

## Moving On: The Creative Way™

A study to explore the reasons why learners following Level 3 vocational programmes in the creative arts subject areas choose not to progress to programmes at Level 4

“I prefer to learn whilst doing something rather than sit down, read about it, write about it, talk about it.”

Dr Pamela Percy & Tony Hudson  
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## Acknowledgements

This report was produced on behalf of The Creative Way Lifelong Learning Network by Dr Pamela Percy and Tony Hudson from Continuum – the Centre for Widening Participation Policy Studies based at the University of East London. Additional thanks for research support to Dr Genia Browning and for critical reading to Professor John Storan.

Partnership working and collaboration is central to the mission of Continuum. We were therefore delighted to undertake research for The Creative Way – a network of Higher Education and Further Education providers who are committed to partnership working and share our passion for widening participation. The research team thank all the learners and staff for their contributions to the report.

In addition we wish to thank the members of both The Creative Way Board and Operations Group for their encouragement and support throughout the project.

Lastly we would like to acknowledge the support of Liz Pearson, Director of The Creative Way Lifelong Learning Network and The Creative Way delivery team.

## Forward

The Lifelong Learning Network (LLN) initiative, first announced by the Higher Education Funding Council for England in 2004, seeks to bring together higher education institutions (HEIs) and further education colleges (FECs) to create new opportunities for work based and vocational learners to progress into and through higher education. Conceived as pilots or demonstrators, LLNs have been given the opportunity to test different approaches which will develop and support progression for vocational learners.

The Creative Way is the Lifelong Learning Network for the Thames Gateway. Established in September 2006, the Network builds on a strong partnership of institutions committed to the concept of progression. One of our key objectives is the development and roll-out of a Network-wide progression agreement scheme.

In taking forward our work, we wanted to understand more about the needs and aspirations of learners. Anecdotal evidence suggested that students on vocational programmes in creative arts subject areas do not lack commitment or interest in the prospect of moving on to higher education. But progression statistics pointed to a sharp discrepancy between apparent interest and intention and actual enrolment.

To help us investigate this issue further, we commissioned Continuum, the Centre for Widening Participation Policy Studies at the University of East London, to undertake a study exploring why committed students on vocational programmes in further education turn away from progression to higher education.

The Continuum study gives us no easy answers. It does, however, provide us with a clear picture of some of the key issues we need to address as a partnership of FECs and HEIs as we take forward the challenge of developing a progression agreement scheme which offers new and meaningful opportunities for vocational learners.

Liz Pearson  
Director, The Creative Way.

## Executive Summary

Lifelong Learning Networks have been established to make a step change in vocational progress from level 3 to level 4 study by:

- \_ developing curricula to make progression easier by removing barriers, promoting bridging provision and involving employers
- \_ offering learners lifelong learning information, advice and guidance and track their progress
- \_ producing progression agreements that define for learners what they can reasonably expect from their universities and colleges and which these institutions have to commit to.

Post Leitch (2006) the imperative for institutions to address higher level skill shortages and engage with employers is heightened. The HEFCE funded LLN policy initiative aims to address the primacy of the vocational over the academic and bring coherence, clarity and certainty to the progression of vocational learners.

The Creative Way – the lifelong learning network for creative and cultural industries in the Thames Gateway – was established in response to learner demand for courses in media and arts and skill shortages at level 4 in creative and cultural industries (CCIs) across the Thames Gateway.

Moving On: The Creative Way is a focussed study on learner progression. Listening to learners reveals a story of shaky progression and lack of preparedness for HE at an academic and practical level. Listening to learners, who are passionate about their subject, reveals the tensions between the practical and the academic, the complexity of learners' lives and how interrelated social and cultural factors contribute to education progression.

This research project arises from the priority which The Creative Way LLN gives to learners' progression. The specific aim is to understand why a disappointing number of level 3 arts and media learners in the Thames Gateway progress to level 4. The specific brief was both unusual and imaginative: to explore this progression issue from the learners' perspective. Learners voice take centre stage in this report.

Level 3 and level 4 learners on arts and media programmes across the Thames Gateway speak about:

- \_ **Going to college** (section 3.1)
- \_ **Their families** (section 3.2)
- \_ **Their educational advisors** (section 3.3)
- \_ **Employment prospects** (section 3.4)
- \_ **Money** (section 3.5)
- \_ **Their passion for creative work** (section 3.6)

In a series of informal conversations learners revealed their passions, their doubts and their understanding of educational and career progression. To contextualise the learner perspective, the research team undertook a number of conversations with staff in colleges and universities. These focussed on specific aspects of progression: on inhibitors and enablers to progression for level arts and media students, especially the influence of learners' families, issues of learner confidence, consolidating good links between colleges and universities and fostering employability amongst vocational learners.

Drawing from student and staff interviews, the report considers three key areas which are central to progression and which appear to warrant institutional action: curricular aspects of progression; informing learner choice and learning to learn at work.

The Creative Way LLN has a developing portfolio of activities, thus – prudently in our view – the outcome of the research was not to produce a series of detailed recommendations which could constrain and limit development, but drawing on these findings, for the Network as a whole to consider a coherent set of measures which will support arts and media learners within the Thames Gateway to progress to creative employment.

YOU COME WITH

**AN IDEA**

BUT THEN YOU

**EXPERIENCE SO MUCH**

THAT YOU CAN CHOOSE

Level 3 student

# 1

## Introduction

In this section we describe briefly the background to Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs) and the context in which the Creative Way Lifelong Learning Network is located and operates.

## Lifelong Learning Networks

Lifelong Learning Networks are a HEFCE policy initiative, the detail of which was initially outlined by Howard Newby in his Colin Bell Memorial Lecture in 2004 (Newby, 2004).

The networks are partnerships of Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) and Further Education Colleges (FECs) and other key partners such as: Aimhigher partnerships, Regional Development Agencies (RDAs), Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) and employers. The focus of each LLN will differ in response to the needs of the local economy and the vocational skills gaps. In setting their operational plan LLNs are informed by the RDA's plans and work closely with relevant SSCs and employers. HEFCE have stated that: "... the overall objective for Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs) is to improve the coherence, clarity and certainty of progression opportunities for vocational learners into and through higher education." (HEFCE, 2007:1)

Whilst LLNs are expected to be responsive to local needs they are also expected to be innovative in operation. The development of LLNs has been an iterative process, a dialogue between HEFCE officers, regional advisors, the LLN advisory group and the prospective or embryonic LLNs. In part, as Whitston (2005) noted early on in the development of LLNs, this would be achieved by asking a series of questions focussed on the learner. The result of this dialogue is reflected in the HEFCE updates for LLN practitioners (HEFCE, 2005, 2005a, 2005b, 2006 and 2007a). HEFCE has identified specific activities which should be common to all LLNs.

- \_ develop curricula to make progression easier by removing barriers, promoting bridging provision and involving employers
- \_ offer learners lifelong learning information, advice and guidance and track their progress
- \_ produce progression agreements that define for learners what they can reasonably expect from their universities and colleges and which these institutions have to commit to (HEFCE, 2007a).

In short, LLNs are expected to make a step change in vocational progression from level 3 to level 4.

To date some £100 million has been allocated to fund 28 LLNs (HEFCE, 2007a). Most networks have been funded for a period of three years after which time they are expected to become embedded and self sustaining. Of the 28 funded LLNs 17 have creative and cultural subjects as their main strand of activity and 2 as a subsidiary strand. Only 2 LLNs: The National Arts Learning Network (NALN) and the Creative Way focus exclusively on Creative and Cultural Industries (CCI) (HEFCE 2007b).

## Creative & Cultural Industries

The creative and cultural industries form a complex sector; indeed the term 'creative industries' is relatively recent in academic and policy discourse, having been developed by Creative Industries Taskforce in the UK in 1997 (Cunningham, 2002).

The CITF defined creative industries as: 'activities which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have the potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property' (Cunningham, 2002).

The CCIs form a highly fragmented, diverse and complex sector, embracing established commercial business sectors, analogue and the new digital economy. CCI businesses range from bookbinding, dance and theatre, architecture, film and video production and distribution, retail and wholesale of music, journalism, newspapers, PR and advertising, software design and computer game development.

Within the Thames Gateway, with the exception of large newspaper companies, most business in the CCI sector are likely to be small enterprises, with on average 5 employees. This compares with other industry averages in the Thames Gateway of 12 employees. There are probably 25% more businesses (around 4,000 companies) that are sole traders and do not appear in the business stock statistics. Small business needs are therefore key to growing the sector and developing the regional economy. Engaging with small and medium enterprises (SMEs), micro businesses and sole traders, to address their needs, is challenging but necessary if the LLN is to develop progression pathways from work into HE as well as work experience and work based learning programmes.

**"... the overall objective for Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs) is to improve the coherence, clarity and certainty of progression opportunities for vocational learners into and through higher education."**

## The Thames Gateway

London is Europe's fastest-growing city. The Thames Gateway, a 43 mile corridor along the Thames estuary, is Europe's largest regeneration zone. It encompasses 16 local authorities, some of which are amongst most deprived boroughs and wards in England with some of the lowest employment rates. A diverse area in terms of geography and ethnicity, it is also educationally deprived, with less than 20% of residents having a qualification at level 4.

This compares unfavourably with the rest of the greater South-East area where 30% of residents have a qualification at level 4 (TGLP, 2007).

Research undertaken by DTZ Piedad Consulting (DTZ Piedad Consulting, 2005) identified the importance of CCIs in the Thames Gateway and the mismatch between the skill base of the local population and the skills required by the sector. CCIs form a significant proportion of the workforce in the Thames Gateway, accounting for some 16,000 businesses, employing over 80,000 workers. DTZ conclude that: "The potential for CCIs to help regenerate the Thames Gateway cannot be overestimated." (DTZ Piedad Consulting, 2005: i)

Turning from employment in CCIs to education, DTZ (2005) report on the drop of CCI programmes, even amongst those learners who are considered "hard to reach." In 2003-04 there were 5,300 learners in HE, and 49,100 learners in FE on cultural and creative programmes. Whilst HE based learners are more likely to study outside of the Thames Gateway, a significant 43% remain. Compared with the rest of England, there are more FE students on CCIs programmes within the Gateway, but there are less than average numbers of HE students. Figures suggest that there is a gap of some 2,600 learners who decide not to progress from level 3 to level 4.

## The Creative Way

The Creative Way is the Lifelong Learning Network (LLN) in the Thames Gateway for Creative and Cultural Industries. Following a bid to HEFCE's strategic development fund in February 2006, funding for the LLN was approved in April for a period of three years. It has been operational since September 2006.

The bid was sponsored by the Thames Gateway Further and Higher Education Action Group (TGFHEAG), which brings together senior managers from FE and HE with senior policy advisors from government departments and agencies. Chaired by Bill Rammell, Minister of State for Higher and Further Education, TGFHEAG is an established partnership which focuses on a range of issues including widening participation and delivering higher level skills and training as part of the regeneration of the Thames Gateway.

Informed by the research undertaken by DTZ (2005) the Creative Way LLN was established to meet the rising student demand for CCI related courses as well as employer demand for graduates to support the growth of the CCI sector in the Thames Gateway. The ability of institutions to deliver students with the necessary skills at level 4 to contribute and support the growth of the sector is dependent on progression from level 3, which as noted previously, is lower in the Thames Gateway than the rest of England. The Creative Way aims to develop and test innovative approaches to enhance progression into and through HE which, if successful, will have the potential to be rolled out across other sectors as part of the wider Thames Gateway skills development.

**THE CREATIVE  
INDUSTRIES  
HAVE BEEN GROWING AT  
DOUBLE  
THE RATE OF THE ECONOMY**

The creative way™

# 2

## Rationale, aims and approach

In this section we outline the rationale, aims and approach to understanding progression from level 3 to level 4 in CCI programmes across the Thames Gateway. Whilst our approach was guided by the aims of the research it was tempered by the resources available and the timescale in which the research had to be conducted.

## Rationale

**The ability and capacity of HE to deliver the skills required to support the growth of the CCIs appears to some extent to be constrained by the progression rate of students from level 3 courses and effective employer engagement.**

This research project arose from the priority The Creative Way LLN gives to understand why an unsatisfactory number of learners on CCI programmes in the Thames Gateway are not progressing from level 3 to level 4 study. Making a step change in vocational progression from level 3 to level 4 is a fundamental aim for all LLNs – indeed it is their *raison d'être*.

Research by DTZ (2005) reported that in the Thames Gateway there are more students, and rising demand, on CCI related programmes up to and including level 3 compared with the rest of England. However, the research also showed that there are lower than average number of Gateway learners on CCI related programmes at level 4. The rate of progression from FE at level 3 to level 4 at HE was identified as a key issue. As noted previously, CCIs are a major driver of economic and social regeneration in the Thames Gateway. Employers in CCIs demand a highly skilled workforce, with qualifications at level 4, making HE the major provider of the skills required. However, the ability and capacity of HE to deliver the skills required to support the growth of the CCIs appears to some extent to be constrained by the progression rate of students from level 3 courses and effective employer engagement.

It was this evidence of employment opportunities and the lack of progression that provided the basis for the research described here which aimed to 'get behind' the simple progression data and to describe qualitatively some of the issues which encourage or discourage learners when they are deciding whether to enter HE.

There are a number of factors which influence learners' progression and entry to Higher Education:

- \_ Firstly, individual factors, which include prior educational experience and attainment, family circumstances, socio-economic and employment status, perception of job opportunities and the value of a qualification at level 4.
- \_ Secondly, national policy on education and student finance. In terms of finance, the impact of fees and student loans, coupled with learners' attitudes towards debt. In terms of educational policy, the general drive to expand HE (and HE in FE) and skills agenda post Leitch.

- \_ Thirdly, the policy and practice of individual FE and HE institutions in terms of progression arrangements from FE, admissions policy, the curriculum offer, and flexible modes of delivery and assessment.
- \_ And finally, employment or enhanced employment opportunities available during and on successful completion of study. These issues were explored with the learners in our study and reported in section 3.

## 2.2

### Aims

The aim of the research was twofold: to explore learner perceptions of the choices available to them at the point when they complete a vocational programme of study in the CCI subject areas at level 3; and to consider the factors that influence learner decisions about whether to progress to level 4.

## 2.3

### Approach

Our qualitative approach was necessary in order to get behind the available progression data and to use methods that would enable us to capture the perspectives of learners, their teachers and support staff in a range of CCI subjects across the Thames Gateway. Our respondents are not representative, in the statistical sense, of all learners and staff on CCI programmes across the Thames Gateway and care should be taken to avoid drawing conclusions on that basis.

### Sampling

The research was not, as we have noted above, designed to produce a statistically representative sample. We adopted a purposive approach to sampling, given that we wanted to ensure that we spoke to as many learners and support staff as possible, in a range of CCI subjects, across the Thames Gateway within budgetary and time constraints. We also interviewed a small number of learners on non CCI programmes as a control group.

We conducted a total of 30 group interviews with 155 students and 23 interviews with teaching and support staff. Lists of teaching and support staff, programmes, institutions and learners are included in the appendices.

### **Data Collection**

Primary data was collected through interviews with learners, teachers and support staff, plus a short demographic questionnaire for learners. All of the research instruments were piloted and where necessary, amended, before being used in the field. Prospectuses and other publicly available material were collected on all partners in The Creative Way LLN.

We conducted group interviews with learners for both methodological and practical reasons. Interviews were arranged by tutors and courses leaders, who were briefed in advance about the research. Interviews were conducted in classrooms and canteens of colleges and institutions. Group interviews are relatively inexpensive to conduct, compared to individual interviews, are often stimulating for respondents and consequently generate rich data. However group interviews can also be problematic, not least for the interviewer or moderator who must be skilful in dealing with group dynamics, by an individual or small group of individuals from dominating whilst encouraging recalcitrant respondents to participate. Interviews lasted on average 50–60 minutes. All learners participating in the group interviews were given a small token of appreciation, a high street voucher, for their participation.

Teaching and support staff were offered the option of either being interviewed over the telephone or face-to-face. From a practical point of view telephone interviews can be more cost effective for geographically dispersed groups and can be made at a time convenient to the respondent. However we recognise that this method does have a number of potential problems and limitations such as establishing rapport and the absence of non-verbal cues and behaviour. Wherever possible we sought face-to-face interviews. Telephone interviews were generally shorter 20–40 minutes than face-to-face interviews which were on average 60 minutes duration.

