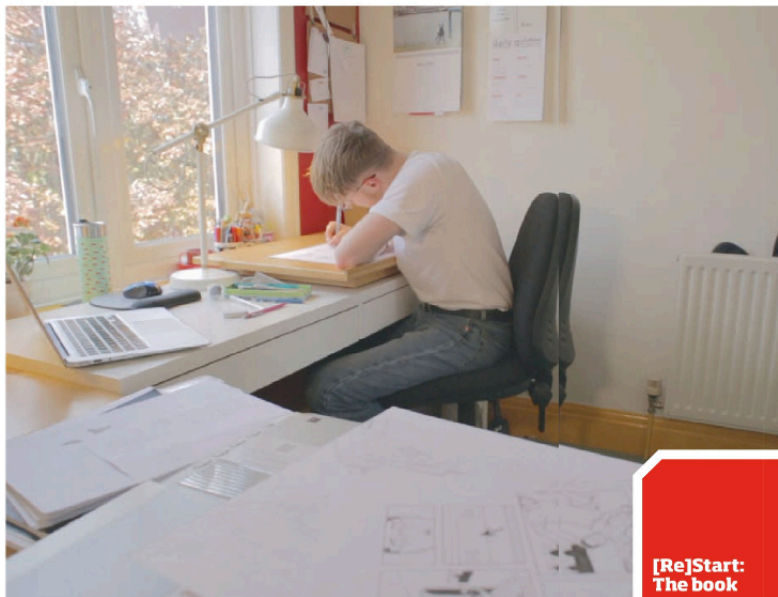




[RE]START CONTRIBUTORS AT A CAFE, AND ILLUSTRATOR EDDY NICHOLLS, RIGHT



[Re]Start: The book



[Re]Start: It's Never Too Late
James Pattinson, Julia Cockerham, Latreya Nelson, Eddy Nicholls, Alex Copeman, Yabaewah Scott
Whitefox Publishing, 16th January, £16.99, pb, 9781915096360
Andi, Pete, Priya, Sophie, Tash, TJ and Yasmin enrol onto the [Re]Start programme, and in six bite-sized chapters, learn how to manage the many obstacles they face.

[Re]Start offers compassionate career guidance in an innovative format

[Re]Start founder James Pattinson discusses the collaborative and creative process behind a graphic novel which seeks to educate and support young people making choices about their futures



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The flowering of *[Re]Start*—a genre-bending graphic novel cum wellbeing and professional development handbook aimed at 15-21 year-olds—sprouted just before the pandemic but in many ways its roots are far deeper.

The founder of the project, James Pattinson, has had a career as a marketer and entrepreneur including a senior role at Procter & Gamble; then at Reluctantly Brave, a Hoxton-based agency he co-founded in 2012; and latterly at The Strategy Shop, the consultancy he launched in 2020 along with the *[Re]Start* imprint. A line throughout these posts has been his work on mentoring and training younger people, particularly at Reluctantly Brave, where in the eight years of his tenure there, the (Young) Brave

scheme had more than 170 mentees and trainees work with the agency.

Pattinson says: “We brought in people from any background and trained them to be strategists, had them working with c.e.o.s., HR directors, the finance team at Sainsbury’s—that kind of level of leader. What we realised quickly is that if you give people the right kind of coaching and training, age or background is irrelevant.”

Pattinson left Reluctantly Brave in 2019 to take a sabbatical in which he travelled around South America. On his return to Britain he began considering ways to bring this personal and professional development training to a wider audience: “I started thinking, what if you could package up the learning that we used to do—because we used to train young people up and then also train them on the job—in a way that was accessible?”

An obvious package was book form and here Pattinson thought there was a gap in the market: “There are a lot of developmental books out there, but very few for younger career people. There’s the sort of Matthew Syed end, who is very good but is on the very young side. Or there are

the investor books, like Ray Dalio which is like: ‘I’m a billionaire, this is how you get successful like me’. Both of which really don’t speak to the age we are going for.” And the graphic novel form was hit on partly for its accessibility, partly as it would be easier to merge narrative strands of the book design-wise with its handbook sections.

