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Opinion: the future looks bright

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Opinion: The future looks bright

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In the mid-1990s, demographers warned of the loss of knowledge and wisdom associated with the impending wave of baby-boom retirements. Some in the lighting community predicted a future in which there were fewer educational programs in lighting for designers or researchers, fewer conferences, fewer and weaker journals, and fewer experts to serve on committees. All the talk at meetings and in the bars after was gloomy.

Instead, today our collective future shines brightly.

As in other fields, many lighting professionals remain active well past traditional retirement age. We need their wisdom now more than ever, so that in the headlong rush to apply new findings from photobiology or to use novel light sources, we do not repeat past errors.

New leaders and programmes have emerged. A group of lighting design educators led by the Professional Lighting Designers' Association is using a wiki to develop a common curriculum for architectural lighting design, building for the first time an international consensus on what a lighting designer ought to know. In North America, IES has a new educational programme, and the Nuckolls Fund for Lighting Education funds a variety of curriculum development and graduate student research projects. New staff have moved to universities where it had been feared that key departures had meant an end to lighting education. Previously existing scholarship and student design competitions continue, some with endowment funding to ensure their continuity.

Innovative events such as the Academic Forum hosted by VELUX in Lausanne in May 2011 contribute to the strength of the next generation of lighting researchers. Thirty doctoral candidates in lighting from all over Europe shared their research ideas and received feedback from their peers and from more seasoned scientists. As one of the latter group, I was impressed by the creative ideas presented as well as by the number and diversity of students. The second such forum, now called LumeNet (and sponsored by VELUX, the Society of Light and Lighting, Thorn Lighting, Zumtobel, and the University of Sheffield), will take place in June 2012 (<http://www.lumenet2012.group.shef.ac.uk/index.html>).

Every established professional can contribute to this bright future by serving as a mentor. Whether in the context of a formal program, or one-on-one, early-career professionals benefit from an ongoing relationship with a more senior colleague in the same field who can guide their career development, preferably someone not in a direct reporting relationship. Mentoring well takes time and thought and can be a distraction from one's job, but it is a professional responsibility that we all ought to take seriously.

This is a good time for lighting, with the exciting advances in lighting technologies and in scientific knowledge about light and lighting. These new developments and emerging leaders add to the ample reasons for optimism about lighting's bright future in our buildings and communities, as an industry, and as part of the fabric of society.

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