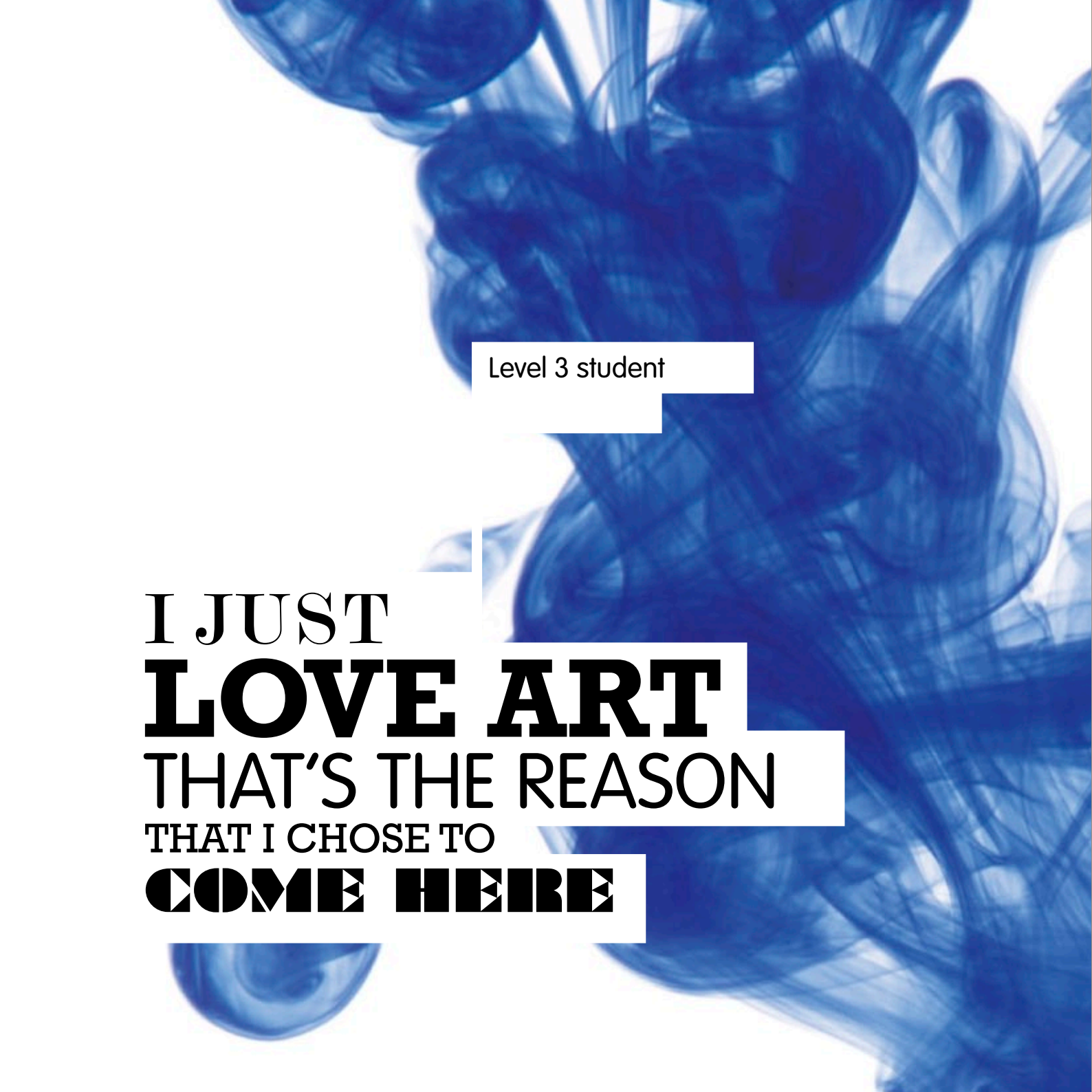
All interviews with learners and staff were recorded, with their consent, using digital recorders and transcribed as soon as possible after the event by the researcher who conducted the interview. We were aware of the challenges of recording and transcribing group interviews and the potential for data loss and distortion.

We recognise that interviews are contextually based (Gubrium & Holstein 2002), a mutual endeavour between interviewer and respondent(s). This study of learners resonated with the researchers, who themselves are first generation

HE students from non-traditionally qualified backgrounds and this consequently resulted in a deeper ethnographic understanding.

### **Ethics and safety in the field**

Throughout every stage of the research process, from design, to fieldwork and dissemination, we have been mindful of both ethics and safety in the field. As active researchers we support and comply with the codes of conduct of our professional associations (Social Research Association, British Education Research Association and the British Sociological Association).



Level 3 student

I JUST  
**LOVE ART**  
THAT'S THE REASON  
THAT I CHOSE TO  
**COME HERE**

3

## Learners speak about ...

In this section we explore the decision making processes that students engage in as they progress to higher level study or move into employment or take other pathways.

**The creative and cultural industries form a significant employment sector in the Thames Gateway region.**

Our lives are full of decisions, from the small and mundane such as what to wear or eat to the life-changing such as moving house or changing jobs. Our right to choose is central to our individuality. This report considers one quite specific life-changing decision undertaken by one particular group: we look at college students studying arts and media subjects and explore the decision making processes which students engage in as they progress to higher level study or to move into employment or to take other pathways.

How do students make this choice? Almost every other decision we make involves some element of predicting the future. What alternative futures do students envision which they decide whether or not to “go to uni”? What forces of emotion and rationality do they bring into play?

And the students in this study are particularly passionate. They study subjects related to the creative and cultural industries, subjects which are intensely absorbing and engaging: Photography and Fine Art, Graphic Design and Costume Production, Art and Design and Fashion, Music Technology and Theatre Design, Web Publishing and Film Studies, Media and Animation. As a young woman on a level 4 course told us: “I don’t know anything else that moves or inspires me more.”

The students in our sample all spoke with enthusiasm about their creative work, and were lively, open and engaging. Conversations, mostly with groups of four to eight students, were informal with respondents sparking off each other. Their appreciation of the efforts of college tutors was a common feature.

The creative and cultural industries form a significant employment sector in the Thames Gateway region. Creative and fulfilling jobs are available and these industries employ a high percentage of graduates. So our talented graphics designer or fashion photographer will improve their employment chances by moving on to higher level study and getting a degree before entering the job market. But do college students see their choices in this light? Do they make a calculation? Do they consider the costs of degree level study? Do they know the relation between graduate status and higher paid employment? Or are they seduced by the prospect of immediate employment albeit with a lower salary and reduced career choices?

These are not solely individual choices. Even the most calculating and focussed student does not have an entirely free choice. There are external factors: Families may encourage or discourage, may be unfamiliar with the idea

of university, may perceive poor employment prospects in the world of arts and media, and may find the costs of higher level study unaffordable. The student’s schooling may have given insufficient academic preparation for an undergraduate course. Peer pressure and media representation may also play a part; we are all shaped by social forces. The exercise of choice occurs within these constraints.

However, our focus here is not to elaborate the theoretical determinants of educational success. Our aim is to capture learner perspectives on the available choices. Granted that choice may be shaped by family, culture, finance and institutional offer, how do students perceive the opportunities and choices which are before them? What do students see as constraints to educational progress? How do students see the creative and cultural job market?

Our immediate aim is to explore student perceptions of their choices after level 3 study. The broader aim for this project is to recognise the perceived hurdles to progression and to propose ways in which colleges and universities may adjust their programmes to make it easier for students to progress to higher level study.

In the next sections, we hear how students themselves perceive their choices.

### 3.1

#### Learners speak about going to college

For young people entry to undergraduate courses is usually via A level or BTEC preparatory study. Mature students may undertake an Access course, or demonstrate their suitability for degree level study in other ways. But for the vast majority of young people, A level and BTEC provide the pathway to higher education. For learners whose school career has been undistinguished, the vocational route offered by Further Education colleges is critical. Colleges provide the vital bridge to level 4 study.

#### College is better than school

School pupils in year eleven face important decisions: stay on until they are eighteen, find a job or training place, do nothing, or move to a Further Education or Sixth Form College. For many young people school has not been an affirming experience, many have acquired a distaste for formal study and a sense of themselves as unsuited to academic work. On the brink of adult status

they find the age-related hierarchies of school constricting. For many level 3 students Further Education offers a glimpse of autonomy, independence and adulthood – elements which they feel are absent from school.

“This is better than school. There were too many in the class. College lets you have your own will.” \_L2 non arts course

“I did one year of A levels and didn’t feel I was progressing as well as I could ... I thought, you know, I couldn’t take school any more. It was still in the school environment. Some people did want to be in that sort of environment – but I didn’t want to be in that any more. ... I wanted to be, you know, treated more like an adult – even though you get privileges [in school] you’re still treated like a kid.” \_L3

For many level 3 students vocational courses offer that chance to focus on their special interest, their area of accomplishment.

“I had the chance to carry on at sixth form. But then I decided I could just do art and nothing else.”

*What about A levels?*

“But then I’d have to study the other subjects as well. I wouldn’t be able to spend as much time on the art as I could here.”

“I didn’t want to stay at school. Didn’t want to do A levels. I wanted to come to college and carry on with IT. ... Bit of programming and graphics as well. I think it’s great.”

“I didn’t want to do all the A level extra things, I just wanted to do art. I came here.”

“I couldn’t do my second year [in school A levels] because I dropped one of the subjects I was doing and they said I had to find somewhere else. So I came here. ... It’s been really good. It’s a helluva lot better than A levels. It’s more hands on. It is like really a lot of pressure in A levels, because you’re doing various other topics and lessons. Other than that it is harder to concentrate on art. It’s a lot less pressure here and you feel a lot more free to do you own stuff.”

College was also valued for other reasons. Several students referred to the opportunity to ‘wear your own clothes’ at college, ‘it’s more comfortable’ and allows you your own ‘identity’. Students reported a sense of success in college ‘unlike school’ where the ‘teachers treat you as stupid’. ‘The teachers give you more time here’. Respondents regularly expressed negative attitudes to school teachers, feeling that teachers did not respect them and that they were treated like ‘kids’. The desire for respect was a recurring theme, not expressed as a tough posture – rather as an expression of the frustrations of school. By making a radical break with childhood, Further Education serves a vital role in encouraging further study among disaffected school leavers.

“I think it’s better, and particularly here, that you’ve got more of a one on one basis with the teachers rather than it always being these desks between the teacher and the class, that the teachers they come round, they sit with you, and they work with you on things individually, and you build up more of a friendship with your teachers here I think. And that’s something that’s really helpful.” \_L3

### The opportunity to start again

For a significant number of level 3 respondents College was seen as more than simply an alternative to school, for many of our respondents – vocational students on BTEC courses – Further Education represented an educational second chance, the opportunity to put past failures behind and to forge a new path.

“You’ve got to be grown up, this provides a clean slate, you can start again. I’ve learnt more here than I did at school.”  
\_L2 non arts and media course

“I didn’t want to go anywhere around me because I didn’t want to be around anyone that I knew and because I thought that if I came with my reputation ... If I was to come here I’d have the opportunity to start afresh and I would have no-one looking at me and what I’m doing.” \_L3 at a college some way from home

“I came out of school with no A–C GCSE grades at all. Highest I got was a D. I came to this college to do the National Diploma straightaway but obviously I didn’t get the grades so they put me on the Intermediate course, which was OK, it just meant that I had to do an extra year.”

**“This is better than school. There were too many in the class. College lets you have your own will.”**

Further Education offers an alternative route into level 4 study, the student above had the opportunity to move from GCSE failure through BTEC to a level 4 course. Since it is sometimes difficult to repeat courses at school, this facility provides a much needed second chance, an important ladder for those for whom school has been less than satisfactory.

“I was in sixth form for my A levels and I sort of messed up quite badly. So I came here. I’ve always wanted to do art and architecture, so I really needed an Art A level and I sort of messed that up so I came here to do the two years to figure out what I want to do.” \_L3

“I didn’t get into drama until a couple of years ago. I’m twenty one now. I left school and went to college. I started doing four A levels and then dropped down to two. I got AS levels in media and music technology and then I went into rehab. And when I came out of rehab I came here.” \_L3

“When I started working, and worked for a year, you think this isn’t ... You think I want to better myself. And I came to that and I went back to education and I’m twenty so you do get to a point if you’re not in the right area of work, where you think well, maybe university does something. You’ve got your whole life.”

“It was my plan since I was fifteen or sixteen to go to university. And I wanted to go from sixth form at school straight into uni. But I started at the sixth form and it didn’t work out so I went to college for two years and I did vocational A levels in Business Studies. It was OK. It wasn’t great. BA English and Education.”

Colleges also offer a second chance to level 4 students, both through their accessibility and through the opportunity for internal progression.

“I did A level and started an HE course and dropped out. Spent the next few years travelling and working and sort of moving around. And it got to the point where I’d been sort of going away and coming back so often that it felt like I had to do something. I bought a digital camera and started taking photos and loved it and thought I had a fairly good eye for it. And I was actually in Australia and I decided to do a course [in the UK]. I applied, started it, really enjoying it ... I’m thinking about going to university.” \_L4 in FE

“I’ve done about ten different courses. I’m a bit of an education addict I suppose. So I left school, tried out different things and I’d kind of start a course and just do a few months, as soon as I didn’t like it I’d leave and then I’d try something different. And then I went off travelling, would work a bit, go away travelling again. And then did an evening course, a GCSE, a bit of a hobby in Photography and then found that I really enjoyed it. ... I joined this course, which I love, and really enjoyed it. And now I’m going away to Falmouth University to do the final year to top up the HND to get my degree.” \_L4 in FE

### The breadth of vocational study

BTEC is valuable. It gives students from all backgrounds the chance to learn about creative practices which are unavailable at school. The breadth of BTEC provides learners with opportunities to explore a range of different skills and thus to make informed choices. A number of level 3 respondents felt that the BTEC curriculum offered the opportunity to learn new skills, acquire techniques and learn new areas of creative expression.

“I wanted to do something in Fine Art but I wasn’t sure what area. It’s like if I wanted to be a painter it’s going to be hard to make money from it. But now I’ve gone straight in on illustration. So I’ll maybe take a course at university just focussing on that.” \_L3

“This course makes you open your eyes to everything else. You come with an idea but then you experience so much that you can choose.” \_L3

“At school I did comic illustration and I came here and then I was told I was good at textiles and fashion so I started to look into it and it seemed to be really interesting and so ... both Fashion Design and Fashion Photography ... We just make stuff. At the moment I’m making a pair of jeans. They’re not that great.” \_L3 male

“When I first started doing it, it was literally just as progression and as a way of finding something to do. And I’ve always been interested in Art. I thought I’ll come to college and do art as well. Through doing that I’ve realised that it’s not really the art side I’m interested in, it’s more the photography. Most of this year I’ve been doing photography and researching different types of photography and sort of general information on different cameras and things like that.” \_L3

**“This course makes you open your eyes to everything else. You come with an idea but then you experience so much that you can choose.” \_L3**

**“It was textiles before, but I changed, because this course makes you change your mind about what you want to do. Different sculpture, different things ... I just changed my mind to Interior Design.” \_L3**

“Through my GCSEs I was really into Fine Art and through that I got into Animation and that’s what I really want to do when I grow up. Go to university and create animations for BBC or whatever.” \_L3

“I’ve always enjoyed painting and since I’ve been at college I think my painting skills have got a lot better, it encourages me to use paint more, to do like more crazy dynamic pictures with paint which I’ve never ... Before I used to paint within the lines. I’ve actually gained more confidence with a paint brush and go crazy with it. I like painting. Fashion, it’s got a bit better. I’ve never done fashion in school and it’s only in the college in the last two projects that they actually started to involve fashion – so that’s what I’ve chosen.” \_L3

“It was textiles before, but I changed, because this course makes you change your mind about what you want to do. Different sculpture, different things ... I just changed my mind to Interior Design.” \_L3

It could be argued that the flexibility of vocational routes comes at a price – to what extent does the BTEC route provide learners with an adequate preparation for level 4 study? Both BTEC and A level courses are designed to prepare learners for level 4 study, yet undergraduate study is still largely constituted around post A level norms, both in curricular and cultural terms. Of concern here is the adequacy of vocational level 3 courses to prepare for study success at university.

### **The attractions of the practical over the academic**

Whilst being passionate about their creative studies, level 3 students were largely dispassionate about formal academic study. Some students have learned that they are not academic. This is, of course, their perception rather than an objective assessment. BTEC scores highly with learners because of its practicality. Respondents referred again and again to the practicality of BTEC courses over the more diverse academicism of A level syllabi. The attraction of practical creative work was widespread, extending from level 2 students to undergraduates in high status institutions.

