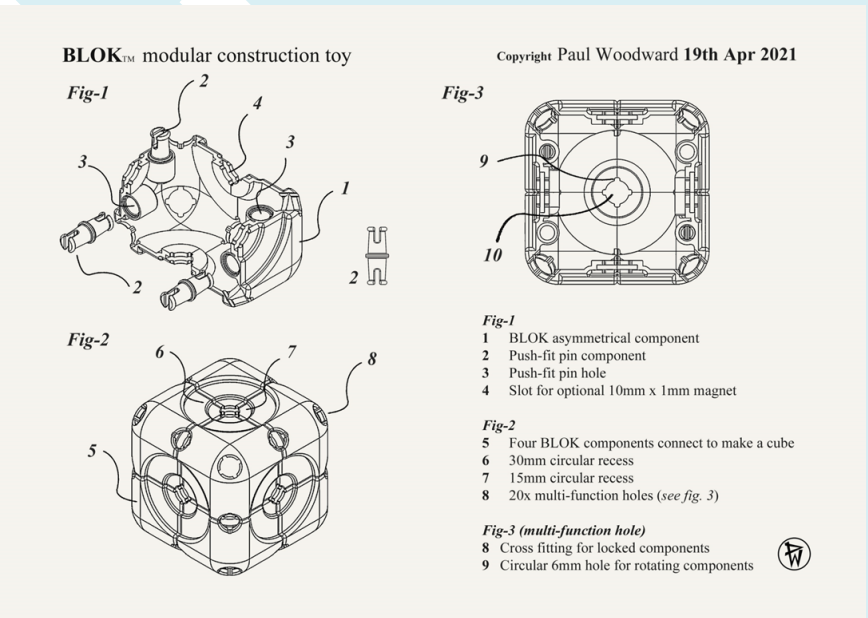
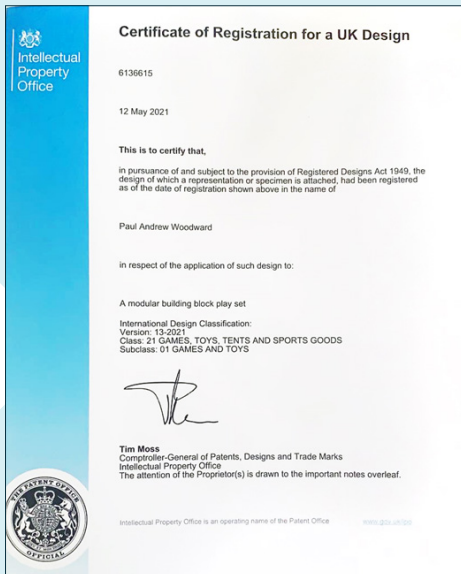


Protecting Designs

Paul Woodward, Curriculum Consultant at the Design & Technology Association

Exploring the importance of safeguarding creative work, Paul explains key types of IP protection such as trademarks, patents, and copyrights, while also providing practical advice for students and teachers on protecting and valuing their designs. Sharing ideas through exhibitions or online can expose them to misuse, making it vital to understand intellectual property (IP) protection.



