

Creative Industries Students Rebel.



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From no how to know-how.

Skills Online Group
Limited

7th March 2011

Prepared by Fraser Black
Managing Director

Following the UK coalition government announcement of its intention to increase University tuition fees, 2009 and 2010 graduates of Art and Design were surveyed to elicit their opinions on fee increases, the quality of the university tuition, advice and preparation for employment.

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“Only 9.3 % of recent UK University Art & Design graduates found a job in their chosen career, 51.3% had no option but to take a job outside of their field of study and 77.6% of graduates say, with hindsight, they would have considered alternative forms of study had they graduated with the newly proposed student debt.”

Following the UK coalition government’s announcement of its intention to increase University tuition fees, 2009 and 2010 graduates of Art and Design were surveyed to elicit their opinions on fee increases, the quality of the University tuition, advice and preparation for employment.



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Creative Graduate Research Report | <http://c-b.me/85>

Skills Online Group Limited | 24/02/2011

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Methodology

Skills Online Group designed an online survey containing 13 simple multiple choice questions each containing an open-ended comments field. The survey link was emailed to approximately 900 UK Creative Arts students who were student exhibitors at the 2009 and 2010 [Free Range Art & Design Show](#) held at the Old Truman Brewery in London. The range of students emailed and those who responded spanned the Creative Arts spectrum and included all exhibiting Colleges and Universities. The sample is broad and equally distributed amongst the Creative Arts. The sample included students from 15 UK Universities and Colleges for 2009 graduates and 31 Universities and Colleges for 2010 graduates.

The survey was launched on the 9th of February 2011 and ran for 16 days. The survey closed on the 25th of February 2011 with 161 respondents. Graduates were incentivised to complete the survey with an iPad lucky draw sponsored by Skills Online Group.

Total approached:	Approx. 900 students via email
Total started survey:	161
Total completed survey:	148 (91.9%)

Objectives

- To assess the attitudes and opinions of recent art and design graduates towards the proposed UK University tuition fee increases
- To gain insight into graduate experiences when job seeking in the UK creative industry; launching as freelancers or setting up their own company
- To assess UK Universities integration of *blended education activities

*a mixture of in classroom and online teaching modules

View survey responses here: <http://tinyurl.com/6zw6kq2>

Publishing rights & Distribution:

Link to report on Skills Online Group site: www.skillsonlinegroup.com/graduate-employability-research

For comments, please contact Fraser Black at: fraser@skillsonlinegroup.com

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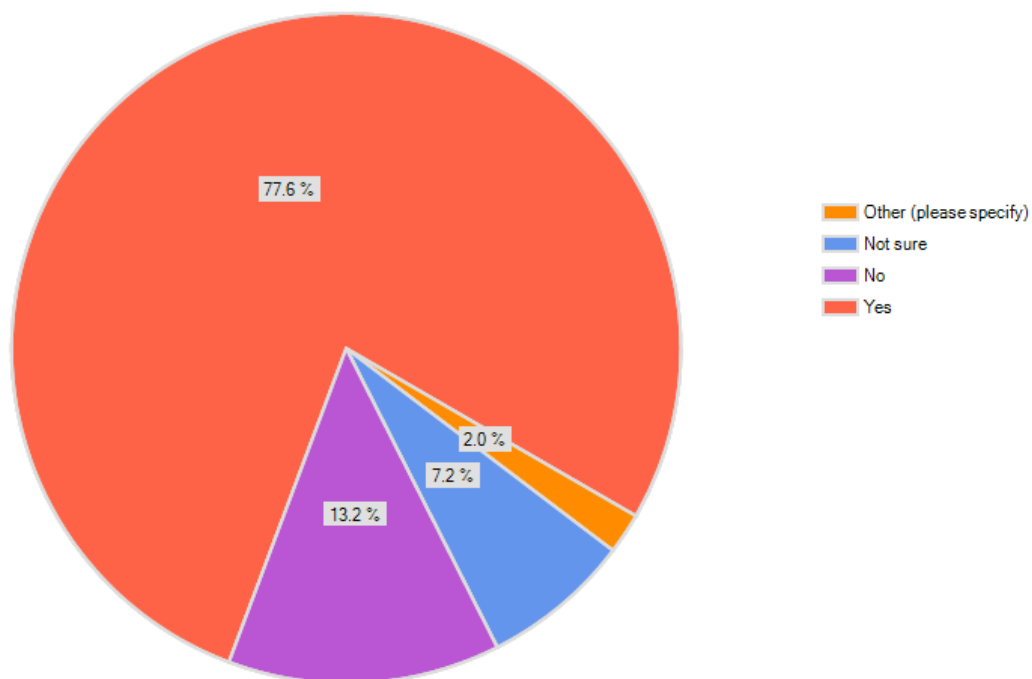
Views and opinions expressed by participating students are not necessarily the views of the Author.



Section 1 – Quality of teaching and value-for-money

77.6% of University Art & Design 2009/10 graduates say, with hindsight, they would have considered alternative forms of study assuming the newly proposed student debt.

Let's pretend it's 2015 and you've just graduated with a Degree in the Creative Arts! Although, you've now got £27,000 of student debt and £10,000 of personal debt due to your living costs not covered by your student grant or loan. Knowing this, would your debt have made you look more carefully at other types of training and education (i.e. Apprenticeships, overseas Universities) before you enrolled on your Degree course?



- Based on student debt levels, 77.6% of the respondents said they would look carefully at alternative types of training and higher education if UK Universities went ahead with their new tuition fee structures.

Comment:

The UK Coalition Government announcement to increase student tuition fees is likely to have an adverse effect on the number of students selecting University as their preferred education and training option.

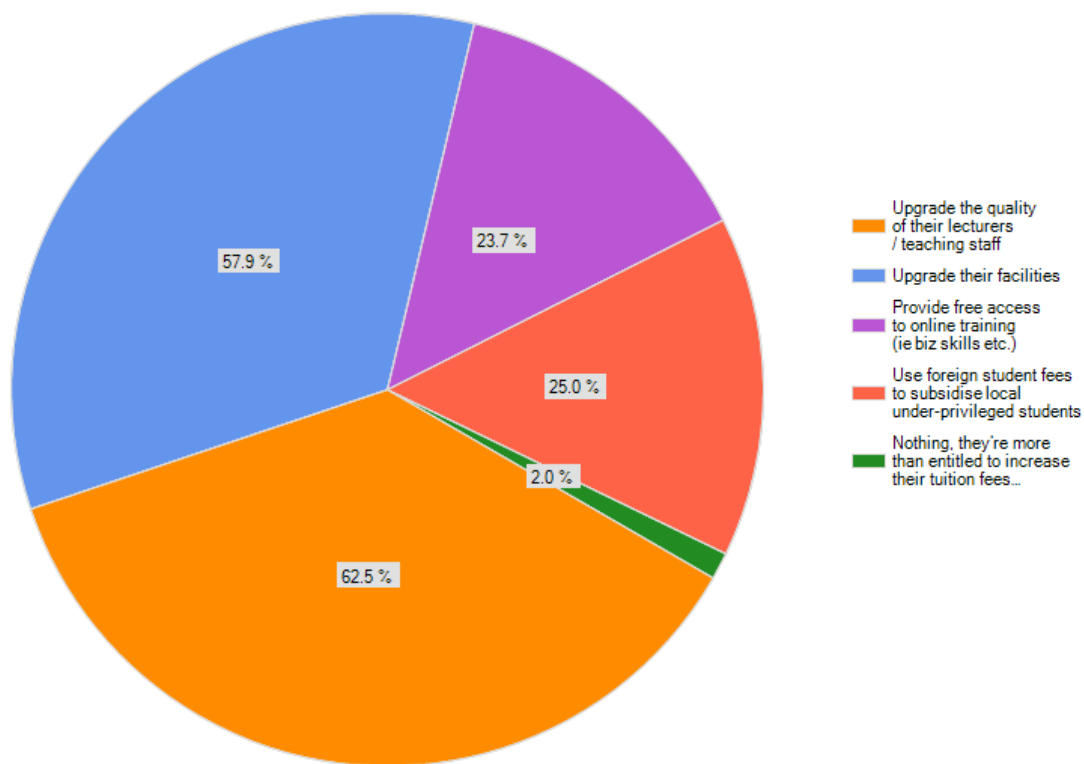
Fast-forward to 2015 and UK Universities will need to market themselves very effectively in order to attract normally anticipated student registrations.