“A lot of people find that [Academic work] difficult ... writing really, I’m more of a practical person. I prefer to learn whilst doing something rather than sit down, read about it, write about it, talk about it.” \_L3

“I think all my other courses had failed because they were too academic. You sit down in a formal lecture and I can’t concentrate in that sort of situation.” \_L4 in FE

“I was doing my A levels before I came here. I was doing two completely different subjects. I decided that I didn’t like the academic side of things, so I like the more creative side of things. I’m hoping to go to university.” \_L4 in FE

There was evidence too of some conflation of writing with theory and a general distaste for, or at least unfamiliarity with, written forms of expression.

“When I started this course I didn’t think it would be as much writing as what it is. Everything we do has to be evaluated. Everything has writing on it. We can’t hand something in if it doesn’t have writing.” \_L3

For some, academic work was even associated with being indoors.

“I didn’t want to do the digital imaging because that’s more of an indoor kind of thing. I’m more of a practical, hands-on, get stuck in [person].” \_L3

However, slightly older arts and media students saw written work as integral to creative work.

“I think they’ve got quite a good balance here actually because a lot of our theory is more in the research end of what we do.” \_L3

Yet even students on media courses in high status universities were resistant to theory.

“I went [to look at X University] and that was one hundred per cent theory. No practical and a media course! And that concentrated on cultural studies ... We did a taster day and I sat there and I thought “I’m bored” and that was just the taster day. ... I get bored if I’m doing too much theory.” \_L4

For level 3 learners distaste for academic study took the form of resistance to the Key Skills. The Key Skills element in the BTEC curriculum was derided by

students, one group reporting that their perception that their tutors thought it was “rubbish” but had to “go through the motions.”

“There’s been ups and downs on the course, I didn’t know there was going to be so much non-art such as IT, English, maths and study skills – it interrupts the art work that you’re doing.”

One level 3 group were positive, reporting that “the Key Skills tutor is really helpful, but there’s not time for people with special problems, like dyslexia”. However, even these students had reservations. With a group size of twenty at this college both staff and students felt that there was a significant lack of support for learners with dyslexia.

There is a clear need for courses which are different from A levels, not simply as an alternative, second chance, route but also in terms of the technical and vocational needs of the economy – a fact which perhaps relates most especially to the creative and cultural industries.

### Level 3 is an achievement

Whilst the focus in this study is on progression from level 3 to level 4 study, it is important to remember that getting to level 3 is a major achievement for many young people and their families. Our respondents saw college as better than school, recognised the benefits of a broader creative curriculum, and saw that college could offer a second chance. There were, however, some students who exhibited a lack of knowledge about the opportunities that are available to them. For many level 3 vocational students in our sample, they were the first in their family to go to college.

“[My family] are happy. I live with my boy friend, I’m the first person who’ve actually been to College in my family.”

This was sometimes evident in respondents’ innocence about courses and about the relation of courses to university and to employment outcomes. This media student, for example, had yet to explore his object of study.

“Since I’ve been here I’ve found that radio’s quite cool.”

*Do you listen to the radio?*

“Only in the car.” \_L3 on media course

**There is a clear need for courses which are different from A levels, not simply as an alternative, second chance, route but also in terms of the technical and vocational needs of the economy.**

For a BTEC Technical Theatre student, the course showed him how he could combine his existing interest in electrics with a newly awakened interest in the theatre.

“I can’t remember how it came up and I thought, ‘Yes.’ I knew I wanted to do this sort of course. Because I like lighting and stuff. And I have done for some time. I never really knew I liked it [theatre lighting] and then when I came here I realised I liked it. What is your next move? I’m just going to go into the warehouse job after this and work my way up, like in lighting. They just offered me a job yesterday.” \_L3

This technical theatre student was on a one year course, so at seventeen was too young to move on to a level 4 course. He said he was keeping his options open and might well consider degree level study the following year.

“I’m going to study scenic arts, the art side of the theatre. ... Stage design and the making and the construction side of it. I enjoy construction and making things. But then I’m torn and thinking about where it’s going to take me. Maybe thinking stage management, but I guess I can always change. See how I like the first year. Or do two courses even.” \_L3

Here too a respondent displayed an innocence about the relation between education and work, assuming that two courses would be a financial possibility or even a career benefit in a world of increasing specialisation.

This fashion student was representative of many who did not know what was on offer in the post-school curriculum.

“I wasn’t intending to go to university a few years ago, because of the exam thing, but when I realised that there were courses that didn’t include exams – that sort of changed my mind. I’m going to Middlesex University, starting in September, doing BA Fashion there. I choose it because, again, it’s all course work and that suits me more. And I wanted to go on and do better.” \_L3

Some seemed to have drifted from course to course, others continue in indecision.

“I wasn’t sure whether to do IT or music and decided to do music. I’m not sure because I don’t know whether I want to go back into IT now or carry on with music. So I’m thinking of taking an intensive A level in IT next year alongside music. One evening a week or something like that. What about university? Yes, but not sure whether IT or music. Will take advice ... here”

Vocational courses offer an alternative route to level 4, a second chance, an opportunity to focus on the practical, and the opportunity to learn across a range of creative skills.

One student reported that his father is proud of him; he’s coping with the course despite English being his third language. Another was spurred on by peer rivalry.

“I wasn’t planning on going to college. I wasn’t planning on doing anything. But recently I found out that someone else was going to college. And I thought to myself, if they can go then, if they’ve got what it takes to get to college then I thought to myself ‘what am I doing?’ ... I didn’t know anyone that did drama in college or higher than secondary school.”

“My parents never thought I’d want to go to college or university.”

For some students, just getting to a Level 3 course is a significant achievement.

## 3.2

### Learners speak about their families

The level 3 vocational students who have spoken to us were largely drawn from the 17–22 age range. At this stage in life the influence of parents and of the broader family is particularly great. Families provide food and shelter, money, emotional support as well as educational and careers advice.

Many of the students interviewed had a two-fold challenge in talking to their parents about progression to level 4: firstly the idea of studying for a further three years could be both culturally strange and financially daunting; secondly those students studying arts and media subjects had difficulty convincing their parents that the creative and cultural industries offered any job opportunities at all.

### Parental views of progression to level 4 study

Our respondents are studying in the post-compulsory sector; they have already been encouraged to continue their education. Thus most students reported that their parents were supportive.

“Yes, they think I should go for it. They’re backing me all the way to go for it.” \_L3

“My family have always supported me through anything I do, so. They’re always backing me up, no matter what I do. There were quite impressed.” \_L3

For some parents, encouragement was qualified by suggesting that students studied locally. This may be for financial or supervisory motives.

“Oh yes they’re fine with it. Yes. They’re happy that it’s close to home and everything.” \_L3

Another student reported that her family were supportive but not happy about her moving from home to study in higher education. Friends too have an influence.

“I want to go to uni. I haven’t decided which one yet. Not too far away. Because I don’t really want to leave. Some of my friends have gone to uni this year and I don’t think it’s worth, like, losing friendships. Like you really like sort of fall out.” \_L3

Parents without experience of university could be supportive, despite being slightly mystified.

“Neither of my parents went to university, so statistically that means I have less of a chance of coming to university. But my mum regrets never having gone into further education. She’s always encouraged me in it and my dad is very relaxed about everything. They’ve both been very supportive. My dad can’t understand what I do with all my time. He’s like “You only have eight hours of lectures a week! What do you do with the rest?” \_L4

**“Neither of my parents went to university, so statistically that means I have less of a chance of coming to university.”**

Some parents did more than offer support, as respondents attributed their educational progression to parental encouragement.

“I took a year out. ... Whilst I was working I was also having to sort my parents pushing me to go to university. I can see that without my parents pushing me you can fall into a trap. You think go on a gap year, then you get into work and then they offer you something ...”  
\_L4

“I think if anything my mum persuades me more than what I persuade myself. A lot of times I’m, you know, it’s so hard to get into anything and all that studying and come out and not have nothing.” \_L3

“But my mum encouraged me to keep on with it. She says she knows that if I wasn’t doing it, I wouldn’t be doing anything, so.” \_L3

In some cases it appeared that students were fulfilling the thwarted ambitions of their parents. One level 4 student reported that:

“I talked to my mum about it. She just wished she’d had the opportunity. She works in HR. It wasn’t really around for her, it wasn’t an option. None of her brothers and sisters went to uni. My dad, they all did you see.”

In a similar vein a level 3 student reported that her dad had wanted to take an art course, so was really pleased as he had not had the opportunity. Young people try to please their parents, in some cases to the extent that one BTEC Media student had taken two years IT in a neighbouring college “for my parents” before moving on to media.

Some parents support the move to degree level study but take the precaution of suggesting realistic back up plans.

“My parents are supportive, but they’re pushing me to say “If you don’t do this what are you going to do?” They’re trying to make me realise that if I don’t get into university what am I going to do? If I do get into university, what am I going to do? Either way they look at it, it’s what am I going to do afterwards, and during, if I don’t get into university. They’re sort of trying to make me think about that side of it as well.” \_L3

Here the cautious approach came from a parent who prompted her son to consider his own prospects.

“I was forced to [have a back up plan] if I wanted to do something arty. My Mum sat me down: ‘you know we’re not going to be around for ever. I’m spending your inheritance now’. Thanks Mum. It made me think. What would you get from this degree if you couldn’t get into the theatre? I’m quite lucky [lighting & design course] theatre, television, window dressing, I could be a handy man. I could be a builder if I wanted. You know I had to come up with all this. OK I could end up teaching if I couldn’t get into the industries I wanted. I would [consider teaching] but I’d have to be very careful about the age group. Children get to me. But its definitely on my mind a lot of the time. You have to think about it.” \_L4

Few students reported parental opposition to university. However, one level 3 media student reported that his father ran a gym, had lots of contacts, and had said “I can get you a job in video”. Another described parents unfamiliar with either higher education of the cultural and creative industries.

“Mine don’t really approve of me being here. They tried to advise me against it, at the start. When I started auditioning, they thought I should get a job and do something different and not do this and also they don’t ... they’re a bit strange. They don’t really believe in an education system either. They’re very traditional and they’ve worked all their lives and not really got on in education themselves.” \_L4

Whilst the vast majority of learners reported familial support, of more concern for parents was the learner choice of subject.

### Parental scepticism about studying arts and media

Our interviews were with students at level 3 and level 4, all in post compulsory education. Thus one would expect parents to be broadly supportive of further study in general. Whilst many parents were in favour of progression to university, the overwhelming majority of students reported some at least initial parental scepticism about the wisdom of taking a degree in an arts or media subject. Overwhelmingly learners reported that their parents were doubtful about the employment outcomes of such study. As evident in the later section on educational advice and guidance, parents expressed a preference for more

conventional, traditional and professional areas of study and employment. The creative and cultural subjects need to be sold.

When asked, "What do your family think about you doing a creative arts course?" Students sometimes simply replied "They don't like it."

Even an undergraduate student in a high status institution faced some resistance.

"[My parents] know that this course is a respected course. And I am enjoying it so they are very happy. My dad has made the comment of, you know, about Mickey Mouse degrees and all that kind of thing – which you just expect to take." \_L4

However, such attitudes were seen to change as parents became more familiar with what the students were actually doing: exhibitions and performances were seen to be helpful in this respect.

"At the beginning they were a bit sceptical about it, they didn't see it as a career for me. Now they know more about it they are supportive."

"My parents in the beginning were like "Why am I doing drama?" Like my dad said "When you go to uni, what are going to study?" I said I'm going to do drama. He said, "No, you can't do drama." I said "That's what I've been doing for the past how many years now." And it was like I'm not just going to go to uni to do something ... to do something that I don't know nothing about. He's still a bit iffy about it. That's why I want him to come to see my show."

"... My parents were very keen on me getting a degree. My mum [was supportive] my dad was 'Oh a music degree is not ... be realistic ...' but this is what I really want. And as I did more performances in the community he came to realise that this was a legitimate thing. ... He could see me making progress ..." \_L4

This Drama student appeared to use his passion for the subject to persuade his father of his serious career intentions.

**"My dad's all right. Because he's just like "As long as you're happy and you know what you're doing". But my mum hates it because she doesn't see what there is at the end of it. She's just like "Oh! Acting. I wanna be an actress." But she doesn't realise there's more to it." \_L3**

"My Dad ... was quite intent on us getting an education that he couldn't have. So that's why I decided to do A levels. He wanted me to be like a lawyer or something. My brother did take that route into academia ... He went to Manchester, did Physics, did a year in Berkley, was in Japan for two years and then got a job in the city, with loads of money. So I went to do A levels and look around universities and that. And so I said "I'll go to look at some universities and let me do some auditions as well". And so we made that deal ... I was in Manchester looking at the Creative Writing course, with English. Creative Writing is like a bit of it. And we were sitting there in this seminar room [on an Open Day] and the guy was speaking about the course, I was like "I can't do this mate. Dad, I can't do this. No way I can do this." And that was a course with a bit of creativity as well! I think he saw the determination in me. And then a week after I had an audition at Birmingham, that was my first one, and I got a recall. And when he saw there was a possibility of me doing it, and how much I wanted to do it, then he gave me emotional support. It was well good. Still not money wise though! Emotional support is better because it gives you some kind of foundation." \_L4

Some respondents reported no difficulty in persuading their parents that creative study was a positive step. This family managed to embrace the arts despite poverty.

"[On moving into a creative subject] I was all right, because my brother, he's a dancer, so ... it was no problem. I only live with my mum, I don't live with my father. And she'd always take us to do and try stuff and everything so it was just, kind of, like natural. Like my mum, she's a designer – it wasn't anything out of the ordinary." \_L4

Parents do not necessarily speak with one voice. Many students reported that their parents had contradictory views.

"My dad's all right. Because he's just like "As long as you're happy and you know what you're doing". But my mum hates it because she doesn't see what there is at the end of it. She's just like "Oh! Acting. I wanna be an actress." But she doesn't realise there's more to it." \_L3

“My mum and dad split up when I was about thirteen. They’re divorced. ... So when I told my mum I was going to college to do the BTEC she was happy for me, she was like encouraging me. “I know you like this so you’d better do it”. Dad was a bit ... on the way to the audition at college he was like “You’re making the wrong choice. You’re throwing it away”. I think he didn’t really understand that acting can be a career. I think he thought I was wasting my time and I’d end up working in McDonalds in ten years time because I was not getting work as an actor. I think he was very narrow-minded about his views on me going to the creative world.” \_L4 in a specialist college

Resistance to the creative and cultural came not only from middle class parents with professional aspirations for their offspring, but also from working class families where physical work is valued.

“My stepfather is not quite as supportive. My mum and dad are supportive and think I’ll be able to get far with it. My stepfather though he doesn’t like it. He says “Oh, it’s going to take four years just to get a job”. He’s always been a grafter. He’s done roofing and building and things like that. So he doesn’t understand it, and why I want to do that, and why it’s taking so long. He’s very supportive of me going to university. It’s just my career path he’s not supportive of. He doesn’t really approve. I don’t listen to him, so.” \_L3

In other cases parents were won over by students selecting options within the area that were perceived to have better employment prospects.

“I was always into Fine Art and it was “What sort of job can you get out of that?” So I kind of veered away from that and let myself try new things and that’s when I got into Graphic Design. And they were quite happy because there’s a range of careers out of that.” \_L3

“My parents panicked at first thinking I was wanting to be a freelance Artist type person, with no real job. But when I explained that I wanted go into Art Therapy, it’s OK.” \_L3

“I did have full support. I changed my course, they said ‘There’s no point of being on a course where you’re not happy’. I did acting on my BTEC. They’re quite happy as they feel I’ll probably get more work out of Stage Management.” \_L4

**“My family are cool about it so long as I’m financially stable.” [hoots of laughter from the group] \_L3**

In other cases parental scepticism was modified not from knowledge of the modern creative industries, but rather from an old fashioned connection to domestic creative work.

“I do a lot of handwork hobbies at home, knitting, crochet, cross-stitch, embroidery, that sort of thing. I’ve done that from quite a young age. That was something that fed into choosing this course as well. Were you encouraged? Yes. My mum was really keen for me to pursue this pathway because she thinks I’m quite good at it as well because she taught me all these crafts when I was quite young and she thought it would be good for me to develop it further.” \_L3 Fashion and Textiles

Family influence can also be exerted in counter productive ways.

“My mum and her family used to be dressmakers and I went and did Fashion Design and Technology first of all. I thought that I’d follow in her footsteps. But I was too young then and didn’t enjoy it much. I think you haven’t got that confidence at eighteen as well. I thought “I’m not going to make it, it’s competitive” and so I didn’t bother carrying on. I looked at other creative subjects from that. Mature student on photography course.” \_L4 in FE

Some support reflected a rather out of date parental understanding of the creative and cultural industries.

