital Academy Participant**





# Social Return on Investment

The Digital Academy was made possible by the generous financial support of our four Partners and 14 sponsors. This sponsorship had a significant impact on our participants.

**The Digital Academy generated an incredible Social Value return of £34 for every £1 of sponsorship\*.**

\* Calculated using the HACT Social Value Calculator.

**This calculation includes the value generated from:**

- The positive impact on young participants, specifically the impact on their confidence, on attendance at group activities
- The volunteer contributions, in particular that of mentors
- The delivery of vocational training for young people.





# The Programme

## The Approach

Collaboration, creativity and conversation were at the heart of the Digital Academy. Each week, the group connected online where PLACED set the context for the two-hour session. Ideas were allowed to develop over the course of the programme through guided prompts and activities, enabling participants to explore their perception of spaces, buildings, communities and policies in depth.

The programme was organised into two parts; the first saw participants responding to an independent project, whilst the second was a group project. Briefs were set by PLACED and three of our Partners.

## Independent design project: Community Hub

The first half of each Digital Academy saw participants responding individually to a design brief. During sessions, they worked in groups to develop ideas around the needs of their neighbourhood through discussion and idea generation, then completed an independent design activity at home.

In the autumn Digital Academy, the group considered the Liverpool City Region (LCR) Combined Authority's Spatial Development Strategy (SDS) during the first half of the programme. As a group, they learnt about the LCR's proposed objectives for the City Region's environment, health, quality buildings, economy and social value, and provided feedback on these from the perspective of young people. Their Community Hub designs were then shaped both by the needs of their area, and the LCR objectives.

Both programmes saw inspiring designs and conversations about young peoples' priorities for how they want to live, work, play, and experience their environment.

"Engaging with young people through the Digital Academy was a really innovative and different way to hear the voices of the future. The pandemic, like most things, completely altered the way we could discuss, learn and engage with various groups and so we were really pleased that PLACED were still able to go ahead with their Academy, albeit in a slightly different and virtual format.

Time and time again it brought to focus that our young people passionately care for the environment that they live in and the health of themselves and their families; two key points which are really driving forward the development of the SDS policy."

Emma Dyson, LCRCA



## Group design project: Communities and development

The second half of each Digital Academy was spent developing group designs based on a live project brief. Each group consisted of approximately 6 young people and was assigned a mentor to assist them with their designs.

The Regenda Group provided the summer cohort of participants with a brief for a live housing-led regeneration project. Participants worked in groups to understand the needs of existing and new communities in the area, to enable them to develop a considered design with a mix of housing, amenities and spaces.

The autumn cohort worked in groups to design masterplans in response to a Town Centre development from Public Sector PLC, challenging them to think about what makes a great neighbourhood to live, work and play.



**“It was a great experience and useful to engage with a group of young people who have no preconceptions of the scheme or the area so really came at it with a fresh approach. They managed to focus on core ideas such as sustainability and community as a result”**

**Kate Howe,  
Public Sector PLC**

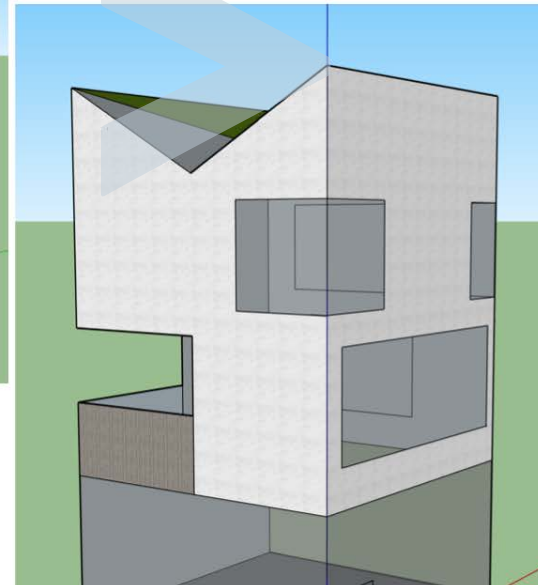
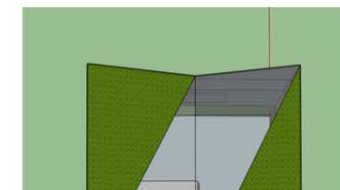
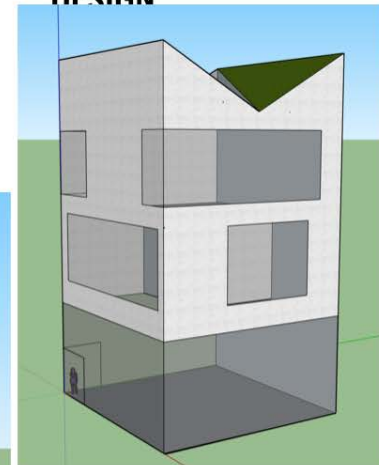
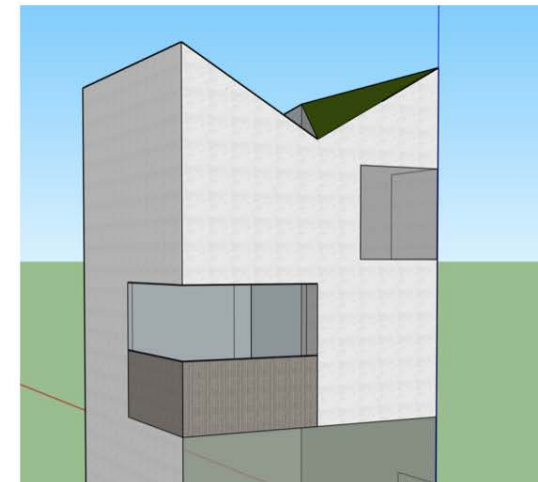
**“It’s such a good experience. Despite ours being online, we learnt so much and met so many people. And it’s extremely beneficial for university applications and just personal growth.”**

