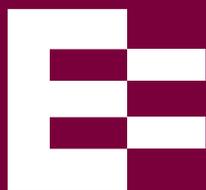


Work placements in the arts and cultural sector: Diversity, equality and access



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Equality Challenge Unit

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arts and cultural sector:
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Foreword

The importance and associated benefits of work placements for students and employers cannot be underestimated.

Work placements provide students with a broad spectrum of skills, knowledge and essential industry contacts that enable them to gain a real insight into the sector. This benefits both a student's academic achievement and their future employability. Nowhere is this more true than for students who wish to enter the arts and cultural sector, where great value is placed on industry experience and knowledge, not just a person's qualifications.

For employers, offering a work placement to students brings fresh thinking and innovative solutions to the table. It is also an opportunity to raise the profile of career opportunities available within an organisation, and develop the management and leadership skills of existing staff. Most importantly, work placements offered by the sector improve the skills of new entrants to the industry and encourage diversity.

However, this report provides evidence of the challenges some students face in accessing and completing a work placement, particularly disabled students, black and minority ethnic students, and those from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds. Such difficulties may have negative consequences for the arts and cultural sector, for example marginalising potential audience appeal and limiting sector expansion.

Tackling the barriers students face in work placements is central to the wider challenge of overcoming the lack of diversity in the sector and dismantling the profound inequalities of access.

This report and its accompanying toolkits for higher education institute staff and students provide recommendations to move towards greater equality in the sector, through the provision of inclusive and positive work placements. Employers, higher education institutions' staff and students need to work collaboratively and recognise the great value work placements bring to the arts and cultural sector.

Sue Caro
Diversity Business Partner
BBC

Executive summary

Work placements for higher education students are particularly important in the arts and cultural sector, and play a central role in promoting students' employability. Yet some groups, particularly disabled students, black and minority ethnic (BME) students and those from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds, face challenges in accessing and completing a work placement. Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) commissioned this research to examine the equality issues associated with higher education work placements undertaken in the arts and cultural sector, with the aim of developing practical tools to address the challenges and inequalities in the sector.

This report presents the research findings and makes recommendations for change. The findings are drawn from interviews with students from equality groups who had experienced work placements and with staff from five higher education institutions (HEIs). In addition, interviews were conducted with a small number of employers from across the sector who host work placements.

Summary of research findings

- ⇒ While students are strongly encouraged, if not expected, to undertake work placements, some students experience inequality of access to opportunities to undertake formally supported placements.
- ⇒ There are deeply embedded notions of the 'ideal student' and 'ideal work placement candidate', which favour middle-class, white, male and non-disabled students.
- ⇒ Great value is placed on self-directed placements, accompanied by an expectation on students to be self-motivated and driven in both finding placements and making the most of them. Not all students can take up such an approach.
- ⇒ Locating a 'good' placement and getting the best from it depends on students' access to social, economic and cultural resources, such as access to industry networks, the money to undertake unpaid or lengthy placements, and knowing how to 'sell yourself' to employers. These resources are not distributed equally.
- ⇒ The normalisation of unpaid placements leads many students to self-select on the basis of their financial circumstances, and does little to address the predominantly middle-class character of the workforce.

Executive summary

- = Students from equality groups do experience problems: they may feel they do not fit into an all-white environment, need to hide their disability, or have to adopt masculine behaviour to be accepted.
- = There is an absence of a language of inequality, making it difficult to identify and discuss equality issues in the work placement process.
- = Employers and HEIs have equality policies in place, but it is unclear how far these are embedded in placement practices and procedures.
- = The research reveals a paradoxical situation. In the creative industries, unspoken assumptions about success lead workers to regard issues of race, gender, disability and class that emerge in work placements as students' own personal problems that they should solve by themselves. However, there is a strong desire within the sector to capitalise on opportunities offered by diversity and to make the most of this future workforce. In order to maximise the value of diversity, work placement providers need to proactively recognise and address inequalities and to question unspoken assumptions.

Summary of recommendations for addressing equality issues

The research has generated a number of recommendations to help HEI staff address equality issues in higher education work placements within the arts and cultural sector. Based on these recommendations, we have developed two toolkits: one to assist HEI staff in their daily practices, the other providing advice and information to students on how to access and succeed in work placements

www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/diversity-equality-and-access-toolkits.

