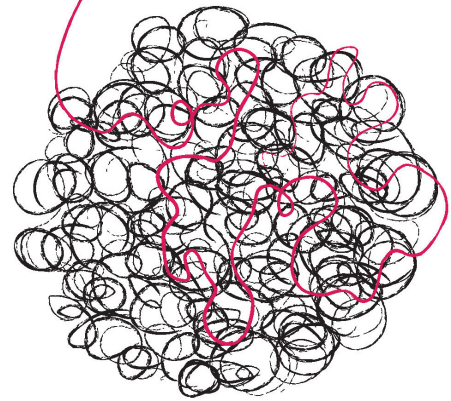


**CREATIVE
GRADUATES
CREATIVE
FUTURES**



Creative Career Stories

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Creative Career Stories

Report for Stage 2 Qualitative Research - Creative Graduates Creative Futures

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© First published in October 2010 by the Creative Graduates Creative Futures Higher Education partnership and the Institute for Employment Studies.

Creative Graduates Creative Futures is a major longitudinal study undertaken between 2008 and 2010 of the career patterns of more than 3,500 graduates in art, design, crafts and media subjects qualifying in 2002, 2003 and 2004 from 26 UK higher education institutions

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Acknowledgements

The authors would like to extend their gratitude to the many graduates who agreed to be contacted again in 2009 and 2010 by email and telephone and who told us in some detail about their early career experiences. We would like to thank all those at IES and University of the Arts who worked on and supported this project over the past two and a half years.

ISBN 978 185184 432 6

Cover design: Felix Lam, Meg Richardson.

Report production:

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Foreword

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Creative Career Stories is the second stage of a major study of the early careers of creative graduates in the UK. Taking the findings of a large-scale survey published in *Creative Graduates Creative Futures*, this report fleshes out those high level findings with an analysis of individual experiences. The voices of individual graduates reflecting on their own journeys, their hopes and fears, challenges and successes, bring to life the complex mix of factors that shape their career paths: from their educational experiences to the individual's own particular attributes and personality, their personal and family circumstances, the networks they can draw on, and of course, the broader economic context.

These stories bring into sharp focus the challenges of 'making' a career in the creative and cultural sector and the resourcefulness that graduates need to make the transitions into employment from education, from being an intern or being freelance, and from being employed to running a business. Not all have made these transitions successfully and others worry about the sustainability of their careers in the longer term. Things have also changed since the original survey undertaken in autumn 2008. This report, and the stories on which it is based, add another and very important set of insights. The timing of this second qualitative survey in autumn 2009 has enabled the authors to report on how these graduates have fared during the economic downturn and how some have been able to turn the impact on creative businesses to their advantage.

There is much to learn here for educators. The report gives a clear steer to educators about what they can do to support graduates trying to enter the world of work and paid employment, or to take the next steps in their careers in these difficult economic times.

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Executive Summary

Creative Career Stories is the second report of the *Creative Graduates Creative Futures* longitudinal study of the early careers of more than 3,500 creative graduates, undertaken between 2008 and 2010. It draws on findings of qualitative research, providing further insights into creative careers some five to seven years after graduation. It explores through narratives the connections graduates make between their courses and careers, in their own words.

Key findings

Creativity is the focus for creative graduates' careers

- Graduates often make a lifestyle choice when they choose a creative education and a creative outlook is already a way of life. After graduation, goals and aspirations remain focused on creative practice.
- Graduates' early career stories demonstrate a willingness to acquire new skills on the job and a determination to make creative considerations central to their career decision-making.

Creative graduates stay connected with peers and contacts

- Creative graduates stay connected with their peers. This is important for creating opportunities, for critique, for combating the isolation of solo working, and for finding work; and continues into their careers.
- Collaboration crucially provides opportunities to discuss work and seek feedback to progress with creative practice. Graduates value working with others and joining together to share costs or show work collectively.
- Word of mouth and active networking are crucial for job seeking, as opposed to responding to job advertisements.

A range of factors facilitate the development of creative careers

- Work placements and industry experience are important pre-requisites for careers and significant for gaining experience and building work contacts.

- Graduates employ a combination of strategies, personal attributes and support to developing their careers. Key career facilitators are a strong work ethic, resourcefulness and good industry contacts to inspire, support and collaborate with.
- Graduates often attribute their success in finding work to luck, but perhaps they are not taking credit for their own resourcefulness and openness to opportunities.
- Graduates often return home after graduation. Family and friends are a strong source of support and their largely hidden contribution to the growth of the cultural and creative sector deserves wider recognition.

Graduates are adept at finding work in the recession

- In their early careers, graduates make frequent job changes and undertake unpaid work to gain experience, skills and insight into different sectors; and this can cause considerable hardship.
- The economic downturn has had an impact on incomes and on growing creative ventures, with graduates experiencing pay cuts, redundancy and increased competition. They are, however, adaptable and inventive in exploring new markets and clients.
- The main barriers to career progression are financial, lack of contacts and relevant experience, coupled with competition and uncertainty in the creative sector. Whilst creative graduates respond flexibly to changing employment opportunities, they recognise that freelancing and self-employment are important sources of work, but they are hindered early on by lack of business experience, professional knowledge and client-facing skills.

Portfolio working and self employment are dominant chosen work models

- Five to seven years after graduation, creative graduates continue to engage mainly in work related to their discipline.
- In employment, in both creative and non-creative occupations, graduates broaden their experience and take on responsibilities in management and senior roles, not always matched by higher pay.
- Freelance and short contract work is very common immediately after graduation, and often the only work available. Portfolio careers and self-employment continue to dominate and although they develop in their creative disciplines, graduates experience some stagnation in career progression.
- At this career stage, teaching is seen as a balancing career and a new career aspiration, as graduates derive satisfaction from combining it with creative practice and broadening their income base.
- Creative graduates are prepared to sacrifice financial reward for the personal satisfaction they derive from creativity. Working to high standards, making new work, rising to new challenges, learning new skills, recognition by peers and client satisfaction are important, as well as facilitating creativity in others.

- Creative graduates are realistic and recognise that their pattern of work may vary with changing circumstances and trends in the workplace. Sole traders may form working arrangements with others to collaborate on projects and work in partnership with other practitioners.
- Work satisfaction comes from staying creative, working with others, transforming lives, teaching, learning something new and progressing their careers. Success equates with achievement and creative fulfilment above financial reward. For the future, sustaining a living through creative practice is a commonly held goal. For many, setting up their own enterprises to fulfil ambitions and undertake postgraduate study to progress in their practice are important aspirations.
- Graduates' concerns for the future are about the necessities of juggling career aspirations with gaining experience leading to career progression. The need for a stable income becomes more important as graduates anticipate the demands of family life.

Creative graduates value their education

- Creative practice provides graduates with an ideology that they take with them into their working lives. They see creative education as a means of developing their potential and value 'learning by doing' through project-based enquiry. The majority of graduates continue their personal creative practice either at work or in their own time.
- Graduates value the experience of peer learning, giving and taking criticism and take this approach into their working lives. They gain confidence through the process of critique and presentation on their courses and this process has been helpful for presenting and defending their work in commercial settings.
- Graduates are able to demonstrate the transfer of creative processes and thinking into other settings through teaching, the transformation of others and in practising creativity in different settings, including non-creative occupations and non-creative sectors.
- Respondents were asked what advice they would give to current students and to graduates about to enter their careers. In the main, they suggest a proactive approach and instilling a strong work ethic from the start – persistence, patience, resilience, fearlessness, good self-organisation and self-motivation are required – all with an eye to the future.

Graduates continue to invest in their own development

- Graduates demonstrate a continuing commitment to advancing their careers and enjoying a variety of experiences in the workplace. They are keen to enhance their current practice and explore new areas of application for their disciplines, as well as overcome perceived weaknesses or skills gaps.
- Professional development needs have been met by accessing training to help with current roles, gain promotion, develop their businesses and keep up with digital technologies. Those working in non-creative roles are also keen to enhance their professional standing by undertaking management development and training.

Enhancing creative careers

What are the challenges for higher education?

- HE needs to build students' confidence for creative careers and help them to recognise the connection between creative learning and personal fulfilment and the importance of peers in providing the foundation for professional networking and future collaboration.
- Graduates would benefit from improved preparation for the transition into work, with further opportunities for and greater visibility of work placements, business and enterprise skills; and a good grounding in technical skills and discipline specific knowledge.
- As graduates are likely to work freelance or on short contracts in their early careers, students need to be prepared for this with the right advice, experience and opportunities to make useful contacts on their courses, together with a realistic picture of how to go about finding work.
- New models for employer engagement, in the form of collaborations and partnerships between HE and the creative sector will improve access to placements and work-related learning.
- Fostering a research culture on courses will encourage innovation and prepare the next generation of teacher-practitioners.
- Funded internships and graduate apprenticeships will provide much needed impetus to kick-starting careers and help micro-enterprises to grow.

What are the challenges for the creative sector?

- Low pay is a feature of the sector, and unpaid work is becoming a pre-requisite for career entry in a more competitive market. Micro-enterprises are happy to build capacity by taking on free labour and whilst this provides excellent experience and learning on the job, widespread practice is unfair and even unethical. As a consequence, graduates often experience considerable hardship and exploitation in their early careers.
- The sector needs to recognise that freelancers are innovative, flexible workers – just what the sector needs – and they continue to research their practice and build capacity through pursuing speculative and personal projects that feed into their paid work activities. They systematically go on learning and invest in their professional development.
- Although graduates are well placed to take on responsibility in employment, this is often without higher salaries. As freelance jobbing individuals they have little opportunity to develop leadership and managerial skills, and this may have a serious impact on the health of the creative sector, on business growth, on promotion prospects and career progression.
- Graduates aim to build sustainable careers, achieve improved pay levels and access funding for continuing professional development. If these aspirations are not addressed as graduates' careers progress and they take on family commitments, how can the creative sector retain these workers and continue building capacity?

1 Introduction

Creative Graduates Creative Futures (CGCF)¹ is a major longitudinal study of the early career patterns of graduates in art, design, crafts and media practice-based subjects from 26 UK higher education institutions. At a critical time for the UK economy, this study is important because it contributes insights into creative careers that will inform strategies for maintaining growth in the cultural and creative industries.

'It ... does not just paint a more detailed picture of the creative graduate world than we have had before - it suggests what an improved architecture might be.'

Will Hutton (2010) CGCF, foreword²

The research, undertaken between 2008 and 2010, involved first degree and foundation degree UK and international graduates up to eight years after graduation. The findings of the main quantitative survey element of the study were published in January 2010³, and drew on the responses of 3,500 graduates making it the largest detailed study of its kind. The sample was broadly representative of the creative HE sector, and the profile of responding graduates in practice-based arts, crafts, design and media courses across the participating institutions.

Hosted by the University of the Arts London and sponsored by CHEAD (Council for Higher Education in Art and Design), the overarching aim for the study was to demonstrate the enduring contribution of graduates in practice-based creative subjects to the creative and cultural industries, to other sectors of the economy, education and in society as a whole. The findings from the quantitative CGCF survey showed that, indeed, graduates were making a contribution, and the majority were staying close to their creative practice, predominantly working in the creative sector and in education.

¹ When comparisons are made with the findings of *Creative Graduates Creative Futures* in the text of this report, the shorthand (CGCF) is used.

² Ball L, Pollard E, Stanley N (2010a) *Creative Graduates Creative Futures*, Institute for Employment Studies, CHEAD, University of the Arts London.

³ Ibid.

1.1 Creative graduates are resourceful and aspire to creative careers

Graduates stayed focussed on pursuing a creative career and were resourceful in the face of the complexities and challenges of finding work and earning a living, with high levels of self-employment and engagement in work of a creative nature. Many sustain a living by multiple income streams through portfolio careers. These life-long learners devoted time and resources to learning new skills and gaining new knowledge. As a result, they experienced high levels of work satisfaction and engagement with the creative industries, but sometimes at the expense of some disadvantage in terms of financial reward:

- 4 out of 5 graduates were in paid work
- 3 out of 4 worked in creative occupations at the time of the survey
- 45 per cent worked freelance and 25 per cent started a business in their early careers
- 48 per cent were engaged in multiple work activities (portfolio working)
- 48 per cent worked in micro-enterprises
- 77 per cent were satisfied in their current work
- 79 per cent were in work that related significantly to art, craft, design or media
- Half earned over £20,000 and one-third earned less than £15,000 per annum
- Fewer than 1 in 20 were unemployed or looking for work
- 62 per cent of graduates expected to be self-employed or running a business over the next five years.

1.2 Creative practice provides the focus for both study and work

Creative graduates placed a high value on their higher education experiences and the learning approaches and opportunities provided by the creative curriculum, although they would have liked a stronger connection with the professional world, and preparation for the transition into work is a key concern.

Creative practice is at the heart of the educational experience and is also at the heart of the creative economy: old agendas for skills development, models for work and purposes of education need to be revitalised in this new reality, in which creative practice provides the context for academic study, work experience, employment, professional development, innovation, enterprise and productive careers. Work satisfaction is focused on measures such as personal fulfilment and opportunities for creativity and new learning.

1.3 Changes in the creative sector and in the economy

Larger proportions of graduates now work in the creative and cultural industries and in work related to their subject than did a decade ago. The CGCF quantitative survey provided comparative data with the last major longitudinal study of art and design graduates (*Destinations and Reflections*, Harvey and Blackwell, 1999), so it was possible to note changes in employment patterns over the ten-year period. Growth in business start-up and fixed-term/temporary contracts, together with a fall in full-time employment and a drift away from

work in medium-sized enterprises to micro-businesses is consistent with recent changes in the sector.

Looking ahead, the effects of economic recession will result in increased competition and a further shift to short contracts and reliance on freelance workers. This is evidenced in our findings with many graduates gravitating towards portfolio working from full-time employment as employers cut overheads and outsource work. Project-based working and the contract economy will continue to draw on a pool of creative, skilled and adaptable workers who rely on multiple income streams. These will be individuals who often collaborate to respond to client needs, make new work or engage in creative endeavour. These workers will be willing to acquire new learning to respond to specific niche needs of contracts and clients and to continue to work flexibly.

Economic recession will play an important part in shaping the creative sector and in the evolution of careers and creative ventures over the medium and longer term. What are the implications for growing new businesses and their longer-term sustainability? How can graduates be prepared for the uncertainties that they will face in an industry dominated by micro-enterprises? In the longer term, as the majority of respondents in our sample anticipate life-changes and family responsibilities as they move into their 30s and 40s, how can their careers be sustained as their financial commitments increase? There will be lessons here for all sectors of employment.

1.4 Six key challenges

At the launch of the findings of the Stage 1 Report in January 2010, and in response to the key findings, the authors presented six important challenges relating to the preparation of creative graduates for work entry. These challenges were addressed to key stakeholders: CHEAD, HEFCE, HE academic staff, managers and careers services, Subject Associations, and to other creative sector organisations, both national and regional – sector skills councils, Arts, Design and Crafts Councils and professional societies.

1. New models for employer engagement

A traditional model of employment based on the supply of graduates matching the demands of industry no longer predominates in this sector. The rise of self-employment, portfolio working and rapid networking between graduates as free agents, and the shrinkage of opportunities in medium-sized enterprises all make traditional employment patterns less relevant.

The question for HEIs is how can methods of professional preparation during courses change to meet the new reality? How can new models of employer engagement be created in a sector in which small businesses and freelance professionals work in fluid, collaborative and non-hierarchical models of practice?

2. Connecting creative learning with personal fulfilment

Graduates place a high value on job satisfaction which relates closely to their desire to work creatively.

How can HEIs systematically recognise and enhance creative learning and develop graduate personal fulfilment? Specifically, at a time when formal placement opportunities are difficult to find and fund, how can the creative curriculum enhance professional learning through other means such as live projects, exhibitions, commissions and learning alongside teacher practitioners?

3. Encouraging a research culture and preparing the next generation of teacher-practitioners

A positive feature of careers within the creative industries sector is the high proportion of graduate entrants and the increasing readiness of graduates to undertake Master's qualifications to augment their skills and understanding. However, the large majority of such postgraduates study near-to-market courses.

This leaves a significant issue for HEIs, as there are few postgraduates contemplating a future career in higher education, and employment legislation and HE cuts have affected the recruitment of part-time academic teaching and research staff. Significantly, there has been no growth in doctoral submissions during the past ten years, which is worrying for the development of research communities to generate new knowledge and innovation – vital to growth in the creativity economy. How will the next generation of teacher-practitioners be supported and contribute their professional expertise to HE? These creative professionals provide important role models for new generations of students. At the same time, innovation and new knowledge developed through partnerships between HE and creative practitioners are vital to the creative economy.

The question for HEIs, subject associations and AHRC is how can this state of affairs be improved and the next generation of teacher-practitioners be supported? Do we need new academic models for practitioner-teachers and research-led teaching? How can research partnerships between the creative sector and HEIs be sustained?

4. Building students' confidence for creative careers

When providing an innovative education, HEIs put creative practice and professional development at the heart of provision and pedagogic approaches. Confidence is key to successful career progression.

How can employability skills, tacit learning and adaptability be more fully articulated in the context of creative practice so that students can speak more confidently about their competences and extend their work opportunities?

To what extent does career advice recognise the different needs that portfolio and other non-full-time workers have compared to traditional employees?

5. Funded internships and improved pay levels

A major development over the past ten years has been the willingness of graduates to undertake unpaid work to gain necessary work experience (42 per cent have worked unpaid since graduating at some time, and 23 per cent were still doing at least some unpaid work at the time of the first survey). There is evidence that graduates from less wealthy backgrounds are less able to afford to undertake voluntary work, and that they may then miss the opportunity to build up a worthwhile portfolio of skills and experience.

The question that HEIs, local authorities and employers face is how can funded internships be made more available across the board to increase the pool of experienced graduates? A related question is what steps can be taken to improve the pay level of a considerable proportion of creative industry workers?

6. Relevant support for the transition to creative careers and lifelong learning

Creative career patterns have distinctive characteristics. Two-thirds of graduates anticipated portfolio career patterns and the number of graduates working in micro-businesses continues to grow. Some 62 per cent of graduates anticipated self-employment in some form in the future.

How can graduates be better supported at the point of transition from their undergraduate courses and through CPD provision in professional short courses, affordable training and appropriate business support? Who will provide it? Can new consortia be created? Can new enterprise allowances be re-started to motivate and help graduates cope with unstable and novel employment conditions?

A second qualitative stage to the research provided an opportunity to explore these issues further and elicit more detailed information from graduates about their transition experiences, the challenges they faced in their early careers, what they valued from their creative education and their aspirations and needs for the future at a time of considerable economic instability.

1.5 Qualitative research

Following on from the launch of the first report, these challenges informed lines of inquiry for the qualitative stages of the research undertaken between autumn 2009 – spring 2010, one year on from the initial CGCF survey and this second report provides further insights into the complexities of career progression.

The second stage of the study was also a unique opportunity to see how graduates fared at the onset of economic recession.

More than 2,000 respondents to the first survey were approached via an email follow-up questionnaire, to elicit personal reflections on HE experiences, career journeys and to explore themes emerging from the main survey. Almost 450 graduates responded with rich narratives contributing further insights into early career patterns. In addition, 40 respondents participated in depth telephone interviews to provide career stories – a holistic picture of

themselves, their values, their experiences and their perceptions of success. Together these provided valuable material for this Stage 2 Report.

Creative Career Stories differs from the report of the quantitative census survey (CGCF), as it elicits narratives from graduates, because we were looking for the connections graduates themselves made between their courses and careers, and these weren't necessarily articulated in the quantitative study. The email survey and depth telephone interviews gathered feedback about graduates' educational experience and its relevance to their working lives, how their careers evolved and the challenges they faced.

- The transition from HE into work – what they had been doing since graduation, how they found work and the choices they made.
- What they are currently doing.
- Career facilitators, barriers and the challenges they faced.
- Collaborations – ways in which they have worked or networked with others.
- How they have fared in the economic downturn.
- Aspects of their HE experience that had been valuable in their careers.
- What else they would have liked on their courses.
- Future plans, development needs and next steps.

Analysis and discussion of graduates' responses in the above thematic areas are presented in Chapters 2 to 6.

Chapter 7 presents a selection of career stories drawn from the depth interviews and these give a real sense of early career experiences the live experience of early careers in the words of the graduates themselves. (See Appendix 1 Methodology for details of the sample, research methods and questions.) Please refer to the CGCF report for background discussion about pedagogy, enterprise, models for work and comparisons with other studies.

Finally, Chapter 8 concludes with a series of challenges to HE and to the creative sector for enhancing support for graduates in their entry to the creative sector in difficult economic times, and to prepare them for the realities of creative working lives.

This report is aimed primarily at course providers and tutors, raising awareness of what graduates found important on their courses and afterwards, and when they found these inputs most valuable.

2 Early Career Experiences and Career Facilitators

This Chapter explores career facilitators, how graduates found work and the challenges faced in early careers.

2.1 Creative graduates aspire to creative careers

Some four to six years after graduation, the majority of the 3,500 respondents to the quantitative survey (CGCF) were in creative careers and half were earning from more than one work activity in portfolio careers. One of the most surprising findings was the small proportion working in non-creative careers (18 per cent in their main job). At the time of the survey, a very high proportion (79 per cent) were in work they felt was related to art, design or media in at least one of their work activities.

The survey indicated that the most common employment sectors were the design industry (28 per cent of graduates) education at 23 per cent (including teaching at 18 per cent); followed by fine art and fashion/textiles design (both at 14 per cent) and work in media production and photography (13 per cent), largely reflecting the expected vocational choices of the sample population.