Competition can be expected from new and alternative higher education choices such as online Universities, respected global Universities offering Distance Learning Degrees and traditional Universities based overseas that offer value-for-money coupled with an overseas learning experience.

University marketing efforts will need to reinforce overall value, quality of tuition, the actual number of lecture hours per course, available learning technologies as well as graduate employability and student satisfaction figures.

What should Universities be doing to justify their tuition fee hikes? (Pick the most relevant answer)



- Approximately 60% of graduates felt that Universities should upgrade the quality of their teaching staff and upgrade the teaching facilities in order to justify tuition fee increases.
- 1 in 4 graduates felt that Universities should provide free access to online training for business skills and other niche modules.
- 1 in 4 graduates felt that foreign student fees could be used to subsidise local under-privileged students.



Comment:

The challenge is how Universities might provide a more efficient, and higher-quality education whilst challenged by an anticipated cut in teaching staff and overall budget.

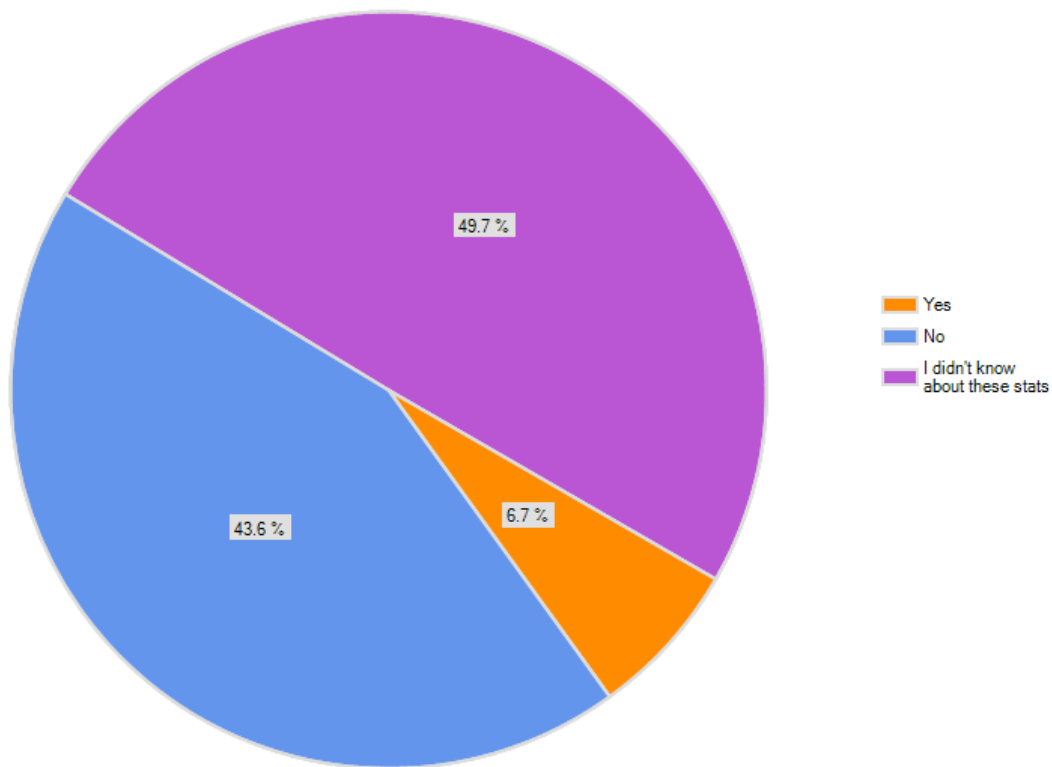
Could Universities benefit by providing access to online training as an added-value proposition?

Might that be easier and more cost efficient than upgrading facilities and teaching staff?

Could online training be a revenue stream for Universities to fill the short-fall in public funding?

Open-ended research responses predominantly featured comments associated with proposing a minimum number of tuition hours per week, better relationships with potential employers in the industry and on improving how Universities generally prepare students for employment.

Did graduate employability figures offered on the Unistats website influence your decision to study a particular course at a University?



- Only 6.7% of graduates were influenced by the published graduate employability figures offered on the Unistats website. (<http://unistats.direct.gov.uk>)
- 43.6% said that they would not be influenced by the published Unistats graduate employability figures
- Whilst almost 50% said they did not know of these statistics!

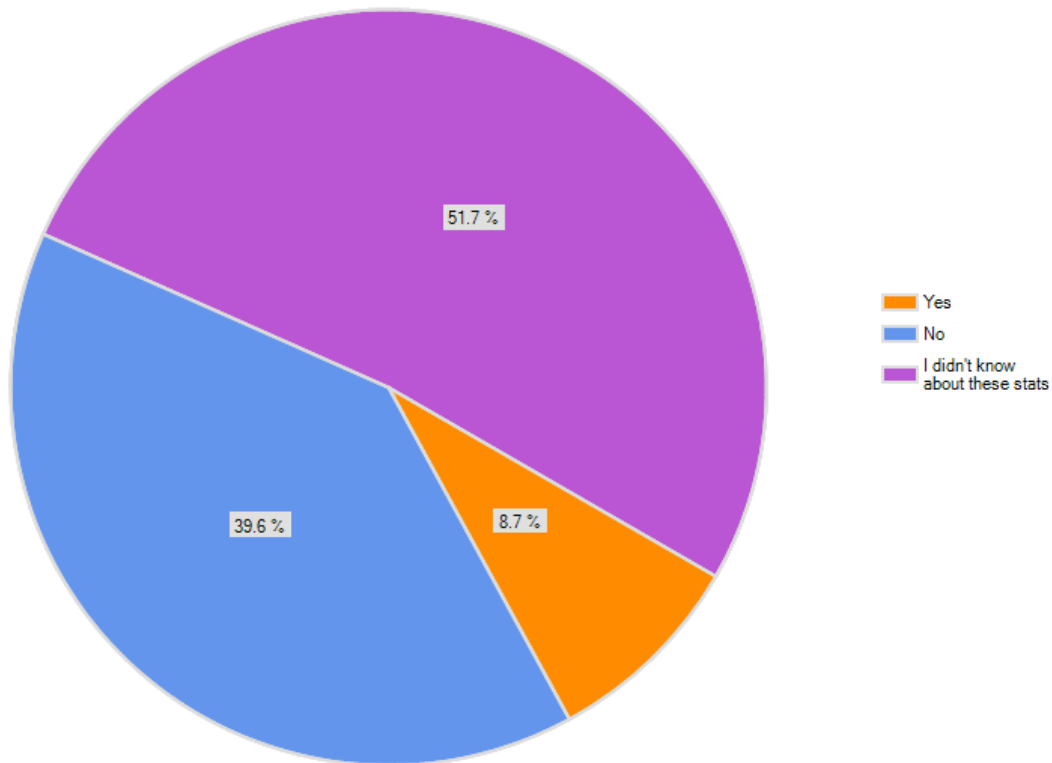


Comment:

