Evidence for Enhancement:
Improving the Student Experience

QAA DATA MATTERS CONFERENCE
Prof Vicky Gunn, v.gunn@gsa.ac.uk
*(representing the creative arts cluster)***,**
January 2019.

Draft paper to go alongside presentation.

INTRODUCTION TO THE CREATIVE ARTS COLLABORATIVE CLUSTER

1. Who we are:
We are a collaborative group representing a range of creative arts HEIs in the Scottish Higher Education sector aimed at building and maintaining an academic, practice-based learning and teaching enhancement network. At the moment our work is focused on how the creative arts in higher education can develop and communicate effective evidence and engage with other key players in the cultural ecology around the impact of the enhancement of teaching in the creative arts.

Members:
- Vicky Gunn (Co-Lead)
  (Glasgow School of Art, GSA)
- Jamie Mackay (Co-Lead)
  (Royal Conservatoire of Scotland)
- Stuart Bennett (Co-Lead)
  (Edinburgh College of Art, Edinburgh University)
- Pauline Miller Judd
  (Arts and Creative Industries, Napier University)
- Shaleph O'Neill
  (Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art, Dundee University)
- Anthony Schrag
  (Media, Communication, and Performing Arts, Queen Margaret University)
- Alison Clifford,
  (Hub for Culture and Creativity, School of Media, Culture and Society
  University of West of Scotland)

Project curatorial practice assistant: Alasdair Campbell (GSA)

2. What we're doing:
Following a successful expression of interest to QAA (Scotland), our creative arts cluster formed to engage with the activities of the latest Enhancement Theme. This project sits

underneath the sector strand: *Optimising the use of existing evidence.*[1] Outputs from the project can be found here: https://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/current-enhancement-theme/defining-and-capturing-evidence/the-creative-disciplines

Building a social network across the Scottish sector and facilitating round tables and targeted symposia, the creative cluster is attempting to explore ways of resolving the following key dilemma:

> Creative arts programmes in Scottish higher education are enhancing learning and teaching, but the sector is still left with the question of how we communicate the data of the impact of these changes in a meaningful way to prospective and continuing students, funding bodies, employers, and collaborators.

The project aims to deliver around the following:

- *Building capacity* for the Visual and Performing Arts in higher education across Scotland to come to terms with the new metrics being used to judge the effectiveness of our learning and teaching, at the same time as challenging dependence on them as 'evidence' by developing Arts' centered forms of evaluation and evidence.
- *Finding sustainable ways to communicate* how we are improving student learning and experience in general to communities likely to employ or commission our graduates as well as those who regulate teaching quality/excellence.
- *Trying to create new forms of evidence* that show how what we do is not easily defined as a mechanism but rather sits within a creative ecology (within which a 'circular economy' operates and, therefore, that while we'll use metrics as required and that are useful, what we really value is practice-based, creative evidence that adds value within an ecology and is also emergent from that ecology).

---

[1] www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/current-enhancement-theme/sector-level-activity/optimising-the-use-of-existing-evidence

A. CONTEXT OF THE ACTIVITY: THE CREATIVE ARTS ECOLOGY AND THE METRICS MELEE ON THE MARCH

The UK's creative sectors are in the midst of a metrics melee:

1. *Creative Arts school and college pipelines* into higher education are becoming increasingly subject to 'value for money' metrics attached to either broader educational agendas (such as the introduction of the Baccalaureate in England or the concern expressed explicitly by the Scottish government of duplicate costs associated with the senior phase of the Curriculum for Excellence and the first year of undergraduate degree programmes in the four-year degree cycle[2]).

2. *Creative Arts subjects in higher education* are far from immune to the rapidly emerging effects of Higher Education regulatory reorganisation from Westminster and the rise of certain metrics. These metrics, particularly those associated with the Teaching Excellence Framework subject pilot in England[3], but also increasingly likely to be influential in the devolved nations, include particular items in the NSS, socio-economic and equalities indicators, graduate outcomes (both short and long term) which can be benchmarked by subject.

3. *Creative Arts national and regional funding* and 'quality and impact' metrics[4] related to individual and substantial regional project impacts are becoming part of the daily routine for both self-employed creative makers/ performers and the creative industries keen to align with governmental and research priorities regarding the creative industries.