Creativity and life choices

Moving on to look at the findings from the email survey and depth interviews, we find creativity is an important motivating factor and central to career satisfaction:

'How important is being able to be creative to me - (using my degree in jewellery and silversmithing)? Absolutely paramount. I think as far as the job is concerned if I'm not enthusiastic about it then it obviously doesn't follow through with my students. So I need to keep on top of my creative skills and knowledge, because I'm passing that on to them. I feel I'm getting more creative now that I've got the teaching side sorted.'

Creative graduates tend to have developed a particular view of the world and how they want to interact with it, but do not necessarily see creativity as being exclusive to those in the arts sector:

'Being creative is important - but creative doesn't necessarily mean artistic or anything like that. I think creative is a way of looking at things in a different way, so even if you are a mathematician, you have to be creative. It's nothing to do with art. It's a way of perceiving the world, the way you live.'

Graduates are often making a life-style choice when they choose a creative education. A creative outlook is already a way of life:

'There's lots of different ways of being creative. To me, it means being imaginative with materials - I make a lovely mess! But it also involves other people as well, being creative in the way that you deal with other people and the way that you encourage them to be creative. Watching other people be creative is great.'

'Creativity is an important part of my life really. I like my food to look nice on a plate - I arrange it so that it's balanced and colourful. The house is all very planned and considered. It's always been a part of my life, long before the course as a mature student.'

A creative career is seen as a natural progression from earlier life experiences. This is supported by findings in another recent study in which creative graduates gravitated towards work that was closely related to their skills and subject discipline as their careers progressed (Smith C, et al., 2010).

We found only a minority of graduates working in what they considered to be non-creative roles, and there is clearly further potential for graduates to make a contribution in other work sectors or occupations, either as a main activity or as part of a work portfolio.

Early career facilitators

The qualitative research provides ample evidence that creative graduates stayed focused on finding creative work in their early careers, but they found career entry difficult and had to be persistent in finding opportunities and paid employment after graduation. They experienced some early turbulence, particularly during the first year, before settling into (in the main) creative careers.

After graduation, goals and aspirations tended to remain focused on creative practice and, in response to lack of opportunities, graduates were often inventive in taking time out to do something else, learn new skills, and generate income from paid work of all kinds to continue with practice.

This and the high incidence of portfolio working perhaps indicates that linear career progression and achieving higher status at work are less important career motivators for creative graduate?

Graduates employed a range of strategies, personal attributes and support, often in combination:

- **staying creative** - 'whatever I am doing'; belief in personal direction for creative practice, working at developing specialist subject discipline knowledge and 'know-how'
- **self-belief and personal attributes:** confidence, a strong work ethic, resourcefulness, determination, high standards and continual pursuit of excellence

- **supportive parents, family and friends** - the unacknowledged contribution to the success of the creative industries.
- **further study, professional development and new skills** - formal and informal learning, continually updating practice, learning new skills - including updating industry software and new ways of using digital technologies, making skills and business knowledge
- **work placements** - work and employment resulting directly from formal and informal work placements, and experience prior to university
- **unpaid 'internships'** unpaid industry experience, low paid jobs and short term contracts were important for getting a foot in the door
- **building and using contacts** - word of mouth and being recommended for work or contracts by others was a very important method for finding work
- **connectedness with peers, academic staff, employers and practitioners** - nurturing good contacts to inspire, support and to collaborate with on new opportunities or ventures
- **inter-disciplinary working** - crossing into learning new skills or knowledge in other creative disciplines or collaborating with others to create new opportunities
- **relocation** - moving to where work is more readily available
- **kick-start from grants and schemes** - opportunities leading on from success in grants, schemes and residencies, and learning business skills.

These career facilitators are significant for graduates across all subjects, as leavers enter a more uncertain employment market in which more persistence is required.

In the discussion that follows we explore the transition to work and factors that help and hinder graduates in gaining creative work in more detail, and our observations are accompanied by anonymised quotes from graduates.

2.2 First steps in finding work

In the main, graduates found work early on through personal contacts and networking, or from placement experiences. Very few appeared to have success through responding to job advertisements, and many worked unpaid to gain experience and get a foot in the door. Graduates undertook all kinds of paid work, temporary contracts and freelance work and continuing with part-time jobs undertaken as students.

'I got invited back to work for a placement company (furniture design) in the design studio. Then I was offered a job as senior designer with (another well-known design studio), then I went freelance as I wanted to earn more money.'

'The biggest help has always been from people I have worked with in the past and/or ex-tutors putting in a good word for me.'

'Work has been 90 per cent word of mouth (in the film industry). This is not to say it's about who you know, but about developing skills and people noticing that. Also, people around me developing at the same time. Grand plans aside, in reality I feel that I've actually been following my nose more than a clear career plan. It is only now that I realise this and I'm starting to take a real step back to look at where I am.'

'After graduating (in graphic design) I worked as a runner for various TV production companies on and off, whilst doing some freelance print design work for local companies to

where I live, and working in a pub part-time too. After a year I found a job on a production website for a runner at a motion graphics company. There I worked my way up from runner, to designer, to lead designer before taking the decision four years later to continue as a designer and director on a freelance basis.'

'I found my first job (in textiles) through Drapers Record magazine/website. Since then I have worked closely with specialist agencies to find new positions within the fashion design industry. None of this information was given to me whilst at university.'

Testing different kinds of work

Graduates appeared to be comfortable with testing themselves in different kinds of work, often as a portfolio of activities, and there was some reticence about making a commitment to a particular direction early on. There were frequent job changes and periods of unpaid work to gain insights into different sectors, new experiences or develop new skills, sometimes interspersed with travel.

'I moved to London, got a job as a graphic designer in a small agency for three years, went travelling, came back and worked on a film as a designer for 9 months, then got a job in a company that designs/brands film for one year. Then got made redundant and now looking for the next thing.'

Although some graduates were successful early on, the first year or so after graduation was critical, with many returning to their parental/family home to save money and think about their plans. It often took time to find out what they wanted to do and what they wanted from a career (whether this was a creative career or not) and as a consequence not all graduates actively pursued creative work immediately after graduation.

'It took at least six months to get my first real job. While looking for that job I was living back at my mum's and so I didn't have to pay rent. I managed to do a little bit of freelance work which paid a little bit, but I didn't get any follow on work from that.'

'When I finished my degree I moved back to my father's place to save money, and I thought the chances of me getting a job in ceramics or other crafts there were higher. It was frustrating because he was on my case all the time: "why haven't you got a job yet?"'

Support from parents and family was key at the early career stage and continued for several years after graduation.

Compromise and changing goals

As careers progressed, periods of unemployment were interspersed with work – paid and unpaid, developing practice and further learning – portfolio careers. Some graduates viewed times when they were unable to work very positively, using slack periods to gain experience or develop new skills by working unpaid or through formal or informal volunteering opportunities.

'Being out of work gave me a chance to get my portfolio really up to scratch. Through agencies I was called for interview by three couture design houses within a week. I took one of the offers and have been here two and a half years now.'

Graduates were sometimes frustrated in their efforts to find creative opportunities and had to compromise their goals, often taking on other jobs to support themselves until something more aligned to their aspirations became available.

In their career journeys, graduates frequently progressed from employment to portfolio careers and vice versa, demonstrating the fluidity of creative careers and the insecurities and unpredictability of the job market.

'(After graduating in graphic design) I continued to work part-time at an Arts Centre working front of house whilst applying for jobs, competitions and setting interviews with design studios that interested me. I won a couple of small jobs but found it very isolating being freelance on my own and as I had had no luck getting a full-time job, I was about to quit when a colleague from College contacted me as a possible artworker assistant for her husband working mainly for an independent record label. I got the job and did this for two days a week for two years, in which time I also secured regular freelance work with my current employer as a result of applying for a full-time Junior Designer position. I worked two days a week for the record label and three days a week in this job and after two years it became full time.'

2.3 Career facilitators

Self-belief, personal attributes and resourcefulness

Self-belief was an important career facilitator, linked with identity and closely associated with creative practice. Labels were important to graduates, and an indication they had progressed professionally and had confidence about what they could do:

'Six months after graduating I got a job as a camera trainee making commercials. Since then I've probably done about 300 jobs in one form or another. Three or four years ago I made the move and called myself Director of Photography. I could have earned a lot more money as a camera assistant ...'

Graduates who expressed an openness to new opportunities, were adaptable, pro-active and naturally enterprising in their outlook appeared to be more successful in finding work and making progress in their careers than those who were more passive and waited for opportunities to come along. The more enterprising graduates were constantly assessing their situation, looking for connections – and sometimes put this down to luck, but it may be that they are not taking the credit for their own resourcefulness.

'As I kept a good portfolio and won a few awards before I graduated (in graphic design), jobs hunted me instead. Also won a few international design awards after going back to Hong Kong.'

'I made sure I got a lot of professional experience whilst at university so when I graduated I'd be ahead of the mass of other people trying to get into the industry. I first got a part-time job to pay the bills whilst I made short films to show at festivals and continued to work days here and there on professional shoots. A year after graduation I got a job as trainee director at an independent TV company. I have been working with them for four years now.'

'I graduated in illustration, and after I left uni I temped at a large corporate design department for a while, when that contract came to an end I picked up work quite quickly working for a software firm designing websites and promotional materials as well as designing the back end of their software products. In my own time I was designing flyers and producing illustrations for local gigs and festivals. This kept me creative and helped my portfolio. The economic downturn meant that I was laid off at the end of 2007, just before the bubble burst. I managed to find work at a small digital marketing agency with big ambitions. The agency is now four employees strong and I oversee any design that takes place and am responsible for the creative output of the agency. I am head of design at a

small Digital Marketing agency. I design and build web pages, HTML emails and do the odd bit of advertising for both print and web. I am employed as opposed to freelance and I like the security this gives me. Our clients range from small florists right up to (large corporate companies).'

Work placements and relevant experience

Formal work placements and industry experience of all kinds, including project work were recognised as important pre-requisites for career entry, and at the same time were essential for building potential work contacts and networks.

'Work experience was probably the most important thing from the whole course (textiles design). I learnt all about actually going into work and the practical sides of what you have to know. It was a print design company for ladieswear and swimwear design. They gave me a project and straight away I was getting on with designing and being a part of the studio company. It was a very comprehensive couple of weeks of learning the basics after which they asked me if I wanted to stay on for another week. I got on really well and kept on working for that company during the third year. I started tailoring my degree towards that specific kind of job, which funnily enough I was told would give me a lower grade - but I got a job at the end of it, which I thought was quite ironic really. Also I was more confident because I knew what I wanted to do.'

'On the second year of my degree (fashion product development) I did the teacher associates scheme year 1, then I did year two the year after. I then graduated and went straight into a GTP placement which I found myself. I then changed school for my NQT year and am still there now.'

In some cases graduates were offered first jobs or freelance contracts with placement companies:

'My current employer wrote to my college tutor shortly before graduation (in silversmithing) enquiring about suitable candidates for a studio assistant. I got the job in 2004 and have developed my role into Head Designer. I have chosen to stay at the same company, despite a successful interview at another company. This is due to the growth experienced at the company I work for. I enjoy being part of an expanding company, and it's been exciting to see where we go next.'

'I took a sandwich degree (in surface pattern design) at university which was key in finding the right job when I graduated, as I returned to the company I did a placement with and worked my way up from a designer to a manager over four years after graduating. I then emigrated to Canada where I found work in the greeting card industry, for a very small company. Unfortunately due to the economy and working for a small business I was made redundant. I love my newfound lifestyle in Canada. I have taken up freelance design work until I can find full-time employment again in the future, due to visa current status.'

Unpaid work and internships

Working on a voluntary basis is an established feature of the creative industries landscape. There is plenty of evidence for this and it's on the increase: 42 per cent of CGCF respondents had undertaken unpaid or voluntary work or work experience since graduating. Those most likely to have done so were: women, older graduates, graduates with disabilities and those from fine art courses. Findings showed that those from more advantaged backgrounds had more chance of gaining relevant work experience (by working unpaid or undertaking internships, before or after graduation) because their parents could support them.

Graduates need to be resourceful and willing to work unpaid to gain necessary experience and entry into creative work. The nature and form of voluntary work or unpaid ‘internships’ is controversial in the context of minimum wage legislation, and there is evidence of graduates spending months rather than weeks in unpaid roles. However, valuable industry-related know how and experience is gained in this way and unpaid work is becoming an essential job pre-requisite. Paid work may follow, but it may take time to be formalised, reflecting the instabilities of the creative sector.

‘I’ve worked incredibly hard (since graduating in Fashion Promotion with Journalism), got myself into a mountain of debt from working for free. The money in journalism is woeful but the experiences make it worthwhile. The biggest challenge is existing on slim salaries and managing workloads. I’ve often had to work two or three jobs to survive.’

‘After graduating in graphic design I was working in design related fields in London more or less for free in the hope that getting design related work experience on my CV would eventually lead to a paid design job. I got tired struggling and feeling frustrated by having done a useless degree. I am now living in Denmark where I have a part-time paid job whilst trying to do my own art on the side. In London working in the design field is a dog eat dog life and it wore me down. It is about using and abusing people because the competition is so tough.’

At the time of the CGCF survey, some four to six years on from graduation, a quarter (23 per cent) of those in work were in unpaid roles, although often as a secondary activity combined with permanent work and/or self employment. Few (five per cent) of those in work were in an unpaid or voluntary role in their main (or only job). On the whole, these unpaid roles were seen to be enriching and tended to be creative and part-time. Voluntary activity does not recede as careers progress and continues to feature in early careers.

Examples of unpaid work/voluntary activities combined with income streams were:

Voluntary work in music and art with disabled students combined with paid freelance events management as my main job

Voluntary community arts work combined with paid work as a photographer and box office agent

PR events volunteer combined with temping and working as a PR co-ordinator

Voluntary chair of trustees combined with paid work as a promoter/centre manager and work as a graphic artist

Gallery volunteer combined with other jobs as a gallery assistant and customer service assistant

Textile intern combined with paid jobs as sales assistant and freelance designer

CPD, postgraduate study and developing on the job

Graduates continued to invest in their careers after graduation, and CPD was a significant career facilitator (see also Chapter 5). More than one-quarter of CGCF graduates returned to HE at some point in their early careers to study at a higher level. At the time of the qualitative research, some five to seven years on, postgraduate study was still an aspiration for many respondents – to be able to take time out to focus on personal creative practice, or as a route to a type of work, for example, the teaching profession. As careers progressed many graduates

undertook PGCEs (postgraduate teaching qualification). In some cases, considerable sacrifices were made to undertake formal postgraduate study:

'I am currently looking for teaching/lecturing work. I am also making and selling my own textile work and running my own textile workshops for adults. I am about to begin teaching on an 'AimHigher' course at a college, teaching adults and also first diploma textile students. I have also been appointed as an Edexcel Assessment Associate, and I will be a visiting moderator for GCE A-level Textile design Unit 2 in the next year. I graduated with a 2:1 in Textile Crafts, went on to study a Masters in Fashion and Textiles. I then took some time to travel the world to develop my inspiration for my own textile work and collaborated with a fellow colleague in making our own textile works to sell at fairs, exhibitions etc. I also continue to exhibit my own work in local galleries. I decided that I needed a steady income and have always wanted to move into teaching so I studied a PGCE in Post Compulsory Education and Training. I am now looking for teaching/lecturing work within textiles at FE or HE level.'

'I did a professional development course and worked at minimum wage for a fashion retail company who employed me because of my degree and the specialist course. Worked for them for two and a half years but reduced my working hours to do a part-time Post Compulsory PGCE, also working in a 6th form art department (no pay). The school offered a residency but withdrew the offer when I mentioned pay. Could not find work using my qualifications since then (2007) and it became difficult to find references, even for the most basic jobs. So someone leaving school with a few GCSEs was more likely to find work than I was. I did continue to develop my practice, but sold hardly any work. I am investing what little I have of my savings in my MA and hope it will boost my career chances. If it doesn't work out, I will have to try self-employment. This is difficult as I have had to sell my house.'

Combining study with part-time work was a common pattern, though affording the fees and being able to sustain an income were serious barriers to formal study.

Graduates continued to find ways to enrich their practice and learn new skills whilst working and, as with more formal learning, this sometimes involved considerable hardship.

'I did a number of unpaid internships at consumer magazines and PR companies, landed a job involving a huge pay cut at (newspaper) as editorial assistant, worked my way up from there in five years via the picture desk, finance dept and editor's PA roles to write regular features and news items. I did additional training in features writing, media law and photoshop as well as TV presenting for pod casts. I left journalism for a year to pursue copywriting but found it wasn't for me - however it paid much better and improved my editing and proofing skills. I learned French and was appointed editor of the UK women's site - an international sister site to the mighty French portal. I work in Paris at the moment and will move to London in 2010 to continue the editorship on home turf.'

Connectivity, collaborations and working with others

Creative graduates appeared to exhibit a connectedness with their work and with one another – sending out messages to their peers about themselves and their wants, capacities and aspirations and this is an important method for finding work and developing opportunities.

In the creative industries sector collaborative working is the norm in which individuals come together to work on a contract or a project, make a film, or put together an exhibition, or pool resources. Graduates recognise the importance of building and maintaining networks and they develop important social skills in this way. Collaboration is not just with fellow creative practitioners, as they often work in multi-disciplinary teams. A wider notion of collaboration includes the public, contributors and audiences.

'I've always worked with others - the nine months I did designing graphics for (major motion film) meant I collaborated with signwriters, craftspeople, car manufacturers, costume designers, architects, CGI designers and set-decorators and most of all film-makers.'

'Collaboration is essential. The (TV and film) industry is all about teamwork. Social skills are imperative. It's not just the employed team one needs to collaborate with, it's the public, contributors and other businesses. Making programmes relies on the kindness of strangers. Establishing an instant rapport with people is half the battle.'

Collaboration crucially provides opportunities to discuss work with others and seek critical feedback needed to progress, as well as combating isolation. Graduates also develop useful curatorial and critical skills as they put together group shows and exhibitions.

'My design job in the UK involved me working with people from many different design disciplines and being able to source their work to create innovative new products. This included freelance designers and illustrators too. I worked with 3D product designers, textile designers, graphic designers, illustrators, photographers ...'

'I have done craft fairs all year with a friend from uni. This enables us to split the cost of the stall, the work of setting up and it is much more fun to do with someone else than on your own. We have met many contacts through this and it is good networking. My friend has had gallery requests and commissions from these events. I have just joined a textile group in Liverpool and we have had our first meeting in town. It is mainly people setting up as small traders and should be really useful. The business advisor at Blue Orchid was really helpful in my doing the business plan and getting me thinking about things. I met lots of people over the year at all sorts of events and visits who were friendly and helpful. Giving me contact numbers, advice etc.'

As they progress in their careers, graduates are sometimes in the position of employing or commissioning others.

'Throughout my working career, there have been many occasions when within the creative department, teamwork has been necessary and crucial to my job with other employees. Other examples have been for preparations for certain events, such as '100% Design', my agency at the time collaborated with Ted Baker to produce an installation piece. And for this we had joined forces and hired two sculptors to help us complete the work. The project began by selecting a group of London based creatives. The new Nokia N93 was the catalyst for the project idea and tool for capturing the experience. Each creative recorded a powerful narrative to capture glimpses of London, which not only shares new perspectives of seeing the city, but also shares a great deal about their own personalities.'

There are examples of self-employed graduates employing others to help them with their work and to provide work experience for these individuals.

'As a freelance visual arts co-ordinator for education projects, I have employed six artists over the years on both agency and collaborative projects, alternative skills being of great benefit to both business opportunities and personal practice. Being able to share practice with other artists has been highly influential in developing confidence and holistic values.'

There was recognition that building good relationships with clients and others, and leading or contributing to teams to bring projects to fruition are important business skills:

'My job constantly consists of working with others. Being part of the design process I am always working with either designers or engineers, helping them make their ideas reality. I also work with a team on a regular basis whether its working on different parts of the same vehicle or working on a range of products.'

Grants and schemes

Success in accessing grants, residencies and start up schemes was significant in advancing careers, although few graduates accessed these:

'I went through a 'Go Wales' scheme after I finished my Masters, which put me in a placement with (aero engineering company). I then went to work for (a gas manufacturing company) as an Industrial Design Engineer, then as Industrial Designer in another company. A key decision I made was to move to the Reading area to seek work in my field with a higher pay band. I am currently working as an aircraft interior designer, and also dealing with their marketing issues and advertising projects.'

'In 2003 I was awarded a grant and residency through the Arts Council. I began my own business in 2004 and exhibited nationally. I did a number of crafts fairs including Chelsea in 2005. Last year after having my first child I went back to University to do a PGCE in art and design. Unfortunately the workload was quite overwhelming and I had to stop after six months. Currently I am looking to do a few little art fairs in 2010.'

'Currently Head of Design, at a joint venture company I set up as a result of a KTP (Knowledge Transfer Partnership). Graduated, worked freelance for Habitat, developed my own work, then got the KTP job. Took that job as offered university and business contacts, and have developed an innovative new company as a result. Was awarded Business Leader of Tomorrow. Now continuing the role, seeking investment finance, and working with global brands.'

2.4 Challenges and barriers to career progression

Analysis of the email survey returns reveals that graduates had experienced many challenges in their early careers and were quick to respond – putting survival strategies into action, coping with job losses, working hard to maintain demand for services/products necessary to sustain creative practice, cutting costs and working for less, or making adjustments to ways of working to limit financial risk. Others were deferring job change until the market became more stable.

Adequate preparation for the transition from higher education is clearly crucial, as many struggled to find their feet at the start:

'At my degree show I was asked can you make me 100 of these scarves by the end of this month? And, I didn't know, so I said, I'm not sure. I didn't know what I was selling - I went to see some people, I didn't present myself very well, so they didn't know why I came over and I didn't know why I went to them. Also I did a New Designers interview, but got nothing. It was typical of somebody who doesn't know any thing about the world. Nobody at college told me, actually you can make different things and you can become a designer-maker, or you could do this or that ...'