“My mum went to Secretarial college, my dad went to Art School. So my dad is fairly used to the arts not having many prospects. He’s ended up driving a van. He went in the sixties, so he doesn’t use computers or anything, so he’s ended up being left behind.” \_L4

Persuading parents of the prudence of study in subjects related to the creative and cultural industries was a task that students took on, although they may privately be more doubtful about the chances of success.

“My family are cool about it so long as I’m financially stable.” [hoots of laughter from the group] \_L3

For those students unable to assuage parental concerns, a passion for their chosen creative subject can lead them to pursue it nevertheless.

“They are so worried, ... but I don’t want to be a doctor or something like that. My family, they keep on saying “What you doing? What’s this? What’s that?” but at the end of the day I like acting because it’s a passion, you know. I don’t do it for anyone. It’s something that I like, and even if I don’t get paid I will still do it.” \_L3

There were some marked differences. All members of an ethnically mixed HNC Fine Art course in a disadvantaged London borough reported that their parents had expressed great reservations about both level 4 progression and about studying art. Yet when we met with a group of white middle class young women in a relatively privileged institution, not one reported parental concern about the distance between a Fine Art course and obvious career opportunities.

There were clear differentials in affluence among our cohort. Some students came from privileged homes, whilst other student groups acknowledged that they could only attend college because of the Educational Maintenance Award. Yet there appeared to be little discernable correlation between family financial position and knowledge of the career opportunities with the creative and cultural industries. Most parents were reported to be sceptical about the vocational usefulness of studying arts and media subjects, and thus may be largely uninformed about the employment opportunities in these newer industries.

### 3.3

#### Learners speak about their educational advisors

##### The importance of family and personal connections

Going to college is a big step. Going on to degree level study even greater. The personal costs of level 3 and level 4 study – time, costs of study, earnings forgone and risk of failure make signing on for a course a significant life decision. The learners in our study were advised by their families, friends and other personal contacts. Personal connections were important, informal advice and guidance was influential. There were few references to professional advisors.

Respondents were guided by personal connections to particular colleges.

“I chose [this university] because my mum came here to do her Masters in Business Management. So I saw the university when I was fifteen ... And it’s quite local. ... It was my first choice of all my unis.” \_L4

“Cardiff really appeals to me. Definitely. I know people who went ... years ago. It’s a great city. It’s got a good mix of culture and people.” \_L3

Students were recommended to specific courses.

“I found out about this course because my cousins went here years ago. Said it was good. It’s OK. Some of the teachers are a bit immature, but such is life.”

“I’m going to university in September. I found out about this course from my sister.” \_L3

“I’m going to Rose Bruford in September to study lighting design. I knew about this course a few years back. My partner was on this course.” \_L3

“I found out about the course because I knew someone that studied it before ... I’ve learnt a lot. I’ve really enjoyed it.” \_L4

*How did you get into Theatre Design?*

“One of my friends was into Music Video and I saw that and started researching.”

“My aunt, she went here. I think it was here. She’s a fashion buyer. She told me about this course and how it was really good, and how they helped her really develop and get into the business.” \_L3

“I done a BTEC course in Liverpool and then I took a year out and I done a Foundation course elsewhere – just a private one. And then I auditioned and got in here. I had a friend who was here about four years ago so I know through her, like.” \_L4

Others were influenced by family in their choice of employment.

“I want to be an IT technician. I got a brother-in-law, he’s an IT technician. ... I wanted to be a pilot once. I got IT. ... I’m always on computer. I’m a computer fanatic.”

"I want to go maybe to Ravensbourne University. I'll have to work my socks off, and hopefully become a cameraman ... My mum's cousin is a cameraman and he said the BBC quite like people from Ravensbourne. So, do well at Ravensbourne and get employed by the BBC. That's what I'm aiming for." \_L3

"I wanted to be a regular therapist at first, like Psychology. But I didn't want to lose touch with the art altogether, so I was talking to my art teacher at my old school and she knew someone in her family that did [art therapy]." \_L3

There was evidence of the need for informed guidance, in the absence of which learners fell back on family experience.

"I want to be a social worker."

*What do you know about social work?*

"Nothing really. Well, my Nan was a social worker and she really enjoyed it. ... Because I want to help children."

*Are you going to university?*

"I ain't got the grades. ... I've read that you can join the NSPCC voluntary, but then after about two years they want you, if they think that you cut it." \_L3 Early Years

### Parental preference for traditional professional pathways

Parents may offer informal careers advice, but it appears that this may take the form of fairly stereotypical career pathways. New careers, like those in the creative and cultural industries, do not feature. Many students said that their parents wanted them to study in a professional area.

**"Parents expect you to do Business, or be a lawyer or doctor or something like that."**

"My mum needs to see something like a recognised profession. Something that you don't need to study for, you go into it. And when I told her I was studying [Technical Theatre] she says "Right, you can be doing that part time and you can be doing your law." I'm like "No." When she found out that I've been doing it for two years now, she's like really surprised." \_L3

**One student reported that his brother was in higher education so he felt he had to follow suit. His family were both pleased and supportive; his Nan had sent him twenty pounds.**

*Why does your mother want you to do International Politics?*

"Well, it sounds professional. I don't want to do Law, I'm not good at Mathematics so I don't want to do Accounting. I'm not doing Sociology, it's too vague, too vast." \_L4

"Parents expect you to do Business, or be a lawyer or doctor or something like that."

"Yes, they're quite happy. They were a bit not quite happy at first because I wanted to do medicine before Art. And so it was a bit of a change. They were quite shocked." \_L3

Other students had undergraduates within their immediate families, whilst others took informal advice from their families. Sometimes this took the form of following the pathways already trodden by their parents, siblings and close family members.

"My mum's in university now. She's doing Biomedics. I've forgotten the name now. My sister's at Greenwich, doing Languages." \_L3

"My mum graduated from Greenwich and she's a midwife. A community midwife." \_L3

"My mum sort of has this dream of me being an accountant. My dad has this dream of me being a priest. They're not particularly strong in their convictions. My mum made me go to university in the first place." \_L4 musician

"My mum did ask "You don't want to be a doctor?" I went "No". So Art it was. And she supports me so it's OK." \_L3

"The course I want to do at uni [forensic computing] kind of describes my job. My dad's in IT, my brother is as well. My dad works for BT and does network security. My brother is an administrator for the Woolwich Building Society." \_L2

One student reported that his brother was in higher education so he felt he had to follow suit. His family were both pleased and supportive; his Nan had sent him twenty pounds.

A mature, single parent undergraduate told us:

“Most of my cousins have attended uni. My parents are Jamaican born, none of them didn’t attend, my aunts, my uncles, none of them that I’m aware of attended university but they’re all a working family. They don’t like hanging about in the house ... [T]hen my cousins started going to university and it’s like “When I was at uni”. You feel a bit left out, you know what I mean? I decided I wanted to go to uni.” \_L4

“I’ve got four sisters, two are graduates and one is in uni right now. Basically I don’t want to be the only one.”

### Finding out for yourself

Whilst professional sources of information, advice and guidance about courses and careers was scarce, some respondents showed impressive skills in searching for themselves.

“I found out about the course because I came to an Open Day and found out what was available and I auditioned for this course.” \_L4

“I found out about this because I looked it up on the internet. The course has really brought out my confidence and helped me to express myself more better ... I’m going to university. Drama. I want to be a drama therapist.” \_L3

“I went into UCAS and searched for the Media courses with the highest grades [required for entry] because that was my way of thinking that’s going to be the best course. So that’s my way of finding this uni.” \_L4

“Previously I went to John Ruskin college where I studied media, so I had a chance of directing, editing, being in front of the camera. That’s when I discovered my talent in acting so I decided to research about Lewisham College. So I came here and I looked up a prospectus and found that Performing Arts was the one for me. So now that I’ve been here I’ve found like a good opportunity to go to the theatre. And it’s worked my confidence. It’s a really great here, a really terrific college and I’ve made great friends here, which I really like. It’s really, really good.” \_L3

“I applied for this course purely on what I’d read on the internet. I was out of the country when I applied. So all I read was about a part-time course, which was actually what I needed, Photography. It was obviously going to have a practical element to it, which was what I wanted as well. I was looking for something that was not just academic but wider ...” \_L4 in FE

Self-starter information was sometimes incomplete.

“First off I’d like to do the Nationals. Then I’d like to go to uni to do computer forensics. ... It was actually a TV programme. I wanted to do it since I’ve seen it. You think, I want to do that. ... It’s a long course, a three or four year course. A minimum of 200 UCAS points to go on to it. ... I’ll do a National Diploma, I think with a National Diploma you can get up to 400 UCAS points. Basically more crimes are being done on the internet and they need more people to go to computers.” \_L2

Some combined resourcefulness with advice from friends and acquaintances.

“I was at college before I came here, doing BTEC Performing Arts. I’m on Community Theatre, first year. I went through UCAS but I’d already found out about the university through various other sources, including an old secondary school teacher of mine whose son came here. So I heard about the place through word of mouth and then, when we were at college Colin Sell, who is Head of Music, came and visited the college and from what he said and from what I’d seen on the website I just fell in love with the place, and finally got in through auditions.” \_L4

“I did my A levels and then I did BTEC and then I just took time out, worked in the real world for a bit. I ran a guest house for about a year, and then I just did some theatre work in local companies and then I met someone who had trained [here] and I auditioned that year for different drama schools. And I came to have a look and auditioned and that’s it.” \_L4

We also met a number of students who were well informed consumers in the educational market. Again, differences were marked. Other learners appeared to have drifted from course to course without any clear direction, nor any

**Educational choices, like any other decision making, occur within a specific cultural context.**

clear guidance from professional sources. Educational choices, like any other decision making, occur within a specific cultural context. They rely largely on who you know, where you are, on class, ethnicity and culture.

### The cultural context of educational choice

Choices are not isolated events, but take place within a sea of cultural meanings: parental expectations, peer group pressure, the attractions of creative work and knowledge of employment opportunities. Progression to level 4 is made easier where this is normalised and part of the pattern of expectations at home, school and college.

“I guess the school I went to presumed that everybody went to university. It wasn’t a grammar school, it was a so-called Beacon school. A school that other schools aim to be like. They put everybody through a process, everybody went to a Fair, we had talks on UCAS and things and also I guess I’d always wanted to be a secondary school teacher, so I know that I had to have a degree for that. So I was career motivated as well.” \_L4

For others the expectations were quite different.

“I come from a working class background, as you can probably hear, and at school it’s OK to get a job. There’s pressure on you to get a job, it’s not good to be on the dole and in that way they might get a job that they’re not interested in ...” \_L4

“A lot of them are content to land up on the dole ... I was in the fish and chip shop round the corner to my house and standing there in the queue just behind me was my tutor and one guy who’d been in my tutor group [at school] and overhearing their conversation the tutor said “what are you doing now?” and he said “F...all”. And that made me feel really good. I’ve actually bettered myself, so I can get out of that area and of the whole thing ... yes they’re nineteen years old and they still walk around as if they’re fourteen and I think it’s a real shame, they’ve got no passion in life ...” \_L4

A fellow student added to this account.

“I come from the other side – it’s exactly the same thing, but instead of not going to university they go because they’re told they should. They’ve no personal incentive to go. I’ve got a friend who was in all the school plays with me working on the technical side of it, but then because when it came to applying a teacher said “You’re off to Imperial are you?” “What? Oh, OK” so he’s off to Imperial doing Astrophysics or something like that and he dropped out before Christmas because it just wasn’t interesting to him and he thought “Hang on, at school I was dropping out of Physics to go and work on the school play” so then he thought “what do I want to do?” and he decided to do the Open University. And a lot of my friends ... they go to university on all these academic courses and then the highlight of their week is “OK lets go out and get drunk”. OK, we drink to get drunk, but we enjoy our courses during the day as well, whereas they seem to just churn out essays so they can get a job and send their kids to a cathedral school. ... I think the creative degree courses are courses where people can break away from those social classes I think that was why we see [this course] needing publicity really, so people will see it as an option.” \_L4

### The influence of professional information, advice and guidance services

Despite prompting during our focus group conversations, few respondents referred to professional sources of information, advice and guidance. Students were however grateful for the extended help which they have received from their tutors as opposed to professional careers services.

“Yes, it’s helped us. Ploughing through the UCAS forms and universities, we’ve actually had help literally every step of that. Writing our personal statements, picking the right course for us ... They’ve actually given us ideas of universities to look at which will do the sort of courses we want to progress to.” \_L3

Learners on this one year course had reached the end before considering their next move, and were reliant on their tutors, even at this late stage.

“We’re in for another week. We’ve got tutorials next week so we can ask about it then. It’s a finish-up really for the course. So we can ask questions about the course and where we’re going to.”

These seventeen year olds were relatively directionless; compare this with the extensive practice interviews which other seventeen year olds receive in their preparation of for the Oxbridge admission process.

There were however some satisfied consumers of careers advice.

“At school we went to see a careers advisor. Basically she asked us “What do you enjoy doing?” So I told her I enjoy my Fashion and my Art and my Textiles. And she told me about the course. It sounded just what I wanted to know.” \_L3

During our recorded interviews we received far more negative than positive accounts of educational advisors. These were unprompted, and surprising since our sample is skewed – these are largely successful students who have chosen to be in post-compulsory education. Thus respondents in our sample could give no guide to the ways in which professional advisors may deter learners from education altogether.

There was some evidence of teachers attempting to dissuade students.

“My teacher said not to do it [course in media or drama] because it’s too competitive.”

“From my teachers at school, like, I’m really close to them. And my Graphics teacher told me that he was going to be an architect. And he said “I went to university, done Architecture, and now I work as a Graphics teacher because I couldn’t get a job in it.” He told me himself that it’s not worth going to university.”

“It would help if the college would help you get a job ... Me and Dan went around looking for our personal tutor once and she said there’s a book of jobs in the library, but it was jobs you can’t get. It was no help at all.” \_L3

“I went to my careers tutor and he advised me not to go into drama school because they said I would never get anywhere ...”

“I went to, what they called? Connexions? Rubbish, that’s really rubbish. Like you go around and they say “OK, what are your qualities? OK, this might be good.” Print. ZZZ. And I say “OK, what

I want to know actually is, you know, I don’t have any A levels ...” and they say “OK, I can give you a number and you can give them a call.” \_L4

Some students gave an account of their educational journey, accounts which seemed to cry out for some informed and accessible advice and guidance.

“I was doing a nursing course and I didn’t like it. I did the first year. ... The hours! I didn’t know what I was letting myself in for. Lot of shift work. It was just more difficult than I thought it would be in terms of the hours and things like that. Physically demanding.” \_L4 non arts and media

“I’ve always liked Psychology. I didn’t even realise you could do a combined honours. I thought “Wow, if I can combine that it would give me one up over other graduates, because I’d have more than one ... I’d have transferable skills because I’m multi-tasking.” The things I do in Biology are totally different from what I do in Psychosocial. I like the contrast. It really get me on my toes and really gets me thinking.” \_L4 non arts and media

Students in our cohort drew educational and vocational advice from many sources, personal connection seemed to feature largely with younger learners whilst older respondents adopted a more systematic approach to reviewing education and career alternatives. For many their choice of course was framed by the educational and employment experiences of family and friends. For the majority of learners however, choice was framed by financial considerations, as we discuss in a later section.

## 3.4

### Learners speak about employment prospects

#### Realism about the utility of a degree

There was evidence that many learners recognised that a degree would give them a competitive advantage in the labour market. In particular students were also realistic about their chance of obtaining employment in the creative and cultural industries.

“Media jobs, at least the ones that I’m looking for, will require a degree, because it is so competitive.” \_L4

“I went to my careers tutor and he advised me not to go into drama school because they said I would never get anywhere ...”

“I did a degree because my sister did, she’s two years older than me and I felt like I was following her ... and also because it’s a way you could get a job, by having a degree, get a job you want. ... We have the exhibition next week where all the employers come in to look at your work. Hope to get something out of that.” \_L4

“I want to stay in the same field, as a composer ... I came here because I wanted do music theatre and film music, television. Although I’ve got experience in the pop genre, I want to brush up my skills.” \_L4

*Could you go freelance?*

“I don’t think I could. The whole reason I want to go to university is just to extend my knowledge. Maybe then I could do something myself, or I could go into a company and work for them.” \_L4 in FE

Students appear to acknowledge that an undergraduate course can also confer other benefits such as networking and exposure to prospective employers. Responders readily recognised though that a degree offers no guarantee of work.

“Just try and make it in the music business ... Will having a degree help? I think it might do, but word of mouth I reckon will be the best option. Hopefully uni will get me talking to more people.” \_L3

“It’s a worry for myself, am I going to get a job after it? A job in the media?” \_L4

“There’s nothing really that I see that is definite that you’re going to get a job afterwards. People have said to me that photography is not worthwhile doing because there’s nothing really you can do afterwards.” \_L4 in FE

For this student the uncertainty surrounding employment was itself a barrier to progression.

