# Bey*o*nd Employability

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There has been much talk recently as to the value of arts and humanities degrees, as raised by the recent Augar report, for example. Here, in the School of Arts and Cultures, and at Newcastle University more broadly, we are firm advocates for the importance of cultural and creative subjects to individuals and to wider society. Our UG and PG courses are not simply about 'value for money' in a narrow, economic sense. Rather, a Higher Education qualification is valuable for our students in all kinds of ways. It might be a step towards a more independent life, the development of a creative practice, or support for a planned career. There are new friends and colleagues to be made, new ideas and ways of working to explore. Ultimately, we aim to enable our students to realise both their potential and their ambitions and to be reflective, global citizens.

Teaching in the School of Arts and Cultures is extremely diverse, covering a wide range of specialisms, expertise and sector collaborations. We are renowned as an ambitious and exciting place to study, and our courses are some of the most highly ranked in the country. Our commitment to employability forms part of that ambition. We have three dedicated subject 'leads' in Fine Art, Music and Media, Culture, Heritage (MCH), who have worked together for the past eight years to co-ordinate and share expertise across the School with tremendous results. Many of these projects enable students to work with community groups, schools and charities, making a valuable contribution to wider society in the process.

I am delighted to see the Beyond Employability project contribute to this ongoing work and, in particular, welcome the focus it gives to listening and responding to our students' hopes and concerns about their futures.

I encourage everyone to read the pack, and to try out some of the activities and considerations.

Prof Rhiannon Mason
Head of the School of Arts and Cultures

Introduction

The *Beyond Employability* teaching pack is the product of a year-long research project in the School of Arts and Cultures, Newcastle University, UK, over the course of the 2018-2019 academic year.

It stems from our collective experiences as members of teaching staff, and our concern over what we saw as a notable increase in students expressing anxiety over their 'employability' and their lives post-graduation. To be clear, we strongly believe in the quality and value of teaching throughout the School of Arts and Cultures – which is, and continues to be, outstanding. We know that staff take employer expectations seriously, and regularly update their teaching so that students receive up-to-date and industry standard skills and experiences. We know too that SACS offers modules and programmes that are sector-leading when it comes to fostering a critical engagement with employability (e.g. Music Enterprise in ICMuS, Life, Work, Art in Fine Art and the three 'Working on a Project' modules in MCH). We also recognise that since the announcement of the new Employability and Enterprise strategy in 2016, a huge amount of work has been undertaken at Faculty and University level to recognise the work undertaken by colleagues in SACS, who have been at the forefront of developing these, and other, modules. The formation of the SACS Employability and Enterprise team is a good example of this and it is thanks to the members of this team that the School now has a dedicated subject-level employability advocate for each Section. Learning from the work of these colleagues (amongst others), we wanted to use this project to reflect on the ways in which employability is embedded, not just within individual modules or curriculums, but into the teaching practice and ethos of the School as a whole.

How, we wanted to know, did teaching outside of specific careers modules or activities impact student perceptions of employability? And, more importantly, what else might we do, as teaching staff and a School, to prepare students for meaningful and

ethical work – and for life?

Such questions and concerns are not ones that we, as academics, are immune from. Indeed, it is important to mention that at the point of the project's inception we (the authors) were all precariously employed - as either Early Career Researchers or PhD candidates. Perhaps for that reason we heard much of our own experiences reflected in the way that students spoke to us about their careers. From conversations with personal tutees wrestling with the decision to leave their home towns in pursuit of a dream, but as yet unobtained job, to overheard conversations between seminar students whose primary concern was how to avoid a lifetime of financial insecurity and exploitative working practices, we saw in our students many of the concerns and anxieties that we had ourselves. Yet most academic and policy literature continues to focus on employer expectations and Higher Education's ability to fulfil these (e.g. as in Hinchliffe and Jolly, 2010) .

As a result, we decided to focus on students' experiences of teaching in relation to ideas of employability. How, we wanted to know, was the increasing neoliberalisation, both of the university sector and creative careers as a whole, informing students' expectations of life post-graduation? And, more importantly, what support were we, as teaching staff and a School, offering to students working through these issues?

*Beyond Employability* was designed in response to some of these questions and in reaction to what we saw as a lacuna of data from across the School(s) and Careers Service on this topic. Indeed, whilst Newcastle University collects quantitative data on students' careers post-graduation (largely through the DLHE surveys and Graduate Outcomes surveys), relatively little is known about students' qualitative, personal experiences of negotiating their own employability whilst at Newcastle University. Such negotiations are  particularly important to consider in relation to students based in the School of Arts

*'Obviously we're taught we're all special, we've all got things to offer [...] but deep down I know there is always people that maybe offer a bit more than me?'* (UG Media student)

and Cultures where, with a wide variety of degree programmes in Music, Fine Art, Film, PR, Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies, and Museum, Gallery and Heritage Studies, our graduates are far more likely to enter the creative workforce than most. As a sector that is characterised by irregular working patterns (Ball et al. 2010), long-term financial insecurity (Oakley, 2008) and, at its worst, exploitative labour practices (Allen et al. 2013), we owe it to our students to better understand how these conditions are impacting their identities in the present in order to drive forward practical change for the future.

Whilst internal reviews of careers-related teaching within the School of Arts and Cultures have been conducted in the past (see: Baveystock, 2012) with the intention of changing teaching practice to better meet the needs of our students and the sector, the tendency in Higher Education has been to frame employability as a 'property of the individual' (Universities UK, 2002, p.16). This is in stark contrast to mounting evidence that suggests that an individual's employability, *especially* in the creative sector, is almost always invariably a product of a much wider set of structural concerns, in which individuals' gender, class, caring duties, race or dis/ability  play a key role in determining applicants' success in getting work. Whilst colleagues leading on module development and teaching in the School of Arts and Cultures very often actively resist such framings within lectures and seminars, the narrative of employability as an individualised property is one that appears to continue to shape our students' self-perception and expectations, and very often the provision that is made for them. Thus, for example, student workshops that aim to build 'confidence' are widespread across the UK, but similar workshops that promote fair working practices and labour rights are not. This project therefore aimed to go *beyond* employability in this regard, in order to get us to think not just about how teaching provisions made within the School and by

the Careers Service were facilitating the development of students' professional identities, but also how these identities were being shaped by a much wider set of structural conditions and experiences outside of our control. In doing so, we seek to challenge the notion of employability as an individual property, advocating instead for an understanding of our students' careers that asks, not how we might make our students more attractive to prospective employers, but how we might support their development as active, ethical citizens and members of a creative workplace.

The rest of this pack offers an overview of some of the key findings from our project, and is followed up by a series of activities and considerations, designed in collaboration with colleagues from across the School of Arts and Cultures. These activities will, we hope, enable us to share and cross-pollinate existing good practice, whilst responding to additional challenges identified by our research. We realise that not every activity will be suitable for every module or programme – there is far too much going on for that to be practically feasible! But we hope you can see in the pack suggestions that might be expanded upon, activities you might adapt, ideas you might take up in the future.

