



Evidence for Enhancement: Improving the Student Experience

Collaborative Cluster: the Creative Disciplines

End of project report

Context

Enhancement Themes aim to improve the student learning experience. They involve institutions, staff and students working together, sharing practice and generating new ideas for learning and teaching. Evidence for Enhancement: Improving the Student Experience asks about the information (or evidence) used to identify, prioritise, evaluate & report on what's good and what could be better about the student experience. As part of this Theme, QAA Scotland has supported a number of collaborative clusters, with institutions working together to progress an area that will have benefit for the whole sector.

About this project

This project ran from October 2017 to September 2019 and aimed to raise awareness of how institutions are using outcomes metrics in creative subjects, to assess the impact of the education students receive. The work was led by Glasgow School of Art, The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and The University of Edinburgh (Edinburgh College of Art).

Its key finding in relation to measuring the value of creative arts and design higher education (CADHE) is that multiple circulating impact indicators are attached to a range of policy arenas (beyond simple economics) which CADHE could use to demonstrate value. Each one, nonetheless, generates critical direct and indirect concerns for how we design CADHE regulation and disciplinary enhancement over the next decade and, if we venture along such a path, requires more sophisticated mechanisms of value measurement than currently available.

Its originality lies mainly in the co-creative method that emerged from the project. This method was used to simultaneously generate both a pragmatic response and a critical one. Firstly, it created pragmatic outputs which could feed into policy discussions regarding the value, values, and related impacts of the creative disciplines within the cultural ecology of a devolved context (Scotland). Secondly, it ensured the robust naming of points of contention related to over-simplifying linear econometrics in current policy conversations about the creative economy which need to be resolved if creative arts and design higher education is not to be devalued or to witness forms of value extraction likely to maintain inequalities.

The cluster's work provides a process-based prototype method for engaging Art and Design HE disciplinary players in the production of relevant and critically informed impact indicators which remain stubbornly underdetermined in policy contexts. It does so by:

- Accepting the embedded as well as distinct value of creative practices for society as developed in higher education by students and graduates.
- Capturing the nature of creativity as demanding acknowledgement of paradoxes in policy agendas. These paradoxes in turn are considered as locations of the impact of creative art and design students and graduates which can be both culturally normative and counter-cultural within a given socio-economic context.

Activity and impact during the life of the project (2017-19)

The key work of this cluster was the production of a toolkit designed for use by those leading programmes in the creative disciplines in higher education. The toolkit itself can be found on the cluster webpage, and comprises five documents:

- Toolkit for Reflecting on Impact
- Understanding the Learning Journey in the Creative Arts
- Visualisations of the Creative Disciplines' Learner Journey: Documentary Expressions and Student Voices
- Creative Disciplines' Learning Journey: Nine dilemmas for the skills agenda
- Creative Disciplines' Annual Programme Monitoring Briefing: Considering outcomes metrics as Part of Enhancing Programme Design and Delivery.

The cluster also included an event entitled 'Collaborative clusters in creative disciplines: Considering 'impact' of teaching and research', which took place at the Edinburgh College of Art on 23 May 2019. In addition, the cluster was represented at related events, including [Places of Creative Production](#) (1 February 2019, Dundee) and [Focus On: Graduate Skills – Sharing Practice](#) (5 June 2019, Glasgow). The cluster also had a presence at Data Matters (16 January 2019, London), an event run jointly by the M5 Group (QAA, Jisc and HESA). At this event, delegates considered how institutions can make the most of data and metrics to improve the students' education. It also provided an opportunity to discuss whether the sector's investment in data and metrics is making a difference. The presentation, available on the [cluster webpage](#), considered how creative disciplines can engage with data including what evidence is meaningful to promote the curriculum and the skills that students develop on their way to graduating.

Throughout the life of the project, the cluster's work was promoted through online networks including Twitter, research.net, and LinkedIn, where the page from the toolkit that includes the diagram of principles has had over 1000 views. The cluster was also invited to contribute to a number of publications, including: the blog of the Society for Research into Higher Education ('[Notes from North of the Tweed: Valuing our values](#)', September 2019); the magazine of the Royal Academy of the Arts ('A question of value for Art Schools', RA Magazine, August 2019); and the newsletter of the Creative Industries Federation, published (August 2019).

The cluster's work has had a clear impact within institutions during the life of the project. At Glasgow School of Art, Programme Monitoring and Annual Reporting was redeveloped during academic session 2018-19, work that involved the use of the toolkit. Workshops to support staff, using the toolkit, will continue at the institution. Further evidence of the relevance of this work has been seen in related, institutional events at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.

The cluster has already contributed to policy development in Scotland, its work having been considered in the development of Scotland's Cultural Strategy and the Scottish Government's policy statement on the Creative Industries. It has also fed into sector-level

conversations about skills (through Universities Scotland's Learning and Teaching Committee), subject renewal of higher national level qualifications (through partnership with the Scottish Qualifications Authority) and the development of a skills agenda framework (through partnership with Skills Development Scotland).

The involvement of the University of Edinburgh allowed this cluster to build links with the [AHRC Creative Industries Clusters Programme](#). This has provided further opportunities to promote the cluster's work in Scotland and beyond.

Anticipated activity and impact post-project (2019-21)

Feedback at a meeting of the Theme Leaders' Group (17 June 2019, Dundee) confirmed that the findings and outputs of this cluster's work have relevance in subject areas beyond the creative disciplines. Several institutions in Scotland have indicated that they are likely to use the toolkit, including the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Edinburgh Napier University, and Scotland's Rural College.

It is anticipated that the cluster's work will continue to influence policy development, including the second stage of the Scottish Government's policy on the creative industries, NESTA's statement on the soft power of CADHE, and UK-wide analysis of the value of creative education.

The cluster event in May 2019, and the profile of the cluster's work at related events, have facilitated a cross-Scotland academic network. It is hoped that this network will continue to develop. Ongoing presence at relevant events is likely to be an important part of this development. The cluster was represented at the [Beyond](#) event (21 November 2019, Edinburgh) through participation in a research symposium on creativity, and will be represented at the Creative Industries Research Frontiers Seminar Series (5 February 2020, London) and Beyond Measure? Exploring What Counts in Higher Education (3-4 June 2020, Glasgow).

The cluster's ongoing links to the Council for Higher Education in Art and Design (CHEAD) will be key in terms of the ongoing dissemination of this work.

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