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FUTURE OF WORK AND EDUCATION FOR THE DIGITAL AGE

Can education and skills development be more aligned locally reflecting local work patterns and business growth?

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Abstract

Education systems have increasingly become aligned to centralised national views of what young people should learn whereas local business growth is not evenly spread across countries. Regional differences arise from local policies, investment opportunities and suitability for growth in particular industry sub-sectors. The creative industries provide a good case study for new sectors that operate differently from traditional industries, require different skills and tend to develop in 'clusters' rather than evenly throughout a country. By the 'Creative Industries' I follow here the UK Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport's sectors: advertising and marketing, architecture, craft, design, film and TV, creative tech, publishing, museums and galleries, music and the performing arts, video games and heritage (1) although some studies use other definitions (which are flagged in the notes). These industries offer a model for a 'place-making' approach bringing the cultural sector, the commercial creative industries and education together to create more opportunities for local growth and development. They also contribute more than economic value, a point that is often lost when researching industry sectors: cultural activity has social benefits too. Managing young people's understanding of and entry into the job market can benefit from a detailed understanding of the local economy. This model may be useful beyond the creative industries.

Challenge

Work patterns across all industries are changing rapidly. An examination of the creative industries is instructive in that this sector has, arguably, always embraced start-up culture, a willingness to tolerate 'business births and deaths', technological disruption, a freelancer and small business culture. It often operates 'under the radar' for Government investment, rarely benefitting from public investment in infrastructure, struggling to access loan finance because of the perception of risk, and with creative and arts education programmes commonly seen as marginal rather than core. In the UK statistics were not collected consistently until 1998, and definitions, what is included and not, have changed over time making data still inconsistent when compared with traditional industries such as manufacturing, construction or the public sector. The history of the creative industries differs from country to country, but characteristics and growth trajectories of the creative industries are similar internationally. To survive in this industry and similar new sectors (e.g. tech, 'gig'), workers need tenacity and flexibility and must be able to work in project teams, carve out their own careers separately from employers and constantly reinvent themselves. Creativity is key.

Education systems often still focus on traditional skills (numeracy and literacy) and

knowledge-based curricula at school and at tertiary level. Their model tends to be linear (primary, secondary, tertiary education and into employment) based on an assumption that learners will move into a career following a long period of front-loaded study and preparation. There is rarely any 'customisation' of the education and skills offering based on the specific employment character of a local area or region as education policy tends to be devised nationally, or at state level, whereas business growth happens in a more ad-hoc way. In industries where growth is unevenly distributed university students leave their institutions on graduation and flock to the relevant cluster areas (such as London) resulting in loss of talent in the home cities and a squeezing out of employment for local young people in these cities. International comparators such as PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) reflect a view that there is an absolute norm for what young people need to learn and the competencies they need to acquire.

There are indications of <u>curriculum</u> change, for example in countries like Australia, Singapore and Finland where there is recognition that learning content needs to be more competency and skills-based than knowledge-heavy, and PISA is adopting 'global competence' to address how students develop openness and connectivity to operate in a sustainable world. PISA will introduce 'Creative Thinking' as an innovative domain for testing in 2021. (2)

Not much has been done, however, to consider how education and training can focus on equipping young people for work in a digital age by bringing together thinking about local employment growth and recruitment practices and how they impact on workers in particular localities, and impact on young people's learning and experience of the workplace. The concept of weaving education into a range of local economic sectors whilst preparing young people for working in a digital and fast-changing age with a view to contributing to their own communities is challenging. Nor has there been much thought on how a local approach to bringing educators, learners and industry together can create a more relevant work-leisure-learning paradigm.

Key words: *creative industries, culture, employment, sectors, workers, global competence, local.*

Proposal

Introduction

The creative industries are a new sector compared with, for example, more traditional manufacturing and service sectors, but have grown up with maverick work practices

and career patterns that are now becoming more prevalent in other industries. By the Creative Industries we mean advertising and marketing, architecture, craft, design, film and TV, creative tech, publishing, museums and galleries, music and the performing arts, video games and heritage (¹). These sectors provide an interesting case study from which to draw general lessons about translating national employment and education policy into practical delivery and effectiveness on the ground where there is a tension between sectoral needs reflected in labour-market data and spatial workforce issues. This paper cites labour market statistics from the UK. The data will be different in scale and sub-sectors in other countries across the world but there are numerous studies to suggest that the trends will be the same in all countries where the creative industries thrive (³).