We've also focused on 'micro-activities' – things that might easily be used in a seminar, workshop, or to improve a lecture – rather than complete module change, or shifts in School policy. Rest assured, we're interested in both, and many of our colleagues in Music, Fine Art and MCH have already developed innovative and exciting modules that seek to address the concerns outlined above. However, these modules are not necessarily open to all of our students, nor do all students choose to enrol in such modules, which can lead to an unevenness in the student experience. We'd also argue that employability – in a critical sense – is not 'just' for teaching staff who deal with placements, projects and employers, but for everyone. So, we're using this pack to start a conversation about what 'employability'

might look like in the School of Arts and Cultures, and have concentrated here on smaller activities and suggestions that we can all try immediately – and hopefully in the years to come.

Please do let us know how you get on.

Emma, Katie, Jess, Maria
and Cecilia

# 2.

# *Background to the Research*

'Employability' has become something of an expedient 'buzzword' in UK higher education. Driven by the twin forces of a marketised Higher Education sector, and the introduction of new 'quality' metrics embedded into the Teaching Excellence Frameworks, universities in the UK are coming under increasing pressure to 'increase their share of the graduate employment market' (Minocha *et al.* 2017, p.237).

Whilst the desire to consider and support employability is not in itself a bad thing (and is in fact a significant improvement on HE's previous nonchalance towards students' post-graduation lives), there remains as, Tymon (2013, p.842) has highlighted, 'a lack of coherence about what is meant by the term itself'. Such incoherence has been complicated, firstly by the sheer number of stakeholders involved in defining employability in the first place (Tymon, 2013), and secondly by a repeated, but somewhat misguided interpretation of employability at all levels, which often reduces it to 'skills'. This is in spite of the mounting evidence which suggests that not only certain personalities, but also different *identities*, are increasingly being targeted by employers as desirable attributes for prospective employees (Allen *et al.* 2011; Taylor and O'Brien, 2017).

The situation isn't helped by formal educational bodies, such as Universities UK, who have tended to avoid discussing the structural inequalities that inform employment practices and opportunities for work (such as unequal pay, access to networks, or graduate mobility) that truly inform how 'employable' a student is (Morley, 2001; Budd, 2017).

*'There's this whole stereotype that [...] if you are brown you need to be doing something that makes you very employable e.g. you have to be in law, you have to do engineering, you have to be a doctor [...] Doing something like Media, so many people look at me like, 'oh, why is it you're doing that?' [...] There's this expectation that I should be doing something that is more employable, more recognised'* (UG Media Student)

Moreover, while these concerns apply to all sectors in general, they are particularly acute within the cultural sector, where a form of 'cultural individualisation' (McRobbie, 2001) puts pressure on students to align their whole selves and identities with the status of 'being a creative'. For students working in journalism, advertising, art, heritage, or music, the ability to self-define as a 'creative' worker often means balancing a portfolio of varying jobs (Ashton, 2015) and worse yet, enduring exploitative labour practices or unpaid internships as employees enter in a race to the bottom in the hopes of avoiding unemployment (Precarious Workers Brigade and Carrot Workers Collective, 2014). Recognition of this has seen both undergraduate and postgraduate students becoming more attuned than ever to the need to 'add value' to their degrees (Tomlinson, 2008), whether that be through different forms of 'self-improvement', extra-curricular activities, or HE organised work placements, where even the latter can, as Allen *et al.* (2013, p.433) have highlighted, become 'realm[s] in which inequalities are (re)produced' [For more on this please see Teaching Consideration 4]. The pressure to add value has, in effect, made employability a core part of the student experience.

Even within Newcastle University, itself a generally progressive and critical university, understandings of how different career choices and demographic factors might impact the 'success' of students after graduation are often uneven at a policy level. Key documents, such as our *Employability and Enterprise Strategy* (2016) recognise that employability is seen to 'permeat[e] the student lifecycle' (Newcastle University, 2016, p.5), and that precarity and competition are urgent issues for students, yet tend to overlook animating structural inequalities that inform these conditions. And whilst the University's most recent Educational Strategy prioritises the development of students 'as the whole person', critiquing the overemphasis on 'skills' and stressing the role it wants them to play as 'critical global citizens' (NU

Educational Strategy, 2018) it is, as yet, uncertain how these shifts away from traditional measures of success will perform when it comes to the increasingly metric-driven HE landscape in which the University is situated.

The authors of this report felt that examination of such structural issues, as well as the students' understanding of their own identities and career options, would therefore be a useful addition to the knowledge pool currently being developed at Faculty and University level, particularly when it comes to the creative careers associated with the School of Arts and Cultures.

Finally, we knew that to better support our students into – and through – a changing world of work, we first needed to better understand the student experience. We wanted to know what the pressure to 'add value' felt like, for example, how concerns over employability might shape the student experience of learning and teaching. On that account, we prioritised students' voices – and we would like to thank them again here for sharing their experiences and thoughts with the team. None of what follows would have been possible without them.

3.

# *Methodology*

Research for this project was conducted between October 2018 and July 2019 at Newcastle University and involved an initial scoping exercise, focus groups with undergraduate and postgraduate students from Music, Fine Art and Media, Culture and Heritage and three case studies of existing teaching practices from across the different Sections.

The programme offering within the School of Arts and Cultures is notably diverse: it currently runs approximately 16 courses (6 undergraduate and 10 postgraduate) across three different Sections (Music, Fine Art and Media, Culture and Heritage). With 30% of our student body coming to us from outside of the UK and EU (many of whom are concentrated in the department of Media, Culture and Heritage in particular), students in our classrooms also come to us with a variety of different perspectives, experiences and expectations regarding their future careers, all of which inform the way they relate to employability. At a faculty level, we do recruit a number of students from BME, widening participation, and state school backgrounds, although in general figures for these students are lower than other faculties, whilst the number of female students in HaSS is on average higher than in SaGE (the Faculty of Science, Agriculture and Engineering) and FMS (the Faculty of Medical Sciences) . Such figures are worth bearing in mind when thinking about student responses to our focus groups, in so far as they may inform participants' perspectives on employability to one degree or another.

It is important to note that the biggest challenge for this project lay in the recruitment of students. Indeed, whilst the initial aim had been to recruit around 50 students from across the School (8 undergraduates and 8 postgraduates from each Section), and host twelve

focus groups (6 in each semester), in the end only 13 students were recruited from across the Sections. This was in spite of repeated attempts across the team to engage with and recruit students from these Sections. We unpack the significance of this in more detail later on in our key findings, however a lot of the lack of student enthusiasm for the project we attribute to a fundamental confusion amongst students about what the term employability means, and how participation in the project might benefit them [see Key Finding 1].

To supplement our recruitment issues, questionnaires were circulated amongst the students asking about their understanding of employability and experiences of it within their own degree programmes. Students were also approached on some of our case study modules and asked to share their thoughts anonymously on post-it notes. A further 40 responses from students were gathered through this mechanism.

As a consequence of the recruitment issues noted above, we were unable to track student development – to find out how students' relationship to their own employability and creative identities changed over the course of the academic year. Instead, we built activities into our focus groups that allowed the students we spoke to in semesters 2 and 3 to reflect back on their encounters with employability across the whole year.

# 4.

# *Key Findings*

## i. Students don't connect with the term 'employability'

Perhaps the key barrier we faced during the project was getting students to talk to us about their experiences of employability in the first place. This is a common problem. Colleagues across the School of Arts and Cultures repeatedly told us they had put on 'employability' style events, often at the students' request, only to be greeted by empty lecture halls. We also know that colleagues working on similar projects in other universities have faced similar challenges. Our experience as a whole thus resonates with Tymon's (2013) suggestion that there is a "lack of coherence' about what constitutes employability, both at a university and employer level. We would further suggest that this incoherence is particularly acute in the cultural and creative industries, where less traditional forms of employment only add to the conceptual confusion over what then constitutes 'employability'. Indeed, when it comes to the student body, 'employability' as a concept is incoherent in the most literal sense; the vast majority of students we spoke to did not know what the term meant or referred to.

