Shaping systems that deliver better economic outcomes

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Jersey Business recently welcomed experts from the UK's Design Council to Jersey to deliver workshops for Government representatives and the wider Jersey business community, exploring how design thinking can help tackle complex economic and social challenges. Following the visit, Emily Moore of All Island Media interviewed the team about their approach and its relevance to Jersey. The interview is reproduced in full below.

How do you address the big, “wicked” challenges such as climate change, productivity and economic growth?

They are questions which have taxed politicians and policymakers around the world but while many people may start by looking at the numbers or the science, the team at the Design Council believe that another approach could be more effective.

Invited to the Island earlier this month by Jersey Business, Design Council senior programme manager Nikki van Grimbergen and experts Neal Stone and Laura Melissa Williams delivered a series of workshops focused on the “value of design in unlocking systemic, complex challenges”.



Design Council experts Neal Stone and Laura Melissa Williams and senior programme manager Nikki van Grimbergen

“Our role is to develop design processes, such as the double-diamond and systemic-design framework, which we can then help policymakers and business leaders to embed in their work,” explained Ms van Grimbergen.

“The basics of design thinking really encourage people to think about problem-solving, collaborative working and taking an intentional approach to the design of systems and processes,” added Ms Williams. “Having covered that in the first part of each workshop, we then introduced systemic design, which is an evolved way of thinking and using design to identify and think about the impacts and consequences, intended or unintended, of the decisions we make today.

“This is all about looking at the bigger picture, considering not just recent or current stakeholders but also those of the future. This means identifying our vision for the future because if we can’t imagine where we want to be, how can we design for that future?”

Key to achieving this, says Mr Stone, is taking a step back.

“The core premise of the double-diamond model is that good design thinking relies on considering the problem you are trying to solve instead of jumping to solutions,” he said. “The world and our inboxes are littered with instructions intended to make things happen but good design thinking is all about taking a step back, identifying what the real problem is and then generating creative solutions to that challenge.”

While this may, as Mr Stone admits, sound like a lot of “jargon”, he stressed the value of such an approach.

“Design has proven its worth in terms of economic value and return on investment,” he said. “Businesses that are design-led outperform their peer group and by exploring issues at system level – a bit like going up in a hot-air balloon and viewing the system as a whole – you start to see other forms of value, such as social and environmental elements, as well.”

With collaboration at the heart of design thinking, Ms van Grimbergen said it had been particularly pleasing to see the range of businesses and sectors represented at each session, which took place at The Club Hotel and Spa.



Emily Moore of All Island Meadia speaking with Rod Bryans

“The workshops have been attended by policy workers, charity workers, business owners, educators and healthcare workers,” she said, “and it is vital that these people work together for systemic work to succeed.”

Among the topics discussed over the two days, said Ms Williams, were health, agriculture, education, tourism and doing business in Jersey in the future.

“We look at nationwide events, things happening specifically in Jersey and systems in a business context,” she added. “We then explore what happens if, as a business person, you throw a pebble in a pond. What ripples might that create across a wider system? And from that one-person perspective of what can be done, we then scale that up to think about what we want as an island.”

It was that spirit of “collaboration and connection” which particularly resonated with Jersey Business chief executive Paul Murphy who, in his introduction to the workshops, highlighted the diverse yet linked nature of the Island’s

economy.

“At Jersey Business, we spend a lot of time working with organisations that are navigating complexity, whether that’s productivity challenges, skills gaps, sustainability or adapting to a rapidly changing economic landscape,” he said.

“What we have learnt is that many of these challenges are not isolated; they are interconnected and they require a different way of thinking. That’s where systemic design comes in.

“It gives us a lens to step back, see the bigger picture and understand how people, policies and processes interact and, importantly, where small changes can have meaningful impact. It’s not just about designing better services or products; it’s about designing better systems.

“For Jersey, this is particularly important. We are a small but highly connected economy. That gives us a real advantage, as we can bring the right people together quickly, test ideas and implement change at pace. But it also means the challenges we face are often deeply interdependent. That is why these sessions are about moving from reacting to individual problems to shaping systems that deliver better outcomes for businesses, communities and our economy as a whole.”



Laura Melissa Williams delivering the workshop

Anyone unsure about design thinking’s ability to achieve that, said creative consultant and former Education Minister Rod Bryans, should look at Singapore as an example.

Having introduced the Design Council to Mr Murphy and to Paul Wylie, chief officer of the government’s Cabinet Office, Mr Bryans said that design thinking

was all about “design from the bottom up”.

“If people want to see an indication of how design thinking works, look at Singapore,” he said. “In 1965, just after gaining independence, the country was on its knees. Now it is at, or near, the top of all global indices, and it achieved that by using design thinking. It’s taught in schools, used in government services and in businesses, and it’s been fantastically successful. Why wouldn’t I want to share that with this island?”

Having previously brought Design Council representatives to Jersey nine years ago, Mr Bryans said that his attempt to “change thinking” at government level then was thwarted by the arrival of [former chief executive] Charlie Parker.

“Now, with a new government coming in and an openness to the approach from Paul Wylie and Paul Murphy, there is a real opportunity to embed this thinking across everything from health and education to the judicial system,” he said.

“If you look at all the problems in the Island, from hospitality and the living wage to housing and loneliness, design thinking could be the lens we look through to solve those problems. We just need to spread the message and recognise the solutions that design thinking offers.”

This interview originally appeared in the Jersey Evening Post on 23rd June 2026.