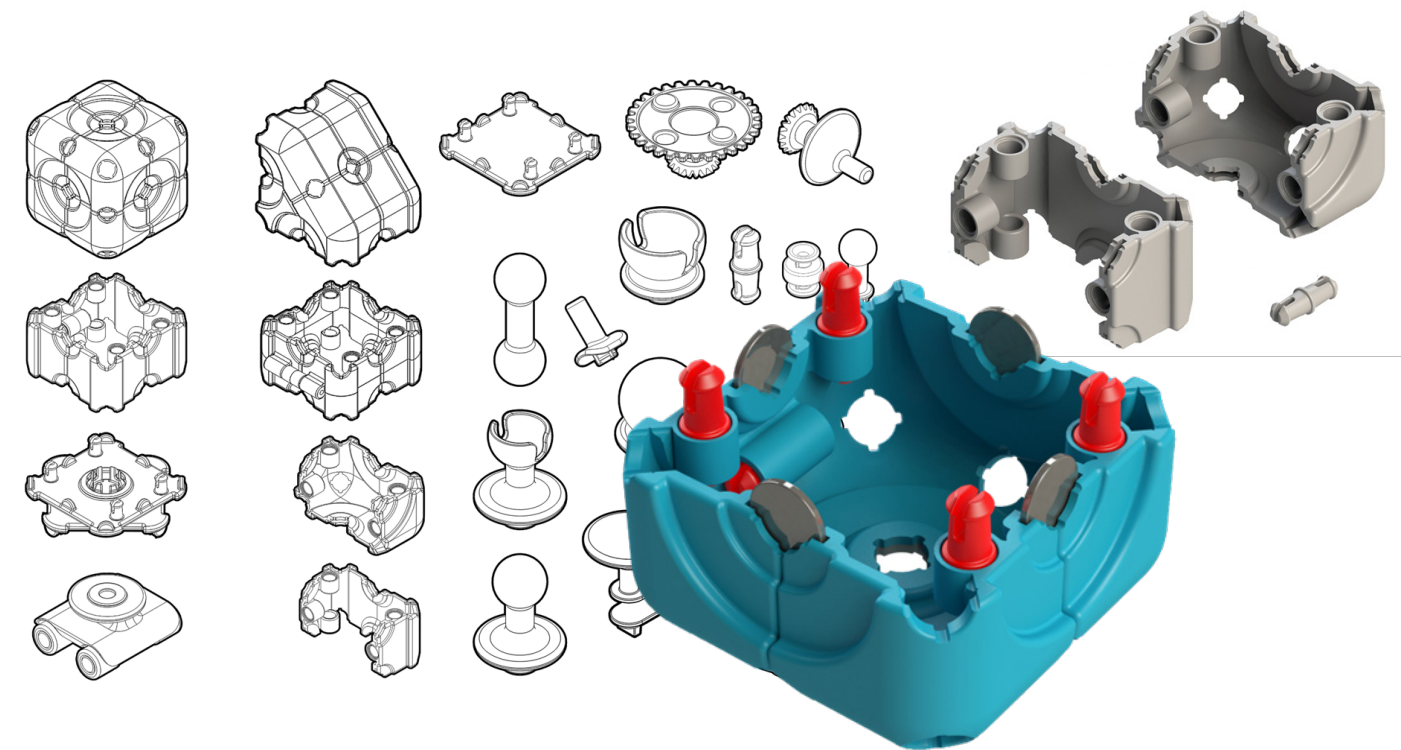
As a teacher, it's easy to think that the ideas and concepts created in school are crude or lack potential. After all, these are the concepts of young minds who are yet to develop into designers or architects. Students often value their ideas even less, yet how many basic ideas, with a little development, might become a great design. It will take time and perseverance, of course, but it could happen; it could also happen that someone else sees the potential of that design in a newsletter, end-of-year show or even on social media. Given that it's just a student project, surely it's alright to be inspired by it, or maybe even just take it?

Sadly, it does happen, not just in the world of education but also in the real world of industry. That is why there are ways of protecting your designs, but do you know how or what type of design protection is needed?

If someone took a physical object from your home, we call it theft, but it's harder to comprehend that same theft being an idea or concept from your mind. Intellectual Property (IP) is just like your house; it is your physical property. Intellectual Property can be protected too.

There are various ways that this can be done, but in the UK, we use the government IP office which can be found via the link at the end of this article.

There are a few different approaches to protection depending on what it is you have created.



Trademarks

Trademarks, like logos, are a vital aspect of a product or brand's identity. Consider the Apple logo and how valuable that is to the company. Did you know that the original Apple logo belonged to the Beatles, who sued Apple in 1978? Rumour had it that the reason the Apple logo looks the way it does is because the Beatles company took a bite of their profits, so they took a bite out of the Apple logo. It's so it looks less like a cherry. Use this if you have designed a name or logo that needs protecting.

Patents

Patents require that the aspect being protected is unique and could essentially be licensed. Think about zips, press studs, paper clips, correcting fluid etc. Many different brands, but someone holds the patent and therefore receives money from each sale. Registering a patent is an expensive and long process that involves checking against other patents worldwide. This is best left for when something new and groundbreaking is invented.

Copyright

Copyright is automatically granted to its creator. However, proving that it's yours is where copyright enforcement comes into play. You can claim copyright for anything you create, from a poem to a spaceship

Students are most likely to need registered design protection for their work. This option registers the appearance of a

product, such as its shape or pattern, so if you have designed a chair or item of clothing with a unique appearance or function, you would register that design. If a design registration is granted, you are given a unique design number which lasts five years. You can keep extending this up to a maximum of twenty-five years.

Bear in mind that your design must be new.

The design of something can include one or more of the following:

- physical shape
- configuration (or how different parts of a design are arranged together)
- decoration or colour
- pattern

Registering a design is not free and starts at £50 for one design to £150 for up to fifty designs. Bear in mind that it is a strictly controlled process where illustrations have to meet strict set standards, or they will be rejected. It is certainly an interesting process to look at, even if you don't go through with it to the point of paying.

It is also worth noting that you cannot register a vague concept or idea, no matter how good it is. You would, at the very least, need to provide drawings and illustrations explaining what it is you are registering. You might have CAD renders or working prototypes too, but whatever is in the image you send is registered, so if you had

some coloured buttons in one design, but they were plain white in your registered images, it wouldn't be covered by the registration if someone copied it.

Remember that there is no obligation to protect your designs and that copyright is automatically assigned to its creator. However, if you want to truly own your designs and stop them from being copied it is good to know that the service is there and, even if you don't pay to register your design, it's a good exercise to look at the process which could even enhance the quality (and grade) of your design work.

Link



Intellectual Property
www.gov.uk/government/organisations/intellectual-property-office