On the other hand, once we got students talking about what we as a team recognised as 'employability', we found that students often had a great deal to say. Thus, for instance, students might define employability quite vaguely in one moment (e.g. as 'the way to get employed' (Music, Male, Stage 3 UG) or 'a good CV' ( Music, Female, PG)), only to later recognise employability as crucial to their future careers and selves (e.g. noting that it 'means everything' (Music, Male, Stage 3 UG), while still not demonstrating any fuller understanding of what employability might constitute. Indeed, this confusion seemed to contribute

*'Employability is very confusing'* (Fine Art UG Stage 1)

*'Means very little. About a kind of sociability'* (Fine Art UG Stage 1)

to the general sense of panic that students experienced when thinking about their future lives, and is something that we unpack in more detail later on.

A key issue then is how we, as educators, attract and engage students with employability, both in terms of the concrete events, initiatives and teaching sessions that might directly support individuals, and wider critical debate (see Teaching Consideration 1).

Having experienced these issues first hand, we would certainly suggest that future events and projects opt for something other than 'employability' in their title. It may be that subject-specific vocabulary is required to connect our work with student concerns in the different sectors across the School. For example, we noticed that students in Fine Art, Film and Music were more likely to speak of an ongoing 'practice', while students in journalism, media and heritage tended to imagine themselves in particular jobs, or talked of 'professional careers', although there was some slippage. It may be that events in each sector need to be carefully signposted and tailored, using terms already familiar to students, in order for us to better communicate our intentions.

Similarly, we might all take care not to 'prescribe' employability via our everyday language. For example, students are often asked to 'make an appointment' with the Careers Service, when inviting them along 'for a chat' or 'conversation' might be more appealing to those who haven't yet made decisions, and thus are in most need of support.

It also seems crucial to retain an international perspective. Events geared towards work in the UK, or which pre-suppose similar working environments, sectors and norms, are unlikely to attract international students, who consequently miss out on support. We would strongly suggest that staff think carefully about the language they are using when planning events and activities then – but also look out for opportunities to let students in on the discussions around employability. As the later sections detail, students have a great deal to say,

*'Means you're worth employing'* (Museum Studies, Female, PG)

*'How easy you find it to find work'* (Music, PG)

and it is vital that we make room for their experiences, perspectives and critiques.

## ii. The impact of employability on students

Despite the difficulties noted above with the term 'employability', we repeatedly witnessed in our discussions with students a finely developed understanding that the degree alone was no longer 'enough' to secure employment post-graduation. In this sense, many of our students were quite candid about taking a strategic approach to their degrees from the very beginning – choosing modules or taking up extra-curricular opportunities that they hoped would 'add value' (Tomlinson 2008).

This approach tended to revolve around the need to have a 'good CV' to present to employers. Skill-based, experiential, and/or project-based tasks and modules – even if challenging – were largely welcomed by students in this regard, and staff were active in promoting these sessions in terms of their employability (i.e. flagging up, say, project work, as something to talk about in interviews). In fact, tensions could arise when students felt they had to undertake assignments or activities that were not so easily assimilated into the CV – often as attached to 'theory'. As one UG Media student remarked in relation to a theoretical assignment, for example, 'how is this theory going to be applied? We're not going to be writing essays in the workplace, so why is this relevant?'. In cases like this, opportunities to position theory and critical thinking as central to the lives of students, in the widest sense, were lost.

Indeed, the need to 'package' the learning and teaching experience was at times so paramount to students, that one, very notably, spoke of their inability to fully 'liv[e] in the present', instead remarking that they had to make 'the most out of this experience, not for myself, but for my future employer' (UG Media student). Terms and phrases like 'sold' or 'selling yourself' were

*'I'm here to get my shine on a little bit, buff me up a little bit, so I can be sold at the marketplace. I am like that diamond that isn't set in the ring yet. So Newcastle University can set me in that ring, so that I can be bought by somebody'* (Heritage Student, Female, PG)

common across all subject areas.

At times, we saw in this kind of conversation active and critical students who knew how to 'play the game'. At others, we listened with increasing concern as students narrated their attempts to 'match' not just their skills, experiences and abilities with employer expectations, but understandings of themselves as individuals. It often felt to us that students had internalised, and were now performing, 'economically driven discourses' of employability (Tomlinson 2017).

Similarly, while for many students, extra-curricular activities and employment were a reality of student life – and indeed, a financial necessity – both paid and unpaid roles were regularly presented by students as a means by which they might 'prove themselves' to later employers. Credited placements, valuable work experience, precarious contracts, poor quality internships and everything in between might thus be articulated as a stepping stone to something more stable in the future, or taken up in the hopes it would provide a competitive edge upon graduation – despite many of these kinds of 'opportunities' taking up a great deal of time for little to no reward. Elsewhere, students struggled to reconcile unpaid work with an idea of their own value or success, or talked at length of the sacrifices needed to complete long periods of volunteering they considered a necessity post-graduation for entry into a number of 'creative' fields.

As educators we found much of the above alarming. We simply hadn't anticipated how completely students felt they had to package and align themselves with employer expectations, or fully understood the pressures placed upon them in terms of the need to 'add value'. Of course, we recognise that many students need or want to work throughout their studies, and that there can be benefits to this. What we would argue, however, is that students today navigate a very different world of work – and more than ever they need our support and guidance. There is therefore an impetus for teaching staff to intervene in dominant and often

*'I can't really afford to go back and be an intern again. Or go back and [...] work my way up [...] I need to get a job. Like a real job. And unfortunately if that does not happen within a reasonable amount of time then I'm not really sure what is going to happen'* (PG Heritage student)

employer-driven discourses of employability; to resist and challenge certain narratives and expectations, and make space for students to learn – and live (see Teaching Activities 1 and 2). We might, for example, take care when introducing unpaid internships as 'great' or 'wonderful opportunities' – as this can further alienate students who are unable to apply, and drive the sense that students should always be doing more.

Our research flagged up one further, intriguing, possibility. When we asked students why they had chosen Newcastle University, many of them pointed to an imagined future self that – in contrast to the above – was not primarily positioned via employment. For example, students spoke of selecting courses that would give them 'lots of options', or talked of 'becoming an independent person and adult in the city' (UG Media student). It would seem that our students arrive at Newcastle University with hopes for the future that are more rounded and civic-minded than we might expect, and we might do more to support and encourage this (see Teaching Activity 6 and Teaching Consideration 2).

### iii. Panic

Given the pressure put on students to 'add value' to their degrees – right from year one – it might come as no surprise that the most common reaction to our attempts to talk about employability with students was a kind of pre-conditioned panic. A group of UG Media students, for example, commented that they were 'terrified' of the approaching end of the programme, and had greeted the news that peers had applied for jobs by 'panicking'. Indeed, this unwelcome news seemed to foster competition between the students, who began to position peers as 'obstacles' to their own employment.

In other cases, students spoke of panic caused by what we came to term the 'phantom graduate' – or the idea that there was always someone 'out there' with more experience, better grades, and better connections,

with whom the student could not compete. At times, this 'phantom graduate' seemed to compel students to take on more. At others, and particularly for those placed at a structural disadvantage, students began instead to feel hopeless about the future.

