

How to Get Hired as a Graphic Designer in the UK During the Pandemic

2020 has definitely, as they say, been a year for the history books. The world—and our lives—has been overwhelmed by the continuing Covid-19 pandemic. While we continue to navigate these remarkably tumultuous times, Shillington graduates around the world continue to produce incredible for their portfolios. Many of these students transitioned into online learning with us when “Stay Home” orders were given in our campus countries. On top of this, there is a silver lining—our amazingly talented graduates are still finding jobs in the design industry.

In the first of three blog posts, we spoke to two of our UK graduates—Mason El Hage and Ella Dawson—about finding a job during a global pandemic. We asked them about navigating the job search, how their interviews worked and advice for other graduates. Read on for some juicy insight into getting a job in this unfamiliar world.

The Graduates

Mason El Hage graduated from Shillington London in December 2019. Before starting on the course, he already had a degree in Digital Advertising & Design and had been working in a start-up accelerator in London’s Old Street.

He decided to return to education and study at Shillington to curb the bad habits he had picked up over the years and instil a reliable creative process—which Mason says is something he was seriously lacking. He wanted to be able to tackle any design challenge with full confidence.

Since graduating, he got straight down to creating some amazing personal projects which he often shares on his Instagram. In fact, these Instagram posts caught the attention of the studio where he now works, Monopo. The studio, which was founded in Tokyo in 2011, opened its outpost in London last year.

Shillington Manchester graduate Ella Dawson started the full-time course in January 2020. She was one of our first students to graduate in our online classroom, after the pandemic forced us to close all our campuses back in March.

Before studying with us, Ella took an Art Foundation course in Manchester. This allowed her to think about which creative route she wanted to take and she knew that graphic design was the right one for her. Shillington allowed her to make these dreams a reality.

Just three months after graduating, Ella was snapped as a Brand Designer by Manchester studio Shape. Shape is a Web Design Agency who specialise in web design, web development, eCommerce and organic SEO.

Mason's Branding (Student Portfolio)

The Job Hunt

Fortunately, as a large majority of job searching is done online these days, the actual process of looking for a job hasn't changed drastically. Don't forget to check out Shillington's Jobs Board for roles across the world. We also have an blog post on the Best Design Jobs Boards if you wanted to look further.

The thing that has changed about the Job Hunt is the amount of jobs out there. We can't say that a global pandemic hasn't had an effect on the amount of jobs out there, but these graduates are proof that there is still jobs for you to apply for. It

took Mason around six months to find his role at Monopo—though he kept himself busy freelancing during his search:

“After doing a significant amount of research, I got in contact with the studios I liked and felt would be a good fit for me, either cold emailing or applying for jobs they had advertised online. Unfortunately—after securing a couple interviews—the pandemic came along and put all of that on hold for the next few months.”

In the end, Monopo actually got back in touch with Mason after an initial chat months before. He told us:

“I had first emailed Monopo in February asking if they were looking to hire any junior designers, and had spoken back and forth with the MD of the London office. They told me they weren’t looking to hire, but would keep me in mind for future freelance projects.

“Having spent a significant amount of time over lockdown creating designs for my instagram page to stay productive, Monopo got in touch with me again in July saying they’d been following what I’d been doing and wanted to interview me.”

Immediately after she graduated, Ella jumped into freelancing and managed to get a good amount of projects under her belt, including designing part-time for a healthcare company. Though she didn’t feel it was the time to start job hunting, she turned to the internet for some help:

“I didn’t actively look for job roles as most of the creative industry had come to a halt and/or on furlough.”

“When it started to pick back up I started to actively use LinkedIn as a way to connect with studios as well as likeminded creatives, this has become a integral part of job hunting recently with so many amazing opportunities and generous people offering a helping hand whether it be to

review your folio, your CV etc.”

Despite feeling like the design industry wasn't hiring new designers, Ella found herself in her new role at Shape in June after graduating from Shillington in April.

Ella's Social Shepherd Website (Shape)

The Interview

In a time where most offices were shut and people were advised to stay at home, a job interview was always going to look different to normal. Though, like with just about everything else, people found a way to work around this. Like a lot of

things this year, Mason's interview was held on Zoom:

"It was very relaxed. At the time they were hiring for a Senior Digital Designer position which did not match my profile whatsoever. I'd told them this in advance, but they were still keen to have an informal chat and learn a bit more about my experience and skill set. We spoke for an hour on a Zoom call and it went really well. They ended up offering me a different position at the agency."

Ella's interview was a bit different. With the team at Shape taking things away from the usual question and answer session. She shared that:

"I didn't really undergo an 'interview' per se. Andy, co-founder of Shape, reached out to me for a specific project which acted like a 'trial project' to see if Shape liked my approach. We had a general chat about what I was doing, what I was after, as well as specific criteria of my abilities outside of graphic design. After presenting back my ideas, Andy liked my approach and offered me a job!"

Both Ella's and Mason's experiences show that, even though interviews are being delivered in different ways, they're still largely the same. Interviews being on Zoom can also work in your favour—if you're able to do a good job on there, they know you'll be ready to work remotely.

Want to know what to expect in a graphic design interview? Check out our article on the kind of questions you can expect to be asked and the best ways to answer them.

Mason's Packaging (Student Portfolio)

The Studio

With many people working from home, design studios are looking like very different places in 2020. In fact, some studios have made the decision to scrap a physical studio all together. Though, many still keep their traditional office space.

