

CONSTRUCTING CREATIVITIES: HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE CULTURAL INDUSTRIES WORKFORCE

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Over the past decades the spheres of higher education (HE) and cultural industries have evolved considerably. Globalisation, massification, economic instability, technological innovation and neoliberal policy agendas have impacted considerably on both sectors opening them up to greater competition, creating a downward pressure on costs and leading them to have very different relationships with their publics. Like never before, questions about what university education is, and indeed should be, are emerging along with threats to the economic viability of some of its institutions and academic disciplines as a result of new relationships between the HE system and the governments that largely fund and regulate it. Historically education in culture and the arts has enjoyed a social significance linked to values like creativity, inclusion, and community; however, these subjects are increasingly positioned within a pervasive economic agenda. At the same time, the cultural industries are endorsed as part of the knowledge economy contributing to 'UK PLC' and offered as a remedy to numerous financial and social ills, a logic which is critically discussed throughout this volume.

The relationship *between* these two sectors has also evolved over the last three decades with the well-established links between HE and the cultural industries developing to become 'more formal, more directed and more calculating' (Oakley 2013: 26), characterised by points of both co-operation and tension. This chapter examines this relationship focusing on how the expectations, attitudes and conditions of education linked to creative work has changed in response to an evolving policy landscape, and it discusses HE's role in (re)producing some of the structural conditions of labour in

the cultural sector, particularly around mechanisms of exclusion in response to internal and external demands.

HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE CULTURAL INDUSTRIES: A MUTUAL DEPENDENCE?

The complex entanglement of higher education and the cultural sector is not a new phenomenon. Higher education has long nurtured creative practitioners in all fields of cultural production and has been an important site of cultural production in itself. As Frith and Horn (1987) identify, particularly in the milieu of the art school, the role of the institution was as much about the social development of a cultural practice and 'scene', as about vocational education. Rather than through the implementation of discrete public policy (Oakley 2013), this context was nurtured through increased personal freedom and greater cultural experimentation associated with youth culture. While this mutual dependence remains, today the relationship between HE and cultural industries is far more strategic and instrumental, and the balance of power is shifting.

Higher education remains a popular route for prospective workers to the cultural industries, with graduates making up more than two-thirds of the workforce in interactive media, literature, computer games, TV and radio, with this figure increasing to 80 per cent in animation (Catchside 2012). These graduates are seen as bringing the higher-level skills demanded by knowledge economy policies and strategies.

While Frith and Horn (1987) highlight how historically universities have played a vital role in nurturing creative and cultural projects, these activities are gradually being framed as commercial opportunities. Along with teaching and research activities universities are increasingly called on to

perform a further role in the interplay between regional industry and society, particularly around regional development, local regeneration and the development of creative cities (Lazzeroni and Piccaluga 2003; Wilson 2012). Over the last few decades the creative and cultural regeneration agenda has been married with the provision of higher education in UK regions, particularly in peripheral areas, as a way of distributing resources and addressing inequalities (to mixed success). By providing public spaces for networking, a forum for industry/user debate and access to resources as part of their knowledge transfer initiatives, universities are framed as spaces through which stakeholders can realise their economic goals.

While this supports the view that ‘without higher education, there would be no creative economy’ (Catchside 2012 citing Crossick), the direction of traffic is certainly not one way. Increasingly higher education institutions (HEIs) are dependent on the cultural industries for expertise, indirect revenue and collaboration. The *Looking Out* report surveyed 108 art, design and media departments in the UK and found that over 85 per cent employed teacher-practitioners as a way of ‘sustaining current industry knowledge in the curriculum’ (Clews and Mallinder 2010). This form of practical knowledge has contributed directly to the curriculum with work simulations and live industry projects a key feature (and thus selling point) for many creative and cultural degrees. Demand for these courses continues to grow and since 1999/2000 there have been above-average increases in enrolments in ‘mass communications’ and ‘creative arts and design’ degrees (Universities UK 2010), highlighting this as a lucrative market for UK universities who are dealing with falling enrolments in other subjects such as electrical engineering and computer science (Grove 2012). Creative and media courses, therefore, have become a significant source of revenue for universities in a new era of austerity, private funding models and market-driven agendas.