Work placements need to be recognised as an equality issue. For HEIs to develop more inclusive and effective work placement practices and policies, there is a need for:

- = collaborative working and reviewing of procedures
- = developing a language of equality and diversity
- = better support for students

Collaborative working and reviewing procedures

- ⇒ Work placements need to be reflected in HEIs' existing equality schemes and coupled with systematic and joined-up procedures. These should be developed through collaborative working and dialogue between all relevant staff and agencies within the HEI to identify and address equality issues.
- ⇒ HEIs should review work placement arrangements and policies to address equality issues in accordance with guidance provided by the existing public sector equality duties. Central to this is the importance of developing procedures to gather feedback from students and to monitor the take-up and impact of work placements by different equality groups. Further to this, HEIs should consider developing an equality policy that is specific to work placements.
- ⇒ Equality procedures need to go beyond dealing with overt cases of discrimination to recognising and attempting to overcome the ways in which institutional systems and structures for work placements might create inequalities.
- ⇒ Equality and diversity training for all staff who are involved in work placements, whether directly or indirectly, should help to address equality issues such as the different resources available to students which help or hinder their success.

Developing equality and diversity discourse

- ⇒ HEIs should consider how they can assist students to discuss, identify and address issues of inequality. This can help to remove some of the stigma around 'complaining' about employers, and minimise students' fears of talking about challenging experiences. Creating effective mechanisms for students to feed back and share their experiences is central to this.
- ⇒ Similarly, HEIs should develop dialogue with employers about equality issues and the opportunities for diversity within the sector.
- ⇒ Embedding the language of equality and diversity more broadly within the arts and cultural studies curriculum will enable students to think about equality and diversity now, and the potential for transforming and having a positive impact on practices within their future workplace and as cultural producers. This might take the shape of a module on equality issues in the arts and cultural sector.

Better support for students

- ⇒ As HEIs' resources to manage work placements can be restricted, they should assess how resources may best be used to provide maximum support for students on placement. This could be through a placement mentor who maintains contact and makes visits, or through online forums enabling students to keep in contact with staff and other students while on placement.
- ⇒ HEIs should work to identify and widely promote funding opportunities for placements, such as bursaries, Access to Work funds or other government initiatives, as well as schemes specifically targeted at particular groups, such as BME or disabled students.
- ⇒ To increase students' awareness of their legal rights and acceptable practices regarding pay, hours and fair treatment in the workplace, HEIs should include this information in seminars and tutorials. Simply posting information on careers websites and in placement packs is not sufficient to prepare students.
- ⇒ HEIs should encourage dialogue between work placement staff, careers staff and academics to share essential knowledge to support students when looking for placements.

1 Introduction

Work placements are central to promoting students' employability, and are particularly important in the arts and cultural sector. However, barriers remain for disabled students, black and minority ethnic (BME) students and those from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds when accessing and completing a work placement. As stressed in a report from the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions (Cabinet Office, 2009), this results in profound inequalities of access to one of the key growth sectors in the economy.

This research was commissioned by Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) to examine the equality issues associated with higher education work placements undertaken in the arts and cultural sector, with the aim of developing practical tools to address the challenges.

Interviews were conducted with disabled students, BME students and students entering sectors where significant gender imbalances exist, who had experienced work placements. Interviews were also conducted with staff from five specialist and non-specialist higher education institutions (HEIs) across England and Wales. Additionally, interviews were conducted with a small number of employers who host students on higher education work placements in the arts and cultural sector. These interviews were designed to shed light on the equality issues experienced by students in the work placement process, HEIs' policies and procedures for supporting students undertaking work placements, and employers' practices in offering placements and supporting students from these key equality groups.

2 Research aims and terminology

Aims and rationale

- = To explore how HEIs provide positive and inclusive work placement experiences for disabled students, BME students and students entering sectors where significant gender imbalances exist, that will enhance their future employment prospects in the arts and cultural sector.
- = To develop two practical resources – one for use by careers and placement staff, the other by students – to facilitate inclusive work placements for those in higher education.

Key terminology

Defining equality groups

The research was interested in students from three equality groups who have undertaken some form of work placement activity in the arts and cultural sector.

Disabled students

This report uses the definition of disability used in the Equality Act 2010.

'A person has a disability if they have a physical or mental impairment, and the impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.'

