



Helen Wat was the winner of the RSA's Spotify Award, which acknowledges projects that reimagine ways of working to improve social interaction, facilitate the transfer of knowledge and foster community spirit. Photography by Betty Zapata 2023.

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Success for Northumbria students and graduates in international design awards

Talented design students and graduates from Northumbria University have won a string of accolades in a global awards competition.

Two graduates, Jai Mistry and Helen Wat, topped their respective categories in the [Royal Society of Arts \(RSA\) Student Design Awards](#), an international scheme that recognises and rewards budding designers who propose creative solutions for tackling key social, environmental and economic issues.

Four other Northumbria students and graduates were finalists in this year's awards, with one of them, Rob Swan, receiving an official commendation for his efforts. All six students are enrolled on or have recently completed Northumbria's popular [Design for Industry](#) course.

Jai Mistry won his award for his education-based *GRAB A PLANT* initiative, which encourages social responsibility at a young age by giving primary school children the opportunity to develop community gardens at local rail stations.

Using New Pudsey station in Leeds as an example, Jai's proposal brings together local schools to plant food and flowers at the stations in boxes supplied by local DIY firms. Train travellers and the passing public are then encouraged to take one of the plants and replant it in their own home.

Jai Mistry and the award winning project 'GRAB A PLANT'. Photography by Betty Zapata 2023.

Jai, who is originally from Leeds, said: "I'm thrilled to win the RSA award for my concept, which builds a sense of social responsibility and pride for young people, helping them to realise the value of looking after their communities. If my proposal was implemented, the public would benefit from a greener environment at their local stations, and be able to replenish herbs and plants in their homes. Local organisations, including DIY and gardening companies, would also be able to play their part in an initiative that knits together so many elements of the local community. It's a chance for rail firms, for example, to make their stations more biodiverse and attractive to travellers and passers-by.

"If people feel they have a stake in their local community, they'll be more inclined to look after their surroundings, be less likely to indulge in anti-social behaviour and feel more empowered to do something positive.

"The RSA judges seemed to like the simplicity of my concept and the way in which it was presented. They also liked the fact that it's scalable and could be replicated in other communities."

Helen Wat was the winner of the RSA's Spotify Award, which acknowledges projects that reimagine ways of working to improve social interaction, facilitate the transfer of knowledge and foster community spirit.

Helen created *Neighbourhood Patch*, a future work-lifestyle platform that pairs remote workers with a local garden space to support gardening breaks within their working day. The focus on gardening reduces stress and improves work-life balance, whilst each participant in the initiative is given an interactive light that facilitates communication between worker and garden owner. The idea behind the project is to support remote work-life balance, nurture collaborative relationships and support the local ecosystem through gardening activities.

Helen Wat and the award winning project 'Neighbourhood Patch'. Photography by Betty Zapata 2023.

Helen, who is aiming to pursue a career in furniture design, said: “It was fantastic to come out on top in the Nature of Work award category. The interview process was conducted via Zoom and I had seven minutes to pitch my idea. I think the judges were impressed with the scalability of my solution, which could be applied to other communities.

“The light reminds workers to take a break by glowing an orange-yellow colour. They press the light and send a message to their local garden owner via an app to let them know they want to visit. Workers can complete a range of tasks while they’re there, such as gardening, growing food or picking fruit and vegetables.

“They can also use the app to connect with other like-minded workers so they can share knowledge and experience – such as how long it takes to grow different types of food.”

Jai and Helen each won a cash prize of £2,000 for their efforts. They were not the only Northumbria success stories, with four other students and graduates shortlisted for an RSA award.

Jake Moran impressed the judges with his *10-4 (Ten Four)* innovation, an app-based delivery and collection service designed to aid drivers of heavy goods vehicles and light commercial goods vehicles in their pursuit of a healthier lifestyle.

Elizabeth Mackey was recognised for her social enterprise, *The Cloth Library*, which provides the necessary infrastructure to better utilise unsellable

clothing within the charity shop network – making it a valuable resource for local communities of designers and clothes manufacturers.

Another finalist, Rob Swan, was the brains behind *Palate Local Vending*, a sustainable vending service that aims to encourage people to eat more local food in train stations, while Freddie Reed received his accolade for creating *LUX*, a badge device and app designed to encourage intake of natural light for increased wellbeing and productivity.

Rob and Elizabeth recently graduated from the Design for Industry programme, while Jake and Freddie are preparing to embark on the final year of their course in September.

Anthony Forsyth, Head of Subject for Industrial Design at Northumbria's School of Design and one of the tutors on the RSA project, said: "Six accolades for our design students in an international competition is an outstanding achievement. They showed their aptitude for adhering closely to the briefs and finding simple propositions to tackle complex societal issues.

"The students gained valuable experience of working with real people to deliver scalable solutions that could potentially be rolled out across different communities.

"Our Design for Industry course has a great track record of producing designers whose work has enjoyed enormous commercial success – most notably Sir Jony Ive, lead designer at Apple for many years. Our students are equally adept at tackling responsible design challenges, creating credible proposals that bring social and environmental benefits. This makes them ideally equipped to tackle how we transform our economies to be more conscious of people and the planet in the coming years."

Northumbria's School of Design offer study programmes in fashion, industrial, communication and innovation design. Discover more online by visiting www.northumbria.ac.uk/design

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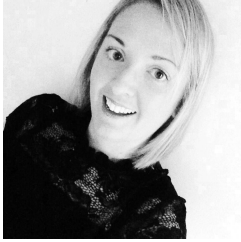


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