This relationship, however, extends beyond teaching and course enrolments. In England 81 per cent of universities identified the creative industries as a target sector for outward activities through external engagements such as knowledge transfer, commercialisation of Intellectual Property and the marketization of creative works (Catchside 2012). Universities have always maintained relationships with external stakeholders but this has transitioned from relational to functional (Boden and Nedeva 2010). On one level we can see this as a practical response to declining resources and as an attempt by universities to become more entrepreneurial and aggressive by extending revenue streams (Lazzeroni and Piccaluga 2003), something which is relatively easy to deliver in the context of cultural production. However, on another level this also resonates with a 'policy trajectory that is preoccupied with the construction of a knowledge economy and a learning society' (Ozga and Jones 2006: 2). In this system universities become instruments for furthering economic growth, a process which has accelerated since the 1980s, and within which university research in particular is expected to become 'more responsive, rhetorically and substantively, to commercial and political agendas' (Willmott 2003: 2). Universities must now pursue 'direct, immediate and demonstrable economic utility' (Boden and Nedeva 2010: 41) through many of their activities.

The Wilson Review (Wilson 2012) which appraised business-university collaboration highlighted the positioning of universities as an integral part of the supply chain to business—'a supply chain that has the capability to support business growth and therefore economic prosperity' (Wilson 2012: 1).ⁱ The opportunities for creative disciplines within the framework of business-university interaction is clear, enacted at a macro level through government interventions and employer-led demands for industry-ready talent; and at a micro-level in the work placements, internships and professional accreditations which shape and condition the everyday experiences of students, academic staff and management (Ashton and Noonan 2013). However, some question the marriage of business and

university goals, and the ways in which 'business involvement is bound to regulate and limit cultural productivity' (Buckingham and Jones 2001: 12). Differences in motivations and purposes mean that partnerships can become problematic and education is increasingly seen as the weaker partner due to its positioning in the policy system (Buckingham and Jones 2001). To that policy framework, and the inequalities it is claimed to perpetuate, we now turn our attention.

HISTORICAL CULTIVATION OF THE CREATIVE STUDENT-PROFESSIONAL

The historical coupling of education and work-related policy has a long lineage and can be traced back to the mid-19th century. The Select Committee on Arts and Manufactures, convened in 1836 in response to the fear that Britain was losing the export race to low-cost competition from abroad, investigated the 'best means of extending a knowledge of the arts and of the principles of design among the people (especially the manufacturing population) of the country'.ⁱⁱ The report concluded that countries which were successful at exporting were also funding design education for their manufacturing industries and so this led to the foundation of the Government School of Design (now the Royal College of Art) (Sproll 1994).

Over the next century education policy continued to develop with the focus on both social and work-related goals. For instance, the Robbins Report (Committee on Higher Education 1963) sought to expand and democratize university provision, arguing that university places should be available to all who were qualified for them by ability and attainment. It outlined a number of objectives for the university; the first, a utilitarian one, was 'instruction in skills'; but second universities must also promote the 'general powers of the mind', to produce 'not mere specialists but rather cultivated men and women'. This was followed by the Dearing Review (1997) which expressed that, alongside

contributions to society and personal fulfilment, a key aim for HE should be to ensure individuals are well-equipped for the workplace.

However, in the last decades of the previous century and the first decades of this one, a significant shift has occurred in policy; a shift which is in line with neoliberal agendas for public service provision more widely. First, under the Conservative government (1979-1997) universities were progressively 'corporatised, massified and marketised' (Boden and Nedeve 2010: 39). Then, as part of New Labour agenda, universities were positioned as working in partnership with the private sector. This neoliberal agenda had at its core a number of characteristics which legitimised it as 'moral and democratic' (Boden and Nedeve 2010: 39): the concept of individual 'choice' and the exercise of agency, while performance management regimes and audits were necessary under the auspices of transparency and accountability. Consequently, universities became the site of much government intervention, activity and the central exercise of power usually related to public funding systems and 'narrowly established performance indicators and norms' (Buckingham and Jones 2001: 5).

