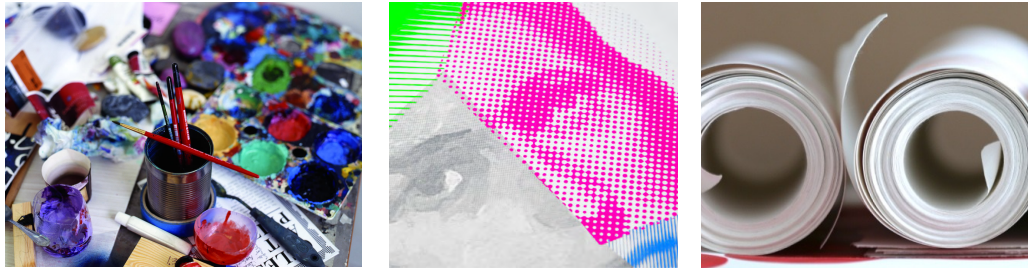


CHEAD Regional Seminar: What is the Point of Employability in Art and Design?

15 May 2015 - Chelsea College of Art and Design, University of the Arts London



This event was funded by the Council for Higher Education in Art and Design (CHEAD) and University of the Arts London.

In May 2015 the 'What is the Point of Employability in Art and Design?' event brought together over 40 colleagues from 17 different UK Higher Education institutions and 2 related organisations in the field of employability.

Context: Why we did this

The seminar offered colleagues the opportunity to share, debate and explore enterprise and employability from cross-disciplinary backgrounds. Art and design is not one subject, therefore the seminar explored and shared approaches that place enterprise and employability as part of, not replacing discipline(s) so that it is valued as part of practice and can inform policy and practice in Art and Design Higher Education.

The seminar explored the following areas:

- What does employability and enterprise mean in the context of art and design?
- How can we talk about this work so that it understood within creative practice?
- What are the differences in employability and enterprise curricula in the range of disciplines within art and design?

Students express a desire for clearer enterprise and employability learning articulation. Enterprise and employability can be so embedded that students do not always know it is happening and/or students don't always understand what *they* offer as practitioners. Articulating what we do well implicitly at the core of a creative education and opening up discourse to make this explicit in learning and teaching and curriculum design can make enterprise and employability prominent, inclusive and valued as part of discipline practice.

Those outside the disciplines perhaps perceive the skills which our graduates take into the workplace as narrow. Arts, design and media subjects in multifarious ways encompass and include a wide range of enterprise and employability qualities and behaviours. The seminar helped to surface ways in which innovation, creativity, professionalism and organisational skills are developed and contribute to the greater good and to improving the economy of the UK and globally.

The seminar disseminated project findings of the **HEA funded 'An Anatomy of Employability: Articulating Graduate Capabilities for the Creative Arts' Project completed by Buckinghamshire New University (Bucks) and Glasgow School of Art (GSA)**. This collaborative project investigated and developed modes of delivery for the specific and distinct employability needs of students within the fields of Fine Art, Design and Media, using students as active participants. The project drew upon Beverly Oliver's Model for Assurance of Learning for Graduate Employability (<http://boliver.ning.com/>) to inform policy of employability enhancement across the sector and to create accessible models for working with employability. A web-based resource was created as an outcome to capture and summarise debates and activities of the project. This resource includes 'Debating' which considers the theoretical approaches to employability and 'Doing' which looks at existing practice.

The seminar also shared nationally recognised work by **Careers and Employability at University of the Arts London (UAL) and the HEA funded 'Re/Claim' Creative Practice for Enterprise and Employability**. This session provided an opportunity to explore and reflect on practice, to link concepts and relationships; what learning and teaching activities are valued in the curriculum, the language that is used to describe these and what it means in relationship to enterprise and employability. The aim was to open up discourse across disciplines and HE stakeholders (students, academic, careers) and share an approach to developing a vision for enterprise and employability through the lens of creative practice.

These projects offer a detailed rendering of employability and enterprise in the context of creative practice.

Method: What we did

Students from Bucks and GSA led discussions in small groups around employability issues such as:

- How can we make the studio a more effective contributor to professionalism in art and design?
- What kinds of learning activities will help to develop skills in 'making things happen' and how do we help people to realise the importance of these kinds of skills?
- How can skills learned in an art and design HE be transferred to a work environment?
- How can we break down the barriers between the 'real world' and university? Why isn't a university art and design education seen as being the 'real world'?
- Creativity is increasingly important in employment, particularly in cross-disciplinary situations. Should we be helping students in HE to transfer their skills to unexpected subject areas and how might this be achieved?

