

Professionalism and Community

Policy Plan 2020-2022

1. Kick-off

This policy plan outlines, as briefly as possible, where BNO currently stands and what we want to work on in the upcoming period. The changes that determine our world and the design profession by extension are rapidly unfolding. We have this under control to some degree and can influence it, but not entirely so. That is why we have opted for a relatively short-term time frame, as was the case with the previous policy plan. The more detailed reflections set out in the previous plan are mostly still valid and will not be repeated here.

Vision

Our world and our lives are malleable, at least in part. Designers have a crucial part in this, whether they design products, services or systems. Their inquisitive and unconventional nature also allows designers to drive necessary changes and come up with innovative solutions. This is desperately needed in this era of transition. By supporting the more entrepreneurial side of their profession, designers are free to excel creatively.

Mission

BNO is there to help professional designers in all fields, at all stages of their careers and however they are organised: as a student, solo, as an agency, in a cooperative or at a company. BNO provides knowledge, inspiration and growth, assists with expert advice, matches designers and their agencies with peers and other relevant professionals, and serves as the designers' voice vis-à-vis clients and politics.

Ambition

BNO membership is a matter of course for a growing number of designers and design agencies because BNO is a lively and visible creative community, represents the interests of the professional community well and offers excellent service.

2. Context

The design industry is doing well. There is a great deal of interest in creativity, which is also gaining credence beyond the design sector. The creative industry has maintained its standing as a top sector. An increasing number of businesses are embracing the phenomenon of design thinking, and service design and social design are being used to address social issues. Creative input is essential on all sorts of levels when it concerns the question: in what kind of world do we want to - and can we continue to - live in?

The issues of climate change, the environment and sustainability are on the political agenda worldwide. As part of (production) chains, designers can help bring about positive changes through their unconventional approach, brainpower, craftsmanship and knowledge of processes and materials.

Technology has become part of almost all design domains. Continued digitisation, robotisation and artificial intelligence will eventually make many professions redundant. At the same time, there is renewed interest in the human aspect, the physical and the analogue. Festivals and other live events are unparalleled in popularity because of their tangible characteristic and how they invoke group feeling.

The labour market is complex and riddled with contradictions. On the one hand, the design world has a shortage of specialists. This is in part compensated for by in-house learning and development processes, and in part by recruiting designers from abroad. On the other hand, designers in certain fields find it difficult to find work with fair remuneration. The number of self-employed workers is increasing, which not only includes the willingly 'free birds' but also many of which left flapping the wind. The perception of the profession, both by the public and by clients, requires an ongoing effort to dispel any ignorance and to promote proper commissioning practices. There is still a large gap between many Dutch design schools and professional practice.

Local and global trends occur simultaneously. It is extremely uncertain how long the current economic boom will last, partly in light of unpredictable international machinations. In any case, the pursuit of local activity is increasing and is linked to the need for more sustainable practices. At the same time, the world can virtually be an open playing field for anyone. So, a number of designers are successfully spreading their wings. In doing so, they also anticipate changing relations between Europe and the rest of the world and the consequences for their business. International operations are a given for many agencies, as is reflected in their team, their assignment portfolio and their locations.

3. Trade community and association

Creative power is indispensable. Designers commit themselves in various ways: in the front line or behind it, on a large or small scale, as an individualist, activist, researcher, mediator, team player and/or executor. The design profession is also constantly influenced by technological and socio-cultural developments.

An equally indispensable element is a professional organisation that is naturally also viewed, used and appreciated as a community. Some members merely act as clients. But there are also those members who consciously contribute, strengthen the community, derive pleasure from doing so and gain valuable (learning) experiences and a specific network from it. BNO wants to devote more conscious effort to this in the upcoming period, knowing that professionalism benefits from collectivity on many fronts.

BNO has seen a slight uptick in its membership numbers. This is remarkable considering the tough times that associations are going through. At the same time, there is a yearning for 'belonging', i.e. the need for collectives, communities, coming together and working together.

Member retention and recruitment call for different approaches aimed at specific wishes and target groups. Continuous efforts are needed to maintain and improve the services offered by BNO and to lobby effectively for an optimal professional climate. The greater the collective, the greater the clout.

4. Key points for the upcoming period

BNO will continue to build upon the course it set in recent years. We monitor the relevant professional developments, know our members, constantly assess what works for them and how it can improve.

We will pay close attention to digitisation in the coming period as its deployment is as indispensable as it is promising for any design practice. Internationalisation will be a high priority, in light of market expansion as well as promoting design from the Netherlands in general.

We will also focus on ties with foreign employees of agencies, foreign students and foreign designers who relocate to the Netherlands.

Finally, of course, recruitment will once again be high on our agenda.

Over the past few years, we have experimented with programmatic approaches tailored to different profiles and target groups, such as different fields and issues as well as the professional phase in which designers find themselves; this approach has proved effective. We have reviewed our communication tools and are working towards an effective communication mix.

We will further align the various components of our services, aiming for synergy.

We have a more systematic approach to our own marketing because a large and powerful community is vital to our mission.

Advice and support

The business and legal support offered by BNO is the most important reason for many designers and design agencies to become a member. After all, an excellently-implemented, accessible and customised source of information is more appealing, and usually much more effective, than generic digital alternatives.

We provide access to a lot of essential basic knowledge via our website, supplemented with tips, advice and experiences from designers. We monitor relevant changes in regulations. We update, supplement and verify our sample documents as necessary (including the General Terms and Conditions).

In addition to all activities for starting designers, we will be paying closer attention to designers in the mid-career phase, for example, through the BNO Next Step programme. Issues that concern them are, for example, the right focus for them, how they are organised, reaching new markets or upscaling.