For freelancers, in particular, and for all graduates a need was expressed for start-up knowledge. There was no smooth passage, and graduates felt they needed persistence and resilience to combat the insecurities of creative working, seek new work and clients. In addition workloads were unpredictable with many experiencing a 'feast or famine' situation:

'I have just completed a commission for Topshop designing the window display. It has just gone to every one of the 300 Topshop stores nationwide. It has been a quick project taking just five weeks. Next week I'm going back to my pub job.'

Career barriers were perceived to be a combination of personal and external factors:

- **Personal:** lack of knowledge about how to find work and what creative working was all about; loss of confidence as a result of not finding work; financial problems/need for stable income; lack of experience/right skills; personal constraints and family commitments; lack of motivation and commitment to work; and lack of time to make changes for the better.
- **External factors:** economic recession; uncertainty in the creative sector and lack of paid full-time employment to gain necessary experience; jobs not advertised and mainly gained through personal contacts; contract economy and too much competition; juggling portfolio careers/different jobs; having to reposition self in relation to changes in the market, or new directions in subject discipline; and changing direction in response to lack of opportunities.

Overall, financial constraints were the main barrier to career progression and impacted on professional development and opportunities to learn new workplace, technical or IT skills. The need for stable income often meant deferring further study. There was a reluctance to move to risky but perhaps more rewarding jobs/work, or leave relatively well-paid but less satisfying work to gain further experience in lower paid or unpaid more creative roles.

Many of these challenges are illuminated in the case studies and career stories throughout this report.

3 Impact of Recession on Early Careers

This Chapter explores the impact of the recession on graduates' career progression, one year on from the first survey.

In the quantitative stage of the study we asked graduates about the impact of recession on their lives and career plans, and how they were coping. Economic uncertainty was clearly having an effect, in particular on incomes and on growing creative ventures – evidenced by pay cuts, redundancy, difficulties accessing credit, reducing rates of pay, cutting costs, and fewer or slower sales (as buyers become more cautious).

'Shops are not wanting to take the risk of buying a new label - they need to know that they can sell what they buy in, so it is a difficult time to be trying to introduce something new. I will keep plugging away for as long as I can afford to ... I have noticed that this year in particular the general public have been bringing a set amount of cash to art shows etc and are leaving their cards/cheque books at home.'

Yet, respondents were often inventive in exploring new markets or clients, or changing the direction of their practice to open out new opportunities. However, low pay is a feature of creative careers, with one-third of respondents to CGCF earning £15,000 p.a. or below, but this needs to be set against the high levels of satisfaction experienced by creative graduates.

3.1 Early career graduates are well placed

Some graduates still appeared to be unaffected by the economic downturn, as yet, perhaps reflecting their resourcefulness and persistence and the flexibility of portfolio careers and multiple income streams. This may also reflect graduates' desire to stay focused on creative practice.

'The recession has thrown a few unexpected changes my way, but overall it has made me more proactive with my work, which has had a positive effect on my career progression. I have seen it as a challenge and worked harder, become more independent, learning more and produced better work as a result. I have increased my self-promotion as a freelancer, and also been producing more personal projects to enhance my portfolio and show-reel to attract new work as well as satisfying myself creatively.'

In spite of increased competition, some early career graduates continued to find contract and freelance work, as clients preferred to employ smaller, more flexible and competitively priced companies/freelancers rather than large agencies, enabling smaller organisations and

freelancers to compete successfully. In our sample, very few graduates were registered as unemployed or relying on benefits.

'If anything, it has brought me more business Many companies who would previously have gone straight to agencies with a large budget are now looking to save money with freelancers.'

'The recession has certainly made things a bit quieter this year on the freelance front. However I also think that freelancers in general have benefited as many companies can't afford to take on new employees but still have to meet the same standards and deadlines and therefore have no choice but to outsource some of the work.'

For others, as more senior staff were made redundant, they gained rapid promotion, more responsibility and management roles – often without training, and not necessarily matched by higher pay.

'I am fortunate to have kept my position due to being a fairly low earner, and having taken responsibility for many 'non-designer' tasks (admin, filing). I do think that had the job market been better I am at the stage I would now be looking for other work.'

Some were hoping to work towards steady jobs/employment to provide a regular income rather than continue freelancing but the reality was more short contracts or self-employment.

'I was made redundant this year, with few jobs available I had to work as barmaid whilst freelancing and selling work graphic work to international agencies. However I was lucky enough to find a new job within 4 months. It has taught me to be prepared for the worst as designers are often seen as a commodity and not a necessity. But also to keep your options open the more varied you are the easier it is to find work.'

'It forced me abroad! I had decided to go freelance just before the recession hit the UK, and I found it increasingly hard to find stable freelance work in London, so I ventured back home to the UAE where I now work as a permanent Senior Designer.'

3.2 Stagnation in career progression

These changes will impact on career progression in the longer term, as freelancers become jobbing creatives with little opportunity to take on management or development responsibilities. Lack of opportunity for advancement and salary progression will have serious implications for the aspirations of creative workers as their financial commitments increase, i.e. if they decide to start families or become homeowners into their mid-careers. This prospect is illustrated by a graphic design graduate working full-time in a design studio:

'I owe a lot to student loans. I have no savings as a result and no raise in sight. I can't afford to rent a flat or buy and I couldn't support myself if I lost my job. I would most likely leave the country if I lost my job. So it's more what the recession might do rather than what it has done, because at the moment I can tread water, but that is all. The recession does not affect my ability to buy a flat or house as this is near impossible anyway. This is a highly unlikely event unless I meet someone who is rich or my parents die and leave me money from their house, so I will likely be in my late 40s before I can consider buying a place. The economy, from that perspective, is a huge burden for many people starting out. On the positive side, having very little does give you a kind of carefree outlook most times, if naïve!'

3.3 Impact on risk-taking

Individual risk-taking appeared to be affected, both positively and adversely by the economic downturn. Some graduates were resourceful in broadening their creative practice (being flexible within and outside their discipline), identifying new customers or markets, being more proactive in gaining work, and considering self-employment/freelance work alongside other paid employment. Downtime was used to develop new work and skills, and seen as an opportunity for risk-taking, experimentation and moving forward with personal creative practice.

However there were others, often those graduates in permanent work who tended to play safe, staying in more limiting jobs and being less likely to make more exciting career moves because of the economic uncertainty. In creative practice, some graduates felt they could not risk developing new work or ideas where the market may be unknown (which may affect the progression of their practice). There is evidence of economising on expenditure and outgoings, sometimes sharing costs with others.

'I have started to develop a cheaper range of work to appeal to a wider market. My usual high-end work has been slower to sell but this is picking up now with a new exhibition I am taking part in.'

For others, playing safe meant impact on quality and opportunities for creative development:

'... working in an environment where there are limited funds for materials or development of ideas, this reduces the scope and quality of work produced.'

3.4 Teaching is a safe haven

Gravitation towards teaching was one strategy for achieving a stable income, or a conscious career move, five to seven years on from their first degrees. Teaching was perceived to be a protected occupation – safe from the effects of the recession. However, those working in adult and community education and company training felt demand had fallen, presaging further redundancies in the education sector.

3.5 Graduates invest in their own development

Economic recession appeared not to have affected graduates' enthusiasm for new learning and continuing with their development, with many examples of ideas for retraining, developing their practice, or learning new skills to open up new opportunities. Although there were some who felt the need to put off postgraduate or further study for the time being as they could not afford the additional cost, many were looking to the long-term and making plans for the recovery.

'I think it has temporarily put things on hold, but I am still trying to learn new things and prepare myself for when the market recovers.'

4 Models for Work and Portfolio Lives

This Chapter explores how graduates' lives have progressed since the first survey, what they are currently doing and the dominant working patterns.

4.1 The characteristics of creative graduates and their careers

The findings of the main quantitative survey presented a set of recurring attributes, values and experiences that feature strongly in creative graduates' early careers. In summary, creative graduates:

- Learn important working methodologies and life skills through engagement with creative practice on their courses
- Place a high value on their higher education experience but would like a stronger connection with the professional and commercial world on their courses
- Engage in work and employment that is creative and closely related to their field of expertise or course of study
- Undertake multiple part-time work activities combined with opportunities for development - portfolio careers
- Are motivated by creativity, autonomy and independence in their work and opportunities to use and develop knowledge and skills
- Seek to maintain a strong life/work balance, valuing spending time with family and friends
- Aspire to a stable income, but are not willing to compromise values to achieve high earnings
- Experience work on a self-employed basis at some point in their careers
- Work in small organisations or micro-enterprises
- Continue to develop creative practice, undertake further learning and develop new skills through formal and informal study
- Are proactive and resourceful and willing to work unpaid to develop new knowledge, skills or opportunities and gain entry to creative work
- Stay focused on their career goals and envisage continuing to progress in the same kind of work.

CGCF, p.206

These characteristics continue to feature as careers progress, and have a strong bearing on the models for work experienced or chosen by graduates. This way of maintaining life/work balance is highly relevant to a rapidly changing society. In their early careers, creative graduates are at the forefront in initiating change in the creative sector, and their tolerance of uncertainty and ability to adapt and continue to learn equips them for contemporary life and work.

4.2 What are they currently doing?

One year on from the main CGCF survey, graduates are progressing in their careers in employment, mainly in work related to their degree disciplines, often broadening their experience and taking on responsibilities in management and senior roles. Similarly, those that entered non-creative careers are progressing into more senior roles, and at the same time, continuation with personal creative practice is an ongoing activity. Graduates work predominantly in the creative industries sector, education, public sector and in not-for-profit organisations.

Portfolio careers and self-employment continue to dominate, and there appears to be some progression from employment into freelance working as practitioners become more confident, experienced and build good relationships with potential clients, many of whom are former employers.

The detail and complexity of graduates' current work roles and portfolio careers, drawn from the email survey demonstrates the diversity of working patterns. This random selection illustrates the diversity:

- Working in a school as a **Creative Design Assistant**. I am also working for a Community Improvement Partnership as a Marketing and Graphics Co-ordinator. I am continuing my freelance graphic design company as a sideline
- **Aftercare Worker** for an addiction specialist charity, as part of my support work I create and edit a service user magazine for client art work which is distributed to 2000 clients and professionals
- **Senior Designer** specialising in denim, supplying high street stores such as Miss Selfridge, River Island, Peacocks
- Continuing in the same job at a HE institution. I now also work in **Marketing** as well as the Media Dept for the college and I am **Media Technician Manager**
- **Live arts sector**, in particular within arts centres and community groups, booking and promoting acts, while also contributing towards education. I also run a music-based charity and complete freelance design, photography and fine art assignments
- I am recently **unemployed** - made redundant, now looking for design work
- Self-employed **fashion designer** setting up a designer limited edition surfwear company and also doing bespoke made to measure clothing and accessories
- **Teacher of art**, technical theatre, technology and costume
- **MA fine art full time**

- **Marketing Assistant at a health care charity.** I write copy, do design work and commission artists and photographers. In my spare time I am producing my own work; sculpture, photography, film and writing
- **Research post** at (a London university); PR and fundraising for a south-west based theatre group, piloting of a project for writers and story tellers; writing for the media as part of my MA course in screen/ script writing
- **Senior Product Design Engineer** for a business to business company
- Working at **Animation Studios** in California
- I have opened my own animation studio in the last year working mainly on TV series work.
- **Head of Marketing** at global renewable energy company managing all marketing activities including design and production
- I am currently working freelance as a **Stained Glass artist.** I also produce my own photography and stained glass projects for exhibiting
- Working for a **performing arts venue** working with 11-25 year olds on creative projects to involve marginalised groups in the community to engage in worthwhile and creative learning experiences in the context of a live venue.

4.3 Areas of employment

Creative employment

Those in creative careers stayed in work related to their discipline and sought progression and new challenges with many working in senior roles, and as art directors and middle managers:

Examples include: Producer/director of primetime TV documentary about British troops in Afghanistan - also writing a comedy series; Art Director in Advertising agency; Marketing Executive for international golf company; National Account Manager for manufacturer supplying interiors/equipment for retail sector; Senior Product designer; Senior Graphic Designer stationery/design company in New York; Production Designer/Coordinator in Fairtrade childrenswear company; Director and owner of Gallery in Sweden; Business Planning Manager in finance and accounting business; Senior product design engineer.

'I did lots of experience at uni and continued to do some after graduating until I did work experience on the picture desk at (magazine publisher). It was there that I decided working on a picture desk for was for me. I continued to work there as a 'workie' until I was put forward for a job opportunity where they were after a picture assistant on a special project which turned out to be (a major global magazine). I have stayed in this job for six years now working my way up to where I am now doing picture research, news, sport, cover shoots, style shoots, contracts and more.'

'I am employed as a Senior Knitwear designer. I did a placement straight after graduation at Austin Reed, this was advertised through the university via our notice board. I looked for work for around 5 months before I found a role at as a knitwear designer at (fashion retailer). This was a great graduate job and a great learning curve for me especially it being such a specialised area. Once I felt I had achieved everything I could with this company, as I was an assistant designer and at them time there was no room for me to progress, I decided to move into wovens as I wanted to gain more experience in this field

and in print design. I attended interviews over in Spain for (fashion knitwear company) and in London for (fashion retail company).'

'I moved down to High Fashion in London for this job and again, new to wovens, I felt I gained so much knowledge and it was a great company to work for. Then I moved back up north and back into knitwear as a Designer at (knitwear company). Although a very successful company, it really lacked creativity and was a little dull for me, the design department was more like an accounts department and it just didn't fulfil the creative and dynamic design role that it advertised itself to be. From here I moved my current employer. This has certainly been a completely different experience from my previous jobs as I was brought in to set up the knitwear department and help to establish it and grow the knitwear business in what is known as a very successful denim company. This has been a great challenge and we are going from strength to strength. I have been here nearly 2 years now.'

'I am a Project Design Manager - working in commercial interior fit-out projects. My first job was doing furniture design for a bespoke manufacturer which was advertised in the local newspaper. Two years later I was made redundant from that job, so I sent my CV to numerous companies, from architects to interior designers and landed my current job, where I've been for over three years. I have to work within a team through projects, whether it be colleagues or contractors on site, architects leading up to the fit-out project and clients.'

'I currently work for a design consultancy specialising in 3D design and visualisation for the product automotive and marine industries. I graduated in 2000. The first year in the real work was difficult. I managed to gain some work experience, but struggled to find any full time design work till a year after I had graduated. I managed to get a full time position as a junior 3D structural packaging design at a company in the automobile industry. This was an amazing opportunity, but not quite the industry I had dreamt of working in as a child. After three months I got offered the job that I have been in since.'

'I am currently Art Director in a Communication (Advertising) agency. Went to London with my copywriter, showed our book to loads and loads of agencies. Worked for free in one agency for about a month. Then got 2 months paid work there - before we had to leave because of cut backs. Left London and moved back home to Norway after 7 months in London due to a severe cash flow problem. In Norway I knocked on the door to an agency I had had an 'apprentice year' with before starting uni. They gave me a shot and I've been here for 5 years now.'

Teaching

Routes into teaching were varied, with many graduates gravitating towards teaching as their careers progressed from fine art and design practice and work in community settings. Several graduates were Heads of Department. Teaching was considered to be particularly beneficial for those wanting to combine it with the development of their practice.

Case study

'After graduating with a degree in graphic design, I continued to work as an architect for several months until the firm closed down (something I had done prior to studying). After that I was unemployed and did a couple placements in Glasgow and London design studios. Eventually (more than a year after graduating) I moved to London for a full-time in-house design job at a small music conservatoire. As the sole designer there I learned a great deal but quickly realised the likelihood of ever getting a job in a studio was slim to nil. I nearly got a job at (a major publishing house) as a book cover designer but lost it to someone who had been headhunted for the job (and lost it within her probationary period!) even though I was the best candidate. I ended up working as a designer at (London fine art auctioneer house) in the proposals department - it was a bigger design team, a different clientele, something new. It was a terrible fit, so I left within my probationary period to work at (a London university) as a senior designer.'

After one year there I decided to pursue my dream of teaching by getting my PGCert in Higher Education which came with a teaching placement at (another London university). Working part-time as a designer, 1 day a week teaching and 1 day a week studying, I completed my PGCert and began to look for full time teaching. In July of 2008 I got a job at a Scottish University. A few months in I was asked to design a new 4-year programme for Graphic Design. I have just started teaching the first year of this new programme. I'm exhausted but finally very happy with what I do.'

Non-creative work

In the main CGCF survey, fewer than one in five graduates undertook work they considered to be in non-creative roles. There was evidence of progression into more responsible roles:

Examples include: Head of Alumni Relations, higher education institution; Marketing Assistant, health care charity; Funeral Director; Returning to part-time work as Psychiatrist in NHS; Military career; Head of Marketing, power generation company; Live in carer combined with personal practice; IT Marketing Executive; Support work for trade union; Clinical Library Information Assistant; Officer for London 2012 Olympic Games in London Borough; Head of Development Fund at UK Film Council; Director of philanthropic trust investing in social entrepreneurs.

There is evidence of inherent creativity in their approaches:

'I am currently a test analyst (software tester) for a large medical appliance company. After graduation (in illustration in 2003) I was unemployed for about nine months before finding work in the Payroll Dept of Accenture via the Job Centre. After two years' service (with no holidays) I left to pursue a growing interest in the mortgage industry including self-studying the CMAP level qualification for a period of six months. I gained employment with the (Building Society) in the Mortgage Intermediary Dept but only stayed three months, as being on the telephone all day was killing me. I realised that my job preferences were not suited to call centre type positions and sought out jobs that would not require constant communication with customers. I joined my current employer in March 2007 in the Data Quality Dept and after just one year was promoted to Test Analyst, a job I am ideally suited for, being able to apply my artistic perfectionism for detail and creativity skills on every project.'

'I am currently a full-time retail manager for M&S. As an illustration graduate, I joined a graduate trainee scheme, as I wasn't sure if I could get a job in design. I have stayed with the company since graduation and just completed a Master's degree in fashion marketing sponsored by my employers.'

Case study

'I work in the field of philanthropy, with a small family foundation in the Silicon Valley. We invest in Social Entrepreneurs and other innovative solutions to social problems. I've held a number of jobs. I knew fairly soon after graduation that I would not be a practising artist, full time. After working as a photographer for a while I knew I needed to push myself further and also start paying off some debt. I worked as an Estate Agent for a while, didn't find it personally satisfying enough. Moved to Beijing for an adventure and trained and worked as a Montessori teacher, there.

I decided I needed to continue my education and use time in graduate school to really figure out how to find a career that satisfied my creative thought, enjoyment of more meritocratic work, and desire to contribute to making the world a better place. During my MBA I found a meaningful application of business and creativity in social entrepreneurship, and have been working in this field ever since. I see myself working in this field for the rest of my career/life.

The two main things I think that have helped me are: hustle and the Gen Y perspective. I've always been able to see a different way to go about things, or applied an existing method to a new situation. When applied to the task of building a career, this has helped me enormously. I have never applied for a job that has been widely advertised or applied for - preferring to find jobs which are created for me, as I 'sell' the value I can bring. Being a Gen Y, I have no desire to stay in a job I don't love or find enormous value in. Believing that my work could be both challenging, creative and meaningful is half the battle. Many (most) people do not even start off with this belief. I knew something was out there that was just right and wasn't going to settle in to a career until I found it. Creative thought. Confidence in creating something out of nothing, doing something different, not being afraid to fail.'

Choosing a creative employer, first of all in a non-creative role, was one strategy for moving into a more creative job with the same employer later on:

'I have a full-time contract at English Heritage in administration. I have found it very difficult to get into the type of role that I would like to do (from a Conservation degree), ie museum/heritage hands on type of role and not just the more background administrative stuff. Even though I have a BA and an MA it doesn't seem to have made a difference in allowing me to progress quicker or into the areas I'd like to be in. Having said that I should be grateful to be in the heritage sector so I'm holding out for a permanent position and then move into something more interesting. At the end of the day life has to continue so you have to take the job offers that do come along even when they aren't what you thought you'd be doing. I hope that one day I will end up in a position that is fulfilling on all levels, not just one that pays a wage.'

Some made a decision to keep their creative practice as a separate interest, outside work:

'I currently work as an Undertaker. I had several different jobs since graduating in Model Design. Only had one six month freelance job relevant to my degree. Otherwise, since Summer 2002, my degree has proved utterly worthless in terms of employment. The key decision I have made is to keep my creative interest as a hobby, as employment relevant to my degree is so sporadic. I learned more from a few hobby magazines than I did from my degree course.'

Aside from always having had a nagging interest since my teens in becoming an Undertaker, it is one of the most secure professions it is possible to have in this day and age.'

Public sector work

Work in the public sector was often related to culture and the arts.

Case study

'I graduated in Product Design and New Media, and I am currently working for (a local authority) as their officer for the London 2012 Games. I took the role five months ago after working for them as a Senior Media and Communication Officer. In my final year as an undergraduate I was heavily involved in organising our graduate show in London. Upon graduating I was successful in gaining part-time employment as a studio technician on a BTEC Foundation Course. I fulfilled one year working there before taking a year out to travel in Australia and America. Upon my return I exhibited some artwork at a London gallery and went on the work as an events coordinator for the Kent and East Sussex Railway after seeing an advert in the Kent on Sunday newspaper. I then joined a recruitment agency and applied through them for the role of Assistant Media Officer for (in a local authority) in 2006. I was successful in a promotion to Senior Media and Communication Officer in 2008.

In October 2007 I started an MA in Arts Policy and Management (part-time), and took a three month work placement in the marketing team at Tate, London. My interest in arts and culture

has led me to work within this remit at (local authority) and encouraged me to apply for my current role. A large part of my role is based in partnership working, which takes place on a daily basis. My current role now means I am working on county, regional and national partnerships, with an aim to work on international cultural projects. I have also been on two interview panels when hiring media officers, and been shocked by the poor standard of the applicants.'