It's relevant to note that as much as one in two students were not aware of the published Unistats graduate employability figures. This could be seen as a benefit to the poorer performing Universities and Colleges as students unaware of these performance statistics would not be influenced during their decision-making.

If 43.6% of our students are not be influenced by graduate employability figures the question regards what is influencing their decision-making, needs to be asked...

Did published student satisfaction figures offered on the Unistats website influence your decision to study a particular course at a University?



- Only 8.7% of a graduates decision to study a specific course was influenced by the published student satisfaction figures on the Unistats website.
- 39.6% said that the figures would not influence their decision-making.
- And 51.7% said that they did not know these statistics were available



Comment:

More than 50% of all students were not aware that these statistics were accessible via the Unistats website.

Are the top-performing Universities and Colleges using the published statistics to their advantage and the under-performing Universities avoiding them?

Students looking to enrol on a particular Degree course should be checking statistics and using them to aid their decision-making.

Section 2 – Job Prospects and Career options

Only 9.3 % of graduates found a job in their chosen career, 17.3% settled for a non-ideal industry job and 51.3% had no option but to take a job outside of their field of study.

One in ten graduates found a job in their chosen career. Almost 20% had to take a non-ideal industry job and more than half took a job outside of their field of study. Is this why students are protesting?

These figures are alarming. It would be helpful to compare these figures against comparative research undertaken in other professions to determine if this is common to 2009/10 UK arts graduates and to assess whether global economic slow down has a greater impact on art and design graduates. ..

The exceptionally low number of 2009/10 Art and Design graduates who secured employment post graduation compared against the high number who accepted employment in industries unrelated to their field of study would appear to correlate- with the 77.6% of graduates who, with hindsight, would re-consider a University education, if tuition fees increase to the levels announced in 2011.

30% of graduates launched a freelance career and 5.3% set-up their own business

The UK Design Council Design Industry Insights Report (2010) and the Office for National Statistics' Labour Force Survey (2009) indicated a 39% growth in the number of registered freelance businesses in the UK post 2005. If this is correct, why is it that 61.2% of graduates believe that their University or College did not adequately prepare them for working as freelancers or creative business owners?

Freelance, as a career option, has grown almost 40% in 5 years yet the majority of Universities do not appear to be preparing students for freelance and self employed status.

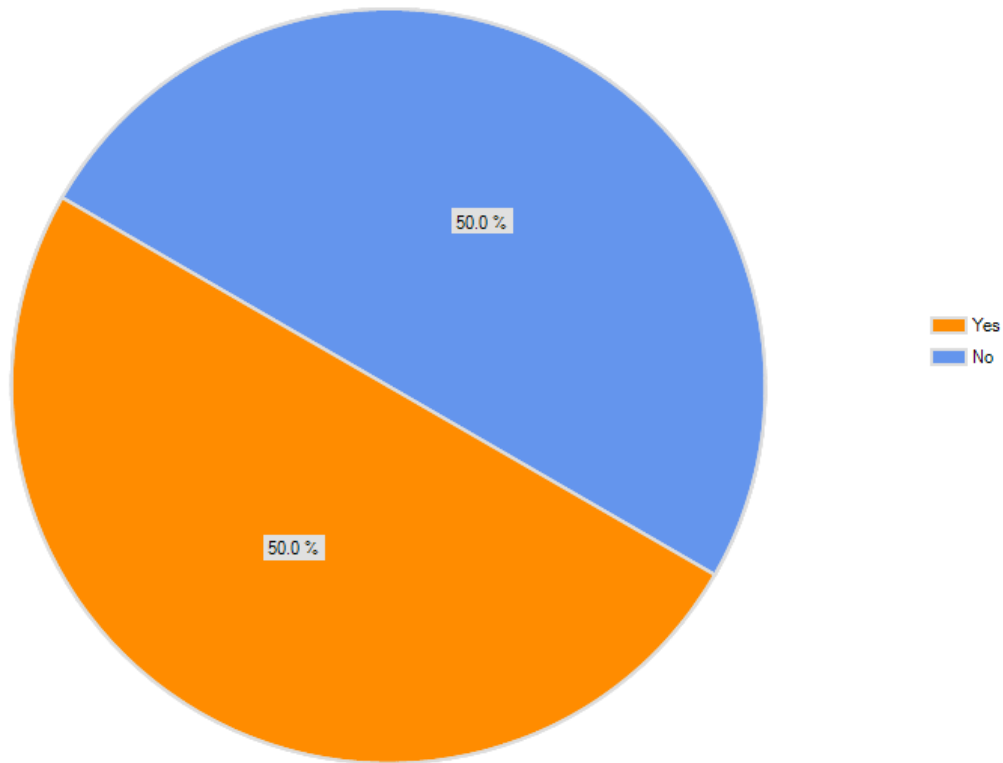


50% of students worked as paid freelancers whilst they were studying...

With 50% of students successfully gaining paid freelance work during study should their Universities and Colleges assist to manage and nurture students through freelance structures, contracts and best practice? Such training and guidance could be introduced earlier into the curriculum.

The employment landscape in the UK creative industry has shifted due to technology, changes in the industry as well as the current economic climate. Have Universities adapted to these changes?

