



# Working in Partnership

## 'Designing Weather' Project with the Met Office

### Overview

The Met Office approached Bath Spa University with a clear brief for the design of three visual ideas for a particular kind of weather forecasting. The brief contained some particularly conceptually challenging ideas. A team of students and staff members were assigned to the project.

### About the Project

The DesignLab at Bath Spa University's School of Art & Design has many relationships with organisations and companies, some of which involve collaborative projects with students and staff. The Met Office approached the University for support with its 'Designing Weather' project in a negotiated commission. The project was set by the Met Office in collaboration with a tutor and included required outputs.

The Met Office wanted to find a way to present probabilistic weather forecasts in such a way that they can be grasped by the non-specialist without requiring interpretation by a Met Office forecaster. The objective of the Designing Weather project was to develop innovative visual presentation of probabilistic forecasts.

A further objective was to road test this presentation with potential users.

The Met Office brief required the following deliverables:

- Three options for visual presentation of probabilistic forecasts
- Determine appropriate criteria for assessment of the design and provide results from road-testing with users
- Presentation to the Met Office at the end of the project

The project involved the following team from Bath Spa University:

- Julie Depledge, Head of Graphic Communication
- Anthony Head, Senior Lecturer Digital Media & Senior Teaching Fellow
- Paul Minott, Senior Lecturer Graphic Design
- Four third year graphic communication students

Part of the tutors' role was to mediate a result that was satisfactory for the Met Office and yet had the interests of the students' education as its goal. The complexity of the brief led to a great deal of investigation and discussion in order to ensure all-round understanding of the concepts.

### Fast Facts

- The Met Office brief was challenging intellectually and clearly met the University's course learning outcomes
- The project benefited the students with transferable skills
- Further possibilities for collaborative working are being pursued

## Benefits

Working on this project benefited the students with transferable skills such as time management, team working, self-esteem and confidence, networking and learning presentation skills. It also enabled the exploration of creative skills and gave the students experience of client-based briefs.

The Met Office brief was challenging intellectually and clearly met the University's course learning outcomes due to the specific nature of the brief. The client was very 'hands off' in its approach and deliberately did not dictate too precisely any expectations. They were looking for innovative ideas rather than any particular solution. This was a significant benefit for this type of project, as the creativity of the students was not compromised.

A mid-project visit to the Met Office was arranged for the students to present their ideas in progress. This was useful, as it confirmed to the student that they were on the right track. This kind of mentoring also helps students to understand the nature of client-based work. A final presentation was made to the Met Office in May 2009.

In exchange for the value received, the Met Office made a contribution to the graphic communication department at the University.

## Outcomes

The project scope expanded and was undertaken by four students, heavily supported by Bath Spa University staff. Following the final presentation of the developed work, a number of the ideas presented have commercial potential which the Met Office would like to take forward and evaluate with customers in the next phase of the project. Some of them have a strong possibility of going into production. Further longer term possibilities for collaborative working between the Met Office and Bath Spa University may be pursued, such as a Knowledge Transfer Partnership and partnership in a MA Communication Design.

## Perspective

“It was great to see the creativity generated by the students especially working with probabilistic forecasts. We were delighted with the results and would not be shy about doing something like this again.”

**Karen Dutton**  
Head of Products & Portfolio  
Met Office

“This design project offered students plenty of creative and educational challenge, whilst fulfilling the client's needs. Keeping academic aims at the core of the project ensured that all stakeholders – students, staff, the client, the design industry – not only understood the benefits but were able to celebrate this kind of project.”

**Anthony Head**  
Senior Lecturer Digital Media  
& Senior Teaching Fellow  
Bath Spa University