Sometimes career changes occurred as a natural progression and following a wish to seek new learning opportunities as well as a need for financial security.

'I currently work as a (police force) Communications Officer. Since graduating (in fashion) I briefly pursued a career in Fashion Marketing - I managed the press for Urban Outfitters. I then decided a change in career to something more steady and higher paying and applied for the position of Comms Officer for (police force). I still work alongside a group of volunteers at a soup kitchen. I also worked with a range of (sometimes difficult) journalists when dealing with the press at Urban Outfitters. I still have that eagerness/openness to learn new things and develop my skills. I am open to working with new people too. I will be undergoing a PGCE course in order to train as a primary school teacher. I also aim to undertake a British Sign Language course. (My advice to students is to) get as much experience - voluntary if you can - as possible as it does help!'

Work in the not-for-profit sector

Graduates worked in a wide range of charitable and community organisations, and roles involved support, advocacy work and management roles, fund raising, and community events with specific social groups.

Case study

'After I graduated in fine art, I went to Zimbabwe for 3 months, got married and when I returned to England, I worked for an organisation in London that imported ethanol till March 2006. I left London for (the Midlands) and spent two months doing a paper round whilst looking for gainful employment. It was quite depressing knowing that I was well qualified for jobs and in two months I sent out 40 applications for employment. Only two responded and the 40th application is the one that employed me, which is where I still am three years later.

My degree involved working in the community, and I am currently the Services & Development Manager for a community based charitable organisation that offers family and study support primarily to black, African, Caribbean and dual heritage children and their families. We provide advocacy and inclusion, guidance, parenting skills support, holiday club activities, cultural activities, identity work, work with children in regards to their emotional well-being.

We get involved in community events and provide information to families. Working in partnership with schools, users normally access our service through referrals by Social Services, schools, other agencies or self-referral. I manage five members of staff and am always looking at innovative and creative interventions to engage with the children, young people and families that we work with. We have just launched the 'Slavery and our Legacy' educational pack that we are going to be rolling out to schools, groups etc. The ABC fishing club is now 2 years old and this club has helped 14 children and young people attain their young leaders and sports leader level 1 award in sports leadership. We plan to hold at least one leadership training course in February every year. I am currently in the process of applying for funding for up to 3 years as our current funding ceases in July 2010.'

Case study

'I am Programme Manager for a visual arts project for people with mental health problems. On graduating (in fine art) I took part in a community arts course. During that course I applied for the post of arts worker in a mental health programme. I was promoted to programme manager when the then manager left. I frequently work with others in my role in the arts organisation and also as a member of an artists collective. My organisation has given opportunities to art students to gain work experience.'

4.4 Self-employment and freelance work

In the main CGCF survey, 45 per cent of graduates had worked on a freelance basis and around one-quarter had started a business during their early careers, and there was a future aspiration for almost two-thirds of respondents. Self-employment is a serious career entry strategy and feature of portfolio working, as well as reflecting the way in which work is organised in the creative sector – a predominantly contract economy.

Directly after graduation, it is not easy to set up immediately as a freelancer, but some found that, in the absence of paid jobs, self-employment was the only option.

'I work from home as a knitwear designer/producer making made to measure pieces and knitting two collections a year for private customers. I also started producing catalogues which I sent to private customers in the country and abroad. The first year was a bit depressing. After graduating I started applying everywhere I knew there was a knitwear line within fashion companies, but never managed to get the job I wanted - knitwear designer. I did not want to give up on my dream of being a knitwear designer, so it occurred to me that the only way of living my dream was to start producing some knitwear of my own and seeing whether people were interested. It turned out they were and I started selling through friends that way. I did different placements in different companies since 2000, working from very low positions until I became an assistant designer at (major UK fashion house). I am now collaborating with a marketing expert friend of mine who I cannot employ for money reasons, but who is bringing an extremely profound contribution to the growth of my business.'

There was a view that working freelance was not healthy for longer-term career progression, and it was not easy to set up full-time as a freelancer from scratch as one needed experience, contacts and money to live on.

'The main difficulty is affording to live while setting up as a creative. Try and plan for this, set aside cash if possible, live at home for a while, apply for grants etc. The MA gives you somewhere to work. Work part-time. Collaborate with others to share costs and support each other. Don't give up.'

'Maybe I've been a bit lazy in terms of pushing myself. I think that with freelancing you don't progress so well career-wise (in graphic design). They're not going to give you loads of responsibility as a freelancer, so to progress in my career I would have to go for a permanent position and think about the long-term.'

Career progression is often characterised by gravitation towards self-employment from salaried employment or portfolio careers, often requiring determination and considerable persistence:

'I am now running my own online shop, making my products, completing commissions and custom orders and also doing freelance graphic design. When I graduated, I decided I didn't want to do anything to do with graphic design as I was so disillusioned with the whole subject. I worked at a bank doing admin. After a year or so I got a job in a design studio and decided to give it a go seeing as I had trained to do that. Worked there for a year or so

before moving to London and working for a national magazine. Enjoyed that and worked my way from Junior Designer to Senior Designer. Left over two years ago as I didn't like living in London and wanted to be more hands on creative and work for myself. Started (my own business) and haven't looked back.'

Case study

'I graduated in graphic design and I now work as a freelance designer and director, for a motion graphics company (animation). I swap between about 3 main companies doing similar work, but I mainly stick with one for the majority of my work. I am constantly learning new programs to help me progress with my work. After graduating, I worked as a runner for various TV production companies on and off, whilst doing some freelance print design work for local companies to where I live, whilst working in a pub part-time too. After a year I found a job on a production website for a runner at a motion graphics company. There I worked my way up from runner, to designer, to lead designer. Before taking the decision 4 years later to continue as a designer and director on a freelance basis.

The nature of my work means I am constantly working as part of a team. I produce the initial storyboard for the commercial/title sequence, then depending on the job I collaborate with stop-frame/after effects/3D animators, photographers, cinematographers and producers to realise the final project. I also employ others for certain jobs, for example model makers, art department etc.

My creativity has always remained a constant in any job I do - even if it wasn't a creative job. Which reminded me that is definitely a path I should always pursue. Whatever I was doing I'd always end up being creative in some way - whether creating posters for events, coming up with ideas, or taking photographs. In my job I am constantly learning from people around me, and they motivate me to learn new programs and keep up with the latest design trends. You learn from other people, but there is a small amount of competition which challenges you to pursue certain areas and motivate me into learning and pushing boundaries. The thing that could hinder me the most would be a lack of self-belief, and working with rude people - but so far I haven't suffered from either very often!

The most valuable part of my undergraduate study is the people I met whilst studying. You realise you have a network of potential collaborators and contacts who end up being spread around the country, and sometimes world. With these people there is a bond and loyalty which is invaluable in working life.'

4.5 Portfolio careers

Graduates were very frequently portfolio workers, with almost half in the main CGCF study combining paid work and employment with unpaid volunteering, study, professional development, and family life. As discussed in the first CGCF report, Handy (1989) provides a useful model for our respondents' patterns of work in which they combine:

- **paid work:** wage/salary (employment) and fee work (freelance/self-employment)
- **free/unpaid work:** unpaid work to gain experience, voluntary/community work, formal and informal study and home work (home and family).

Portfolio working may be serendipitous, evolutionary in nature, or driven by necessity, but for some it is a planned way of achieving the life/work balance they want. Closer examination of graduates' career journeys reveals that they continue to combine work and development activities well into their careers and juggled these with the demands of family life.

In our study, the four key drivers for portfolio working are:

- **creativity** – maintaining a focus on creativity and control over its direction; blurring distinctions between ‘own work’ and ‘other work’ with sometimes four or even five activities revolving around creative practice
- **the contract economy** – adapting to the opportunities available, with freelance work, part-time work and self-employment continuing to feature strongly
- **personal and creative development** – a wish not to stand still but to gain new experiences, develop new skills, often on the job or in unpaid/voluntary roles, and engage in development activity and further study, both informal and formal
- **peers, contacts and collaborators** – work opportunities will often come about through contacts and networking; collaborations may be formed to build teams to meet the needs of multi-disciplinary contracts.

Teaching is often a balancing career for makers/creative practitioners in portfolio careers. This is illustrated by a self-employed jeweller, who combines teaching jewellery at evening classes and summer schools, work with a charity, developing her more personally driven work, and exhibiting nationally and internationally:

‘I was lucky enough to spend two years after graduating as an artist in residence where I could continue to create my work in a supportive environment as I started to approach galleries and have my work shown. As part of the residency I taught 1 day per week in the department and this is how I started teaching. I received a start up grant from the Scottish Arts Council and set up my own studio to work from and continued working at the art college as an assistant in 1st year and assisting in summer school. After this I began to teach evening classes and summer school courses and also where I held the residency. I have been involved with (an arts organisation) and am now a council member, helping to organise the annual exhibition amongst other things. I have also been involved with a charity in Kenya teaching underprivileged girls jewellery-making skills. Throughout this time I have continued my own work and have been exhibiting nationally and internationally.’

Freelance and contract work are key features of portfolio careers, and the multi-stranded nature of the work brings additional pressures:

‘I work for myself running a business in personal training. I also still freelance as a magazine designer. I got work experience at a magazine doing graphics, then got a 3 month contract designing a small magazine. Went onto freelance for 2 years then had a full time job as a magazine designer for 2 years. I left 2 years ago to start my own business doing personal training. (Career facilitators are) my ambition and ability to always look forward and take as many opportunities as I can, and my determination to mould my own working life and hours. I’m doing my own study in life drawing as I have always enjoyed it and want to get my creativity going again. Sometimes I’ve combined jobs. It was an absolute nightmare; it was really not worthwhile because I stayed up till four in the morning, just finishing one job and then starting on the next one.’

Other portfolio workers had a non-creative main job to provide a regular income balanced with freelance design:

‘I am working full-time in admin at Deutsche Bank and as a freelance evening gown and dog costume designer and maker. Been working in the Shakespeare’s Globe theatre freelance after I graduated in UK and I went back to Hong Kong as Merchandiser in the fashion industry.’

But after all, fashion can't earn me a living in my home city so I decided to change fields and make my fashion and costume interests into a freelance job.'

4.6 Defining and achieving success

In the main CGCF survey, four in five respondents indicate they are in or close to their chosen career and experienced high levels of satisfaction. What does success mean to graduates, and to what extent have they achieved it? The most common success factors relate to staying creative, progressing in creative practice and seeing through personal aims and decisions.

Graduates set high standards for themselves and are keen to progress in their working lives, develop new work, ideas and learn new skills, and have recognition from peers and other professionals as well as 'customer satisfaction' – seeking a response to their work, typically through exhibitions and feedback from clients. Taking responsibility, leading and directing – having a direct input into a larger creative project, as well as facilitating creativity in others are key success factors and drivers.

At this early career stage, graduates recognise they may have some way to go, and for many the goal is towards becoming sustainable – earning solely from creative work. For others, there is disappointment, mainly rooted in not having continued in a creative career and that still remained a longer-term goal.

'I feel that success is surviving and having become what I am. Sticking at it and actually having the job title and doing it and making a living at it is success. There have been a few moments when I've gone - that's great, or, wicked, or, I've just got a great little job - a little golden moment, little memorable events that I've gone through. I'm starting now to relax a bit and turn down jobs that I don't want to do, and start to be able to plan to do other things in my life, not just try and make money and make films.'

'I am not sure what success is, to be honest. I wouldn't call myself successful at the moment, because my financial world is so minimal ... if success means that you have enough money, I'm a complete failure. If success means the way you go through your life, then I am managing it, so I'm successful at the moment.'

'I think I've done really well. I've progressed in certain ways; moved to different areas of print design, started doing a lot of children's wear, T-shirts ... but mainly I still do the same thing that I've always done - but the skills and techniques have progressed. Going to New York has given my work a real boost - you're in the middle of the industry and it's an eye opener. My success is that I'm still doing what I set out to do in the first place, and that I've managed to make a living out of it. I've got better and better at what I do.'

'I graduated with a degree in decorative art, and I'm pleased with the way my career's gone. A nagging bit of me says I should have been applying to the fine art galleries, but when I'm truthful about it, that really doesn't suit me. I'd much rather make something that's practical - it's more true to me. I make a lot of people happy by teaching, so that's good.'

'My particular successes are: my own illustration exhibition - that was great, and designing some fabrics that are the best sellers that the couture house has ever made - that's been really great. Success is something that you make that makes you happy six months after you've finished it, or something that people tell you is nice for a long time. Success is something that has longevity to it, and is commercially successful.'

Overall, success is seen either in terms of financial gain or in terms of personal development. Many graduates sought to maximise both, but there is strong evidence of sacrificing financial success for personal satisfaction.

5 The Value of a Creative Education

In this chapter, we focus in more depth on how graduates articulate specific aspects of their learning and wider HE experience, in relation to their value in working life.

5.1 Creative graduates value their creative education

The main CGCF survey provided important evidence of the value graduates placed on their educational experiences. Creative graduates learn important working methodologies and life-skills through engagement with creative practice on their courses.

We asked respondents to look back at their creative education and tell us what they valued most, and what they taken with them from their creative education into their working lives. Their responses help to build a picture of how choosing to follow a creative course has influenced their lives and careers and where there may be gaps in provision. These insights will help to raise awareness about what's important – for courses, for staff, for students and employers.

Whilst there were many positive responses, inevitably some graduates felt their courses did not match expectations and they would have liked more teaching in methods and technical processes, tutorials, resources and contact with industry.

The intrinsic value of a creative education

Graduates who valued their creative education for its own sake saw it as a unique opportunity for personal exploration and development – and the rich curriculum provided new experiences and enjoyment in learning. Fine artists in particular valued the opportunity for self-discovery:

'I found the fine art course absolutely wonderful, it was an opportunity to play for three years while learning profound concepts and expanding your mind into areas that I'd been aware of, but hadn't previously taken on board. ... It's a very serious business - learning; but to be allowed to look at how pieces of string fall on the ground and think about that is quite liberating after a lifetime in a more prescribed work environment. It allowed me to go into my own head, and generate work independent of something outside.'

'I enjoyed doing certain subjects. I don't know whether they were useful but I enjoyed doing them. I did metalwork and art curation. I learned to write better - that was useful.'

'One reason I did my degree was to give myself a broad pallet of practice, because I could never visualise myself actually retiring with slippers in front of the fireplace. I always feel that I will be producing art until they bring me out feet first in a box. To have had the experience of the degree in fine art, and the equivalent of a degree in photography, gives me two practices that I can do while I've got a hand that's capable of holding a brush or pressing a shutter. That I feel is my future - it will always be there, and that's a very positive thing to have. It will never go away and I love it.'

The prestige value of having attended a particular institution was felt by some to be extremely useful for gaining work, whereas for others this was not important. In general, a degree was felt to be essential for getting a job or finding work, and the process and experience of going to university was seen as beneficial. It was clear that most of those who were positive about their education were pro-active and made the most of the people, resources and learning they had experienced, often finding their own work placements during study and creating their own opportunities after graduation.

Learning through creative practice

The first CGCF report (2010, pp40-41) identified a combination of elements of a creative education that encourage independence and the development of important learning processes, skills and outlooks with experiential learning as the dominant pedagogic model. Students engage in high-level intellectual learning, using creativity and imagination and application of skill and theoretical considerations to conceive and solve problems. The creative curriculum – learning by doing – through project-based enquiry and the contribution of teacher-practitioners to this process are particularly valued.

'I've taken into professional life the methodology of how you design things: creating the concept, going through storyboarding and then gradually building up the project. In the workplace, because of deadlines, people would push you to forget about process, but I've found myself going back through the process to come up with something that's really well designed and well executed.'

'I most valued the opportunity for ideas generation and creativity. I feel I benefited most from the outside tutors who came in to teach and critique us than from the design course staff at that time. One part-time tutor in particular was my main inspiration and if it hadn't been for his confidence and encouragement in my ideas, I would not have pursued an artistic career.'

'What I most valued from my creative education was experimenting with media and developing a good research ethic.'

'Studying art and design (graduating in illustration) all through my academic life certainly developed my preference for detail and striving for perfection. This, combined with a personality type that functions on logic, organisation and the ability to view things from different perspectives (ie put myself in someone else's shoes) are all qualities ideally suited to Quality Assurance. The need and ability to thoroughly research an idea or proposal with facts, figures, graphs and related examples - it's far easier to convince people you're right when you have plenty of factual ammunition to prove it.'

'Art school (film and video production) is tough because you have to discover yourself, and if you don't you're not very successful. You can't really hide away, you've got to socialise all the time and expose yourself quite a lot. Before I went to university I was quite introvert so I found this hard but really beneficial.'

Transferring creativity

Opportunities to apply creativity in different settings naturally occur in the curriculum as students undertake a variety of project work, industry-linked initiatives, placements, collaborations, exhibitions and competitions. The qualitative research with creative graduates allows us to explore the extent to which the creative process transfers into the workplace in a range of settings:

'Teach students that creativity and the training they get as artistic students does not mean they can only be artists. They can use their training to be creative in many more ways and situations outside the arts, where it is just as, if not more valuable and rewarding.'

'I still use many aspects learned through my study including research skills and getting on with my work as an individual.'

'The key skills learned at undergraduate level have allowed me to keep producing my own work and have also allowed me to teach these skills to others. [As a teacher], working through projects and to briefs have also been key to developing my own lesson plans and proposals for courses.'

'I have taken into my working life the knowledge and understanding of art and ideas and being able to transfer skills onto others - developing confidence when speaking about my own work and work of others, teaching and supporting. My Fine Art degree allowed me to know more about myself and in turn I can pass on information for my students now to create exciting, challenging and expressive art works through various applied skills and concepts.'

Graduates specifically valued creative, design and making skills, opportunities to learn from mistakes and theoretical considerations supported by good research skills, criticism and contextual learning, and these were seen as fundamental to creative careers.

'The best thing about the course was being given permission to experiment with all the different materials and at the same time getting a lot of design input from lectures. I tried to make as much of the experience as I possibly could - I knew it wasn't going to happen again.'

Critical and contextual learning and academic writing were valued, and many had found these aspects challenging but rewarding:

'The thing I found most rewarding was my dissertation because I was really apprehensive about it. I went into a subject area I knew nothing about - it wasn't directly to do with film - and it worked really well. I got a lot of credit for trying something difficult. I got a First Class degree (in film and video production)!'

Learning from others and critique

Building relationships with peers, tutors and industry professionals was fundamental and provided the foundations for the creation of work opportunities, networks and the connectedness referred to in Chapter 2, pp.14-16. Peer learning, team projects, working alongside others, and using feedback and criticism to inform practice was often cited, and continued to be valued into working lives:

'The clearest benefit has been creative and working relationships with people that I studied with that continued into my working life.'

'When you finished each module you had to explain what you were doing and why, justify it and explain your thinking behind it and the design process - which gave me more confidence in myself, which I'd been lacking.'

'Listening to criticism from peers and fellow students ... taking it on board and learning from it.'

Work placements and relevant experience

Almost half the respondents to the main CGCF survey had experienced work placements on their courses, and students were pro-active in gaining work experience, both as part of the course and outside the curriculum and saw this as essential for finding work and gaining insights into working practices.

'I made sure I got a lot of professional experience whilst at university so when I graduated I'd be ahead of the mass of other people trying to get into the industry'

The value of work placements is explored in Chapter 2, pp. 12-13.

Developing workplace skills and attributes

The dominant pedagogic model of 'learning by doing', underpinning curriculum activities, provides a variety of opportunities to develop skills and experiences useful for the workplace. For example, juggling projects, working independently, being well-organised, managing the pressure of working to deadlines and a strong work ethic. The ability to self-initiate new creative ideas and outcomes was central to work in creative roles, and similarly, a keenness to learn new skills and develop further.

'... successful time management and a strong work ethic. The workload from my degree was such that there was little time for a traditional student way of life and so I came out of my degree well prepared for the working world.'

'At university I became more focussed on what I wanted to be in a few years' time. I grew up a bit and had a more serious view on life because of the hours that we were expected to put in on our degree. So it's given me a good work ethic.'

'At university we used to have to do a lot of stand up presentations and I remember thinking why do I need to know these sorts of things? But it's quite nerve wracking standing in front of a shop full of customers - they're all listening because it's a quiet environment. So in that respect it definitely builds up your confidence talking in front of people.'

Business and self-employment

In the last decade, HE has improved its provision for enterprise and business education, often integrated within courses (CGCF, p.215). The main CGCF survey showed course activities that provided an interface with professional requirements, Personal and Professional Development (PPD), teamwork and self- and peer-evaluation were rated highly and considered useful for careers and the continuing development of practice. Business education was valued, but many graduates felt they had not recognised the importance of these professional aspects at the time they experienced them.

'There was a very good business module which told you all the different ways you could sell, how to access opportunities, and all about setting up as a self-employed independent practitioner. You can't pick up the practical bits until you actually do it, but it gave me all the materials and the confidence to try it out.'

'We did some business skills seminars and lectures, but because I'd already worked for a jeweller and self-employed, contracting, I knew most of it already. The seminars were basic, but if you were interested to go self-employed it was enough information to get you started.'

Whereas others made their own arrangements:

'Although I enjoyed my undergraduate study immensely, I feel it has impacted on my practice very little. The main thing I have taken with me is the business training a few of my class mates and I attended in our own time with a third party organisation.'

Confidence and skills

In the main CGCF survey, respondents felt that their higher education had developed many of the critical skills required for their careers, rating most highly creativity and innovation, visual skills and presentation, which had given them the confidence to progress with their careers:

'My degree turned me into a far more confident person generally - talking about how great your work is and believing in it. To this day I can speak up when I want and need to - that's definitely help me with all the things I've done.'

The wider experience of being at university was also a contributing factor:

'The ability to work to a design brief with deadlines. Only now the deadlines are much tighter! Having been student rep for three years at college helped my confidence to take on more senior roles with added responsibilities.'