Paradoxically, it tended to be those staff members who recognised students' concerns and sought to critically engage with employability (e.g. by hosting dedicated sessions with graduates, or running events) who often fell foul of exactly the kinds of panic they had hoped to allay. For example, it was common to start such sessions with an introductory talk highlighting structural concerns and a lack of opportunity in the sector – most likely as a means by which to underline the importance of the strategies, ideas and possibilities that followed. However, it would appear that students – already bombarded with depressing news about changes to the world of work –simply did not 'hear' anything past the introduction; the sense of initial panic generated was enough to swamp everything that came afterwards. Similarly, the Precarious Workers Brigade (2017 p.6) talk of the dangers of leaving students 'paralysed and demoralised' when critiquing employment and work, where the only available options are ''fight' (competing) or 'flight' (dropping out)'. As a School, we need to re-think the 'framing' of such sessions, and to make absolutely sure that other possibilities are outlined (see Teaching Consideration 1).

Another common example concerned career-narratives intended to demystify a profession (as provided by an invited speaker or graduate). While these stories could be really positive, certain narratives were rejected or challenged by students for their reliance on periods of unpaid work, exclusive networks, paths and mechanisms that no longer applied, and/or a degree of mobility not available to all. It seemed to us that students in all subject areas were looking for younger and more experimental role models who might focus on the pragmatics of decision-making (see Teaching Activity 2 and Teaching Consideration 3).

*'nowadays everyone's just like fighting each other [...] if people knock you down, you just have to be like 'eff them, just do what you need to do, get what you need to get'*
(UG Media Student)

The clear exceptions to the above were the module and programme options that dealt with employability over a far longer time period (i.e. as per the Music Enterprise or Life, Work, Art modules in Music and Fine Art). Students here talked in often glowing terms of the focus on partnership and experiential learning, for example, and felt they were gaining 'real world' skills and experiences that helped them to make sense of their own creative practices, and their possible application post-graduation. Part of the success of these modules, in fact, was their ability to deploy a critical approach to employability, which ensured that students did not simply 'package' themselves in relation to employers' or industry expectations, but rather had space and time to explore what a creative practice or career might look like for them. (see Teaching Activity 6, Teaching Consideration 2 and Teaching Consideration 3).

For those of us working either on far shorter activities, or extra-curricular events, the clear message was to flag these up for students as early in the course as possible, linking together events into a programme of activity wherever possible. This both 'builds-in' critical employability over a longer period (allowing critical thinking to develop in relation to practice and other teaching) and helps students to act (e.g. access resources, try activities and feedback) while they still have lots of time. Students faced with ad-hoc events a few weeks before graduation, for example, tended to see them as too little too late.

iv. Understanding the field

In our conversations with students, it became clear that there were very mixed understandings of the kinds of work available in selected fields. This finding is mirrored in an older internal report on teaching for the Museums, Galleries and Heritage programme where, which similarly noted 'a poor appreciation of the diversity of work available in the sectors' (Baveystock, 2012).

The ways in which students articulated these understandings varied quite considerably by subject however. In Fine Art, for example, students tended to opt for jobs that they felt would financially support a creative or studio-based practice (i.e. teaching, educational or outreach work, or any other paid work), and/or anticipated a post-graduation lull. A common concern voiced here was that employment in arts was somehow more specialist and less 'obvious' than other creative career options. Thus even students who wanted to continue their practices struggled to articulate how they might do this.

Students at both UG and PG level in media and journalism, in contrast, seemed more entrepreneurial – noting the distinction between traditional 'jobs' and ways they might earn a living (e.g. via YouTube).

What was common across subject areas was an often poor or mismatched understanding of what a particular job or role might entail. Thus students might articulate a strong emotional connection to a particular position – to the extent of selecting modules or whole programmes of study that they felt would support them in this trajectory – only to later indicate that they knew very little about what that position would actually entail. Alternatively, students spoke of having little to no idea of what came after their studies. In this instance, it was common for students to talk of employability sessions, or the need to select a dissertation topic, as 'breaking the bubble', and to then describe the subsequent panic over picking an entire career in a matter of days.

With the exception of those students who had taken part in modules mentioned above, very few of those we interviewed demonstrated a keen, critical understanding of their selected fields and the practical means and strategies by which they might earn a living. This is perhaps all the more striking given that students were often very articulate about the struggles they might face post-graduation, particularly in terms of structural issues like gender, race and class. The need to have a 'good CV' or to 'interview well' was mentioned

*'University doesn't exactly feed you into jobs. I'm expecting when I graduate to be lost for a little while'* (MA Fine Art)

repeatedly, for example, but there was no mention, for example, of collective or collaborative working practices, of union membership, of networks, of the kinds of fees or costs that might need to be factored into freelance work, or alternative sources of support.

We would argue that we – as teaching staff – need to look again at our respective fields of practice, and to the kinds of employment available. For example, it may be that students can no longer rely on 'traditional' post-graduation roles, and instead need practical, detailed support to help them navigate periods of freelance work, to set up small businesses or co-operatives, or simply to help students be aware of – and fight to retain – their working rights (see Teaching Activity 2).

### v. Accessing wider support

While the Beyond Employability project mainly explored students' perceptions of our teaching in the School of Arts and Cultures, it also looked at the wider support available to students as provided through the Careers Service. Statistics show that patterns of engagement here are patchy at best. For example, out of a student cohort of 872 undergraduates and 353 postgraduates, the Careers Service records individual interactions with only 345 students in 2017-18, only 20 of whom came from Music.

There are a number of possibilities here. Low engagement may be explained by teaching on certain programmes already fulfilling students employability needs, for example. However, when we asked students about the Careers Service, it became clear that many of them perceived it as lacking the specialist support they would need. For example, one MA Museum Studies student remarked that 'they [the Careers Service] don't apply to me or my course. They always seem to be for certain career paths'. This is surprising, for each section of the Careers Service has its own lead careers specialist, in addition to specific Employability and Enterprise representatives amongst the academic staff.

*'I have been focusing on getting teaching experience [...] because Fine Art is so broad'* (BA Fine Art)

Similarly, even where events are specifically targeted towards SACS students – such as *Creative Careers* – attendance is again quite low (42 from Media, Culture and Heritage and 6 from Music in 2017-18).

There are exceptions and anomalies here too. Students from Media, Culture and Heritage, and then Fine Art, are comparatively more likely to take up the service's Applied Enterprise Module than any other student across the University, for example. And according to data from the Careers Service, of all the many available forms of support, the most popular for Arts and Cultures students was help with CVs. This was echoed by our participants, who when asked what they thought of the Careers Service, would most often talk of CV workshops – often in very complimentary terms.

That students found CV workshops useful is good news, but we would point out that the Career Service 'offer' is in fact far, far broader; it includes financial help for placements, project funding for graduates, business start-up support, and specialist tools for career planning, for example. In fact, it may be that students only know about the CV workshops because we, as teaching staff, tend to ask our colleagues in the Careers Service to deliver this one session.