While the core idea and a lot of the concepts were Pattinson’s, he “made no claims at being a writer”—or for that matter, being in the age demographic *[Re]Start* is aimed at—so he assembled a team of early-career writers, illustrators and designers to bring the project to fruition: Julia Cockburn, Latreya Nelson, Eddy Nicholls, Alex Copeman and Yabaewah Scott. Though it should be noted that in the end around 60 people will have worked on the project “from age 16 to 60”, including A-level student script reviewers, BookTokkers and senior business people acting as advisors.

Ultimately, I really want [Re]Start to change mindsets—that there is no single path to your future

Accessible storytelling

When he joined [Re]Start, now Manchester-based Nicholls had just graduated from the Falmouth University illustration BA and had already built a chunky CV as he had been self-publishing his own comics since he was 15. But the project chimed as “I had been thinking about where comics come from and how they can be used as a medium going forward. If you look at their history, they were used a lot in education in the UK and the US before getting sidelined for being, I guess, ‘downmarket’. Which is a shame because they are perhaps the most accessible way to tell a story, and an accessible way to teach something: aeroplane safety manuals are essentially comics, for example. So when [Pattinson] came to me, he had all these great characters to work with, it was for an amazing cause and it pushed the medium of comics forward”.

Illustrator and animator Nelson was a recent graduate, too, when joining [Re]Start, having just completed an MA at the University of Arts London. Her fresh-into-the-workplace eyes and personal experience were poured into her sections of the book: “I’m a Black, working class, female animator—I’m like a myth. But I liked that I was able to pop characters from my background and my family into the story. And the book is a self-help guide and there are so many self-help guides out there, but they’re always talking at you: ‘This is what you should do.’ Our book doesn’t do that; it gives you the tools. It says: ‘You can do this, but it’s OK if you don’t, there are other avenues that you can take.’”

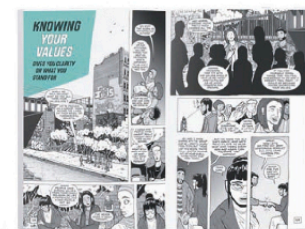
The narrative of *[Re]Start* has seven London-based young people from all walks of life who are trying to carve their own paths in the world, but due to various familial, educational and relationship difficulties are all at a crossroads. These include working-class kid TJ, whose education and employment prospects dim as he continues to remain loyal to his lairy mates from the estate; Afghan refugee Yasmin, who yearns to go to art school but thinks she should opt for a more “ambitious” degree in order not to disappoint her

parents who sacrificed so much to get the family to Britain; and tech whiz Pete who had to chuck his scholarship to an American university to care for his ailing parents.

The protagonists all meet at the titular [Re]Start, a course to help young people navigate work and wellbeing. The rest of the book has the reader also “taking” the course, but also following each character’s story. And it succeeds, partly because tips and tricks of the [Re]Start programme are lightly introduced within the narrative, but also because the outcomes of the stories are never sugar-coated and all feel real.

Imaginative progress

It is striking how much of the course is about mental health and wellbeing. Chinese exchange student Andi’s story, for example, largely centres around her self-esteem issues and the crushing isolation and loneliness she faces when she moves to Britain. Pattinson says this strand was in the pipeline at conception, but got more attention as the team kicked ideas around during the pandemic. He adds: “The heart of this book is about the challenges and confusion which are always there with young people when they are thinking about what they should do with their lives. But with Covid we really needed to address mental health as the statistics are so startling with more than 70% suffering from some sort of stress and anxiety.”



Pattinson has self-funded [Re]Start, setting it up as an arm of his marketing business though releasing the book through whitefox publishing services. Partially this is about keeping control of the IP, Pattinson explains: “We had conversations with some publishers and agents. But we want to have a book, various digital products, maybe set a film up—basically extending the audience in as many ways possible. A lot of publishers think book first and I don’t think they have the skills, the capability or the desire to do it the way we wanted—particularly as co-creatively as we did. So, shut or bust, I say.”

Nelson adds: “Obviously we hope this will eventually be a huge feature film, all the characters get brought to life on social media and all of that multi-channel stuff. But ultimately, I really want *[Re]Start* to change mindsets—that there is no single path to your future. *[Re]Start* is a way to connect parents to younger adults and let them have the conversation that there are many different ways to get where you want to go.”