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**Creative work careers: pathways and portfolios for the creative economy**

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**Abstract**

This article examines the career opportunities, challenges and trajectories of creative work. As part of the Creative Trident approach to creative workforce measurements, the embedded mode draws attention to creative work as it is undertaken outside of the creative industries. This article further considers and conceptualises the complex careers pathways of creative workers. Firstly, creative workers in non-creative occupations in other industries are discussed to highlight the challenges and barriers to securing creative employment and the balance creative workers establish with other forms of employment. Secondly, students from creative courses that go into non-creative occupations in other industries are discussed to highlight challenges students face in making the transition from higher education to creative employment in terms of workforce expectations and the competition amongst graduates. This article critically evaluates assumptions about transitions from education into creative work employment and associated career trajectories.

**Keywords**

creative industries; creative work; higher education; employability; careers.

**Introduction**

In December 2010 Universities UK published *Creating Prosperity: The Role of Higher Education in Driving the UK’s Creative Economy*, areport that emphasised higher education as the ‘primary producer of the talent and skills that feed the creative industries’ (iii). The report goes on to outline that:

[…] the primary purpose of higher education is not to develop narrow skill sets [...] Higher education nurtures and develops creative talent, and produces graduates with deep specialism and, increasingly, the ability to work in multidisciplinary teams. It is this talent that will innovate new products, processes and business models to drive the creative economy of the future (UK Universities 2010a, v)

This talent-based approach is well-established within a UK policy context and clear connections can be made to the earlier creative economy report *Creative Britain* (Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2008) in which a talent pathway is established through several stages of education. These reports sit within a wider policy context entwining higher education and the Creative Economy (see Banks and Hesmondhalgh 2009; Ashton and Noonan 2013). Central to these creative industries policy interventions is the question of how creativity and creative talent can, through higher education, be positioned as contributing to the UK economy. For Oakley, the global growth of the cultural and creative industries has seen this relationship become ‘more formal, more directed and more calculating’ (2013, 26).

Examining the distinctive features of creative work, Flew connects together individual understandings of creativity with workforce opportunities:

The capacity to be creative is something that is highly regarded. It is seen as being part of what makes us human, and a creative society is seen as something worth aspiring to. From such an angle, it would appear that creativity, like culture, is something that you cannot have too much of. There is also ample evidence that the ability to pursue creative work is highly sought after. (2012, 100)

These comments provide a helpful starting point in highlighting the different investments in creative production that extend from the capacity to be creative and involved in creative content production to making a living from, and contributing to, the economy as a creative worker. Reports, such as *Creative Britain* (Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2008) and *Creating Prosperity* (UK Universities 2010a),and higher education practice underpinned by an ‘industry-ready’ employability agenda (see Ashton and Noonan, 2013) address this later stage of enabling students to develop their interest in creative production and pursue careers as creative workers. However, as this article argues, there are potential obstacles for individuals moving positions on the talent pathway and in following a creative career trajectory.

Creative work is characterised by portfolio working in which individuals are involved in ‘multiple work and/or development activities simultaneously’ (Pollard 2013, 54) and, as such, there exists a multiplicity of career pathways and trajectories. Conditions of portfolio working and ‘multiple job-holding’ (Throsby and Zednik 2011) are increasingly the norm within creative career and labour markets and present a challenge for those hoping to securing creative occupations as a first choice and identify and follow defined career pathways and progression (see also, Stoyanova and Grugulis 2012 on career progression paradoxes). Building on a previous examination of the talent pathway approach of individuals realising and contributing their creativity to the economy (Ashton 2011a), this article draws on the concept of the ‘embedded creative’ to further examine the contingencies and challenges of a higher education for the creative industries.

