



LONDON DESIGN CAPITAL



**RECOVERY AND LONDON'S ROLE
AS A GLOBAL DESIGN HUB**

This research report explores the current impact of Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic on London's status as a global design hub and evaluates the steps London can take to maintain its internationally renowned reputation in an uncertain time.

London Design Capital brings together the current experience of business leaders through interviews and an NLA Members Survey in order to understand how the export of skills and services has been affected. We revisit our original London Design Capital research and recommendations published in 2017, after the UK's vote to leave the EU, and assess how things have changed.

The research is supported by a showcase of international projects, collected from a call for entries, that are currently being delivered by London-based practices, illustrating both the reach of the capital's skills and the breadth of expertise.

Programme Champions

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This research report was published by New London Architecture (NLA) in July 2021. It forms part of NLA's year-round City Dialogues programme, dedicated to connecting London with other cities for knowledge exchange.

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Foreword

By Peter Murray OBE, Curator-in-chief, New London Architecture

Four years ago we were able to write confidently that London was the “world’s global capital for creative design and construction skills”. Our research reported on the work of London-based offices across the sector who were busy working in Europe, the Middle East, Far East, Australasia and the Americas.

So what is happening today? We thought it important to find out and assess the impact of COVID-19 and Brexit on the capital’s international standing as a creative hub. While other cities which compete for the title have all had to face similar problems caused by the pandemic, only London has had to deal with the double whammy of pandemic and political and commercial disruption.

In this study, we collate the experiences of practitioners and how they are responding to this fast-changing commercial and cultural landscape.

London’s fundamental strengths have not changed: the use of English, the multitude of other languages spoken here, the legal system, the general probity of business and its location. But will its geography, which made it such a convenient home for global

business travellers, have the same pull as companies reduce the number of flights they take in the future? They can now make greater use of virtual communications as a result of their experiences during lockdown and they can reduce their carbon footprint at the same time.

One of London’s great strengths in this regard is its ecology of creativity: its diversity, its networks, its education and cultural offerings, an ecosystem in which NLA plays an important role but it also needs strong political backing. At the time of writing, the Financial Times reported that London had reclaimed its crown as Europe’s top share trading centre from Amsterdam. Traders were returning to the City of London because of its ecosystem of expertise. The moves were no doubt also prompted by the Chancellor of the Exchequer’s statement that he wanted the UK to be “the best place in the world for high-growth, innovative companies” and his strategy of making finance green.

Such statements are important. I look forward to the Mayor of London Sadiq Khan speaking out in support of London businesses generally and

highlighting the significance of London's role as a design capital.

Equally important is the protection of the cultural and hospitality sectors in the Central Activity Zone. These are key attractors for young talent to come to the capital. London's education offer feeds new talent into the system and its good health is essential if we are not to see a gradual impoverishment of skills entering the workforce.

The NLA is doing its bit to support the sector. We work closely with London & Partners, the Mayor's business growth agency, and we're expanding our global cities network — which has been able to step up gear in the past year and a half as a result of the wider familiarity with Zoom and Teams.

We have confidence in the resilience and expertise of London's architects, engineers and consultants to continue to operate on the global stage at the highest level and we will work to ensure that we remain the world's design capital.