The most recent evidence of the ever-increasing overlap between work and HE is the growing embeddedness of an employability agenda within policy circles (Boden and Nedeve 2010; Thornham and O'Sullivan 2004). In the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills' (BIS) *Students at the Heart of the System* (2011) White Paper the government's intention was clear: 'to create the conditions to encourage greater collaboration between HEIs and employers to ensure that students gain the knowledge and skills they need to embark on rewarding careers' (BIS 2011: 33). The further prevalence of economic discourses can also be seen in the government commissioned Browne Review (2010) and its changes to HE funding and student finance which has shifted the cost to the

individual student creating greater pressure on young people to subsidise their own tertiary education.ⁱⁱⁱ Within these discourses students are positioned as ‘self-investing customers’ (Boden and Nedeva 2010: 41) and:

[A] major role of universities today is the production of an appropriately trained workforce that fits employers’ needs. In many contemporary neoliberal states the long-standing contributions of universities to the development of citizens’ knowledges and skills have been re-badged as ‘employability’.

(Boden and Nedeva 2010: 38).

In this context HE is seen as ‘surrendering’ to the logic of the market (Collini 2012). The importance of competitiveness, employability and training becomes firmly embedded within education and business policy discourses (Wilson 2012), and has become increasingly difficult to move against within the context of academic disciplines like media (Thornham and O’Sullivan 2004).

Within this general employability agenda a sector-specific one also prevails. This emerges directly from creative industries policy which foregrounds skills development but with little critical consideration of the impact. The role of education to foster marketable creative skills at all levels can be traced to New Labour strategies. Both the *Creative Industries Mapping Document* (DCMS 2001) and *Creative Britain: New talents for the new economy* (DCMS 2008) can be seen as further blueprints for how to develop human capital and how it may be put to work in the creative economy. ‘Creativity’ and the ‘cultural productivity of young people’ (Buckingham and Jones 2001: 11) is celebrated in generalized terms, as a social good that should be cultivated and commercialised; and despite the emphasis on diversity, there is little recognition of the politics of culture and exclusion (Buckingham and Jones 2001). The report goes on to signal the approach to helping this creative talent ‘flourish’, and states that, ‘having unlocked creativity, the vital stage is to ensure that young people have real opportunities to develop, and that they can see clearly the directions in which their talent can take them’ (DCMS 2008: 7). Therefore, the education system

becomes an important partner in the discovery of talents, and subsequently directs these to become commercially exploitable resources.

Such discursive and political framing of the creative economy and its relationship to an education framework is significant. By positioning the cultural industries under the umbrella of the creative economy, the *Creative Britain* report indicates 'a concerted drive to develop workplace skills, stimulate business-orientated education and improve competitive advantage across the creative industry sector' (Banks and Hesmondhalgh 2009: 426). HEIs are 'encouraged' to prioritise the development of certain skills (i.e. those which have economic value in the market). Contemporary employability discourses emphasise the development or 'banking' of narrow job-related skills in preference to capacity-building education and the acquisition of social and cultural capital (Boden and Nedeva 2010) with little or no reference made in any of these documents to career difficulties or issues faced by graduates from creative disciplines.

HEIs have certainly responded to this employability agenda through their curricula and pedagogical practices. Academic faculties have been rebranded, restructured or initiated to service this industry. Increasingly work placements, live simulations (such as television or radio broadcasts) and assessments mimicking the experience of cultural work are a visible part of the curriculum. Industry input also comes directly in the form of course accreditation (from organisations such as Creative Skillset^{iv}) and the inflow of teacher-practitioners to the HE system. While all of these are often important and attractive aspects of the curriculum shaping both its graduates and its public image, it affirms the lure of vocationalism and the artificial framing of a theory/practice dichotomy (Corner 1995) with potentially serious implications for the nature and role of universities in developing 'critical citizenship and civic courage' (Giroux 2000).

However, while HE has evolved to accommodate this neoliberal agenda and the demands of the knowledge economy, concerns also remain that HEIs are still not delivering effectively for the creative industries. For example, Creative Skillset (2009), the skills council responsible for the creative sector, has warned that despite an oversupply of willing graduates competing for jobs in the sector, the industry is reporting that HE is failing to deliver the *right* kind of skills needed. Reports indicate serious skills shortages in areas like digital technology and multiplatform capability, broadcast engineering, business and commercial know-how, visual effects and craft-orientated jobs (see Creative & Cultural Skills and Creative Skillset 2011). Furthermore, while there are claims of gaps in specific occupational and sectoral roles, the curriculum itself comes under fire (for example in the NESTA commissioned report *Next Gen.* (2011) which is uncompromising in its criticism: 'There are already many university courses purporting to provide specialist training for video games and visual effects. But most of these courses are flawed, leaving those graduating from them with poor job prospects' (Livingstone and Hope 2011: 5)). Guile (2010: 470) argues, 'despite universities' close links with this sector, studying for a C&C-related [creative and cultural] degree rarely provides an expectation or understanding of what is required in vocational contexts'. Again the pressure is on the HE sector to remedy this, for example through ensuring a 'greater uptake of Skillset-backed courses and accreditation services, such as Skillset Academies [...] strongly supported by employers' (Creative Skillset 2009).