Given the success of CV workshops 'outside' of our taught courses, we would recommend that colleagues instead make room for students to explore the vast array of tools, projects and possibilities offered by the Careers Service, and signpost this as *specialist* provision (although careers staff themselves may not necessarily be specialists in the creative sectors, they are specialists in decision-making and guidance theory, and each School has a dedicated member of staff) (see Teaching Consideration 5). Doing so early in the programme (and then again at certain intervals, as part of the programme schedule) is likely to help students engage more widely with varied forms of already existing provision, and to make the most of their time at Newcastle University.

Summary

It is no secret that the cultural and creative industries are undergoing massive, sector-wide change, and that our students face altered futures. The introduction of tuition fees and the increasing neoliberalisation of the university has also, to our minds, deeply affected the student experience, resulting in a pressure to do more, to add more, and to 'be' a certain kind of person. In focusing on the students' qualitative, personal experiences we hoped to give voice to such concerns, and to challenge notions of employability that focus only on the acquisition of certain skills, or the delivery of employers' expectations. We wanted to demonstrate the pervasiveness of employability discourses, and the very real need to remain critical of them. This is vital work, for our students are already volunteers and interns. They are targeted by job adverts, programmes, blogs and articles that suggest how they might become more 'successful'. Unspoken norms and deeply unequal practices are not hard to find here – and we need to think our teaching through in this broader context; to understand 'employability' via the far fuller, lived experiences of students.

We want to see our students meaningfully employed in creative practices and workplaces. But we also want to empower them to enact change, foster ethical working relationships and practices and, in doing so, more fully embody the University's commitment in enabling them to become citizens of the world.

As a team, we strongly believe in the quality and value of learning and teaching right across the School of Arts and Cultures. In putting together this pack, we hoped to demonstrate this commitment further: by encouraging our students to voice their concerns, being unafraid to look critically at our own practices, and – most importantly – finding ways to continue to improve.

We recognise that not every member of teaching staff can lead a dedicated module, and that some of what is detailed above is subject-specific. In fact, as teaching staff we do not all have

the opportunity to contribute to some of the more obvious 'employability-style' modules, events and sessions. What we would argue, however, is that a critical understanding of employability is not limited to placements, projects, experiential learning or the acquisition of certain skills. Rather, we can see employability as a means by which we support students to understand, navigate, change, and even resist structures of contemporary work. In this sense, everything we do – from theory, to practical exercise, to simply encouraging and listening to our students – is relevant. We might even go so far as to see ourselves (as teachers and practitioners in many cases) as role models, and note a responsibility to 'live' ethical working practices, and thus to demonstrate to students how to manage a work/life balance, the importance of taking care of themselves, and how to resist a narrative of all-consuming 'creativity'.

At the same time, we certainly do not want to tell our colleagues (or our students) how to 'do' employability – not least because we are all specialists in our respective fields, and we might take this opportunity to trust in that shared expertise. What we hoped, instead, was to share key findings and ideas for further discussion; to share our thinking, and see where each of our colleagues might take it.

In that spirit, we have included in the rest of this pack suggestions for activities and considerations that relate to the findings detailed in sections i-v. Some of these are drawn from teaching practice within the School of Arts and Cultures, and are either written by or co-written with colleagues. Others we have sourced from elsewhere in relation to specific concerns. All are open to adaptation.

6. # *Activities & Teaching Considerations*

Each of the following activities and teaching considerations aims to engage students in a critical understanding of employability. To us, that means going beyond activities that seek to render individuals 'more employable' (i.e. by updating their CVs, or taking up various 'opportunities' in order to demonstrate their commitment). Instead, we want to raise awareness of key structural issues and factors. We want students to be knowledgeable about their chosen fields, to be able to navigate them – and to change them. We want students to be able to identify and resist all-consuming narratives of creativity, and the kinds of exploitative practice that often follow.

To do this, we need to offer a balance of critical thinking, pragmatism, and hope. We need, for example, to create spaces where we talk candidly about employment rights, the nitty gritty of freelance work, contracts, and 'real-world' conditions and expectations. And we need to do this in a way that encourages students to identify new pathways, or to intervene in practice – to challenge poorly-paid job adverts, for instance, or the obligation to be 'passionate', while flagging up practices of solidarity.

This means that it is not enough to simply promote certain forms of work, or conditions of work, without criticality. The university, in our opinion, is more than a training ground for workers of various types. On the other hand, it is likewise not enough to critique a field of practice from a distance, without going on to suggest what might be done to intervene in or change that practice. Our students and graduates are likely already engaging with the field as it is now, and we need to support them, pragmatically and critically, in these endeavours.

The following activities and teaching considerations thus rely on sector-specific readings and expertise. We have tried where we can to put in examples; texts that we have used and found useful, links to podcasts or groups. We would strongly recommend that you use sector-specific information of your own wherever possible.

Teaching Activity 1:

Alternative CV workshop

**Format:** 1 hour seminar / workshop
**Preparation:** none

Instructions:
• The students form small groups. Hand out pens and large sheets of paper (2mins)
• Ask the students to identify, as a group, a job they would like to apply for post-graduation (5mins)
• Ask the students to invent an applicant and their 'winning' C.V.. Students are to go into as much detail as they can in the time allocated (15 mins)
• A spokesperson for each group presents the C.V., and explains the rationale behind key decisions (e.g. is the candidate male, female, what kinds of grades or experiences do they have?) (15 mins)
• Introduce the term 'employability' to the students. Explain that a traditional measure of someone's employability would focus on the skills and experiences that might render someone employable. A more critical approach would look at structural forces and narratives. For example, are the skills, grades and experiences they listed available to everyone equally? What kinds of privilege / stereotypes have been identified? (10 mins)
• Whole group discussion: How might students begin to challenge such issues? For example, what are their working rights? How might they support each other before and after graduation? What other ways of working might there be? How might they, as a junior colleague, begin to enact change without compromising their position? (You may want to point the students towards campaigns that target exploitative entry-level jobs such as @ fairmuseumjobs, for example, or details of the National Minimum Wage) (10 mins)

[An alternative version of this exercise, and one which might be helpful if you're concerned about students feeling disempowered or 'trapped' by their positions would be to ask students to each bring in a job advert, and to then critique these in groups, as per the Precarious Workers Brigade (2017: 38-40). Or, you may want to bring in a pre-prepared 'perfect' C.V. and ask students to think about the kind of opportunities and support the candidate would have had access to in order to produce such a document]

Post-activity reading
We would suggest giving the students something to read after this activity rather than before, to ensure that students are encouraged to act and are not left discouraged. For example, we have found the following texts useful because they offer multiple, active possibilities for the future, and 'work through' ideas of privilege versus hard work in a way that we have found helps students to recognise the opportunities they have been given (or not), without feeling hopeless or picked on.
• Precarious Workers Brigade (2017) *Training for Exploitation? Politicising Employability and Reclaiming Education* https://www.joaap.org/press/trainingforexploitation.html
• The White Pube (2019) *'How I Got A Gallery'* https://www.thewhitepube.co.uk/how-i-got-a-gallery

Teaching Activity 2:

Career trajectories activity

**Format:** 1 hour seminar / workshop
**Preparation:** none

Instructions:
• Draw a 'traditional' career trajectory on the board / paper for the students to see (i.e. a graph with 'time' on the bottom axis and 'career' on the vertical axis, and a diagonal line for your career, where every decision or stage progresses to the next) (2 mins)
• Change the 'career' axis to 'happiness' or 'fulfilment'. Re-draw your 'actual' career – highlighting points when things went wrong, or were enjoyable but unrelated to the position you now have, etc. (5 mins)
• Ask the students to draw a career trajectory for themselves that similarly looks back at their lives 'in the round' (15 mins)
• Ask the students to compare their trajectories in pairs/small groups. What does this tell them about

the kinds of work they have done or would like to do in the future? Do they feel pressure to 'perform' a linear version of success, and what might other kinds of success look like? How might this help them make decisions in the future? Where might they need support? (15 mins)

<span style="color:blue">Follow-up activities:</span>
• Initial ideas. As the students to think back to the period in which they first visited/selected Newcastle University. What hopes did they have – in the broadest sense (i.e. in relation to living away from home, or taking up new sports, as well as for their studies)? How might they continue to think about work/employment/a creative practice alongside the other parts of their lives?
• Where next? Ask students to spend a few minutes outlining their plans for their future, and the sources of help available at Newcastle University/ elsewhere. Pool all suggestions as a whole group.
• Key Terms. Pick out key terms for whole group discussion e.g. 'health', 'volunteering', 'childcare'.
• Know your rights. Ask students if they know about their working rights. If yes – students share examples and information. If no – students are given time to research this and feedback to the group.