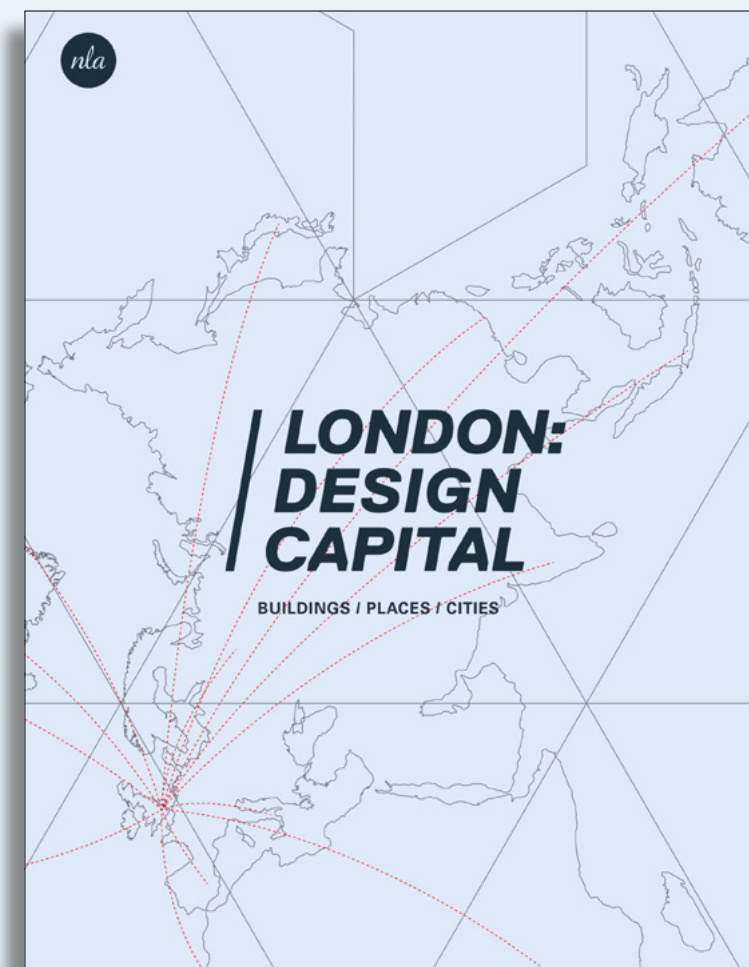


View of London's Eastern City Cluster © Jason Hawkes

Executive Summary

The impact of Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic cannot be disentangled, but as we navigate the long-term implications, London has an opportunity to reinvent itself as it has done so successfully throughout its history.

In 2017 the original London: Design Capital publication demonstrated London's pre-eminence as a hub of highly diverse skills and talent, now with unprecedented challenges afoot it is essential we nurture that fundamental make up that makes this city so attractive to live and work.



Our 2017 recommendations for the London Mayor still stand and have gained even more relevance with the current experience, these include:

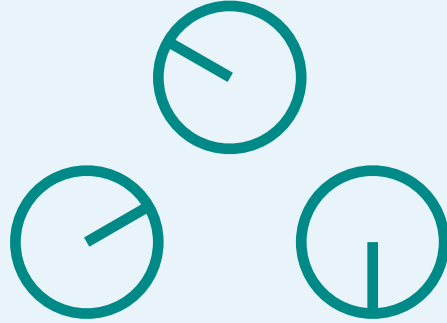
- **Continue to attract and retain access to talent.**
- **Recognise and promote London's built environment expertise to the export market.**
- **Make London an attractive and affordable place to live and work in the long term.**
- **Create and reinforce links with other cities and provide a better voice for the profession.**

Now, four years on and six months from the UK's departure from the EU and over a year into the pandemic, we find ourselves with new challenges and therefore have set out the steps that London can take in order to maintain its status as a global design hub:

- **Maintain an outward-looking and forward-thinking attitude as we emerge from the pandemic.**
- **Nurture London's existing outstanding reputation for built environment excellence and culture.**
- **Invest in skills.**
- **Harness and export strengths in green innovation and digital expertise.**
- **[Read more on these points](#)**

The London 2035 Checklist

Our findings resonate with the London 2035 Checklist presented in our 15-year anniversary programme *The Changing Face of London*, in 2020. The Checklist sets out 15 themes that London will need to address in response to current challenges, and to position itself even more positively over the next decade and a half. All NLA research, programming and advocacy continues to respond to these themes and pushes the agenda forward, using this list as a tool to measure London’s progress each year.

 <p>Healthy A city that prioritises health and wellbeing</p>	 <p>Zero Carbon A greener city that responds urgently to the climate emergency</p>	 <p>Equitable A city of stronger, inclusive and more equal communities</p>	 <p>Flexible Buildings to meet changing needs and support the circular economy, with time-based use of streets</p>	 <p>Polycentric 15-minute mixed-use neighbourhoods with convenient public transport links to a strong centre</p>
 <p>Responsive A city where people can organise their time and space to suit their changing needs</p>	 <p>Leading A leading global city and business centre</p>	 <p>Affordable An affordable housing-led recovery</p>	 <p>Hospitable More diverse and thriving high streets and town centres</p>	 <p>Active A city that walks and cycles, with better air quality</p>
 <p>Meanwhile More meanwhile uses are encouraged</p>	 <p>Viable An open and growing city</p>	 <p>Smart A city that manages and regulates technology and big data effectively</p>	 <p>Public A greater role for the public sector in driving regeneration and housing delivery</p>	 <p>Knowledge-based Research, tech, bio-med and creative sectors drive the city’s economy</p>

Recovery and London's role as a global design hub

***‘We are going to have to have new
solutions for the problems we’ve got
now and in the future ... so London’s
ability to be agile and adaptable and
innovate is really important’***

***Neil Brigden, Director of Foreign Direct Investment,
London & Partners***