UAL led a process for participants to develop a framework in order to tell their story of enterprise and employability as part of their practice. The activity was designed to elicit discourse on practice, and shared language and values. These included:

- How do you make the curriculum for your subject?
What are the top three learning and teaching activities for your course and/or subject in the curriculum?
- Why are these learning and teaching activities valuable to your subject and curriculum design?
Why do you make your curriculum in this way?
- What do students learn from these learning and teaching activities for enterprise and employability?
What are these qualities and behaviours (knowledge, literacies, abilities)?

Reflections: What we learned

Student-led change is key

There is a desire for more enterprise and employability learning articulation as expressed by students and there is a degree of anxiety about what happens following course completion. Students don't always understand what *they* offer as practitioners so addressing this is valuable.

Language and terminology are an issue

Defining and making everything explicit makes it prescriptive and can reduce practice and behaviours and qualities to tick boxing. Instead we should invent a system of naming things that is more than just words or skills, and encourage behaviours, values for action and allow for ambiguity and interpretation throughout the process.

We need to have confidence in the messages we send out to future students and to business communities about the value of an education in the creative arts.

Art and design subjects are being excluded from education core subjects and under recognised as a relevant economy. We need to demonstrate we have a powerful discipline and sector that is one of the most responsive to the nature of the changes of the 21st century.

Employability is often implicit rather than explicit

Articulating what we do well implicitly and make this explicit for the institution and student. A conceptual shift is to make enterprise and employability prominent, inclusive and valued as part of practice; balancing 'star stories', rebellion and those not practicing in creative fields, and how a creative education sustains and develops a rewarding professional life, generating benefits to students, graduates and their community.

The studio is a key location

The 'institution' is the studio. The studio is the heart of the learning experience, connecting theory, research, material practice, lectures and workshops with practical experiences.

Confidence and self-efficacy are major themes

Learning awareness and life skills are complex and happen over time. Employability is not just skills, it is life long learning with a focus on 'ability.'

Need to reframe the embedding of employability in the curriculum

The demand for instant results can reduce enterprise and employability to getting students jobs. The focus of embedding employability is on preparing students for an ever changing and rewarding professional life. Enterprise and employability in a creative curriculum is the integration of practice, behaviours and qualities that sustain and develop a rewarding professional life, generating benefits to students, graduates and their communities.

A cultural shift in academics' thinking is needed

Place enterprise and employability as part of, not something extra or replacing discipline(s) practice. Create an aspirational model, not a deficient model that will support colleagues to develop and respond to gaps in planned course delivery. By engaging in review, validation and revalidation cycles opens a space for important conversations and reflection around enterprise and employability, enhance teaching and learning and subject areas through pedagogic development.

A network could be valuable

The seminar provided an opportunity to consider if it is useful to launch a network for those interested in art and design employability and enterprise. A network could bring together colleagues working on this agenda.

Student led activities and events

The day provided the opportunity for collaborators to consider a follow up event in 2015/26 that would be student-led.

Participation and attendance

No of Attendees: 41

No of institutions represented: 19

The seminar was co-delivered by:

Buckinghamshire New University

Professor Alison Shreeve: Head of School Design Craft and Visual Arts

Mark Hudson: Course Leader, BA Graphic Arts

Students: Louis Bennett, Anthony Didlick, Deborah Mills, Katy Needham

Glasgow School of Art

Libby Anson: Student Employability and Enterprise Manager

Students: Adam Benmakhlof, Lili Eichinger, Arne Wern

University of the Arts London

Prof Susan Orr: Dean of Teaching, Learning and Enhancement

Katie Mills: Acting Director Careers and Employability

Cara Lee Roth: Educational Developer
Amanda Johnston: Academic Coordinator, London College of Fashion
Cath Caldwell: Academic Coordinator, Central Saint Martins

Evaluation

Attendees were asked to evaluate the day and of those responding 58% rated it Excellent, and overall 96% rated it Good or Excellent.

Over 95% of attendees would attend a similar event in future.

Comments included:

'a good day for sharing best practice, working with colleagues from other art and design institutions and careers staff' (delegate feedback)

'Great to debate the issues of employability and enterprise especially as the students came up with the questions' (delegate feedback)