CREATIVE CAREERS AND NON-TRADITIONAL TRAJECTORIES

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A report on an interview-based research project conducted
for the project 'Non-traditional participation and pathways'
for the National Arts Learning Network

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Our thanks to the many people who assisted in this research project and most especially to our participants; our interviewer, Pippa Michaels; our research administrator, Sally Kynan, and our transcriber, Niki Sherlock. We would also like to thank Alan Cummings at the RCA for leading the joint research project with ourselves and our IES colleagues, and Juliet Thorp for facilitating the organisation.

Preface

I am very pleased to introduce the report 'Creative Careers and Non-traditional Trajectories', commissioned by the National Arts Learning Network (NALN).

NALN is a national Lifelong Learning Network comprising specialist arts institutions, working together to widen participation in higher education and to ensure a more diverse workforce for the Creative and Cultural Industries. In commissioning and disseminating these reports we aim to make a significant contribution to widening participation in postgraduate study in the creative arts. It is my hope that the arts higher education sector will respond quickly and effectively to the challenges identified by this research.

I would like to thank the authors of the reports for their detailed and insightful work, and the Open University for their interest in this important area. I would also like to express very great thanks to Danny Killick (Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design), John Last and Pauline Smith (The Arts Institute at Bournemouth) and Neil Powell (Norwich School of Art and Design), who made up the Steering Group for this NALN project. In particular, I would like to thank Professor Alan Cummings of the Royal College of Art. His particular concerns about diversity in art and design at postgraduate level were the starting point for the research, he managed the project to a successful conclusion on behalf of the NALN, and he chaired the Project Steering Group.

Mark Crawley
Director of the National Arts Learning Network
June 2008

A second report 'Mapping Provision and Participation in Postgraduate Creative Arts and Design' is being published alongside this one.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Part I: INTRODUCTION

This report presents the interview project conducted as part of the composite project 'Non-traditional participation and pathways' funded by the National Arts Learning Network (NALN).

1.1 The aims of the research

The interview project investigates participants' experience and understanding of work and study pathways in Art and Design and their perceptions of postgraduate level study as part of these pathways.

1.2 The larger context

Our micro-level data analysis investigates how the experience and perceptions of our participants are mediated by the established knowledge and definitions of the larger contexts of cultural sector and creative industries which are generated by policy-level discussions and commentaries.

1.3 Theoretical background and analytic stance

The research employs a narrative-discursive approach to the interview process and to the interpretation and analysis of interview material. The interviews are analysed as

(i) accounts of participants' experience and views

(ii) a single body of talk data in which recurring patterns of terminology, imagery etc. indicate the discursive resources which shape participants' talk

(iii) talk in which speakers perform identity work as part of a reflexive and individualised identity project

Part 2: THE EMPIRICAL WORK

The empirical work required a series of initial decisions, reported in sections 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3, on the definitions of 'Art and Design', 'non-traditional entry' at postgraduate level, and 'UK domiciled' to be used for the recruitment of participants.

2.4 Recruitment of participants

Participants were recruited mainly through email calls sent to current students and alumni lists of several NALN member higher education institutions (HEIs). A further call was attached to a survey (Survey B) conducted by the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) for the joint project 'Non-traditional participation and pathways' but this produced only a small number of responses. Calls were also circulated at the 2007 NALN conference and through personal contacts of the steering group for the joint project. Approximately 200 initial expressions of interest were received.

2.5 The participants

A total of 46 participants were interviewed for the research project. They included

- prospective postgraduates who had followed non-traditional pathways into their undergraduate studies
- current and former postgraduates whose non-traditional experience preceded either their undergraduate study or their postgraduate study

Respondents' and participants' self-identifications did not necessarily match our distinction between 'traditional' and 'non-traditional'. That said, we are satisfied that our final sample is appropriate to the aims of the research.

2.7 Ethical permissions and procedures

The research was designed to comply with the Code of Ethics and Conduct of the British Psychological Society (BPS) and the requirements of the Open University's Human Participants and Materials Ethics Committee (HPMEC) which gave approval for the project. The project was designed to minimise risks to participants, including by protecting their anonymity. Appropriate steps were taken to obtain informed consent for the interviews and the use of the interview materials.

2.8 Analytic process

The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed in close detail. The lengthy and intensive analytic process, on the three 'levels' noted in 1.3, included the preparation of preliminary and summary notes on transcripts.

Part 3: FINDINGS FROM THE ANALYSIS

3.1 Grouping the participants

The sections in Part 3 present the main patterns detected in the data analysis. For the purposes of the report, the participants can be discussed as current students (Group 1), people at an early point in their careers (Group 2) and people who have been away from study for ten years or more and are, in the main, fairly established in their careers (Group 3). These categories were not used for recruitment purposes but developed during the analytic process as a practical device for discussing the findings.

3.2 School experiences

Many participants had had difficulties in their school education, sometimes subsequently attributed to dyslexia. Academically successful students were often discouraged from studying art and related subjects.

3.3 Dyslexia

A high proportion of participants had been identified as having dyslexia although it was noticeable that this corresponded to different levels of obstacle. Most welcomed the identification, partly for the practical support they subsequently obtained, but also for other reasons, including to account for previous educational failure or difficulty.

3.4 Progression to HE

The educational pathways of many participants involved multiple fresh starts and relocations. Part-time study and non-traditional qualifications could contribute to this fragmentation.
Few participants felt they had received useful career guidance at school about possible study or work paths in Art and Design. Many had been actively discouraged from pursuing a career in these areas.

The decision to apply to a particular HEI was often based more on a chance contact or recommendation than systematic research into possible courses and colleges. Informal contacts and connections were important, especially for students with dyslexia.

3.5 The meaning of study

Current students, especially those below postgraduate level, tended to equate study with personal development. This expectation of personalised learning led them to emphasise the importance of matching education and qualifications to themselves.

3.6 'What I want'

Personal enjoyment was presented as a major justification for studying Art and Design and also as a reason for changing from an alternative career.

3.7 The application process

When they applied to study, few participants had difficulties with application forms, unless they were dyslexic, and most reported positive experiences of interviews although they were sometimes taken aback not to be asked about their portfolio work. The preparation of a portfolio was not usually regarded as a major task for courses below postgraduate level, but applicants to Masters (M) level study gave much more attention to its nature and scope and what they wanted it to communicate.

3.8 Current students

Whether they were officially full-time or part-time, most current students had considerable commitments to other activities than their studies, including to paid work. They regarded study as a luxury and were appreciative of good tutors and of opportunities which courses provided for work experience.

3.9 Interrupted HE study

Many participants had one or more false starts to previous HE study. Students for whom these were connected to personal problems, such as substance abuse, were more likely than other participants to favour a structured learning experience.

3.10 From undergraduate to postgraduate

There was general agreement among participants that it was desirable to have a break of several years between BA and MA. Participants who had entered M-level study without a first degree found the transition demanding but rewarding. Participants who had been older than their fellow students, on undergraduate or postgraduate courses, felt that the younger students had been less motivated and less appreciative of the course.

3.11 Postgraduate study

Postgraduate level study is regarded as an opportunity for exploration, personal development and transformation. Participants sought a match between the creative milieu offered by a particular institution or course and their own interests and ways of working. They were also aware of the reputation of HEIs, for particular kinds of work and more generally, including for their degree shows. In retrospect, they were likely to value the influence of a particular member of staff rather than a course. They also valued contacts with other students, including those on different courses, and informal learning through these contacts. They brought a high level of commitment to postgraduate study. The dissertation was a daunting task for students with dyslexia.

3.11.1 Confidence

Most participants who had studied at postgraduate level valued the experience for building their confidence, because it had helped them to develop their own voice and practice and their ability to talk about their work. The qualification itself was also a source of confidence.

3.12 Employment prospects and skills

Final year undergraduates were particularly concerned about finding a job after studying, sometimes with the eventual goal of starting their own businesses. They assumed that their employment prospects would depend on the skills they had obtained, especially through work experience which was highly valued. Some students had to forego opportunities for work experience because they could not afford to work unpaid or could not relocate to other countries.

3.13 Qualifications

Group 1 and 2 participants valued qualifications for opening doors or drawing attention to work in a portfolio. Some Group 3 participants had found their qualifications became less relevant than their subsequent work experience and success. Postgraduate study was valued less by prospective postgraduates i.e. those with undergraduate qualifications or currently studying below M-level. In some fields, HE qualifications may be less valuable than work experience, or may not lead into the kind of structured career path which some participants expected.

3.14 From study to business

There is a recognised path from study into employment (especially in design) linked to an 'apprenticeship' model of learning through low-paid or unpaid work, during or after HE study.

3.15 Part-time and short courses

Part-time and short course study had been important to participants for introducing them to new career possibilities in Art and Design, upgrading skills, maintaining their connections with creative fields and helping them to prepare portfolio work to support applications for full-time study.

3.16 Future study

Many participants expressed an interest in undertaking further study in the future.

3.17 Student debt

Student debt is a heavy burden on recent and current students and is likely to discourage prospective postgraduates from doing M-level study in the future. Participants who had completed HE study before the introduction of student loans suggested that they would have been unable to achieve the same qualifications in the current funding system.

3.18 Mentoring

Participants had been assisted by mentoring relationships, including with teachers, tutors and colleagues. Such relationships can provide an important example and support for shaping a creative career. Some participants felt disadvantaged by the absence of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) role models in Art and Design institutions and fields.

3.19 A career in the creative industries I : Expectations

Some Group 1 and 2 participants avoided planning their futures. Others looked ahead to employment, self-employment or some variant of a 'double life' in which they would support their creative work through earnings from other work. They were concerned about prospective low earnings and lack of job security.

3.20 A career in the creative industries II: Early stages

People in the early stages of a creative career may have a limited or unrealistic view of their prospects. They are likely to support their creative work through some version of the double life. It is possible that some abandon Art and Design.

3.21 A career in the creative industries III: Mature stages

Group 3 participants varied in their circumstances although most had established some level of financial security, sometimes through the double life.

3.22 Advantage and disadvantage

Participants' experiences indicated several sources of advantage and disadvantage.

3.22.1 Family of upbringing

Families of upbringing could provide assistance through direct financial support, accommodation, employment and also informed support around entry to higher education and to careers in Art and Design fields. Those in secure salaried employment could impose greater expectations of 'age-stage' career paths than those with experience of running small businesses.

3.22.2 The attitudes of others

Some participants felt disadvantaged by the attitudes of others who categorised them in terms of age, race or ethnicity.

3.22.3 The stigma of educational failure

The most commonly claimed source of stigma and disadvantage was low educational achievement at school.

3.22.4 Mental health

A number of participants referred to the experience of mental health problems, including 'breakdown', substance abuse and depression.

3.22.5 Relationality

Personal connections and responsibilities to other people could be a source of emotional and financial support for participants but were also experienced as limiting work and career opportunities, especially by women with children.

3.23 Success and failure

Participants' main criteria for success were recognition and financial reward. Although most suggested they had relatively low expectations regarding earnings, they did recognise payment as a form of validation for creative work. There was a range of views on the 'logic of success' or how success can be achieved. The sample of participants for this project does not include people who abandoned their creative careers because they had not succeeded; this is a gap which requires further research.

Part 4: Concluding Remarks

The research suggests that creative careers do not follow established trajectories or sequences of stages but are emergent. Each person's career is itself a unique creative project to be improvised from her or his specific work and life circumstances, possibly over an extended period. Within this project, postgraduate study is important for the development of a personal voice and practice; for conferring status, drawing attention to work, and providing contacts and opportunities; for boosting personal confidence, and as a general point of entry into the 'art worlds' associated with particular creative fields.

Part I: INTRODUCTION

1.1 The aims of the research

This report presents the interview project conducted by Stephanie Taylor and Karen Littleton of the Open University as part of the NALN-funded 'Non-traditional participation and pathways' project. The particular aims of the interview project are to:

- investigate the experience, backgrounds and aspirations of former, current and prospective postgraduates in order to understand their pathways into Art and Design and their perceptions and expectations of postgraduate level study and its place in their study/work trajectories;

- highlight the constraining influences which have operated on them and which may also exclude other potential students. These constraints include 'prevailing understandings within a society', for example about routes into study and work and also the kinds of people these are open to.

1.2 The larger context

The research presented in this report was conducted in 2007 with participants whose study and/or work positions them within the cultural or creative sector of the UK economy. This sector has been the focus of considerable research and debate, including multiple definitions. For example, Freeman (2007) outlines alternative Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and other classifications of the 'cultural sector' in terms of separate sectors, sub-sectors, domains and stages of creative production. He describes 'creative employment' as comprising individuals working in the creative industries, whether employed or self-employed, and also those 'who have creative occupations' outside the creative industries. NESTA (2006) proposes a model of the 'creative industries' as made up of creative service providers, content producers, experience providers and originals producers.

These discussions indicate the breadth of activities and life circumstances encompassed by the various terms 'cultural sector', 'creative sector', 'creative industries' and 'creative employment'. However, there is widespread agreement on several points about this general context which are relevant to our participants and this research.

- The creative industries are important for the contemporary UK economy. For example, they have been estimated to 'account for 8% of the UK economy' (NESTA 2006, p.2) and 'more than 5% of GDP' (Leadbetter, 2004), and to 'employ more than a million people in over 110,000 businesses' (NESTA, 2006, p.1). They are also said to have grown 'at twice the rate of the economy as a whole' in the decade up to 2004 (Leadbetter 2004), although Freeman (2007) suggests there was a declining trend from 2001 to 2004 which may or may not have been reversed in 2005.

- Culture was once seen as 'a self-contained realm which exists in opposition to the material and the economic' (Ward and Pitt, 1985, cited in Selwood, 2002) and was therefore funded for its own sake. However, national and local government policy is now driven by the assumption that 'cultural provision is instrumental and can deliver on government objectives' (Selwood, 2007), including assisting the regeneration of depressed urban areas, promoting social inclusion and creating new jobs.

- London, where our research was conducted, has a special significance, as the national 'creative industries hub' (Knell and Oakley, 2007). The UK's cultural industries are concentrated there (Leadbetter, 2004) and, as a 'global city', it links them into the global cultural economy.

- Much of the work within the creative industries is short-term, project-based, low-paid and even unpaid. Many people work on a freelance, self-employed basis, with very limited security. This situation has been widely criticised. It has also been presented positively, as offering freedom and 'self-actualisation', and as the model for the future of work, especially when linked to the 'knowledge economy' (see Gill, 2007; Knell and Oakley, 2007; McRobbie, 2002 for discussion of the contrasting depictions). Commentators have also noted the huge variety in the work and employment situations which prevail in different sub-sectors of the creative industries (Oakley, 2007) and called for more detailed information and evidence (Selwood 2007).

This, then, is the context within which our participants study, work and live. Commentators have called for more evidence, about the sector in general (Selwood 2007) and also the differences within it (Oakley 2004). Our research project makes a particular contribution, as a qualitative, interview-based study of the experience and perceptions of a (necessarily) small sample. In conventional statistical terms, our participants offer a very limited basis for generalization. For example, they could be fitted into the classifications discussed by Freeman as:

- mainly in the DCMS sectors of Audio-Visual, Visual Arts and Heritage Management (rather than Books and Press, Performance, Sport or Tourism);

- in all six stages of the creative production chain (Creation, Making, Dissemination, Exhibition/Reception, Archiving/Preservation and Education/Understanding), though mainly in the first, fifth and sixth of these;

- currently or prospectively (for full-time students) in all three components of creative employment (employees in creative industries; self-employed persons in creative industries; persons with creative occupations outside the creative industries).

However, the relevance of our small sample and our findings for this larger context is given by two points. The first is the central importance within the sector, however defined, of universities and other education providers. The research presented here was funded by the National Arts Learning Network (NALN). For our participants, as for many other people, their pathways into the creative industries are opened and largely shaped by their HE study of Art and Design. The particular focus for our research project is the place of postgraduate study within their study and work trajectories and the participants' status as former, current or (as graduates) prospective postgraduate students.

The second reason that our research has a more general significance is that the experience and perceptions of our participants are, inevitably, mediated by the established knowledge and definitions of the cultural industries. One example of this would be how discussions of the importance of skills for the larger industries shape HE curricula and course descriptions and are taken up by current students trying to understand and improve their employment prospects. Our close micro-level data analysis investigates this kind of mediation and the ways in which such understandings shape the participants' educational experiences and opportunities, their career expectations (or lack of them), the attitudes of other people towards these careers, the participants' creative work and the kinds of lives it makes possible for them.

1.3 Theoretical background and analytic stance

The theoretical approach which informs the research project discussed in this report is derived from narrative psychology, discursive psychology and discourse analysis in psychology, and from the reflexive modernity thesis of the identity project in sociology. A fuller discussion of our narrative-discursive approach with references for the main background sources is presented in Taylor and Littleton (2006); Taylor and Littleton (2008), and Reynolds, Wetherell and Taylor (2007). The following summary presents the main points relevant to this report.

The report presents findings from a qualitative analysis of 46 transcribed interviews. The analysis has been conducted on several levels, informed by different assumptions.

(i) On the first level, the talk was considered as reportage for the 'facts' it could provide about people's lives, such as the details of their experience of applying for university courses. The assumption here is that participants' talk is transparent and generally reliable. Analytically, this assumption is often separated from interpretive and constructivist approaches to talk data (see ii and iii) but we do not see them as incompatible. We agree with Martyn Hammersley's 'more subtle realist' position that: 'No knowledge is certain, but knowledge claims can be judged in terms of their likely truth' (1998, p.66) and we accept participants' accounts as broadly truthful and reliable.