“I can’t say Yes, I’m going to go’ [to university] ... say if you go there and then like everyone else you ain’t going to get a job out of it or nothing like that – then you’ve just wasted all that time. ... There’s no guarantee that you’re going to get something out of it.” \_L3

**“I don’t think everything should be handed to you on a plate, to make it that easy. You need to have that ‘get up and go’.”**

Respondents also recognised that they would need to be adaptable and to start at the bottom.

“Getting a media job? I know it’s going to be really hard, and that I’ll have to be a runner.” \_L4

“I’m studying music, culture and performance. I was a freelance songwriter for about three and a half years. ... I got a certain amount of big artists that were recording my songs, but they got dropped off the album for whatever reason, or the artist got dropped from the label ... Some got recorded and then didn’t get released. ... I realised I was a bit restricted in what I could do. I’m a bit pigeonholed in the whole urban music thing. I started to realise it wasn’t just about talent, it was about timing and opportunity.” \_L4

It was also evident that, in addition to a degree, passion and maturity were positive personal assets.

“In this kind of industry [photography] you have to be passionate, you have to go out there and do it. I don’t think everything should be handed to you on a plate, to make it that easy. You need to have that ‘get up and go’.” \_Mature L4 in FE

“I think there’s a difference with the age ... I wasn’t necessarily proactive when I was eighteen. It’s the mature students who think “Oh, shit. We’ve got to do this now because it’s our last chance”.” \_Mature L4 in FE

Whilst undergraduates appeared to have realistic assessments of their employment prospects, younger students were more optimistic.

“I’m going to go to a drama school ... and hopefully after that I’ll be in a profession and become an actress and be on the TV, so I’ll be all right.”

### **The value of work experience**

Our cohort spoke enthusiastically about their work experience – whether in school, at college or in university. For many it was, or was expected to be, a very positive experience.

"I done work experience in Year 10 in a nursery. Before that I wanted to be a hairdresser. When I done my work experience I realised I wanted to work with children." \_L3

"That's one of the things I'm looking forward to at university, that you get like a block of work experience where they actually take you into industry. And a lot of people take their job feeds from there, because people have got experience in that area. I think that would be something good to do here." \_L3

"Work experience – you're building up you contacts. You do learn a lot." \_L4 in FE

"Next step? I'm not sure really. Hopefully by then I'll have done some work experience. We have people coming in from industry to give talks, perhaps ..." \_L4

Respondents found that work experience enabled them to have discernment in their understanding of employment opportunities.

"Oh, I love it. The first one I did was with young children, but now I know that about four to five [years] is what I like." \_L3

"I still plan to be a teacher, because my cousin, he does part-time childhood [studies]. He influenced me. And we had to go out to do something in the community at school. I got put in a primary school so that was interesting. I did that one and then I went back and did another year voluntarily." \_L4

"Because I really liked my work experience at school. I was in a primary school for two weeks with year two."

*Do you want to be a teacher?*

Not a teacher, but something to do with children. I didn't know what.

*Why not a teacher?*

I don't know, I prefer to be like one to one with the children. A whole class is too many. But I could do one to one." \_L3

For some students work experience was especially valuable, it enabled them to see the less interesting aspects of some jobs, and to deter them from that kind of employment.

"I worked for half of the [gap] years for my local newspaper. I was really lucky with that ... I was in the advertising department, the creative ads. That showed me that I definitely didn't want to go to work. ... I was the youngest. I managed to get hold of what I was doing with a few months. People much older than me had been there a lot longer doing exactly the same as I was doing. It wasn't challenging enough." \_L4

Whilst respondents acknowledged the benefits of work experience, many reported great difficulties in procuring opportunities in the creative and cultural industries.

This level 4 student was concerned about the level of competition for media jobs.

"It's unlike a lot of other courses because you have to get work experience before you even ..."

She outlined the ways in which she had sought to procure work experience through the year.

"... I worked in an image company for work experience. I went in one day a week for a couple of months ... that was more like photography. It wasn't television ... I have just completed a two week placement at ABC Productions which is a television company. ... The opportunity wasn't there for me to go on set because they didn't have anything in production. ... I'm supposed to be doing another one in August. That's for three weeks but I can't afford to do three weeks. They pay for travel expenses and lunches, £10 per day."

These opportunities are not part of her course, the student had sought them out for herself with a realistic grasp of what is needed to get a job in the media.

A number of students reported difficulties in finding relevant work experience.

"I think work experience is very important, but even within the industry it's not that easy to get because, like, the competition." \_L4 in FE

**Whilst respondents acknowledged the benefits of work experience, many reported great difficulties in procuring opportunities in the creative and cultural industries.**

“... how do you get a job if no-one will take you until you’ve got experience?”

“I sat there all day emailing certain lists, like out of magazines. And you need to be proactive to get that [work experience].” \_L4 in FE

“In the areas that I want to get into ... I don’t have much of a portfolio in those areas, so I going to go looking for no paid, low paid, expenses only – like they’re doing it for students and recent graduates.” \_L4 in FE

Poorer students found the idea of unpaid work inconceivable.

“It’s very hard ... you need money to live ... I’d love to do volunteer work, to do photography work, it’s just the fact that there’s things to pay for. You can’t always just give up the time. [Money] It’s not a luxury, you have to have some money.” \_L4 in FE

Students at lower levels found it even more difficult to find work experience opportunities.

“I’ve tried that. To do it, even to do work that you don’t get paid for, you do have to have a degree.” \_L3

“[Work experience] I’ve looked at working ... see if you can do sort of helping designers in companies. And nowhere takes you until you’ve got experience or you’ve got a degree. And how do you get a job if no-one will take you until you’ve got experience?” \_L3

Graduate internship arrangements commonly occur in some sections of the creative and cultural industries, poorer students resisted the idea of internship.

“If I go to university and get my degree I wouldn’t really want to go and work for free because I’ve got my degree. You’ve got to pay your debts back, so how can you go and work for someone for free?” \_L3

Other students sought work experience by other means.

“I’m going to take a year out. I’m actually looking at the moment to try to get a job at a photographer’s. Could be that I could get a bit more experience before I go to university. To get into an actual photography working environment rather than just doing it at college.” \_L3

## 3.5

### Learners speak about money

The majority of students interviewed had some form of part-time work, or were actively looking for part-time employment. A number of students were only able to continue their studies with the support of part-time income. All students adopted an instrumental approach to their employment – it was to earn money. We did not find instances where student work had any relation to their creative studies. For this reason the discussion of student part-time work is included in the next section on student finance.

The Thames Gateway is a huge area, embracing extremes of poverty and privilege. Financial concerns of vocational students in disadvantaged East London were, predictably, greater than those found in leafy suburbs or in the affluent parts of Kent and Essex. Such differences are also reflected in institutions. Students in specialist colleges, whose educational careers have been relatively privileged, have fewer concerns about finance than those of students in inner city Further Education colleges.

Within these broad divisions and inequalities we found level 3 students had considered the cost of level 4 study, and that both level 3 and level 4 students are concerned about day to day living costs. There are, however, significant differences between level 3 and level 4: level 3 students are familiar with financial arrangements for their current studies, Educational Maintenance Allowances for example, whilst level 4 students have close experience of the fees, loans, grants and bursaries minefield which accompanies undergraduate study.

There are particular financial concerns for students on arts and media courses, the cost of materials can exert a heavy burden. This was felt by students at both level 3 and level 4. A BTEC Art and Design student reported:

“Cost of materials? You don’t realise how much you use until you have to keep going to the shop and buying things. Presentation-wise you need ink, paper ... For my final project we had to buy a lot for ourselves. I spent £70 on spray paint alone.”

The cost of materials for level 3 students varied considerably, with some colleges being far more supportive than others.

In the following sections we focus firstly on level 3 learner perceptions, secondly on those of level 4 students.

### Level 3 learners: understanding the cost of level 4 study

Level 3 respondents had a great deal to say about the costs of level 4 study. Their comments reveal more about their family background, cultural attitudes to debt and unreliable sources of information than they do about objective financial features of undergraduate study. This study is concerned with learner perception rather than financial accuracy, and finance clearly plays a major role in the decision to progress to level 4. We illustrate here the more common attitudes to student finance.

There was substantial evidence that for some students, finance posed a worrying barrier to progression, and presented some with hard choices.

“I’m worried about finances. I don’t have a family to rely on.”

“It’s a lot of money like when you do go on campus.”

“I’m not going ... if I went to university and then I didn’t even get a job. Or I found out that I have a degree and I still have to work for free and I spent all that money to go to university. ... the money issue, I can’t afford it, I’m not willing to be in all that debt for no reason. So I’d rather not go.”

“I filled in my UCAS, I went to UEL, I went to see all the different universities, and I thought ‘No it’s too expensive’.”

For this committed BTEC Art and Design student even Open Day visits were overshadowed by thoughts of money.

“The worse thing they tell you, and as an introduction to the course, that if you work more than two days a week then you won’t be able to do the course. That not enough, two days, like you’d be living on £40 per week. That’s nowhere near enough.”

Level 3 students have differing responses to the cost of degree level study.

Given negative publicity about student finance it was perhaps surprising to find the number of level 3 students expressing little concern about the costs of progressing to level 4.

“The loans? I don’t know. I think loans will support most of the things. I’m not greedy. So with bursaries and the loans I think I’ll be all right. In the future, paying it back, it’s only £5 per week. I’m not worried at all.”

There was evidence of some student research into undergraduate student support, but this was partial. Respondents quoted a rate of 3% (itself inaccurate, loans are subject to a variable interest rate, pegged to the rate of inflation). But even 3% can mount up over a protracted period of repayment. Even at 3% the notion of this as an annual rate was not fully appreciated.

“It’s only 3% interest. It depends on what they give you ... the money will always be an issue, but we’ve been researching it and we know that you have to have full-time employment and over £15,000 [to pay back the loan]. Even then it’s only something like £5 per month, so it’s not ..., you’re not going to be out of pocket.”

“It’s got more expensive because of the top-up fees. But it’s not like getting a loan from a bank where they’re going to chase you. They allow you to wait until you’re on a decent wage – I think £16,000 – until you have to start paying it back, which is fair. It’s not like they spring it all on you.”

Notions of grant and loan were sometimes used interchangeably, with young people displaying a touching faith in a paternalistic government.

“It’s obviously well worked out in a grant how much they give you in a grant. They obviously give you enough to live. ... I don’t think they’d give you a tiny amount of money on which there’s no way in hell you can live off. They’ve obviously worked it out, they give you enough to pay for your accommodation and towards your food.”

Many of the young people interviewed had little idea of the scale of the living and study costs they would encounter.

**“I’m worried about finances. I don’t have a family to rely on.”**

“I want to stay away from home to do interior design.”

*Can you afford it?*

“I don’t know.”

This lack of knowledge was compounded by two further factors: parental support, and the availability of work.

“Obviously there’s my parents, but ... I’d rather like to start saving now and get like a grand or something under my belt. My plan is to get labouring work, because you can get like £100 a week.”

He added “You start early and you finish early as well” as if the conditions of work were the important factor, rather than its availability.

When asked “What do you think are the costs of going to university?” we received a very wide range of responses. This student asserted:

“It cost approximately about four thousand pounds if you round it up. In total. And living expenses on top of that.”

“I want to go to uni, I’m definitely going. But I want to do it full-time, because I want to take the three years that it’s going to take. If it’s going to be longer, I don’t want to do that. I can’t do full-time uni and a full-time job just to support ... I’m going to get the loan, just be careful on it, don’t waste it.”

A number of respondents had optimistic ideas on two important fronts: firstly they exhibited a degree of financial complacency, thinking that finance was not going to be a problem, that loans will suffice; secondly respondents overestimated how much they could earn doing unskilled casualised labour and thus how much they could accumulate as a hedge against the costs of level 4 study.

“I’m actually going to take a year out because I wasn’t able to apply in time. I’m not actually changing my mind, that I don’t want to go. It was a money issue. I was really worried about the money. I’m taking a year out, just to get a job. I don’t care where, supermarket or wherever, just to like build up the money so that I have a bit of money stashed away and maybe next year apply to university.”

**“At the end of the day, debt is a life skill, you can work around it. Just like money management is a life skill. I don’t think it’s too much of a problem so long as you control yourself.”**

A level 3 Art and Design student from an affluent home had a different perspective.

“I’m living out of my parents pocket. ... I wanted to go out and get a job but my parents didn’t want me to. They wanted me to really focus ... They said cost-wise they’re fine funding me, they said like next year that is when I become a real adult and they’re stopping it. Next year it’ll be a loan and getting a job. I’ll still be at home with my parents – it’s just course materials, and clothes.”

Students were resistant to debt since it was accompanied with the uncertainty of employment after the investment in level 4 study. This was the case even when they had no certainty of employment after level 3. This level 3 student, at the end of his course, was asked “What are your job prospects now?”

“I don’t know ... I was going to go to university but then I decided No, waste of time. Waste of money. I don’t want to go. So I don’t know what I’m going to do now.”

We now live in a society where mortgage and credit card debt is at an all time high. Debt has been normalised. Total credit card debt in the United Kingdom is greater than the rest of Europe put together. In this climate it is perhaps to be expected that students can exhibit relaxed, not to say cavalier attitudes to debt.

“At the end of the day, debt is a life skill, you can work around it. Just like money management is a life skill. I don’t think it’s too much of a problem so long as you control yourself.”

“Why worry about the finance side of it?”

“It does worry me, but you don’t have to think about it. Still don’t. You could get run over by a bus. Anything could happen. Seems a long way away, maybe in the third year.”

“Obviously people are worried, because it’s money, but they’re not letting it affect them. If that what you want to do, just do it. Think about it later.”

Other students appear to recognise the enormity of debt but view it with qualified optimism after weighing up the financial advantages of obtaining a degree.

“You don’t know you’re going to get a job ... There are risks to everything you do ... I know that the chances of getting a job are a lot higher with a degree than without one. And the pay is better with a degree, because people are always looking for those qualifications now. So I think yes, it costs a lot of money, but the amount of time you have to pay it back over, is better. It’s going to be the best loan you’ll ever get. Because I was looking at some of the sort of repayment. They’re, you know, ten pound a month. That’s not a lot. That’s pennies really.”

“It is a huge chunk of money. But you haven’t got to pay it back until you’re earning over a certain amount of money a year. It is more reasonable than you think it is. And I think with the better prospects that you do have – I’m not saying there’s a guarantee – are worth the money.”

“I’d rather not be [in debt] but if it means that I’m going to be giving myself better prospects, then I will be.”

Whilst debt has become a norm for some, for others it was culturally unacceptable.

One student from a relatively disadvantaged part of the Thames Gateway region told us:

“I applied for a student loan, and I’m staying at home to save a lot of money. My dad didn’t want me to start off with a big loan ... I’m the first person in my family to go to university so I’m entitled to a certain amount.”

There appears to be a close correlation between the status of the course and students’ financial concerns. For the poorer students, on lower level courses, the financial aspects of progression were of central concern. One member of a BTEC National Diploma multimedia group was sure that he did not want to go to university, his family had experienced debt, they had impressed on him: debt is bad. Another student in this group was still, at the end of year 2, undecided solely because of financial concerns.

For students on lower level courses even greater emphasis is placed on the financial aspects of further study, most specifically on the question of debt.

**“Dad will have to continue paying maintenance while I’m in full time education.”**

From lower down on the educational ladder, students on a BTEC level 2 Certificate in IT were initially convinced of the non-necessity of progression. Debt was a barrier to the very idea of progression.

Young people are finding their way, establishing an identity, and discovering how to manage in the adult world. Inescapably they will reveal contradictory notions, inevitably educational progression will be bound up with class, masculinity, and other cultural meanings.

Some level 3 students showed considerable ingenuity in their financial management.

“That was the hardest bit of the Foundation course for me, the initial start. Because my parents couldn’t fund it. So I had to kind of do the whole loan thing and then start repaying that, so that was really awkward because I was trying to repay it myself as well as going to college. But I think there is more help at degree. Because I tried to get loans and stuff to start Foundation but because it’s like further education as opposed to higher education ... I’ve been working at repaying my parents. I work at [the local] Football Club, as a steward. But because I wasn’t old enough to get my loan, I had to get my parents to take it out, and then repay them. But it was worth it in the end, when I finally got rid of it. I could finally just enjoy Foundation.”

One student showed more advanced financial skills, he said he would get the student loan, and put it in a bank account to pay back the loan at the end of the course.

