

Online Mentoring Gets A New Look!

Birmingham City University's unique online mentoring scheme has been given a brand new look. The new site has been designed to make interaction easier and offers up to date information to all participants through the new knowledge bank.

We have seen the scheme continue to grow this year. With so many students looking to get the edge on the competition and develop their commercial awareness they are turning to the invaluable insight that a mentor can give them.

"I found being a mentor very rewarding. It is quite something to think that you are being asked for advice and are helping someone who is in the same position as you were only a few years ago."

Get involved!

- Share your own knowledge and experience and continue to be involved with the University.
- Develop your own skills through being a mentor.
- Gain insight into the skills and experiences which today's students and graduates have to offer.

The scheme has been designed to be simple, effective and flexible to fit around your work.

"It was encouraging that my mentee was very actively engaged in the process and was asking genuine questions and seeking genuine advice which I hope she found useful. It was also wonderful to hear her opinions on the profession I am currently working in and what their expectations and anticipations are."

For more information contact the Careers and Employment Service at www.bcu.ac.uk/askemploymentzone

Sign up today at www.askbcu.org

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BRINGING ART to the Inner City



MA Visual Communication graduate Claire Farrell specialises in breathing new life and colour into some of the most neglected corners of inner-city Birmingham.

Claire established EC-Arts in 2006, while still at the University, to create opportunities for art in unusual locations. Her first project was the Festival of Xtreme Building, which saw a team of artists and architects produce experimental structures on a disused piece of land in the city's Eastside district. The open-air display of unusual designs attracted massive media interest in the UK and overseas, and its success opened the door to further opportunities for Claire.



Subsequent commissions included painting murals on temporary hoardings around waste ground in Digbeth and on the Birmingham Central Library building, an experimental art installation which used advertising billboards as blank canvases, a performance by a branch of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra in Ladywood Fire Station and a short film to mark the opening of Birmingham Coach Station.

What ties together all of these diverse strands, Claire says, is bringing art out of the gallery into the public realm and coming up with concepts that suit particular locations: "It was through the University that I was introduced to the Festival of Xtreme Building – I

moved quickly from co-ordinator to project manager and realised that I had the ability to make things happen. The festival was a great success and Marketing Birmingham had to employ the services of McCann Erickson because it was generating so much national and international media interest.

"I try to show that you can create art even in difficult times – the halted developments around the city because of the economic crisis have created some negative aesthetics but even there you can be creative – and the feedback I've received shows that it's appreciated. With the murals we did in Digbeth, I've had emails from people who work opposite, thanking me just for brightening up the area."

In the current economic climate, gaining funding for arts projects is tougher than ever, but Claire has nonetheless been successful in securing a grant from the Arts Council for phase two of the billboard project, dubbed '48 Sheet'. While the pilot covered just four billboards, the full-scale project next spring will feature as many as 80.

"The pilot was very successful and I had a vision to do it on a much bigger scale. It was a long process, from the pilot to researching the full-scale project and writing a 10,000 word request for funding – university dissertations have nothing on Arts Council grant applications!

"To secure funding now, you've got to make sure you know your stuff – you can't just throw a project together and expect people to give you money. Now, more

than ever, you need to do your research first – look at partnership opportunities, regeneration, heritage, participation for young people – all of these are what the funding bodies look for and you need to fulfil those criteria.

"The most satisfying part of my job is seeing your vision through to fruition, and creating opportunities for art that really makes a difference to people's lives. It's incredibly hard work at times and I can only do what I do because I have a lot of energy and am incredibly single-minded!"

"The University was a massive influence on me and I'm still in contact with so many people I met here – not just fellow students but also the staff who were instrumental in getting me involved with some of the projects I worked on at the time. I always tell people who are students now that they must make friends with their lecturers because they have great contacts in their industry and if you show willing and potential, they will introduce you, but you have to have the right attitude first."