Unlike a survey questionnaire which necessarily limits possible answers to enable a quantitative analysis of the findings, our interview schedule (see Appendix 4) was designed to encourage free conversation. Participants' answers to the questions were therefore more detailed and varied than in a survey interview. Our first level of analysis of the interviews was to note any recurring patterns in participants' accounts and experience without reducing these to a number or percentage. (As in any qualitative research project, the number of interviews is too low and the level of detail too great for any statistical generalisation.) This is the basis on which we summarise common features of the experience of the participants.

It is important to note here that we do not approach individual speakers as 'types'; the experience or opinion of any particular speaker is not assumed to be representative of others who might be similarly categorised i.e. as typical of the experience or opinions of women, people of colour etc. This point is relevant to decisions made regarding the recruitment of participants (see 2.1, 2.4).

(ii) The second level of analysis involved close reading of the interview transcripts as a single body of talk data in order to detect recurring uses of terminology, imagery, connection (for example, of assumed cause-and-effect) or other relationships. This form of analysis is derivedfrom discourse analysis in psychology (see Taylor and Littleton, 2006 for a fuller discussion and relevant sources). Patterns of such features are taken to indicate speakers' use of 'discursive resources' which are held in common and pre-exist a particular occasion of talk. Our approach assumes that in answering a question and describing their lives, people will produce a unique version shaped for the (complex)

occasion of the telling, but they will make this version out of the discursive resources available to them. Following the further premise that (spoken) language is not a neutral medium for conveying information but is constitutive of meaning, these resources are assumed to shape and constrain the versions which can be constructed by speakers.

The discursive resources available to speakers are cultural resources shared across the wider society. They include the values and logics which make up our taken-for-granted knowledge about the world and how it works. Speakers may also draw on more local resources derived from narrower life contexts, such as those associated with their families, education and professions. In this project, such contexts included the various schools and colleges at which our participants had studied and it was noticeable that the 'voices' of particular teachers and tutors echoed through the interviews conducted for this research project and its predecessors (Creative Journeys 1 and 2) as an importance source of 'local' resources.

This second level of analysis can therefore indicate some of the common sense or unquestioned assumptions around study and career pathways in Art and Design which shape participants' interpretations of their own experience and life possibilities. One example would be the classification of school subjects, and students, as either 'academic' or 'artistic', and the implications this has for choices about later study and careers.

(iii) The third level of analysis relates to the identity work of speakers. This is a more complex concept which needs to be explained in greater detail to show its relevance to the project

In the contemporary social sciences, a person's identity is understood not as inherent or given but as performed and lived out, a work-in-progress which negotiates the various positions and possibilities given by personal history, social location, and different life roles, relationships and interactions. Although some identity work may become well-established, such as that associated with a particular job, this multiplicity requires us to be continually making and re-making ourselves, within the (fairly rigid but not unbreakable) limits established by our existing social and personal situations.

Sociologists such as Anthony Giddens (1991) have suggested that in contemporary Western societies, the work to make an identity has become a reflexive and individualised project: 'I' am the person I make myself to be. This notion of identity places great emphasis on intention, effort and control. It has been criticised for overemphasising agency, and for disallowing our connectedness as social beings and all the constraints which these connections impose on our lives. However, the theory of the identity project does not deny the social; rather, it proposes that contemporary life possibilities are understood in terms of individual opportunity and responsibility rather than, say, accepted as being 'given' by class or other social locations. One consequence is that success and failure may be personalised. This is the logic of claims that anything is possible if you want it enough, or work hard enough, or focus enough, and also of the corollary that any limits to achievement must be your own fault. (It was noticeable in the interviews that younger participants were more likely to talk in these terms.)

Established images of the artist or creative have a special significance for the identity project. Howard S. Becker (1982) dismisses the individual image of the creative as a 'romantic myth', a selective and historically situated construction which denies the cooperation and joint activity essential to all art worlds and also denies how any creative is dependent on others (see also John-Steiner, 2006, Littleton and Miell, 2004, Sawyer, 2003). However, the interest for our research is in how this image itself functions within people's lives and identity work. For example, Angela McRobbie (1998; 2002) has suggested that young people are attracted to the contemporary UK creative industries by the freedom and self-fulfilment associated with the image of the 'auteur'. For McRobbie, there is an element of illusion and self-exploitation in a creative identity project. She suggests that these novice creatives face precarious self-employment in an increasingly deregulated labour market.[1] Although we take a less pessimistic view than McRobbie, the concept of the identity project is important within the theoretical background of this project.

Our own academic outputs from this project and its predecessors focus on speakers' work to construct and take up creative identities. Identity work is particularly salient, and problematic, at transition points in life. This is because implicated in transitions are processes of intense narrative and discursive change which entail the rehearsal of new narratives of self to guide, define and organise new practices (Wetherell, 2006). Academics in educational fields suggest that identity work is therefore relevant to learning and to the experience of novices, such as those of our participants who are currently studying, or within a few years of completing their studies (i.e. those we will refer to later in the report as Group 1 and Group 2). Our analytic interest in the reflexive and individualised identity project also emerges from a commitment to a conceptualisation of education in terms of the development and dialogic construction of understanding and identities (rather than the transmission of specific bodies of knowledge and skills). Seen in these terms, learning is fundamentally a process of 'becoming': it is transformative and changes who we are. The educational process therefore necessarily involves the continual construction and (re-)negotiation of subjectivities as well as ideas and artefacts.

A key part of identity work is the construction of a personal biography or life narrative. This is not simply 'given' by the events of a life but is shaped in the telling. Both the past and future can be interpreted as pathways to aspired-for situations and identities. The 'non-traditional' experience which is the focus of this report is inevitably defined in relation to speakers' assumptions about traditional or established career pathways. Associated with these pathways are identity positions which can be positively and negatively valued. For example, our previous research (Creative Journeys 1 and 2) showed that most participants claimed an early interest in Art and Design, from childhood. These claims were not necessarily untrue (see i) but the accounts usually referred to activities which would be enjoyed by many more children than those who go on to creative careers. We suggested, therefore, that the claim of a continuity of interest in Art and Design from an early age does special identity work for a speaker; it implies an aptitude or vocation which is not to be denied and which therefore validates a later decision to enter a creative career.

The analysis of participants' identity work refers back to both (i) and (ii). As noted above, we looked at constructions of life and career trajectories and the 'logic' of successful progression along available pathways. (For example, is this attributed to talent, effort, or contacts, or luck?) We are interested in constraints and opportunities, as perceived by the participants themselves, and also as these might appear from the outside. The participants who are more established as artists and designers (referred to later in this report as Group 3) are of particular interest for the 'facts' of their experiences and circumstances, and how these are interpreted. Since many of these people are also teachers or employers, their own lives and pathways already operate as models for novices. Their work and lives afford examples and instantiations of ways of practicing, possible trajectories and the associated proposals of potential identities – what Wenger (1998) has called 'paradigmatic trajectories'.

Part 2: THE EMPIRICAL WORK

Part 2: The Empirical Work

The empirical work required a series of initial decisions on the definitions of 'Art and Design', 'non-traditional entry' at postgraduate level, and 'UK domiciled' to be used for the recruitment of participants.

2.1 Defining 'Art and Design'

NALN's interest is in widening participation and progression routes in the arts. Given the broad reference of the terms 'the Arts', 'Arts and Design' and 'Art and Design' we made the following decisions:

1> To exclude participants in the performing arts. We decided to do this because we had very few potential participants from the performing arts (see 2.4). Given the limited number of participants to be interviewed for this project (a final total of 46 out of a projected total of 50), there was a likelihood that there would be only one or two participants from the performing arts whose careers and experience would then be taken, incorrectly, as representative (see 1.3). It would also be difficult to protect their anonymity (see 2.7).

Following this decision we use the term 'Art and Design' (not 'Arts and Design') throughout this report to refer to the range of fields in which participants studied and worked.

2> To allow participants to self-identify as people in 'Art and Design' i.e. not to impose any definition, or exclude potential participants on the grounds that their area of work or study does not qualify for the description of 'Art and Design' (except as noted in 1, above).

3> To recruit (initially) through NALN member HEIs and to allow their (current and former) course provision to define the 'edges' of Art and Design (see 2.4) except as noted in 1 above. An indication of the range of the participants' study experiences is given by the subjects of some of their most recent courses. These were: ceramics / conservation / digital surface design / enterprise management in the creative arts / flower design enterprise / fine art / footwear/ graphic and media design / industrial design / marketing and advertising / painting / photography / product design / sculpture / textile design / vehicle design / visual communication / women's wear.

However, many participants had previously taken courses in different areas of Art and Design, in some cases for a first degree and in others without obtaining any qualification. For example, a designer who had studied engineering at undergraduate level had taken evening classes in life drawing, and a painter had previously studied and taught ceramics. Although we asked participants about their experiences of applying for courses and studying at HE level (see question schedule in Appendix 4) our participants ranged from people who were currently studying Art and Design to those who had completed postgraduate courses years and even decades before the interview.

In terms of the 'broad' and 'narrow' definitions of creative arts and design adopted in the Institute for Employment Studies parts of the joint project, the participants in our research could be said to be located mainly within the narrow definition i.e. the 'Creative Arts and Design' subject group in the Joint Academic Coding System (JACS) hierarchical academic subject structure used by HESA. However, the additional point to note is that participants in our research ('Strand 3') are not all current students; they include people who have been away from HE study for some time. The JACS categorisation therefore has limited relevance and is not used in this report.

2.2 Defining 'non-traditional entry' at postgraduate level

The postgraduate focus of this project distinguishes it from others funded by NALN and raises particular issues for the meaning of non-traditional entry. We began the project with a complex definition. By 'non-traditional students' we meant:

1> People who had entered undergraduate studies in Art and Design

a> Without A-levels: for example, with a BTEC or other alternative pre-degree qualification;

and/or

b> After a substantial interruption in their studies, returning to education as mature students;

c> As a variant on 1b, after study, training or work in a different field. (This included both those who worked before deciding to attend university and those who went to university directly after school, possibly with A levels, but not to study Art and Design.)

People in the above categories would subsequently enter postgraduate study in Art and Design (actually or prospectively) with an appropriate first degree. To summarise, for people in categories 1 a, b and c, their 'non-traditional' experience precedes their undergraduate studies in Art and Design. (We assume that this is the same category who are of interest to the other NALN research projects.)

2> In addition, for our research project we counted as 'non-traditional students', people who were probably not included in other NALN research projects, namely, those who entered postgraduate study without a first degree in Art and Design, in contrast to 'traditional' entrants who have a first degree in Art and Design. Our second category was therefore of people who had previously studied or worked in another field and then changed to Art and Design at the point of postgraduate study.

Participants in this second category include:

a> Those whose previous study, to degree level, and/or work was in an area unrelated to Art and Design;

b> Those whose previous study/ first degree had been in an area relevant to their Art and Design study but without a creative focus. An example would be someone who had studied engineering for their first degree and then moved to product design for their Masters;

c> Those who (probably but not inevitably with a previous qualification in another field) used a postgraduate qualification to develop the creative potential of skills and work experience they had obtained in a non-Art and Design area.

Note that self-identification did not necessarily match our distinction between 'traditional' and 'non-traditional'. For example, some people who had changed from an engineering to a product design focus (i.e. our category 2b) presented their educational path as synthesising their different areas of interest and experience, rather than as involving a significant change of direction. Alternatively, some people who responded to our calls for participants did not fit any of the categories above yet saw themselves as having followed a non-traditional pathway, for example, by moving from painting to jewellery making. In selecting participants, we excluded those who, on the information available to us before the interview, did not fit into one of the numbered categories above.

2.3 Defining 'UK domiciled'

We made a further decision, given NALN's educational focus, to include only 'UK domiciled' participants. Our aim was to include only people who had grown up and been educated in the UK, excluding those who had come to Britain in order to study (i.e. as non-British European students or foreign students).

However, in practice this was difficult to operationalise. A requirement that someone had been born in the UK and/or was a 'native' English speaker risked excluding minority ethnic first generation British citizens who are highly relevant to NALN's focus. We also had responses from potential participants who had migrated to Britain as adults, before or at the point of university study. Finally, it was questionable whether it was logical to exclude participants from the Republic of Ireland while including those from Scotland and Wales. Given our method of recruitment, decisions had to be made on a case-by-case basis, sometimes on limited information. We are, however, satisfied that the final sample is appropriate to the aims of the research.

2.4 Recruitment of participants

An example of a call for participants is included in Appendix 1. Minor details such as dates and references to particular HE institutions were modified in different calls.
Calls for participants were circulated as follows:

- through IES survey B (a call attached to the survey);
- through Royal College of Art (RCA) alumni lists (by email, December 2006, March 2007);
- at the NALN conference (by handout, February 2007);
- through Central Saint Martins (CSM) alumni lists (by email, December 2006);
- through Norwich School of Art and Design (NSAD) alumni lists (by email, April 2007);
- to current London College of Communication (LCC) students (through staff, January 2007);
- to current CSM students (by email and through staff, April 2007);
- through a request (by email) to previous participants to be passed on to others who might be interested;
- through personal contacts (by email April 2007).

We contacted three other HEIs with requests for calls to be circulated but this could not be arranged. We received approximately 200 initial expressions of interest. Most potential participants contacted us by email or phone, in response to one of the calls. However, we were passed the names and contact details of :

- IES Survey B respondents who had expressed an interest in being interviewed and who lived or studied in London;
- current LCC students on graduate certificate and diploma courses who had expressed an interest in being interviewed.

Potential participants were sent a description of the project and a further invitation to participate (see Appendix 2) and asked to confirm that they were still interested and were available to attend an interview in London on a working day. In some cases, they were asked for further information about the non-traditional aspects of their experience and/or their UK-domiciled status.

As is typical with this kind of study, the majority of the initial expressions of interest did not convert to commitments to attend an interview. The main reasons were that the respondents:

- did not fit our criteria for selection, in particular, our definitions of 'non-traditional' and 'UK domiciled' (see above);
- were unable to attend an interview in London;
- were unable to attend an interview within our schedule (months, days and times).

Some people who initially expressed interest chose not to become involved in the project when they had more information about it, or found that they were too busy to be interviewed. A small number who agreed to be interviewed withdrew just before the interview or did not attend it.

2.5 The participants

The 46 participants include:

- 8 people who emigrated to Britain as adult or teenagers;
- 1 Irish citizen.

Of the 46:

- 30 were contacted through the RCA, although not all had studied there: a few had been told about the project by RCA alumni or staff;
- 13 were contacted through the University of the Arts London;
- 3 were contacted through IES or other sources.

20 of the participants were women, 26 men.

The participants were:

- current and former postgraduates (see categories 1 and 2 in 2.2);
- prospective postgraduates who had followed non-traditional pathways into their first degrees. These included current students on postgraduate certificate and diploma courses i.e. postgraduate in time but not M-level.

2.6 The limits of the sample

Because of the relatively small numbers of participants in any qualitative research project, a sample will never be statistically representative or evenly divisible into categories of gender, age, ethnicity etc. (see 1.3).

We would note the following additional points about our final 46 participants:

(i) A majority are men (26). This is unusual in an interview project. Researchers almost always find that the majority of expressions of interest come from women.

(ii) The largest group of participants are RCA alumni. The second largest group are current students at LCC (studying at different levels). We attempted to recruit more participants via other NALN member institutions but received a very limited response. The final sample is therefore polarised.

(iii) It is likely that the calls for participants selected for success over time. The participants who fell into Groups 1 and 2 (as described in 3.1) include people who expressed concern about their prospects in Art and Design; some said they would 'give it five years', or three years or some other fixed period, implying that they would seek an alternative career after that time if they were not successful. The Group 3 participants (see 3.1) are those people who have been sufficiently successful in Art and Design careers to continue to define themselves in those terms and/or stay in contact with their former colleges (for example, through alumni associations). This project therefore does not include former graduates or postgraduates who had abandoned any expectation or hope of success in Art and Design and moved into a different field.

2.7 Ethical permissions and procedures

The research was designed to comply with the Code of Ethics and Conduct of the British Psychological Society (BPS). As a requirement of the Open University, approval for the research was obtained from the Human Participants and Materials Ethics Committee (HPMEC) at the University. Contact information and data are stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

The main points relevant to this report relate to informed consent, minimising risk, participant payments, and debriefing.

2.7.1 Informed consent

Ethical guidelines require that researchers obtain 'informed consent' from participants, both for their active participation in a research project (in this case, being interviewed) and for subsequent uses of the material obtained from them (in this case, the recorded and transcribed interviews). This required us to describe the project as accurately as possible to potential participants, and to give them certain assurances about our intended use of the interview material.

In some cases, the initial invitation to participate was not sent by the researchers and contained inaccurate information (e.g. about where the interviews would take place or payment for expenses). However, all potential participants were subsequently sent an accurate description of the project and its purposes (see Appendix 2). In addition, before each interview, the interviewer gave each participant a printed copy of the same description. She then talked through the points listed on the consent form (see Appendix 3) and checked that the participant understood these before inviting the participant to sign the form. It includes a promise of confidentiality and an assurance that references to participants in publications will be anonymised.

To ensure anonymity, in this report and other publications, we take the following measures.