<span style="color:blue">Teaching Activity 3:</span>　　　<span style="color:blue">Navigating the field: Professional statements</span>

<span style="color:blue">**Format:** 1 hour seminar / workshop</span>
<span style="color:blue">**Preparation:** ask students to write a 200 word 'professional statement' (i.e. a longer description of their skills and experience, written with their ideal job, role or practice in mind). Photocopy some examples for use in class.</span>

<span style="color:blue">Instructions:</span>
• Ask the students to compare their 200-word professional statements in pairs. What do they like

/ what would they change? (10 mins)
• As a group, look at some 'professional statements' used in the field (e.g. look up the 'Top 20 Film Producers in Europe', or conference bios.). How is this information usually arranged? What information is routinely included? Why? What might the students usefully copy? (15 mins)
• Ask the students to think (individually) about 'claiming'. For example, do they say 'I would like to be a ....' when they could 'claim' that position? What skills or experience could they detail to support that claim? (5 mins)
• Ask the students to think about the kinds of 'languages' they might need to use. How do they feel about 'swapping' between certain languages? For example, might they usefully employ different languages in different roles, or does this feel inauthentic to them? What does this tell them about the kinds of work they envisage? (5 mins)
• Ask the students to think about the position or practice they have in mind. Is it realistic? What steps might there be in between? What barriers or disadvantages might they face? What kinds of support might they need? What other options or opportunities might there be today? (15 mins)

<span style="color:blue">Follow up activities:</span>
• Students suggest and share role models and groups they admire (this could be a 'followathon' on twitter, or just in general)
• Students consider the kinds of 'application' – in the broadest sense – they may need in the future. For example, is it likely that they will apply for set positions, or will they need to be able to 'pitch' for work, either formally or informally? How might they adapt the statement above for these differing scenarios? What else might they need? For example, students may need to pitch a specific project or idea rather than themselves. How might they practice doing this?

• Thinking internationally: it may be that students face very different prospects and pathways depending on where they envisage themselves in the world. Ask students to pair up / form small groups to explore these differences. What do they think will be similar / different? Are there opportunities to support each other by working internationally post-graduation?

• Thinking more broadly: are there ideas, pathways and tactics in related sectors that the students might learn from? For example, do graduates go on to work in media, education, or for public authorities? Might they start collectives, or subscription clubs? What alternative models are there for generating a sustainable income?

Teaching Activity 4: Establishing ethical working practices

**Format:** 1 hour seminar / workshop
**Preparation:** none (you will need to invite a guest speaker(s))

Instructions:
• Ask a guest speaker(s) to come in and talk candidly about their career to date (i.e. about the good, the bad, and the downright ugly). Try to pick someone with a career path similar to that anticipated by the students, who is at a relatively early stage of their career. The guest speaker(s) do not need to prepare anything.

• Arrange chairs into a circle. Remind the students that everything said in the session should be treated confidentially and respectfully (some guidance may need to be provided here around the use of social media) (5 mins)

• Introduce the guest speaker and ask them to talk about their career to date, focusing on the kinds of decisions they had to make / periods where they struggled / the support they encountered. Invite

questions as and when (15 mins)

• Identify through this discussion a number of ethical working practices (e.g. the importance of paying creative practitioners / freelancers at the 'proper' rates, of identifying structural barriers) (10 mins)

• Run a Q&A session, where students can ask questions and contribute to the discussion. What does it mean to be an 'ethical' practitioner? What power relationships are at play in the field? How might students work to actively overcome these now / in their intended roles – even if these roles are very junior? (20 mins)

Follow up activity:
• Ask the students to research an aspect of an ethical working practice identified, and to share with the group more information e.g. they might find the rates of pay suggested for artists as provided by a-n and Arts Council England, the Equality Act 2010, or a campaign they find interesting.

• Ask the students to set challenges for each other in groups (e.g. 'What would you do if someone in your workplace proposed an all white, all male panel talk?'). Students then swap challenges and have 10 minutes to think of how they might respond. They then feed back to the whole group.

• Co-develop an ethical working statement that will apply equally to you and your students from now on. What kinds of practice might you agree on? For example, no emails after 6pm, or the importance of taking holidays?

## Networks

One of the clear 'gaps' in our data concerned networks. Very few students mentioned the need for, or their use of, a professional network, for instance. But as teaching staff (and creative practitioners and artists) we know that networks can be vital – for finding work, making connections, and, perhaps most importantly, for solidarity.

**Format:** 1 hour seminar / workshop
**Preparation:** none
NB – this session would work well near the beginning of the programme/module, so as to encourage students to build their networks over a period of time.

Instructions:
• Hand out large sheets of paper and pens to small groups. Ask the students to quickly list all the kinds of 'network' they can think of, in relation to their professional field (10 mins)
• Group discussion: how do the students feel about certain kinds of network? For example, are they wary of online networks (Twitter / LinkedIn)? Does 'networking' sound like something they feel comfortable with? Why / why not? (10 mins)
• Ask the students to work individually, and to write their name in the centre of the paper. Ask them to list everyone who has ever supported them, with people who feel 'closer' listed near their name, and those who have helped from afar, or in the distant past, further away (this could include family, friends, colleagues – anyone) (5 mins)
• Ask the students to add in, or highlight in a different colour, people they admire in their chosen field. Again, ask them to distribute the names spatially (5 mins)
• Ask the students to add in, or highlight in a different colour, all the organisations or people

for whom they would like to work. This can be long-term, or on a one-off basis, or just places or groups they are curious about. Again, ask them to distribute the names spatially (5 mins)
• In pairs, ask the students to briefly think about their 'networks'. Who have they included? Who or what is missing, or might be strengthened? What does this tell them about the sources of support and opportunity they currently have access to? (5 mins)
• Group discussion: What is a network, and what might it do? What overlapping networks might they draw upon throughout their studies, and beyond? How might students use their studies at Newcastle University to further develop their networks? (For example, you might want to encourage students to develop professional online profiles to interact with, and become known to, sector leaders – as per #MuseumHour, or to see in each other an international network of support and collaboration) (10 mins)

Follow up activity:
• Ask the students to set three, realistic goals that would help them create a network of support. For example, students might want to talk to someone new in their cohort, set up a professional account and join in with/respond to a conversation, or send an email to someone they admire. Students should give themselves no longer than a month to try all three. Set 10 mins aside in a later session to come back to these goals and reflect. Repeat if helpful.
• Provide the students with a key reading on individualisation in their specialism (or, for a more general perspective, you could try McRobbie 2011). How might networks, clubs and/or collective action offer students something that more 'traditional' forms of employment do not? Why might networks of support be particularly necessary now?