Under the ideologies of neoliberalism and the knowledge economy, two policy movements have come together to direct the relationship between higher education and the creative industries. The result has been that individual creative talents are now framed as economic resources and employability has become central to the role of the university. This has been managed by a plethora of economic metrics (e.g. monitoring and measuring graduate destinations) and changes to the

funding structures. However, while many continue to voice their reservations about this development (Comunian et al 2011; Collini 2012; Thornham and O'Sullivan 2004; Buckingham and Jones 2001), it is likely to continue apace in the future.

GOVERNANCE AND LABOUR STRUCTURES

This policy landscape and the evolutions therein have had a direct impact on curriculum content, and the ways in which the expectations of a cultural education and subsequent work are shaped. As outlined, creative industries discourse has been very influential in policy circles as it merges innovation, creativity and economic growth. However, while policy purports to nurture many of the central ingredients of the knowledge economy, the 'dynamics of policy formation in the UK impose a straightjacket on the education and training system' (Guile 2010: 466) as universities are caught between two systems of governance. On the one hand there are 'supply-side measures' from policy-makers imposing targets, merging funding with targets and taking a 'one size fits all sectors' approach to education policy development (Guile 2010). On the other hand are the demand-led pressures of industry for specific work-based skills with massification ensuring a ready and cheap supply of labour. For example, the evolution of the employability agenda ensures a reframing of the role of the universities, marking a transition of authority over the definition of what constitutes employability away from HE to industry and the state (Boden and Nedeva 2010). These converging forces mean that universities have had their strategic capacity to act on the basis of their 'professional judgement severely circumscribed' (Boden and Nedeva 2010: 47). 'Failure to comply with the demands of the purchaser - to 'play the game' according to its rules - risks a loss of funding, with consequences for employment as well as the continuation of funded activities' (Willmott 2003: 3).

Structural data on the labour market also reveals the impact of HE on the creative ecology and how its own agenda for growth feeds some of the labour issues encountered by creative workers. From their research Comunian et al conclude that the growth in scale of creative disciplines in HE has 'expanded the provision of those skills without real corresponding opportunities' (2011: 305). The result is an oversupply of graduate labour which contributes directly to the continuing cycle of lower economic prospects and precarious working conditions. Oversupply results in earning capacity falling (the scarcity of skills/talent which drives wages up is dissipated by more graduates entering the market annually). Wages are dampened with competition continuing in the form of 'pro-longed entry tournaments' (Marsden 2007) and work placements often involve free labour under the rubric of 'gaining experience', This pressure to professionalise through demonstrable experience becomes a mechanism of exclusion in itself for those from certain socio-economic backgrounds. Comunian et al's research questions the current policy framework and whether it has really benefited prospective creative workers or if it has done the opposite, 'blurring economic and structural differences across the creative industries in a positive portrait' that is experienced only by a few (2011: 292).

With this expansion and massification of HE greater scrutiny has been put on institutional structures, discourses and practices. The impact of these forces on access has become a key theme in educational policy both in the UK and internationally. Burke and McManus' (2011) research examines admission practices on a number of art and design courses, concluding that such practices are often tied to the complex operation of power, exclusion and subjective constructions of value and potential which 'unwittingly reproduce deeply embedded inequalities' (2011: 700). This is particularly significant in the context of the creative sector where judgements of quality and value are often subjective and cultural work itself is often cited as gendered, classed and racialised with substantial inequalities existing around access, development and pay (Oakley 2013; Guile 2010; Comunian et al 2011). Furthermore micro-level initiatives within the curriculum, which are endorsed

by reports such as *Creative Britain* (e.g. industry collaborations, work placements and project simulations), can reproduce rather than challenge current structural conditions around exclusions (Allen 2013; Oakley 2013; Siebert and Wilson 2013) though some see these simulated work environments not just as naive reproductions but where the critical issues and politics of cultural work can be rendered visible, debated and contested (Ashton 2013).