Characteristics of the creative industries

The number of people employed in the UK creative sector as defined by DCMS is 1.96 million. There was an increase of 25.4% since 2011 with 1.2% increase in jobs in the UK as a whole. If we go beyond the creative industries themselves to what we call the creative economy – meaning that we add in creative jobs in other sectors such as marketing in engineering companies, or product designers in the automotive sector, then jobs total 3 million workers. The creative economy accounts for 1 in 11 jobs across the UK.

The creative industries contributed £91.8 billion to the UK economy in 2016 i.e. 5.3%. This is year on year growth of 7.7%, compared with growth of 3.5% for the UK economy as a whole in the period. This makes the creative industries the fastest growing sector (⁴). At a time when US research suggests that 47% of current employment is at risk from automation, creative occupations are at low risk with 87% of the jobs in the creative economy being at low risk. There are more than 284,000 business accounting for 11.8% of all UK businesses (Frey and Osborne, 2013) (⁵).

44% of all workers within the creative industries are self-employed. And with 'creative jobs' – including, for example, designers, creative agents, performers but not managerial, administration and other supporting roles - 47% are self-employed, compared with 15% self-employment in the economy as a whole. This creates big challenges for educators: a lot of young people in this sector will not progress into employment. They will work for themselves or set up companies. Other industries are now out-sourcing in this way either by sub-contracting or by hiring individuals as and when needed requiring even those in traditional job roles to need enterprise and business skills.

33% per cent of the UK workers are in London. An important point to note is that the jobs are not the same everywhere. Recent figures from the Department for Digital,

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Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS, 2016) ([6]) show that growth in the film and TV sectors in Yorkshire and the Humber outstrips that in every other part of the UK, increasing by 40% in 2015-16. Often regional development funding encourages particular industries to invest in their areas on the basis that clustering certain businesses benefits them all, and this makes investing in a skills element through local education providers potentially more sustainable and provides a direct 'line of sight' to jobs for young people in education. World-wide the trend is similar with creative industries clustering in urban centres and capital cities spawning many research studies. (Florida, Richard (2002), Lee, N and Rodriguez-Pose (2013), Landry, C (2012)([7])).

Most creative businesses are micro-businesses. 78% of creative businesses have fewer than 5 employees. This suggests challenges in terms of the burden of taking on young people who are not job-ready and need on-the-job training and a major challenge for offering work experience. Unlike more traditional small businesses like hairdressers or plumbers, no two small businesses in the creative sector are the same. Educational courses and qualifications tend to assume that sectors are evenly distributed across the country and their nature is always the same, and that courses can be delivered for young people where they are irrespective of the absence of local relevant industries. This works for general school and college courses, general qualifications and Higher Education courses which are promoted as inherently valuable in themselves without directly linking them to the available jobs (e.g. in the arts and humanities). At the interface between work and study, however, where an element of work experience, apprenticeship or compulsory work placement is required there needs to be an awareness that industry sectors can usually only engage meaningfully with education providers in their immediate area. This creates a dilemma with only those young people whose educational institutions are near creative clusters to be able to access meaningful work experience or placements to enhance vocational qualifications.

The mis-match between qualifications and available job roles

Workers in the creative industries are highly qualified with 57% of workers qualified at level 4 or above – graduates or post-graduates - in comparison to only 32% in other industries. This sounds positive but it hides issues around opportunities for other young people to get into the workforce. A lot of young people are technically 'over-qualified' for the jobs they are doing in that they are general arts or humanities graduates applying for job roles which are technical, rather than academic in nature. Arts and Humanities apply to Higher Education with a reasonable expectation that their courses will lead to employment but because of the general nature of their degree courses they are not specifically qualified for the available job roles which tend to be in the technical areas, or as freelancers, or indeed are business start-ups waiting to happen.

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Such graduates are using entry-level jobs to get a foot in the door. This makes for rapid turnover, over-employment (people over-qualified at degree levels but working at a lower technical levels) and poor productivity particularly in specialist areas. It also means that employers can adopt lazy recruitment practices because they are faced with large numbers of applicants even though many are not suitably qualified for the available jobs (Creative & Cultural Skills, 2014) [8]. Typically they use qualifications to short-list from large numbers of applicants rather than to match qualifications to the jobs being advertised. This paradox of over-supply of graduates when there are available jobs and growth potential has led employers not to engage with the education sector in terms of qualification, apprenticeship and curriculum development.