**Part one: Defining (creative) industries and occupations**

The concept of creativity is the focus of continued academic, industry and policy debate, and it has been constructed and identified in relation to specific industries (DCMS 2001) and as processes that can be seen across the economy (Potts and Cunningham 2008; Bakhshi, Freeman and Higgs 2012). At stake within these debates are questions around what counts as creative work and who creative workers are. The Creative Trident approach – developed by the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation (CCI) (Higgs, Cunningham and Bakhshi 2008; Cunningham 2011; Flew 2012) – is a conceptual and empirical resource for examining creative work. In introducing the Creative Trident approach, Flew (2012) surveys different workforce definitions and notes that due to a lack of agreed methodology there has been a tendency to underestimate the number of people working in the creative industries. The Creative Trident approach emerged specifically in response to the Creative Industries National Mapping Project with the objective of ‘provid[ing] “defensible” evidence of the extent and contribution of creative workforce to the economy’ (Higgs and Cunningham 2008, 3). As Higgs, Cunningham and Bakhshi outline, the Trident focuses on three types of employment which collectively form the creative workforce:

Specialist – artists, professionals or creative individuals working in the creative industries.

Embedded – artists, professionals or creative individuals in creative roles ‘embedded’ in industries not defined as creative.

Support – staff in the creative industries providing management, secretarial, administrative and accountancy back-up. (2008, 20)

The methodology for defining these categories is based around statistical classification analysis but recognises that industry activity codes alone are insufficient (Cunningham 2013). As Cunningham (2013) outlines, the Trident disaggregates creative employment and allows for analysis of different types of employment (specialist, embedded, and creative) and creative activity within different labour markets (notably between cultural production for final consumption and creative services as business-to-business activities). The Creative Trident approach considers occupational and industrial classifications highlighting that creative work is not always located within the creative industries. More specifically, the concept of ‘embedded creative work’ signals the diverse activities and locations associated with creative work and, for this discussion, raises some of the complexities of creative career trajectories from higher education into ‘creative work in the creative industries’– specialist creative work.

**Part two: The creative trident and diverse sites of cultural production**

A portfolio career can involve a wide variety of ‘creative’ and ‘non-creative’ roles and contexts, and this article stresses the exploration of how ‘creative workers’ (see Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011) and ‘creative graduates’ (see Ball, Pollard and Stanley 2010) can find themselves in a variety of ‘non-creative’ roles and contexts.

Based on analysis of the wider inputs of creative work to the economy, Cunningham encourages a more nuanced account of where creative work takes place and argues that ‘creatively trained people are more likely to be working outside the specialist creative industry sectors than inside them, and this is the case in most countries, and has been the case for a long time’ (2011, 37). Whilst the embedded creative work approach importantly foregrounds other employment possibilities and highlights the creative worker undertaking *creative work* outside the creative industries, there is room to further examine the creative worker undertaking *non-creative* work and the associated career pathways and forms of portfolio working.

The Creative Trident approach emphasizes the diversity of how and where creative work takes place. A number of commentators have taken the position that the Creative Economy is suffused through all industries and that creative workers are embedded in all sectors to varying proportions (see Bakhshi, Freeman and Higgs 2012 on the concept of ‘creative intensities’; Hearn and Bridgstock 2013 for a wider outline). A revealing comparison may be drawn here with Negus’s (2006) proposals on studying the creative/cultural industrieslike any other industries. On one hand, Negus’s perspective connects with the embedded creative work approach in looking outside of the creative industries to identify creative work. Indeed, Negus takes issue with the idea that ‘a cultural industry provides the main context within which cultural production takes place’ (2006, 207). A reading of these comments in relation to the concept of embedded creative work might see this as a call to look beyond creative industries to other industries where creative work takes place. On the other hand, Negus questions the assumption of the inherent creativity of people and industries. For Negus, these industries should not be ‘bracketed from the rest due to the particular type of artistic value or creativity that is *assumed* to reside there’ (2006, 202; emphasis added). For example, the creative career portfolio of the creative worker undertaking administrative work with a creative industries company may be defined as much by the nature of the day-to-day income generating work, rather than their experiences as cultural producers or their wider creative contexts.