Another student showed a different kind of financial awareness, one related to changing family structures. He pointed out, with some glee, that

**“Dad will have to continue paying maintenance while I’m in full time education.” \_L3**

#### **Level 4 learners: perceptions of student finance**

Students on level 4 courses, whether in Further Education colleges or in universities, actually experiencing the cost of level 4 study, exhibited a variety of attitudes toward student finance.

**For students on lower level courses even greater emphasis is placed on the financial aspects of further study, most specifically on the question of debt.**

“Yes, a problem. I’ve got a loan. I don’t get any financial backing from my parents. I’m worrying about the debt I’m going to come out with and that’s probably the worst thing about university, the debt. Apart from that everything is alright.”

“My family are not particularly well off. I don’t get financial help from my parents at all ... I’m not worried about the debt ... But I think if I were coming to university now, I’d think twice about it [because of the grant changes] ... I would have got a job [instead] but it would have been a real disappointment.”

“The slightly depressing thing is that, in my work, there’s some people there, and they’re like twenty eight and twenty nine, and they’ve only just paid off their student loan. ... And they didn’t have as much as we have. It’s going to be a long journey.”

When asked “Was finance an issue in deciding to progress?” students on a level 4 course at a specialist institution expressed their fears.

“Yes, a bit. I felt my family had huge financial problems before I started, and yes, that was one of my main problems.”

Even for the relatively well-off student in a high status BA Media and Communication course there is a concern about how to finance finding a job.

“Financially it’s a bit worrying. I’ve got my house here until September next year, so I’ve got six months to look for a job. So if I can’t find a relevant job, even slightly linked to the media, I don’t know how long I could afford to live in London.”

For every student in a HNC Fine Art group, money was a big issue, as was the related issue of not going away to study. Their supportive Further Education college buys canvases and major materials, with students providing brushes and pencils. Each member of the class affirmed that they could not undertake the course otherwise.

Undergraduates in the second and third year of their degree had a more practical take on financial reality.

“I’ve got a job at Sainsbury’s. Twelve hours per week. I do full time during the summer holiday period. And now I’m married I’ve become an independent student so I get grants and a higher loan.”

*Can you manage?*

“Yes, it gets a bit tight during the summer when your student loan runs out.”

*Do you worry about debt?*

“I feel satisfied that I will be able to pay it off. I think most people will be in that situation.”

This student added, somewhat chillingly,

“I’m a bit worried about getting on the property ladder.”

Many Level 4 respondents displayed a remarkable degree of financial naivety.

“I got a loan each year. And debts each year. £3000? I don’t really know. I haven’t looked into it. I got my tuition fees minus about £50 paid for, because it was still my dad and he was still on Widowers Benefit. But yes, I’ve had the full loan each year.”

A number of respondents were relentlessly upbeat about student finance, displaying little knowledge of the terms and conditions of their loan, but somehow managing to cling to the more benign aspects of student debt.

“You don’t have to pay it back if you go bankrupt.”

“The student loan is like the lowest rate you’re going ever have to pay.”

“After a certain age you don’t have to pay it.”

Few students were able to feel financially comfortable, able to rely on parental support.

“I have no problem at all. My Dad is in quite a well paid job – a finance director. He pays all my fees. I cut the grass for him. So, ... I’m very lucky.”

“Not really a problem. Mum and Dad are paying for me. I don’t have a loan.”

### Part time work for money

The majority of level 3 and level 4 students interviewed had part time jobs. Of those not in part time employment, most were seeking work and would take whatever was offered. The student not in part time work was a rarity. Many students used the word ‘hate’ to describe their part time work – low paid, unskilled, casualised labour. In a graduate led labour market, this could be their alternative to further study.

Does your part-time work provide material for your creative work?

“It’s a stimulation of the fact that it makes you never want to do that.”

“In my first year at uni I didn’t work. Now I’m in my second year I work in the student bar. And I work for a women’s sportswear company, Sweaty Betty, and I do waitressing in a gallery in Soho every now and then when they’re got events on. And I’m also a student ambassador here and they often call you up for, like, Open Days and for local schools. What I’ve just finished today is the Student Associate Scheme which is set up by the TDA [Teacher Development Agency]. I’ve been working in a school for three weeks in Lewisham. You get paid for it. And it’s for people who want to see if they want to into teaching or not. I don’t. I fancied this for the money, and the experience. It was an experience I can tell you.”

There are a small minority of students for whom part time work was a pleasure.

“McDonalds. I love it. I’m working there for six months. After three months I got promoted to supervisor work. It’s only weekends. Everyone’s young. Everything’s OK. Extra money.”

“I get to know a lot of people. And because I work in the dining area I’m always talking to the customers.” [16 hours per week]

“I’ve just quit doing Youth Work at the Elephant and Castle. ... My dad’s been a youth worker for twenty four years. It was like to get

kids involved from that area. So I just joined, I liked working there. It was all right. But then it got a bit too much working with my dad. So now I’ve applied for a job in River Island.”

This student had little time for part time work.

“I see myself as a practising artist. Art is my focus. I do a bit of part time work occasionally.” \_HNC

Courses in the creative and cultural areas of study often require extended attendance, in the studio, dark room, design room and so on. There was evidence that, in addition to these hours, students are undertaking a considerable burden of part time work. Here are some examples:

“I took a job teaching at a synagogue, I’m Jewish. And then I also took a job as a steward at a football ground which was good because it was my football team so I got to be around the football team. But I shouldn’t have taken up that second job. It knackered me out and made me ill. So I regret that in a way.”

One student, whose course required attendance from nine to six thirty, five days a week, did an additional twenty hours per week in part time work.

“I’ve been working ever since I moved here. I support myself. I pay my rent. I pay my food. ... I work as a part-time waiter, which I hate because I find it really degrading. If people hear someone with an accent they think you can’t speak English. Also, before I moved here I was a manager, in a hotel. So I left being rich to become poor. I love it, I’d do it over and over again.”

## 3.6

### Learners speak about their passion for creative work

In previous sections we have pointed to the ways in which schools, families, finance and educational advisors influence learners’ decisions to progress to study at level 4. Some of these influences are positive, some are clearly a deterrent to progression. Despite all these disparate pressures, students demonstrated great joy, pleasure and love of their work in the creative arts; they are committed to their studies.

Learners speak about ...

**“I hadn’t started learning properly or enjoying learning, before I went to university. This is another box to tick. But when you come to university for the first time you get a hunger to get information and to try this out, or perform with these people, just because you want to.”**

In an age of apparent disconnection, where the alienated response “whatever” is not at all uncommon, we were both impressed and heartened to hear young people speak with passion about their creative studies. It was heart-warming to listen to spontaneous expressions of commitment and enthusiasm for creative activities – and this was evident across cultures and educational levels.

“It’s fantastic. You know that you’re going to come in and be in there doing something interesting that day. Doing something different each time. We’re always doing something new every day and the best thing I love about it is graphics, multi-media and when we do an internet site. And like when we do Fireworks [a software package], Animations.” \_L2

“I love it here. I just came here because art is the main thing that I love. I’ve got art in my history. Like my mum and my granddad – they’re all artistic, my mum does drawing ...” \_L3

“I had a year off before I came here. I just love art – that’s the reason that I chose to come here.”

“I’ve been acting for about three years now. I started in the BTEC First Diploma, done me National. I started the course because it allowed me to become someone else and convey the lives and show the stories of people. I’ve really enjoyed it.”

“I never heard no-one go to drama school. I didn’t even know there was drama school. I didn’t even know that there were courses at university that done drama. It’s because I think that most people that do drama, they only look to do it on the subjects. They don’t look to do it after. Like when I came here I just expected to do drama and figure out what I’m going to do afterwards. But now, now I’ve been here and done drama, and all the research I’m doing. I know which way I’m going.” \_L3

Undergraduates at the end of the second and third year of their studies retained this zest for creative work.

“I hadn’t started learning properly or enjoying learning, before I went to university. This is another box to tick. But when you come to university for the first time you get a hunger to get information and to try this out, or perform with these people, just because you want to.” \_L4

“I’m passionate about music. ... The course is good. In music you’re encouraged to express yourself all the time. You become a more rounded person because all the time you’re being told to express yourself.” \_L4

The majority of our respondents were highly focussed on their creative work, and did not like the distractions of complementary studies. This was true even of older students in specialist institutions.

“Well, in the States everyone on a degree programme is required to do some general education and I found that my time was being taken up with chemistry and history when I really wanted to concentrate on my music ... I think that was because I was twenty eight and I knew what I wanted to do and I really didn’t want to waste time.” \_L4 now in a specialist institution in the UK

Passionate creativity was evident across levels 3 and 4. This level 4 student not only expressed great enthusiasm for her subject, but exhibited a zest for the more formal aspects as well.

“I’m studying Performing Arts Community Development, combined with English Literature. ... I did my first year of the degree at Oxford Brookes University. [Before moving from Oxford Brookes University to a Thames Gateway institution]”

*Have you enjoyed your second year?*

“Yes, loved it. In a completely different way. The degree here has been perfect. It’s just what I was looking for and I’ve really enjoyed the experience. ... coming here was a far more academic choice, even though Oxford may be sort of more sniffer – in terms of my degree it was a far better standard here and I felt more academic in this degree than I did in the Oxford one.” \_L4

Our conversations with students have been inspirational.

**THEY SEE THE NEED  
TO EXTEND THEMSELVES**

**BEYOND**

**LEVEL 3**

**TO GET EMPLOYMENT**

Member of staff  
on learner's perceptions



## Staff speak about ...

We have listened to learners ... In this section, we turn to staff, to colleagues working in further and higher education.

The focus of this study is the learner perspective. We have listened to learners at levels 2, 3 and 4 in a variety of institutions across the Thames Gateway region. Their direct and forthright comments give us a glimpse of the cultural context of student experience. The student comments reported here illustrate the ways in which vocational courses are deeply embedded psychologically, culturally, financially and geographically into the complexity of learners' lives.

Learners' accounts are revealing, but necessarily situated, inescapably drawn from a particular point of view. In this section we turn to staff, to colleagues working in further and higher education. Their perception sheds a different and contextualising light on level 3 to level 4 progression for arts and media students.

Interviews were conducted – both face to face and by telephone – with staff in generalist and specialist colleges and universities throughout the region: from Tower Hamlets to Havering, Loughton and Southend on the north side of the river, and from Lewisham and Bexley to Dartford and Chatham and Rochester to the south. (See appendix for details.) All staff are in posts related to arts and media subjects, ranging from senior management to Head of Department, from Admissions staff to lecturing staff.

We illustrate here three topics from our conversations: staff views on the major inhibitors to progression for vocational arts and media students; comments on factors which enable progression; and the development of employability for both level 3 and level 4 students.

## 4.1

### Inhibitors to progression for level 3 arts and media students

From the staff point of view the major inhibitors to progression for level 3 vocational students revolve around issues relating to learners' families and learner confidence.

#### The influence of learners' families

Arts and media students are committed to their creative studies, they may wish to progress to level 4 yet, as we have heard, parents can be highly sceptical about this move. From our conversations with students it would appear that parents find it difficult to see the link between study in the creative arts and sound employment opportunities. Our conversations with staff confirmed this and outlined efforts taken to persuade parents of the vitality of the creative and cultural industries.

"That's the issue that we always have ... The fact that the creative industries are the fifth largest industries in the country, that it's larger than manufacturing – all of that. We do a bit of that, that is important because of where we're trying to connect ... this is quite an entrepreneurial place, the largest number of SMEs in the south of England ... People are looking to make money and to start up businesses. They're concerned that their children are doing something which will give an income and pay their way. Sometimes there is that concern – people think how do you make money from making dresses, or designing or painting? We try to say these are transferable skills and it's a hugely important industry. And it's not that you do one thing – you train and you have several jobs in your life. So that kind of discussion takes place."

Like others this colleague judged that young people are more clued up about the creative economy than their parents.

"The young people are aware, aware of the potential of technological elements in design ... games design, fashion promotion, fashion design is something that's taken off as well. Magazines, television, all that massive industry, students are more clued up now."

This view was shared by staff in other institutions.

"They see the need to extend themselves beyond level 3 to get employment, including an advanced portfolio."

Generally staff endorsed the view that parents are apprehensive about employment opportunities in the creative and cultural industries. One colleague has developed an interesting metaphor when talking to parents, one designed to bring creative industries into the realm of known employment opportunity.

"I draw parallels between the creative industries and something like the building trade in terms of the employment patterns – they are very similar. The notion that their children won't be going out to a secure job, but to a relatively secure occupational practice, building up their own firm, and parents seem to clock onto that. If you're a plumber it's about building up your contact list, you do a stint with a big company and then you get your white van."

**The job of persuading parents is made more difficult – in Kent at least – by the ready availability of jobs for college leavers.**

Another colleague seeks to persuade by presenting job opportunities in the creative economy in “manly” language, to link, say, architecture with construction.

The job of persuading parents is made more difficult – in Kent at least – by the ready availability of jobs for college leavers. Staff spoke of the “Bluewater effect” and there is no doubt a “Lakeside effect”. Parents unfamiliar with the creative industries may weigh up the benefits of immediate employment – albeit low paid and low status – against the costs of higher education and uncertainty of creative employment. One colleague felt ‘there is a real job to be done in pulling parents into Connexions.’ Another reported that parents see studying art as dalliance. Yet another saw ‘our biggest challenge is to get through to Bangladeshi families, to say that you can get a job in the creative industries. You’ve got this talent, you can do it.’

In poorer areas, in inner city colleges, family pressures dominate. It was reported to us that students are financially prevented from progressing not simply by the costs of level 4 study but by the need to get a job to support the family. In one college half the students on a textile course ‘were married off by the mid-point of the course.’

Colleges seek to persuade parents by bringing in successful alumni to demonstrate employment possibilities, work with live projects, promote good links with industry and generally seek to give parents some idea of the seriousness of the artistic endeavour.

Families, particularly parents, influence progression decisions, both in choice of subject as well as the locality of study. Most of the level 3 students in our sample expressed a wish to study either locally or in the south east. Staff felt that perceptions of geography are an important factor in the decision to progress.

**“I would say that National Diploma students tend to stay more local ... Norwich is considered up north.”**

One colleague told us “They look for commutable distances,” another that “a lot of students haven’t been further than north London.” When she suggested Glasgow to her students, they had no knowledge of it, “they had nothing to catch on to.” She characterised her students’ choice of university as “more leaning toward what you know.” Her students felt “people there might talk differently. They might not understand a south east London accent.”

**“I would say that National Diploma students tend to stay more local ... Norwich is considered up north.”**

Staff reported students saying “Rochester is in the country.” One colleague felt that her students have “no sense of knowing what Birmingham is like.” They had asked “Where’s Cornwall?” “What’s Cornwall?” For her students it could be a million miles away. Most students prefer to remain close to home. They may wish to be in contact with their friends and culturally familiar surrounding. Geography is, however, also closely bound up with financial considerations. Staying locally, staying at home, is cheaper.

**“Everyone’s fully aware of the fact that students are tending to stay closer to home for financial reasons and also in our area lots of students have jobs ... and feel concerned about giving that up as a source of income. Not everybody’s living at home.”**

Learner progression can also be shaped by other familial events. Some inhibitors to progression inevitably come from life, from circumstances that, despite best efforts, colleges are unable to mitigate.

**“If someone doesn’t progress, it’s because they don’t want to progress. It’s because they want to take a year out, or they’d changed their mind, what circumstances have cropped up in their lives, that does happen ... we have every variety, family circumstances, financial circumstances, emotional circumstances, all of that.”**

### **Learner confidence**

Despite decades of debate and deliberation on the theme of parity of esteem vocational courses do not command the same status as academic courses. The introduction of Foundation degrees should have impacted on progression, but academic staff commented that there was, in practice, very little difference in the admission requirements for FDs compared to honours degrees. FDs were seen as re-accredited HNDs and had failed adhere to the original vision and structure of being vocationally focussed with a strong emphasis on employer engagement and work based learning. There are several recent policy developments which will impact on the progression of vocational learners to higher education. The first is the new Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) being developed by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), which will if it receives approval create a fully credit based system for the FE sector. This should, in theory, ensure smooth progression for learners with vocational qualifications to HEIs. The second development is the introduction of the 14–19 Diplomas.

These diplomas will provide a vocational alternative and progression route to higher level qualifications and pilot work is being undertaken by a number of LLNs through the HEFCE funded Pathfinders funding.

Until these developments come to full fruition, this inequality inflects the work of college students and staff.

“Our largest intake comes in the National Diploma level, primarily sixteen year old students. Those are our largest single cohort ... students who at school have shown some form of aptitude and interest in Art and Design and want to progress. ... But they’re not high fliers from the school. The students have not gone on to A levels, so they require that two year programme to build them up to potential degree level.”