(Equality Act 2010)

A 'work-limiting disability' is a long-term health problem or disability that affects the kind or amount of paid work a person might do (DRC, 2006). This includes physical impairments (including asthma, diabetes, epilepsy, etc) and severe disfigurements, sensory impairments such as hearing impairment or visual impairment, learning disabilities, mental impairments (including clinical depression, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and post-traumatic stress), and progressive conditions such as cancer, multiple sclerosis and HIV.

For the purposes of this research, disabled students are individuals who meet the above definition of disability, and who are students or graduates of a UK HEI.

In this research, many of the students were in receipt of the disabled students' allowance (DSA), a grant available to undergraduate and postgraduate students

to help meet the extra course costs they face as a direct result of a disability, and had disclosed their disability, but did not identify with the label 'disabled'. It is therefore important to recognise that a student's self-identification is not always consistent with the legal definition provided in the Equality Act 2010. These issues are discussed in the section of this report on 'The student experience'.

This research is underpinned by a social model of disability (Oliver, 1990), and addresses the physical and attitudinal barriers that are socially constructed and can affect how disabled students are included or excluded within the work placement process.

BME students

The research included students who identified themselves as being a black or minority ethnic person. This group included both UK-domiciled, home fee-paying students and international students.

Students seeking to work in areas where there are significant gender imbalances

This research was guided by labour market intelligence that highlights particular sectors of the creative industries where women or men are under-represented. This identified a low proportion of female students undertaking placements in architecture, film and television, and design.

While these three equality groups were the main focus of the research, other pertinent equality issues were illustrated where they emerged in interviews with staff and students, including issues of social class.

Defining the arts and cultural sector

The 'arts and cultural sector' has various definitions. For this research we used the Department for Culture, Media and Sport's definition of the 'creative industries' to encompass:

'those industries that have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property.'

(DCMS, 2001)

2 Research aims and terminology

These industries account for over seven per cent of the UK economy, employ 1.8 million people, and are a key sector for employment growth (DCMS, 2008; Hutton et al, 2007).

The creative industries include:

- = advertising
- = architecture
- = art and antiques markets
- = computer and video games
- = crafts
- = design
- = designer fashion
- = film and video
- = music
- = performing arts
- = publishing
- = software
- = television and radio

However, this research recognises the amorphous nature of creative employment, where students may enter creative occupations outside these key industries, such as in public sector organisations.

Defining work placements

Work placement experiences can encompass many different types of work-based learning. The National Council of Work Experience highlights the different forms work placement experiences may take (Little and Harvey, 2006). These include:

- = sandwich placement: a fixed period (normally between six months and one year) in the industry as part of a student's degree, often assessed and normally paid – this type of placement has been referred to as the 'gold standard' of work placements (DfES, 2002)
- = work-based project: an assessed piece of work for a university course, sometimes undertaken at an employer's premises

2 Research aims and terminology

- = internship: a placement within an organisation, usually for a six- to 12-week period over a university's summer holiday
- = work placement: shorter than an internship or sandwich placement (a number of weeks or days); can form a compulsory part of a student's course or be taken up voluntarily, and may be paid or unpaid

This research expands on rather narrow definitions of work placement that refer only to formal, planned periods of work in the industry linked to a programme of study. Here we include a range of placement experiences, whether formally recognised placements that are part of a structured period of learning, or independent placements that may not be formally supported by HEIs but are encouraged or expected as a central aspect of students' learning and preparation for entry into the creative industries. Initial desk research suggested that such independent, self-driven placements are very common in the sector (Ball, 2003) – this was confirmed through the interviews.

3 Background to the research

Diversity, equality and access issues in the creative industries

The literature illustrates that at present the creative industries are not representative of the UK population as a whole and suffer from a 'chronic lack of diversity' (Hutton et al, 2007). BME groups, women, and those with disabilities are under-represented within the workforce. While workforce representation in terms of gender, ethnicity and disability varies across different creative industry subsectors, available labour market intelligence suggests the following:

- = BME workers in the television and film sectors are more likely to experience a lack of access to industry networks and a greater reliance on unpaid work than other groups (Pollard et al, 2005).
- = Women make up over two-thirds of the student population on creative arts and design courses (HESA, 2008), but less than two-fifths (39 per cent) of the creative industries workforce (Creative & Cultural Skills, 2005; Skillset, 2006), below the UK average of 46 per cent. Women are particularly under-represented in technical roles.
- = On the whole, the gender imbalance in the creative sector relates to female under-representation. However, there are some areas of the creative sector where men are under-represented, such as in cultural heritage, art retail and textiles (Creative & Cultural Skills, 2008a).
- = Fewer than 12 per cent of creative workers have a work-limiting disability or a disability as defined by the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) (Creative & Cultural Skills, 2005), compared with the UK workforce average of around 14 per cent (DRC, 2006).
- = Women, BME people and disabled people all earn substantially less than average within the audiovisual industries (Skillset, 2005a) and women are less visible in top positions (Holden and McCarthy, 2007).
- = There is evidence that the creative industries are predominantly middle-class professions (Publishing NTO and Skillset, 2002; Özbilgin and Tatli, 2006; Sutton Trust, 2006; Cabinet Office, 2009).
- = Over half (54 per cent) of those working in the creative industries are under the age of 40, with the largest single age group being 25–29 years old (Creative & Cultural Skills, 2008a).

More detail on issues of diversity within the creative industries' workforce can be found in the appendix.

There has been growing recognition by the industry and within policy that more needs to be done to encourage people from all backgrounds to seek careers in the creative industries, and to break down barriers that may prevent these groups from accessing and remaining in the sector. Work placements can play an important role within this: inclusive experiences can encourage students from under-represented groups to pursue a career in the creative industries. However, it may also be that, on entering work environments lacking in diversity, students from these groups may not feel that they 'fit in' to the industry.

The importance of work experience to student employability

Work experience is important to the employment prospects of graduates in all occupational areas (Harvey et al, 1998, 2002; Cooper and Hills, 2003). ASET's *A good practice guide for placement and other work-based learning opportunities in higher education* states that:

'the objective of any work-based learning experience, regardless of length, is to consolidate and complement the academic learning, knowledge and skills, while integrating some aspects of personal career awareness and development.'

(ASET, 2009)

Work experience is especially valuable for those seeking to enter the arts and cultural sector, due to the highly competitive nature of the industry (La Valle et al, 2000). Many students undertake voluntary or unpaid work experience as a way of getting 'a foot in the door' (Harvey and Blackwell, 1999; Dumelow et al, 1999; Ball, 2003; Ball et al, 2010). Students see work experience as a valuable part of their course (CHERI, 2002), where they can apply their learning as well as tapping into industry contacts to improve their job prospects (Ball, 2003).

Industry knowledge and experience of a working environment are highly valued among employers in the creative sector because of a perceived disjuncture between the skills developed within higher education and those required by the industry (Ball, 2003; DCMS, 2006; Creative & Cultural Skills, 2008a; Design Council and Creative & Cultural Skills, 2008).

3 Background to the research

Art and design graduates who undertake some form of work experience prior to entering the job market have better employment prospects (Harvey and Blackwell, 1999; Taylor and Littleton, 2008). Accessing such opportunities can be a principal factor for students, enhancing their employability by increasing their knowledge of the workplace, and improving their communication skills and self-confidence (DfES, 2002; Cooper and Hills, 2003; ECU, 2008).

For example, the graduate employability project, funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England's widening participation initiative and based at London Metropolitan University, found that work experience is a principal factor in enhancing the employability of BME students, students from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds, and mature students who face difficulty in securing employment after graduation, by increasing their knowledge of the workplace, enhancing communication skills and improving their self-confidence (Cooper and Hills, 2003). Similarly, ECU's *Transition to work for disabled students* suggests that placements are crucial mechanisms in supporting disabled students into the labour market (ECU, 2008). A guide from the former DfES, *Providing work placements for disabled students*, reiterates this, stating that 'for students with disabilities and/or learning difficulties this opportunity can be a key to the world of work from which they might otherwise be excluded' (DfES, 2002).

Barriers to inclusive and positive work placements

Opportunities to undertake a work placement are not evenly distributed. Research highlights a number of barriers – both general and sector-specific – that can affect students from particular equality groups in accessing and completing work placements.

Money

Unpaid or low-paid work placements (and unpaid work) remain prevalent within the creative sector (NUJ, 2007; Cabinet Office, 2009; Arts Group and Skillset, 2010; Ball et al, 2010; BECTU, 2010), which can be a barrier to undertaking a work placement for students from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds. This has a significant impact on students' choice of placement.

3 Background to the research

'For many, entry into the sector is dependent on gaining extensive work experience, mostly unpaid, which can discriminate against those who can't afford to do so.'

