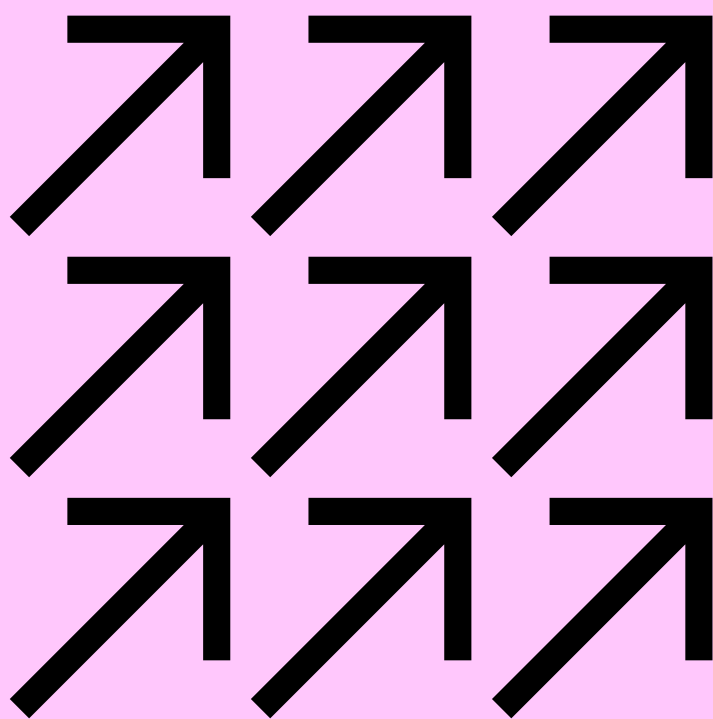




Upstarts Mentor Guidelines 2026



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TBWA Ireland

Overview

The Upstarts Programme helps to unearth and prepare emerging creative talent for the industry, regardless of their background. At its heart, it's a social good collaboration that fosters, supports, and provides opportunity to creatives who demonstrate skill and aptitude.

The role of a mentor is pivotal. It's a mutually beneficial relationship, offering mentors a chance to develop leadership skills, give back to the industry, and genuinely influence someone's career for the better. For the Upstart, your guidance is invaluable in developing their creative skills, bolstering confidence, and understanding the industry.

Commitment as a Mentor

To ensure a successful and rewarding experience for both mentors and Upstarts, please consider the following commitments:

Time – Quality over Quantity:

- ↳ We ask mentors to commit approximately one hour per week for one-on-one time with their Upstart. This can be a single session or split into two shorter meetings/calls, depending on what works best for both of you.

Availability & Communication:

- ↳ Mentors are asked to be contactable and make themselves available to their Upstarts – within reason. We do not expect immediate email responses or for you to share personal contact numbers if you prefer not to.
- ↳ Establish clear communication channels and expectations from the outset (see section 5).

Scheduling Meetings:

- ↳ While mentors are asked to take a lead in scheduling initial meetings, this should become a reciprocal relationship. We encourage Upstarts to act professionally in managing their schedules and respecting yours.
- ↳ Be mindful that many Upstarts may be working full or part-time jobs alongside the programme.

Programme Events:

- ↳ Mentors are requested to attend 2-3 key in-person events during the programme, such as the initial programme launch (where mentors are assigned) and the final exhibition.
- ↳ You will be given plenty of notice for these events.

Guiding Your Upstart

Key Responsibilities

Your primary role is to support your Upstart and help them navigate the programme effectively. This includes:

Creative Development

Help them develop their creative skills in response to briefs. Discuss briefs, review work in advance of each hosted agency/studio session, and provide constructive feedback.

Industry Insight

Offer general advice on presenting work, engaging with creative directors, and provide insights into the workings of the creative industry.

Confidence Building

Bolster their confidence as they prepare to become industry-ready individuals.

Navigating the Programme

Help them understand how to make the most of connections and the overall Upstarts experience.

Successful Mentorship

Feedback from previous Upstarts has shown that a clear understanding and proactive engagement from both mentor and Upstart leads to the most fruitful relationships.

The Initial Meeting is Crucial:

At the very beginning of your mentoring relationship, we strongly encourage you to have an open discussion about mutual expectations. You should cover:

- ↳ Preferred communication methods (e.g., email, Zoom, phone) and realistic response times.
- ↳ Key goals for the Upstart during the programme.
- ↳ How you both envisage your weekly sessions working (e.g., work review, industry chat, specific skill focus).
- ↳ Boundaries and availability.

Proactive Engagement:

Encourage your Upstart to be proactive in preparing for discussions, having questions ready, and clearly articulating areas where they need guidance.

If your Upstart is quiet or seems disengaged, try to proactively reach out and check in.

Open and Honest Communication:

Foster an environment of trust. Discussions within the mentor-Upstart relationship should be treated as confidential by both parties.

Be receptive to their questions and concerns.

Constructive Feedback:

Provide honest, constructive feedback aimed at helping them improve and grow. Be receptive to their thoughts on the feedback too.