Others were less positive about their preparation for the workplace, felt they could have made more of their HE experiences and had more opportunities on their courses to develop self-management, IT, networking and client-facing skills.

5.2 Graduates' advice to students

Graduates were asked to provide advice that would help current students to prepare for work, and much of the advice offered by graduates in the email survey mirrors career facilitators discussed earlier in Chapter 2. Their advice centres around finding a career focus in accord with their personal values, making the most of people, resources and facilities, gaining work experience whilst studying, developing support networks and contacts for after graduation, and knowing the strategies needed for finding work.

Choosing the right course, managing debt carefully, taking every opportunity to learn excellent making and technical skills and valuing contextual, academic and business studies were frequently mentioned, often with regret, as respondents admitted they did not value these sufficiently at the time. Research skills, peer review and academic study were specifically cited for developing sound critical and professional skills and providing evidence for decision-making. Focussing on longer-term goals and taking an active role in your own learning - *'treat study like a job'* were felt to be fundamental to maintaining motivation and self-confidence, as illustrated by this fine artist working for a charity supporting families:

'I think that current students should enter their first year as if it was their last year. They are there to do a job and should stay focused, I believe that friends will always be there, but education is a treasure that must be grabbed with both hands and to let go until the end of the race. Always hand work in on time. Remember in the real world there are deadlines to keep. I attended University as a mature student. I regret that I did not have that opportunity when I was younger because I feel that I would have achieved a lot more.'

Contacts and networks

Building a good professional network, starting with keeping in contact with tutors, peers and placement employers is critical for finding work, creating opportunities through work experience, collaborations and maintaining motivation and confidence. Family and friends were seen as vital support, especially in the early stages of careers.

'Do it for the love, not for the money. Always be friendly and professional as word of mouth is your biggest selling point. Take advantage of all the support networks you have available to you. Network, network, network. And as my grandfather used to say "Shy Bairns Get Nowt"!'

Work experience and workplace skills

Placements and industrial experiences of all kinds were considered critical for credibility, building a reputation and opening up opportunities for the future, as well as learning how to run a business. Graduates suggested taking every opportunity to discuss creative work, develop and learn personal, professional and business skills – and continue to do so after graduation and into careers. They advised students to think about how to get work early on alongside study and to plan for this financially (How will you manage it?) – through placement opportunities, internships, summer jobs and learning from all jobs.

'Work experience is a must, pursue it. Don't think you know everything. And make sure that your portfolio shows your workings as well, finished pieces are all well and good but prospective employers like to see where the ideas came from.'

Creative practice is a way of life

The majority of graduates had continued with their personal creative practice after graduation whether in work or in their own time. Respondents advised that creative practice should be current and ongoing and linked to longer term career aspirations – building a portfolio with an eye to the future, transforming it into a professional portfolio and maintaining it into your career, whatever work you are in. It should not just have your projects and coursework but reflect ongoing work and continued development.

'Just be prepared to have a lot of knockbacks when first looking for work. I would also say if they are employed outside the industry to keep their hand in by taking on free/volunteer jobs or commissions to build up a portfolio of work that has been generated outside education. I would also stress that free rein to be creative in a brief is very rare and when jobs like that do pop up to really relish them.'

*'90% of students on my degree were ***** lazy! Art and design isn't a degree or a lifestyle, it's a compulsion, I had no choice but to do art. Just work your ***** off and talk to as many people as possible about your work, the more people that know the better.'*

Lifestyle and values

Keeping focussed was tempered with realism. Considering what is important and not losing sight of it and taking some time to think through and test out what you want were felt to be fundamental, and as was being honest with employers about what you can do.

'Get out and meet people early on as it will help you figure out what you want. Be honest in interviews as the right people will respect you for it and if you are not right for the job, they will be more inclined to help you out than if you tell them what you think they want to hear. It's really up to you to produce and make decisions about what you think matters. Nobody else can do your work.'

'Choose an area you love, and tailor work specifically to the area of design you are passionate about. Do as much work experience as possible, and start building up industry contacts. Really research the range of companies that are out there; I studied as a print designer and have ended up as a designer/creative working in motion graphic and advertising. I didn't even realise as a designer I could work in this field - but it suits my style perfectly. Try and be as pro-active about learning technical and computer programs whilst at uni. I didn't learn many technical skills but they are really important once you get into the real world. And make the most of all the facilities you have at your disposal whilst at uni - you will rarely have the opportunity to have so many tools and facilities once you leave!'

Some compromise was expected and inevitable, balanced with having sufficient income to live:

'Making good art work rarely results in a well-paid job. If that's what you want you should do something else. Likewise if you're prepared to compromise, then you're not really an artist.'

Career and job seeking strategies

Flexibility in thinking and working – being open to advice, being prepared to be a portfolio worker – juggling a range of activities – working freelance, undertaking unpaid work to get experience or a foot in the door, relocating to where work is, being patient and persistent and recognising that it takes time to achieve goals were important strategies. For some graduates, working freelance was seen as the most realistic option in the current climate, but, as discussed elsewhere, they were often ill-equipped to get started.

'My suggestions to current students would be to volunteer for a while, to get your foot in the door. Organise projects with your peers, this helps with confidence and allows more interesting/bigger projects to happen, it also attracts more financial support, rather than seeking funding as an individual.'

'A few words of advice, keep it real, don't price yourself out of the market and do the leg work, visit galleries send out imagery and keep your chin up. If all else fails try again!!!'

'There just isn't room for complacency any more. If you really know what it is you want to do - focus on being the best at it, and cover yourself with some peripheral skills ... If you don't, focus on a few things. Make as many contacts in industry as soon as you can. Do work placements before you leave university. Experience and recommendations are what get you the job: Lack of it will lose you the job.'

'Don't think that all of the best jobs are in London. There are lots of great agencies outside of London, and in the recession it's great if you have a bit more money to save (or use to pay off student debts). Keep in touch with your lecturers too as they have so many contacts and can often help!'

Managing debt was a recurring issue, coupled with the likelihood graduates would experience low pay.

'Don't get into too much debt as this plays a constant role in future life. Peers have left uni with huge credit card bills in addition to student loans and this has seriously impacted on their lives when it comes to making repayments.'

SAVE!!! Save money and don't get loans and credit cards. I wish someone had told me that if I didn't have debt I would be free to pursue my career goals and do whatever I want. I still feel very trapped and anxious about my money situation and even after 6 years in the working world, I'm still not even close to paying it off.'

5.3 How can HE improve how they prepare students for their working lives?

Respondents contributed many suggestions as to how HE could improve its courses to help graduates prepare for career entry and to optimise their chances in difficult economic times. These tended to echo the career facilitators discussed earlier.

There was an assumption that most students intend to follow on into creative work from their courses, and staff should provide encouragement, support and focus on connecting students with the real world, particularly through finding placements. Also that early on in their studies staff should also communicate to students the realities of what their careers would be like: i.e. that they are likely to engage in creative work, work freelance and have portfolio careers.

Graduates felt HEI provision should begin on courses, help prepare for the transition and also follow on into the workplace, providing:

- business and enterprise skills and the basics of working freelance and engaging with contract working
- work placements and industrial experience, real world learning through interactions with industry partners and employers in live projects and competitions
- a good grounding in technical skills and knowledge specific to their discipline
- active help in finding work - knowing where to look for jobs/work and building a strong network of contacts
- regular opportunities to present their work and promote themselves.

The need for paid apprenticeships and internships shortly after graduation to kick-start careers was frequently mentioned.

'Ensure that students are taking part in 'learning on the job'. Actually doing some work experience or shadowing someone who is working in their field I found to be very beneficial and builds confidence and prepares for when graduating and finding a job.'

'I think more work experience placements would be very helpful. I undertook a one month placement as part of my degree programme however this was optional and I think more or longer placements would allow students to form contacts within industry and so find it easier to find work once graduated.'

'Teach them skills etc but also teach them about the real world and not just through visiting lecturers. Encourage them to go to shows and scope them out so they are ready to apply when they leave. Have possible apprenticeships available. Equip students with lifelong skills and the knowledge of their chosen specialism as well as subject knowledge so they do not sink when they leave and embark on real work!'

6 Future Plans and Professional Development

This chapter explores graduates aspirations for the future and their perceived professional development needs.

6.1 Future plans

Graduates were asked about their future plans over the next five to ten year period, and their responses indicated a continuing progression in the same careers, which, if achievable will continue to build capacity and improve stability in the creative industries sector. Aspirations involved the need to improve income levels, gain experience, a wish to take on more responsibility and have more of a say in the direction and outcomes of creative projects. Financial success and recognition of themselves and their work as professional artists/designers by peers and people who matter in the sector, and being able to sustain a living from creative practice were ultimate goals. (See also 4.6 Defining and achieving success).

The most frequently mentioned future aspirations were teaching, self-employment, achieving sustainability in practice and taking time out to do an MA. Freelance work and starting a business for many was a natural progression from employment and portfolio careers. Working from home in the future was felt to be a pragmatic solution to combining a family with continuing to work.

'I have always wanted to pursue my own business. Even while I am working with this company. This new little venture I'm starting off will go somewhere. If it doesn't work, definitely evolve it into something else which will be along similar lines. We're going about it very carefully. We will certainly not bring in more than we can afford to lose. Ultimately, I suppose, having my own company, be it either a studio or agency, or a clothes company, that's where I see myself in the future.'

'Having recently completed an MA at the Royal College, I'd like to think that I'm certainly quite happy in the east end of London with a studio that's just about affordable. I'd like to continue that. A combination of a link with an institution, the odd couple of days' teaching, or some kind of mix of academia and predominantly my work would be ideal. Obviously, I'd like to push my work a lot more. I had a five-year plan after graduating from the Royal College. There's a myth that no-one gets anywhere for at least five years, and I've just realised that my five years is nearly up. I've got to get on with stuff, but I suppose just push my work more. It's taken me nearly five years to actually financially not have to totally stress about when the next rent cheque is going to go, so that should open up the next few years. Certainly the exhibitions that I've been in the last year have been much

higher profile, so I'm hoping this is the building blocks to make more, to actually do my work I suppose.'

Variety and change were also welcomed:

'I don't really have a plan or anything. I think I'm enjoying what I'm doing at the moment. In the future I definitely want to travel more so I'd quite like to maybe go and work in another city or spend time in another country. I don't want to work for any big corporate company. I think I'd quite like to work in a studio again with a group of people because it does get a bit lonely working on your own - apart from a bit of teaching in an art college or something.'

Those who were self-employed or working freelance, in particular, sought the company of others to combat isolation by finding a studio with others, or going into teaching and combining this with solo practice.

6.2 Continuing professional development

Graduates were asked about their professional development needs over the next twelve months, and beyond. In the main, they wanted to continue to enhance their creative practice and career prospects, access training to help with current roles, gain promotion, develop their businesses or prepare for future roles, and to keep up with technology. They were keen to address perceived weaknesses or skills gaps. Areas of interest included new digital technologies, business skills (leadership, management, branding/e-marketing, presentation skills), additional creative and technical skills/processes, and professional training that would enhance their standing (generally outside of creative roles).

Graduates were also interested in academic study to gain further qualifications, possibly a PhD in the future, but Masters were much more common. They wanted academic study to further their career, provide time out to reflect on their practice and move it on, improve their knowledge and allow them to specialise, break into new fields or gain credibility to access further funding.

The main inhibitors to study were financial and uncertainty in the job market, together with other commitments (eg family). Other financial requirements mentioned included funding for marketing, to expand client base, exhibit their work and gain new studio space.

They would also like to enhance their current practice and explore new areas of application for their disciplines, indicating that they were keen to move with the times and trends; but with a strong emphasis on valuing the hand-made and the expertise they had developed over time:

'Possibly look into getting a few qualifications with diamond grading because that's massively important and so many people ask for diamonds. Being able to work from home - there's a software design programme that I think would be really important for me to learn for the future, because I think the jewellery trade is going to change a lot. When people think they can walk into a jewellers like they can IKEA and buy something, whereas with us it's quite difficult because we always have to make it. But I think that if I learn that it's something that I could sit in there and design something for them in 20 minutes, and it actually renders the design that you've done into a photo, I think that would be more acceptable to people in this day and age.'

Learning something and becoming really fluent so I could possibly work from home and go freelance. But have the option to back myself up (with present work) and maybe look into teaching because I think it's important for future generations to learn the technical, traditional parts of jewellery and I just don't see that at the moment as the thing that's being taught in universities and colleges.'

Graduates did not comment on who should provide training (though this tended not to be HE) and it may be assumed that present patterns of self-initiated development, learning on the job, taking unpaid experience and short courses would continue.

'Free short seminars/private tutorials, I recently had a free session with Ecce tutor (name) which was excellent, but I am also aware of the fact that after the first 3 sessions the tutorials will have to be paid for. Also, I took part to a seminar given by Fashion Diversity at the Museum of London and found that extremely encouraging and useful.'

Graduates are clearly continuing to be lifelong learners and are prepared to invest in their own development. At the time of the main CGCF survey, 38 per cent were engaged in further study, or some form of CPD, often combined with paid work. Making full use of and improving knowledge and skills continue to be the most important factors in career decision-making.

7 Career Stories

The thirteen career stories in this Chapter are drawn from edited verbatim transcripts of in-depth interviews with respondents. They are representative of subject discipline and type of work and offer rich insights into how graduates' creative careers evolved, in their own words, and explore the relationship of subject of study to working life. An additional nine career stories appear in *Crafting Futures*, a parallel study of crafts specific subjects, undertaken by the research team and commissioned by the Crafts Council as part of the CGCF project in 2009-10.

Career stories are grouped in three categories: employment, self-employment and freelance careers, and portfolio careers.

7.1 Employment

1. Director of photography

'When I'm describing myself the phrase that I use at the moment is 'I'm making a documentary with a friend' and sometimes I just call myself a film maker. It feels like it's not really a job - it's something that you are.'

I wasn't sure if I wanted to go to university but my dad gently cajoled me into it and said, your career's going to be all over the place, you should really get a degree. I applied to what I thought were the four top courses, and chose the one that seemed most practical, down to earth. I nearly left at the end of the first year because I was disheartened with how messy everything was and I didn't think the students were hard working – I wondered if I was wasting my time. The second and third year I learned how to use the system to get what I wanted. And I got much closer to my student colleagues, so the main thing I got out of it was working relationships with people around me.

Also before I went to university I didn't think I was strong academically, but I did really well with the academic side and my dissertation, which really gave me a lot of confidence – it felt like a real bonus. Art school is tough because you have to discover yourself, and if you don't you're not very successful. You can't really hide away, you've got to socialise all the time and expose yourself quite a lot. Before I went to university I was quite introvert so I found this hard but really beneficial.

In film school you make a film – which is much more difficult than you realise – and then you stick it on a big screen and there's the rest of the year group – maybe 60 people – watching it. Then you have to stand at the front and defend it and talk about it. When you know that it succeeded and that's a bit of a high. You also get a high seeing other peoples' work really succeed, as well. The thing I found most rewarding was my dissertation because I was really apprehensive about it. I went into a subject area I knew nothing about – it wasn't directly to do with film – and it worked really well. I got a lot of credit for trying something difficult. I got a First Class degree. The other tangible thing from university is about six fellow students that do a similar job to me. We still work together and help each other; it's almost like a little community.

I felt the university did a bolt-on business thing on the end of the third year because they'd been pushed or thought they ought to. What would have been really useful would have been to learn about tax and how to be business-like with people. At university I did various bits of work experience, and that's a really good idea. I did it in several places, some through people I knew before university when I was a camera assistant. Also, for sponsorship, the university invited us to get in touch with companies, but didn't hand it to us on a plate, which I thought was a good approach.

After university I knew I was going to give it a really good go with the film industry, and knew that would most likely be in camera and lighting. It's really hard to get in – after a while I claimed benefit and the employment place didn't know what was going on, so I just ended up being dirt poor.

The head of a lighting company I got to know through university sent me a few things, or recommended me for a few shoots and things. And through a family friend and people I knew from before university I was able to get bits of work and just try to make the most of it. The degree wasn't really useful in getting work – the thing is, to make films you don't need to go to university. You could go to university and study philosophy, photography, or painting and that might make you a more successful film maker in the long run than just learning the mechanics of film making.

Six months after graduating I got a job as a camera trainee making commercials. It gave me a lift; I thought, God this is really good, they've got proper, grown up cameras – I've made it. Since then I've probably done about 300 jobs in one form or another; it evolves constantly. Three or four years ago I made the move and called myself director of photography. I could have earned a lot more money as a camera assistant but I was deliberately trying to jump around on different things. And accidentally I became a teacher; I'm not qualified, but I do a bit of teaching every now and then.

One thing that helped me is planning my own learning; things like befriending very experienced people in my own field. For example, a friend was working on an underwater film and he got me a job on the production and I learnt about filming underwater. So it was all completely self-driven and not formal. Sometimes I look for courses but I can never find what I'm looking for – as an example, if I had a really fundamental understanding of how computers work it would be a good foundation to understand other things. I've just recently applied for the first time for an Arts Council grant to do a project with somebody. I've shot

quite a few films that in some way had been funded by arts schemes and grants, but I wasn't the person that applied for the money.

I feel that success is surviving and having become what I am. Sticking at it and actually having the job title and doing it and making a living at it is success. There have been a few moments when I've gone – that's great, or, wicked, or, I've just got a great little job – a little golden moment, little memorable events that I've gone through. I'm starting now to relax a bit and turn down jobs that I don't want to do, and start to be able to plan to do other things in my life, not just try and make money and make films. The benefits of being self-employed are I am my own boss, I take the jobs I want to take and I have a lie in if I want to and I have a holiday if I want to. And if I don't like somebody I don't work with them again, I follow my own path and my own ideas. But the reality of that is that it's really hard – I've got to make a living, so if I get offered a job I better take it.

When I'm describing myself the phrase that I use at the moment is 'I'm making a documentary with a friend', and sometimes I just call myself a film maker. It feels like it's not really a job – it's something that you are.

BA Film and Video production, Male

2. Graphic designer in branding agency

'Having been able to work in small, medium and large companies has helped me define the type of company I like - that's why I'm now at a large branding agency. I like being part of a team; I like being part of a company and I like to share the worries a company has and its progression.'

I chose my bachelor's course because it was a three year degree, and I thought that would be better after my year of foundation studies. You could major in graphic design, as I did, but you could also work with the illustration course, a video course or a photography course. I thought those four fields would give me a larger scope of visual communication. I really enjoyed the dissertation a lot. Now I'm working in branding, and I really admire the tutors we had for theory and conceptual work for the insight they've given me in my profession today. There was also the opportunity to go abroad on an Erasmus exchange, and it was a very interesting and enriching experience to be in Barcelona for seven months. In addition I developed a very good network at college – with Scandinavians, Japanese, Europeans, and a lot of English students.

I found summer work placements through networking, through friends and people I know and just keeping an eye open for anything out there. The first summer I worked for three months, and between the second and third year I got a placement for five months with an international advertisement agency out of Brazil. That helped me a lot – especially having some work to show when applying for jobs at a later stage. My plan was to work immediately when I finished, so I started applying for work in April of the third year. I tried to find positions in London, and then decided look in Portugal because I thought it would be interesting to work there to begin with. During the Easter holidays I was in Portugal, so I

went for interviews and started networking – that’s how I got the job. In continental Europe, having studied in the UK gives you a bit of an advantage. So that worked out well – I met my objective of working immediately – I think I started work five days after finishing college.

My first job was for an Iberian advertisement agency. They weren’t very big at the time. They made a trainee scheme for me where I would be in strategy and then advertisement and then design. After two weeks in strategy I quickly moved into design, and was there for three years.

In my second year at that job, it became quite clear to me that I wanted to move to a different type of market, ideally to the UK or to the United States. However, I felt that my portfolio, in terms of graphic design, was not ideal to get into those more mature and sophisticated markets. So I looked at emerging markets. At that time Dubai was a very strong English language emerging market – and all the multinationals were present. I went to Dubai on holiday for four days – I didn’t know anyone at all, emailed all the companies I could think of but had no responses – so I just went there, knocked on doors and was hired. It took about three months to get a valid visa to work in the UAE.

I worked for two companies in Dubai, both for short periods. The first project I worked on was moved out to a local agency – but I wanted to work in a multinational. So, I followed through the first two projects I had committed to for two and a half months, and then I left and worked for a branding agency, where I work now in London. I was with them in Dubai for eight months.

I left Dubai to deal with some family issues, so for 15 months I worked at a small Spanish branding agency with a lot of work in Spain, Portugal and Africa. I thought they were an attractive opportunity for me to do identity work and develop the experience I got from working in Portugal and Dubai.

Once I had dealt with my family issues in Portugal I decided it was time to try my luck in the UK. I went for various interviews here through agents and through my own network. I still had an emotional attachment with the branding agency I had worked for in Dubai – and I ended up coming back to them in London. Now I have been here for two years and two months.

My company knows that part of my short to mid term plan is to do a masters in business studies. Since university I’ve done some short courses and workshops – but nothing formal. I feel I need a Master’s to progress my career. As you progress in design you start managing projects, time, people – but without any formal tools. I feel that I could do it much better with the tools – which would be good for my career in the long-term.

I feel good about my progress in the sense that I’ve been working all seven years full time. I was already in a senior position when I moved from Dubai, and it was good to get recognition in London in this field. It’s one of the two best places to work in my field between the US and the UK. So it has been a good journey and it has been faster than a lot of people’s.

To have a place in this field you need to network a lot and you need to really badger people to get in the door, and you need to be passionate and work really hard. I think you have to be always on the move. Unfortunately people don’t stay for long periods in the same place,

unless they are already in management roles. People have to be willing to move companies, to be out of their comfort zone a lot. They have to be willing sometimes to move countries as well. I think that is a privilege that I was born and raised in so many different places. That has helped me a lot, especially to adapt culturally and to develop people skills on my own.