**Mitchell**

This project aims to be and fulfill the aim of ensuring cultural and social sustainability. Cultural sustainability is a huge part of architecture and social sustainability is actively supporting the capacity of current and future generations to create healthy and livable communities. These are of course aided by political, economic and environmental sustainability but I believe that, as we become further reliant on technology and social media, that we need to be actively creating social and communal spaces. Only through talking to others and learning will we be able to achieve cultural and social sustainability as well as learning how to solve modern global problems.

**FINAL DESIGN**

*Isobane*  
always seek knowledge



## Presenting Ideas

Participants used a range of methods to communicate their ideas. They were encouraged to draw, make models, collage, research and write using traditional or digital tools. Each group developed ideas together using collaborative software which culminated in a presentation in front of their peers and our supporters, an additional opportunity to increase in confidence and public speaking skills.

We were amazed by the quality and diversity of the designs. The participants showed great resilience and an ability to work together in a digital way. All groups placed people at the heart of their designs and demonstrated an overwhelming awareness of how design can affect the wellbeing and prospects of communities.



# The Extra Mile

The Academy would not be possible without the generous funding from our Partners and Sponsors, along with the practical support during sessions where Partners and Sponsors worked together with our wider Ambassador network. During a period of real uncertainty, in particular for young people, this support has been invaluable.

A crucial aspect of the Academy is connecting young people with students and professionals in the field. Many of our participants told us how valuable this opportunity has been in allowing them to ask questions, learn about careers and create networks to help them in their next steps.

We would like to say a huge thank you to the following Partners and Sponsors who have gone the extra mile in their support.

**“Put yourself forward. It is so much more than a social value activity in the communities you operate. This is real people with creative thinking who challenge you to think differently too. This is our future generation and in a digital world I really learnt new techniques too, whilst giving young people the sense that there are a variety of roles within the Built Environment regardless of your background or where you are based.”**

**Karen Vigar, ISG**

## Live Projects

Our Partners defined the Digital Academy programme by tasking the group with live projects. This invaluable opportunity saw participants providing informed, comprehensive feedback and gave our Partners the rare opportunity to gain in-depth insight from the perspective of young people. The process ensured that Partners were better able to understand the values and perspectives of young people, which are too-often unheard, underestimated or undervalued.

- LCRCA
- Public Sector PLC
- Regenda

## Mentors and volunteers

Throughout the Digital Academies, we were supported by volunteers from our Sponsors and Partners, along with volunteers from our wider Ambassador team. Many supported multiple sessions, enabling young people to meet a diverse range of students and professionals during the first half of the programme.

During the second half of the programme, twelve mentors supported small groups of students over a duration of five or six weeks. This unique opportunity to work closely with professionals helped students to find out more about jobs and pathways in the built environment and provided ongoing support in the cohorts' development. The role also benefited mentors: they felt inspired by the students and got unique access to young people's perspectives on the built environment which in turn helped them to think differently.