4. *Creative Arts lobbying agencies* in direct relationship with Enterprise organisations and skills development bodies are producing metrics on everything from the monetized 'value' of the creative sector to the UK's economy, to skills gaps in areas of heritage crafts, and more general areas of leadership in the creative arts.

Behind this melee, existential and pragmatic conversations are occurring amongst creative arts higher educators, the students and other stakeholders with whom they interact which attempt to address the following questions:

- What is the role of the creative ecology and sustainable creative arts industries in helping creative arts undergraduate and postgraduate programmes operate in the changing world of metrics-based analysis and judgement?
  Beneath this is another set of sub-debates:
  How do we define a creative ecology or a sustainable industry in which graduates of our creative programmes will make a living? Is it a UK ecology, or wider? How do we address the creative ecologies that operate within devolved parts of the UK, where cultural policy is more consciously and, possibly, more confidently linked to community consciousness? What does this mean for our students? Do we focus upon a technocratic definition, emphasizing the added value of the creative industries and the broader creative workforce? Do we accentuate conversations about the importance of the skills

---

[2] https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/entries-arts-subjects-key-stage-4/; Conversations regarding this are emerging from the Scottish government Enterprise and Skills Board https://www.gov.scot/publications/working-collaboratively-better-scotland/pages/7/
[3] https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/teaching/subject-level-pilot-2017-18/
[4] https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/advice-and-guidance-library/impact-and-insight-toolkit; https://www.creativescotland.com/what-we-do/major-projects/creative-learning-and-young-people/artworks-scotland/is-this-the-best-it-can-be; https://artworks.cymru/en/knowledge-centre/knowledge-zone/toolkits

pipeline and graduate outcomes? Or do we push for a narrative of social wellbeing facilitated by culture generation at all levels of our society, interlinked through webs of creative action? Or do we find creative ways of going around the seemingly insurmountable obstacles, encouraging students and colleagues to be agents of possibility in preferable futures? Or, indeed, do all of these questions together compose the heart of the creative ecology?

- Given how elusive our outcomes can be in a world increasingly depending on 'big data' and metrics, can we / should we comply with, redefine, or develop a data-measurement base that allows us to demonstrate to funders the impact of such an ecology, at the same time as creating new forms of evidence which engender confidence amongst creative practitioners? How might the concepts of *boundary crossing*, *social network surfing, smuggling crafts in* enable the articulation and possibility of more connections between creative arts education, publicly funded arts, the creative industries and everyday creativity in a sustainable manner?

- How do we use our educational contexts and the 'place-making' that inevitably emerges from within them to make new creative ecologies out of insights drawn from interdisciplinary research which crosses current funding and metrics boundaries? Is STEAM fundamentally a creative ecology imperative? Will sustainable industries emerge from it? How might fine art, design, the performing arts weave threads of criticality and empathy amongst the specialist foci and how might this be translated into how we teach?

- What happens to our existing creative ecologies as technology and automation disappear hitherto traditional jobs and technological infrastructures seem to direct our activity. How does this impact on the curriculum design, modes of delivery and assessment patterns within creative arts' programmes of study ACROSS the life-cycle of creative arts makers, doers, and conceptualisers?

B. RECONSIDERING CREATIVE ARTS PROGRAMMES AS AGENTS OF IMPACT

We are increasingly being asked not just to assert and describe excellent teaching and learning but also demonstrate the impact of it in terms of categories which the instruments of measurement are entirely focused on. As the metrics melee plays out, what is clear is that creative arts programmes cannot avoid the positives and negatives of the metrics evidence we are amassing. Key to these positives and negatives are the following 'headline':

The problem is not necessarily metrics per se, but which ones have emerged with an authoritative position that skews the conversations about creative arts programmes and what they are about and for. The metrics are a problem if:
- They are unidimensional, centred on instruments that embody deficit models of perception, and/or invested with the over-confidence of apparent economic common sense in which growth is almost always a good thing.
- People believe the input and the outcomes metrics we currently have tell the whole story.
- We only fixate on a tiny proportion of the data available about the creative arts, delivered to us by particular conduits of benchmarking.