Noting the conditions and challenges of cultural labour markets, a pathway to non-creative work may be increasingly common for creative students graduating from higher education. As Oakley highlights, there is

a growing body of evidence, about the nature of work in the creative industries and who gets it, the geographic distribution of such jobs [and] the deflation of the bubble of expectations about the growth in the creative industries themselves. (2013, 26)

For example, whilst creative graduates undertaking administrative work at a creative industries company would be included within a Creative Trident count of the creative workforce population, in terms of Creative Economy talent pathways and the kinds of *graduate* destinations that higher education institutions may be monitored on (see Higher Education Funding Council for England n.d.) the fit is less clear and not as might be expected. Returning to the *Creating Prosperity* report (UK Universities 2010a), this could see higher education creative graduates drawing on both specific occupational skills and wider generic skills to undertake ostensibly non-creative work in non-creative industries.

This article proposes addressing not just embedded creative work and creative workers in other contexts, but also creative workers in non-creative occupations in non-creative industries. This could be an understated aspect of the Creative Trident approach and include those who *could* contribute as creative workers but do not count in either in the specialist, embedded or support mode. Whilst there might be case for identifying such individuals as specialist workers who are concurrently undertaking work elsewhere as part of a portfolio career, a question mark emerges here around how meaningful (self)-definition can be given the frequency, duration and substance of creative work. Pursuing the theme of creative workers/students undertaking non-creative work presents a further dimension to the Creative Trident approach and indicates challenges facing those on the creative economy pathway. In putting forward the case for this extended analysis, part three focuses on creative workers in non-creative occupations in other industries and considers some of the challenges they face in securing and maintaining a creative work career. Part four then follows by considering students undertaking creative courses who go on to work in non-creative occupations in other industries.

**Part three: Creative workers in non-creative occupations in other industries**

In their discussion of creative cultural occupations outside the creative industries, Hearn and Bridgstock (2013, 44) comment on the relevance of self-definition to processes of classifying and measuring creative work:

embedded creatives would not be categorized as such if they were not doing essentially the same work as those in creative firms. For example, a journalist outside the publishing industry must have described their work in such a way to be categorised as a journalist per se.

The following section addresses self-definition and those who could be regarded as creative workers, but whose career pathways and portfolio working practices mean that the status of creative work as a primary activity becomes uncertain. Exploration of these uncertain and tenuous positions can include the challenges and barriers to securing creative work (notably in the creative industries), and the push factors that see creative workers move career direction. These entry and exit strategies can be developed by also looking at the portfolio character of work and the extent to which descriptions of being a creative worker remain obvious and relevant when ‘other’ work is the main source of income and expenditure of time.

***3.1. Challenges and barriers to creative occupations in the creative industries***

In defining the creative industries, Hartley et al. refer to ‘dynamic and volatile markets and industries’ (2013, 65) and this section focuses on some of the labour market issues, challenges and barriers for finding ‘creative work employment’ and, especially for higher education students, of demonstrating ‘employability for creative work’.

Challenges and barriers can be examined at a macro level in which a complex range of factors interconnect to shape and constrain the possibilities for gaining creative work employment. Flew’s (2012) engagement with established theories of unemployment is a useful reminder of the wider conceptual resources that may be drawn on in the analysis of creative work. Specifically, Flew (2012) outlines how theories of unemployment distinguish between frictional, structural and cyclical unemployment and that whilst analysis might focus on the challenges of creative labour workforce markets, these issues and processes can be identified across the economy more widely. With this in mind, the following turns to a number of commentators who have made significant contributions to analysing distinctive creative labour workforce conditions.

Reflecting on creative workforce issues in the UK, Haukka identifies:

[…] an over-supply of new entrants, an agile freelance pool who must ensure their skill currency, a mismatch of applicants’ skills to the needs of the job, new entrants finding it difficult to secure their first job, employers preferring to recruit experienced employees and freelancers from home and abroad, and new entrants lacking skills and knowledge in multi-platform content, intellectual property legislation, management and leadership, commercial acumen. (2010, 42)

This summary by Haukka captures many of the challenges and barriers to finding creative work employment and, within the scope of this article, why it is that creative workers may be faced with few alternatives but to seek employment in other industries where the opportunities to undertake their core creative activities are not present.