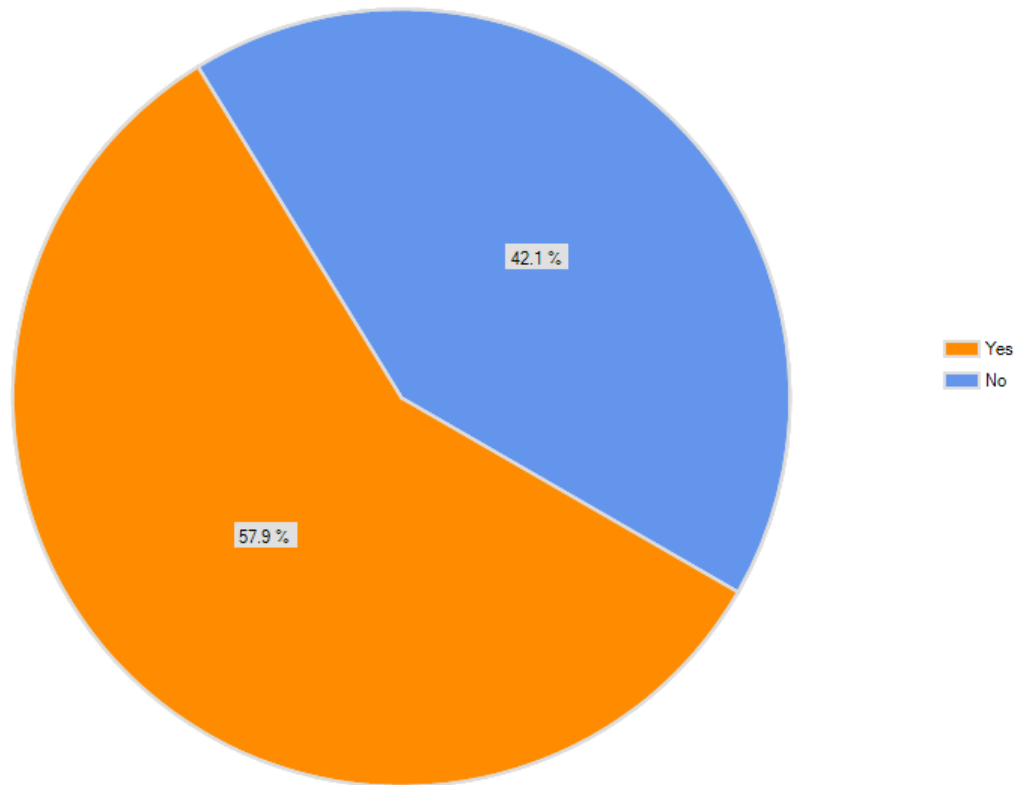
Did you do any paid freelance work whilst you were still a student? (ie. Photography, Design, Illustration, Animation etc.)



- 50% of graduates engaged in paid freelance work whilst they were still studying.



Have you freelanced since you graduated?



- 56% of 2009/10 graduates have freelanced since they graduated.

Comment:

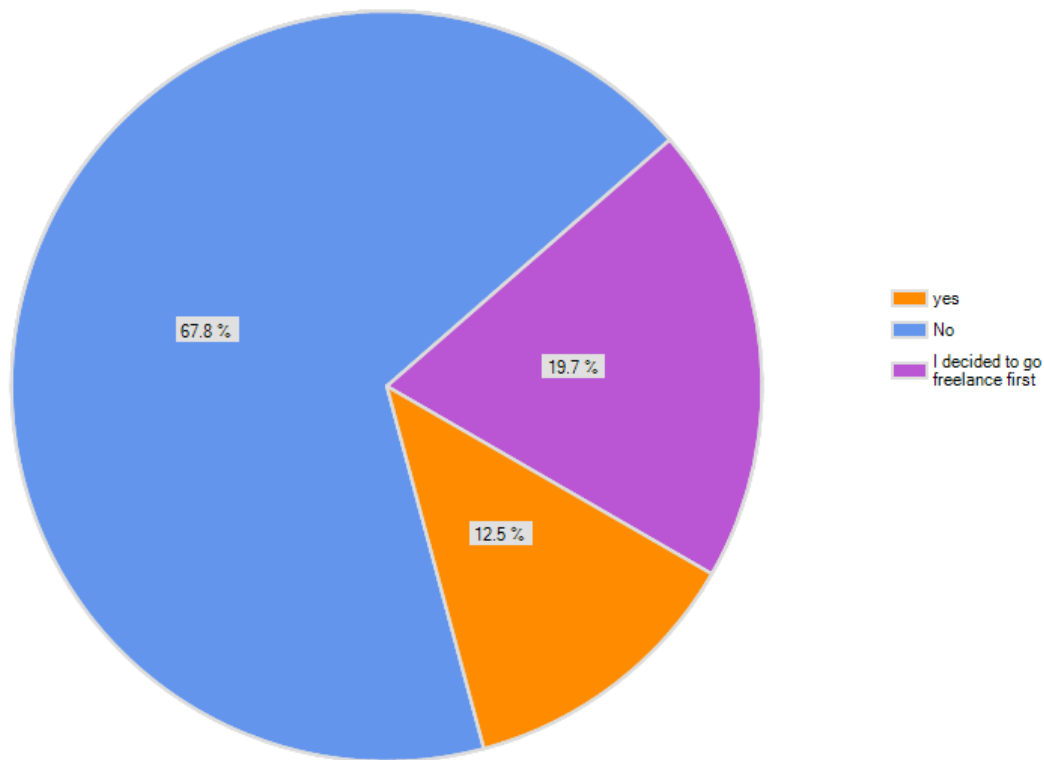
This is compelling evidence that Universities and Colleges should be helping their creative arts students prepare for freelance working as a career option in the creative industry. It is evident that a graduate is no longer guaranteed a job at a creative agency (or in-house) immediately after graduating.

This insight concurs with the 2010 UK Design Council Insights Survey that cites a 39% growth in the number of UK registered freelance businesses since 2005.

Yet 46% of our graduates did not receive any formal advice or training from their University or College to assist preparation for a freelance career option. Does this indicate that Universities have not kept abreast of the employment trends and changes in the industry?



Have you set up your own creative business since you graduated or perhaps whilst you were still a student?



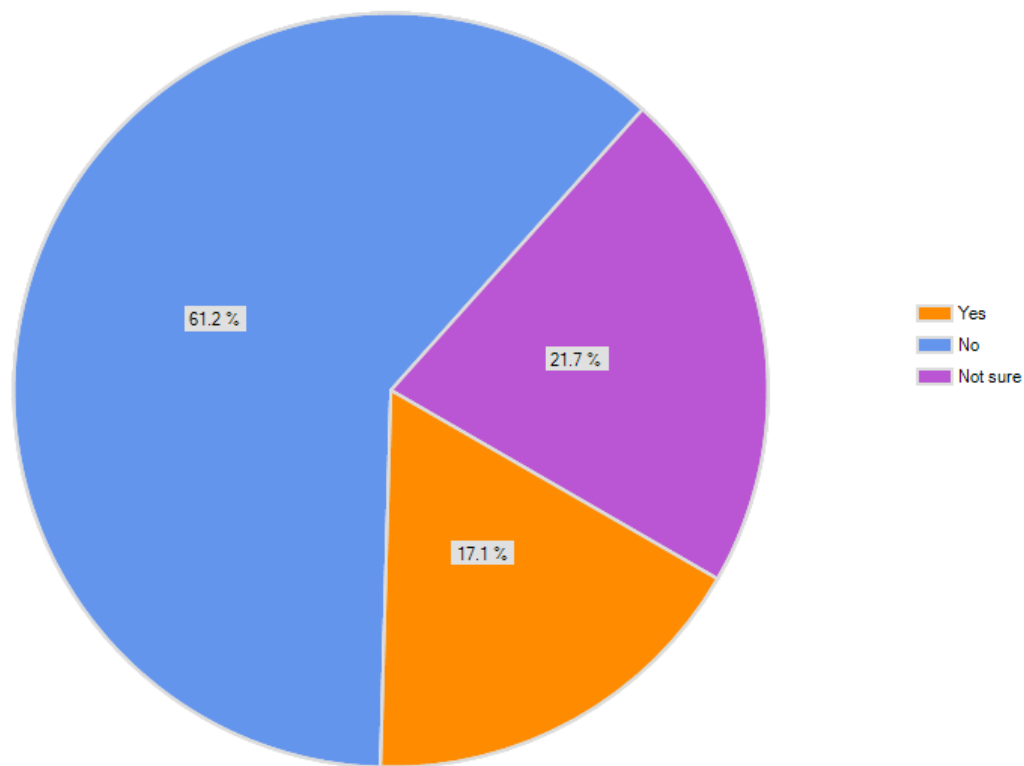
- 19.7% of graduates have launched themselves as paid freelancers since graduating.
- 12.5% have set up their own creative businesses (i.e. creative entrepreneurs).
- Collectively, 32.2% of graduates become freelance operatives or set up creative businesses soon after graduating.