(Creative & Cultural Skills, 2008d)

The cost of travelling to placements may also make them too expensive for some students (Hills, 2004). Research suggests that many students struggle to undertake placements alongside study and part-time work, and are likely to select placements on the basis of their financial situation (Little et al, 2001; Hills, 2004; Guile, 2006; Özbilgin and Tatli, 2006; Taylor and Littleton, 2008).

'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 [...] To work unpaid was a privilege which was not available to all students.'

(Taylor and Littleton, 2008)

Pay legislation

Under current national minimum wage (NMW) legislation, it is illegal for UK employers to offer unpaid work experience under certain conditions. The current minimum wage is £5.80 an hour for workers aged 22 and over, and £4.83 an hour for 18–21 year olds. There are some placements that are exempt from the NMW legislation: placements that last up to a year and are formally recognised as part of a student's course, and placements that involve only work shadowing. Where students are undertaking work that would be otherwise carried out by an employee and that contributes to the employers' objectives or profitability, placements should be paid. Students who undertake work outside any work experience undertaken as part of their course are entitled to be paid at least the NMW for that work, as are students who are studying at non-UK educational establishments. Students who are on a placement for longer than a year should also be paid at least the NMW.

3 Background to the research

Time

Students' commitments outside their studies, such as part-time jobs or caring responsibilities, can also impede their capacity to undertake work placements (Hills, 2004; Özbilgin and Tatli, 2006). Students may have to forego placements because of these commitments, or balance placements alongside them.

Access to social networks

Sourcing work placement opportunities in the creative sector is extremely dependent on access to social networks, where word-of-mouth recruitment is common in the sector (Ball, 2003; Skillset, 2005a).

Research shows that people from more affluent backgrounds are able to use their connections to source work placements through friends or relatives who work in the arts and cultural sector (YouGov/CCE, 2010). International students, who are unfamiliar with the local industry sector, can also feel excluded from important social networks through which to find placement opportunities (Barnes et al, 2004).

The prevalence of informal and closed recruitment practices makes it 'difficult to redress the continuing demographic imbalance of the workforce' (Skillset, 2005a).

Knowing how to negotiate the placement framework

Research suggests that some students are disadvantaged, including BME students, international students, and those from disadvantaged socioeconomic groups, because they lack the appropriate knowledge of the labour market and placement process. This includes knowing where to look for placement opportunities, how to write applications, and how to 'sell yourself' to host organisations (Hills, 2004; Cabinet Office, 2009).

Geography

The creative industries are unevenly spread across the country, with a large proportion of employment in London (Creative & Cultural Skills, 2005), which can affect the opportunities available to students according to their proximity. The capacity to move away in order to undertake placements will be restricted for those from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds and students with other commitments that limit their mobility (Hills, 2004; Cabinet Office, 2009).

Disability, disclosure and adjustment

The prevalence of small and medium-sized employers in the sector can create significant challenges for disabled students wishing to undertake placements, as smaller employers are typically less equipped to make adjustments (Creative & Cultural Skills, 2005; Design Council, 2005; Guile, 2006) and are less likely than larger employers to have embedded equality and diversity policies and practices to support such students (Bunt et al, 2007; ECU, 2008; McConnell, 2008). It can be difficult for higher education staff to locate supportive placement environments for disabled students while ensuring equality of choice. Higher education staff may unwittingly discriminate by encouraging students to pursue placements only in those organisations that they think can support them, while discounting other possible providers (DfES, 2002).

For disabled students, there is often great anxiety around issues of disclosure because of concerns that they may be judged negatively. Research suggests that many disabled students are unsure of how to disclose their disability to host organisations (Blankfield, 2001; ECU, 2008).

Variability in support for students from equality groups

Research into work placement arrangements across London arts institutions has found that issues of equality and diversity – particularly those relating to disability – are insufficiently addressed within the placement process. This includes an absence of monitoring and evaluation systems to assess the impact of placements on different equality groups, as well as a ‘lack of self-critical thinking’ or a ‘full awareness of equal opportunities’ among staff (Özbilgin and Tatli, 2006). Other research has found that higher education staff members are sometimes not fully aware of the appropriate services available to support art and design students with particular needs (Hudson, 2006). The National Student Forum similarly suggests that, while career services offer ‘outstanding facilities’, these are not always tailored to the needs of specific students, meaning that ‘some disabled students have [been] unable to access sufficiently specialist advice and guidance from university careers services’ (NSF, 2009).

Research also suggests that the support available to disabled students within the higher education setting is often lost when students enter placements (Blankfield, 2001).

