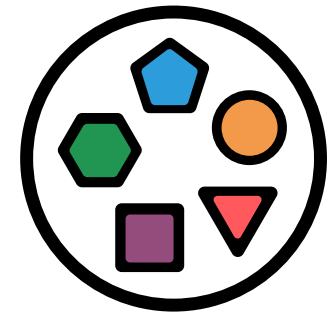# Inclusive Design Framework:

Exploring Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion
in Designers' Career Lifecycle

Authors

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Introduction

Achieving equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in the workplace and its reflection in the work we do throughout the design profession requires addressing challenges at every career stage. To support this effort, we are developing an Inclusive Design Framework based on real experiences of product (physical and digital), and service designers in the UK.

Grounded in qualitative interviews and co-design workshops conducted in 2022-2023, our research engaged over 30 designers across career levels, industries, backgrounds and demographics. By capturing their diverse narratives, we mapped the designer career lifecycle from education to various stages of employment. At each transition, we explored how EDI issues intersect and impact experiences.

This document represents an initial step toward the final framework - a journey map synthesizing the career stages and EDI challenges faced by designers. It outlines key milestones, barriers and strategies to foster inclusion through education, recruitment, career growth and workplace culture change.

The following maps are a step towards realizing this vision for inclusion.
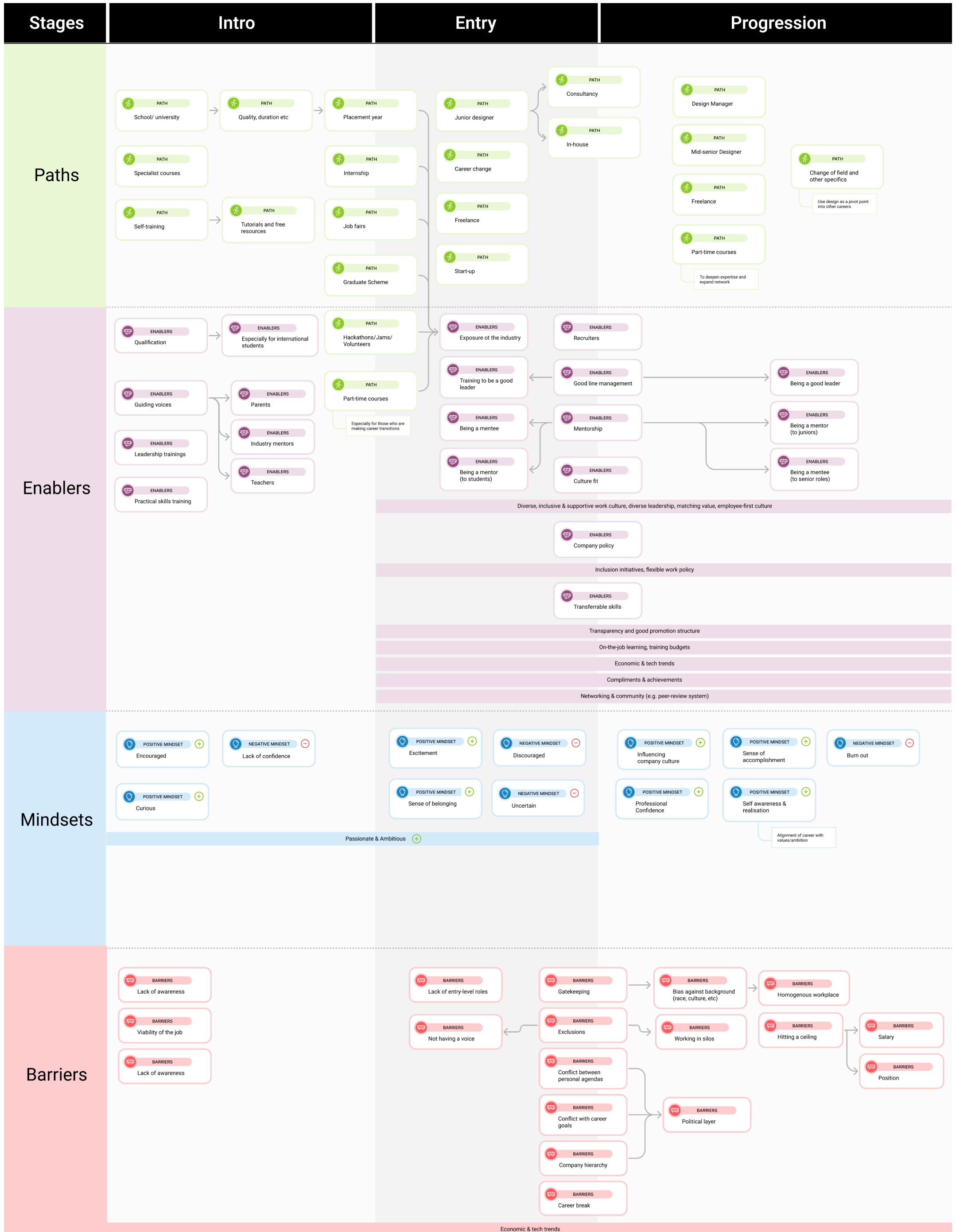
Elements of a designer's career journey