Creative Enterprise Campus
By *Jane Nolan*

The Creative Enterprise Canvas is a visual and dynamic tool for thinking through the development of a creative practice, freelance portfolio, or a creative business – routes which are taken by many people who wish to work in the creative sector. Using the Canvas, students can reflect on their vision, the value they can create, their skillful practices, the partnerships and networks they have, and those they need to develop, and consider the practicalities of setting up. It is a way of thinking about employability in terms of developing a self-employed creative career, as well as a way of gaining understanding of key aspects of businesses in the creative sector and beyond.

The Creative Enterprise Canvas is an adaptation of the original Business Model canvas, which was developed by Osterwalder and Pigneur (2010), who worked with 470 practitioners in the art and design fields from 45 countries. They created a visual framework for planning which they compare to a painter's canvas, with 9 key areas which need to be considered. Creative Enterprise Canvas is a more recent iteration, which was developed by Jane Nolan (Lecturer in ICMuS) and Dawn Weatherston (previously of Newcastle University Careers Service) working with students in the Arts and Humanities from Newcastle, Durham and Queen's Belfast Universities through an AHRC funded project, to co-create a version using language and ideas which were more congruent with their sense of identity (Nolan and Weatherston, 2016).

## Ways to use the Canvas
• For team projects or challenges within a module e.g Music Enterprise event teams
• For small groups within a workshop setting (2hours approx) exploring options for creative practice/

freelancing/setting up a creative business/collective.
• For individuals working on future career planning as a creative practitioner or freelancer, or setting up a creative business.

It is helpful to use a case study as an example, such as a recent graduate who has set up a creative practice/ business, perhaps someone who has overcome structural issues, whose experience can resonate for students. The facilitated sessions suggested above help students see how to use the Canvas and gain value from doing so; it can then be a take-away for ongoing planning and reflective practice.

## How to use the Canvas
The Creative Enterprise Canvas poses key questions about setting up a creative practice/portfolio/ business/project; the questions are printed on the Canvas itself. The Canvas can be used in A3 size using post it notes to jot down ideas, then placing them in the appropriate area. It is best to work through the Canvas in the following order.

The starting point for working with the Canvas is to consider the value which will be created – value must be created for customers/ audience/wider society/other organizations/ the practitioner themselves, for there to be a sound basis for proceeding. Value is understood much more broadly than economic value when considering this section of the Canvas, for example in terms of benefits for individuals, audiences, communities of practice, culture and society.

The right hand side of the canvas considers the onstage/audience-facing/right brain/emotion and value aspects – gaining an understanding of who the audiences/customers will be, of how to approach communication with, and marketing and promotion for, those audiences. Also, how and where will the practitioner or creative business reach their audiences and engage them with the

compelling story about their practices, services, events, ie the value which will be created.

The left hand side of the canvas looks at the back stage/left brain/ logic, efficiency and the processes which will be needed. A key question is about networks and partnerships, a crucial aspect for any creative practice or business to consider, since no-one works in isolation – it is important to identify who might be potential collaborators, who might share the vision and aims of the practice/ creative business and help to deliver them. Other key questions include: what do you need to be good at, what resources will you need and what will your key activities be?
Finally, at the foundation of the Canvas, consideration is given to the viability of the idea. It is vital to make meaning but also to consider how to realize economic value from talent and creativity, so it is crucial to think about how to put the practice/creative business on a viable financial footing. What will the costs be to set up and where will the sources of money/funding which can sustain the practice/business/project flow from?

The Creative Enterprise Canvas is a versatile way of thinking about and discussing these key questions and gaining perspectives on employability, through reflection and the exploration of ideas. There is support within the School and the Careers Service to help students and this can be signposted to enable them to follow up and further develop their creative career thinking.

# 7.  *Teaching Considerations*

Consideration 1:

**Introducing employability (without panic)**
It was noted above that in some cases, student groups reacted to employability-style events and sessions with panic, which caused them to miss out on information or to feel despondent about the future.

In response, we have co-compiled a list of tips from staff across the School of Arts and Cultures that might help.

• Be critical – but practical and hopeful too. Students don't want 'sugar-coated' advice, but they do need our help to recognise and navigate complex – and at times seemingly very personal – issues.
• Emphasise collectivity – it's likely that students aren't alone in feeling nervous about the future. Rather than competing with their peers, they can act as sources of support.
• Students are bombarded with warnings about the future of work. They're also likely to be paying back tuition fees. Be sensitive to their situation. Recognise that they might already be undertaking several different kinds of work.
• 'Build in' employability from the start. A last minute, one-off session at the end of the year can prompt panic for students already concerned about the future, and who feel there isn't time to prepare.
• Be careful with key terms. 'Employability' is unlikely to attract or engage students. More subject-specific vocabulary can help students feel that the support you are offering is specialist (e.g. talking about 'employment' can be off-putting for those envisaging a creative 'practice')
• Try not to promote uncritical working practices – CV workshops are brilliant and really helpful, but they won't solve structural issues. What else can you offer alongside this?
• Highlight existing support within Newcastle University (see Teaching Consideration 5).
• What alternative strategies and ways of working are out there? Who might act as a role model for your cohort? What ideas or other strategies might be copied from other sectors?

## Assessment and Criticality
By *David Butler*

Developing students' criticality about employability is a key issue. Assessment can be useful in this, as well as probably being a necessary part of a module.

### Top tips:
• Use a reflective report as an assessment tool rather than assessing the 'project'. This enables students to both outline what they have learned and – importantly – to identify and gain value from projects that have 'gone wrong' e.g. a public event that has involved a lot of work to develop but never happens because of problems with external partners.
• Clearly brief students on what is expected from a reflective report. For example, a description of a project is not sufficient: the student needs to analyse the project, reflect on what they have learned, and how they might use that in future. This all needs to be evidenced through documentation which they need to start collecting from the outset of the project (i.e. emails, meeting notes, plans, social media links, photos, videos, participant interviews etc.).
• Emphasise for students that the reflective report is not just an assessment tool but a useful document for them too. For example, alongside the needs of the course or programme, they can use the report to develop a critical evaluation of the kinds of work they might later engage in (or avoid!).
• It is helpful, especially if the students are new to project-led work, to run a workshop on report writing that raises key issues, such as what constitutes success, how that balances against the 'costs' (work and resources put in), any sense of personal fulfilment/achievement (or otherwise), how they might approach a similar project in the future, or how the project may lead to the 'the next step'/ development for them.

• Remember: a project that tells the student they never want to do that again (e.g. work in a school, do a gallery placement) can be as useful (or possibly more useful) than a project that fulfils expectations. Get the student to identify and reflect on that!

## Towards holistic decision-making
By *Iain Wheeldon* (Cultural Peeps Podcast)

Thinking about career options can be overwhelming and stressful for many students.

The range of jobs and careers that our students go onto undertake, and how those journeys unfold can be hugely varied and are often influenced by a wide range of factors.

Some students graduate with a fixed idea about where they would like to work and how they intend to get there, whilst others need a lot more support and help in understanding the wide range of ever-changing opportunities and options available to them.