Further, staff in HE are caught in their own precarious labour market and expected to behave as strategic actors in a research and degree market as alternative providers enter the market. One of the greatest threats to the sustainability of the current HE system comes from intermediary organisations which create new spaces for aspiring entrants to enter industry (Guile 2010). The emergence of corporate, for-profit and virtual universities, along with private universities and colleges, poly-technical institutes and specialist institutions challenge the privileged position of universities on the higher education landscape and this trend is unlikely to be reversed as HE becomes increasingly subject to consumer sovereignty and existing media companies look for new revenue streams.^v

Finally, the transfer of responsibility for financing research which has shifted from higher education institutions to research councils, foundations and sectoral agencies means that academic staff engaged in research increasingly rely on external sources of finance. Allocation of public funding for research (through systems like the Research Excellence Framework)^{vi} is selective, legitimized through a system of peer review (Willmott 2003), and governed by centralised assessments of performance; thus deepening and widening government management of the research process (Couldry 2011). Critics argue that these allocation systems do not encourage autonomy or risk-taking but rather conformity (Collini 2012; Couldry 2011) requiring academics to act as intermediaries between policy

and industry. Universities are measured on their responsiveness to commercial, industrial and political agendas with industry engagement often encouraged and used directly as a measure of academic effectiveness. As researchers become increasingly reliant on external resources, partnerships and knowledge exchanges, their ability to be critical of practices and enthusiasm for engaging in such exchanges is uncertain.

In many ways HE may be complicit in (re)producing many of the structural issues within cultural labour. The convergence of policy, admission practices, occupational pressures and current models of governance render universities largely powerless, marginalising their voice, and rendering them seemingly impotent in current policy decision-making. The focus of this chapter has been predominantly on the UK context. However in an era of globalisation, policy often travels and such monitoring and management of teaching and research is likely to be attractive to other governments looking to further their development of the knowledge economy, to make the work of academics more responsive to industrial and policy priorities, while reducing costs and competing internationally for prestige and talent. However, while such conditions seem impermeable, strategies for resistance are discernible both within and out with HE; how HEIs engage with social enterprises, co-operatives, trade unions and activist organisations will be vital to ensuring that conversations about exploitation, access and what constitutes 'good work' remain as part of the curriculum for vocational and theoretical degrees thus helping to recover a debate lost to mainstream economic thought (Oakley 2013).

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ⁱ In 2011 Sir Tim Wilson was commissioned by the UK government to review university-business collaboration. Recommendations made by the report included strengthening graduate employability through subsidised internships, enhancing the structure for knowledge transfer partnerships and making employment data for postgraduate courses available.

ⁱⁱ The Select Committee on Arts and Manufactures is regarded as a significant milestone in the development of British art education as 'it was the first occasion when key questions regarding the relationship between art, commerce, and art education were the subject of parliamentary debate' (Sproll 1994: 108).

ⁱⁱⁱ The Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (BIS) is a UK ministerial department created in 2009 by the merger of the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) and the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR). The department is responsible areas such as business regulation and support, further education and higher education, intellectual property, regional and local economic development, science and research, skills and training. Due to devolution some policies apply to England alone (such as further and higher education policy), while others are not devolved (see Court 2004 for further discussion of the impact of devolution on HE policy). The Department for Education (DfE) is a separate department of the UK government responsible for education (up to secondary level).

^{iv} Creative Skillset is the industry body supporting training for the UK creative industries. It accredits practice-based degrees offering 'an invaluable signpost for potential students, apprentices and employers to indicate those programmes that provide the most up-to-date and relevant industry training and education' (Creative Skillset 2013).

^v Guardian Masterclasses are the fastest growing business at *The Guardian* (Rutter 2013) offering courses in music journalism, digital media, web design, creative writing and more.

^{vi} The Research Excellence Framework (REF) is the national system for assessing the quality of research in UK HEIs. It allocates funding for research based on measures of "excellence"; provides accountability for public investment in research and provides benchmarking information to establish reputational yardsticks (REF 2012).