

Where are the career paths?

The creative sector is growing, so where are the jobs? **Pauline Tambling** squares up to the challenges facing young people and arts organisations.

The creative sector, the fastest growing sector in the UK with 1.8 million jobs, has doubled in the last ten years and has proved to be resilient through the recession. Many young people are attracted to it and specialise in the arts at university. Understandably, they read the growth statistics and assume that there will be jobs waiting for them when they complete their degrees. Then there are other young people who have no idea what job opportunities there are in the creative industries, assume that the sector is not for them, and their talent is lost.

Graduates in particular are finding it hard to get into the arts and some are frustrated that the path they have chosen is not leading to a career. There is a paradox: the sector is strong and fast-growing but it's not easy to see where the jobs are. The truth is that lots of jobs that arts graduates are looking for are not there. They often have a fairly firm idea of what they'd like to do as a career, but this may not reflect the reality of the numbers of such jobs available. A small number of large institutions are visible and well-known but have a finite number of attractive jobs – and the people who work in those institutions tend to love their work and so stay put. When I speak to young people they know about acting, performing, being an artist or working in a gallery, but they often don't realise that many jobs in the arts are behind the scenes, technical, marketing, front of house and fundraising. Arts courses tend either to be vocational (acting, performing, events management) or generic arts and humanities courses that don't aim to lead to specific job roles.

The wider creative sector is dominated by small enterprises and sole traders that respond to trends in opportunistic ways. This may be new technology, a popular style of entertainment, or the fact that a city is hosting a major event and suddenly needs a lot of technical and front-of-house staff all at the same time. Pantomime and biennials spring to mind. Unfortunately these jobs can be fixed term and without any of the benefits that full-time, permanent workers enjoy – and are certainly not the career trajectory that a young graduate is hoping for.

A number of general messages go out from the government and the universities about higher education. Graduates will earn more, they will be equipped for specific roles in particular sectors and their qualifications will enable them to move straight into employment. These do not necessarily apply to arts graduates in a sector where salary is not the main driver and where attitude, flair and tenacity are as important as qualifications. In many ways an arts degree is just a start. The jobs come when young people stop applying and start 'making' the jobs as enterprising young freelancers, using their skills and contacts that have been created during their years of study.

Many further and higher education institutions already provide students with the industry-ready experiences of responding to creative briefs and engaging with employers. This helps young people gain credible experience. More than ever, young people need to adopt a 'T-shaped' mindset: augmenting a deep specialist skill acquired in education with a wide range of other wrap-around attributes like problem-solving and creative thinking. Unlike sectors like social care or manufacturing, arts sector employers have not needed to engage with young graduates to fill their vacancies. Unfortunately too many graduates have been willing to take on unpaid internships in the arts to get a foot in the door. And it's difficult for a myriad of small companies – some 70,000 small businesses in the sector – to engage with schools, colleges and universities in a systematic way, particularly as they'll have a wide range of job roles that don't easily map across specific courses.

There is another group of young people who are unable to go to university and are denied even this foothold into the sector. This is where apprenticeships come in, providing a business with a new employee and a fresh perspective, and giving a young person a start in the creative industries that they may not otherwise have gained. The arts sector needs graduates but many of the job roles are not graduate jobs. Some job roles, for example, in art and design, are best suited to young people who thrive by learning 'on the job' through an apprenticeship. We need both routes into the arts. Otherwise we will perpetuate the lack of diversity and loss of talent that is already an issue in the sector.

Funding from the [Creative Employment Programme](#), which supports the employment of young people claiming unemployment-related benefits, is specifically targeted at reaching a wide demographic while helping employers take on apprentices and interns. As the government presses towards achieving its own challenging target of three million apprentices in work by 2020, it's important that the arts sector engages with apprenticeships as an entry route to employment. Larger creative sector employers will soon be subject to the new apprenticeship levy whereby they will have to pay an annual sum through HMRC towards apprenticeship training. If they take no apprentices they'll lose that investment to other sectors.

The changes in the workplace for the arts are radical. We are demanding more and more of the young people coming into the job market without offering them good salaries and job security in return. If the creative industries are to continue to thrive, then a greater collaboration is needed between business and the education system to produce the next generation of creative professionals.

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