As a sector the UK creative industries are not representative of the population as a whole. This is caused by an unwillingness of employers to hire under 23s (often hiding behind health & safety issues and unsocial working hours) or non-graduates and losing out on young people joining the workforce straight from colleges and through apprenticeships. It has also led the education sector to continue to produce general arts and humanities graduates without providing specific support into the creative industries, and for colleges to be seen as irrelevant in the provision of new workers into local creative economies. [9]

There are several lessons that arise from this both for the creative industries and the new economies (e.g. the 'gig' and 'tech' economies). Many people are self-employed and preparing young people to be employed is therefore misplaced. One in 7 workers in the overall UK economy is self-employed. This will rise further with self-employment predicted to overtake public sector employment by 2020. Young people need the entrepreneurial skills to 'make jobs', not look for them. This trend crosses most employment sectors as companies outsource functions and hire staff in response to specific business needs and trends rather than as full-time employees.

New responses to the creative industries as an employment sector

Because of the changing nature of work we need creative people who have 'deep' technical skills and a wider range of other skills too. Young people with a depth of experience in a particular field – for example music or film production - but combined with an ability to collaborate across disciplines, engage with sales, be creative and tenacious, work with other people and respond to challenges. Beyond this the creative industries have a unique ability to operate as both social and economic drivers in local economies. A perceived weakness of some branches of the creative sector, particularly the cultural sectors like museums, libraries, cultural heritage and the arts, is that they require ongoing government or state subsidy and exist only to

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perform an aesthetic and/or social function in making art or building or sustaining local communities. If such organisations are co-located with commercial creative businesses there is the potential for promoting creativity and well-being bringing economic and social synergy to place-making underpinned by skills development. In the UK the so-called 'death of the High Street' has already resulted in pilots to revitalise High Streets with such activity by providing other reasons for the public to visit town centres for arts and social purposes and also generate economic activity (**The Guardian**, 29 March, 2018 'How to bring a high street back from the dead'; 9 May, 2018 The Shopping centre where currency is hope'([10])).

Because careers in the creative industries are not linear young people must be able to constantly re-invent themselves as workers. They are unlikely to find an entry-level job that translates into a career. They need to constantly gain new skills to stay employed. This may include moving from project to project rather than moving up the management structures in a company. They need to stay abreast of new technologies, digital developments and consumer trends just to stay employed. This often involves new technological developments for example in live events, legal requirements like health and safety legislation and modern foreign languages because it is likely than international work and opportunities will be on offer. The linear educational paradigm of 'school -college or university -career' has always been challenged by the creative industries. Qualifications, other than specific vocational qualifications for performers and visual artists who study at Drama School, Conservatoire or at the higher levels of Art and Design and then use their careers to hone their practice, rarely relate directly to those who work in other parts of the creative industries. The creative industries thrive on innovation, problem-solving and collaboration and so 'natural' ingenuity, creativity and questioning from young people with no qualifications can be as important than academic learning. Equally a model whereby young people gain national qualifications and launch themselves on a national 'market' on graduation looking for entry-level jobs has resulted in mass migration of graduates to London in the hope of work in the creative industries resulting in young people being saddled with high living costs and local and regional centres being deprived of talent.

An alternative model

An alternative model is to marry sector and local ambitions, recognise and develop the specific industry qualities of a local area and its potential for growth, and to marry opportunities for young people to engage with employers, develop skills and competencies which relate to specific creative business requirements in their locality, alongside building on a subsidised cultural sector which is better placed to offer ongoing liaison with its local education providers at school, college and university levels.
This offers the potential for a unified local approach to providing young people

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with careers advice and guidance specifically related to their local industries, work placement opportunities shared across cultural and commercial sectors aligning opportunities across museums, libraries and arts organisations with those in commercial companies such as film studios, small design companies or music studios whilst growing capacity for colleges and universities to work in tandem with local investors and local authorities to encourage centres for enterprise and start-ups, acknowledging the potential business growth for freelancers and small businesses.

By creating local synergies across education at all levels and its business partners, ideally brokered by expert facilitators the pressure will be off the educators to 'chase' meaningless work links as local centres prioritise community building, creative thinking and place-making.

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