Comment:

One-third of 2009 and 2010 creative arts graduates are currently actively employed as freelance operatives or have set themselves up as creative business owners. Universities could be doing more to encourage and support creative entrepreneurship as these businesses will eventually start to employ staff, pay Corporation Tax, National Insurance, VAT, and assist to alleviate youth unemployment as well as develop products, services and propositions that may assist to enhance the UK Plc reputation for innovation and creativity, stimulate manufacturing and as a result increase exports ...



Did you feel that your College or University adequately prepared you for launching your career as a freelancer or a creative biz owner?



- 61.2% of graduates felt that their University or College did not adequately prepare them for launching their careers as freelancers or creative business owners.
- Only 17.1% said that they felt that their University or College adequately prepared them for these career options.

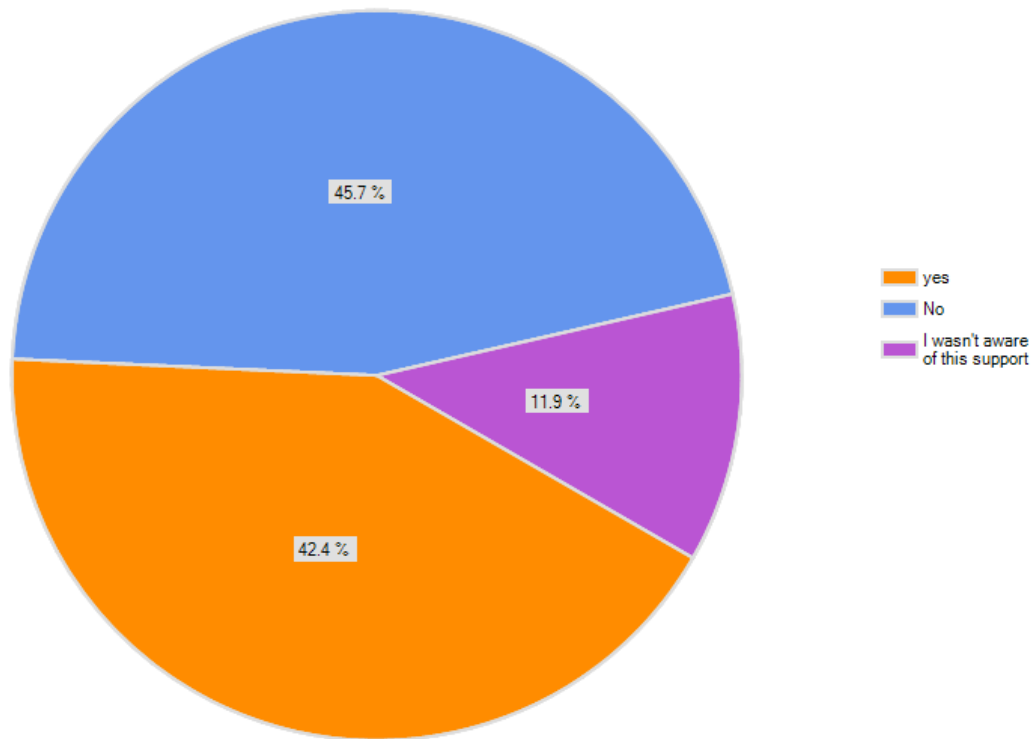
Comment:

It's evident that Universities and Colleges need to adapt their student employability and creative entrepreneurship programs. Whilst almost one in five students felt that they were adequately prepared, almost one-third did not feel they were adequately prepared for a freelance career or supported and prepared to launch a creative business.

Universities need to adapt and communicate to creative graduates that they are not guaranteed their ideal employment on graduation but instead present and prepare them for options such as freelance and own business options. Such options are as valuable and valid as a full-time job in a consultancy or an in-house design team.



Did you receive any formal advice or training from your University or College in order to set yourself up as a freelancer or to launch and manage your own creative business?



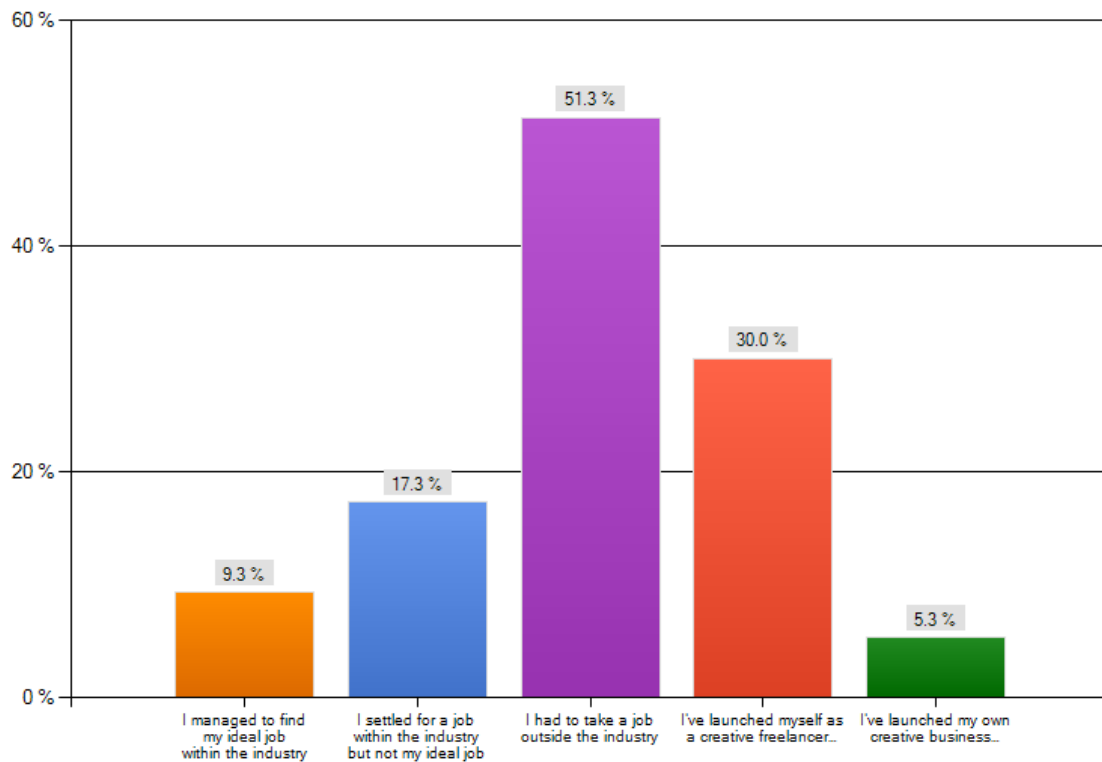
- 45.7% of graduates did not receive any formal advice or training from their University or College in order to help them prepare for working freelance or owning their own creative business.
- 12% said that they weren't aware of this support. It might have been available but they did not know about it.