This map visualises the designer's career journey. The core (blue) represents the stages of progress, while the opportunities and factors that accelerate growth are highlighted in orange. Additionally, it depicts the setbacks in both personal and professional life at exit points or key transformational factors (green).
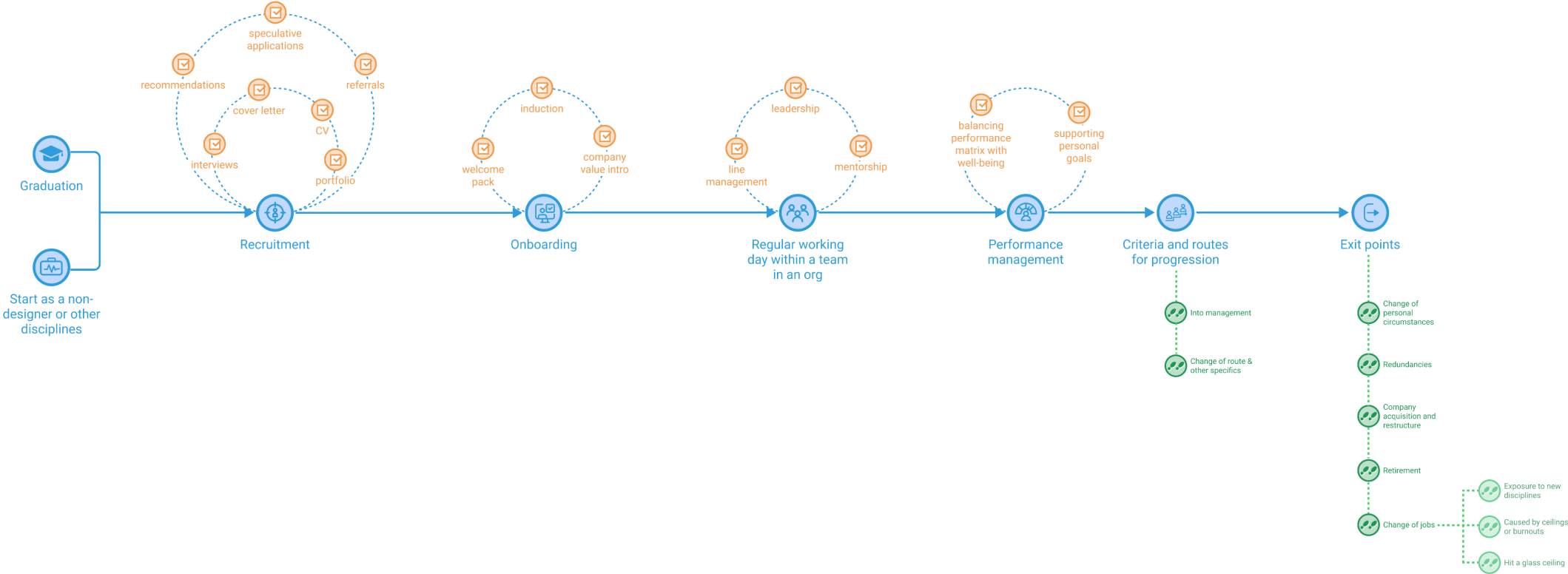
Synthesis of designer career journey map

This map visualises the synthesis of core insights from interviews and workshops with 30 designers. It provides a comprehensive overview of their journey, from initial stages to progression, highlighting key enablers for growth and acceleration, supportive mindsets for navigation, and encountered barriers at different stages.