- We publish extracts from interview transcripts but not the full transcripts.
- We edit these extracts to exclude details which could enable the speaker to be recognised (e.g. specific names, places, employers, details of work).
- When referring to particular participants, we provide only minimal descriptions.
- The report does not include a table of participant details (exact age, gender, specialisation, colleges attended etc.) because this would certainly make participants recognisable to some potential readers. (A further point is that this kind of detail implies a 'classification' of speakers as representative types, which conflicts with the theoretical basis of our work. See 1.3).

2.7.2 Minimising risks

The steps to ensure anonymity relate to a further requirement of the HPMEC, the need to 'minimise foreseen risks' to participants. In this project, the main risk would be that a participant would be embarrassed or disadvantaged if information or opinions disclosed in the interview situation were revealed in other contexts. Some participants may not be concerned about confidentiality (though others contacted us after the interview for confirmation that we would protect their anonymity as promised on the consent form). It is also possible that, despite the information provided about the project, some participants have assumed that the interviews were 'for' the RCA or another NALN member institution. However, the terms on which the project was set up mean that we must protect the anonymity of all participants. One consequence is that we cannot make the interview recordings, transcripts or analytic notes available to others, including NALN members.

2.7.3 Participant payments

The HPMEC requires that 'recompense is only given for expenses and inconvenience, otherwise it might be seen as coercion/inducement to participate'. Following this, each participant was paid the sum of £20 'for your time'. Participants were not paid additional money for travel expenses or other costs.

2.7.4 Debriefing

All participants were given an email address for the project administrator and contact details (name, email address, position in the university) for the Principal Investigator, Dr Stephanie Taylor. They were sent a message of thanks with an invitation to contact us if they had any questions or requests. A small number of participants subsequently asked about how their interviews would be used in the research. Some participants have requested information on the eventual outputs of the project and we will send them a copy of the final version of this report. We will also provide them with the transcript of their own interview if they request it.

2.8 The interview process

The one-to-one interviews with participants took place in Central London, at either the RCA, LCC or CSM. Each interview was conducted by the same person, Ms Pippa Michaels, a qualified art therapist, who is an experienced research interviewer. She spoke informally to each participant for approximately an hour following a general list of questions agreed in advance with the project researchers (see Appendix 4). The interviews were semi-structured and they were specifically designed to give participants the opportunity to talk about their backgrounds and to discuss their experiences of studying and practising Art and Design. The interviewer encouraged participants to talk freely, allowing them space for reflection, development or qualification where appropriate. She adopted a facilitative stance, picking up on any additional issues raised by an interviewee and, where necessary, encouraged them to talk further or give specific examples.

2.9 Analytic process

Each audio-recorded interview was transcribed verbatim by an experienced transcriber. The resultant transcripts were very detailed and included, for example, hesitations, pauses, laughter and some non word utterances such as 'mm', 'um' and 'ooh'. Whilst such details were essential for the analytic phase of the work, the extracts reproduced later in this report have been 'tidied' for ease of reading.

The analytic process was both lengthy and intensive. For each of the 46 transcribed interviews both researchers made personal preparatory notes regarding points and issues of analytic interest and salience. These notes were used as the starting point for a series of analysis meetings (ongoing between April and September 2007). In each meeting approximately two or three transcripts per session were discussed in turn and in depth. Notes of these discussions were typed up as a record. Within our confidential data-set, each transcript thus has a companion 'notes' document associated with it. The notes documents reflect (and also shaped) the multi-faceted nature of the analytic endeavour that was undertaken. As noted earlier (see 1.3) the analysis was conducted on multiple levels. At one level we were interested in the reportage of 'facts' and recurrent patterns in participants' accounts that would enable us to summarise common features of their experiences. At another level the interview transcripts were being treated as a single body of data to identify recurrent patterns, such as uses of particular terminology, imagery or connections of sequence and consequence. Of particular interest were the taken-for-granted assumptions and expectations shaping participants' accounts of their lives and futures. At a different level, the identity work within speakers' talk was also considered, because we were interested in how the speakers were negotiating and taking up creative identities.

As we were working with such a large body of data, the analytic process necessarily unfolded over a number of months. We thus regularly 'took stock' of the key areas of analytic significance, both established and emerging, and developed a number of brief summary documents which captured 'work-to-date'. As new patterns emerged we undertook further re-reading and cross-checking of transcripts that had previously been discussed.

Part 3: FINDINGS FROM THE ANALYSIS

Part 3: Findings from the Analysis

The sections in this part of the report present the broad patterns which emerged in the analysis of the interview material (see 1.3 and 2.9). The extracts from participants' talk are illustrative. They have been selected as examples of points and patterns detected in the general analysis or, occasionally, as contrast cases.

3.1 Grouping the participants

Given the range of the participants' experiences, the report will mainly discuss them with reference to the recentness of their HE study in Art and Design i.e. as:

Group 1: Current students (postgraduates and others) and those who had completed studies within the last year;

Group 2: Those at an early point in their careers, in approximately the first five to ten years after study;

Group 3: Those who had been away from study for ten years or more and were, mainly, fairly established in their careers.

It is important to note, however, that people's lives did not follow automatically from 1, to 2 to 3. For example, some participants had returned to study after completing undergraduate or postgraduate studies some years earlier.

The participants were asked if they thought of themselves as working in (or intending to) work in 'the creative industries' (see Appendix 4). Most accepted the term, often with some qualification, but their talk about their work, plans and prospects indicated the breadth of the term (see 1.2). Unsurprisingly, throughout the interviews participants placed a high positive value on creativity and the creative: they are creative people doing (or aspiring to do) creative work. However, this was differently defined. For some, creative work was linked to a product; for others, it was associated with a process and also an approach, so that for some participants quite unexpected activities (computer programming, cooking, cement work, property development) could become creative.

3.1.1 Group 1

The breadth of interpretations of creative work was greatest in Group 1 i.e. among the participants who were currently studying. Some final year undergraduates or graduate certificate/diploma students were taking courses which directed them towards eventual employment in sales, management or administrative roles in advertising, that is, in jobs which had no connection with making creative or artistic work. These participants were included because they were studying at NALN member HEIs and appeared to meet our criteria for selection on the information obtained before the interview.

For example, one of these participants, whose ambition was to sell advertising, distinguished creativity from artistic work and said he would be creative because he would use ideas. Another regretted that her course was only about advertising and marketing; she had wanted a more 'creative' course but had misunderstood the course description. (In this case, she took personal responsibility for not understanding the description correctly, but she was not the only participant who had found herself taking a 'wrong' course and degree). For her, art and design had been relegated to a hobby but she hoped to return to it on a Masters course.

Other current students were taking fine art courses, part-time or full-time, sometimes as part of a succession of more and less successful study experiences (see 3.2). In some cases, they had returned to study to develop their skills in a particular medium, to work in a stimulating environment, or simply to obtain studio space and materials to allow them to continue working.

A further group of students were on courses (at undergraduate, graduate certificate/diploma, or postgraduate level) which function as specialised training for a specific and narrow field of applied creative work, such as community art or one area of fashion. These participants sought highly specific employment, with a long-term view to running their own companies, and were very anxious about their employment prospects. We also interviewed some participants who had recently completed a similar course (within the last year) and were still seeking work.

3.1.2 Group 2

Most Group 2 participants i.e. those who had completed HE Art and Design studies within the last five years, were either

- fine artists at a fairly early point in their careers whose main occupation was making their own work. These participants supported themselves financially in different ways (see below). Some were currently doing further study to improve their chances of earning, for example, a PhD to help them obtain teaching work, or
- designers, often in fields which utilised their technical or craft skills, experience and qualifications (e.g. in ICT or engineering). People in this group had skills which enable them to make money doing work for others, on an employed or self-employed basis; this work sometimes had a creative element, but not always. A common issue for this group was to retain a creative/fine art focus to their work, whether in the product or in the creative process, and to control and 'own' the work, for example, to devise and organise their own projects; these were the two aspects on which they generally had to compromise in order to make money. Some of this group, however, had achieved working situations in which they were doing work they valued and making money (although almost never as much as they aspired to). For these participants, their future career pathways might not be clear but they were confident that a pathway exists and that success was achievable.

3.1.3 Group 3

Group 3 participants either had established careers or lives in which their creative work was central, or were living a 'double life' (see 3.19). Most had completed HE Art and Design study at least ten years before the interview, and in many cases considerably longer before. Some of these people made an additional contribution to the project in that they were able to talk not only about their own experience but also about the recent Art and Design graduates who they employed, tutored or interviewed as applicants for study or work.

3.2 School experiences

3.2.1 Difficulties in school

Many participants had had difficulties in their earlier education. Often, these were later attributed to dyslexia (see 3.3). Group 3 participants who had been unsuccessful at school, whether because of dyslexia or for other reasons, remembered their bad experiences long after subsequent academic success (for example, obtaining a Masters or even a PhD) might have been expected to supersede them. Some continued to feel bitter that their aptitude for creative work had not been recognised and encouraged.

3.2.2 Academic vs. Artistic

Students who were academically successful at school had faced a different problem. As one participant put it, she was 'quite academic' and at her school 'art subjects were for people who were too stupid to do the proper subjects'. She says 'I never thought of myself as artistic because you were kind of academic or artistic. It was one or the other'. Another participant was told when she was choosing her GCSE subjects that 'you can't do more than one art-based subject because it's not really a proper subject'. In her school, arts based subjects included art, graphics and technology. Other participants told how they had been guided away from art into an alternative choice of A-level subjects and career, despite having an early interest in drawing, painting or other creative activities: 'A lot of my teachers ... the head of 6th form wanted me to do something academic ... I think they had my best interests at heart because they thought Oh there's no jobs for art students'.

Participants in Groups 2 and 3 who had been successful at school and taken subjects other than art had often gone on to take A-levels and a degree in science or another area, sometimes followed by a number of years working in another career, then entered HE Art and Design at postgraduate level.

This academic/artistic split may partly explain the high proportion of dyslexic people on HE art courses. At secondary school level, students who were lower attaining were more likely to be 'allowed' to take art or design-related subjects, whereas those who succeeded in more academic subjects were directed to follow alternative lines of study (see 3.3).

For example, a woman in Group 1 who took art as her fourth A-level (because her parents thought that 'art wasn't really a proper A Level' and the school suggested that 'if you were going to do it it should be an extra one') was discouraged from taking a foundation course. She subsequently completed a BA and MA in art history, before a BTEC in a design area. At the time she was interviewed she was in her late twenties and completing a postgraduate design course and working full-time in a design practice. She is confident about her career prospects in the creative industries but regrets the roundabout route she has followed to get there. Another woman (from Group 3) who was forced to choose between the arts and sciences at A level chose art. She has since developed her creative work on a science/art borderline, through a series of courses (foundation, HND, MA in design) and subsequent employment. She is now frustrated that she was forced to give up science and has considered returning to study 'a bit on the side just to improve my knowledge', possibly followed by a PhD related to her current creative work.[2]

A Group 1 participant suggested that it remains the case that enthusiastic and capable students are not encouraged to view Art and Design as a viable study or career choice:

> 'I went ... to this meeting at college for mentoring foundation students... One of the guys there was saying You know with all the 17 year olds because they're really impressionable ... They don't know what they want to do and you have to be realistic about it and maybe sometimes you should try and put them off.'

3.3 Dyslexia

The proportion of our participants who had been identified as having dyslexia was so high that as we worked through the interviews we came to expect the moment of disclosure. This is a complex issue, as references in other sections indicate. Some institutions have recognised dyslexia as being prevalent amongst Art and Design students and provide appropriate support.

The condition itself is contentious. Some authorities do not accept that it exists, and it was noticeable that it represented very different levels of obstacle for our interviewees. One, for example, was already an engineering graduate before he was identified as having dyslexia. Another was a young woman who had been successful academically and completed postgraduate study at an early age; she said that the effect of her dyslexia was that she 'struggled in a few places at school' and 'wasn't too keen on' some subjects.

In contrast, other participants were so challenged by the condition that they resorted to strategies for managing it analogous to those which people might develop to conceal illiteracy, such as recruiting family and friends to fill in application forms and produce the writing samples required by certain HEIs. One highly successful designer and academic commented that it was a priority for her to make friends with the secretarial staff when she entered a new workplace, because she would be dependent on their help. Some participants found that using a computer reduced their difficulties but for others their dyslexia made computer work impossible.

It was noticeable that all the participants who mentioned dyslexia welcomed its identification. The support provided by HEIs (for example, testing; advice on managing dyslexia) had been effective in that it appeared to have given participants confidence for dealing with it. It had also, for most, reduced the stigma attached to the label itself and to difficulties in reading, writing, spelling etc. Our analysis indicated that a 'diagnosis' of dyslexia can even work positively in sev-

eral ways. First, as one person identified as having dyslexia and dyspraxia said, it 'gave me the tools I needed to get past them'. Second, the identification can explain previous educational difficulty or failure and so permit a retrospective reinterpretation of bad educational experiences: as one woman said about receiving the identification at the age of 40: 'the rest of my world falls into place'. Third, some people suggested it had helped them develop other life skills: 'I can talk' and 'because I'm dyslexic I'm very good at getting people to do things for me'. Finally, because the condition is so widely shared by creatives, for some participants it can act as a form of validation; a number mentioned, for example, that it is associated with creativity: 'It helps you creatively in some senses'; 'it's often people who are very creative who are dyslexic'; 'rather than memorise things ... I work it out from scratch ... and I think that helps with the creative side'.

Group 3 participants with dyslexia felt they had benefited from some flexibility in arrangements for recruitment and assessment earlier in their careers. They felt they had been lucky in this because 'it couldn't happen now'.

3.4 Progression to HE

3.4.1 'Crazy paving'

For many participants, but especially those who had had difficulties in school, their educational path resembled what Kevin Whitstone (2007) has described as 'progression as crazy paving'. For current students (Group 1) and those who had finished studying recently (Group 2), education was further fragmented by part-time study and non-traditional qualifications which, on the positive side, recruited students who might otherwise have not attained university level, but, more negatively, tended to involve multiple fresh starts and relocations.

As one example of this fragmentation, a student who left school with one GCSE (Art), went on to do: a 'GNVQ intermediate', a GNVQ advanced, a BTEC /National Diploma in Art and Design (commenting 'I think they've actually changed the name of that course now to something like a degree foundation'), all at different institutions, then an HND (taught across two colleges), and then, at yet another college, postgraduate study. Perhaps as a consequence of such fragmentation, this student and others sometimes appeared uncertain of the nature or status of the qualifications they did have: 'I think it's called a diploma in foundation studies in brackets art and design with merit'.

More positively, for one participant the two years of study for a GNVQ in art had been combined with foundation course study, enabling her to go on to a BA a year earlier than if she had taken A-levels before a foundation course. Other Group 1 undergraduates had chosen to do a foundation degree (FdA) and then transfer to a full BA because that route enabled them to 'skip' a foundation diploma course.

Many participants who had struggled at school had also recognised their interest in Art and Design and followed it consistently, albeit through the 'crazy paving' of successive courses. Some had been so consistently unsuccessful in any other area (for example, they had repeatedly failed O level Maths and English) that Art and Design had been almost the whole of their educational experience. These participants had often got onto foundation and HE Art and Design courses through a 'back door', generally involving personal contact. They had been accepted on the strength of their work, without the usual qualifications. For example, one prospective student had gone directly to the college and showed a portfolio of work to a sympathetic member of staff who had then helped the student to bypass formal procedures for application and admission.

Some Group 3 participants who had had difficult and fragmented educational experiences suggested that they had gained admission to HE in atypical circumstances: 'they said Oh go on go next door and do a drawing We won't even look at it Start on Monday ... so I started on Monday'. They had nonetheless been highly successful in their subsequent careers, in terms of both recognition and earning. They commented that the paths they had followed would not be open to current students. However, current students (Group 1) also referred to many experiences of reduced requirements for admission, fast track registration and so on. These generally operated at the level of the course, perhaps to fill numbers, rather than as a response to an individual student as in the earlier cases.

3.4.2 Choosing to study Art and Design

As already noted, participants in all three groups, but especially those who were older than their mid-thirties, often commented that art had been ranked low in the hierarchy of subjects at their schools. Many had been forced to choose between art and science (see 3.2.2).

Few participants of any age had been given useful career guidance at school about possible study or work paths in Art and Design. Many were critical of the poor advice they had received. One person who later studied fashion had been directed to a job with an engineering firm as appropriate for someone interested in 'design'. Schools generally associated art and design with drawing skills, not ideas, and many participants had felt they were disqualified from any creative field because they could not draw well: 'it's a lot more encompassing than just being able to draw really well [but] I think for a while I just thought Yeah I've got to be able to draw very well for people to actually think that I'm creative'. (Interestingly, a Group 3 participant who had been more confident at the point of application for postgraduate study had prepared his portfolio to demonstrate that 'artistic outcome isn't necessarily painting and drawing It's also creating in 3D'.) Advisors in school were generally unaware of career possibilities beyond fine art:

> 'Even the art teacher said You don't want to go and study art ... you know you'll never get a job in it';

> 'I went there to study the history of art basically because all my teachers were persuading me not to do art'.

As in our previous research (the Creative Journeys projects 1 and 2), we found that many participants remembered a particular teacher or tutor who had encouraged them to pursue Art and Design and sometimes recommended a particular HEI or course. A few had decided early that they wanted to go to a particular college (usually the RCA) because they had heard about it by chance: 'I asked her What's that? and she said It's the best art college in the world and I said I'm going there'. Many had eventually applied to a particular HEI on the basis of a chance recommendation or existing contact. This was part of a more general pattern in the interviews which we have labelled 'serendipity', that major decisions and life changes were presented as the result of chance rather than as having been deliberately chosen and planned for.