Creative labour market conditions may also be addressed through questions of identity and those who are able to regularly secure employment. For example, issues of ethnic, gender and social underrepresentation have specifically been identified in relation to the creative industries (Creative and Cultural Skills 2008; see also: Allen et al. 2012; Lee 2013; Saha 2013). Issues of underrepresentation can also be considered as a question of ‘fitting in’ and for Tomlinson (2007) the subjective dimensions of employability are continually overlooked within employability discourse. Tomlinson’s analysis helps to reveal that barriers to creative employment can be explored in terms of attitudes, dispositions and identities. For example, part of the challenges in gaining access to creative employment may be networking norms, and Allen et al. examine how networking can act as ‘a mechanism of social closure to the creative sector, favouring those with high levels of social and cultural capital’ (2012, 10).

Further to networking practices that may be exclusionary in terms of social capital (Lee 2011) and the ability to manage competing personal and career commitments (Blair 2002), the ability to embody and perform recognisable creative worker identities is notable. Based on research into art colleges, Taylor and Littleton suggest in their discussion of creative identities that, ‘it will be easier to be become accepted as an artist if you can look like one, that is, if you already are the same kind of person as other artists’ (2012, 26). Likewise, Nixon and Crewe (2004) take up the issue of creative worker dispositions in their examination of advertising and magazine publishing. They note how certain aspects of ‘cool’ creative workplaces (see also McGuigan 2009; McRobbie 2002) can have a ‘strongly gendered character’ (2004, 134) and that ‘the flourishing of robustly masculine cultures within agency offices and publishing companies formed a considerable block to women’s capacity to succeed in these occupations’ (2004, 146). They illustrate this culture through the examples of football in the corridor, condoms on the Christmas tree and Barbie dolls in bondage gear. In their closing remarks, Nixon and Crewe argue that ‘the subjectivities of creative workers and the occupational cultures they inhabit mediate the practices of cultural production in which they are engaged’ (2004, 146).

From Nixon and Crewe’s analysis, at least two issues of relevance for this discussion can be drawn. Firstly, dominant forms of subjectivity and occupational cultures may provide barriers to working in the creative industries for those who identify themselves as creative workers but are unable to ‘fit in’. Secondly, and with reference to creative workers embedded in other industries, creative worker attitudes and dispositions may differ within different occupational cultures. With both these points, it is clear that the possibilities for undertaking creative work cannot be separated from creative worker identities, workplace cultures and industry contexts. As the following turns to, individuals may go to significant lengths to maintain these identities even when the opportunities to engage with creative workplaces and connect with established forms of creative worker identities and cultures are hard to come by.

***3.2 Primary occupations***

Examining the careers of artists in Australia, Bridgstock notes changes in traditional employment relations and that, ‘increasingly work can be characterised as a series of periods within and outside paid employment, linked by experiences of learning and retraining. In addition these periods of paid employment may include casual work, short-term contracts and job sharing’ (2005, 41). The norm of temporary and freelance working practices in the creative industries is well established (Oakley 2008). Indeed, part of the distinctiveness of working in the embedded creative mode are the possibilities for greater security of tenure and more stable working conditions. Writing in relation to the Australian context also, Bennett addresses concurrent working and multiple job-holding and outlines how:

artists meet their needs through acting in multiple concurrent roles and often combine high- and low-skilled positions as required […] it is common to find artists working concurrently as a performer, director, manager, teacher, and in low-skilled administrative and technical roles. (2009, 312)

The list of occupations provided here resonates with what Throsby and Zednik (2011) would describe as arts-relatedwork. The inclusion of low-skilled administrative work would though more readily connect with the non-arts labour categorisation of the type that Throsby and Zednik (2011) elaborate on through the adage of actors working as waiters and taxi drivers. In considering different motivations and preferences, they go on to suggest that arts-related work, ‘might be deliberately chosen by artists as providing a new and stimulating way in which their creativity can be expressed, or as a more attractive source of additional income than driving a taxi’ (Throsby and Zednik 2011, 19). The practices of multiple job-holding and the diversity of what can be involved in creative work portfolio careers indicate for this discussion the complexities of creative career pathways.

