

# “You don’t need a degree”

Freelancing, employer engagement  
and the challenge for HE

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6<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Employer Engagement

## Overview

- Employer engagement in parts of HE has become entangled in 3 competing entities
  1. Creative Industries
  2. Policy rhetoric
  3. HE Context





# HE and the Creative Industries

The Creative Industries form a significant sector of the UK economy contributing £111.7bn to the UK economy in 2018

Between 2012 and 2016 a 12% increase in undergraduates studying CI

At least 4 new courses at Russel Group Universities in the last 3 years – global intakes

# The UK Creative Industries 2019 JOBS

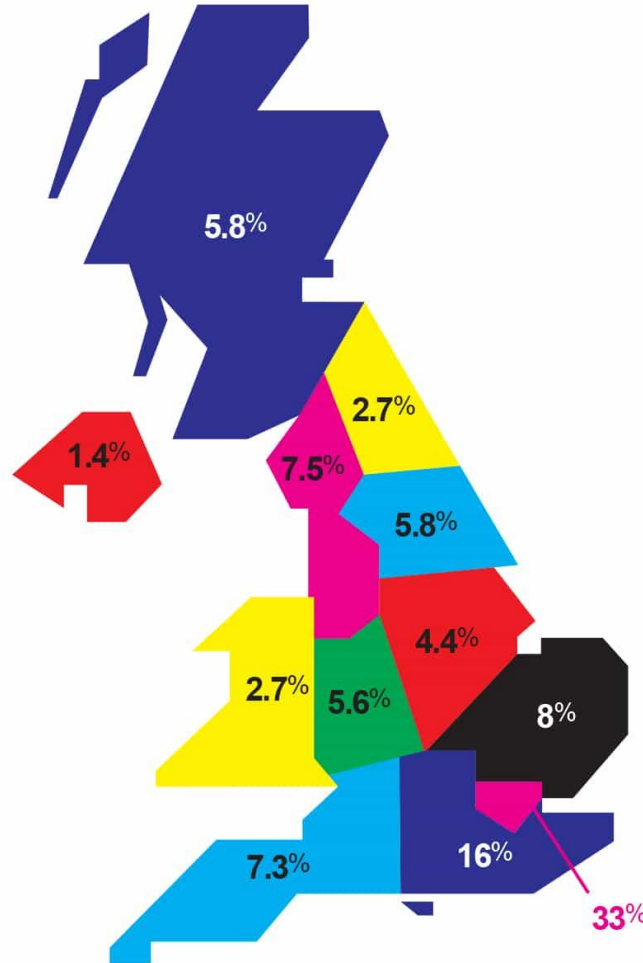
Jobs

**2.1**  
MILLION JOBS  
TOTAL

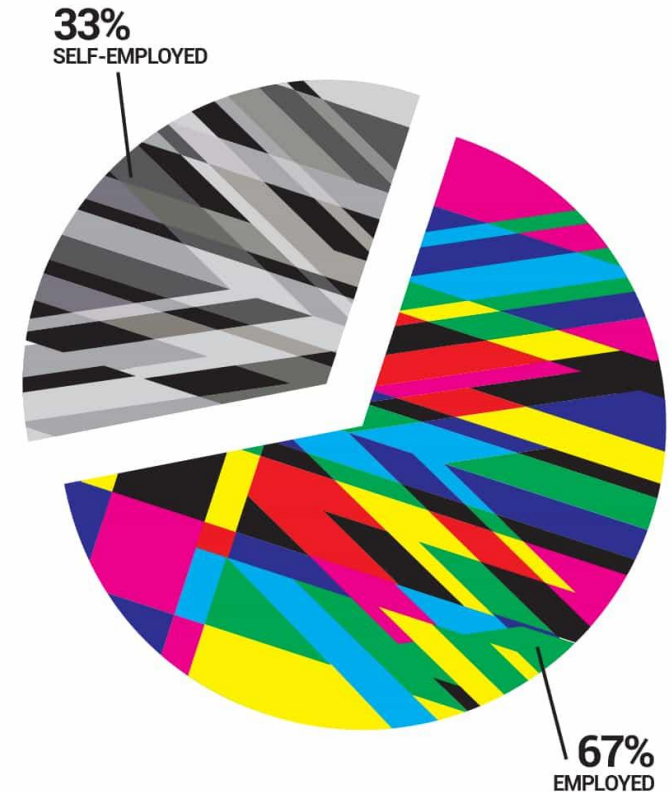
**61k**  
NEW JOBS  
IN 2019

**2.7x**  
JOBS GROWTH OF UK AVERAGE

Proportion of UK creative industries jobs by region in 2019



UK Creative Industries Workforce 2019







33% Self Employed

54% in film and TV

71% in theatre

# Academic Literature

- Precarity and portfolio working (Banks; Oakley; Throsby; Hesmondhalgh etc)
- Range of skills required (Huddleston and Ashton; Grugulis and Stoyanova)
- Global skills and labour markets (Brown; Keep; Ashton; Lauder; Bound et al)
- Transitions (Furlong; Arnold; Fettes et al; Ashton and Ashton)








**Engaging with Freelancers**

**“You don’t need a degree”**

**We can teach them the skills. We need a willingness and ability to learn and adapt.**





The background is a composite image. The top half features a grid of numerous small video conference windows, each showing different people in various settings, suggesting a global, remote workforce. The bottom half shows a night-time aerial view of a city, with the Tokyo Tower prominently lit up on the right side. The overall theme is digital connectivity and the future of work.