There seemed to be a certain age element operating here in that younger participants were more likely to use the language of planning, self-regulation and life management, especially when talking about their futures (rather than describing past behaviour). This way of framing life possibilities, as deriving from effort and intention rather than circumstances of birth (family, class etc.) and therefore as under one's personal control, reflects trends discussed by sociologists (see section 1.3). It appeared again when we asked 'Is there anything that's specially helped you in your career, or any lucky break that you've had?' Younger participants were more likely to say that you make your own luck. However, the different language does not necessary indicate a difference of behaviour. For participants of all ages, choices of HEIs and courses were mostly prompted by recommendations from one or two people, such as a tutor or a friend. Very few participants had systematically researched alternative courses and colleges or planned their progression from undergraduate to a particular postgraduate course before embarking on higher education in Art and Design. Some presented themselves as having made wrong choices.

Few participants mentioned consulting prospectuses. Some had visited degree shows and looked up courses and colleges online. As in our previous research, there were assumptions about criteria for acceptance which may or may not be correct but may discourage some people from applying to certain courses:

> 'it's hard to get into a London college from outside London';

> 'places like Goldsmiths like people to have worked outside as an artist before they go onto their MA rather than go straight from a BA';

> 'for ages I thought I would need a BA in fine art or some art school training to be able to do an MA in fine art'.

This may be a reason why informal and 'back door' application routes are valued. It was also noticeable that informal connections were particularly important for students with dyslexia. They were likely to choose a course because an acquaintance had recommended it and to register because they had been able to make direct contact with a member of staff by phoning or visiting (see 3.3).

3.5 The meaning of study

Current educational policy and practice emphasises the need for 'personalised learning', which demands a responsive and structured approach to each student's learning and necessitates an education system tailored to the needs, interests and aptitudes of every single learner (Miliband, 2005). Personalised learning is seen to have a special relevance to Art and Design education[3] and this is reflected in participants' views. For example, one said 'I think if you're on any kind of creative course you need enough time to pursue your own interests or you know kind of build up your own style'.

Perhaps as a consequence of negative life experiences outside education, there was a strong tendency among current students, particularly those on undergraduate or graduate certificate/diploma courses, to equate study with personal development (see also 3.11). Of course, one purpose of education has always been to develop the whole person. It was noticeable that the undergraduate interviewees were particularly likely to emphasise this, and the importance of matching your qualification/education to yourself. In these terms, the ultimate definition of a good course is that you find yourself and the educational experience is matched entirely to you. It is an extreme case of personalised learning. There are almost therapeutic overtones: you pursue education in order to find yourself/explore facets of yourself. Although this might seem to conflict with the notion of education as preparation for and an entry to employment, the two views appeared together, in the talk of the same participants. It is possible that for some of the students, the idea that they have developed personally is a consolation for the fear that they will not find jobs at the end of their courses: 'even though it maybe doesn't sculpt you perfectly for the industry it definitely makes you develop your taste'.

3.6 'What I want'

Participants who had entered Art and Design as a second career generally described their earlier educational and work experience in fairly positive terms, but said they moved to Art and Design because they found it more interesting and satisfying. This justification was part of a more general pattern in the interviews in which participants cited their enjoyment of Art and Design as the motivation for pursuing it and also evidence of their vocation. One participant said that she asked herself 'What do I really enjoy doing?' and made her career choice accordingly. Others said that they knew they had found the right area of work because they liked what they were doing.

It was striking how this 'personal enjoyment' justification predominated in the interviews;[4] there was almost no use of alternative justifications which might have been expected, such as a claim to a special talent or aptitude as the prompt for choosing a particular kind of work. A few people referred to a preference for a certain lifestyle (for example, working for yourself). One participant suggested that self-employment was a default option, for people who didn't feel able to make formal applications for jobs.

3.7 The application process

3.7.1 The documentation

For some participants, completing the application documentation for courses at postgraduate level or below had been relatively straightforward. A few even commented that the need to generate a personal statement and/or answer specific questions had been a useful exercise, serving as a prompt for them to consider what it was they actually wanted to do. Many, however, commented that completing the documentation had been an obstacle and a particular source of anxiety and concern because of their dyslexia: 'I never thought I would go to university ... because it was about filling out forms' (see 3.3). Prospective students in this situation had frequently relied very heavily on the support of friends and/or family members to help them develop the application:

> I had to write an essay and I had friends write me that for me basically I sat with them again you know ... then it was the same with filling out the UCAS form and I had my uncle who helped me fill it out.

3.7.2 The interview

While often suggesting that they felt nervous about interviews, for the vast majority of participants the experience of being interviewed for a place on an Art and Design course was a positive one. For most it had served as an important form of recognition and validation, being indicative that they themselves had potential and what they were doing was of worth. For other participants, however, although the interview process was construed as useful and the line of questioning had (at one level) been quite simple, they had nevertheless found the interview process a deeply challenging experience personally. One MA applicant put it like this:

> they were really tough and I think what also happened was that they in a way they almost started the process of what was going to happen on [the course] ... about stripping away some of the kind of myths you've built up around your own practice You know that you kind of reinforce yourself with them ... they were only asking quite simple questions but sometimes they're the worst and really just by challenging me and provoking me slightly ... my practice started to fall apart in the interview or that's how it felt to me you know.

The suggestion here is that the interview process pre-figures and starts the challenging period of study that is to follow. While this was perhaps the most troubled account of the interview process that was given, there were two issues which were repeatedly experienced as disconcerting. The first was that participants had expected to be questioned in detail about their portfolio work and were surprised when this did not happen. They were also generally somewhat intimidated by the presence of current students, whether they were formally members of the

interview panel/process or just generally 'around', for example, looking through the portfolios which had been submitted. That said, a few of the participants were reassured to have students sitting on the panel.

3.7.3 The portfolio

Participants talked about their experience of preparing and presenting portfolios for entry to courses, at various levels, and for applications for work.

Only a few participants had seemed daunted by the task of preparing a portfolio for application to a course below postgraduate level, suggesting either that this has been largely superseded as an entry requirement for many courses, or that the presentation of a somewhat eclectic collection of work ('I just brought along some bits of work that I'd done at home I think') is adequate to indicate the potential of a prospective student on a foundation or undergraduate course. It is also possible that the effort put into preparing a portfolio is played down in retrospect, perhaps to indicate that the speaker has since progressed to a higher standard of work. Some students with non-traditional backgrounds had little or no work to show. A few participants did emphasise the importance of someone helping you to prepare a portfolio for an application to a course, feeling that there was a correct way to do this and that it is important to consult someone who knows what should be done. (Some NALN colleges provide specific support for preparing a portfolio.)

For entry to M-level study, however, participants gave much more attention to the nature and scope of the portfolio and what they wanted it to communicate. A few participants underscored the importance of using the portfolio to exemplify interest and ideas, rather than to 'showcase' a completed, well-rounded project:

> 'Well the way I always applied was you know I thought you know What's the point of putting in a full completed rounded project ... I thought it was much more interesting to show what it was that you were interested in ... different ideas and how they worked together and that's what you're interested in so I always showed the different types of work.'

> 'I just thought Well if I want to go here they've got to see what I'm really interested in doing ... I'm putting one thing in one coherent piece of work That will be the whole portfolio so they can see what it's about so the video work and the photographic work goes together.'

This concern with the presentation of ideas is crucially linked to the notion that if you want to study at Masters level there needs to be something that you really want to develop. In respect of this, most of the participants who said they felt particularly vulnerable about the quality and

nature of their portfolios were those whose prior higher educational training and/or work experience lay within the fields of science, technology or engineering. Often they had not had access to good facilities or materials. Some were concerned that, because they had pulled together pieces of work undertaken over a long period of time, the final body of work either lacked coherence or was too far removed from their current ideas and thinking. They were also concerned about the conditions under which the work was made, suggesting that the kind of work made for 'fun' at an evening class is different to that required to gain entry to art college. So for a multiplicity of reasons, these participants felt that something was lacking:

> 'I was very intimidated at my interview because everyone else seemed to have gone to (an art) college ... or had professional experience and had huge portfolios with incredibly impressive work ... and I'd kind of had a few doodles on some bits of paper and a CD of some websites that I'd done But luckily they liked my ideas.'

> 'I submitted some work from my design A Level ... I like to make things and I used to make a lot of clothes and just little knick-knacks and ... so I submitted some of them and then decided to do a project just to kind of illustrate what kind of thinking design ... thinking I could do and what areas interested me ... but that was a bit of a slapdash affair and ... you know I kind of wouldn't want to show it to anyone really.'

There was further reference to a negative experience of presenting the portfolio. Applicants had been surprised to find they often had no opportunity to talk about it, but were just required to leave it at the college and collect it later, sometimes to find that it was being looked at by students already at the college. Other applicants were disconcerted not to be asked questions about the portfolio at the interview. One participant rationalised that the work in the portfolio speaks for itself so it was logical that the questions to him would be about other things, but others were perturbed that the portfolio work was not acknowledged

With regard to applications for work, rather than study, there was considerable discussion of the relative importance of a portfolio or qualifications (see 3.13). Many participants emphasised the importance of the portfolio for showing prospective employers what you could do, and had already done. In this situation, it is positive that the work speaks for itself. For some participants, there was an implication that the work would speak in contexts where the maker might feel ill at ease, operating as a proxy in an elitist art world from which she or he feels excluded, perhaps by class and race. Postgraduates and postgraduate students were more likely to suggest that qualifications, especially from a prestigious college, were useful as a means of drawing attention to your work. There was also mention of their importance for obtaining teaching work. Undergraduate and graduate certificate/diploma students or graduates placed more emphasis on the importance of work experience.

3.8 Current students

Our interviewer commented that none of the current students were 'just' students. Most had considerable commitments to activities other than their studies, whether they were officially part-time or full-time. (There is a strong contrast here with the RCA students we interviewed for Creative Journeys 1 who focused their energies on their postgraduate courses, although some also worked for money.) A full-time study commitment (undergraduate or postgraduate) was referred to by some participants as taking up just two days a week, though other students devoted more time to it. Participants from Group 3 who held academic posts suggested that, in contrast to their own earlier experience, students now receive less individual attention and support for creative work, and are required to do more theoretical work and writing. They also carry a much larger financial burden because of the student loan system (see 3.17). A Group 3 participant who teaches Art and Design also described how students attend two core days a week and use the remaining time not for study but for work to get money. He considers their educational experience impoverished compared to his own and said that they seem less committed to it, even though they are paying for it.

Almost all of the Group 1 participants worked to earn money, usually in an activity not connected to Art and Design. In some cases, for older students, the work was a full second career which they had developed in order to support their creative work: this was the extreme form of what we have called 'the double life' (see 3.19). In a few cases, the double life had been developed to the point that the course itself was taken as the opportunity for creative work, for example because it provided access to facilities, such as studio space and materials, and some communication about the work with tutors and fellow students.

For all the current students, it was noticeable that their lives were extremely full and time was short. Conventional images of student life as carefree are not appropriate here. Their multiple commitments can also be contrasted with the immersion experience which many former postgraduates, in particular, had valued as a feature of their courses. It was also noticeable that for the majority, study was a 'luxury' rather than a duty: they valued the (hard-won) opportunity to study, were highly appreciative of good tutors and critical of bad ones, and sought out extra study opportunities (for example, to update their IT skills), even if they had had bad experiences of study earlier in their lives. Students in design-related areas also had an additional imperative, to gain work experience (see 3.12).

3.9 Interrupted HE study

Many of our participants had had one or more false starts to previous HE study. Some had begun work or study in another area which they found unfulfilling (e.g. engineering), then changed to Art and Design. Other participants had not only started but followed through a full degree and even a career in another area before changing to Art and Design. Some blamed poor careers advice at school for directing them away from an early interest in creative work. Others had enjoyed their first career but changed because, for example, 'I felt there was something missing in my life'.

Some participants had faced self-imposed barriers. Among current students, some interviewees hinted that their previous study had been interrupted by personal problems connected with 'partying', substance abuse (also see 3.21.4) or mismanagement of money: 'I'm wanting to get sensible then really at last It's taken a long time'. For students who had experienced personal problems, the discipline of study (for example, following a schedule and 'sticking' to something) was an important and welcome part of the university experience. One made appreciative reference to a tutor who rang her students and told them to get out of bed and come to the studio! These people wanted a more structured learning experience, in contrast to the majority of participants who valued freedom and the opportunity for self-direction in their Art and Design courses.

3.10 From undergraduate to postgraduate

Although some participants (particularly those in Group 2) had moved directly from undergraduate to postgraduate study, there was general agreement that it was more useful to have worked for a few years between, for the sake of your CV, because of the importance of work experience (see 3.12), and for yourself: it helps you to 'focus and narrow down', and 'postgraduate is quite good when you're feeling at that point where you want to change something'. A participant who had not had a break between BA and MA said 'Maybe if you've been working somewhere and you have realised exactly what you want to be doing then you can use these two years to get to that whereas if you just do it all in one go you are kind of working blindly'. There was a prevailing idea that you have to be 'ready' for postgraduate study: 'you have to have a subject in terms of research really At this moment in time I'm not ready to do writing around that'.

Participants who were admitted to postgraduate study after difficult earlier educational experiences, sometimes without a degree, found the transition demanding. However, they also suggested that they were better able to appreciate the course and benefit from it because they were older. As one said 'I had a lot of catching up to do ... I threw myself in very seriously.' Another person without a first degree said 'I was quite shocked when I came (on the course) at the students that had been very much through the degree and the A Levels. They were to me seemed quite lazy and they weren't very self-motivated'.

Similarly, those who had changed career to study at any level suggested that they gained more from the courses than younger students. A 35-year-old woman said 'I think being older helps in a lot of ways I think I'm a lot more motivated because personally this is costing me a lot of money But also I've given up a lot to be here to do this and you really notice it with the other students You know a lot of them don't turn up half the time They don't do the work They're not just not there And I'm sure there's loads of people who are infinitely more talented than me but I don't think there is anyone on the course that I'm on now who is prepared to work as hard as I am'.

3.11 Postgraduate study

Many participants who had changed from science or engineering to design, suggested that earlier formal training (for example, at HND, foundation or degree level) is 'along the lines of giving you the grounding and the base of what the subject is'. At postgraduate level their expectations concerning personalised learning and a tailored programme of study become central. Postgraduate study is construed as a time for experimentation, personal development and exploration, both of the medium and oneself, and for pursuing work-related passions and obsessions:

> 'I wanted to do exactly what the MA allows you which is self-directed work and to really concentrate on your own development'.

> 'I think postgraduate study develops you as a person I think you know before that undergraduate develops your mind in the subject area and equips you with a certain amount of tools and understanding'.

> 'A lot of students at 18 going through doing their BA who aren't that serious about ... what it is they're going to do ...whereas MA's you know For me design is all about obsession and and it is about obsession and MA's a chance to really get obsessed ... and find your own edge'.

For these reasons, participants (particularly those who had had already completed M level or PhD study) suggested that the process was not only 'enjoyable' and 'rewarding', but also 'tough'; 'demanding'; 'hard' and 'challenging'; a form of 'self-inflicted torture'. Postgraduate study was a personally transformative experience which changed participants' thinking and practice (which were seen as existing in a dynamic interplay):

> 'Personally it's changed me immensely and it's changed my art practice immensely'.

> 'I would never have got to the point where I am now in terms of my thinking and in terms of my practice without having gone the route I've gone I'm absolutely positive of that'.

Given this emphasis on learning as a process of personal transformation and development, and the associated desire to meet personal needs and achieve particular goals and aspirations, the application process, notably at postgraduate level, is one of trying to establish a 'fit' between the institution and oneself. Applicants want to locate themselves within an appropriate creative milieu, one which will enable them to pursue their own particular ideas or projects within a context that suits their specific interests, personalities and ways of working: 'I didn't want to come somewhere like [Institution 1] which was very different ... I guess in its outlook ... whereas [Institution 2] was much to me was much more suited to my personality I guess'.

The decision to apply to a particular institution is therefore influenced by the participants' understandings and appraisals of the relative strengths, merits and repute of organisations and particular courses. However, in making an application they depended heavily on hearsay and personal recommendation. In some cases, they were aware of the type of work 'coming out' of particular institutions, for example, because they had attended degree shows. They also placed value on their immediate student-community and network of peers. For example, some participants talked about their wish to be surrounded by a stimulating group of committed, like-minded students and to be where it is 'happening'.

In referring to different levels and forms of study, participants from all the groups were more likely to mention the positive influence of one particular member of staff rather than the design or content of a course. Negative study experiences were characterised in terms of restriction ('a bit prescriptive'; 'they weren't really letting me do what I felt like I wanted to do') and lack of pastoral care. Good courses were those which offered freedom and the chance to pursue your own interests, with support from staff: one participant described herself as 'bingeing on tutorials' during her postgraduate studies.

Participants in Groups 2 and 3 who were looking back on their postgraduate experience were likely to refer to the value of informal learning from peers. RCA alumni, in particular, repeatedly cited the easy interdisciplinary contact across course and speciality boundaries as a very positive feature of their study experience:

> 'Just the sheer kind of diversity of creative things going on here but at a really kind of interesting level'.

> 'I think it was being at this place and being in this general environment with other departments What was really useful is the cross fertilisation between let's say the fine arts department and the film department or the knowledge of in some industrial design I mean it was ... you gained a lot of ... you were exposed to a lot of like minded people with perhaps different talents and that was incredibly stimulating'.