A number of staff echoed these thoughts, recognising the usefulness of BTEC to mitigate the sometimes damaging stratification of the school examination system. This was particularly apparent in Kent, where eleven plus selection still takes place and grammar schools persist. This has consequences for learners entering further education. One college admits 1000 level 3 students a year from the High School route (failed 11+), learners who “identify with failure” and the task of the college staff is to increase learner confidence, to persuade students that “you are as good as grammar school learners.”

In skill and commitment to their creative work, BTEC students shine. And in their focus on practical creative skills BTEC courses have significant advantages over A levels. A Head of Programmes working in an inner city college told us:

“We get a lot of A level students ... and they have a very fractured experience of education in comparison with my vocational students. Because the nature of A levels is the grid system, and they’re with one group for one and a half hours, and then they change and they’re with a separate group. They have a tutor who never teaches them – in contrast the National Diploma, their tutor also teaches them, sees them a lot of the time in the week, they’re more settled, we have less behavioural problems.”

A levels provide learners with different kinds of skills and confidence. These differences persist; they do not cease after certification but may still be evident in employment.

“We spend a lot of time when the students first come here to nurture and to build up basic skills and to get students to stand up at the front of the class and speak. We’re trying to get them to toughen up because if they want to get a job in the creative industries they will have to do a pitch, or compete against those A level students that are articulate and can sell their work, and can stand there with their portfolio and talk about it.”

The differences between BTEC and A level preparation may be seen not only in terms of cultural capital but also in skill. A colleague in a level 4 institution celebrated the practicality of BTEC.

“Those that come from A levels seems to have a better sense of context, and lower confidence levels in terms of practical skills ... The BTEC students are actually quite skilful but can’t place it in context.”

For one colleague this very focus on practical, vocational skills deterred learners from progressing to more abstract, academic study at level 4, where he felt the curriculum offer may be viewed as unattractive.

“BTEC National Diploma in Fine Art, Graphics Design, Media Design, Media, Photography and Interactive Media, they just are really keen about doing the thing. Although we put historical contextual studies in, we on the whole play down the academic side. You could say that is not equipping them for level 4, on the other hand – they have a good time at level 3.”

It may be argued that undergraduate courses are designed with an ideal type student in mind – an A level student. To progress successfully BTEC students therefore require some orientation to A level or higher education norms. The general perception is that vocational students are less able to compete with A level students, they are less confident in literacy and numeracy. A perception which was rebutted by an inner city tutor.

“Actually there is not that much between it ... some of the A level students, their literacy is frighteningly poor ... GCSE English grade C is just meaningless because the literacy level is poor at the moment.”

A tutor in a specialist level 4 institution commented on the incidence of literacy problems.

**“Those that come from A levels seems to have a better sense of context, and lower confidence levels in terms of practical skills ... The BTEC students are actually quite skilful but can’t place it in context.”**

**“Actually there is not that much between it ... some of the A level students, their literacy is frighteningly poor ... GCSE English grade C is just meaningless because the literacy level is poor at the moment.”**

**... poor numeracy skills do have a restricting effect on course success and on progression.**

“I have recently become aware that the amount of writing on some courses has got to the point where there’s not enough for the FE colleges to determine whether the students themselves are dyslexic or not. So we’re picking up quite a trade in dyslexia identification, when the students come through the door.”

This rather disturbing comment was reinforced by an Art and Design colleague:

“All students are screened when they come in, we know on average that sixty per cent of Art and Design students have a form of dyslexia. ... You don’t like reading, you get the crayons out.”

In Kent additional difficulties are produced by rigid selection at age eleven.

“This is a grammar school [and] comprehensive [sic] area here. I think a lot of students come to us as failures, and they say that to us. From eleven ... they’ve gone through the comprehensive system, but they’re just misfits. ... The levels of literacy and numeracy are very very weak. But not only that, the confidence, the public speaking, how they articulate themselves, although they are buzzing with ideas and they’ve got energy and enthusiasm. They’re great students to teach but they’re fragile. ... We do spend a lot of time trying to nurse them.”

Where numeracy is concerned staff have similar disquiet, seeing that poor numeracy skills do have a restricting effect on course success and on progression. A tutor in a suburban college outlined the ways in which low levels of learner confidence in maths relate to course success and to progression.

“Within the National Diploma course there is a certain concern amongst staff about students coming in without maths GCSE, and certainly there are concerns about a student being able to deal with certain aspects of the course ... Anything that involves a kind of business aspect, for example, National Diploma Fashion and Clothing has a pathway Fashion Promotion, and that’s dealing with cost factors, selling their work, bidding and trying to achieve sponsorship, working on costs for a final show – those kinds of numerical ... that level of acumen, it helps if you’ve shown you’ve got GCSE maths.”

## 4.2

### Enablers to progression for level 3 arts and media students

**Staff acknowledged that the Progression Agreements promoted by the Creative Way have done much to foster more effective links between level 3 and level 4.**

From the staff point of view the enablers to progression focus firstly on outreach and secondly on establishing good links between further and higher education. A number of colleagues spoke to us about their own outreach activities and about the progression links which they had established, or would like to establish.

#### Consolidating good links between colleges and universities

Building on existing practice, a number of staff made suggestions for even more productive college/university links. Universities could:

- \_ do more by talking to learners and their parents about career opportunities in the creative economy.
- \_ offer short Artist in Residence facilities to level 3 students. It was felt that this would not only motivate students but also help them to acquire effective communication and presentation skills.
- \_ support a forum for college lecturers, an arena in which to share good practice, share frustrations, stimulate critical thinking and also provide a cost effective means of college/university communication.
- \_ develop peer mentoring arrangements for vocational creative programmes.
- \_ as employers, universities could assist employer engagement by offering work placements in graphics and other service departments allied to the creative and cultural industries.
- \_ Offer simple organisational support, for example arranging for a bus for level 3 learners to visit the university, or a gallery, or to see the processes of creative production in workplaces.

Staff acknowledged that the Progression Agreements promoted by the Creative Way have done much to foster more effective links between level 3 and level 4. The development of trust between colleagues was seen as vital. Describing one linked course, a level 4 tutor spoke of the work of his level 3 colleagues:

“I’m very comfortable with them in terms of what they do, the standards they achieve, the judgements that they are making, their quality of students. To the point now where I would be happy to take their students on the say-so of the tutor. ... It’s lovely to have got to that point of mutual respect.”

And the actions which follow from these contacts are directly valuable to students, such actions as: work on portfolio building; arranging visits to End of Year shows; the provision of summer schools to aid level 3 to level 4 transition; and offering pre-UCAS interview arrangements.

In terms of reaching out to schools, there was evidence of imaginative workshop sessions taking place – making dresses from paper, developing a programme of dance for teenage boys, and, for a specialist institution, making outreach a compulsory part of the undergraduate programme.

In some level 4 institutions there appears to be an in-built bias in favour of A level applicants. Describing the excellent industrial links which her college had developed, and the associated employment opportunities for students, one colleague pointed to the ways in which this very success served to disadvantage vocational students.

“The competition for places ... It is very hard on of BTEC students. And that is a huge thing because the tutors here obviously take the crème de la crème. And they’re not, are they? You’re kind of fighting a battle there on a lot of the courses because they’re just not going to get on.”

The LLNs have done much to redress this bias. Thus the significance of the additional students numbers from the Lifelong Learning Networks, specifically for vocational students, was seen as a key factor in enabling BTEC students to compete with A level candidates, enabling them to join courses which lead to secure employment.

## 4.3

### Fostering employability

Staff in colleges and universities go to great efforts to make their courses relevant to the modern labour market.

At level 3 colleagues sought to develop learner employability by a range of means:

- \_ In college A, a specialist institution, all tutors are themselves practicing artists and work to instil a professional ethos. Students are expected to treat college as a workplace, to be punctual, and to observe deadlines.
- \_ College B mounts an annual public exhibition, inviting parents and employers to comment on students’ work. This provides an opportunity for students to talk about their work, and to make employer contacts.
- \_ College C reported success in working with local companies, and bringing in staff from local companies to work with students. This college also works with a number of live briefs.
- \_ Imaginative attempts are made to simulate the workplace. At College D students are put into vertical companies to engage in live production work.
- \_ In college E, courses on “Create your own business for creative professionals” and “Self promotion for creative practitioners” have been designed to bring business acumen and creative skills closer together. Places on these courses are largely taken up by learners with some experience, but the very demand for these courses suggests that earlier skills based vocational courses do not fully address the entrepreneurial skills needed for creative work.

At level 4 more extensive arrangements are in place. Colleagues told us:

“We have joint projects with architects who are working with graphic design and interior design students. ... One company gave a week’s work experience for a different degree student every week. The pay off for them is that they looked at it as a long job interview and at the end of it two students have been offered full time employment. So the good side for the company is that it gave them a chance to have a look. The good side for us is it gave our students real experience in the industry.”

At one level 4 specialist institution the entire curriculum has been reviewed.

“We reviewed all our courses a couple of years ago and the shape of them now is really exclusively [designed] with employability in mind. ... About half the training is literally performing, classes, preparation for performance, and the other half are vocationally based modules that are designed to help prepare someone for different aspects of the profession. Where are they heading? What part of the profession? What skills and attitudes do they need to acquire to get them there. How should you look, physically, mentally, on paper, what kind of sound should you produce, what physical things do you need to be able to do ... And a huge amount around the presentation of profile.”

One colleague eloquently reminded us of the general vocational utility of arts subjects.

“Training in the arts means that you are extraordinarily well prepared in terms of transferable skills, because it is all about group work and communications, and if you know how to do that without words and through physical indication in a group performance context then there’s a good chance you’ll be able to do that extremely effectively in an office environment.”

Employability is as bound up with issues of familial attitude and learner confidence, as it is with outreach and institutional links. The aim is for vocational learners to secure good jobs in a creative environment. Yet there were some silences in our conversations with college and universities colleagues. Whilst commenting on the differences between level 3 and level 4 curricula, no one proposed that the undergraduate curriculum should change. Whilst the commitment of level 3 arts and media students is readily acknowledged, as is their disaffection for academic study, no one proposed changes to the level 3 curriculum to include a greater element of work based learning. Whilst colleges and universities generally have good links with employers in the creative and cultural industries, little mention has been made of the work experience or employment opportunities which exist in the public sector, and no mention at all of the third, not for profit, sector.

**“Training in the arts means that you are extraordinarily well prepared in terms of transferable skills ...”**

The creative way™

LEARNERS' ENTHUSIASM FOR  
**ARTS AND MEDIA**  
SUBJECTS  
IS ITSELF A  
POWERFUL DRIVER FOR  
**PROGRESSION**

5

## Conclusions from the learner perspective

In this section we reflect on the interrelated cultural factors which contribute to educational progression.

We have listened to students in an unforced, conversational context in their own classrooms and canteens. Such an ethnographic approach cannot yield statistics or discrete causal factors. What our small scale study has demonstrated is the interrelated cultural factors which contribute to educational progression. Staff interviews have added institutional and curricular contextualising dimensions.

We recognised at the outset that there appear to be at least three tensions affecting progression from level 3 to level 4 within the Thames Gateway:

Firstly, the Gateway is a hugely diverse region, rich in creative and cultural industries which have the potential of offering interesting employment opportunities to talented graduates from arts and media courses. Yet despite their passion for the subject and opportunities in the industry, a relatively low number of Thames Gateway learners proceed to level 4.

A second discrepancy is the difference between expressed student intention and the disappointing statistics of level 4 enrolment. Yet of the 95 level 3 students who have spoken to us, the vast majority say they wish to proceed to university and there is evidence that they are actively pursuing that aim.

Thirdly, there are tensions on a broader, societal canvas. In the past decade there have been significant governmental attempts to promote social justice through education. The policy initiatives from central government have focussed on raising aspiration, on encouraging learners to aim higher, and to progress. Yet progression is only partly due to individual aspiration. There are also structural features inhibiting learners from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds. Our educational system remains selective, in schools, colleges and universities, some are chosen. No matter how inclusive widening participation action seeks to be, middle class learners seem to dominate and learners from the lowest social class are underrepresented at level 4. When it comes to employment, further social selection takes place, when both educational and cultural factors may come into play.

Here we reflect on our conversations with students and staff and consider three key issues which are central to progression, and which appear to warrant institutional action:

- \_ Curricular aspects of progression
- \_ Informing learner choice
- \_ Learning to learn at work.

## 5.1

### Curricular aspects of progression

For many students, deciding to go to college offers a stepping stone to adulthood, an escape from the hierarchies of school and its attendant associations of child status. College offers the chance to focus on your creative subject and to be introduced to a wide range of new creative media and skills. College offers an alternative route, a chance to start again. As we have seen, for many College learners the transition from school to College has proved to be profoundly affirming. College promotes the practical, the hands-on. College offers a supportive pedagogy. The attractions of small scale and neighbourhood proximity form a strong part of the College package. Small wonder then that some students prefer to progress to level 4 within the familiar context of Further Education – a seamless transition.

For the majority of students, however, progression to level 4 means progression to study at a university. And here the transition may be far more daunting. For many of our respondents, the experience of learning in school compared unfavourably with the experience of learning in College. For the creative student, College seems to focus on all the good bits – without the irritating intrusion of other subject study, or the burden of written work. By contrast the competences required of an undergraduate may be significantly different from those required in College. The transition from a Further Education curriculum to a Higher Education curriculum represents a significant step change in learning style.

#### **The transition from a Further Education curriculum to a Higher Education curriculum represents a significant step change in learning style.**

The level 3 arts and media students in this study expressed a marked preference for the practical over the academic. In part this student distaste for academic expression may derive from school experience – they are learners who were “good at art” in school. As if art and academic competence were oppositional. As if art and abstraction were mutually exclusive.

Inducting learners into academic modes of study presents a problem for those teaching on level 3 arts and media courses. Whilst we found evidence of Herculean efforts by tutors to integrate Key Skills and Employability skills into the creative curriculum, nevertheless students in the main did not like formal written work. Respondents were emphatic on this point. Learners like BTEC courses in arts and media subjects precisely because they are heavily weighted to the practical. Does this provide a clue to the discrepancy between student intention and admission statistics? There are strong indications that level 3 learners are deterred by what they perceive as academicism in level 4 study.

Higher Education courses may be characterised by higher levels of abstraction, by theoretical critique and by independent research. This applies to the arts and media curricula as strongly as to other subject areas. Level 3 learners who are daunted even by the UCAS form will find level 4 study difficult.

We have heard from staff that a number of students express an intention of going on to level 4 study, apply, gain a place, and then do not enrol. When we asked about practical and academic study, some level 3 learners said that they thought university would be much the same as college; that they would have to write a critical evaluation of their practical work. A staff view was that students did not fully appreciate the level of theory and formal abstraction they would find in a level 4 media course – even when the university spelled it out.

If arts and media students progress to degree level study and are disillusioned by the amount of academic work, then there will be some evidence in level 4 retention statistics, although these are bald figures and some closer scrutiny may be required. It is, however, equally possible that level 3 students get an early sense of the seriousness and theoretical character of degree level study, and change their minds. This can happen at any stage in the application procedures, from Open Day, through the completion of UCAS forms, to receiving the preliminary reading list, to induction week. Some further investigation is required to explore why some level 3 students do not take up the offer of a place.

Practical creative work is clearly attractive to learners, whose passion for their creative studies is evident. Learners' enthusiasm for arts and media subjects is itself a powerful driver for progression. The challenge for providers is to ensure that the enthusiasm is tempered with an adequate preparation for level 4 study – and this is not a discrete Study Skills concern, but rather a structural question of integrating critical thinking, enquiry, and learner confidence in literacy and numeracy into the creative curriculum.

What can be done to minimise the quantum leap which students are required to make in the transition from college to university? There is a balance to be struck here. Should the level 3 curriculum change to accommodate the requirement of higher education? Should universities adjust their arts and media curricula to emphasise the practical elements? Some reciprocity is required – in matters of subject content, as well as necessary study skills – to preserve the best of vocational and academic approaches to preparation for employment in the creative and cultural industries.

It may well be that, with their curricular focus, the LLNs are best placed to provide a forum for such exchange. Joint work on bridging courses and outreach initiatives could also do much to ensure that learners are supported in their progression from level 3 to level 4. A Further – Higher Education community of practice would not only ensure a measure of trust between institutions, but also facilitate greater seamlessness in the transition process. LLN sponsored Progression Agreements provide the fulcrum for such inter-institutional dialogue, staff development, and curriculum modification.

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## 5.2

### Informing learner choice

In this study we have offered evidence of the ways in which vocational learners find out about courses. Relying on largely informal methods, learners appear to need high levels of serendipity to find an appropriate course. There is too evidence of incoherence in course search; some students were uninformed, ill-advised and unguided in the process of course selection.