Stages	Intro	Entry	Progression
Paths	PATH School/ university → PATH Quality, duration etc → PATH Placement year; PATH Specialist courses; PATH Self-training → PATH Tutorials and free resources; PATH Internship; PATH Job fairs; PATH Graduate Scheme	PATH Junior designer → PATH Consultancy / PATH In-house; PATH Career change; PATH Freelance; PATH Start-up; PATH Hackathons/Jams/Volunteers; PATH Part-time courses (Especially for those who are making career transitions)	PATH Design Manager; PATH Mid-senior Designer; PATH Freelance; PATH Part-time courses (To deepen expertise and expand network); PATH Change of field and other specifics (Use design as a pivot point into other careers)
Enablers	ENABLERS Qualification → ENABLERS Especially for international students; ENABLERS Guiding voices → ENABLERS Parents / ENABLERS Industry mentors / ENABLERS Teachers; ENABLERS Leadership trainings; ENABLERS Practical skills training	ENABLERS Exposure ot the industry; ENABLERS Training to be a good leader; ENABLERS Being a mentee; ENABLERS Being a mentor (to students); ENABLERS Company policy	ENABLERS Recruiters; ENABLERS Good line management; ENABLERS Mentorship; ENABLERS Culture fit; ENABLERS Being a good leader; ENABLERS Being a mentor (to juniors); ENABLERS Being a mentee (to senior roles); ENABLERS Transferrable skills

Diverse, inclusive & supportive work culture, diverse leadership, matching value, employee-first culture

Inclusion initiatives, flexible work policy

Transparency and good promotion structure

On-the-job learning, training budgets

Economic & tech trends

Compliments & achievements

Networking & community (e.g. peer-review system)

| **Mindsets** | POSITIVE MINDSET Encouraged ⊕; NEGATIVE MINDSET Lack of confidence ⊖; POSITIVE MINDSET Curious ⊕ | POSITIVE MINDSET Excitement ⊕; NEGATIVE MINDSET Discouraged ⊖; POSITIVE MINDSET Sense of belonging ⊕; NEGATIVE MINDSET Uncertain ⊖ | POSITIVE MINDSET Influencing company culture ⊕; POSITIVE MINDSET Sense of accomplishment ⊕; NEGATIVE MINDSET Burn out ⊖; POSITIVE MINDSET Professional Confidence ⊕; POSITIVE MINDSET Self awareness & realisation ⊕ (Alignment of career with values/ambition) |

Passionate & Ambitious ⊕

| **Barriers** | BARRIERS Lack of awareness; BARRIERS Viability of the job; BARRIERS Lack of awareness | BARRIERS Lack of entry-level roles; BARRIERS Not having a voice; BARRIERS Gatekeeping; BARRIERS Exclusions; BARRIERS Conflict between personal agendas; BARRIERS Conflict with career goals; BARRIERS Company hierarchy; BARRIERS Career break | BARRIERS Bias against background (race, culture, etc) → BARRIERS Homogenous workplace; BARRIERS Working in silos; BARRIERS Political layer; BARRIERS Hitting a ceiling → BARRIERS Salary / BARRIERS Position |

Economic & tech trends

Summary & next steps

This initiative forms a crucial part of a research project led by Dr. Silvia Grimaldi, Veron Lai, Yini Zheng, Meghana Shailendra which explores the profound impact of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) on company culture and its reverberation on the products created.

The next part of the research is a framework outlining some tools, processes, strategies and policies that can help individuals, managers, and senior leadership make a significant difference and enable organisational change, followed by two research papers.

Our hope is this framework will help the next generation of designers navigate their careers with greater equity, paving the way for a more inclusive design profession that reflects the diversity of our societies.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the participants from the workshops and interviews for sharing their experiences and insights that helped our research initiative and the building of these maps.

If you have any questions or would like to learn more about this research, please feel free to get in touch with Dr. Silvia Grimaldi at s.grimaldi@lcc.arts.ac.uk.

This is one of three parts of the Inclusive Design Framework.

All parts can be found here:

Designers' Careers Lifecycles

Grimaldi S. et al (2023,) Inclusive Design Framework: Exploring Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in Designers' Career Lifecycle. University of the Arts London, London. DOI [10.58129/y0gd-t323](#)

EDI in the Workplace

Grimaldi, S. et al (2024), Inclusive Design Framework: EDI in the Workplace Actions and Implementations. University of the Arts London. DOI [10.58129/kn1n-m289](#)

Inclusive Design

Grimaldi, S. et al (2024), Inclusive Design Framework: Inclusive Design Actions and Implementations. University of the Arts London. DOI [10.58129/ckbf-m922](#)