Former postgraduates suggested that students who undertook postgraduate courses were particularly committed and serious about what they were doing, in contrast to students on undergraduate courses. However, some participants did not enjoy the competitiveness which operated at this level and had enjoyed their BA study more. Some people who appreciated the value of the postgraduate experience in retrospect still commented on how difficult it had been.

Participants who had dyslexia emphasised the difficulty of writing and, especially, of doing a dissertation. Some specifically asked for a message to go to colleges that some alternative should be available. For these people, the requirement to write had overshadowed their experience of doing a postgraduate course, or a large part of it.

Other participants also problematised assessment practices. One Group 3 participant said:

> 'I think the talent needs protecting through spending time in academic institutions ... but you cannot evaluate talent based on some narrow academic standards ... and I just don't think the system is wise enough to realise that.'

3.11.1 Confidence

Given the tendency of the participants to emphasise personal development and enjoyment as key justifications for pursuing Art and Design, it is perhaps not surprising that they also evaluated their postgraduate study in affective terms. In particular, they talked about how it developed their confidence in their work and themselves.

For participants in Groups 2 and 3, a demanding and challenging experience of M-level study was often linked to building confidence in their work or artistic voice and to making them believe that what they were doing had recognisable value or worth. They also described how postgraduate study had increased their ability to communicate their ideas to others. The qualification itself could also be a source of confidence: 'it's given me the confidence as well to know that I do have the qualifications behind me'.

It was very unusual for interviewees to describe emerging from their postgraduate studies feeling less confident about their work and practice. However, one Group 2 participant suggested that this could occur because the process of building an artistic practice remained incomplete:

> 'When I left my BA I was actually much more together in a way as an artist I came out feeling very confident very and really the MA's been about sort of almost stripping all that away and really challenging your practice ... and then towards the second year you start to try and build that back up but I think at the point I left I wasn't quite there.'

3.12 Employment prospects and skills

It was noticeable that most of the final year undergraduates were concerned about finding a job as their goal after studying, sometimes with the longer-term aim of owning their own business. In general, the current students were keenly aware of their employment prospects and, in particular, the importance of qualifications, skills and work experience. They were concerned about the recognisability and status of non-traditional qualifications (e.g. BTEC, NVQ, FdA). One had been asked by an employer what an FdA was, and commented 'I've just been sold a course that's ... branded useless.' A couple of participants mentioned the possibility of lying about your qualifications, such as the class of your degree, to employers. Two said that they had lied to gain admission to courses, claiming to have completed courses which they had not taken or not completed.

In discussing what employers want, participants placed a strong emphasis on skills. Sometimes these were assumed to be obtained through degree study, but generally they were associated with work experience. Opportunities for appropriate work experience were greatly valued. Students had chosen particular degrees because these promised work experience, partly because this would provide contacts who might later help them obtain jobs. However, because it is unpaid, or paid at exploitatively low rates, some students had to forego or limit the unpaid work experience in order, ironically, to do paid work to support themselves. They believed that this damaged their prospects for finding jobs in the area of their degree studies. To work unpaid was a privilege which was not available to all students: 'They asked me to stay ... but I just couldn't afford to do it It's a real shame I really wish I could have in a way I wish I just would have put it ... on my credit card'.

Another issue for some participants was that work experience was often associated with moving to a different country. Italy and France were mentioned most frequently. Group 1 and 2 participants who had commitments to partners and families felt that they could not follow these opportunities: 'I've done my share of travelling and living abroad' (see 3.22.5).

Most work experience opportunities were very short-term. Yet a Group 3 participant running a very successful design company was emphatic that, when employing new staff, she does not want people who have had a 'flittie' career but looks for those who had shown their 'staying power' by holding jobs for at least two years. This suggests that the value of short periods of work experience on a CV (in some cases, counted in weeks or even days) may be less than participants believe.

Many participants had taken additional courses, for example, as evening classes, to obtain specific skills, for example in packages such as Photoshop. The need to update ICT-related expertise led many to take further courses and could become a pressure.[5]

3.13 Qualifications

We asked participants about the importance of qualifications, in their own experience and in the creative industries more generally (see Appendix 4).

For Group 1 and 2 participants in design fields, qualifications were seen as important to open doors and get you interviews, or at least to ensure that someone will look at the work in your portfolio. One designer's good qualifications were valued by her employers for adding weight to tenders and other applications for work. In fine art, qualifications were valued as a basis for networking. A speaker who recently completed her postgraduate studies suggested that people are always looking for ways in which they can establish 'where you fit'. She thought that some qualifications carry 'kudos': she is 'still using' the name of the college where she obtained her MA. Another fine artist at an early point in his career said that most of his exhibition opportunities come from his peers on his MA course, so it is important for him to keep up those contacts. Other participants talked about the importance of qualifications for giving you confidence (see also 3.11.1).

In contrast, Group 1 participants in some fields were aware of the relative newness of degree courses in their areas and had some doubts about the relevance of their qualifications for prospective employers who had not taken degrees themselves. For example, a participant with experience in the fashion industry thought that postgraduate study is only important for lecturing and research, not for the commercial sector. She suggested that a person who wanted to work at a 'name company' could work their way up through the ranks rather than study for HE qualifications.

Another participant who had made a career change into fashion design described how she had been advised, by a tutor on a short course, that rather than study she should look directly for some kind of employment within the industry. She had rejected the idea of 'blagging' her way into a job she knew nothing about: 'Because of my background and because of the way I was brought up educationally that sounded horrific'. Instead, she had taken a postgraduate course. At the time of the interview she was looking for employment and had changed her mind about the importance of a qualification, recognising that in this field it might not place her on a career path.

Other participants who had changed career had also been disappointed to find that their new qualifications did not lead them into new opportunities:

> I've known people who've you know like me have come from this course who've walked in and people just think No you just you don't really know what you want because you know you've just gone and switched so radically And so they're like reluctant to take those people on as well or take you on in general because they kind of feel like if they give you an engineering role that you'll probably kind of get bored and jump ship or they won't give you a pure design role because there are thousands of people who have come through the normal system through BA and who you know could do a lot of the core skill work in their sleep So it's been it's been quite frustrating.

It seems likely that for people with experience of more structured careers, obtaining a degree is sometimes a substitute for risk-taking, but in an Art and Design field it may not function as they intend. It may be that students generally assume that their studies will lead directly onto a path forward; when they complete their studies they may have to re-think their prior expectations regarding an orderly career trajectory. One Group 2 participant did suggest that her postgraduate course helped her to do this. She presents the absence of a career path in very positive terms:

> I think when I was actually going through my educational process I was kind of thinking things have got quite a set route about them ... The more I experience of life in general the more I realise that these walls that you kind of like theoretically put up at different stages like you know once you've chosen your GCSEs and then that means that that you know you narrow it down to your A Levels and then you narrow it down even more to your degree It's not actually tunnelling.
>
> INT: You don't have to stick to that?
>
> No you don't and I think that's what was brilliant about [my postgraduate course] ... it suddenly made you realise that Oh you can go and do different things You can go and do something which is a step to one side of the route that you're going And that you can carry on actually side stepping as you wish and maybe that's kind of like you know the way that professional careers are structured.

Some Group 3 participants had had the opposite experience, of having to obtain qualifications mid-career when it became a disadvantage in their field not to have a degree.

Group 3 participants also described how qualifications are superseded as an individual career becomes more established. One said that in the early days of a career each qualification 'allows you go on to the next level', but that now people never ask about her qualifications; they contact her because they have seen her work or been recommended. Another designer made a similar point, adding that as you go on 'what they want to know is your experience' and 'the last successful product you did'. More negatively, this means that 'you're only as good as your last work'. He also referred to the importance of qualifications for networking. He keeps in touch with his peers from his postgraduate course. When he requires extra staff for projects, he usually employs graduates from the same course because 'I know their skills sets and they fit exactly with the sort of work I do'. Other Group 3 participants also referred to recruiting employees from their former courses and colleges.

Some participants suggested that an undergraduate qualification is as useful as a postgraduate one if you know where you want to go in your career. Postgraduate study was described as a 'luxury' because the qualification would not be useful unless you wanted to go into teaching. A few people who had changed career even felt they had become overqualified by taking an MA and would have more difficulty obtaining work. But other participants suggested that a postgraduate qualification 'stands you out' from the mass of people with first degrees in Art and Design fields and that it can speed up promotion.[6] Almost all of the Group 3 participants had either done a PhD or considered doing one; however, a number were put off by the writing requirement, even if they were not dyslexic.

3.14 From study to business

For those in a design-related area, there appears to be a fairly widely accepted path to be followed after studying. As one person put it, 'you've got to find a lowly job somewhere and work your way up'. This is, of course, the classic model of an apprenticeship in which novices learn on the job in return for their labour in relatively unskilled or menial tasks: 'I got offered an awful job on a pittance on a nightshift but it didn't worry me It's just I knew it was a stepping stone so other people wouldn't have done that'. As one Group 3 participant put it, you do 'rubbishy jobs' and 'absorb what is going on around you whilst you're doing it'.

An HE course which includes work experience could be seen to incorporate some of the apprenticeship model within university study. Nonetheless, there are conflicts between the two models of learning. One is around skills. These may be given less priority in HE. Current students did talk about the importance of obtaining and upgrading skills; on the other hand, a Group 3 participant who is now on the other side of the recruitment table, as a prospective employer, commented on the poor skills of new graduates, in their own specialist areas and also more generally: 'They can't even draw ... let alone putting across an idea for a design'. It is possible that there are issues here around what is meant by 'skills' and which skills are relevant to employers.[7] There is also a problem of expectations. New graduates and postgraduates expect that when they obtain jobs they will concentrate on creative work, but this may not be the case.

A third issue relates to money. Some Group 3 participants commented on the unrealistic salary expectations of new graduates. However, these expectations may be partly a response to higher financial commitments, particularly the need to repay student loans. Participants in Groups 1 and 2 also generally aspired to establish a foothold in the property market and this would require a higher income, especially given current property prices in London where most of the participants lived (see also 3.17).

For participants in many fields, study was followed by a period of self-employment. However, this had different meanings in their longer-term career plans. For some, it was the financial arrangement for 'juggling' whatever work opportunities they could find while waiting for more stable employment. In some cases, the self-employment actually involved working for a single employer, such as a design company, but on a part-time or consultancy basis without any of the benefits of formal employment. (This is the kind of situation which Angela McRobbie has criticised: see 1.3.) For other participants, self-employment was a variation on starting your own company as part of a long-term way of living and working, possibly to be combined with doing fine art work.[8] One Group 3 participant in this situation commented that self-employment is 'unbelievably difficult' and requires skills for dealing with finances and paperwork which many career entrants probably lack.[9] Another Group 3 participant, whose work had received numerous awards, also underscored the difficulty of being self-employed: 'I didn't expect however to end up so out on a limb as a complete independent developing my own work This is a nightmare scenario'.

Many Group 1 and 2 participants in design-related areas (rather than fine art) admitted to an eventual aim of having their own business, but most recognised that they needed to gain (more) work experience first. Some participants were also concerned that they would not have the capital to start a business. Group 3 participants with successful small businesses talked at some length about the need to be creative in managing the business itself (an example of this would be obtaining media attention as a form of free publicity).[10] Some Group 1 and 2 participants were aware of these issues but others were reluctant to confront them. For example, a participant who had recently completed a postgraduate design course said:

> 'If you want to go for something like the Dyson kind of big inventor kind of thing I think the thing that maybe I didn't realise earlier on was how much of that is just kind of business sense rather than design sense And I think I enjoy the design thing more than I enjoy the business thing so maybe it's not ultimately where I want to go.' [11]

One participant in Group 1 had already run her own successful business for five years. Although she had enjoyed studying short courses on design and would like one day to study more design 'just for my own interest', she emphasised the 'very very small part' that design plays in your work to run a small fashion business. She had a sibling who had followed 'the design route' but for herself, had chosen a postgraduate course which links design and marketing. She talks about the discipline you need in this competitive industry and contrasts the attitude of 'creative people' designing what they like with the 'reality' of the business and the need for 'competence'.

3.15 Part-time and short courses

Participants who had completed a first degree in a different area and/or worked in a different career had often had positive experiences studying art- or design-related courses part-time, in evening classes or short courses which did not lead to qualifications. For some, a short course or evening class had been a revelation, making them aware that they wanted to change career. One said about an Adult Education course, 'the clay modelling has got an awful lot to answer for', because she subsequently gave up her engineering career to pursue fine art. Another interviewee characterised herself as 'someone whose evening classes just went far too far really you know ... somehow run out of control'. Participants who worked in a fashion-related Art and Design area were particularly likely to cite short courses (including part-time and short courses at the London College of Fashion) as their introduction to the area of creative work in which they had subsequently done degree-level and sometimes postgraduate study.

Some participants who had had difficulties at school described more positive experiences in part-time or short courses. They talked appreciatively of particular tutors and of learning experiences which contrasted with their previous study: 'it was an equal growing relationship (with the tutor) and also I felt you know I could tell I had an aptitude'.

For other participants, short courses and evening classes enabled them to retain a connection with Art and Design which they had not been able to hold at school, for instance, by keeping up an interest in drawing after they had been directed along a science or languages pathway (see 3.2.2). This connection was then referred to in order to validate a later move, for example, from undergraduate level science or engineering to postgraduate design, or from a complete different field (banking; IT project management; journalism) into HE Art and Design at undergraduate or postgraduate level.

More instrumentally, participants had used short courses to prepare portfolios for applications for full-time study, fill in gaps in their previous study and experience, and obtain access to studio facilities (for example, for printing). They had also studied outside Art and Design, for example, to learn languages to help them in their work, or simply to study for pleasure. One person had been admitted to a college and subsequently told to 'get some qualifications' so, at the same time as studying postgraduate Art and Design he had gone to evening classes to obtain an O-level and an A-level. Participants in a certain age group, especially in Group 3, had not used computers during their degree studies and had had to learn about them through part-time courses.

It may be that the open-endedness of careers in many creative fields and the need to remain fluid and avoid stagnating makes continuing study particularly attractive for people in these fields. Continuing study may also be a way of re-establishing connections within what Howard S. Becker has called 'art worlds' (see Part 4.) Even participants who had had difficulties in their previous studies, whether because of dyslexia or for other reasons, were likely to have taken a variety of short courses and evening classes.

3.16 Future study

We asked participants if they might undertake further study in the future. A small number had already done a PhD and many who already had a Masters expressed some interest in doing a PhD at some later stage. The most frequently cited reason for doing further study was to upgrade their qualifications in order to obtain teaching work, but some participants wanted to return to study for interest and stimulation (see 3.15). Those with dyslexia were, unsurprisingly, more likely to be daunted by the need to produce a dissertation and some had definitely decided against doing a Masters or PhD for this reason. The writing requirement also deterred people without dyslexia, including a Group 3 participant for whom English was an additional language.

As noted above, some Group 1 and 2 participants assumed that an MA would not be relevant for their careers 'unless you want to be an academic'. They said they would like to do a postgraduate course, but later, after establishing themselves: it would be 'purely for the fun of it ...a bit indulgent'; 'just for myself rather than to build on my qualifications.. it would just be sort of for my own interest'.

It was noticeable that participants in Groups 2 and 3 were less likely to refer to the need to do further study to upgrade their skills, though they might do it for other reasons. Some people who had established their own businesses and practices said that they could now 'buy in' skills (for example, in computing) by employing staff who had been 'brought up on computers'.

3.17 Student debt

A number of Group 3 participants were grateful that their own study had been made possible by grants. The head of a very successful business who describes herself now as 'rich' says:

> I got a full grant when I went and did my degree and I always think Could I have done it in today's environment? And I think it would have been a lot more scary so the grant system was amazing for me.

It was clear that student debt is a heavy burden for recent and current students. A woman designer who had been in steady employment since her postgraduate degree still took seven years to clear the debt from it, and she had been assisted to do so by a legacy. She described the stress which this debt caused her. She had 'sleepless nights for years' and 'you know I was constantly worrying about money and you know even at one point the banks were leaning on me and they cut off my overdraft'. Her total debt had been sixteen thousand pounds. There were references in the interviews to current undergraduates having debts of up to twenty-five or thirty thousand pounds.

In some cases, participants felt they had been encouraged by colleges to take courses which added unnecessarily to the debt, for example, to transfer from the second year of a foundation degree back to the start of an ordinary degree. Older or more confident people had resisted offers of additional courses or study years which younger students had taken up and regretted. It is clear that the current cost of HE studies establishes a tension between educational opportunity and the disadvantage of debt.

Some participants had managed to avoid incurring debt. Some current and recent students received financial support from their families. One recent student had taken great trouble to search out sources of funding: 'I went crazy looking in the library for those you know those big books of scholarships and awards and stuff and I ended up getting quite a lot of money from those things'. But another recent postgraduate who had received grants and scholarships still expected that it would take her five years to pay off a career development loan: 'it's quite terrifying how big the interest is on that'. When we asked participants if they expected to do further study or training in the future, they often said they would like to but could not afford it: 'from the money point of view I think a Masters might be a bit tricky'. One Group 1 participant who was studying at BA level in Art and Design after a previous degree and a career in a different field said:

> If you already have a degree you can't take out another a student loan so I have to find all the money myself So that's kind of I think going to put an end on (my study) Postgraduate study is obviously even more expensive isn't it so I think this might be my last chance.