In investigating the notion of primary occupations, McRobbie’s (2011) comments on the status of the second job are revealing. In reflecting on the career choices of a past student, McRobbie notes the irony and tension that creative workers, ‘rely on a second job which is in effect a real job, even though it may be on a project or on a casual contract’ and that ‘many of the creatives find themselves earning the bulk of their income from the second job’ (2011, 32). McRobbie goes on to suggest that her, ‘research shows that such a strata of young people would be better off opting for the profession of the second job, and retraining to gain entitlements and status and promotion’ (2011, 32). Along the same lines, Throsby and Zednik focus on non-art labour marketsand note that, ‘non-art work tends to be significantly more lucrative than an artist’s creative work when judged per unit of time’ (2011, 11) and that ‘the factors preventing artists from reducing their non-arts commitment and devoting more time to creative work are overwhelmingly related to the economic circumstances in which artistic occupations are pursued’ (2011, 13). Whilst both McRobbie (2011) and Throsby and Zednik (2011) consider the centrality of the second job, it is McRobbie (2011) who makes the further step of considering how non-creative occupations in other industries might be more than a stopgap or a means to piece together an income. That said, McRobbie (2011) goes on to argue that the myth of personal creativity is so dominant that many creative workers who rely on a second job for their income would forgo establishing careers, entitlement, status and promotion within this job. These observations have strong parallels with Marsden’s (2007) analysis of ‘entry tournaments’ and the conditions in which aspirants for particular occupations continue to compete for opportunities that are closing down and thereby have to make do with precarious employment conditions.

This comments on the balance of occupational opportunities and directions add a further dimension to Throsby and Zednik’s analysis of non-arts work in which they consider the desirability and creative challenge of working in a creative role in non-creative industries:

Given the evidence that a majority of artists prefer to work in their core-creative practice or in arts-related work, and only resort to non-arts work out of financial necessity, it is tempting to assume that looking for work outside the arts is always a second-best option (2011, 19)

Whilst Throsby and Zednik are referring to undertaking arts-related creative activities (writing, visual art, craft, acting, dancing, music, composing, community cultural development), even if outside the arts, they raise interesting possibilities around what level of engagement and practice is significant for meaningful (self-)identifications of being a creative worker. The portfolio careers of creative workers are complex and assumptions that creative work always remains the core activity may be questioned – especially when it may be the case that ‘other’ work exists as the primary occupation and has a much stronger bearing on career identities.

Part of the rationale individuals might hold for investing in creative identities can include the status of these ‘cool jobs’ in ‘hot industries’ (Neff, Wissinger and Zukin 2005). For Taylor and Littleton, ‘some creative workers may be engaged in a project of avoidance and turning away from workplaces and careers which are interpreted in terms of a caricature modernist industry and the lives associated with it’ (2012, 141). They go on to highlight:

[…] an important direction for future research will be to ask more questions about alternative occupations which are being avoided, and about the sources of common understandings or perceptions of *other* work, and contemporary life more generally, as inevitably unsatisfying, over-systematized and uncreative

(Taylor and Littleton 2012, 141)

The approach taken in this article has strong connections with Taylor and Littleton’s proposed research direction, with the difference here being that creative workers might explicitly make the step away from not only the creative industries, as with embedded creative workers, but also from creative work. Continuing this discussion, the next section explores the transitions that students can make from higher education into creative work.

**Part four: Students from creative courses in non-creative occupations in other industries**

The following considers students on creative courses that go on to work in non-creative occupations in other industries and examines the links between creative degree courses (see Ball et al., 2010) and creative occupations. The relationship between creative work and higher education can most readily be identified with the talent pathway approach of *Creative Bath* introduced at the outset (Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2008; see also Ashton 2011a) and the industry-focused, employability agenda of higher education delivering creative industries related degree courses (see Ashton and Noonan 2013). A major contention of this article has been the complexities of such pathways – a perspective that builds on Haukka’s (2010) discussion of how creative industries education-to-work transitions are not institutionally or occupationally determined compared to pathways into other industries. In illustrating this, Haukka (2010) points to extended transition periods, multiple entry attempts and employment within and outside the creative industries (see also Bridgstock 2005). Developing Cunningham’s (2011) earlier comments on creatively trained people as more likely to be working outside specialist creative industry sectors, this formulation draws attention to creatively trained people who neither work in the creative industries or in embedded creative employment. Rather, this analysis specifically highlights the tensions and complexities of the higher education to Creative Economy talent pathway.

