

Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre

Led by **nesta**

Insights from our Industry Champions

The Value of Creative Higher and Further Education

Introduction

As part of the PEC's research agenda around the value of creative education, the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (PEC) has consulted its Industry Champions on their experience of recruiting talent from post-18 Higher and Further Education.

The PEC's Industry Champions are trusted and respected practitioners, drawn from all parts of the creative industries and from across the UK. They have deep knowledge of industry practice and a desire to inform academic research that leads to better policies for the creative industries.

We convened an Industry Panel which brought together some of the Industry Champions to work through the issues relating to recruitment of talent from post-18 Higher and Further Education. The panellists, working in industries as diverse as publishing, technology, design, craft, advertising, film and visual effects, met on July 16. A rapid evidence review, written by the PEC, and which will be published, was distributed beforehand and used to structure the discussion. The Panel was chaired by Caroline Julian, Director of Policy and Programmes at the Creative Industries Federation.

Panellists were asked to speak frankly about the reality of the situation within their sectors, including about areas where they believed there was a need for change. This note records the key points discussed at that meeting.

The purpose of the Panel was that its outcomes be used alongside research from the PEC and insights gathered from other key stakeholders to feed into relevant policy commissions, the Department for Education and All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs). Examples include Yvette Cooper's Commission for Workers and Technology,

Estelle Morris's Lifelong Learning Commission and the APPG for students, chaired by Paul Blomfield MP. In addition, the Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation Gavin Williamson MP has recently written to the Office for Students (OfS) voicing concerns about students getting 'value for money'. It will therefore be important to feed the outcomes of this Panel and additional research from the PEC into both his ministerial team and the OfS.

In addition, there are direct implications for the PEC itself, as well as for industry, that emerged. These are listed at the bottom of this note.

Insights

Higher vs Further Education

Echoing what we know about where the creative industries source talent, the panellists noted that they had primarily worked with or hired Higher Education (HE) graduates as opposed to those who had entered the sector through Further Education (FE). Statistics published by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport tell us that approximately 63% of employees in the creative industries are educated to degree level or equivalent level 4 qualification (compared with 35% in the economy as a whole). This has increased by almost one-third since 2011.¹

One panellist explained that in their experience applicants were surprisingly unprepared in their applications, and that those who came with qualifications from FE institutions tended to be even less well prepared. Panellists told us that they had met candidates at interview who were unable to even communicate about relevant, previous work and training. Panellists also felt that HE graduates displayed greater independence and had stronger organisational skills, and it was suggested that this may be because university graduates were more likely to have lived independently.

One panellist believed that some universities provided a great theoretical knowledge base for graduates. Best-practice was seen as where universities were prepared to combine this with an ability to listen to the needs of students and industry.

Panellists were generally unfamiliar with relevant **kitemarking schemes**, like the Creative Skillset Tick programme, but thought that they were a good idea. **An implication is that there is a need to more widely communicate these schemes to industry.**

¹ Occupation data is obtained from the Annual Population Survey (APS), which is itself a derivative of the [Labour Force Survey \(LFS\)](#). Methodological information about the LFS can be found [here](#). These are defined by the latest Standard Occupational Classifications (SOC2010) which was introduced in the 2011 data.

Course design

There were many suggestions from the panellists about ways in which HE and FE courses could be made more fit for purpose.

One suggested that students should learn about the impact that new technologies were having on the sector, as well as learning the most up-to-date technical skills that industry requires. The importance of creative technical skills for many creative occupations (as defined by DCMS) is explored in an [interactive data visualisation by Nesta](#). **The implication is that universities and FE institutions need to work more closely with businesses to understand which digital skills are currently being used in the creative sector, and ensure their courses can move dynamically to fit the creative industries' changing needs.**

The combining of courses (architecture, music, fashion) was also highlighted by a panellist as a useful way to prevent silos.

One panellist told us that graduate shows remained an important way for art and design graduates to develop a profile with businesses. One panellist mentioned that they regularly visited shows to scout for new talent.

Lack of business acumen amongst those graduating from both HE and FE institutions was highlighted by the Panel as a concern, particularly for those going into industries where many people are self-employed. **An implication is that HE and FE institutions need to ensure that they have opportunities for students to learn business skills by building them into their creative programmes.**

The importance of one-to-one mentoring as part of vocational FE was also mentioned by several panellists as an important preparation for the workplace. **More should be done by FE institutions and the creative industries to create mentoring opportunities.**

A common concern voiced by the panellists was a recent drop in the quality of soft skills such as communication and interpersonal skills amongst applicants. It was not felt that this was entirely (or even predominantly) the result of HE or FE policy, however, and concerns about changes to school curricula were also mentioned in this context. **The PEC should explore whether this drop in the quality of soft skills of HE and FE graduates is something we can detect in large-scale survey data sets.**