Such financial concerns are likely to be exacerbated following the recent announcement that the Government has decided that it will stop funding English and Northern Irish universities for students who are studying for qualifications equivalent to or at a lower level than a qualification they already hold. Without government funding it is likely that institutions will have to charge higher fees to students affected by this decision to cover course costs.

3.18 Mentoring

In addition to the support derived from teachers and tutors within educational institutions, it is evident that many of the participants had also been inspired or encouraged by other creative mentors:

> I said Well I don't know I've got some sketch books ... and she said bring them so I did ... and her comment was What the hell have you been doing with your life ... so it was quite powerful and quite shocking I don't think I heard it very well I was rather shocked when she said it She said I think you should come and draw with me as well and see what happens so I did.

Interviewees frequently described the significance of receiving specific advice and guidance, for example, on the development of their work or the selection of pieces for a portfolio. One participant described his experience of preparing a portfolio for application to his first degree:

> and then luckily I came across an old art teacher from (when I was at) school who I got on quite well with and he seemed to quite like me and he was quite a stern chap ... a very a lovely man he said Why don't you come to the house ... and show your stuff to me ... He sorted me out ... and told me what I was doing wrong and he said and very encouraging as well he said You should get in.

It was evident that such mentoring relationships were not confined only to supporting specific formal educational experiences or early career-development:

> I had a colleague who then became my line manager who was somebody who was very good at pushing me and she still does when you need And she'll get me to do things and she puts me forward to for various she still always likes to challenge me so last year it was suggested that I sat on the validation board for a new degree so ... I think she's had big influence in my life.

It is clear that important, meaningful mentoring relationships are complex and multifaceted and are not readily reducible to just the proffering of advice and guidance and opening up opportunities. This is because mentors embody and enact forms of creative practice as ways of life.[12] They are in essence living testimonies to what is achievable, expected and desirable. They constitute and represent particular ways of being creative and doing creative work, offering lived examples of possible trajectories and the associated proposals of potential identities. For example, one participant said of some fellow students who started a business:

> that was possibly one of my biggest educational experiences again not tied to an institution necessarily but just seeing how they did it ... In fact as much as anything that's probably a thing that was the tipping point to actually Yeah I can do this ... I can take an idea on my own and make it work.

Another talked about the young designers who founded the company which employs him:

> I've seen what they've gone through and what they had They're kind of you know ten years on from me ... and what they've had to go through to get into a position where they're you know masters of their own destiny ... kind of thing and I'm under no illusions of how difficult that's going to be but I also know that that's you know what I want to do.

These so-called 'paradigmatic trajectories' are not simply reified milestones, such as those marked out by a career ladder. Rather, they embody the history of a community of practitioners and the lived experiences of actual people as well as composite stories which are implicated in them. Wenger (1998, p.156) suggests that exposure to this field of paradigmatic trajectories is likely to be the most influential factor in shaping the learning of newcomers. This seems to be borne out in this research as many of the participants highlighted the particular significance of people they worked for or with early in their careers.

Given the importance of exposure to the field of paradigmatic trajectories, it is important to note that some participants from BME backgrounds commented on the relative paucity of appropriate role models within arts higher education establishments and the field of art and design more generally:

> I'm a person of an ethnic minority background um somewhat disappointed that um the lack of ethnic minorities within higher education I'm still not exactly sure why that is the case ... both from a student point of view and from academic teachers that are actually teaching on the course I refuse to believe that ethnic minorities are not good enough ... or not qualified enough ... um but it seems that the higher up I go the less ethnic minorities I see ... that in itself can be a bit off putting ... but I counteract that by focusing on the end goal.

3.19 A career in the creative industries I : Expectations

To have expectations you must be looking ahead, and it was obvious that some Group 1 and 2 participants avoided doing this.[13] In our previous research we found that current postgraduate students were so immersed in their courses that they were unable to give much attention to planning their futures. In this project too, many participants showed a reluctance to set goals, sometimes as if there were some contradiction between being creative and planning systematically. As one person put it, 'if you want to think of art as a career which I wish we didn't have to really because I don't think it is It's different from that But I think if you do then ... it sort of takes the soul out of it a bit'. A different position was taken by a designer who emphasised how difficult it was to look ahead because of the newness of his field of work: 'We're making it up as we go along'.

In general, there was hope but doubt among current students (undergraduate, graduate certificate/diploma, postgraduate) and recent graduates and postgraduates about the possibilities of supporting oneself through creative work. As discussed in sections, 3.12 and 3.14, participants mentioned expectations of employment, self-employment, having their own business or living some variant on the 'double' life, in which creative work would be separated from earning or there would be some income from the creative work and additional money from other part-time work.[14]

Concern about money was greatest among those seeking full-time employment as necessary experience, for example in fashion, and also to help them pay off debts. Some current students discussed possible salaries in specific terms. For example, £20,000 to £22,000 was mentioned as a good salary for a first job, even though for some of the students this is no more than, and in some cases, less than their rate of pay in current or previous jobs outside Art and Design. Some Group 3 participants commented that current and recent students had unrealistically high expectations about earnings (they want to be 'very wealthy') and also about the kind of work they would do; it was suggested that they had few practical skills to offer employers yet expected to be given major creative roles (see 3.14).[15] However, we also interviewed students who commented on the difficulty of obtaining jobs and the low pay they could expect: a fashion student cited twelve thousand as the salary for 'a good job at a good company' with 'long hours', in London. Some participants referred to insecure employment with design companies. For example, one was shocked to be made redundant, then discovered that the company routinely made many people redundant 'every couple of years': 'they constantly kind of do this... that's how they work'. Some commented on the extra expense of living and studying in London but the need to be there for a particular kind of work, such as design. A current student whose home is in London referred to the expense of relocating as an obstacle to going to study elsewhere.

Current students (Group 1) and participants who have contact with recent Art and Design graduates as their prospective employers (Group 3), commented on the burden of debt now carried by those completing higher education (see 3.17). Participants in all three groups suggested that those starting out in Art and Design careers face more difficulties now because of the much greater numbers of graduates competing for opportunities.

3.20 A career in the creative industries II: Early stages

There was some indication that new graduates and postgraduates have unrealistic expectations, some of which are dashed in the first years after completing studies. A recent Fine Art graduate said: 'anyone that leaves here wants wants to be picked up by a gallery ... and then that's sort of feels like it's the end of your troubles because someone's going to look after you and get you shows and and collectors and money and enough money to make your work'. A recent design postgraduate said, about freelance design work: 'Initially I just thought I should just show up with my portfolio and see what people would suggest but then you've got to be a bit more kind of Right I think I need to I should do this for you'. A participant who had completed a postgraduate course five years before said:

> 'I've been having to do a lot of waking up Growing up probably a better term for it ... since leaving college I have been slowly increasing my financial debt ... I have kind of stood fast on the grounds of wanting to make artwork because that's what I felt ... it's being true to myself ... Really it's just about being realistic and growing up and I have to find some way of financing what I want to do.'

As already noted, some participants had great difficulty envisaging a career ahead. There were more defined paths for designers to follow than fine artists (though the latter might hope for a gallery contact, as mentioned above). There was some frustration at the absence of career pathways, especially among those who had changed from another field. They had expected a clearer structure. As one participant said, 'the only way I describe it is every day you have to reinvent yourself to seem like you are somebody to be worthy of consideration'.

Other people had chosen to follow the career of a particular mentor figure, such as a senior person in a company which had given them work (see 3.18). It was interesting that even participants who were very positive about their work and appeared to have been spectacularly successful, referred to the difficulties of, as one person described it, 'the hellhole that is the London creativity industry', mentioning, for example, the need for the unconditional support of family or close friends to sustain you. Some participants suggested that what was crucial was ongoing emotional support from people who valued or believed in what you were doing. One Group 3 participant also suggested that educational institutions had a distinctive role to play, offering a kind of protective environment for creative people to find their voice:

> 'I think the longer you can continue within the protection of an academic environment to find yourself and find your voice the better It's ... a really hard world out there particularly for creative people ... because everything is based on numbers now Everything that gets respect is what makes money and if you want it be an original voice do something original you can get crushed or you can get in this sort of consumer based world that we live in.'

There was considerable variation in the financial circumstances of Group 2 participants. A few were dependent on their partners for financial support, though these included some women who were also raising families which, as one said, you might 'technically call the equivalent of a job'. The former postgraduates who had been most successful financially were probably those who had either started or joined design practices or specialist, usually small companies. They were likely to comment that their earnings were lower than if they had followed an alternative career path available to them, for example, in engineering or IT, but they were fairly satisfied with their current incomes and looked ahead to earning more.

Some Group 2 participants were making money as fine artists, but in most cases not steadily and not much. Some had received major commissions and one was contracted to complete a thousand pieces of fine art work a year for a major retailer, in effect mass producing his own work. It was noticeable that fine artists were very uncomfortable with the notion of pricing their own work and welcomed decisions about this by others, such as galleries.

For some people who had pursued another career before starting again in Art and Design, the previous life continued to provide an income. Examples of this were fine artists who supported themselves through journalism, other kinds of skilled work, and income from previous earnings which had been invested in rental property. One fine artist with an alternative source of income saw himself as having left a structured career in order to work in a kind of eternal present of creative time. Interestingly, however, this had become less sustainable because of a change in his family responsibilities.

Some participants who were able to market skills which they had acquired previously, for example, in the Armed Forces, kept this income separate from their (lesser) earnings from creative work, for example by channelling it through a company with a different name. This established a separation between creative and other work. Several participants planned to do this and, if necessary, contract out some of the work to others in order to free themselves for creative work.

As already noted, another important source of earning in the 'double life' was teaching. This also functioned in other ways, as a source of creative stimulus and also, in some cases, to provide a certain status and validation. For example, a participant who was making a lot of money through work which he describes as 'very commercial' and 'at the end of the day ... a business' had continued to teach part-time at the university where he studied as an undergraduate. He did this because he liked it ('I do enjoy doing that') and also, it seemed, because it connected him to a world he valued. Another participant described himself as 'product designer and part-time lecturer', and 'company director', and emphasised that he wanted to keep the connection to academia even though the company was successful and expanding. Teaching was mostly described as providing a source of stimulus ('I took a lot out of it from the students and the other tutors') and a context for working out ideas.

It seemed likely that some participants in this group would eventually leave Art and Design. Some had given themselves a fixed time in which to succeed, usually five years. A few planned to return to study to improve their qualifications, usually with a view to establishing themselves as HE teachers in Art and Design.

3.21 A career in the creative industries III: Mature stages

As already noted, there was not necessarily straightforward progression within an Art and Design career. One of the older participants was a fine artist who had achieved varying, sometimes considerable, success over a career of more than thirty years, and alongside this had maintained employment in parallel careers, such as teaching, which would give him a steady income. At the time he was interviewed he was working towards a further qualification which he hoped would provide him with a new source of financial support. He therefore fell into Group 1 rather than Group 3 of our participants but was also in the mature stages of his fine art career.

Unsurprisingly, Group 3 participants varied hugely in their areas of work and their financial situations, although, as already noted, we did not interview anyone who had left Art and Design (see 3.23). Most of them emphasised their continuing enjoyment of their work and many said they were satisfied that they had chosen to pursue quality of life rather than income. However, one Group 3 participant (who had experienced considerable success over the years) repeatedly underscored the recurrent and ongoing difficulties and challenges associated with trying to finance projects and secure resources to develop work. It was apparent that even participants with experience of significant success and critical acclaim were not immune from the anxiety and worry associated with the financing of work. Some also expressed concerns as to their legacy and how history would judge their work. There was at least one participant in this group who wondered if he would have been happier if he had not entered Art and Design.

A few participants had firmly embraced the 'double life', establishing careers in different or related fields which would also enable them to pursue their creative work. For example, one of these compressed four days paid work into three in order to make time for his own work and says that he made a decision not to 'compromise' the creative work by trying to earn from it or turning it into 'product'. Another defines his creative success in terms of continuing to practise rather than making money: 'I'm still practising and in a sense not successful financially but as I say I'm still practising and still doing work twelve years later'. Some fine artists talked of their work as a kind of quest or open-ended process of development and refinement. Although this could be combined with paid employment, in the 'double life', only retirement and/or an end to responsibilities of relationality could leave them completely free to pursue it.

Group 3 participants included senior academics who combined teaching with their own work, though one suggested that as you teach more you do 'less and less of your own work'. On the design side, there were people who ran highly successful businesses. The tension which they faced was not to make a living but to retain interesting work by staying small, in staff numbers rather than the scale of their projects. One said 'I've chosen to not grow the business and keep it to a one-man band because I enjoy the actual work itself When the projects are big which sometimes they are I take on other people'.[16] For participants whose businesses had not stayed small, the continuing development had sometimes taken them away from their original interest, for example, in design, and into new fields, which they might or might not find equally enjoyable.

Overall, the participants who had been most successful financially were those with their own businesses, although some fine artists had had major commissions. Even the more successful Group 3 participants referred to difficult times and their dependence on family and others, for example, to provide a steady income to support a family through the 'peaks and troughs' of a design business. One participant whose public profile would mark her as highly successful remained heavily dependent on an income from inheritance.

The most financially successful participants in this group talked of a wish to 'give back' something, perhaps through charity work. Most supported new entrants to the creative industries in some way, as their students or junior employees. Teaching is another obvious form of support for others and we have noted how people in these roles have an additional importance as exemplars of career paths or 'paradigmatic trajectories' (see 1.3 and 3.18). However, there could also be a disjunction between earlier and contemporary experience. For example, one Group 3 participant had disliked teaching because he was frustrated by (what he saw as) the students' lack of commitment and also because he was unsympathetic to some current directions in contemporary Art and Design theory and practice.

3.22 Advantage and disadvantage

It is, inevitably, difficult to summarise the complex life situations and experiences of our participants in terms of 'class' or other socioeconomic categories. Some self-identified as 'working class' or 'middle class' but those labels had a very broad reference. In this section we therefore separate out some particular sources of advantage and disadvantage in relation to participants' careers in Art and Design.

3.22.1 Family of upbringing

Participants were from a wide range of family backgrounds, in terms both of affluence and parental occupations. These affected them in different ways.

Some participants had received direct financial support from relatives while they studied and a few had used legacies to fund study. The availability of this support depended on various circumstances. An only child might receive extra support, a child of divorced parents less. As already noted, family financial support could mean that students could afford to do unpaid work experience, or continue their postgraduate work over holiday periods when other students had to take jobs, or they could leave their courses without heavy debts.

Families also provided a home base (and even studio space), whether as somewhere to live or just to return to, for example between residencies. Students from London could continue to live at home. Family-run businesses provided employment for some of the current students, especially at undergraduate level. For some in their late 20s, their version of the 'double life' involved living at home and working in the family business (for example, a restaurant), while studying and maintaining their own social lives.

A different kind of advantage conferred by families is what is commonly referred to as 'cultural capital'. For our participants, this related to the family experience of Art and Design, and also of university education. Many of the current or recent students are the first in their family, or one of the first generation, to go to university. Some saw themselves as having opened the way for siblings (including older siblings) to follow. Unsurprisingly, their educational achievement was a matter of pride to parents and other family, but it could also be linked to an expectation that a university degree would lead to a steady job. A young woman quoted her parents: 'They're like Well you've done all this education Shouldn't you be able to go straight into something?' A participant from Group 3 who went into Art and Design as a second career said 'it's not the sort of thing black people did at the time going off to become an artist'. He did a foundation course and then went to university. When it came to choosing a particular course he says 'I wanted to do art I wanted to But you know for me from my background and having worked and being you know 28 or 30 at the time it didn't seem a possibility so I did (design)'.

Participants whose parents had been to university, and especially those with Art or Design connections in the family, were helped to find out about course opportunities. For example, one successful designer had gone to a school which her mother had chosen for its good art department. Her mother had then helped her proceed to the next stage of her study: 'I didn't know that an arts foundation course existed but again through research and my mother helping me we found out that that was the best way to go on to other art courses'. Another participant, making a career change, went to the college to discuss the postgraduate courses available because 'my mum had decided it was always a good idea to go and have a chat with them first to find out what

the course was about before you apply'. Although this kind of informal contact was not unique to participants from particular backgrounds, it seemed to be easier for those who were encouraged by their families. They were also more confident about resisting pressure from colleges to choose options which they felt were not suitable for them (see 3.17).

On the other hand, participants whose parents were university-educated were more likely to face the academic/artistic dilemma (see 3.4.2) and also, perhaps, an age-stage view of life in which it was expected that 'by now' they would have achieved certain things or that it was 'too late' to explore new directions: 'I was like Oh it's too late for me now you know I can't remember how old I was then 25 26 I was like It's too late for me now anyway you know there's no way I could get onto a Masters degree'. They were also more likely to expect formal qualifications to open new career paths (see 3.13). In contrast, some participants from families with lower status occupations (e.g. non-professional) and/or less financial security received more tolerance for late starts and re-starts of career. As we noted in our previous research projects (Creative Journeys 1 and 2), there was also more tolerance of employment uncertainty from families who had experience of running small businesses than from those with a background of secure salaried employment. On the other hand, people from 'working class' backgrounds were expected, by others and by themselves, to maintain existing responsibilities, such as supporting themselves and dependents, alongside study and new initiatives. For example, women with children took it for granted that they would also earn income while studying.