3 Background to the research

More generally, the Equality and Human Rights Commission, which has a compliance role for equality legislation, suggests that while public sector bodies (including HEIs) are advanced in developing equality schemes, in line with their legal duty, there is still a long way to go in terms of actioning the schemes and 'engaging' with the ramifications of the duties in a more sophisticated manner (EHRC, 2010). This is likely to inform the ways in which issues faced by equality groups are addressed within an HEI's work placement practices.

Variability in work placement opportunities

Opportunities to engage in work experience are not equally available or accessible. Research indicates a vast inconsistency in work placement arrangements within and across HEIs (Harvey and Blackwell, 1999; Little et al, 2001; Özbilgin and Tatli, 2006).

Supporting and managing student work placements demands considerable time, money, expertise and commitment on the part of HEI staff, as was found by research into work-related learning in fashion and textiles courses in higher education, where academics voiced concern over the amount of resources required (McConnell, 2008). This included the considerable administrative time needed to ensure health and safety, insurance and other legal requirements are met by host organisations, including staff time to make visits to employers. Some staff also felt they were not given enough time to build networks and maintain relationships with the industry, through which to source placements for their students. Such concerns can significantly affect an HEI's capacity to offer and support placements as an accredited and formalised part of higher education programmes.

Employers' capacity to offer and support placements to students is also variable within the sector. While 88 per cent of employers think that design students should be required to undertake some form of work experience, only 54 per cent are willing to provide this, with many suggesting that they lacked the resources (space, equipment and staff) to oversee placements (Design Council, 2005). Some organisations – particularly smaller employers – lack the adequate resources to oversee placements (Creative & Cultural Skills, 2005; Design Council, 2005; Guile, 2006).

Wider market forces affecting the industry also have an impact on the availability of work placements. For example, in the fashion and textiles sector, research

suggests that there has been a decline in placement opportunities available to students as larger firms outsource work overseas instead (Robertson, 2008). A survey of employers conducted by the University of the Arts London (UAL, 2009) found that the recession has had an impact on employers' placement practices, with an increase in the number of unpaid placements and greater use of cheaper recruitment methods such as word of mouth. This reflects a more general rise of unpaid recruitment across the sector: in film we can see a dramatic increase over the past two decades, from five per cent of people undertaking unpaid work prior to getting their first paid job in the industry in the 1980s, to 45 per cent for those entering in 2000 or later (Skillset, 2005b).

4 Research methodology

This research used a qualitative methodology which included interviews with staff, students and employers. This approach enabled us to conduct an in-depth exploration of the work placement experiences of students from different equality groups and identify the barriers to, and enablers of, inclusive work placements.

Literature review

A review was conducted of relevant academic, practitioner and policy literature, focusing on work placements in general and in the creative industries, and on equality and diversity issues within the work placement process. This review informed the research design and analysis of this report and the toolkits.

Case studies of five HEIs, including interviews with staff and students

A range of HEIs were initially contacted and asked to indicate their interest in the research as well as to provide background information on the work placement arrangements in the institution, the student cohort, and equality and diversity policies. From this scoping exercise, five institutions were selected, all of which offered courses aligned with the arts and cultural sector. They were selected to include specialist and non-specialist institutions and to comprise a range of sizes and geographical locations across England and Wales. The five institutions are:

- = a large, city-based, specialist arts institution composed of multiple constituent colleges
- = a large, non-specialist, post-1992 institution
- = a small, specialist institution
- = the constituent academic school of a larger, post-1992 HEI
- = a large, multi-campus, specialist arts institution

Desk research was conducted to gather appropriate materials and documentation from each of the case study institutions, including prospectuses, placement learning policies or codes of practice, placement guidance and other documentation, equality and diversity policies and monitoring data.

Within each institution, interviews were conducted with members of staff identified as having a key role in supporting or managing work placements (careers staff, faculty and departmental placement officers, heads of department and course leaders), and also with four to six students from equality groups who had undertaken a placement in the arts and cultural sector within the past year.

The overall sample of 26 students interviewed, 24 of whom had undertaken work placements, included the following students enrolled on foundation, undergraduate and postgraduate courses within a range of disciplines:

- = 11 BME students
- = 20 female students, 11 of whom undertook placements in sectors of female under-representation
- = 13 disabled students, covering a range of impairments including physical, sensory, visual and mental impairments
- = a number of students from disadvantaged socioeconomic groups

Students were each assigned a pseudonym to protect their identity.