Students enrol on courses for a variety of reasons. For some, enrolment is the result of information and advice from their friends, family and teachers. Parents generally try to be supportive and to offer advice, which is likely to be based on their own educational and employment experience. Early findings from the Futuretrack study conducted by the Warwick Institute for Employment Research for the Higher Education Careers Service Unit suggest that the social position of parents is influential in deciding where and whether young people move on to university. Very few families are likely to be aware of the scope and breadth of opportunities in the new creative and cultural industries. Given this, it is not surprising that parents look towards what are perceived to be safer, more traditional areas of employment. Some colleges go to great lengths to make parents aware of job opportunities in the sector, although there is far more to be done for both learners and their families in this promotional respect, one which offers good opportunities for partnership activity between colleges and universities.

In conversation with learners at both level 3 and level 4 we were struck again and again by the dislocation between course choice and employment opportunity. The process of course selection, at college and university, is rarely driven by a clear focus on a particular section of the creative and cultural industries. Greater articulation between job market knowledge and course choice is required.

**The process of course selection, at college and university, is rarely driven by a clear focus on a particular section of the creative and cultural industries.**

In addition to personal contact, students find out about courses by their own initiative. The Internet has become increasingly important in this respect, with a number of respondents saying they had made a search by this means. Institutions project themselves to potential students through the web, through prospectuses and through face to face encounter on open days. The human face of an institution is of crucial importance here. Respondents commented on the importance of personal encounter. The welcoming character of open days, advice services, and admission interviews did much to influence student decision making. Respondents reported that this was a factor in their choice of course. A review of best practice in this area would help students to make more purposeful course decisions.

There is one subset of level 3 learners for whom advice, guidance and continuous support would be particularly valuable: those level 3 learners who express the intention of “taking a year out” – usually for financial reasons. Such respondents are not the well informed or financially secure and for them making application to university a year later means applying in isolation. Re-entry, involving labour market knowledge, open days, course choice, UCAS procedures and the whole process of transition to level 4 is very difficult indeed for this group.

Professional information, advice and guidance services appear to have a low profile among our respondents. There are several possible reasons for this: There may be resource pressures on professional services that diminish their accessibility. For some learners the very idea of career planning may suggest a hitherto unknown level of control over employment opportunities. It may be that the approach of professional services focuses too much on reaching an apparent match between learner and course or job title, and too little on process, on understanding the experiences and desires of the individual enquirer. There appears to be an urgent need for a review of student sources of information, advice and guidance, one which extends beyond professional services to include the embedded and continuous advice offered by college tutors to their students.

The need for financial information, advice and guidance is equally urgent. When asked to estimate the costs of degree level study, level 3 learners made wildly inaccurate estimates. Some were so fearful of debt that level 4 study seemed imprudent. For these students the combination of perceived cost of study, fear of debt, and employment uncertainty proved to be a deterrent to progression. Other level 3 learners were equally, but optimistically, inaccurate in their estimates, over-estimating both the adequacy of loans and their own

earning power in part-time employment. Overall financial concerns at level 3 were coloured by class and culture. There were however rationalists who thought that the financial risk was worth it to gain the chance of a better job.

The majority of level 4 respondents held contradictory views: very concerned about money and debt but financially naive. Most were unable to state the extent of their accrued indebtedness and unaware of the detail of their commitment to repay.

There is a need for greater clarity about student finance, either through the internet, or face to face workshops, or media advertising. Recent governmental announcements direct more financial help to the neediest, but at the cost of complicating student finance even more. There appears to be a large gap between learner perceptions of student finance and objective facts; greater transparency is urgently required to aid both the debt fearful and the debt cavalier so that learners can make informed choices.

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## 5.3

### Learning to learn at work

Lifelong Learning Networks have, from the outset, been required to engage with relevant Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) and employers in terms of curriculum offer, delivery and progression. The importance of employer engagement was raised post-Leitch and has now been heightened by the HEFCE’s employer engagement strategy (HEFCE, 2006a), which aims to help the sector respond positively to the recommendations of the Leitch report. The pilot work outlined in the first phase of the strategy will benefit LLNs in identifying and addressing the barriers faced by HEIs in being responsive to employers needs.

Changing the curriculum is a challenge that LLNs will have to grapple with if they are to make a step change in vocational progression and to see passionate learners make the transition from FE to HE and beyond. This will require meaningful engagement with employers, not just about programme content and outcomes, but also focus on delivery and different types of learning experiences. The following sections briefly set out the major issues associated with work related learning.

As we have noted previously, many of the learners we interviewed are working to learn. Whilst most had part-time jobs and some had near full-time jobs, very few worked in or had work experience in the CCI sector. Work experience,

outside of the curriculum, gained through paid employment is firmly embedded as part of the student experience. Whilst term-term working may not be evenly spread amongst the undergraduate population, learners on vocational courses, from deprived socio-economic groups are more likely to be working than traditionally qualified learners from higher socio-economic backgrounds.

Three main categories of work experience have been identified: work experience organised as part of a programme of study; work experience organised external to a programme of study; and finally ad hoc work experience external to a programme of study (Little et al, 2002). Work experience organised as part of a programme of study may take a number of forms such as: a professional practice placement, a sandwich placement or a general work based learning module. Examples of organised work experience external to a programme of study include the Shell STEP, a UK wide programme offering undergraduates project-based work in SMEs.

A number of Centres for Excellence in Teaching & Learning (CETLs) focus on Work based Learning, most notably those at Middlesex University and the Institute of Education, University of London. In addition to the expertise of these centres the Higher Education Academy's Enhancing Student Co-ordination Team (ESECT) has also undertaken research into work based and work related learning. There are numerous examples of well established work based learning programmes, which have been successfully integrated into the curriculum.

Making work experience a meaningful component of the curriculum is an opportunity to celebrate practical competence and see the application of course content in terms of professional practice. Work experience enhances learners' employability by exposing them to workplace culture and affords them the opportunity to discriminate between different kinds of work in their chosen sector.

Whilst work based learning contributes to student employability it does so at a cost to both the HE and the employer. The costs of mentoring or supervising work based learners is seen as a barrier that prevents employers from offering such placements (Harvey et al, 1998). Such concerns need to be addressed particularly since the majority of employers in CCIs across the Thames Gateway are small micro enterprises. There may be a role here for HEIs and their 'seed bed' enterprises.

We have spoken with 155 students, the majority of whom recognise the utility of a degree. Students, especially at level 4, recognise the highly competitive

**Making work experience a meaningful component of the curriculum is an opportunity to celebrate practical competence and see the application of course content in terms of professional practice.**

nature of employment in the creative and cultural industries and some see that a degree can aid networking and initial entry. For other students the very competitiveness of the sector is itself a deterrent to progression, this is especially the case for poorer first generation students for whom the personal and financial cost of degree level study is proportionately higher.

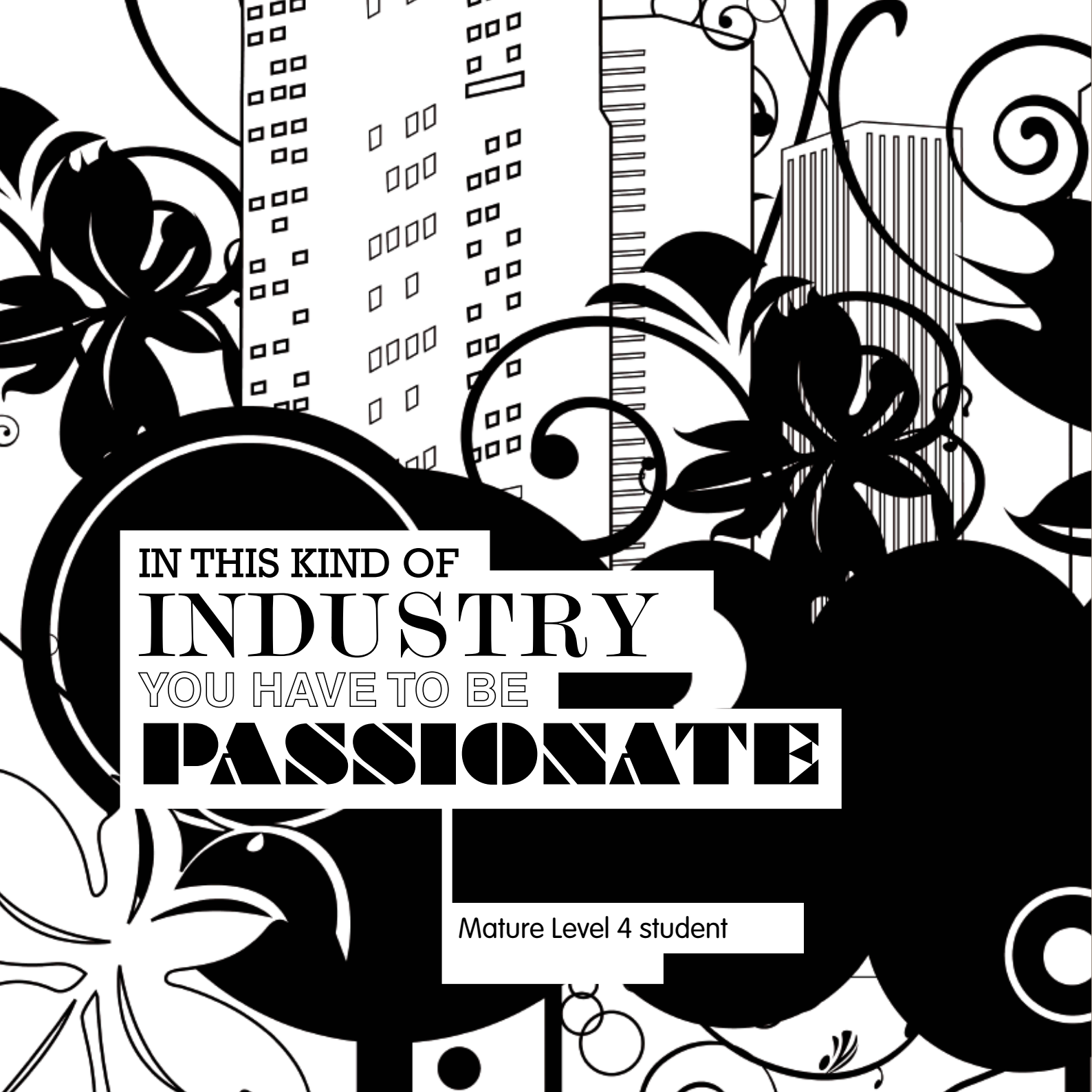
Work experience was welcomed by many students who viewed it as a good reality test – either to encourage or to deter them from a particular workplace or occupation.

Work experience and internship arrangements are now a characteristic of media companies and confident and articulate level 4 students found ways to obtain such opportunities, but these are largely unavailable to level 3 students, especially young BTEC National Diploma students. It is financially very difficult for poorer students to undertake an internship. Difficult too for those already working in CCIs to upgrade their skills to level 4.

Flexibility of delivery, at a time and place to suit both employer and learner is key. The ability to switch between modes and forms of delivery is also important to accommodate the commitments and demands learners face. A recognition of different types of learning experience is also fundamental with accreditation of prior learning, experiential learning and employers' own training programmes. There are issues for HEIs around accreditation and assessment but these are far outweighed by the benefits of workforce development.

Identifying clear progression pathways from FE to HE (including HE in FE) is one part of the progression equation. The other is creating clearly articulated progression routes from the workplace into HE. If learners in FE, HE and employment are to make these transitions they need to have knowledge of and understand how these educational pathways connect to employment opportunities.

Work experience augments the curriculum, especially the Employability component. Work experience aids learner confidence, motivation and sense of employment direction. There is work to be done here in finding ways for level 3 learners to have greater access to the benefits of work experience. Universities employ a wide range of staff in areas within the creative and cultural sector; one strand of Progression Agreements could usefully be the offer of work experience to level 3 students, an arrangement which would introduce learners to both university and work at a single stroke. Some pilot work would be useful here.



IN THIS KIND OF  
**INDUSTRY**  
YOU HAVE TO BE  
**PASSIONATE**

Mature Level 4 student

6

## Appendices

Moving On: The Creative Way

**Glossary**

BTEC	Business and Technology Education Council
FD	Foundation Degree
FE	Further Education
FEC	Further Education College
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
IAG	Information Advice & Guidance
LLN	Lifelong Learning Network
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
QCF	Qualifications and Credit Framework
RDA	Regional Development Agency
SME	Small Medium Enterprise
SSC	Sector Skills Council
TDA	Training & Development Agency
TGFHEAG	Thames Gateway Further and Higher Education Action Group
UCAS	Universities & Colleges Admissions Service
UEL	University of East London

**People and institutions****People*****Students***

We are grateful to the many students who generously contributed to the Moving On: The Creative Way research project. Of the 155 students who were interviewed, the following consented to their names appearing here.

Daniel Adelosoye	Meera Dodia	Nicola Le-May
Johnson Aeboola	Faye Durmush	Candy Lench
Imran Ahmed	Markella Everitt	Mark Lilly
Temi Aina	Jodie Fahy	Aiesha Lindsay
Sairah Ali	Yekaterina Gill	Sharnelle Lopez
Lorna Allan	Kirsty-Dawn Gwatki	Samuel Luckhurst
Lindsey Archer	Kate Henderson	Charlie Lyttleton
Harriet Armstrong	Chrissy Holloway	Ameena Majid
Pinar Aydogan	Rachael Howison	Ellise Mannall
John Bailey	Faye Hoyte	Katie McDonald
Diana Beaupre	Steven Hubert	Palesa Mokoena
Paul Beckford	Jonathan Hughes	Jacky Moore
Awad Bhenick	Daniel Hunt	Keri Jean Mummery
Shamiso Bikwa	Tom Hunt	Andrew North
Katie Bracher	Temolio Ifeoluwa	John Ohadehe
Emily Brackett	Richard Ives	Rachel Oliver
Richard Butler	Hannah Jerrom	Lee Orsmond
Daniel Campbell	Miah Jumbo	Kate O'Shea
Bilal Chaudhry	Lawrence Juniper	David Parker
Rosa Bras-Gonclaves	Thomas Kelly	Gemma Parry
Gemma Clark	Helen Knowles	Lauren Pinard
Emma Cole	Aimee Laing	Sam Poch
Stephen Drake	Jessica Law	Tori Pope
Ana Marta Dias	Taylor Leigh	Seamus Power

Billy Raife	Jacob Skudder	Cynthia Wangai
Sarah Ramsey	Adam Smith	Anthony Watson
Shane Raphael	Claire Smith	Emma Weaver
Scott Rathbone	Clare Soillens	Jess Weller
Adam Redmond-Hall	Jim Spencer	Hilary Whitmore
Abion Rexha	Toni Sullivan	Mark Williams
Daniel Robinson	Bruktawit Tesfay	Grant Wills
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Zoe Ross	Joe Vose	
Ami Victoria Rowe	Tenicia Walsh	

### **Staff**

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Deborah Egan	Judy Morgan	
Gail Glazier	John Morris	
Andy Graves	Lisa Parkhomchuk	
Mark Hudson	Sofie Pinkett	

### **Participating Institutions**

The following institutions generously arranged interviews for our researchers.

Barking College  
 Bexley College  
 Canterbury Christ Church University  
 Goldsmiths College, University of London  
 Havering College of Further and Higher Education  
 Lewisham College  
 Mid-Kent College  
 North West Kent College  
 Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication  
 Rose Bruford College  
 South East Essex College of Arts and Technology  
 Tower Hamlets Sixth Form College  
 Trinity Laban  
 University College of the Creative Arts, Rochester  
 University of East London  
 University of Essex E15 Acting School

### **The Creative Way institutional membership**

Anglia Ruskin University  
 Barking College  
 Bexley College  
 Brooke House Sixth Form College  
 Canterbury Christ Church University  
 Christ the King Sixth Form College  
 Goldsmiths College  
 Greenwich Community College  
 Hackney Community College  
 Havering College of Further and Higher Education  
 Havering Sixth Form College

Lewisham College  
London Metropolitan University  
Mid-Kent College  
Newham College of Further Education  
Newham Sixth Form College  
North West Kent College  
Open University in London  
Palmers College  
Queen Mary University of London  
Ravensbourne College  
Redbridge College  
Rose Bruford College  
South East Essex Sixth Form College  
South East Essex College  
Thurrock & Basildon College  
Tower Hamlets College  
Trinity Laban  
University for the Creative Arts  
University of East London  
University of Essex  
University of Greenwich  
University of Kent at Canterbury

## 6.3

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