In their discussion of the steps that a music student makes in becoming ‘professional’, Creech et al. (2008) describe transition as a process rather than an event. They to go on to consider how the process of transition, ‘opens up a space in the imagination where the individual has the capacity to anticipate future possibilities in relation to present action and to begin to develop effective coping strategies for dealing with real or imagined challenges lying ahead’ (Creech et al. 2008, 316). In relation to higher education students, ‘present action’ may be understood as their degree programme and their university experience, and future possibilities as the career pathways they may pursue. Creech et al. (2008) conclude their study by noting the challenges higher education institutions face in supporting students seeking both performance and alternative careers. This recognition of different career possibilities is central to expressing how expected trajectories and pathways are contingent and continually negotiated.

The changing workforce profile of the creative industries is particularly important for considering how higher education connects with working in the creative industries. Data compiled by Creative Skillset (2009) shows that g**raduates** now make up 73% of the workforce, compared to 66% in 2003. This changing workforce profile can be linked to ‘an increase of 150% between 1999/2000 and 2008/09’ in students enrolling on Media Studies degrees, with creative arts and design degrees also showing a significant increase (64 per cent overall) (Universities UK 2010b, 27). Within this context, there are initiatives that seek to develop understanding of recruitment and training needs for the creative industries (for example, in the UK see Creative Skillset n.d. and in Australia see CCI n.d.). Within the UK, Creative Skillset (n.d) positions its research and evaluation strategy in relation to the demand-led system set out in the Leitch Review in which employer voice is paramount. This approach is not without criticism, with Brown et al. suggesting that a major weakness of this ‘consensus position’ of government and employers is that it ‘presents employability as a technical problem of ensuring that labour market entrants have the skill sets that match the requirements of employers’ (2003, 116). Gaining a handle on the requirements of employers and industry more widely, especially given the strong prevalence of freelance working patterns, can be a significant challenge.

***4.1 Workforce expectations***

The links between higher education and the creative industries are complex and varied. For example, Creative and Cultural Skills (2007, 60 cited in Haukka 2010, 59 –60) refer to, ‘an extraordinarily complex array of qualifications purporting to service the creative and cultural sector […] driven by the appeal of the sector to young people and the interest in learning creative subjects within schools, Further and Higher Education’. This array of qualifications can be linked to uncertainty around their specific connections with creative careers pathways. On this, Haukka (2010) and Guile (2010) consider the growth in higher education courses and associated industry expectations. Haukka (2010) notes that qualifications do not provide a guarantee of workforce entry and for Guile, despite the close links between universities and industries, studying for a degree related to the creative industries ‘rarely provides an expectation or understanding of what is required in vocational contexts’ (2010, 470). Similarly, for Bennett (2009), qualifications are not seen as requirements for the performing arts where practical experience is highly valued. These perspectives reveal the complexities of the education-to-industry transitions within the creative industries, and that for those at the boundaries and intersections of higher education and the creative industries there may be prolonged periods of uncertainty and negotiation.

Part of the challenge of connecting education with creative work remains the gap between employer and industry norms, and the expectations and the understandings of such creative employment that students are able to gain through their degree. Haukka (2010) documents a three-year study investigating the education, training and work experiences based around a survey of aspiring creative workers and employers. From this survey, Haukka noted that, ‘many respondents to the aspiring creatives survey perceived themselves as having very good employability skills and job-specific skills contrary to the reported views of employers that graduates are not industry ready’ (2010, 46). Under the sub-heading, ‘meeting skills needs of employers’, Haukka summarises from the employer survey that, ‘employers indicated the capabilities of aspiring creatives for all 15 skills and attributes included in the employer survey were below their expectations when compared to the level of importance they placed on these skills and attributes to their workplace’ (2010, 49). The existence of such gaps, to whatever extent they are perceived and constructed by different parties, can be further understood and anticipated thanks to research on the embedded creative work mode. In indicating a breadth of potential sites for creative employment, the Creative Trident research also indicates an even greater breadth of recruitment norms and expectations both within and beyond the creative industries. The challenge of this can be connected with the above discussion in part 3.1 in which employability for creative work was raised. Bennett’s research on arts graduates also raises this point around how students would be able to engage with and then go on to demonstrate creative work identities:

For performing arts graduates the need for a positive and broadly based professional identity is clear. Unfortunately, role models are most often successful performance artists, and there is a very real risk that students’ performance identities preclude them from planning a positive engagement with non-performance activities (2009, 313)

The importance of identity to the transitions that students may make from education into creative employment is instructively captured here and, in relation to the embedded creative work mode, there is a need to consider the different kinds of occupational cultures and identities that students are able to encounter and then go on to embody and/or perform.

This question of industry requirements and expectations are compounded for students by the labour market challenges they face. For those who continue to aspire to secure creative employment but are unable to, either within specialist or embedded modes of creative work, an uncertain process of navigating unexpected pathways can ensue. This differs to the circumstances that Cunningham is able to outline whereby the challenges of working in the creative industries may be obviated through working as an embedded creative (2011). Cunningham suggests that working within the embedded creative work mode and outside of the creative industries could be seen as a career preference and strategy to avoid precarity. For those unable to secure creative employment in either specialist or embedded modes, a profile of multiple job-holding and crossing occupational boundaries is common. This could be extended ‘entry tournaments’ (Stoyanova and Grugulis, 2012), prolonged work as an intern (Carrot Workers Collective 2011), and/or engaging in forms of peripheral participation in trying to develop a reputation and secure positions of greater responsibility (Grugulis and Stoyanova 2011), whilst securing a main income elsewhere – for example in ‘other’ occupations as highlighted by Throsby and Zednik (2011). These scenarios of internship and peripheral participation are more specific to students, graduates and earlier career entrants and emphasize the need to include the potential in-between and overlap activities in any account of workforce mapping and career transitions.

Pedagogical research initiatives have examined the intersections of industry and education and the place of work-related simulated learning environments (see Ashton 2013b), work placements (Berger et al. 2013) and career development strategies (Bridgstock 2011). A concern for how students are able gain relevant insights has been documented as something that students also raise. For example, in Bennett’s survey of performing arts the most common response provided by student on the changes that they would make to their education and training included, ‘open discussion about the realities of working life and the limited performance opportunities’ (2009, 320). The realities of working life as posed here connect with the reference to ‘real and imagined challenges’ by Creech et al. (2008) and the coping strategies noted by Ball et al. (2010). Engaging students with issues of unstable employment conditions is not a case of ‘smashing childlike wonder’ (Noonan 2013). Indeed, research by Ashton (2013a) on teacher-practitioners articulated the importance of exploring with students the challenges they would face in industry. Along these lines, raising the challenges of working in the creative industries opens up a space for students to consider ‘not becoming’ creative workers (see Gill and Pratt 2008). This scenario in which students from creative courses re-assess working in the creative industries might be usefully contrasted with those graduating from courses that are less obviously linked, through course content and accreditation, to the creative industries. This seems especially important if the higher education experience of these students covers less the kinds of critical interventions that might be possible within creative courses (Ashton 2013a; Ashton 2013b).

***4.2 Degrees of relevance***

In their analysis of data collected by the Higher Education Statistical Agency on the employment trends and patterns of ‘bohemian’ graduates, Comunian, Faggian and Jewell suggest that, ‘[…] the creative skills of graduates in these disciplines are not fully valued and appreciated in the job market (both in creative and non-creative occupations)’ (2011, 305). This analysis resonates with approaches to embedded creative work in referencing how the skills of creative students may be relevant in creative and non-creative occupations. It does however also raise the issue of students from creative courses being unemployable in both.