In the past I have done freelance work in my field whilst working full time. It's very time consuming and difficult, because you have to be very clear about what you are doing, in terms of dedication, and if you are compromising your time you are not being fair on either party. Having been able to work in small, medium and large companies has helped me define the type of company I like – that's why I'm now at a large branding agency. I like being part of a team; I like being part of a company and I like to share the worries a company has and its progression.

I think my career has been successful because I've been really determined – when I decided to go to Dubai I did and I got a job, and when I decided to come to London I did and I got a job.

In the future I see myself in America, because that is where I grew up. America is a big country with a lot of opportunities, and a strong link with South America. I do believe what every magazine says about the coming BRIC [Brazil, Russia, India, China] growth. That means Brazil for me – I speak Portuguese.

BA Visual Communication / Graphic Design, male

3. Employed as jewellery designer/maker

'I was designing cufflinks, but that was absolutely brilliant for me because I learnt how to budget mass produced things for them to be sellable in the UK. I didn't like it but it did me the world of good because I was chasing suppliers, sorting out orders - it gave me another aspect to the jewellery industry.'

When I was 14 I did work experience in a jeweller's place, and then they offered me a Saturday job. I did a degree just down the road from where I grew up and lived. I wanted to do a degree because with a trade like jewellery big companies are having their materials made by factories, so it's a dying trade, and I thought if I go to university then I've got a back up possibility of becoming a teacher one day.

The course did me a lot of good – lots of different skills to learn – from blacksmithing through to designing things on paper, so it was really broad and widespread. It opened my eyes to different avenues within the trade and made me realise that I definitely wanted to be a jeweller, design my own pieces and take them through to the final manufacturing processes. At university we used to have to do a lot of stand up presentations and I remember thinking why do I need to know these sorts of things? But it's quite nerve wracking standing in front of a shop full of customers – they're all listening because it's a quiet environment. So in that respect it definitely builds up your confidence talking in front of people.

Now I'm working in a small shop and 80 per cent of our sales are commissions so I use the design approach I learnt at university every day. When I first left university I think one of the main things for me was leaving the jeweller's place where I'd worked since I was 14. I thought if I don't leave here I'm just going to get stuck in a rut.

I found work trawling through web searches, newspaper creative job sections, and agencies. After about six months I found a job in London through a specialised jewellery recruitment agency. I was designing cufflinks, but that was absolutely brilliant for me because I learnt how to budget mass produced things for them to be sellable in the UK. I didn't like it but it did me the world of good because I was chasing suppliers, sorting out orders – it gave me another aspect to the jewellery industry and it taught me that I didn't want to work on a computer! I worked at the first job for about six months.

I heard about my second job through a friend at the jeweller's place I'd worked from 14 to 20. It was as a production jeweller, and that was good because that was a completely different end of the scale again. I was manufacturing a minimum of 50 pieces of jewellery every day – really fast paced work – for branches all over the country and concessions within shops.

I worked there for a year and a half or two years. I loved the atmosphere and I loved the people I worked with, but I couldn't take the commuting any more. It was two and a half hours there and two and a half hours back every day. I started sending my CV out to companies around here and got offered a job a lot closer to home, just through CV dropping.

I'm still working on that job. There's only the two of us, so the job is vast and wide ranging – a bit of everything, which is good because it keeps me quiet. It's largely my own designs that we produce for customers, and the vast majority of our work is commission based. I could also be doing something as mundane as painting the shop, and I cover everything from serving customers, through to answering questions on the phone. Quite a few times now my boss has gone away, so I do everything from opening the shop, to locking up, and doing the finances.

I've not needed any other training courses – because I'm working so close to my boss I'm learning everything I need for if I want to have my own business. She goes through everything with me. I'd say my career's progressed really well, possibly not as quickly as I'd like to have, but I've done what I needed to do. One of the reasons that I like this job is that I don't think I'll ever stop learning – it's so broad and widespread with all these things you're learning from each other.

I am able to be creative, though working for someone else sometimes there's a bit of give and take. Since I do the initial designs, if the design is agreed I can make it how I want. You create things through looking at things and turning things over and pulling things apart. It's really rewarding when people trust you to do specific designs and jobs for them. Now friends that I grew up with are asking me to make their wedding jewellery: rings, necklaces that they'll wear on the day and things like that.

For the future I'm thinking of getting a few qualifications with diamond grading – that's massively important. Also it's really important for me to learn a CAD design system because I think the jewellery trade is going to change a lot – people think they can walk into a jeweller's

like they can IKEA and buy something, whereas we always have to design it. If I learn a CAD system I could design something in 20 minutes, and render the design into a photograph; I think that would be more acceptable to people in this day and age. It would give me the option to work from home and possibly go freelance.

Also for the future I may look into teaching because I think it's important for future generations to learn the traditional technical parts of jewellery making, and I just don't see that as the thing that's being taught in universities and colleges at the moment. I find that really sad.

BA 3D Design in Metals, Female

4. Customer service adviser in local authority and creative practice

'I'm badgering to do more things and move up. It's been quite good from the point of view that I can get involved where creative stuff is concerned. I've got into the training side of things. Also they want to set up better structure, and I'm hoping that they'll let me be the person that does that. I can see this job turning into something quite good.'

I did an Art foundation course and then went on to a 3D design course. I did the foundation basically because I didn't have the grades or the confidence to go straight to a degree. I floated through the foundation course; it funnelled you to do the bits you wanted. 3D was something I could visualise myself getting more involved with in a career at that point. What I loved most about the 3D Design course were the practical side and the diversity. It's just immense. I got into lighting during that course – that's what I had such a passion for.

University didn't do any work experience or placements. When I was in the second year, the year above us had a lot of professionals come in and speak to them. We were let down, just one girl came in that had not very much experience. That's where I needed more help; how you go on to earn money on your own to survive.

My degree turned me into a far more confident person generally – talking about how great your work is and believing in it. To this day I can speak up when I want and need to – that's definitely helped me with all the things I've done. Basically I wanted to start my own business, doing lighting design. That's still what I want to do eventually. I had visions of going and working for somebody, for a shop or something in that field. I was very keen about one possible job, and then I got a phone call and went for another interview at a shop which was very similar. But then I thought I'm just doing it because I should do it, rather than thinking oh yes, that's what I want to do. Possibly I'm too stubborn for my own good – I'm into very natural materials so using wood and glass suited my way of working – but just designing plastic lumps that looked a bit funky and retro wasn't my idea of design. I just wasn't enthusiastic about it. Also when it came to it, it was not earning particularly good money.

So when I was at a point without a job, panic struck. I ended up getting a job in a call centre, and it's really good money. I found I was fairly good at it and progressed upwards and made brilliant friends, but then after 18 months I got made redundant so that stopped

abruptly. I got another job quite quickly at a bank's call centre – which was just a job to go to, just earning money really.

After the bank call centre I got a job at another bank as a prospect coordinator. I quickly got into that role and then took on a managerial role. I really enjoyed the management bit, but the money was just a pittance for what was an incredibly stressful job. So after 18 months I applied for my current local government job. My current job title's customer service advisor and it's a very diverse job including bits with the Art Council. I'm badgering to do more things and move up. It's been quite good from the point of view that I can get involved where creative stuff is concerned. I've got into the training side of things. Also they want to set up better structure, and I'm hoping that they'll let me be the person that does that. I can see this job turning into something quite good.

I've not done any further learning or training since university, none at all. I've looked into it because I just think even if it's not something I use for a while it would be very worthwhile for me to improve on and put on my CV. Interior design is something I can see myself doing.

All the time I was working I intended to get back into design work, and it was brilliant when I was living in a town with creativity around you all the time and being able to go into people's workshops. I made a few pieces and mainly for friends and took photos of them, started a good little portfolio but that very quickly just ... it went out after about six months, a year. I put it on the back burner and said maybe later on in life I'll be able to pick up again. I just try and be creative in other ways.

Now it's mainly paintings and photography – I just got my brand new digital SLR camera which I'm very excited about. I'm doing water colours for my friend who's getting married. Even if it's unpaid, it's still incredibly satisfying. I'd love to be self-employed and my partner's the same. We have dreams of ultimately our own little business and he's very practical and hard working. My successes are the fact that I always try and do well at whatever I do. In terms of my degree, I wouldn't change what I did.

Basically my plans for the future at the moment it's just when the money is available then I will do other things. I will look at doing a few courses and things. I'm just going to let life tick along. Unfortunately my body clock is ticking faster than anything else so the need for children is taking over, which is a bit of a shock so I think once that's out the way, then I will look at doing other things.

In ten years' time, I see myself probably looking after a couple of kids and I'll probably be in the same job. I can't see myself being in a different job because it's very secure and safe financially. Also looking into another course and starting something definitely. I think that at least if I'm getting there I'll be happy.

BA 3D Design, Female

7.2 Self-employed and freelance careers

5. Self-employed textile designer / maker / craftsperson

'So my textile career really started about four years after graduating. I started making little things, like handbags, and then I went to a business link course - a free course about how to do the business side of things, and I learnt more about how to approach the galleries and people, and then it started coming together.'

I came to England to get married. I hadn't got a job so I started doing A-levels. My art tutor saw something in me, and suggested the college as the place to do textiles. I really didn't look around, I didn't know much, I was quite naïve really. I did a three year BA in textile design and in the third year I specialised in knit. It was great; you're given these projects which explore everything – there's no limit – so I really enjoyed every project we were given, and had a good go at all the main ways of creating textiles.

Also I liked working independently very much. Although they wanted us to be at college most of the time, they didn't mind – as long as you produced an end product. For work experience I worked for a trend prediction lady, who had clients like French Connection. She did predictions for two or three seasons ahead – things like choosing and naming colours. I was lucky – not many students were given that kind of chance.

At my degree show I was asked can you make me 100 of these scarves by the end of this month? And, I didn't know, so I said, I'm not sure. I didn't know what I was selling – I went to see some people, I didn't present myself very well, so they didn't know why I came over and I didn't know why I went to them. Also I did a New Designers interview, but got nothing. It was typical of somebody who doesn't know anything about the world. Nobody at college told me, actually you can make different things and you can become a designer maker, or you could do this or that.

When I first left university I wrote a lot of letters, asking for some kind of experience in a job: I just went through lists of people from the library and the Crafts Council, and I hardly got any replies. And when some people asked to have a look at my work I didn't have anything to show them. That was the most difficult bit. I graduated in thinking a job would follow, but nothing came. We weren't told how to approach industry, art galleries or anything like that, so I actually gave up almost straight away.

I started working at a travel agent, and then got pregnant, which was bad timing. Having children and raising a family is very important for me and, unless you have lots of support, it's impossible to work. Then while I was raising children, I thought, okay, I'm going to give this another try. So my textile career really started about four years after graduating. I started making little things, like handbags, and then I went to a business link course – a free course about how to do the business side of things, and I learnt more about how to approach the galleries and people, and then it started coming together. I'm a member of a couple of arts organisations which send information about what's happening, so this gives me the chance to exhibit. It's quite important for me, to be a member of some kind of association.

I'm trying to go upmarket. I ended up making my textile work for not much financial return, and work that financially just doesn't fulfil, and also I do want some income now. I should be

paid for what I do, rather than doing it like a favour. Also I'm trying to do more contemporary work – but that's a bigger struggle – I have to produce products which are sellable.

Even now I'm not very confident. I'm genuinely surprised if somebody says, oh, that's very good ... although I did get a first. Looking at my career progress I think in the end, it is quite a long journey to get to here, but I don't think I could have done it any other way. It was definitely a learning process, so I think I'm getting there slowly, and I started to believe that perhaps if I play it right, I will get there, and so yes, very slowly but I think I am making progress, bit by bit.

Being creative is important – but creative doesn't necessarily mean artistic or anything like that. I think creative is a way of looking at things in a different way, so even if you are a mathematician, you have to be creative. It's nothing to do with art it's a way of perceiving the world, the way you live. Being self-employed means you don't have a regular income, but it's good with regards to my children – I can be there for them. That flexibility is very good for me.

Working on several projects at the same time is quite stressful, but the projects influence each other, so it's good for progressing the work. I am not sure what success is, to be honest. I wouldn't call myself successful at the moment, because my financial world is so minimal ... if success means that you have enough money, I'm a complete failure. If success means the way you go through your life, then I am managing it, so I'm successful at the moment.

Looking to the future, I would like to have more financial return, and I would like to have a holiday ... some time when I don't work would be nice. I might do short courses or workshops on dressmaking techniques, or the ecological side of things – because I use a lot of recycled materials. I want to carry on working in the same way and also I would like to do more community work – art therapy and things like that. I don't think I'd be good at anything else, and also I'm getting too old to be trained for something else, so you might as well use what you've got already.

BA Textile Design, Female

6. Freelance motion design director

'They keep me on a rolling contract. This job is quite rich because it involves a lot of visual effects stuff and design as well. Sometimes the jobs are so big I can't really do them all by myself so I get other people in to help and I oversee what they're doing.'

At university I did graphic design. Only a few places did the type of graphic design that I wanted: motion graphic, moving image. You had to do a lot of self-initiated work from home on your own computers. We taught ourselves a lot of the software and technical side of things, but the design methodology side was taken care of really well by the university in lectures and seminars. The process of going to university was really beneficial, but I think it was mainly down to self-initiated stuff.

I've taken into professional life the methodology of how you design things: creating the concept, going through storyboarding and then gradually building up the project. In the workplace, because of deadlines, people would push you to forget about process, but I've

found myself going back through the process to come up with something that's really well designed and well executed.

At university we had quite a few people come in from different design agencies mainly local companies that worked in moving image, and the BBC. It was really useful that we learnt about outside working practices. Through this I made contacts and I sent them my work and built a bit of a relationship. I ended up getting a work placement with one of them straight after university.

I didn't do any work experience while I was at university. I didn't have time to fit it in with all the other work as well. During the summer I was just too focussed on the syllabus and getting projects together for the degree. Entrepreneurship to me means starting up on your own. Becoming a freelancer straight out of university would be really difficult – you need to work with people for a number of years to get an idea of how the industry works. It'd be difficult for universities to teach how it works in the real world, because it is driven by money and budgets. I changed during my time at university, growing up, really. I made good friends that I'm still in contact with, that I've worked with professionally. And I had an amazing time. It helped me find focus and a niche – it definitely helped directly in where I wanted to go in my career. I got a funded placement straight after university. The placement company weren't paying me to be there so I could oversee other people and do my own work as well without all the pressure of having to churn out really good quality stuff straightaway.

Learning alongside the professionals was good. It gave me some pieces of work to put on my show reel, so I had a better show reel as a result. And I got a few more contacts through working there, so found my first job quite quickly after the placement. To find my first job I sent my CV and show reel to a load of companies and followed it up on the phone. In the motion graphics world interviews are quite informal. The degree qualification is really important, unless you have an amazing show reel – and I just don't think that would be possible without doing a design course of some sort.

In my first job I worked for a small company doing big jobs for BBC – a lot of visual effects stuff. I think I was the fourth person to join. We all worked really closely so it was a really good learning curve. It was a good first job, about six months after I graduated. Next I wanted to move to London, so I got a motion graphic designer job through another contact. This new company was really deadline-driven; you had to work fast and develop things really quickly, come up with storyboards and create entire acts within a few days – so that was another learning curve, more intense and I definitely learned a lot from it.

I worked there for a couple of years and then I went travelling around the world for a year. I worked freelance for a bit in Australia and that was good, so when I came back I went freelance and the company that I had left to go travelling took me on as a freelancer and I could charge a lot more. After a bit, I got picked up by the company that I've been working at for the last couple of years through friends and contacts. They keep me on a rolling contract. This job is quite rich because it involves a lot of visual effects stuff and design as well. Sometimes the jobs are so big I can't really do them all by myself so I get other people in to help and I oversee what they're doing.

I'm still in contact with one of the guys that I lived with at university; he did some work on a commercial I was directing and he helps me out every now and again. There are a few others I know from university; they're good contacts to have, and if I needed to do some work I'd go to those guys first. Everyone still seems to be doing all right, from what I know in my group of friends. When I graduated I was given some training in 3D animation, which came out of the blue as part of the work placement. In my first job I had a few courses to learn different software. Since then training is self-initiated, where I download stuff off the Internet.

In terms of successes, I've done some good things recently; commercials where I was directing live action and then overseeing people in post-production. I see it going in the same direction and working on bigger jobs. I have thought about starting up my own company, but I'm quite happy at the moment so I don't think I'm going to stress myself out too much with that sort of thing. Sometimes I've combined jobs. It was an absolute nightmare; it was really not worthwhile because I stayed up 'til four in the morning, just finishing one job and then starting on the next one.

Being self-employed gives more flexibility – I can work how I want, and I can turn down jobs that I don't particularly want to work on. Also you can set your own salary. At first I set my salary from what other people were charging, then driven by the demand I ended up raising my rate quite a lot. My current role could be labelled Digital Composer, Merchant Graphic Designer and Director. Or you could just call it a Motion Design Director, which encompasses all those things. In ten years time I'd like to be directing bigger things and having a team working under me. I'd still like to be doing the same sort of thing and moving forwards.

BA Graphic Design, Male

7. Freelance graphic designer

'I enjoy being freelance. I was a bit sceptical at first, because of not having the stability of a regular income and knowing definitely how much you're getting every month. But you can try different companies without committing to them, and meet people.'

I chose my university because it had a history of getting good results in graphic design. I liked the course because it wasn't specifically pushing you in any direction – after each year you got to choose what you wanted to specialize in: illustration, multimedia, print design – there was quite a variety of choice. It was a good insight into what actually happens in the real world – they give you a brief to work to and you've got to think about all the different elements. It is different in the real world, for one thing you've got a lot less time – but that was where I started learning the basics. It's all relevant. I learned about for example typography, layout skills and all that – it's just a case of developing it as and when you go for your jobs. The course brought in ex-graduates who gave us a talk of where they were at, which was quite helpful, because some of them had set up their own business.

In the second year, for work experience we had to get in touch with different agencies and see if they would take us on. I contacted an agency where I'd already met the guy – earlier

he'd come into the university to give us all a project to work on. The work experience was useful – definitely worthwhile – but I wasn't paid any sort of wage, just travelling costs.

When I first graduated it was a lot harder to find a job than I had thought it was going to be. I applied for junior positions – there was no point in me applying for ones that said two years' experience, because I just didn't have it. Mainly I looked in Design Week, and Creative Review – they used to have a lot of jobs in there, but these days a lot are advertised online. I didn't go through any recruitment agents because they wanted experience and a massive portfolio, and at the time I only had my university portfolio.

It took at least six months to get my first real job. While looking for that job I was living back at my mum's and so I didn't have to pay rent. I managed to do a little bit of freelance work which paid a little bit, but I didn't get any follow on work out from that.

My first proper job was as a junior designer. I didn't know anyone in that part of the country and I moved there because that was where the job was. I was happy there – they didn't make me feel like I was a junior or anything – they really included me in the main roles that the seniors were working on. But unfortunately after 18 months they made me redundant because they just didn't have the work, which was a bit of a blow. For about four months they kept me on a month-by-month arrangement until I found my next job.

I ended up in a job in another town. I wasn't particularly worried, I just felt that I'd start a new life wherever – it didn't bother me that I couldn't stay in that area or go back home. It worked out really well. I was there for four years in the end. I developed more as a designer, and quicker, because they were giving me more work to do. They put a bit of pressure on me, but I was doing more than they were expecting, and probably more than I'd thought I'd be doing. After about three and a half years I thought I need to start thinking about something else. They say you should move round a little bit more and I was conscious of having been there for a long time. I started getting a portfolio ready, and looking for other work, and I applied for the odd job here and there. I was actually looking to move to London. But then at the same time I was looking at other opportunities – and I started looking at other countries as well. I applied for a job at a branding company in Dubai and got as far as the second interview round. I decided if I don't get this job in Dubai, I'm going to leave the UK and go travelling for a bit, and that's what I did for a year.

As soon as I landed back in the UK I got an email from a friend of mine – she's also a designer – saying that they were looking for freelancers at the company where she worked. I've been there ever since, freelancing. Friends and contacts are important in the design field – they know people who've got work, give a bit of feedback on portfolio, CV advice and that sort of thing.

I enjoy being freelance. I was a bit sceptical at first, because of not having the stability of a regular income and knowing definitely how much you're getting every month. But you can try different companies without committing to them, and meet people. I'm working on stuff which is cool, but it's not as creative as I would like to be doing.

Maybe I've been a bit lazy in terms of pushing myself. I think that with freelancing you don't progress so well career-wise. They're not going to give you loads of responsibility as a

freelancer, so to progress in my career I would have to go for a permanent position and think about the long-term.

BA Graphic Design, Female

8. Freelance textiles designer working in UK and USA

'The benefit is flexibility; I love keeping to my own hours and being able to go off and travel or visit people whenever I want. My success is that I'm still doing what I set out to do in the first place, and that I've managed to make a living out of it.'

I did a BA in textile design. I'd done an Art Foundation course and knew I wanted to go on and do something based around art and design. I picked the BA course mainly because of the city – I wanted to go and live there. I went to an open day and found out a bit about the course and it sounded like my kind of thing. The business module was very good – two ladies came in and taught it independently. They showed us how to do sales forecasts, cash flow, business plans, accounts – all the practical side of running a business. That's helped me a lot since – being self employed.

Work experience was probably the most important thing from the whole course. I learnt all about actually going into work and the practical sides of what you have to know. It was at a print design company for ladies wear and swimwear design – they gave me a project and straightaway I was getting on with designing and being a part of the studio company. It was a very comprehensive couple of weeks of learning the basics after which they asked me if I wanted to stay on for another week. I got on really well and kept on working for that company during the third year. I started tailoring my degree towards that specific kind of job, which funnily enough I was told would give me a lower grade – but I got a job at the end of it, which I thought was quite ironic really. Also I was more confident because I knew what I wanted to do.