Respect and Professionalism:

Respect each other's time and commitments. Uphold professional conduct in all interactions.

Suggested Framework for Mentor-Upstart Contact

While every mentorship pair will find their own rhythm, here's a suggested framework to help structure your interactions:

Phase 1: Programme Start & Initial Connection (First 1-2 Weeks)

Focus: Getting acquainted, goal setting, and establishing routines.

Activities:

- ↳ Your first meeting should focus on the points in “The Initial Meeting is Crucial” (section 4).
- ↳ Discuss the Upstart’s application work and their aspirations for the programme.
- ↳ Review the overall Upstarts programme structure and initial workshop outputs.
- ↳ Agree on a regular day/time for your weekly one-hour session, if possible.

Phase 2: Core Programme - Brief Cycles (Weekly)

Focus: Responding to briefs, skill development, industry learning.

Suggested Weekly Session Structure (adapt as needed):

- ↳ Work Review (20-30 mins): Discuss the current brief. Review the Upstart’s concepts, work-in-progress, or polished pieces before they present to the host agency/studio. Provide specific, actionable feedback.
- ↳ Skill Focus/Industry Insight (15-20 mins): Dedicate time to a specific skill (e.g., copywriting, art direction, presentation) or a broader discussion about industry practices, roles, or challenges.
- ↳ Q&A and Forward Planning (10-15 mins): Address any questions the Upstart has. Briefly discuss the upcoming brief or any programme activities.

Phase 3: Mid-Programme Check-in (Around halfway)

Focus: Reviewing progress, addressing challenges, and refining goals.

Activities:

- ↳ Discuss what’s working well in the mentorship and what could be improved.
- ↳ Revisit the Upstart’s initial goals – are they on track? Do they need adjusting?
- ↳ Identify any recurring challenges or areas where the Upstart might need more focused support.

Phase 4: Programme End & Exhibition Preparation (Final Weeks)

Focus: Finalising portfolio pieces, exhibition preparation, and future steps.

Activities:

- ↳ Help the Upstart select and refine their best work for their portfolio and the final Upstarts Exhibition.
- ↳ Offer advice on presenting their work at the exhibition and networking with industry professionals.
- ↳ Discuss potential career next steps and job-seeking strategies.

Flexibility is Key: This framework is a guide, not a rigid set of rules. The most effective mentorships are adaptable to the Upstart's evolving needs and your working style. Regular, open communication about how the mentorship is progressing is essential.

Support for Mentors

You are not alone, ICAD is here to support you:

Ongoing Assistance:

ICAD is available throughout the programme to support mentors and Upstarts alike.

Resources & Updates:

ICAD will share Upstarts briefs on a weekly basis and will periodically check in with you to ensure things are running smoothly.

Guidance:

Mentors receive guidance and support from ICAD to help ensure a positive and productive relationship.

Troubleshooting:

We encourage mentors to reach out at any time if the relationship is proving difficult to manage (e.g., conflicting schedules, workload issues). We can help navigate and find a solution.

Programme Schedule:

ICAD will provide mentors with a full programme schedule by early August 2026 so you have oversight of pressure points and can plan accordingly.

Fostering an Inclusive Environment

ICAD and our programme partners are profoundly committed to fostering a diverse, inclusive, and equitable environment within the Upstarts programme and the wider creative industries. Upstarts actively aims to attract and support individuals from marginalised and underrepresented groups, thereby enhancing the diversity of voices and perspectives in the advertising and design industries. As a mentor, your respectful and inclusive approach will contribute significantly to creating a welcoming and supportive learning environment for all participants.

Contact Us

To apply to be a mentor please fill out this [form](#).

If you have any questions, concerns, or require support at any stage, please do not hesitate to contact ICAD. For any queries, please email: info@icad.ie

Thanks

We extend our heartfelt thanks to our partners for their invaluable support in fostering creative talent and helping retain it within the Irish creative industries. Their commitment also enables us to introduce more diversity into the industry, which is proven to enhance creative outputs and benefit the sector as a whole. Together, through the programme, we are building a more vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable future where Irish creativity flourishes.

Lead Partner

core

Core is Ireland's largest marketing communications company. We collaborate across multiple Practices, working towards a single purpose, to expand the possibilities of what brands can achieve. By truly embracing collaboration, sharing ideas freely and empowering one another, we create work that is more powerful and transformative than our individual efforts can ever be.

Programme Partner

TBWA\ Ireland

TBWA\ Ireland, is over 100 ambitious people who believe in creating a total brand world for their equally ambitious clients. Backed by a network of over 11,100 people, we use Disruption® to connect a brand's total ecosystem. All with the ambition to go beyond just saying things, to doing and making amazing things, every day. Because we believe our best work is always ahead of us.

Diversity Partner

DesignOpp

DesignOpp is a not-for-profit initiative championing diversity in Irish design, so People of Colour can fulfill their creative potential. Our goal is to provide more opportunities, diversify education and create a welcoming community for Creatives of Colour.