Being unable to fulfil creative work career aspirations leads to the kinds of temporary circumstances and unclear pathways that the formulations raised in this article seek to highlight. The distance between student aspirations and graduation circumstances bring to the surface the obstacles, barriers and challenges that education for creative work must address. Ball et al. note that the graduates surveyed in their project, ‘overwhelmingly aspired to creative careers’ and that ‘their specific goals aligned with their subject discipline’ (2010, xxiv). Alignment though can be less than straightforward. For example, Guile argues that, ‘although academic and vocational programmes of study at any level can provide a grounding and inspiration for learners, they are unlikely to provide the conditions to develop vocational practice’ (2009, 774). These comments open up the possibility for addressing unexpected pathways not only in terms of students on non-creative courses that go on to work in non-creative occupations in the creative industries, but also students on non-creative courses that go on to work in creative occupations in the creative industries. In other words, within the context of transferable skills what are the distinctive aspects of degree courses linked to the creative industries for working in creative occupations?

In comments that echo with Ball et al.’s (2010) findings on the desire for students to pursue their creative career aspirations, McRobbie (2011) suggests that for those trained in the arts and cultural and humanities fields, having an interesting creative job is part of their social identity. On this basis, being unable to develop a career within the specialist or embedded mode of creative work may be of concern for students and graduates. McRobbie’s (2011) argument however, goes on to question the extent to which not securing creative work should be seen as a ‘failure to live up to the dream of the talent-led economy’. For those attentive to the challenges of working in the creative industries, such as elaborated on in academic literature (Gill and Pratt 2008; Oakley 2008; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011) and linked explicitly to higher education (Ashton 2011c; Ashton and Noonan 2013), a movement away from working in the creative industries could be a career strategy or choice. For those whose degree course, either through work placements or other forms of curriculum content, provides less in-depth and/or cautionary insights, the uncompromised allure of the creative industries may be strong.

In this scenario students from a range of different degree backgrounds are able to pursue creative careers and, within a labour market characterised by over-supply (Oakley 2013), there are ramifications for students on creative courses. In terms of employer preferences, Ashton (2010) has addressed how ‘traditional’ degrees, such as art and physics, were preferred by games industry employers compared to newer degrees that might be more explicitly industry focused, such as games design and games programming. The standing of certain degrees and the extent to which established degree subjects or certain universities and university courses are preferred was evident here. The acquisition and demonstration of relevant and desirable employability attributes for creative work that can come from degree courses that are not vocationally explicit can include social capital and networking (Lee 2013) and access to internships (Zelenko and Bridgstock 2014, forthcoming). A further perspective focusing on the entrepreneurial and training possibilities gained outside of a degree programme through student media and union activities is indicated by Long (2011). It is clear that pathways from higher education into the creative industries and creative employment are not limited by disciplinary boundaries. As such, the boundaries and margins of creative work can be further opened up and the possibilities for understanding secure pathways and expected trajectories further negotiated.

**Conclusion**

This article has addressed the complexities of creative work through emphasising varied creative career pathways and the tensions and negotiations around securing creative work employment. The Creative Trident approach extends analysis of creative work opportunities and practices beyond working in a specialist mode within the creative industries. Further extending the survey of how and where creative work takes place can reveal temporary, unstable and transient forms of work in which movements in, out and alongside creative employment are common. This article has signalled a range of factors that can shape and often impede opportunities for securing creative work for those who would identify as creative workers and for those seeking to establish their creative worker biographies upon graduation. This discussion of ‘non-creative’ workers and the margins of creative work could be further developed with reference to Negus’ (2002) discussion of cultural intermediaries and Mayer (2011) study of the invisible labour of television set factory labourers.

The specific themes employed in parts three and four to survey existing research and literature show some common circumstances and challenges faced by established and emerging creative workers. In signalling the diverse arrangements and scenarios in which creative workers are (un)able to undertake creative employment, this article is only a starting point that encourages further empirical investigation. Echoing Gill and Pratt’s (2008) comments on potential non-becomings, the question of wanting to but not being able to secure creative work should animate any analysis of how creative work figures within the economy at large. With regard to higher education and professional development for creative workers, this article points to an even greater range of creative worker identity positions and career circumstances. Recognizing the specificity of specialist and embedded modes of creative ensures understanding of different professional identities, career trajectories and occupational cultures. The temporary and contingent nature of categorisation within these modes is apparent though. In this respect, understanding creative education and creative work can be as much about understanding broader and more general overlaps and intersections with education and work.

**Notes on Contributors**

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