We will also be launching new services for agencies, including specific advice and coaching related to tendering. We will be more explicit about the option of second-line advice through the Stichting Rechtshulp Ontwerpers (Legal Aid Designers Foundation).

BNO will continue to claim authority as a unique knowledge centre, not only for designers but also for clients and other stakeholders. The key point 'recruitment' will thus take shape at both individual and collective level.

Talent and education

We will intensify our contact with vocational colleges such as TUs, art academies, CMDs and IPOs. They do a fantastic job in developing creative talent, but voiced concerns expressed in practice often go unheard. Academies still focus too much on autonomous design practices, whereas teamwork is becoming increasingly important and there is a great need for specially-trained talent in the agency world.

We will be in contact with teachers and coordinators. We will organise meetings between them and the creative directors of agencies. We will transform our guest lectures into a more appealing and interactive model under the name BNO Business Boost. As for BNO activities aimed at young talent – YA (Young Alumni), the No Panic Class and No Panic Room, BNO Start and the Driving Dutch Design programme – we will add agency visits as a welcome broadening of professional horizons.

Depending on their size, agencies are also concerned with issues relating to identity and focus, and by extension, to staff policy, scale and internationalisation.

The BNO Academy range has been expanded in recent years with new opportunities for peer review and coaching. We will continue with that. We will also explore how professional training given by professionals can contribute to closing the gap between education and certain specialised professional practices.

Of course, these activities are also directly related to the ‘recruitment’ and ‘internationalisation’ key points.

Exchange and matchmaking

‘real’ experiences increases. Personal contact is highly valued, and the ability to offer it is also an important part of practising the profession.

BNO is a meeting place for young alumni, starters, mid-career designers, agencies and senior professionals. All these designers together possess a wealth of knowledge and experience that cannot be found anywhere else. In recent years, this unique fact has given rise to BNO Mentoring, meet-ups, programmes for and exchanges between alumni and starters, agency platforms and regional platforms. Encouraged by the positive feedback, we will continue in this vein. We add the link between starters and agencies; to inform, update and inspire them in both directions. With eyes wide open, BNO serves as a connector and matchmaker.

The recruitment power this holds is obvious, so we are consciously applying it more often. Extending this to the ‘internationalisation’ key point is part of this as well, for example with the Platform Internationaal (International Platform), English-language meet-ups and more English content on our website.

Communication

Taking into account 'digitisation' as a key point, we are also working towards more online communication. The source of knowledge and information embodied by BNO can be accessed more easily and adapted to the contemporary world. This will also encourage designers and other stakeholders to make use of all available information. In recent years, we have created a new database, a new website and added Instagram to our social media.

Based on a detailed communication plan drawn up this year, we will be streamlining our communication and making it more contemporary. This will be partly done through further development of our website and social media, the facilitation of knowledge sharing and contact between members, the use of more visuals and sound, and content creation with the designers themselves. These methods of communication will increase the relevance of BNO and contribute to its image and visibility. In that context, we are also working hard on a new layout of our magazine, with the first issue to be published in the first quarter of 2020.

Marketing relating to retention and recruitment will receive more systematic attention, i.e. BNO's services and activities will be looked at more closely from that angle. We will recruit new members and acknowledge existing members in their membership. The profile and task of one of our new team members are aimed at this; new promotional material will be developed based on a separate marketing plan, and specific campaigns will be (co-)created.

Lobbying

BNO operates in a landscape that is extensive and not easy to oversee, let alone easy to see through. BNO structurally and actively engages with the following key players for the purpose of lobbying: the network of the Federatie Creatieve Industrie (Dutch Creative Industries Federation), Pictoright, the Platform Makers, and PACCT (the recently established Platform Arbeidsmarkt Culturele en Creatieve Toekomst; Labour Market Platform Cultural and Creative Future). Furthermore, BNO is also affiliated with useful organisations such as MKB Nederland (Dutch Federation of SMEs), Kunsten '92 and BEDA (Bureau of European Design Organisations).

Lobbying activities will be continued or initiated. BNO has lobbying activities on different subjects, in different ways and with different parties. When it concerns how museums deal with the design profession and design collections, we will lobby on our own. Over the past period, together with other appropriate parties, we have successfully brought the issue of 'Archives of Design and Digital Culture' to the attention of the Minister of Education, Culture and Science. As a result, she made funds available to prepare for the development of a renewed policy in which Het Nieuwe Instituut (The New Institute) has been assigned the coordinating role.

Concerning copyright, our lobbying activities will be carried out with and through the Platform Makers. We will use PACCT for lobbying on a wide-ranging and complex subject such as the 'Labour Market for the Cultural and Creative Sector' in an even broader context. The Labour Market remains one of the most prominent items on our agenda. The subject touches on many aspects: educational programmes as preparation for professional practice, further professional development, business equipment, proper commissioning practices, revenue models, rate agreements, etc.

5. Conditions and execution

This policy plan will be translated into concrete action plans for each component. To achieve its objectives, BNO will reconsider its secondary activities, strengthen what works and eliminate what does too little. We will continue to experiment with working methods, information carriers, etc. We will set concrete goals, when feasible and worthwhile. We will continue to evaluate.

Naturally, the composition and working method of the BNO team, the available finances, the exchange with our affiliated designers and agencies, the way in which they wish to commit themselves to BNO as a community and the cooperation with relevant other parties are all prerequisites for achieving our goals. In the upcoming period, we will pay close attention to monitoring needs, questions and the actual use of our services and to securing knowledge through our new database.