We asked participants 'Have you followed a similar study and work path to other people in your family?' Participants who had family connections to Art and Design started with a better understanding of the worlds they were entering. As one said 'we were brought up to be very aware of Art and Design'. Another said he had learnt about design from his family 'by osmosis'. These participants were more likely to receive support for their choice of career and some understanding of the work. Sometimes this support came not from parents but from another relative. One participant said of his sister and her husband: 'Before I joined and did design they were the only people I knew who did design so that was quite useful I think Sometimes you don't appreciate how just having a very brief chat with somebody even if it really is nothing specific ... They were quite supportive of the whole thing ... They also helped a bit with the portfolio and stuff like that'. Another made decisions about her own route into Art and Design after seeing the experience of her mother and brother.

In identity terms, family connections made it easier for participants to connect with the worlds they aspired to. Some had childhood memories of visiting studios or architectural practices, or even colleges at which they later studied. Some gained work experience through family connections. These advantages were largely but not exclusively associated with participants who would probably identify themselves as 'middle class'. The connections could sometimes work negatively, for example when a participant had changed from his first interest so as not to compete with his father in the same field, or when a parent with strong connections to Art and Design was unable to accept that circumstances and opportunities within a field had changed. In the main, however, family connections seemed to be a major advantage for participants and were referred to enviously by those who did not have them.

3.22.2 The attitudes of others

We have mentioned the expectations of families. Some participants faced different kinds of expectations linked to how they were perceived by others. One Group 2 participant, who had completed an MA, referred to the lack of diversity in art college student populations, where everyone is 'white English', and suggested that this has a subtle connection to what 'the people sitting on the other side of the desk see as art', and hence to opportunities for BME students and those with non-traditional backgrounds.[17] A Group 3 participant said that he constantly feels he has to prove himself because people in the design world have 'not much of an expectation' of him because he's a black person. A Group 1 black participant with non-traditional qualifications commented on the 'elitism' of the art world and expressed the hope that 'the work cuts through regardless of what my qualifications (are) or where I come from'.

A participant who had run her own business described the negative experiences she and her partner had had 'as black women' when they were negotiating with factory owners (especially 'Muslim men') to whom they were giving work. She felt she had experienced more subtle discrimination at school when, despite having good O levels, she had been directed to a course in home economics. Gender was also mentioned as an issue by a young designer (not BME) who said 'probably being a man would really really help in the design industry' since women were in a minority in her workspace, even though women students had greatly outnumbered men on her courses.

There was a widely held opinion that youth is positively valued in Art and Design worlds and that older people are disadvantaged. This view was expressed for example by a Group 1 participant, a woman of 33 ('I do think my age goes against me') who had changed careers and found herself competing with 'a 23-year-old' for work experience. A fine artist in his late 30s said he 'got into this a little late' and 'time is working a little against me'. A Group 3 participant in his early 60's suggests that it 'got more difficult because it's an ageist industry It's completely youth orientated'. On the other hand, another Group 3 participant said that she had been disadvantaged earlier in her career because she looked young and people thought 'Well can she deliver?'. As already noted, older Group 1 and 2 participants who had changed career had often accrued skills and financial resources which helped them to support themselves.

3.22.3 The stigma of educational failure

We asked participants what obstacles and disadvantages they had faced and also what change of circumstances could make a positive difference to their career prospects (see Appendix 4). The disadvantages mentioned most were those that related to low educational achievement at school: the feeling that people thought of you as 'stupid', and that you had had a slow start and needed to make up lost ground (see 3.3; 3.2.2).

3.22.4 Mental health

A number of participants, from across all three groups, talked (either directly or elliptically) about how their ongoing or previous studies and work were affected by or disrupted as a consequence of mental health problems. In some cases the experience of a 'breakdown' was implicated in a re-consideration of personal aspirations and priorities resulting in a change of direction and a decision to pursue Art and Design. Some participants spoke about ongoing issues, for instance, with depression, panic attacks and agoraphobia. Others, notably amongst Group 1, hinted that they had experienced substance-abuse or addiction problems, talking about wanting to 'stay clean' (see also 3.9). One participant said that art had assumed importance for her at a time in her life when she had experienced a number of bereavements. Another suggested that she experienced depression as a consequence of having earlier been denied opportunities to make or create:

> 'I suffer from depression I totally link it to that ... and I know people at art school who are like that too and they've had to do other things out of necessity.'

3.22.5 Relationality

Another major area relevant to advantage and disadvantage is that of personal connections and responsibilities to other people. We have called this 'relationality'. We noted in our previous research project (Creative Journeys) that women were more likely to refer to relationality as an obstacle to their creative work. Participants in this project present a more complex picture, probably because of the greater range of ages and career stages covered.

Women were more likely than men to refer to their responsibilities to their personal partners. As one participant summarised it, talking about her boyfriend who worked in the 'same industry': 'He does really understand where I'm coming from but you can see where we're both working really hard at the moment but he's only able to focus on what he's working on Whereas I'm focusing on what I'm working on but I'm also organising the fact that we've moved house and organising like Are we going to like eat tonight'.

But men also talked about responsibilities to their partners: 'My partner said she'd leave me if I ever do any more studying'. Several of the men who were interviewed had recently had children or were about to. This clearly marked a change for them in responsibility sharing and they were re-organising their versions of the double life to allow more time for earning, for example, through teaching. An older man said that he had generally been unable to support his children through his earnings as a fine artist so had depended on his ex-wife to do so.

There were both male and female participants who depended on their partners for financial support. Where both partners were in the Art and Design world, there was sometimes an exchange of support. For example, a woman of 35 who had changed career described how she and her husband had taken turns to work for an income while they returned to study. She had found that the stability of marriage 'can act really positively as like a platform for the rest of your life to suddenly take off'; it had helped her establish her new career.

However, it was noticeable that she did not refer to children in the interview. Other Group 1 women worried about how they would combine a career and childcare and some wondered if they would be able to. One of the most successful Group 3 woman participants, who had a high income, said 'I've chosen not to have kids because my career is so important to me'. Many of the women on her postgraduate course 'have had kids and they've moved out of of design totally'. Most of the references to children in the interviews suggested a similar tension between motherhood and an Art and Design career,[18] amounting perhaps to a double 'double life', although this was managed in different ways.

One Group 3 woman shared childcare with her partner who was also a designer. A Group 1 woman who was already a parent said: 'I actually filled in a form the other day and it said Did you have a disability and I must have been particularly grumpy and I put Yes and What is the nature of your disability and I put Two children but I didn't send it I did delete it before I sent it but that's how I felt'. However, she also acknowledged that, because her husband is supporting her, she actually has more time than peers from her course who have to support themselves financially. This participant had attempted to combine starting a family with making a career change into Art and Design. A single mother of two children had similarly used the time when each child was small to make a major change, in the first case to do undergraduate study and in the second to maintain a business; the latter proved to be too much:

> 'I always thought I can do it all you know I can be pregnant and be a mum and still run this business but in reality when it happened I had to concede defeat because I couldn't do it.'

An older Group 1 participant felt limited by 'being a mum and a wife and a daughter' and said that you are forced to choose between art work and relationships. This point was underscored by a Group 2 participant who pointed to the crippling guilt experienced by those on her course who had children and partners :

> 'I don't have children I think that's an important thing that had I got children um I think it would have been more difficult and another thing which I think is quite I was thinking about this recently ... I haven't had a partner living with me so I haven't had to worry about somebody else's needs in other than in a kind of friendship...Well there's obviously negative things about it as well but actually ... friends who've done it with husbands and with children have had a much harder time than me absolutely even where they've been supportive I think there's less guilt about things which can really cripple people'.

A Group 2 participant describes herself as 'mother wife chief cook and bottlewasher'. She has continued in this caring/home-making role through several courses of study while her husband earns the family income. She stood out from other participants as privileged, as she acknowledged, because she does not need to earn, has her own space to work in and is able to consider her future work pathway entirely in creative terms, without any reference to earning.

Many other women, however, were acutely aware of the limitations family life placed on their ongoing career-development and work-related opportunities:

> 'if I wanted to take up a residency in Israel or something I wouldn't be able to do that I've got 2 children I can't uproot people for a couple of months like other people without children can you know ... I can only apply for local things or very short term projects because everything is crucial to the children';

> 'I think it's difficult I think at this stage I don't have any ambition to go any further because I couldn't realistically undertake more responsibilities and have my family so for me everything's on hold at the moment and I'm not really thinking any further I mean other people have said to me they don't know why I haven't tried to go further up the ladder I actually don't want to';

> 'I feel sometimes that I'm not pulling the weight I'd like to at work I mean I'm doing my hours obviously more sometimes but I would naturally be staying longer than I am because I have to go home and really my children come first so there is that problem'.

3.23 Success and failure

We asked participants what they would count as success in their future working lives (see Appendix 4). Several points recurred in their answers suggesting that there are some well-established understandings about possible directions for creative careers (see 1.3). It was also noticeable that the answers were given very readily, as if this were a question the participants had already considered.

The two most commonly mentioned criteria for success were recognition and some degree of financial reward. The references to recognition indicated the importance of the kind of networks or communities which Howard S. Becker suggests make up 'art worlds'. For example, one participant hoped for 'peer recognition' : 'there's certain people whose opinion I respect and value and them saying that they think it's a good piece of work that would count for a lot'. Another hoped to be 'visible' and others wanted more offers of interesting work and opportunities to exhibit. One said success would be 'to have an object in a design museum ... as an ego thing' and also as something to put on your CV in order to get more 'creative freedom' . Another defined success as 'the satisfaction of seeing a range of good products out there in the marketplace doing good things Not being in landfill you know Actually benefiting people's lives'. The wish for 'recognition' was mentioned by some Group 3 participants who would seem to have already achieved it. It could even be located within the longer term narrative of posterity. For example, one participant in his mid-30s talked about his wish to 'leave a really interesting body of work' and an older participant said 'the real gamble that artists take is that posterity will be not so much be kind to them but will justify what they've done and your work will become relevant to a later generation'.

The second point, financial reward, was mentioned by almost all the participants. Although some suggested that other people, such as new graduates, have high (possibly unrealistically high) expectations and want to be 'very wealthy', most claimed that they themselves had only modest expectations. Even the one participant who said 'I always set really optimistic goals and obviously I've always wanted to have a Lamborghini by time I'm 35' and also 'a bigger house', then said that he wasn't bothered about other things 'like helicopters'! Most participants emphasised that they wanted to live comfortably with some security but they were not seeking large amounts of money. Many Group 2 and 3 participants aspired to steadier incomes than they had so far achieved. Several defined financial success in terms of being able to support dependents, prospectively if they did not yet have families or, in a few cases, being able to repay a partner or ex-partner who had previously taken the main financial responsibility for children, or, in future, having enough money to pay for their children's university fees. Some contrasted the modestness of their ambitions with the high earnings which they could have expected in an alternative career. Many participants were aware that their families and others around them had an 'age-stage' image of career success and specifically distanced themselves from this. One Group 3 participant described a friend of the same age who 'had a very ordinary life... all about making money' and concluded 'I don't think his life has been anywhere near as rich as mine'. Many returned to the importance of doing 'what I want' (see 3.6), suggesting that success

would be doing interesting work and working on your own projects rather than someone else's. Success was also linked to lifestyle: working for yourself, having a studio or simply being able to continue in a current 'double life' arrangement of making your own work while earning in a separate occupation.

There was, however, a complicated connection between recognition and financial reward. Participants did recognise money as a form of validation: 'somebody paying for it does actually make you think Well they must think it's worth (something)'. It was good to sell work or receive commissions, undesirable to receive a low salary (especially compared to younger people in other careers) or, worse, to work for nothing (as a possible hook for future consultancies or commission[19]), and completely unacceptable to relegate creative work to the status of a 'hobby'. Several fine artists referred to their wish for a dealer or gallery, or, in one person's term, a 'champion' to promote their work, connecting recognition with earnings. One participant was proud to have sold work to Saatchi but worried that this had effectively removed the work from possible exhibition for an indefinite period: the money did not wholly compensate for the loss of visibility or control over how the work might subsequently be exhibited. Some claimed that good work in art and design does carry monetary value ('I'm doing good work and I think the rewards should come with that') but others suggested this is an illusion.

Throughout the interviews, participants also indicated what we have called a 'logic of success', that is, their understanding of how success can be achieved. Many talked about effort and the need to 'work hard at what you do'. Similarly, when we asked participants if they had had 'lucky breaks' (see Appendix 4), some replied that you make your own luck, through hard work. Others introduced a more psychological requirement to the logic of success: you need be 'genuine about it', 'throw yourself into it'; 'if you give it a good enough shot it'll work'. In contrast, some participants seemed to step back from ambition as if success is more likely to be achieved by limiting your expectations: 'if you let things happen then things fall into place'. A few participants denied that they had any expectation of success of any kind and said that they pursued their creative work as an end in itself.

A final point to note here is that our selection of participants meant that we did not interview anyone who had left Art and Design because their career had failed (see 2.6). Some participants in Groups 1 and 2 did express concerns about their prospects and proposed to 'give' themselves a finite time in which to achieve success, some were dissatisfied with their current situations (for example, because they earned too little or spent too little time on their preferred creative work) and some Group 3 participants expressed doubts about whether they had chosen the right career (although these were people who would appear successful to others, in terms of their earnings and their responsible positions). A possible future project would be research into the experiences and views of people who abandoned careers in Art and Design fields.

Part 4: CONCLUDING REMARKS

Part 4: Concluding Remarks

For this research project we interviewed 46 people for whom postgraduate study in Art and Design was actually or prospectively part of a non-traditional pathway into creative work and a creative career. The participants ranged from current students to people at the point of retiring after successful careers. Their fields varied but most saw themselves as working in the creative industries (see Appendix 4). They also varied in age (from early 20s to mid 60s), background and life circumstances, areas of work and in what they would count as success. Our close analysis of the interviews, as described in the sections 1.3 and 2.9, reveals a number of strong patterns within this variety.

Many participants had had negative school experiences. For some, these were linked to low achievement. The stigma of failure could persist for many years, despite subsequent successes. Participants who were later tested for dyslexia seemed relieved if that condition offered a possible explanation for their poor school performance. Other participants who had been successful in their school studies encountered different difficulties. Many had found that the categorisation of subjects, and students, as either academic or artistic forced them to put aside their creative interests for subjects which were considered more appropriate for high attaining pupils. Another problem associated with this period of participants' lives was poor careers advice, from teachers, school careers advisers and from families. Participants received very limited information on careers in Art and Design and were often strongly discouraged from following their creative interests.

All the participants had studied or were currently studying at HE level. Again, there was huge variety in their experience, in their areas of study and the qualifications which the courses led to, but there was considerable consensus on the features of courses which were valued. Most participants agreed that a good course in a creative area allows students to explore their own interests. It is loosely structured but provides a high level of personal attention from tutors. At postgraduate level in particular, participants valued opportunities for informal discussion and collaboration, with fellow students and with staff, across the boundaries of particular courses and specialisations.

These preferences follow logically from the personalised terms within which participants frame their creative work, as a quest for 'what I want' and 'who I am'. They are tremendously committed to their own creative work, and they value courses as these are relevant to this work and their personal identity projects (see 1.3). Postgraduate study has a special role in the development of the unique personal voice and practice which provide the rationale and continuity for a creative career.

HE studies and qualifications are important to participants for the validation they offer. Recognised qualifications, especially at postgraduate level, and an association with a prestigious course or college help maintain participants' self-confidence during the challenging period in which they are establishing their individual careers. Part of the validation comes from the initial acceptance for a course, whether this follows a conventional application process (filling in an application form, presenting a portfolio and attending an interview) or is achieved on a special basis as a 'one-off' case, perhaps after an informal talk and presentation of work to just one member of the staff. The latter route was especially appreciated by participants who had had difficulties at school.

Participants also valued their HE studies in more conventional career terms. Current students, especially those in areas other than fine art, and particularly at undergraduate level, seek to acquire skills which will help them obtain employment. Undergraduate students see work experience as vital to this, and also as a means of obtaining useful contacts. There was some concern that employers do not recognise or value non-traditional qualifications. In contrast, the name or 'kudos' of a good course or college was assumed to help you practically by drawing attention to your work. Participants who had studied at postgraduate level considered that a higher qualification increases the likelihood that someone will open your portfolio or consider your job application or entry for a competition, even if what ultimately counts will be the quality of the work itself. They suggested that postgraduate study also provides a useful network, of fellow students (especially from intensive postgraduate courses), tutors and also alumni who are potential employers for new generations of postgraduates and graduates. Some Group 3 participants who are employers confirmed that they are likely to look for staff from their former course or institution, for example, because 'I know their skills sets and they fit exactly with the sort of work I do'. More generally, participants with a postgraduate qualification valued it for helping them to stand out from the increasing numbers of people completing undergraduate studies in Art and Design. Undergraduate students were less likely to regard a postgraduate qualification as useful, unless they wanted to pursue an academic career.

It was clear from the interviews that participants had generally been disappointed if they had expected their postgraduate or other HE study to usher them onto a well-mapped, progressive career pathway. Our research suggests that creative careers are emergent, in G.H. Mead's definition: 'The emergent when it appears is always found to follow from the past, but before it appears, it does not, by definition, follow from the past' (Mead, 1932, p.2 quoted in Sawyer, 2003, p.12). In other words, creative careers do not follow established trajectories or sequences of stages and achievements. They are difficult to categorise in terms of job titles or descriptions (which may be one reason why career guidance at school level is poor) and novices cannot easily predict how their careers may develop or project their lives ahead. Our research suggests that each person's career is itself a unique creative project, to be improvised from the complex interaction of a particular kind of creative work and the circumstances of an individual life. This may be a protracted process and requires self-belief and a continuing openness to new directions.