Comment:

33% of 2009/10 creative arts graduates are currently freelance operatives or have set themselves up in their own creative business. So, why do almost half of all graduates state that they received no formal advice or training in this regard? How are UK Universities and Colleges preparing their graduates for employment? Perhaps students are not being offered the full range of options? If one-third of students are unlikely to find an employed consultancy or in-house studio position then their Universities ought to provide guidance, training and assistance to support the two other options of freelance operative or own business manager.



Did you manage to find the job of your choice after graduating or were you forced to accept alternative jobs, work freelance, work in other unrelated sectors etc?



- 51.3% of graduates had to take a job outside of the creative industry since graduating.
- 30% launched themselves as creative freelancers.
- And 5.3% launched their own creative businesses.
- So, comparatively, 35.3% are now either freelancers or creative business owners.
- Only 9.3% managed to find their ideal job within the creative industry.
- This question produced the most free-form responses (34).

Comment:

Current 1st year students might be alarmed to learn that 3 years spent studying a Creative Arts Undergraduate Degree whilst accumulating a student loan and personal debt currently gives them a one in ten chance of finding their ideal job within their chosen field post graduation.

The one in five graduates who find a non-ideal job but within the industry remain compromised and probably get a chance to move towards their field of study once the opportunity arises.

The rest (one in two graduates) take a job outside of the industry, in a sector they did not study for. However, some of these decisions will be by choice.



It's worth noting that much of these decisions will be due to the graduate having very few options available, despite the price paid in tuition fees, coupled with the added pressure of the fee increases, university research and funding cuts and the general economic climate.

It's evident that there are too many creative graduates and not enough 1st-time jobs available to graduates each year. Further research is required to establish how many graduates working outside the industry will persevere and conclude employment in the creative industry or never work within the industry? How many of those graduates will use their creative talents to good affect in other sectors? How many do not use their talents and how many feel two to three years post graduation that they would not, with hindsight, have attended an Arts Univeristy.

If less than 10% of graduates can be expected to secure their ideal first job within the indsutry should Universities be prpearing helping students for freelance careers, own business set up; and how to use their talent in non creative sector companies?

The research results highlighted that poor written communication skills trend within the open-ended responses. Are creative arts students being taught written and verbal communication skills?

Will graduates secure interviews if they demonstrate a poor grasp of English and battle to write a covering letter? To what extent can Universities and Colleges teach soft skills such as written communication, interview techniques, preparing for interviews, overall business awareness etc?



Section 3 – Blended learning and alternate training options

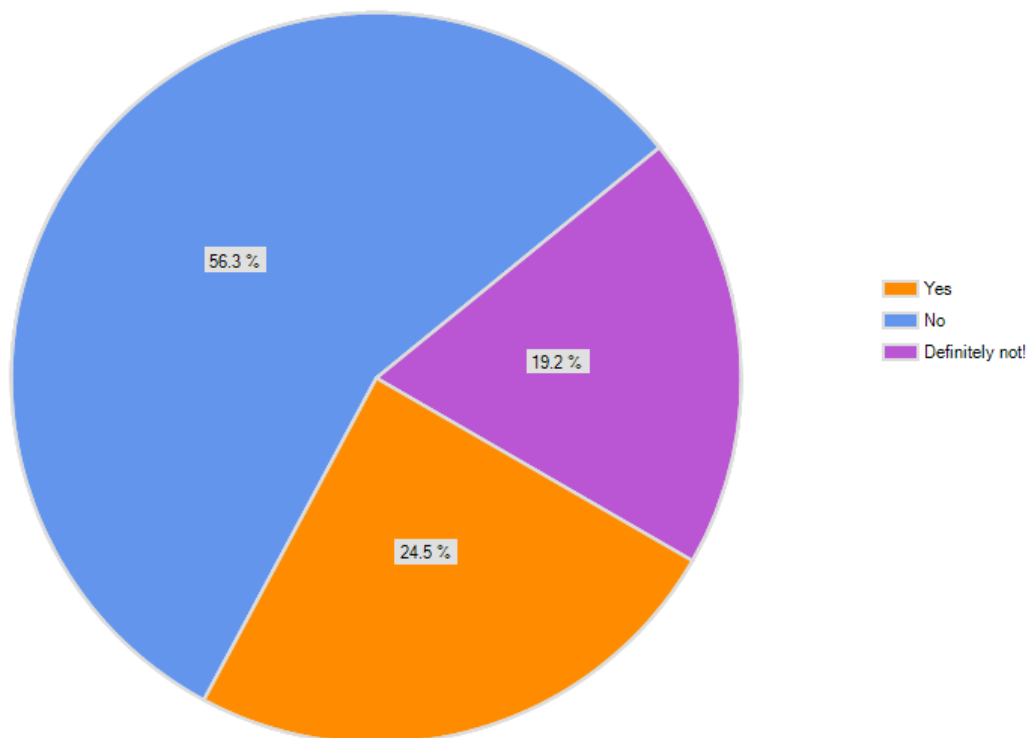
76% of graduates felt that their University or College did not provide them with a cutting-edge blended learning experience.

The rise in tuition fees coupled with modern e-learning technologies; access to online training and the growth of distance learning should enable blended learning to become a key component of a University education. Blended learning could become an income generator provided on or off campus.

The traditional University model needs to adapt and adapt fast. The rise in the launch of private Universities and Business Schools offering a blend of online training and classroom-based tuition will begin to pose a real threat to traditional 'bricks and mortar' Universities.

With the proposed tuition fee increases the quality of teaching, services, support and value-for-money is under the spotlight. State Universities will find that they have to develop more contemporary models or partner and collaborate with the private sector.

In your opinion, did your University provide you with a cutting-edge blending learning experience? (Blended learning is a combination of traditional lectures and online education)



- 76% of graduates felt that their University or College did not provide them with a cutting-edge blended learning experience.