When I first left university and joined the print design company it was all just freelance, so I had to sign on a bit to start with, and then get my portfolio together. I had to build up a lot of work in the collection to be able to start selling so it took quite a while. Through the Jobcentre I did the New Deal – and that was probably the most important thing I could have done because they gave you money to start setting up your own business.

I decided I would just be a bit poor for a while, but work really hard to get myself established; it all paid off. I'd already built up the contacts so I just had to wait for there to be a free space in the studio. Textiles is a small world – everyone has contacts and can recommend people. I've helped a few people get work, or at least try it out or get work experience.

I stayed at my first job for five years, building up the work and the sales, and it got to a point where I could support myself completely, and was gaining more and more experience as I went along. Then I felt I needed a bit of a change, to do something slightly different from what I'd been doing, so I went part-time at the studio. I started working at an independent boutique where I'd seen a notice in the window and just popped in. That was really lovely,

seeing all the retail side, dealing with customers and people, going to a few shows and dealing with the stock and arranging the shop. It was a lot more creative than many shop jobs would be – almost like running your own shop, even though it wasn't mine.

I then decided that I wanted to work somewhere else so I contacted some companies in New York. They'd contacted me first to see if I wanted to work for them, straight after the New Designers show which was just after our degree show. So I went to New York on holiday, took my portfolio, and visited them for interviews. I found a really nice studio which said I could work there. For the last year and a half I've been going backwards and forwards – designing ranges – and spending time working there, and then coming back to my studio here.

I think I've done really well. I've progressed in certain ways; moved to different areas of print design, started doing a lot of children's wear, T-shirts ... but mainly I still do the same thing that I've always done – but the skills and techniques have progressed. Going to New York has given my work a real boost – you're in the middle of the industry and it's an eye opener.

Being creative means being open to lots of ideas and thinking around things, trying to come up with interesting ways of doing normal things. Combining jobs has been really good. I was working six days a week so it was quite full on, but it really makes use of my time. It's definitely a positive aspect of my working life – having all these different projects to work on at the same time.

As a freelance you just have to keep your fingers crossed that you're going to make money. Some people really can't handle it at all because you never know what money is going to be coming in, or what you're going to sell. Even if you're doing well you have to always be really cautious of not spending too much money; you always have to put a bit aside because you don't know if you could then have a really bad month. The benefit is flexibility; I love keeping to my own hours and being able to go off and travel or visit people whenever I want. My success is that I'm still doing what I set out to do in the first place, and that I've managed to make a living out of it. I've got better and better at what I do.

I don't really have a plan for the future or anything; I'm enjoying what I'm doing at the moment; in the future I definitely want to travel more so I'd quite like to go and work in another city or spend time in another country. I don't know if I want to work for any big corporate company because that doesn't appeal. I'd like to do more work in a studio with a group of people, because it does get a bit lonely working on your own. Also possibly I could do a bit of teaching in an art college. I don't want to be employed and just do one thing the whole time. I like to always have a bit of variety in what I do.

Thinking back about university – they didn't really do the basics enough and skipped a lot of very basic knowledge that you need – like painting techniques and drawing techniques, and very basic art skills. Being very conceptual, very fine art, people are missing their chances of actually knowing about the industry. I don't know if it's frowned upon now to be so commercial but, actually, that's what you have to do if you want to make money.

BA Textile Design, Female

9. Practising artist with own studio and gallery space

'The successes are commissions hanging in local institutions and businesses, sculptures in local businesses, and a gallery full of work that I'm proud to show. Sometime, I'm hoping to do an MA, when I've a bit more time free.'

I completed a photography course in the late 1960s and had a long career in photography. I'd always wanted to induce a greater artistic awareness and practice, but day-to-day journalism and studio photography didn't really allow me to do that. About 2000 or so, digital photography was taking off and I was losing clients – they were buying their own digital cameras and stuffing their photographs through a computer hoping they could make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. So I started looking for a course in digital photography to improve my knowledge of the competition.

I got the local College of Art prospectus, but none of their full time photography courses matched what I wanted. The course that really seemed to fit my psychology was fine art. I applied for, and got a place on the course, which started in 2001.

I found the fine art course absolutely wonderful, it was an opportunity to play for three years while learning profound concepts and expanding your mind into areas that I'd been aware of, but hadn't previously taken onboard. I felt part of a group of people who were playing in their adulthood, which adults don't generally do. It's a very serious business – learning; but to be allowed to look at how pieces of string fall on the ground and think about that is quite liberating after a lifetime in a more prescribed work environment. It allowed me to go into my own head, and generate work independent of something outside. It's not always successful – but to produce something from your own ideas which you like, and other people like enough to buy, is quite a motivation.

When I first came out of college I was very much into becoming involved with local artistic groups, and I still am. I was very conscious of producing a lot of work, entering lots of exhibitions and getting my work into galleries here there and everywhere. I completely renovated my photographic studio at considerable expense – now I have a lovely working space: about 2,000 square feet of work space for welding and woodwork, a covered space where I can work on stone and sculpture outside, a painting studio and computer suite, and 600 square feet of gallery space. I've had huge advantages compared to many of my contemporaries at college, who were working out of corners of bedrooms and things like that.

For three or four years I worked quite hard getting into the public eye wherever I could. But it dawned on me that I wasn't making any money. That caused me to withdraw from galleries, and also because of the huge commissions they take. It's nice when you sell a painting or sculpture, but it's a very tenuous sort of existence professionally as an artist, unless you have a sponsor, or you're very pushy and you get yourself in the major city art scenes.

My degree didn't add to my business skills. I think artists generally are unprepared for the rigors of self-employment: dealing with the tax man, day-to-day running of the business, keeping records, receipts and things like that. Your average artist's mind isn't actually tuned to that – otherwise they wouldn't be an artist. I've been very lucky being married to a lady who is very senior in her job, has earned a lot of money, and has been able to support me – so there has been a safety net. I hope that hasn't led me into a certain amount of complacency.

I have two friends, one is a sculptor, one is an abstract painter, and between the three of us we put on about three exhibitions a year. These friends are important to me first because it gives a variety to the work that I'm putting on the walls, and second it allows me to interact artistically and socially with two other people whom I respect. For the exhibitions we try to invite local people with businesses that might want artworks to decorate their premises. But we're not getting enough business to generate a living that any of could totally rely on. It's almost like pin money, really. I have approached the Welsh Arts Council for project funding (all my work is aimed towards Wales) but because I don't have a Welsh address, they literally say 'go away.'

Creativity to me means following an idea, using it, researching it, and developing it into something tangible. Any idea that you have is a form of creation. Taking that idea, and following it through and developing it into a tangible item at the end, whether it be a new widget for doing some specific job, or an artwork that somebody hangs on the wall and enjoys looking at indefinitely, that's what creativity is.

I feel very positive about my experiences since the degree. The successes are commissions hanging in local institutions and businesses, sculptures in local businesses, and a gallery full of work that I'm proud to show. Sometime, I'm hoping to do an MA, when I've a bit more time free. That is an ultimate ambition – I don't want to go any further than an MA, because I feel that is the final level of being a practical artist.

For the future I'm aiming for peace of mind. I think currently all society is running on hyper drive, so I feel I'm lucky to be able to indulge in this slow way of life, in a piece of countryside which is absolutely beautiful. I feel very happy, very content, with what I'm doing. I don't think that the working environment these days allows you in any way the time and freedom of thought to develop yourself – it isn't conducive to being an artist – the odds are stacked against the average artist. That is probably the only negative side of my thinking.

One reason I did my degree was to give myself a broad pallet of practice, because I could never visualise myself actually retiring with slippers in front of the fireplace. I always feel that I will be producing art until they bring me out feet first in a box. To have had the experience of the degree in fine art, and the equivalent of a degree in photography, gives me two practises that I can do while I've got a hand that's capable of holding a brush or pressing a shutter. That I feel is my future – it will always be there, and that's a very positive thing to have. It will never go away and I love it.

BA Fine Art, Male

7.3 Portfolio careers

10. Portfolio career - glassmaker, button maker, working in gallery, involved in artists' professional development

'People find me for work. I've had a lot of introductions through talking to customers. And I network - there's a glass fair where I have a good gossip with the glassmakers; and the bloke in the next office to me at the gallery runs a networking group which is really helpful.'

I chose the university because I was a mature student with young children at home, but I knew it was a really good university for what I wanted to do. The first module was a very good introduction, making you think autonomously and using your design head to produce original artefacts right from the beginning. It gave you a broad outline of different types of materials. Then I specialised in glassmaking, carried on, and now I'm a self-employed glassmaker. I hadn't worked with glass before I went to university – I was a watercolour painter so my direction changed dramatically.

There was a very good business module which told you all the different ways you could sell, how to access opportunities, and all about setting up as a self-employed independent practitioner. You can't pick up the practical bits until you actually do it, but it gave me all the materials and the confidence to try it out. The best thing about the course was being given permission to experiment with all the different materials and at the same time getting a lot of design input from lectures. I tried to make as much of the experience as I possibly could – I knew it wasn't going to happen again. When you finished each module you had to explain what you were doing and why, justify it and explain your thinking behind it and the design process – which gave me more confidence in myself, which I'd been lacking.

At university I did a work experience summer workshop in a primary school for a week. It was fantastic, every each day we did something different, like a papermaking day wallowing around in buckets of water. And I got paid for it. All through my degree I did local workshops. Even if you don't get paid, it's good experience – learning how children react to things and it's very rewarding, teaching them new skills.

After university it was quite difficult to begin with. I knew what I wanted to do; I wanted to be a designer maker, to sell and also teach. I wanted to make something unique that nobody else was doing – my practice is quite esoteric. I started off by working in a gallery because I felt that that would give me the practical background to be setting up that sort of environment – mundane things like packing work to send through the post. I found a gallery that would have me and I badgered them until they gave me a job – I went in about three or four times and eventually they gave in.

I'd been a housewife at home, so I wasn't used to earning money and anything I earned was a bonus. But with some of my children starting university I needed to produce to earn money. If I worked harder I could make a lot more money, but what I do suits me. I like the variety. Also on leaving university I decided to apply to music festivals to sell my stuff. I got into Glastonbury and then others where I've done very well. The festivals were the first really big important selling outlet.

The gallery did loads to help me. The staff were wonderful and I started teaching there; that was a big break. I am very pleased with the way things have gone. Now I work in a gallery one day a week, I work as an invigilator (which is quite a menial job but it gives me a chance to think), I do regular selling outlets (music festivals, up-market craft fairs, pamper evenings ...), and I do talks. I've got on the circuit for WIs, University of the Third Age, Red Cross, etc which are all desperate for interesting people. I've bought an overhead digital projector to show images of my work and I explain how I came to be doing it. I can put my work out and I usually sell maybe £100 or £200 worth. Also I do one or two glassmaking teaching sessions

a month, usually two or three days work each time. And then there are the patchwork groups for which I make buttons.

People find me for work. I've had a lot of introductions through talking to customers. And I network – there's a glass fair where I have a good gossip with the glassmakers; and the bloke in the next office to me at the gallery runs a networking group which is really helpful. I still see a lot of my fellow students. They are all about 30 years younger than me, but it doesn't make any difference. We have lovely meetings – what we call material days and more emotional backup days. They've done all right, but they're not all necessarily going in the directions they want. A lot are going into teaching and enjoying it, which is fine, one or two are just making, and a few of us teach and make.

I would love to do an MA but there's no way I can afford it. I had a place at the International Glass Centre but I just couldn't go because it was too far and I'd got kids at home who'd already put up with enough. I belong to a collective, which puts on lectures. I tried to get grants but don't try any more. I've won a prize – the best stall award at a huge craft fair two years running. I turned it down last year because I thought somebody else ought to get the chance. That was good.

I'm pleased with the way my career's gone. A nagging bit of me says I should have been applying to the fine art galleries, but when I'm truthful about it, that really doesn't suit me. I'd much rather make something that's practical – it's more true to me. I make a lot of people happy by teaching, so that's good. There's lots of different ways of being creative. To me, it means being imaginative with materials – I make a lovely mess! But it also involves other people as well, being creative in the way that you deal with other people and the way that you encourage them to be creative. Watching other people be creative is great.

It's difficult combining jobs because things clash. So you have to be very organised, keep a diary, keep track of everything that's going on and keep track of emails. But I'd be bored solid if I had to do the same thing all the time. That's probably something about being creative, that you like variety, and all the different activities spark off each other.

BA Decorative Art, Female

11. Portfolio career - freelance printmaker and office work

'Straight after university I took my course portfolio to a newly opened gallery which accepted some of my work on a sell or return basis. After a short while, it became a partnership of seven artists, and I joined in with them for about six months running the gallery.'

I chose the local university course following an access course where I got engrossed in printmaking. Being a mature student and paying for the course myself, I wanted to learn as much as I could. I was hoping to express myself on the art side. University gave me the confidence to think I could actually create something to hang on a wall. At university I built up a group of like minded artists which I'm still in touch with for meeting and exhibiting; it was a three year degree course and we shared studio space with all three years of people. Also a few practising artists were allowed in to use the facilities.

Straight after university I took my course portfolio to a newly opened gallery which accepted some of my work on a sell or return basis. After a short while, it became a partnership of seven artists, and I joined in with them for about six months running the gallery. We shared the running costs, and if we sold our own work we got the full amount. But I wasn't selling enough to actually pay my costs, so I pulled out as a partnership member and changed to a commission basis. The gallery has changed hands now and what they sell doesn't suit me anymore. One of the university studio group people who was doing the MA course while I was there founded a print cooperative, so I joined and I've been a member ever since. They have an annual exhibition which I always put a piece in. Last March they also had a print festival, and I shared gallery space with another artist.

Last year I had about four exhibitions, with people I knew or met through other artists. I haven't done much this year so far, but I've got an exhibition in September. I hope that local gallery owners might visit the show and see my work. There's one thing I haven't done yet which I'm very aware would help me; set up a website – most of the artists I know have done that.

I'm not making any money out of my work – I'm lucky if I can cover my costs. But university changed my life, meeting with other artists. When I left university I wanted to do more or less what I'm doing now. I don't have the personality to go out and sell myself; perhaps if I'd found an agent I think that would have been the best way forward for me. It's a difficult time to be trying sell at the present – art is something that people can do without in a recession.

I still support myself with another job – just general office work. I worked part-time even when I did my university course. I actually like to get out and about and mix with other people, I need to get out and be stimulated.

I really want to continue with my art work side of things, it's very much a question of money. I've applied for competitions and not got anything through those; usually you have a fee to pay to send work in, and transport costs. So, I don't do so much of that now. For exhibitions, sometimes I ask myself if I should carry on designing all these things and printing this work if it's not going to sell. I went to an exhibition last year, and I printed nine big pieces – A1 size. That cost me a lot in materials and frames and the very special paper that has to go through the printer, and the ink which was about £80 per cartridge. And I didn't sell anything. I don't

know whether it's because I put too high a price on them, or whether because the gallery was upstairs people couldn't be bothered to climb up the stairs, or whether they just didn't like the work. The people who write comments in a book tend to write the favourable comments, the people who didn't think it was their cup of tea and didn't like the colours or whatever don't comment. I know one way I can sell my work is to make smaller prints at a lower price. But I'm not prepared to make them too small – the things I design have large bold prints. It's a difficult decision to make.

Creativity is an important part of my life really; I like my food to look nice on a plate – I arrange it so that it's balanced and colourful. The house is all very planned and considered. It's always been a part of my life, long before the course as a mature student.

Sometimes I think I haven't really done very much since I graduated – it's six years now. But a lot of it is down to me; I could push myself further, but there's a financial strain. If money wasn't a problem I'd apply for more competitions, organise more exhibitions and spend money promoting myself. I have actually been in quite a lot of local exhibitions and I'd like to get into exhibitions in London. I did try last year, spent the money, sent a disc in, but didn't get accepted. I don't think that reflects on my actual ability. I'm hopeful that the September exhibition will lead to other things. I have been varying my artwork in ways that aren't just flat out working in the frame. I've looked at a lot of alternatives, but I've come to the conclusion that this is what I want to do. It's what people know me for and have been impressed with. My work is actually fun and bright and it's reasonably abstract ... the more obscure modern art doesn't suit me at all. I am very pleased with what I've achieved.

I like to call myself an artist. I sense that's certainly what I want to do – if only I can carry on doing what I do well. Looking back, I found it enormously invigorating to do the degree as a mature student. I probably got more out of it than the younger people on the course who were coming straight from colleges. I'd seen all sides of publishing work in London, but living away from London I'd got bogged just doing ordinary office work because that's all I could get as a job.

Now I feel like I have two completely different lives; my office work which pays the bills, and then some secret life to me, which is my art life. I miss the companionship of being able to go into college on a daily basis and see what everybody else is doing and talking and going to lectures. I had a wonderful art life really at the college.

I might have done an MA, if the local course had been based on practical printmaking and artwork. But it wasn't, it was very theoretical throughout, and I couldn't see that progressing my actual work.

BA Fine Art Printmaking, female

12. Portfolio career - ceramics technician, self-employed ceramicist, and studying MA part-time

'I'm doing the Master's to progress myself. I love learning, and it's a world-renowned college. The tutors are successful artists in their own right: I thought I could learn a lot off them. After four years as a technician I felt it was time to just step up to the next level.'

At GCSE and A-level I was a pretty average student. Both my parents were creative people: my mother was a fashion lecturer and my father was a secondary school art teacher. I always knew growing up I was interested in going into a creative field. So, I did a foundation course in art and design. I had no idea what I wanted to do afterwards, but I was open to all sorts of things: 3D sculpture, ceramics, painting, graphics, illustration – and I actually got completely hooked on ceramics. I quickly fell in love with the material.

I chose my university because the tutors and technicians on my foundation said quite simply this is the best course for ceramics in the country. So, I thought that's a good enough reason for me. I went to check out the city and really enjoyed it – that sold the deal on it.

My time at university was good and I got a lot out of it. The first two years were a bit woolly to me – you don't do anything concrete; you're playing with different processes, materials, clays ... to get you to try different things such as sculptural work, design work, cast work, I suppose. I like to design things quickly in what I'm doing. The final year I was focusing on a single project and it was fantastic. At university I learned things – processes etc. – that I still use to this day; also innovation, where you can get started in the market place, and things like that. As part of our second year we did business studies. I didn't learn a massive amount from it; but that was because at the time I wasn't interested. In hindsight it would probably have been pretty useful to pay attention. At 20, 21, you don't think of yourself as a business; you want to think of yourself as an artist. Later you see that you really do have to function as a business.

At university I didn't do any relevant work experience. As far as I remember there were no work placements offered by the college. I worked, but it was in bars and things like that. When I finished my degree I moved back to my father's place to save money, and I thought the chances of me getting a job in ceramics or other crafts there were higher. It was frustrating because he was on my case all the time: 'why haven't you got a job yet?'

I wanted to become a ceramics technician to help continue my education – I had probably learned more off the technicians than the teaching staff. I mean, I'm a practical chap as well, so I felt that was the next logical step for me, from being a student to being a technician. I ultimately did that; but it took nine months to get there. Straight after moving back to my father's place I went back to the college where I did my foundation and started working as an artist in residence, producing 19 pieces for a post-graduate show. Also I did work in a bar so I could earn ... not enough to pay rent. From September I did a bit of training at the college – I didn't pay anything and they didn't pay me; I just did my work there and helped out a bit. Then a job opportunity came up to fill in as a woodwork technician for a few months – that was the first rung on my ladder – and then came an opportunity as a ceramics technician.

I probably learnt more being a technician than as a student. When you are a student working on your own work you are dealing with just one thing, but when you are a technician you are dealing with 20 students at once. It is really about managing them and all the materials and all the processes and the firings. If students asked me things I didn't know I would have to find out; you are forced to learn fast; there is no room for error.

It was hard to find work after graduating. I suppose I had chosen to do something that limited my employability. I'm not really much of a designer; I'm more of a sculptor – and teaching jobs in ceramics are rare. I feel lucky to have got a job really, even though they paid me sod all. It was two and a half days a week, but I had studio space, and that was a benefit. Some of my friends from university just quit really – they went and got jobs in Next and stopped their creative process. My degree wasn't amazingly helpful in getting work. It would have been nice to have a kind of work related talk where they sat me down and said here are your options, we want to help you survive.

I worked at college as a ceramics technician up until the day I left to start the Masters. While I'm doing the Masters I'm working a bit. I've got two jobs, both very now and again. I work in a gallery as a gallery technician, putting shelves up, making plinths, whatever they need. And I also work at a museum as their ceramics technician in their studios. For both of these I was nominated by my tutors.

I'm doing the Master's to progress myself. I love learning, and it's a world-renowned college. The tutors are successful artists in their own right: I thought I could learn a lot off them. After four years as a technician I felt it was time to just step up to the next level. The Masters is all about doing your own work; that is what you do. I don't want to be one of those static artists that churns out the same stuff year after year; I want to evolve and grow and develop even better year on year.

My goal is to be fairly successful ... well, to be successful. I want to get to a stage where I am selling pieces of work for quite a lot of money. I'm not necessarily looking for fame or anything, but I would like to be recognised as a successful person whose work is in demand. I'd like to reach the point where you become self-sustainable, where you don't have to supplement your work with external income. I always liked the idea of being in a book – once you are in a book in a library then you have a measure of success being recognised by authors, peers, etc. Also in demand for shows in a gallery like the Tate – the quality of venue is a measure of your success. I've not received much in terms of grants or awards – through college there are bursary systems, but I think if you are a British student they are not very hard to get; so I got one of those. A couple of times I applied for one called Quest, which is the Queen Elizabeth Scholarship Trust, but never received it. I don't apply a lot for awards and haven't researched it a massive amount.