When we spoke with Mason back in September, he was working in the office since he started his job. Though, this was flexible and he was working one or two days from the comfort of his own home. Monopo being split between Tokyo and London has created a different kind of remote working. Mason explained this:

“Even though I’m not explicitly working remotely, a lot of the clients we work with are based overseas, mainly in Japan. This brings with it its own set of challenges. Getting things approved can take time, especially due to the difference in time zones.”

On the other side of the spectrum, Ella has been working remotely since she started at Shape. She told us about what a normal day working from home looks like:

“We work 8.30 – 4.30 as it would be in studio hours and we communicate constantly via Slack and Zoom for larger conversations and projects. It definitely works really well with our team and we’re becoming more flexible about working from home when we return to the studio.”

“I do miss the face-to-face contact with getting to know everyone and the studio banter, but equally we’ve got to keep everyone safe.”

With a lot of studios, agencies and other companies around the world still working remotely—or making changes in their schedules—graduating on a remote course gives you a big step up! You already know how to work and design effectively from the comfort of your own home. You’ve completed a course, hit deadlines and made a portfolio remotely so you’re ready to taken on a remote studio.

Mason's Editorial (Student Portfolio)

The Work

One of our favourite things is seeing the designs our graduates work on once they leave us and start their careers—and not even a pandemic could change that.

Unfortunately, Mason wasn't able to share any of his work with us just yet as it's still in development. So we'll have to continue looking forward to that!

Meanwhile, Ella has been working on several different projects across several different industries. She told us about one of her favourites:

“I’ve been working on a rebrand of a Nursery Group. They wanted to stray away from the classic ‘nursery brand’—most of their nurseries have naturalistic elements using plants, lots of exposed wood, up-cycling of furniture, etc. So, the brand had to reflect this yet remain playful. We had our resident design intern Ruby (co-founder Andy’s 5 year old daughter) to join in on the project to creates doodles and drawings which were rolled out across the brand.”

Ella’s MiChild Branding (Shape)

“Another one of my favourite projects is the branding and full site design of a social media Ad agency, this was another really fun one to do with lots of, what we like to call, ‘squiggly’ elements as they didn’t want to be looked at as serious, high end social agency—they’re a young, fun team and

the brand and site needed to reflect this.”

Ella’s MiChild Branding (Shape)

The Course

Nothing makes everyone at Shillington happier than seeing our graduates head off into the design world and forge their own careers. We make sure they leave with all the skills, technical know-how and confidence to be able to do this. And, both of our graduates agree with this. Mason said:

“I think no matter where you’ve studied you’ll run into things in your career you haven’t been taught how to solve, but that’s part of the beauty of design.”

“Shillington teaches you the processes and techniques you need to approach these problems, and find successful solutions. I’m definitely more confident in my ability as a designer and conceptual thinker since I graduated.”

Ella agreed, adding:

“I gained invaluable skills which were developed around an industry standard approach to design. I still follow the processes we were taught at in my own designs today and, it really is true... trust the process. I learned more than I could ever imagine even down to the nitty gritty. Things like exporting projects, web sizes and shortcuts made a huge difference to workflow when I joined Shape as I was equipped with these skills already.”

Ella's Social Shepherd Branding (Shape)

Their Advice

Finally, we asked each of our graduates to share their number one piece of advice for anyone who is starting their design journey with Shillington. Mason offered:

“You must be willing to commit 100% of yourself. It's cliché, but you'll get out what you put in. Turn up on time, make an effort to get to know the people you're studying with, help each other out, utilise the resources Shillington provides, do your homework, go to all the extracurricular events... I could go on and on. Just be sure to make the most of your time there and enjoy it, 3 months will pass in a flash and you'll miss it

when it's gone."

Ella gave us this nugget of wisdom:

"Don't be afraid to explore new things and get stuck in. Start with an open mind because you may find your passion to be something you never dreamt of. It's really exciting, trust me!"

Big congratulations on their new roles to both our graduates, Mason and Ella, and big thanks to both of them for sharing their stories and advice with us.

Ella's Packaging (Student Portfolio)

Mason and Ella are just two of our UK graduates who have

landed a job during the pandemic. We'd also like to say a big congratulations to:

- Izzy Copley, Shillington London graduate, who got a job as a Junior Graphic Designer at AntoineLock Digital.
- Shillington London graduate Georgia Latham who has an internship at Imagist.
- Carl McBride, Shillington Manchester graduate, who got an internship at Toy Fight and was swiftly promoted to a full-time design position.
- Shillington London graduate Emily Chaffer who has been freelancing at Studio Macki.
- Mim Chadwick, Shillington London graduate, who is now working as a Graphics Assistant at Gameface Productions.
- Shillington Manchester graduate Carla Andrew who is Junior Designer at Drew London.
- Shillington London graduate Helen Tong who is now freelancing for Childish Design.
- Michaela-Pascal Mulvey, Shillington London graduate, who is working as a Graphic Designer at Bartlett Mitchell.
- And, finally, Luca Pellegrini who graduated from Shillington London is now working as a Graphic Designer at Minute Man Press.

We wanted to write this article to show that, despite the turbulent period the world is currently facing, there are jobs out there and Shillington graduates are getting hired! We hope this article shows you that there is hope.

Good luck in your job search! For more help, check out the Resources on our blog, there's loads of amazing career tips and treats on there. And, don't forget, we have an incredible Career Guide exclusive to Shillington graduates on The Guide.

Artwork by #ShilloLON Teacher Jack Trotman.

<https://www.shillingtoneducation.com/blog/get-hired-pandemic-uk/>