The workforce is nomadic.  
Skills in the sector are constantly changing.  
We don't know what the future jobs are.  
Where is the workplace?



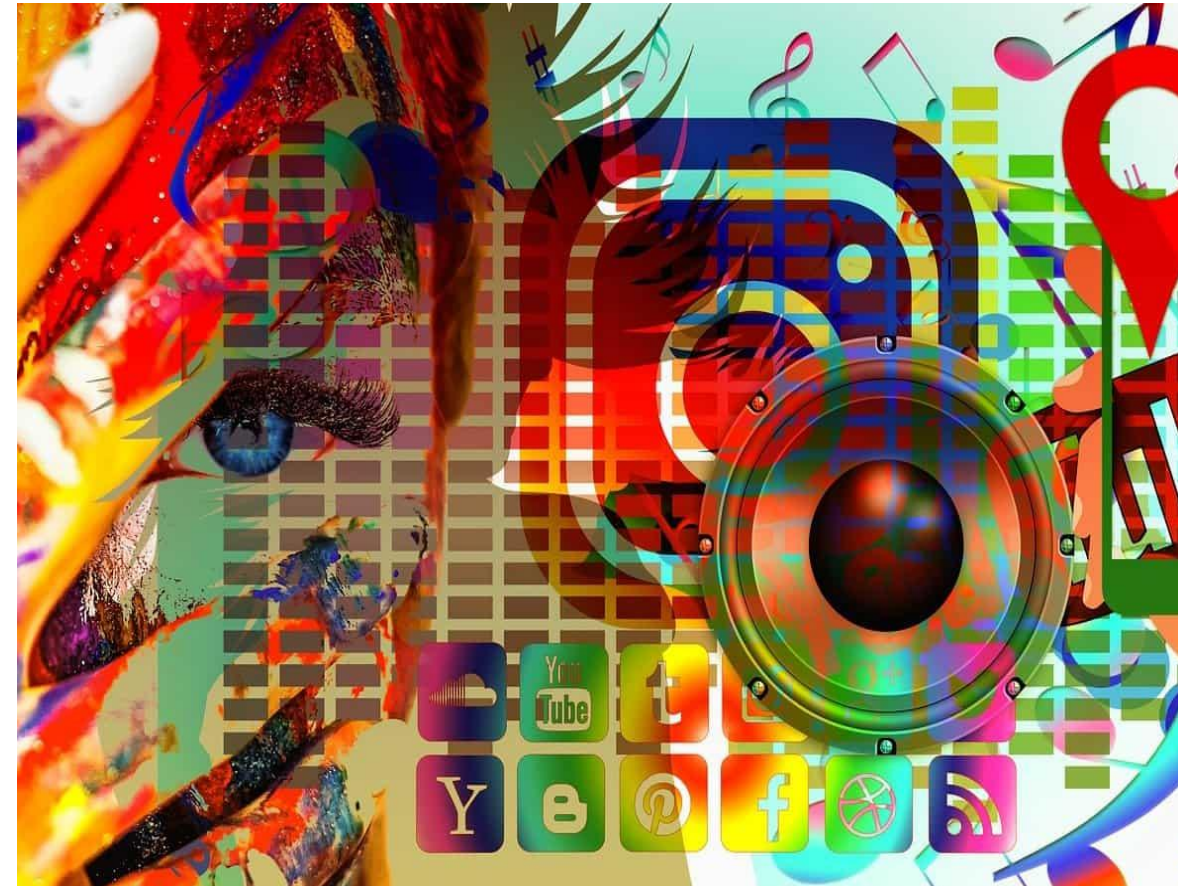
# Dominant Discourse

Discourse in policy and general assumption of education in terms of a supply - demand model. Education is there to fill the 'skills gap' and responding to 'skills-demands' (Huddleston).

Purpose of Education is to have a 'fulfilling working life',  
provide vocationally specific skills?

- University structures

- Limit on time spent 'training' (3hrs per week, per mod)
- CAT structures and rigidity in assessment – difficult to engage in continual assessment
- Employer engagement can become a tick box exercise or encouraged through placements within or external to modules as a route to 'experience' for cv building
- This can lead to 'stringtern' effect (Jacobson and Shade, 2018) and placement saturation.





# Challenges for HE

1. A supply – demand model of skills is not fit for purpose (Angouri, 2021)
2. We cannot rely on transitional experiences that are based upon the ‘workplace’ (Huddleston and Ashton, 2019)
3. UK University structures are not designed to develop vocational skills

**This leads to the question**

**If you don’t need a degree, what are Universities for?**

Is it provision of proto-labour, our idea of ‘employability’? Create workers with “fulfilling working lives”? “To prepare future generations for a changing world” (OECD)?

Intellectual freedom, risk, creating knowledge and exploring new territory  
(Angouri, 2021)?

# Conclusions: Beyond 'successful' transitions and Employer Engagement. Building Forward Better

1. Being honest about the world of work
2. Provide critical thinking and theoretical underpinning to encourage new perspectives and reflexive awareness
3. Desire to learn and keep learning
4. Opportunities to research, take risks, fail, understand how to develop skills and solve problems
5. What is the purpose of Employer Engagement?





# Many thanks

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2<sup>nd</sup> July 2021 / 6<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Employer Engagement / Online