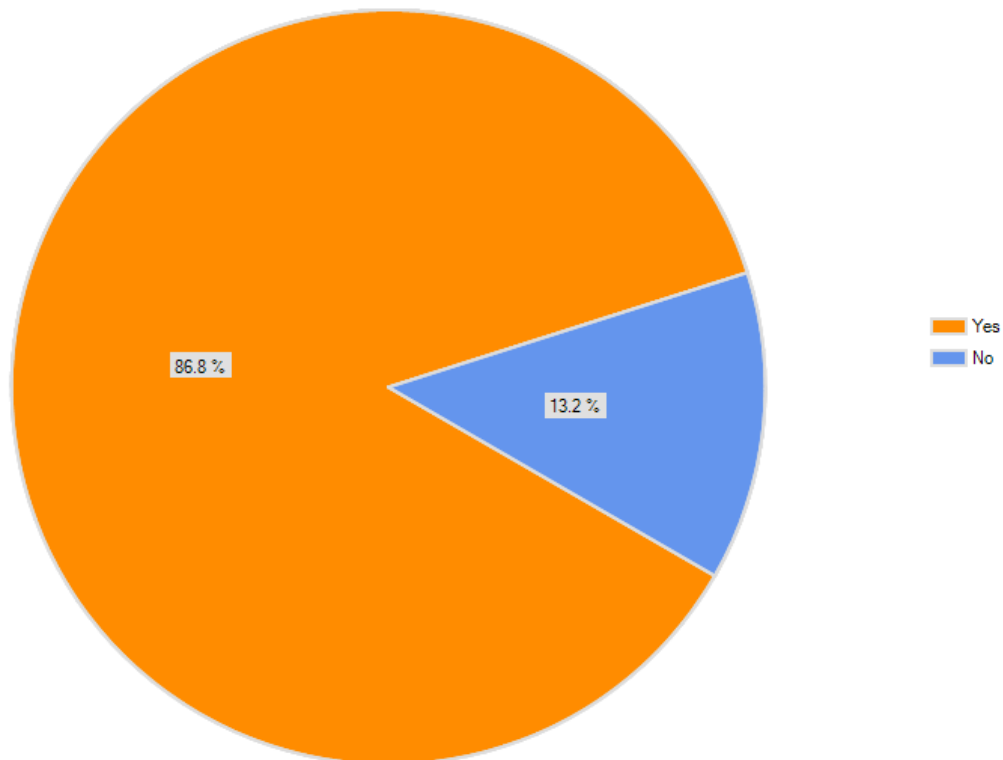


Comment:

Tthe majority of UK Higher Education institutions are yet to implement effective blended learning programmes. Blended learning could enable Universities to retain and improve upon quality teaching and simultaneously develop new income streams. Their bricks and mortar assets could also be adapted to support closer relationships with industry and local community groups and initiatives. With careful consideration it would be feasible for the University to become the core of the community rather than just an education institution for fee payers.

It would be interesting to run the same research with US creative arts graduates to determine how many US Universities are seen to provide a cutting-edge blended learning experience.

Would you take advantage of creative entrepreneurship online training courses that were offered by your University free-of-charge?



- 87% of graduates said that they would take advantage of creative entrepreneurship online training courses if they were offered by their University or College free-of-charge.

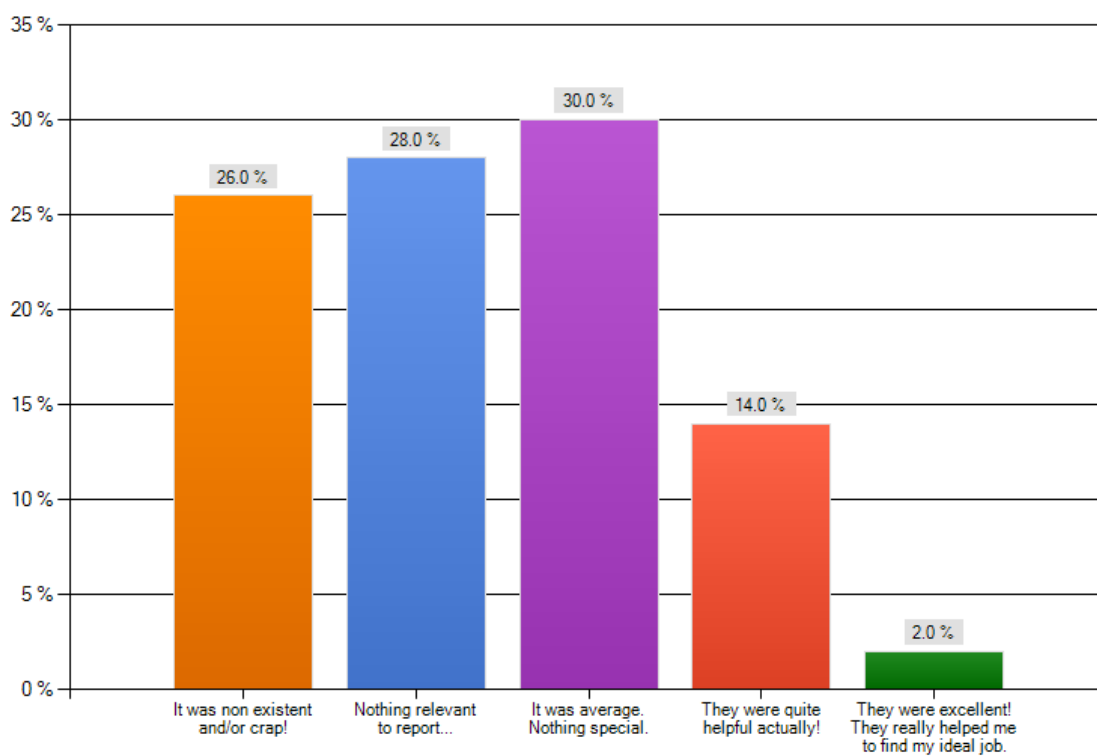


Comment:

Universities can enhance graduate employability with online training courses. Almost 90% of students would take advantage of online training if offered as a value-added service.

Online courses designed to prepare graduates for freelance working or creative business ownership could be particularly useful.

Please rate the service/support you received from your University or College Careers Department.



- Only 16% of graduates rated the service and support from their University or College Careers Department as 'quite helpful' or 'excellent'.
- 26% rated the service as non-existent or very poor.
- 54% rated the service as non-existent, very poor and having nothing relevant to report in terms of service and support.

Comment:

Only 16% rated the service and support from their Careers Department as very helpful or excellent.

84% felt under-supported...



These figures would strongly support a need for the career support and guidance to be re-evaluated.

Is current access to advice sufficient? Is advice relevant to the needs of today's graduates and importantly, is it relevant to the needs of prospective employers?

The message from paying students is that , Universities need to be doing more to help prepare them for employment within the UK creative industry; freelance working or setting up creative businesses.

Comments & Recommendations / Summary

- *Due to the proposed rise in tuition fees, UK Universities and Colleges will experience increased competition from private, online and non-UK Universities and business schools proffering quality Degrees at a lower price.*
- *The market will crowd out poor-value courses, Universities need to adapt to changing times created by new technologies; the rise in distance learning; funding cuts, private sector competition; fee increases; entrepreneurship and the Big Society.*
- *Universities need to review career advice and support services and assist students to prepare for a range of employment options. The employment landscape has shifted and Universities need to adapt to remain relevant and good value- for- money.*
- *Universities might benefit from sub-contracting to or partnering with third party online training specialists in revenue share deals. 75.5% of respondents indicated that their University or College did not provide them with a cutting-edge blended learning experience, whilst 86.8% said they would take advantage of the training if offered free-of-charge!*
- *Universities will need to justify fees increases in a manner more akin to a commercial customer relationship. Student choices are opening up and the economic climate will bring sharp focus to the choices available. Universities will be competing for 'customers' with the private sector and therefore they must become more commercial and more competitive. The overall state of graduate employability within the UK creative industry coupled with the cost of attending University for students from poorer backgrounds is highly likely to result in a significant drop in students from poorer backgrounds studying Art & Design. A lack of diversity in a commercial subject such as design could even result in a negative impact on the consumer.*
- *According to guidelines published by the Office for Fair Access (Offa), Universities in England that charge fees of £9,000 per year would need to spend £900 of fees on subsidies and out reach projects to support poorer students.*



- *“We are now entering uncharted territory and none of us can predict exactly how the new higher fees will affect student behaviour. There is a real risk that disadvantaged students in particular will start to feel they cannot go to University.” comments Martin Harris, Offa’s Director.*

Appendix 1: Sound bites from open-ended comments

What should Universities be doing to justify their tuition fee hikes?