Mentor and volunteer:

- Buttress
- David Miller Architects
- FWP
- ISG
- Public Sector PLC

Volunteer:

- ARUP
- FCH
- LCRCA
- Morgan Sindall
- OMI
- Layer
- Planit-IE

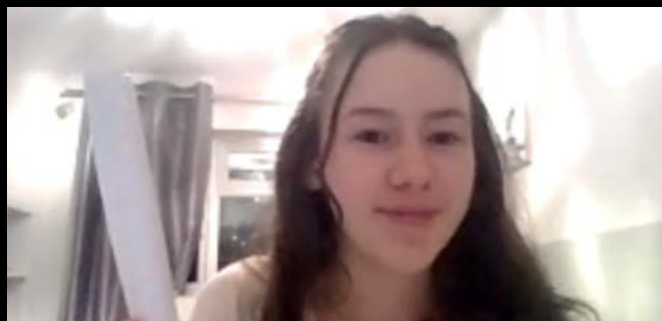


# The Future of the Academy

We were thrilled with the impact of the three PLACED Academies to date. From increasing confidence, supporting university applications and developing design skills, to ensuring young people's voices are heard in the design and decision-making process about the built environment, we have helped to nurture empowered, active citizens.

We are committed to continuing delivering programmes that have a positive impact and break down barriers into the built environment for young people.

We know many of you have continued on this journey with us over the two years, and we offer our sincere thanks. The following outlines our current plans for future programmes.



After delivering successful Digital Academies in 2020, we are now looking to the future. Already we are receiving enquiries for upcoming programmes from young people, demonstrating the significant and increasing need for programmes of this nature.

We will continue to develop our approach and respond to emerging needs and priorities, including through the following:

## Academy Insights

In January 2021, in response to the third national lockdown, we launched Academy Insights, a PLACED funded initiative. The programme is a series of nine short panel events, covering a range of themes from career paths to portfolios. We are being supported in the delivery of sessions by our fantastic network. Within days of launching, hundreds had signed up for sessions, once again reflecting the real need for support, guidance and advice and the real gaps that exist.

## Area-based Academy

We are exploring an area-based Academy model, linking to major developments. This commissioned approach will enable developers, local authorities and design teams to shape the programme. As a result, they will gain detailed feedback on their proposals and be able to deliver meaningful social value.

## PLACED Environmental Academy

In early 2021, we were thrilled to secure a grant from Liverpool City Region as part of the Community Environment Fund. This will provide the foundation for our 2021-22 Academy.

We are incredibly excited about this latest Academy, which will explore what action young people want to see being taken to ensure the design of our built environment helps to protect our climate for the future.

In addition to design workshops and skills sessions, the programme will see young people developing and delivering engagement events across LCR, along with a website with resources for young people, thereby enabling a much wider audience to join the conversation.

We now aim to secure sponsorship to help us to enhance, extend and scale the project to ensure it has maximum impact.

The PLACED Academy has become a key part of our work at PLACED; delivering creative Education and Engagement to change the voices involved in the creation of the built environment and creating #BetterPlacesTogether. We are thrilled with the impact, and hope you are too.

**"Working with the Placed team and the young people in my group was a great experience, it was good to see the design ideas develop over the course of the Academy and see the group grow in confidence and learn to work together as a team."**

**Neil Ainsworth, FWP**



"I really enjoyed working with the PLACED Team and the cohort of young people. The sessions using the Miro were innovative, well organised and fun. The students were really engaged and open to showing their talents. They were so respectful and it was evident that they wanted to learn. I've always been an enthusiastic advocate of the amazing work that PLACED do and this just made me even prouder to be part of their Ambassador Team. Well done PLACED team!"

Chithra Marsh, Buttress

"Great to see participants ideas around community and bringing all different types of people together. Don't believe all the news stories that say young people don't care – they care greatly and want places/communities to exist where everyone feels safe and welcome."

Leena Gullepie, Public Sector PLC

"It's really important that participants are supported by experienced, friendly and encouraging mentors and volunteers. It's a very rewarding position to be in and it's quite exciting to know that many of these pupils will soon be studying Architecture, Planning, Civil Engineering and so on in the near future. All donations, support provided with sessions online and in person will have a positive impact on a each and every participant"

Kira Hasan, Mentor

## Our Academy Partners & Sponsors

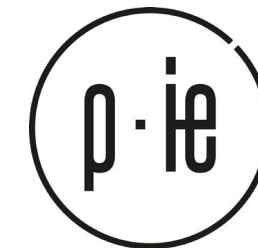
### Partners



### Sponsor+



### Sponsors



We want to take this opportunity to thank each and every one of our Partners and Sponsors for making the PLACED Digital Academy possible. Together you have given 62 young people a unique opportunity to develop skills and confidence, and learn about pathways into careers in the sector during incredibly challenging times. Your support has helped to open doors into professional careers and help them achieve their potential. This support has been invaluable.



### Contact us

If you are interested in sponsorship opportunities,  
please contact us via email at:  
[info@placed.org.uk](mailto:info@placed.org.uk)

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