



Sir Misha Black Awards

for Distinguished Services to Design Education



2025 Sir Misha Black Awards Honour Leaders Transforming Design Education

The 1851 Royal Commission and the Sir Misha Black Awards Committee have announced the recipients of the 2025 Sir Misha Black Awards for Design Education, celebrating outstanding contributions to innovation, leadership, and lifelong impact in the field.

The Sir Misha Black Medal for Distinguished Services to Design Education will be awarded to Professor William Ion and Lady Helen Hamlyn, in recognition of their exceptional influence on design learning, research, and social innovation.

The Sir Misha Black Award for Innovation in Design Education will be presented to Victoria Thornton and the Thornton Education Trust (TET) for their pioneering work engaging young people with architecture and the built environment.

Professor William Ion

Sir Misha Black Medal for Distinguished Services to Design Education

For over 35 years, Professor William Ion has shaped design education in the UK and internationally, establishing Product Design Engineering as a discipline that unites engineering design, industrial design, and manufacturing.

Early in his career, he co-developed and taught the groundbreaking Total Design course at the University of Strathclyde (1986–1991) with Professor Stuart Pugh, attracting over 300 students weekly from across engineering disciplines and setting new standards for interdisciplinary collaboration.

He went on to found the MEng Product Design Engineering programme in 1991, which remains the flagship course of Strathclyde's Department of Design, Manufacturing and Engineering Management (DMEM). Professor Ion also played a key role in the Sharing Experience in Engineering Design (SEED) network and the establishment of the Design Education Special Interest Group (DESIG) within the Design Society, co-founding the influential E&PDE Conference, now a global annual event.

Beyond education, he has been central to manufacturing innovation as founding Director of the Advanced Forming Research Centre (AFRC) and part of the team that established the National Manufacturing Institute Scotland and led the establishment of its Manufacturing Skills Academy, with a focus on lifelong learning.



Lady Helen Hamlyn CBE **Sir Misha Black Medal for Distinguished Services to Design Education**

For more than four decades, Lady Helen Hamlyn has redefined design education through a visionary combination of creativity, collaboration, and social purpose.

Her journey began with the New Design for Old exhibition at the V&A in 1986, reframing ageing as a design challenge. She later founded DesignAge at the Royal College of Art, which evolved into the internationally acclaimed Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design (HHCD)—a pioneer in inclusive and human-centred design impacting design practice, policy, industry, healthcare, and design education.

Lady Hamlyn's impact extends beyond traditional design education. As a designer she has brought design thinking into health, culture, and community development. Amongst her major initiatives are the endowment of the Hamlyn Centre for Robotic Surgery at Imperial College London (2008) which brings together engineers, clinicians and computer scientists at the forefront of research in surgical robotics, founding Open Futures (2003), an award-winning learning programme for children in deprived areas which introduced new contexts for learning and supported schools to design a more holistic and expansive curriculum. International projects in India, Portugal and the USA combine education, sustainability, and cultural preservation and demonstrate her belief that when communities are supported to design their own solutions, the results can be truly transformative.

Victoria Thornton and the Thornton Education Trust **Sir Misha Black Award for Innovation in Design Education**

The 2025 Sir Misha Black Award for Innovation in Design Education recognises Victoria Thornton and the Thornton Education Trust (TET) for transforming how young people engage with architecture, sustainability, and civic design.

Building on her legacy as founder of Open House/Open City, Thornton created TET in 2020 to empower the next generation to shape the environments they will inherit. TET's programmes, including the Inspire Future Generation Awards and its Knowledge Hub, connect educators, policymakers, and design professionals to share best practice and give young people a meaningful voice in the built environment. TET has also recently launched the Imagine Built Environment Education programme, a new initiative designed to bring architecture and the built environment into primary schools across the UK.

Thornton's distinguished career includes leadership roles with the Architectural Association, the RIBA Royal Gold Medal Jury, and national design initiatives such as the Farrell Review. Her work has been recognised with an OBE for Services to Architecture and Education, an Honorary RIBA Fellowship, and an Honorary MA from London Metropolitan University.
<https://www.thorntoneducationtrust.org/>



The Sir Misha Black Medal for Distinguished Services to Design Education and the Sir Misha Black Award for Innovation in Design Education will be presented at a Ceremony to be held at Imperial College London at 6pm on 18th November 2025.

For further information contact the Administrator: royalcom1851@imperial.ac.uk

BACKGROUND NOTE FOR EDITORS

Set up to commemorate the legacy of Sir Misha Black, the Sir Misha Black Medal for Distinguished Services to Design Education is awarded to individuals across the globe who have made a significant contribution to design education. First awarded in 1978, the Medal began life as a biennial event but has since become an annual date within the design world calendar.

The Sir Misha Black Award for Innovation in Design Education was instituted in 1998. It stands alongside the Sir Misha Black Medal for Distinguished Services to Design Education which was established in 1978. The decision to create an additional award was in response to changes in Design Education since 1978.

In 2020, the Sir Misha Black Awards Committee came under the wing of the Royal Commission for the Exhibition of 1851. The inclusion of the Sir Misha Black Awards in the Royal Commission's portfolio, effective from February 2020, reinforces the Commission's mission to "increase the means of industrial education and extend the influence of science and art upon productive industry".

Sir Misha Black

Sir Misha Black was an industrial designer who with his partner Milner Gray, founded DRU (Design Research Unit) in the late 1940s. It became one of the first international, interdisciplinary design practices with major clients in industrial design, architecture and graphics. In 1959 Misha Black was appointed the first Professor of Industrial Design at the Royal College of Art, a post he held until his retirement in 1975. He was the most influential design teacher of his time, involved in international design affairs as well as being a gifted speaker and writer on design matters.

About the Royal Commission for the Exhibition of 1851

The Royal Commission for the Exhibition of 1851 offers major awards to scientists and engineers for research, development and design. First established to stage the Great Exhibition in 1851, the Royal Commission's extraordinary history is founded on an inspired vision of the importance of education to economic success.