The experience of our participants also indicated that success, once achieved, may not be consistent or sustained. Although some of our Group 3 participants had established themselves in relatively stable and financially secure career positions, others had not. Fine artists can move in and out of the spotlight of recognition and critical acclaim leading to sales. People who are self-employed or run small businesses may experience 'peaks and troughs' of success, even when the peaks are considerable, in financial and other terms, and average out to provide a comfortable living.

Our research suggested that it is important for novices to be able to look to the specific examples of the creative careers of known people. Even though these cannot serve as an exact template to be followed (because of the emergent nature of creative careers), they provide evidence of how points in a pathway may be negotiated, and also reassurance that this can be done. The novices will need to construct their own careers and identities, but the examples show that success is possible. Wenger (1998) suggests that the experiences of 'old-timers' in a field serve as 'paradigmatic trajectories'; they provide details of how the field actually works and even set some of the possibilities for newcomers. Many of our participants referred to the example of seniors in established design practices. They also talked about their peers, family members, people they had encountered during work experience, and the mentors appointed by universities for students on some courses.

The importance of paradigmatic trajectories derives from the interconnections which make up what Howard S. Becker calls an 'art world' ('the network of people whose cooperative activity, organized via their joint knowledge of conventional means of doing things, produces the kind of art works that art world is noted for', 1982, p.x). Although he refers to 'art' his discussion is not limited to fine art and has a broader relevance which encompasses the variety of work and circumstances of our participants. A creative career is an individual project but it is also, in a seeming paradox, fundamentally social and collaborative. The work may be individual but the ultimate marker of success for our participants is recognition, within a complex creative milieu which corresponds to Becker's art world. The possibilities and values for creative work are set by others. Participants emphasised the importance of contacts and networking within their chosen art worlds and they appreciated how HEIs function to link them into these worlds.

Constructing a unique creative career and identity is likely to take time. As we have noted, our research showed the enormous importance, and the difficulty, of maintaining self-belief during this process, especially during the early stages. Some people, inevitably, have greater personal confidence. Others will lean more heavily on the encouragement and emotional support provided by peers, friends and family. We have already mentioned how HE education and qualifications, especially postgraduate qualifications, can boost confidence. Other success markers which participants valued include opportunities for work experience (often unpaid), consultancy work, competition prizes and media attention. It was noticeable that participants could be highly successful in terms of these markers without achieving financial success, or even, in some cases, without earning enough to live on.

There is a paradox around money and creative work which we have discussed elsewhere. Participants were reluctant to prioritise money making over creative work, yet they also regarded earning as an important marker of success: they hoped to sell work or obtain commissions or employment, and they attached very little value to creative work as a 'hobby'. (A few participants did separate their creative work in photography and film from 'commercial' activities in similar fields, but they still presented the work as an important occupation, not a side activity in their lives.) One way to deal with the paradox was through an arrangement which we refer to as the 'double life' in which another occupation or even a full second career is maintained separately, alongside the creative work. This is inevitably demanding and requires constant 'juggling', particularly when combined with further commitments from personal relationships, but it can be sustained, even long-term if necessary. Participants who had started their creative careers at a later point in their lives, for example with their postgraduate studies, were often helped in the double life by having marketable skills and some accrued earnings from a previous career.

Student debt is a special problem for more recent students since it is an additional burden for them in the crucial early stages of constructing a creative career. The levels of debt carried by some current students are worrying, even frightening, and will inevitably reduce the possibility of their proceeding to postgraduate courses, even after several years away from study, especially since for many younger participants the need to repay the debt will collide with other life commitments, such as supporting a family and/or a mortgage in London.

Our research indicated that part-time and short course study can serve several functions in the construction of a creative career. It provides opportunities for novices to make good opportunities which they had missed at school stage, whether because they were successful or unsuccessful students. Participants who had changed career had often begun with part-time courses, then proceeded to full-time undergraduate or postgraduate study. Part-time and short course study can also provide continuing stimulus and opportunities to develop new skills as these are required in an emergent career. For participants in the protracted process of establishing their careers or those developing their creative work in new directions, a return to study could function to establish or renew connections into art worlds, through the college and through others on the course. Part-time and short course study is, of course, more compatible with the 'double life' than full-time study. A particular point to note here is that many current full-time students were spending so much time on paid work to support themselves that their commitment to their course was effectively part-time, in the hours attended.[20] Others were under huge stress because their paid employment conflicted with the opportunity which a creative course has conventionally provided, to immerse yourself in your work in order to develop your practice.

In the report we use the term 'relationality' to refer to the connections with other people, such as life partners, children and birth families, which make up a personal life. Relationality cannot be easily dispensed with. Although some participants referred explicitly to decisions they had made to minimise their commitments, such as a choice not to have children, they still needed other people in their lives, including for emotional support to sustain them in their creative work.

As we have already discussed, the personal and the professional are closely connected within a creative identity project. But relationality could also be a burden, especially when the other people in a participant's personal life had little understanding of creative work. In addition to financial and practical demands, such as those associated with child care, participants faced more subtle pressures, for example, to justify their creative work in conventional career terms, and to fit it into a career path and projected life plans in ways which go against the emergent nature of a creative career.

These concluding remarks summarise the key points of participants' experience, as we interpret them. In this project we have divided and grouped our participants in various ways, in the initial decision to interview former and prospective postgraduates, as well as some people currently studying at postgraduate level (and we also draw on our previous research with postgraduates, Creative Journeys), and then in the three groups which emerged from the analysis. This cross-cutting is an indication of the richness and complexity of the participant sample and the body of interview material. We would repeat the point already made, that a single participant is not to be taken as a generalisable 'type' whose experience can be a basis for projections or future decision making. The findings of this research project will need to be interpreted with relation to the issues and circumstances of different parts of the postgraduate Art and Design sector and the particular institutions within it. We thank NALN for the opportunity to conduct this research.

END NOTES AND REFERENCES

ENDNOTES

1. John Knell and Kate Oakley (2007) similarly suggest that 'The reality of work in the creative industries for many is less about self-determination than it is about increasingly precarious employment in industries with an over-supply of qualified labour'. (p.22)

2. The idea of an arts/science split is itself well-established. Kate Oakley (2004) describes how the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, established by New Labour in 1997, set up the Creative Industries Task Force (CITF) to define, map and measure the creative industries: 'the terms were restricted to the arts and cultural industries, but excluded science, maintaining Britain's longstanding 'two cultures' tradition.' (p.41)

3. For example, Kate Oakley (2004) states 'the creative economy requires highly skilled flexible self-learners' and suggests that this may not be met by the current education system in the UK which emphasises 'outputs and targets' over experimentation. (p.46)

4. Rosalind Gill (2007) found a similar 'enthusiasm' and 'level … of passion for the work itself and for the field more generally' (p.13) among the 'new media workers' she interviewed in Amsterdam, some of whom identified themselves as artists and designers. (p.46)

5. For the new media workers interviewed by Rosalind Gill (2007), there was 'significant pressure' to keep up with new 'knowledge in the field', including 'packages and standards'. (p.55)

6. This perception of increasing competition for jobs is supported by a report for NESTA, 'Creating growth: The state of the UK's creative industries', (2006) which notes that 'in the UK design sector' 'there are an increasing number of graduates entering the industry. There were 57,000 students on design courses in 2003-04, a six per cent increase on the year before. (p.58)

7. The new media workers interviewed by Rosalind Gill (2007) almost all had university-level qualifications (in some cases postgraduate level) but said their university study had been poor preparation for their current work. Their three main criticisms were 'the dominance of theory over practise', out-of-date teaching, and the lack of training and preparation for business (e.g. the skills needed for management, working with budgets and working freelance). (p.59)

8. Again, there is striking overlap here with Rosalind Gill's comments on the new media workers she interviewed (2007). She notes that they 'moved between different work statuses, both over time and at the same time' so that distinctions, such as between working for an employer or being self-employed, 'should be regarded as fluid and subject to change' (p.2). She also notes that many 'participants who owned and directed their own companies were indistinguishable from freelancers in some key respects, particularly if the company was small and relatively new'. (p.59)

9. See note 7, above. (p.59)

10. Interestingly, NESTA's 2006 report on 'Creating growth' comments that 'Research and policy around growing the creative industries has tended to assume that access to market is a given, and that commercial rewards are won by those businesses that are the most creative or entrepreneurial' (p.28). This is similar to the optimistic and unrealistic but widespread assumption noted by Becker (1982) that 'something like the condition of perfect information in the definition of perfect economic competition' operates in art worlds'. (p.60)

11. This quotation illustrates a point noted by NESTA (2006), that 'many owner-managers of creative businesses do not prioritise commercial growth' (p.26). This may explain the point noted by Knell and Oakley (2007), that 'very few UK creative industry firms make the leap from small to big' (p.9). The NESTA report suggests that 'creative businesses in the UK need a greater awareness of business strategy skills and related core skills such as financial planning' and also that 'the apparently widely-held assumption that creative and commercial excellence are unlikely to co-exist (or be mutually supportive) needs to be challenged'. (p.60)

12. Interestingly, Rosalind Gill (2007) comments in her research on new media workers that 'the absence of role models in this field was striking' and 'their absence meant that it was hard for many people to even imagine a longer term future in the field. There were not people to look to even to offer a sense of possibilities'. (p.64)

13. Rosalind Gill (2007) notes a similar avoidance or inability among the new media workers she interviewed: 'Almost to a person our respondents were unable to tell us what they thought they would be doing (and even, in many cases, what they would like to be doing) in 5 years time'. (p.66)

14. Knell and Oakley (2007) note the high percentage of 'people who define themselves as musicians, designers, writers or whatever' who work outside the creative industries (p.8). In some cases, this may not indicate the 'double life' because they may be fully occupied in a creative occupation within a non-creative industry (e.g. as a teacher), but in other cases it may indicate the kind of separation we refer to, between creative activity, and identity, and non-creative means of earning. (p.66)

15. The point about expectations perhaps indicates a point made by Rosalind Gill (2007) that 'an inability realistically to imagine the future' leads to 'polarized accounts' i.e. 'on the one hand, the fantasy of extreme success with all its trappings, and on the other, failure and having to quit'. (p.66)

16. This quotation exemplifies a view which the 2006 NESTA report 'Creating Growth' comments on and criticises: 'Many owner-managers take an 'organic' approach to the growth of their businesses, by adding slowly to their customers and clients through the distinctiveness of their work. However, the purpose of creative business is to harness and exploit creativity in a commercial context and for commercial ends. This can be enhanced by a more formalised approach to business strategy and supported by investment in the appropriate skills and technologies.' (p.70)

17. There is general agreement that women and Black and Minority Ethnic workers are under-represented in the creative industries. According to Leadbetter (2004), 'About 4.6% of the creative industry workforce is from an ethnic minority, compared with 7% of the economy as a whole. In London the gap is even starker: ethnic minorities make up 26% of London's population but only 11% of the workforce in the creative industries.' Freeman (2007) says that 'the employment of BAME workers in the creative industries has failed to improve over the last eight years in comparison with London's workforce as a whole, and …the employment of women in the creative industries has deteriorated absolutely' (p.44) i.e. in the creative industries between 1995/6 and 2003/4 the proportion of BAME workers rose from 11 to 15%, compared to 15 to 23% in the whole London workforce, and the proportion of women fell from 42 to 37%, compared to 44 to 43% in the whole London workforce. (p.73)

18. Rosalind Gill (2007) noted similar issues among the new media workers she studied and cites other research with similar findings. (p.75)

19. Freelance new media workers studied by Rosalind Gill (2007) sometimes 'pitched' for a contract at a level 'less than it will actually cost you' to ensure that they would get work (p.17). Knell and Oakley (2007), discussing the creative industries more generally, say 'entry to these sectors is highly competitive and increasingly reserved for those who are able and willing to work unpaid, often for months'. (p.78)

20. A similar point is noted in Guardian Education 25 September 2007. (p.83)

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: PARTICIPANT CALL

TELL US ABOUT YOUR PATHWAY INTO ART AND DESIGN

We want to interview people who followed a 'different' career path into Art and Design, for example, by entering university study without 'A' levels, or postgraduate study without a first degree in Art and Design, or changing their field of work.

This is part of an academic research project supported by the National Arts Learning Network. Interviews will take place in London in (month), 2007. An interview will last about an hour. It will be relaxed and conversational and anything you tell us will be treated as confidential. We will analyse the interviews for our research but we will not identify you. We can pay you £20 for your time.

If you'd like to be interviewed or want some more information to decide, please contact us.

Appendix 2: INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

Invitation to participate: NON-TRADITIONAL PATHWAYS: THE INTERVIEW

We want to interview people as part of a research project to investigate career pathways in the creative industries.

An interview will last about an hour. It will be relaxed and conversational and anything you tell us will be treated as confidential. The interviewer will ask you about:

- your path into Art and Design
- your previous study and work experience
- your current situation
- your plans and ambitions for your future career.

This is an academic research project based at the Open University. It is being conducted for the National Arts Learning Network (NALN) and is supported by the RCA, LCC and CSM. We will audio-record the interview and analyse it for our research but we will not identify you. Anything you tell us will be treated as confidential. (For example, we will change names and other details if we quote from the interview in academic publications.) Before the interview, you will be asked to sign a consent form allowing us to use the interview material for academic purposes.

Stephanie Taylor and Karen Littleton, The Open University

The interviews will take place at three London colleges in January, February and March 2007. The interviews will be conducted by Pippa Michaels. An interview will last about an hour. It will be relaxed and conversational. We can pay you £20 for your time.

If you have any questions, ask Pippa Michaels or email me (Stephanie Taylor) (s.j.a.taylor@open.ac.uk) or phone me on 01908-654517 or 01908-565544.

Appendix 3: CONSENT FORM

Name of volunteer:

The organisers have invited me to take part in this research project. (Please tick each statement to indicate you agree with it.)

- I understand what is in the invitation to participate and I have a copy to keep.
- I have had the chance to talk and ask questions about the research.
- I know that the research is interview-based and I know how long the interview will take.
- I understand that any personal information I give is strictly confidential.
- I understand that my personal information may be stored on a computer. If this is done then it will not affect the confidentiality of this information. All such storage must comply with the 1998 Data Protection Act.
- I freely consent to be interviewed.
- I freely consent to the interview being used for academic research. I understand that any extracts used in academic publications will be anonymised.
- I know that I can stop taking part in the interview at any time.
- I know that I can withdraw from the project at any time.
- I know that if there are any problems or I have questions, I can contact Stephanie Taylor (email s.j.a.taylor@open.ac.uk or phone 01908-654517) (Alternative contact: Sally Kynan s.kynan@open.ac.uk)

  Signature: .....

The following should be signed by the interviewer: I confirm that I have explained to the volunteer named above the nature and purpose of the research to be undertaken.

Interviewer's name: Pippa Michaels Interviewer's signature: ..... Date:.....

Appendix 4: QUESTION SCHEDULE

At the beginning of the interview, the interviewer invited the participant to sign the consent form (see 2.7.1). She asked their permission to begin audio-recording. She introduced the interview with a comment like: 'This isn't a formal interview, like a job interview. I hope it can be more like a conversation about some aspects of your work and your life and your future plans.' She used the question schedule below as a general guide, not a word-for-word script.

1> To start, can you tell me what you're doing now, in work or study or both?

2> If someone asks 'what do you do?' or 'what's your occupation?' how do you describe yourself?

Would you say that you work in the creative industries?

3> Could we go back a bit now? Could you tell me about your study and educational experience over your life, from school on, up to now?

So has Art and Design been an important part of your educational experience?

What's been your most positive educational experience? Why?

What's been the most negative educational experience? Why?

Have you had positive experiences with education that hasn't produced a formal qualification, like an evening class or summer school?

4> When you've applied to study on a course how did you find the application process (in each case)?

Was the experience of applying ever different to what you expected?

5> So what formal qualifications do you have in Art and Design?

Do you think you'll do any further study or training in the future?

How important have formal qualifications been for your career?

Based on your experience, how important do you think formal qualifications are for a career in the creative industries?

[if they haven't already answered this] And how important do you think postgraduate study is for a career in the creative industries?

6> Could you tell me about your work experience, over your life up to now?

7> How do you feel about the way your career has developed up to now?

Is there anything that's specially helped you in your career, or any lucky breaks that you've had?

Have you faced any particular disadvantages or obstacles?

Have you felt limited by other people's expectations or your responsibilities to other people?

8> What kind of job or working life would you hope to have in the future?

Do you anticipate any difficulties getting that?

What would count as success for you in your future working life?

Is there any change in your circumstances which could make a really positive difference to your career prospects?

9> Is there anyone who's particularly influenced you in your study and work?

Have you followed a similar study and work path to other people in your family?

Are the people who are closest to you supportive of your creative work?

10> The last thing I'd like to ask you about, in very general terms, is money and financial things.

Is your current financial situation what you would have expected when you became involved in Art and Design?

Are you happy with your current financial situation?

Looking ahead, do you feel positive about your financial prospects?

Have any of your study decisions been driven by money, or lack of money, for example, for fees?

11> Well thank you very much for answering all these questions. Is there anything else you'd like to add? Maybe something you thought of during the interview or something you came here expecting to talk about it?

At the end of the interview, the interviewer thanked the participant, reminded them that they had contact details for the researcher, and asked if they had any further questions about the research.