Podcasts can be a good way of allowing students to 'deep-dive' into different career pathways and hear directly from professionals working in those fields about what different job roles look and feel like.

They are also good way of explaining how individuals have made career changes or responded to changing circumstances both within and outside of their control, providing a useful blueprint for those who find themselves in similar situations or are looking for inspiration.

Finally, they can also be used to provide tips, advice and suggestions using a range of different voices outside of the classroom setting.

The podcast format means it can be listened to anytime and on any device, potentially reducing its didactic qualities.

A successful example of this is the 'Cultural Peeps Podcast'. Each episode of 'Cultural Peeps' features an extended one-to-one interview with a professional working in or across the Museum, Gallery or Heritage sectors and focuses on their career journey so far.

The guests are intentionally varied and include people at all stages of their careers – from recent graduates through to senior managers. Some have worked in a single institution throughout their entire professional lives whilst others have regularly changed jobs, retrained, become freelancers or transitioned from one area of the sector to another.

The goal of the podcast is to help early career professionals understand the different job roles that now exist across these complex and interconnected sectors and help them interpret job titles in the context of different venues and organisations – in Museums, Galleries and Heritage organisations, jobs with the same title can be radically different depending on the organisation in this area. The project also aims to promote the idea that the people that make up any field of work are all human and are ultimately making human decisions, and that in turn plays a significant part in both their unfolding career pathways and decision making processes.

The Podcast is publically available on a range of platforms including Spotify, iTunes, Google Podcasts, Apple Podcasts and SoundCloud (The project is formally hosted at https://soundcloud.com/culturalpeeps) and supported by Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. The decision to make the project public facing helped create a healthy sector-wide dialogue and diversify the participant base.

A supporting blog also provides additional information about each of the guests and the organisations they have worked for, in and with and is available at: https://culturalpeeps.wordpress.com/

Consideration 4:

Top tips for placements
Co-written with *Iain Wheeldon*

When we asked students and teaching staff about employability, both groups tended to focus on practical activities, projects and placements. But employability isn't restricted to placements and practicals. Critical thinking; literature reviews; research methods; theoretical sessions; the examples, models and case studies used in class; the guest speakers invited in and so on all contribute to a critical understanding of employability.

In fact, a relentless focus on placements can be problematic. Good quality placements require an enormous amount of staff energy and time to set up. Hosts too need to put resources aside to mentor our students – to find them suitable work; to encourage and support them in new tasks; to introduce them to a specific working environment. Without this time and dedication, placements can easily become yet another area in which already privileged students perform well, and less privileged students are left to flounder. And in any given local area, there is likely to be a limited supply of placements to go around.

Given these complications, we would suggest that anyone involved with, or thinking about, placements carefully considers the following:

• What might the knock on impact of a placement with a certain provider be? For example, if a host already offers a placement to a student on another course – can they offer two, or will one 'knock out' the other? What kind of strategic plan might be needed to balance the needs of multiple courses, all hoping to arrange similar placements?
• Who will find and support placements? Who will liaise with hosts? How will this staff time be accounted for? How can that expertise be retained

and shared in order to provide consistency across cohorts?

• What kind of support will students be offered – before, during and after their placements? From who?

• What kinds of tasks will students be expected to perform? How might this be agreed in advance? What preparation might students need to help them make the most of the experience?

• How might students 'flag up' difficulties while on placement? To who?

• What financial help might students need to take up a placement (i.e. help with rent if they need to live elsewhere, or travel expenses)

• Given that placements take time, effort and resources to work well – what kinds of incentives might we offer hosts? As staff, we wouldn't be expected to work on a module for free, so how might we similarly support employers to contribute to Higher Education courses?

## Using the Careers Service

The Careers Service offers a wealth of information and support for students and graduates, and we could not possibly list everything here. Instead, we have opted for a few key suggestions, and would recommend that staff visit the Careers Services webpages, or contact a member of staff, for more information.

### Top tips:

• The Careers Service has dedicated members of staff responsible for the School of Arts and Cultures. Try to introduce staff as specialists in career decision-making, who can offer tailored support and guidance.

• Students already know that the Careers Service offers free C.V. workshops. If you want to run a session as part of a module, try limiting the amount of time spent on this activity to make room for something else they offer.

• Encourage students to go to the Careers Service for a chat or conversation – especially if they don't know what they want to do.

• Encourage students to try Career Compass. It's a free tool (available on the webpage) that helps students identify information and support – and it's tailored to each individual.

• The Student Initiative Fund (SIF) offers up to £500 for student-led extra-curricular projects and is available to students and recent graduates (within six months of graduation).

• Some unpaid 'opportunities' are exploitative and should be discouraged. But if your student has found a high-quality, unpaid position that would really help them, the Career Insights Bursary can provide up to £500 to cover accommodation and travel. Please check the criteria for application.

• NCL Spark puts students in touch with our graduates – as mentors, just to ask a quick

question, or find out more about a possible career or creative practice.

• START UP provides comprehensive support for freelancers / those who want to start their own business and is available for up to three years after graduation.

• The China Gateway Programme is a career development programme specifically designed for students who want to work in China after graduation. It runs every week for five weeks during Semester 1, and students who complete all sessions receive a certificate.

• The Careers Service Placement Year Module is a 120 credit UG module completed over 9-12 months and available to penultimate year students. Support is available for students who are worried about finding a placement (and in some cases – and especially in media – students may be matched with an interested employer). Working hours are paid. Students can also undertake a standalone credit-bearing Careers Module (modules include Career Planning, Career Development, Developing Enterprise, Entrepreneurship and Employability and Applied Entrepreneurship) instead of a placement year.

## The Creative Enterprise Canvas

Designed for: Vitae Workshop       Designed by: Jane Nolan and Dawn Weatherston       Date: Sept 2015       Version:

| Key Partners | Key Activities | Value Creation | Audience/ Customer Relationships | Customer Groups |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Who do we need to partner/ collaborate with? | What do we need to do to deliver the value to our audiences/customers? | What unique experiences, services or products are we offering to our audiences/customers? | What type of relationship do we need with audiences and customers? | Who are our most important audiences/customers? |
| What do we need to share? | | Which of our audiences/customers problems are we trying to solve? | How can we connect, develop and maintain relationships with audiences/customers? | Who will be interested in our experiences, services or products? |
| Who can help us to deliver the business or project? | | What are we helping audiences/customers to achieve? | How do we build communities? | How can we understand groups of customers and identify their interests/needs? |
| | | What audiences/customers' needs and interests will we be helping to satisfy? | What is our story? | |
| | | What are we creating which is valuable to our customers/audiences? | • Who are we? | |
| | | | • what we do? | |
| | | | • what are our values? | |
| | | | (our marketing and brand) | |

**Key Resources**

What key resources do we need:
- Intellectual/ creative
- People
- Physical
- Financial
- Technical

**Channels**

How do we reach each of our different audiences/ customer groups?
- Communication of our offer
- Delivery of creative project/service/product/ or business

**Funds Out (Cost Structure)**

What are the costs:
- Resources
- Activities

**Funds In (Revenue Streams)**

What is the most significant source of funds for our project/business?

What are our audiences/customers willing to pay for?

Based on http://businessmodelgeneration.com/canvas

# References

In addition to the sources we have cited in this Teaching Pack, we have highlighted some work that we found useful along the way.

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