They are much less so if:
- They are cross referenced with multiple data sets for equalities purposes, widening participation, and attainment gaps. After all what recent data has been doing is merely

adding to hitherto assumed anecdotal evidence that art and design has for too long disregarded its failure to address issues of inclusion.

- We accept that this data indicates questions rather than answers about the impact of what we do as educators of artists and designers.
- We widen out how we understand both the impact of our programmes and the evidence used to demonstrate this and engage with the possibilities created by the 'metrics melee'.

If we reach beyond higher education policy matters and their dependence on input measures' metrics (how much delivery, where, when) and outcomes measures (relative earnings' comparisons) to look more broadly at the relationship between a community and/or region and its creative arts higher education, ie the cultural ecology, the way creative arts programmes need to be measured is different to the current set of measurements programme leaders and heads of subjects face.

This means that to address the broader impact questions emerging as part of the creative arts ecology and its current metrics melee, we need to directly assess social, cultural, education, economic, innovation, and wellbeing impacts in terms of:
- Our students
- Our disciplines and institutions
- *Beyond* into our wider communities –
  - *Disciplinary-Professionally* (typically in terms of research and dissemination as well as leadership)
  - *Wider influence* (typically in terms of community engagement through widening access agendas, equality and diversity agendas, cultural ecology agendas, creative production initiatives).

C. IMPLICATIONS OF THIS FOR CREATIVE ARTS ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

1. **Fostering engagement with impact**
   - Movement in Higher Education regulation tends to mean that what we do is increasingly only important in terms of certain forms of impact. The *what* is being superseded by the '*so what, socio-economically*'? In effect, our story telling can no longer finish with 'and they (our students) lived happily ever after' but instead must undertake a forensic analysis of whether or not they actually did and, if they didn't, what role the education we offered played in unhappy endings. It must also engage with how our 'input' measures (what we do in our curriculum on an almost day to day basis) can be enhanced to make a happy ending more likely.
   - Creative Arts within Higher Education need to shift the focus from the limited range of instruments of measurement to a broader narrative on graduate outcomes and Impacts (social, cultural, innovation, economy -business and skills - wellbeing) – with skills and enterprise mindsets, for example, being one thread rather than being the entirety of the conversation.
   - We need to move from case-study based description and assertion about what we do (*achievements*) **to** more creative analysis of metrics and evidence of professional development in our undergraduate programmes (*systematic impact – reach and significance of what we do*), looking where possible at other instruments of arts impact that are themselves emerging in tandem with the more limited HE ones.
   - The creative arts HE sector needs to play a much more active role in the identification and closing of skills gaps in the range of arenas (and their related policy areas) into which our students go, and be open to offering innovative approaches to

enabling graduate apprenticeships that might actually benefit us as a sector rather than just being a threat.
- To do all of this we need to find a way of getting the diverse policy agendas which make demands on higher education creative arts to interface far more.

2. **Drawing together lessons learned from other higher education agendas.**
The Research Excellence Framework (and Knowledge Exchange Framework predecessors) can help in this if creative arts are able and supported to:
- Consider how impact and knowledge exchange has worked in research contexts, identify the key lessons learned, and adapt the most suitable approaches for application in the discussion of impact and outcomes from the perspective of learning and teaching.
- Enable more value to be placed on regional impact research which explicitly explores visual and performing artists and designers' relationships with their locale over the life-cycle of their creative production and articulates any direct or indirect associations with their higher education.
- Encourages the use of hitherto purist educational research networks (funded by the ESRC) to be expanded through direct cooperation between the Arts, Social Science, and Science research funding and bodies that fund the Arts in communities (eg Creative Scotland, Arts Council etc), to enable arts education impact as an intrinsic art of an Art Schools' research offer.

3. **Managing like creative producers**
Heads of subjects and programme leaders need to embrace the idea of being 'creative producers'. Such management is arguably characterized by managing solutionism, formalizing creative collaborations focused on building cultures of enhancement *and* impact, both within our immediate contexts as well as beyond, and materializing preferred possibilities pragmatically. This means having:
- Greater confidence in engagement with metrics and experimental data regarding student outcomes as evidence of impact.
- Working with reflective analysis rubrics that underpin annual discussions with programme leads, identifying the creative 'legacy' of the educational provision.
- Developing, defining, engaging with indicators of impact – this is where regional collaborations come in.