What does creativity mean? I see it as a kind of personal outlet. I'm kind of compelled to make pieces of art; I don't think I have a choice; it is just what I do. I don't think one day I sat down and went, I want to be an artist or I want to be a ceramicist; it is just what I do. It is a difficult question.

I have roughly two months now to put together the MA final show which is attended by some influential people: curators, writers, dealers, collectors, buyers, galleries etc. I want to

try and sell my work and get as many shows as possible. I mean, ultimately, I want to become a successful artist.

BA Applied Art (ceramics), Male

13. Portfolio career - freelance menswear fabric designer in French fashion house, combined with freelance illustration and craftwork

'Staying creative is important for me - something I do to keep happy. I suppose it's the way that you sort out what's going on in your head, how you organise your thoughts and make them into something tangible.'

I chose my university because all the designers I was interested in had graduated from there, so I said – right, I'm going to go there too. It was a great help in the way that they make you think creatively. That's definitely something that I've been able to apply to my career afterwards but everything else was learnt on the job, really. For business skills we had one meeting about copyright with an outside law agency and a lecture about fabric patenting that lasted an hour and a half, and that was it.

Work placement opportunities were there if you really wanted to find them, but they weren't presented as something that you should be doing. I was working in a shop part-time, so I didn't have the time to do placements. When I left I thought I'd be a designer straight away at Dior Couture or somewhere like that. I had a high opinion of myself, which is something that the college fosters in you. When you're leaving you have a lot of confidence in what you can do, but the lack of preparation for going into the workplace became really evident. I ended up applying to everything on the Internet and industry magazines, from suppliers to couture houses, not knowing what is applicable, what is suitable, and whether my portfolio was appropriate.

My first job after university was a production assistant at an established British fashion designer where I'd already done work experience when I was 17. I'd kept in contact with them and two months after graduating I called them. They remembered me and asked can you start on Monday? Since then I've found the degree was definitely helpful. It made me think in a really open way, and having the college on your CV definitely helps; it gets you an interview.

That first job was great grounding for me; it was creative and also gave me a really good grounding as to how the industry works from top to bottom – a microcosm of all the jobs in the industry and doing them all at once. There was buying, bits of design, production, sales, and customer relations. I was there for two years. Then for a while I worked in a shop. Desperate for any job I'd started to use recruitment agencies and headhunters, but nothing was coming up that I wanted. I went for a fabric buying position at a major classic label which turned into fabric development.

After two years I went to a German company, which was setting up a new luxury label, as the fabric and trends manager. But they went bust after three months, so I was out of work for a while back in the UK. Being out of work gave me a chance to get my portfolio really up

to scratch. Through agencies I was called for interview by three couture design houses within a week. I took one of the offers and have been here two and a half years now. I work with seven fellow graduates here. That's one of the good things about the college; it gives you a network of all sorts of different people. Most of my friends are from college.

I'm pleased about my career. It's not the direction I had seen myself going in when I left college, but compared to others from my class I'm pleased at where I've ended up. What I do now is very 2D design based and I'm happy with that. I do illustrations and crafts projects outside of work, which I get paid for. I don't see myself going into 3D design.

I went freelance at my current employer's request, so the projects are all part of my business; there's no problem combining roles. Being freelance is fine – you just need to make sure you get a good contract. I just looked into this more as time has gone on and now I know what I need to ask for. The benefits are: you have more money to start off with, you pay less tax, and you're in charge of your own hours. I really like it.

Staying creative is important for me – something I do to keep happy. I suppose it's the way that you sort out what's going on in your head, how you organise your thoughts and make them into something tangible. It's a way of expressing your personality without shouting and screaming at people and going a bit crazy. It's quite normal for creativity to go up and down. I think it's the same for everybody. One of the problems of being creative is that you're never happy with what you've done.

The first three jobs were in London and now I commute between London and Paris. If they wanted me in Paris full time I would do it, but I'd rather be in London at the weekends. Commuting is part of life, really; you get used to it very quickly. I'm trying to find language courses through work or language centres in London, because it's always good to be able to speak to the suppliers in their own language or at least try to, and then you know what they're saying about you when you're having a meeting.

My particular successes are: my own illustration exhibition – that was great, and designing some fabrics that are the best sellers that the couture house has ever made – that's been really great. Success is something that you make that makes you happy six months after you've finished it, or something that people tell you is nice for a long time. Success is something that has longevity to it, and is commercially successful.

BA Fashion Design - Womenswear, Male

8 Enhancing Creative Careers - the Challenges

The experiences presented in these narratives draw attention to the need for graduates to have career entry strategies to optimise opportunities in difficult economic times, and to prepare them for the likelihood that they will engage predominantly in creative work, work freelance and have portfolio careers.

Graduates derive satisfaction from staying creative, working with others, transforming lives, teaching others, learning something new and progressing in careers. Success is equated with achievement and creative fulfilment above financial reward. These hard-working individuals set high standards and are keen to progress in their working lives, develop new work and ideas, and learn new skills. Recognition from peers, customer satisfaction, taking responsibility and passing on their passion for creative work by facilitating creativity in others contributed to graduates' notions of career success.

8.1 Challenges for higher education

Graduates clearly valued their education, but would have appreciated more relevant preparation to ease the transition into the workplace – first steps. What are their priorities and how can they be met?

- Work placements and industry experience through projects
- Active help with building and maintaining contacts and understanding the best methods for finding work
- Paid internships and work placements after graduation
- Built in business skills and entrepreneurship on courses – starting with the basics of freelance practice and how to get started
- Ensuring graduates have excellent technical skills and knowledge of their discipline
- Opportunities to present themselves, defend their work and promote themselves beyond courses through competitions and external projects
- Understanding professional requirements and client needs.

As the creative sector is fragmented and there are few large employers with the resources to provide work placements and experience, new models for employer engagement and partnerships between HE and the creative sector are required. Confidence is key, and courses need to place emphasis on fostering a research culture and theoretical approaches to underpin practice, so that graduates can present themselves and their work confidently.

Creativity is an ideology

The career stories reveal that creativity is both an ideology and working practice, but it is unarticulated, and this is the first time we actually see it in the context of graduates' life experiences. So learning and a work ethic are really important – being part of a learning community, learning alongside and in collaboration with others.

Connecting creative learning with personal and career fulfilment

What distinguishes a creative education is 'experiential learning' – learning by doing and a bespoke curriculum that allows individual students to build their learning around interests that are personal and intrinsic to seeking meaning and value. It is this process that is central to creating new ventures, products and innovative ideas. The curriculum provides different learning opportunities for students to apply and transfer their learning – in professional and studio settings, through commissions and live projects alongside teacher practitioners. Students need to recognise the connection between creative learning and personal fulfilment.

Creativity is at the centre of career development

At university, there is a tendency to separate the student or graduate from their practice in discussions about skills and career plans: *'What else can you do?' 'What other skills do you have?'* This is at odds with the more holistic learning models instilled in our students – and their connectedness with practice. In researching their own futures, graduates continue to place creative practice at the centre of their career development, simultaneously combining practice, paid and unpaid work, further study and informal learning – and this manifests itself in portfolio careers.

Creative practice needs to be the focus for any discussion that reviews progression and development, pre- and post-graduation, so graduates can articulate their strengths confidently and position themselves in relation to future goals.

Improved awareness of the nature of creativity, the transfer of creative practice thinking and processes, and hearing about the experiences of graduates in non-creative roles should open up new opportunities and aspirations for current students.

Provision of relevant work and professional experience

Graduates clearly valued work placements and the wider experience of going to university. Getting the balance right between academic study, course and industry requirements is a major challenge, but courses provide many opportunities to integrate industry and professional experience and these need to be recognised and exploited. Opportunities to expand placement opportunities are limited by the structure of an industry dominated by

micro-enterprises, and courses need to raise students' awareness of the importance of connectedness through peer learning and building relationships with practitioners through external projects of all kinds.

Connectivity and collaborative working

We have seen how important contacts, relationships with others and active networking are to career progression. Networking starts at university, is a self-selecting process and thrives and grows on success. One significant role of collaboration is that it continues after graduation in collaborative partnerships and continues to provide graduates with critical feedback.

Ensuring students have the experience of collaborative learning/working is extremely beneficial. There is a need to explore differentiated models of employment engagement in a sector in which micro-businesses and freelance professionals work in fluid, collaborative and non-hierarchical models of practice – activities such as live projects and research teams made up of staff, students and creative professionals working towards a common goal.

Supporting graduates into their early careers

We have seen that graduates very rarely find jobs through advertisements in their early careers. They need pragmatic knowledge about how to find work and plan for this early on their courses. Trying out work in different settings helps graduates to determine and refine their career direction.

Graduates experience significant hardship in the years following graduation, and relatively low levels of pay, and acceptance of unpaid work to establish their careers. Small amounts of early career funding in the form of apprenticeships, paid internships, grants, loans and residencies can have a positive impact on graduates, their markets and their creative ventures in their early careers.

8.2 Creative sector challenges

Impact of work sector characteristics on career progression

The creative sector has several distinctive features. It is predominantly a young sector, with the majority of the workforce under 40 and highly qualified with many workers educated to degree level. Entry to the sector often requires workers to work unpaid, and low pay continues to feature in early careers. The main workforce is made up of freelancers and micro-enterprises who collaborate and build multi-disciplinary teams to work on projects and contracts. There are very few medium-sized enterprises and large employers.

Challenges of self-employment

Early on in their careers, graduates may work freelance or undertake short contracts to gain experience and prove themselves, as a way into more permanent work. However, the qualitative research indicates that as time goes on, self-employment becomes a serious aspiration for creative graduates. For many it is a natural step in career progression and a

positive choice, as graduates develop professional confidence, seek more control over their creativity and a wish to improve their life-work balance. Indeed, freelancing is a defining characteristic of creative careers and the contract economy dominates in the creative sector bringing with it some advantages and disadvantages for individual career progression.

Self-employment gives freedom and flexibility, but is financially insecure and there is often a high degree of uncertainty. Graduates value this way of working – opportunities to work with different companies and without making a long-term commitment, and they are constantly meeting and building relationships with new people. Freelancers are innovative and build capacity through pursuing speculative work and personal projects. There is a wish to strike out on their own, with personal inquiry feeding into other work. This is a strength and contributes to developing new knowledge and the start of creative enterprises.

Stagnation in career progression

Graduates do, however, worry about a lack of career and salary progression – they are essentially jobbing creatives – and anticipate a serious effect on later careers as their incomes do not progress in line with financial commitments, lifestyle changes and family needs. Graduates are also funding their own professional development and training, and will sacrifice financial gain to learn new skills, develop their practice, and take on work that is closely associated with their values. Another feature of contract working is that although graduates work in multi-disciplinary teams, they don't have opportunities to develop the leadership and managerial skills that working on and directing large projects brings, and this may have a serious impact on career progression, promotion and on the growth of SMEs.

An inability to achieve a sustainable living may result in individuals drifting into other work sectors, or balancing a creative career with non-creative work in other sectors. Can the creative sector afford to lose the expertise and knowledge of these individuals? What are the longer-term consequences for the sector? What support mechanisms can realistically be put in place? This suggests a need for additional research to follow individuals further into their careers to understand the factors influencing their life choices, and whether they stay in creative work.

8.3 Models for personal and career fulfilment

The challenges brought forward from this study are daunting, particularly in times of economic recession and cutbacks in HE resourcing. Yet these career stories provide a powerful argument for a creative education and its wider benefits for those who have chosen a creative career path. Their adaptability, tenacity and willingness to place creative fulfilment above financial advancement reaps the rewards of work satisfaction, a scarce commodity.

However, the creative and cultural sector provides few certainties and yet many opportunities for those who have the imagination to create them. Creative practice is at the centre of these careers and provides the key to fulfilled lives.

'Governments should work harder at giving meaning to lifelong learning in the creative industries. But I suspect many creatives would stop there; they like what they do and how they do it - they just need a more supportive architecture.'

Will Hutton (2010) CGCF, Foreword

9 Bibliography

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Note: Here, we have included references to works informing this report and published since January 2010. Please also refer to the full bibliography in Ball, Pollard and Stanley (2010) *Creative Graduates Creative Futures*, IES/CHEAD/University of the Arts, London.

Full reports and Executive Summaries of CGCF are available to download from www.creativegraduates.com

Appendix - Methodology

The email survey

Aims and design

The email survey was designed to provide additional qualitative information about HE experiences and career journeys, explore themes emerging from the main census survey such as portfolio working and collaboration, and provide individual institutions with open responses to questions of interest.

This type of qualitative self-completion survey has no researcher input to guide responses and probe for additional information so the quality of responses to questions can vary considerably. Therefore care was taken over the design and coverage of the questions to deliver some commonality of response. Care was also given to the look and feel of the email survey – which took place one year after the main census survey – to ensure graduates' continued engagement with the research and minimise satisficing¹. It was important then that the survey experience should feel different to the original postal survey, move the issues on rather than collect information already given, be relatively short and focused, and give graduates the space and confidence to air their views and share their experiences. The final survey had eight open questions requiring text input. All data collected from the email survey was anonymised before being analysed to draw out key themes (see below).

It is perhaps worth noting that qualitative research is designed to give a rich picture or thick description of issues: to enable a better or more detailed understanding, essentially to provide insight; and to gather a range of experiences or perspectives, essentially to explore diversity. It often serves to complement quantitative studies to explore the nature and content of views, decisions and experiences rather than the incidence, extent or impact of these. The focus therefore in qualitative research is on detail and diversity, in contrast to quantitative research which is concerned with sampling, reliability and validity. In reporting

¹ Satisficing is when respondents give little thought to their answers – giving either no response to a question or giving what they perceive to be a socially acceptable or desirable response.

qualitative research care must be taken to represent the range of views and to present patterns in trends in general ways rather than portraying 'quantitative-like' messages.

Survey administration

In September and October 2009, emails were sent to all respondents of the main Creative Graduates Creative Futures questionnaire survey who had consented to further contact and for whom an email address was held. This sub sample were contacted directly by the research team (no further institutional involvement was required in survey administration) although institutions continued to promote the project.

The emails invited recipients to contribute further to the research by following an embedded link to an online questionnaire. The online questionnaire contained a series of eight in-depth questions inviting graduates to tell us in their own words what they had been doing since graduation, what had helped or hindered them in their careers to date, and what they feel would be of use in the future in terms of development and CPD. The email survey was piloted in order to test understanding and responses to the questions before it was launched.

The final questions were:

- What work, jobs or development activities are you currently doing?
- Please tell us about what has happened to you from the time of graduation till now. How did you find work? What key decisions have you made and why?
- We are interested in your experiences of working with others. Please tell us about any times you have collaborated with others. Also please give details about any times when you have employed others.
- In your life and career to date, what has helped you get to where you are now? And what has hindered or challenged you?
- What aspects of your creative education have you taken with you into your working life that you feel have been of the most value?
- In what ways, if at all, has the current recession impacted upon your current and/or future plans?
- What other support, training or development in the next year would be helpful to you in your career or your creative practice?
- Is there anything else you want to tell us about what would help current students to prepare for work?

Response and analysis

The survey was launched on Tuesday 29 September 2009. An initial reminder was emailed on Friday 2 October, a second reminder was emailed on Wednesday 7 October and a final reminder was sent on Sunday 11 October. Reminders were sent on different days of the week

and at different times of the day to maximise response. The survey was closed after three weeks on Friday 16 October.

Overall, 1,896 emails were sent to valid email addresses and 443 responses were received giving a response rate of 23 per cent. Of the responses, 388 were full responses, 41 were partial responses (respondents answered four or less of the eight questions) and 14 were captured from the pilot.

Each email survey response was saved securely as a text files along with key background characteristics captured in the main census survey such as gender, age, year of graduation, and discipline.

An excel file was then created of all of the email responses and this was uploaded into SPSS (the Statistics Package for Social Sciences) to allow for descriptive analysis of key personal characteristics of the respondents and to explore the diversity of respondents and their representativeness. The dataset was large, complex and detailed so a random sample of 104 cases (representing one-quarter of respondents) was drawn from the 443 respondents for further, detailed qualitative analysis. These selected cases were checked to ensure that a wide range of graduates from different backgrounds were included.

Among the 104 cases there was sufficient representation of males, older graduates (who had studied as mature students), EU and international students (those who lived outside of the UK prior to starting their studies), graduates with a disability (mainly dyslexia), those from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, and those with no parental experience of higher education. In addition graduates were spread across the disciplines and cohorts (see Table A and B below).

These 104 files were then uploaded into Atlas.ti, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis tool. Atlas.ti ensures rigorous, systematic and standardised analysis of varied qualitative information including text through the use of coding, and allows for thorough exploration of all data captured. Coding requires a close reading of the text to firstly establish themes and ideas. These can be developed inductively, emerging from the data itself, deductively to flag concepts in order to test and expand on theories, or, as in our case, a mixture of the two. Codes can relate to behaviours, events, activities, strategies, general conditions or states, meanings and interpretations, participation, relationships, conditions, consequences and settings. Once a set of codes or coding frame is established, similar passages of text that are examples of these themes and ideas are identified and a code or label is applied so that they can be easily retrieved. This process creates a structure by which to analyse the responses. In addition responses can be grouped into different 'families' or categories to facilitate systematic handling of the data. For example families can relate to degree type, gender, age, and income level. Through the codes we can search, sort and retrieve the data and then examine all the text associated with a theme together, compare cases within and across categories or families, and identify any patterns. (see <http://onlineqda.hud.ac.uk> for more detail of this methodological approach).

Working with the Management Group, the research team initially developed a coding frame based around the eight survey questions and during analysis further codes emerged. The final code list had 103 codes.

Further details

Table A: Sample breakdown - personal characteristics (per cent)

	Personal characteristics	Analysed email survey sample	All email survey respondents	All Creative Graduates Creative Futures respondents
Domicile	Home/UK domiciled	85	83.8	85.8
	EU student	6	8.5	7.8
	Non-EU/overseas student	9	7.7	6.3
	Total	100	100	100
	Base (N)	103	414	3,407
Gender	Male	26	27.8	27.4
	Female	74	72.2	72.6
	Total	100	100	100
	Base (N)	104	414	3,455
Age (at last birthday)*	25 or younger	7	8.2	7.8
	26 or 27	40	38.5	43.5
	28 or 29	21	25.5	27.5
	30 to 39	20	16.1	13.3
	40+	12	11.8	7.8
	Total	100	100	100
	Base (N)	103	416	3,445
Disability	Dyslexia	12	10.8	10.1
	Other disability/difficulty	2	3.4	2.8
	Not disabled	87	85.9	87.0
	Total	100	100	100
	Base (N)	104	417	3,451
Ethnicity	White	91	90.4	88.9
	BME	9	9.6	11.1
	Total	100	100	100
	Base (N)	103	417	3,445
Family experience of HE	Parent	51	49.6	45.6
	Other family (not parent)	34	33.1	36.5
	None	15	17.3	17.8
	Total	100	100	100
	Base (N)	104	417	3,414

Table B: Sample breakdown - educational characteristics

	Educational characteristics	Analysed email survey sample	All email survey respondents	All Creative Graduates Creative Futures respondents
Subject of study*	Fine Art	26	22.7	18.7
	Applied arts and crafts	10	6.0	5.1
	3-D design	14	16.2	16.4
	Graphic design, visual communication and typography	22	20.0	22.5
	Textiles and Fashion	17	17.4	20.6
	Media production, photography and interactive and electronic design	9	12.9	12.6
	Other visual or interdisciplinary arts, writing/journalism/advertising/cultural studies	3	4.8	4.1
	Total	100	100	100
	Base (N)	104	419	3,478
Year finished degree	Before 2002	4	2.2	2.1
	2002	20	24.0	24.5
	2003	41	34.8	31.0
	2004	28	33.8	37.5
	After 2004	7	5.3	4.9
	Total	100	100	100
	Base (N)	103	417	3,424
Classification of degree (revised)	First	22	18.4	17.0
	Upper second	52	50.0	50.5
	Lower second	20	25.4	26.5
	Third, pass, FdA pass, other	6	6.2	5.9
	Total	100	100	100
	Base (N)	103	418	3,464

The case study interviews

In addition to the email survey, the qualitative stage of the Creative Graduates Creative Futures research also involved depth interviews with a small number of respondents to the main Creative Graduates Creative Futures questionnaire survey. These interviews were designed to provide an holistic picture of the individual, their experiences, values and career stories – essentially to provide individual narratives of careers.

A discussion guide was designed by the research team to allow for a semi-structured conversation around transitions to the labour market and early career experiences to explore in detail the issue and nature of portfolio careers, issues around collaboration, and issues around defining and achieving success. More specifically the guide had sections focused on:

- their take on their educational experience
- finding work
- how they got to where they are (including: direction, being creative, portfolio working, self employment, unpaid work, and further learning)
- how they think of themselves and where they are going.

A random sub-sample of 40 individuals was drawn from the main survey respondents, along with an additional 20 respondents known to have studied a crafts subject. Only those indicating that they were willing to take part in further research were included in this sub-sample. These individuals were sent an email inviting them to participate in a telephone interview that would give them the opportunity to tell their story in their own words, and noted that only a very small number of graduates were being contacted. Emails were sent on 12 March 2010, and individuals were then followed up by the research team to arrange a time and date for the interview.

In total 29 individuals took part in interviews lasting between 45 minutes and an hour. Participants included both men and women, older and younger individuals, those from the UK and those from the wider EU or further overseas, and from different disciplines. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, and short (two to three page) summaries were produced of each interview. The transcripts and summaries were used to draw out key themes and to add to the findings gathered from the email survey, selecting extracts to illustrate interesting issues. They were also edited to produce career narratives or stories – a selection of which are presented in the report. Unedited data captured during these interviews remain confidential to the research team. Care was taken to anonymise quotes and career stories presented in the report, so that no individuals can be identified.