Work experience

Although all panellists agreed that work experience was important, they expressed concern about the number of different ways in which businesses were being asked to

support education initiatives - including school trips, T-Level experience, apprenticeships and university work placements. One Panel member highlighted problems they had faced when asked to provide work experience opportunities by university staff who did not understand how their business operated and were not prepared to fit placements around their working day. **The implication is that greater coordination is needed across training initiatives (both private and public sector) to ensure that the same organisations are not asked to provide every type of support.**

Difficulties surrounding work experience post-education were also highlighted by the Panel. One panellist told us that those entering the sector who for financial reasons needed to work immediately can get stuck in junior administration roles indefinitely. Recent steps to address the problem of unpaid internships were welcome, not least because these had meant unequal access to creative careers, but low-paid administration jobs were also a *de facto* barrier to entry. **An implication is that policymakers might need to think more laterally about how creative talent can get locked in to low pay careers. The PEC should investigate the number and impact of low-paid roles in the sector.**

A drive for inclusion

The panellists highlighted that there had been a significant drive for greater inclusion within a number of the sectors; one business represented at the table had for this reason dropped its requirement of having a degree.

Because of the high number of applications for many roles, one panellist told us that their business had historically been passive about attracting talent but were now taking more direct action (with placements offered), not to drive numbers, but to challenge perceptions about 'who the industry is for'.

Another panellist mentioned that in order to diversify its workforce their organisation was employing directly from the local community. Many were focussing on increasing access to relevant experiences and subjects for those in local schools rather than for those already in higher and further education.

The value of HE creative subjects to businesses and students beyond salary

Panellists told us that the young people and graduates they encounter are motivated less by money, and instead are interested in the opportunity to work on problems and subjects they care about and which engage them. One member highlighted that within their own business they have alternative measures for success beyond revenue, including relationship building and social responsibility.

One panellist queried whether government measures of value must always come back to individual value, or whether the impact of the arts on society can be factored in.

These points provide fuel to calls for the government to do more to recognise the wider social (economic and non-economic) returns from public investment in creative education.

Salaries in the creative industries

Most panellists acknowledged that the starting salaries for creative occupations can be very low. Not only that, but people can get stuck on low salaries for a long time. One panellist said that in careers in, say, the financial services, each qualification has an associated salary increase which is more transparent than in the case of the creative industries. This is presumably in part because creative skills are more tacit/more difficult to codify than, say, accounting skills.

Interestingly, panellists in different sectors spoke of the phenomenon of a 'plateau' in creative industries' salaries at around £35k. They mentioned that some might experience a sudden jump to Director or Chief Executive level, but that there were few jobs at this more senior level and so many remained at around £35k indefinitely. **This is worthy of more investigation by the PEC.**

It was also observed that the starting age of people in some creative sectors seems to be rising - with one panellist mentioning that many of the people they employ in starter jobs are aged 26 or 27, considerably higher than just a few years ago. However, others said they still looked for talent straight out of higher education (21- 23 years old).

International and national students

One panellist observed that the pipeline out of creative Higher Education institutions into their sector was becoming more international. They noted that in the very recent past the number of those able to stay in the UK had dropped due to visa issues and this was giving rise to skills shortages. **(Note: in September, the government announced that from 2021 international students graduating from UK universities will have two-year work rights after graduation).**

Implications

There are clear insights and implications following from the discussion of the PEC's Industry Panel.

The implications for **policymakers** include:

- **Need for greater coordination across public training initiatives (including apprenticeships, T-level experience and school work experience).**
- **A review of enforcement of current legislation around unpaid internships and broader consideration of factors that lead creative talent to be locked in to low-paid careers.**
- **Greater recognition of the wider social (economic and non-economic) returns from public investment in creative education.**

Implications for **HE and FE** include:

- **Universities and FE institutions need to work more closely with businesses to understand which specific (rather than generic) digital skills are required in the creative sector, and ensure that their courses can move dynamically to fit the creative industries changing needs.**
- **HE and FE institutions need to ensure that they have opportunities for students to learn business skills by building them into their creative programmes.**
- **More should be done by FE institutions and the creative industries to create mentoring opportunities.**

Implications for **industry** include:

- **Need for greater publicity for existing kitemarking schemes.**
- **Need for greater coordination of training and education engagement initiatives.**
- **Industry, alongside policymakers and researchers, should consider why talent gets locked into low paying careers and what might be done to change this. To help researchers to do this they should consider how they can sensitively share salary and training data.**

Implications for the **PEC** include:

- **The PEC should explore whether this drop in the quality of soft skills of HE and FE graduates is something we see in large-scale survey data sets.**
- **Greater investigation is needed of the phenomenon of a 'plateau' in creative industries salaries around £35k, as well as of the number and type of low-paid starter jobs in the sector.**