Have more connection with the Industry and teach relevant skills as oppose to just creative skills, e.g. business, marketing, self promotion, networking etc.

Increase teaching hours, better prepare students for their careers, more placement opportunities.

Guaranteed minimum number of hours tuition per week.

Upgrade the standard of education tenfold. This means increasing the hours of education per week to a reasonable level (not just 3 hours in year 3 as I had) and ensure experienced staff.

Students don't recognise where the money is going, it may help to explain in a student friendly way.

Provide more one- to-one time with lecturers, subsidised food, materials etc

Offer lots of opportunities to gain the experience needed to find a job after graduation.

Reduce costs of course materials / provide a basic materials pack once a year

Did you feel that your College or University adequately prepared you for launching your career as a freelancer or a creative biz owner?

No business information at all and very little careers advice...

My school is really indifferent to their students' future and offered no opportunities.

They can only do so much as you have to work it out for yourself -though scheduled talks with a Career Officer each year may help all students!

Course taught some basics and knowledge, but lacked in general technical training and business skills.

Did you receive any formal advice or training from your University or College in order to set yourself up as a freelancer or to launch and manage your own creative business?

Only token gestures, when a large part of why I chose the course was because there was meant to be help in doing so.

Yes, but this had nothing to do with my course and was a separate initiative.

No information on how to set yourself up freelancing or on how to run your own creative business!



I found the help we received very selective.

Only because I took a 10 week business start-up module, not a lot was provided through lectures/tutorials.

We had just one lesson in 3 years about freelancing and launching a business.

Some basic information in the third year, but more could have been done.

Yes, but not enough... It needed to be run throughout the course instead of the last couple of weeks at the end of the course.

The quality of it was very poor.

I was offered business grants and information but not specific freelance information.

I was giving a little support but there wasn't enough training or advice to be able to set up as a freelancer.

In your opinion, did your University provide you with a cutting-edge blending learning experience? (Blended learning is a combination of traditional lectures and online education)

It was starting to with Add-vantage modules which you would take in addition to your Degree but they didn't go far enough.

No online lectures.

The teaching was almost non-existent in UEL.

Not the best online resources, only handouts and notices.

Would you take advantage of creative entrepreneurship online training courses that were offered by your University free-of-charge?

Definitely if it was provided!!!!

I wouldn't trust any free stuff as I have learned from my previous school that everything need to pay, even language support.

The systems were unreliable and often the access to the network was bad and not everyone can afford internet and access to it. Around campus, facilities were limited due to the amounts of students wanting a computer.

Possibly, it would be nice to have that extra choice and option! We have all paid enough for this option!

Did you manage to find the job of your choice after graduating or were you forced to accept alternative jobs, work freelance, work in other unrelated sectors etc?

Currently working part-time and doing an internship and volunteering. I've had my part-time job for 5 years, but its not really advancing me in my career.

I'm in the same part-time job and cannot find anything full-time



Unemployed but won't be looking for work within the creative industry

My degree did not prepare me at all well. I'm still searching. Terrible degree.

I had to be creative how I went about getting work.

I'm training to teach. I didn't have financial stability to allow for a loan to become a freelancer.

I'm only working part-time in retail which has nothing to do with my degree.

I'm in the process of developing my own creative business. Also looking for work outside the industry.

I am still looking for full-time work but have remained in the job that I was doing whilst studying.

No. Haven't even managed to get an admin job!

Have taken unpaid internship in creative industry.

I know I will end up in a job that's outside of my preferred industry for quite some time.

Same part-time job I had whilst studying.

I have applied for many internships and junior design jobs, but there are too many people attempting to get internships at the same time and all the junior jobs want experience regardless of the Degree.

Please rate the service/support you received from your University or College Careers Department.

I spent my BA course study in a small studio with three curtains divided and that was our 151 students' only studio. We wanted to access tutors urgently and they were telling me they are part-time employed by school.

No help at all.

There was one person within the art building for all courses, there were always jobs aimed at graphics, animation, automotive, product and design industry...very, very rarely fine art and visual art based job opportunities. University Careers Dept just tried to send us on temp jobs unrelated to the course to provide us with a small income. The main University Careers Dept had no creative industry jobs.

Haven't looked at this option because I wasn't really aware it was available.

Helpful. But trying to get appointments sometimes is a joke.

Advice only goes so far though, with the state of the arts sector at the moment, finding a career is not far from impossible.



Appendix 2: Source credits

Unistats website	www.unitstats.org.uk
Design Industry Insights Report 2010	www.designcouncil.org.uk/industryresearch
University & Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS)	www.ucas.ac.uk
Office for National Statistics (Labour Force Survey 2009)	www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase
Office for Fair Access (Offa)	www.offa.org.uk

Relevant news articles:

“British Students are learning that it pays to take their degree abroad.”

www.guardian.co.uk/education/2011/mar/06/university--europe-no-debt?INTCMP=SRCH

“Fair access levy for universities.”

www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-12665503



Appendix 3: Quotes and Commentary from Industry

"These findings add to a body of evidence that some will no doubt find alarming. However, when we consider that most institutions only focus on current student feedback perhaps it becomes less surprising. Evaluating opinions that are formed after graduation have always made much more sense to me and, as this research amplifies, creativity has to be supported by enterprise know how; otherwise students will not be equipped to deal with the contract based / freelance environment that they will undoubtedly have to engage with."

**Dr. Andy Penaluna – Professor of Creative Entrepreneurship, Swansea Metropolitan University
Chair – Enterprise Educators UK
Chair - HEA-BMAF SIG Entrepreneurial Learning
Chair - Quality Assurance Agency - Enterprise and Entrepreneurship benchmark group
Advisor to The National Consortium of University Entrepreneurs**

"This report confirms and adds to the bulk of recommendations from industry and education about the support needs of students, graduates and practitioners in the creative industries. This sector is more likely to be self employed, take on portfolio and freelance working arrangements and use contacts and networks to get ahead and find employment in this highly competitive and desirable industry. As recommended in the report, training providers need to deliver credible and sector specific professional development guidance and teaching to enable creative-led students to gain success in their chosen career, use their knowledge and skills to maximum advantage and continue their creative practice."

**Marice Cumber - Enterprise and Employability Consultant (Creative Industries)
(ex Enterprise Projects Director at University of the Arts London – London College of Communication)**

"The findings made evident by this research suggests that the majority of UK Universities are failing to adapt to significant changes in the creative industry and therefore they're not adequately preparing creative graduates for active paid employment. Something is very wrong if more than half of 2009 and 2010 creative arts graduates were forced to find employment outside their field of study. Technology and the economy have changed the employment landscape. The phenomenal growth of creative freelancing in the UK is testament to this, yet Universities don't seem to be gearing graduates for freelancing upon graduation."

Fraser Black, author of the research and Managing Director or Skills Online Group.

For comment or further information, please contact Fraser Black – fraser@skillsonlinegroup.com



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