Employer interviews

Telephone interviews were conducted with 11 host organisations across the arts and cultural sector who offer work placements to higher education students. These included employers from a range of sectors across the creative industries, both large and small employers, and employers from different locations across the UK.

The sample included some employers who identified as having good or interesting practice in relation to work placements and equality and diversity, including some with specific schemes to address diversity in the work placement process.

Challenges in recruiting students

There were a number of challenges in recruiting disabled students from the case study institutions to take part in this research. Most disabled students who originally came forward to take part in the research had dyslexia. A number of factors are likely to contribute to this difficulty in recruiting disabled students, particularly those with impairments other than dyslexia.

4 Research methodology

National data from 2007/08, commissioned from the Higher Education Statistics Agency specifically for this project, illustrate that while there are relatively high numbers of students with learning difficulties such as dyslexia enrolled on arts and cultural courses in higher education, there are very low numbers of disabled students with mobility-related disabilities, visual impairments and mental health conditions. This means there is a small pool from which to recruit disabled students with other impairments. That pool became even smaller because a criterion for participation in this study was that students had to have undertaken some form of work placement. It is possible to suggest that the difficulties in recruiting disabled students for this study reflect a lower number of these students actually undertaking placements.

It is also important to note that, as with other research (Riddell et al, 2005), the students included in this study who were classified as disabled under the Equality Act 2010 definition and in receipt of the DSA were often reluctant to identify themselves as disabled. It may be that this ambivalence around the label 'disabled student' also contributed to the difficulties in recruiting such students.

In light of the challenges encountered in recruiting a wider range of types of disability within the case study HEIs, a further recruitment drive was conducted to interview an additional five disabled students from other HEIs who had completed placements in the sector. Recruitment of these students was specifically targeted to reach students with mobility impairments, visual impairments and mental health difficulties. Two interviews with disabled students with mobility and visual impairments were conducted, as well as a further two interviews with disabled students from two of the participating HEIs who had not undertaken a placement.

Despite attempts to engage with male students undertaking placements in areas of male under-representation, we were unable to recruit such students. The gender focus of this research is therefore on the experiences of female students who undertook placements in parts of the sector where there is an under-representation of women. As discussed above, while female students make up over 60 per cent of the student population on creative arts and design courses (HESA, 2008), most subsectors of the creative industries have a male majority workforce.

Interview data: collection, transcription and analysis

All interviews, with the informed consent of participants, were audio-recorded and fully transcribed, then coded and analysed thematically to identify key issues. In relation to the student interview data, basic demographic information was collected from all participants in the form of a short questionnaire in order to contextualise their work placement experiences. Students were asked to describe their experiences of their course and their placement, and also to give information about their schooling, their family and their working life outside study, as well as their future expectations and aspirations. Using our knowledge and understanding of existing research on equality, interview data were analysed by the research team with attention to the ways in which structural (or perhaps 'hidden') inequalities could, or had, played out in their experiences.

5 Work placement arrangements in the case study HEIs

This research found great variety in how work placements are located within students' formal learning, and how they are managed and supported within and across the participating institutions.

Types of work placement

Placement learning was identified by staff as an important and integral part of students' learning and preparation for working in the creative industries. It was suggested that work placements provide a number of benefits for students, including:

- = increasing understanding of how to apply skills and knowledge in 'real-world' settings
- = helping students make more informed career decisions
- = developing entrepreneurial skills
- = building interpersonal skills
- = developing confidence in a working environment

A number of staff members suggested that placement learning was particularly common for students wishing to enter the creative sector because career pathways are less structured than in other industries, so work experience takes on greater importance.

Undertaking placements was understood to be beneficial to students' future employability as it made them look more credible and knowledgeable about the industry. Placements were perceived as a central way in which students could gain industry contacts, which would benefit them after graduation. One interviewee suggested that work placements can help to address a lack of diversity in the sector by encouraging students to consider career pathways they might otherwise not have chosen, such as female students entering technical roles.

Of the five institutions, one HEI had no formal work placements. The remaining four had some programmes of study that offered work placements as either a compulsory or optional element of a course. Compulsory placements were rarer

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than optional placements, and were more likely to be shorter, such as a 10-day placement as part of a professional practice module. Three of the institutions offered some courses where students could undertake an optional placement year, forming a sandwich degree. Formal placements were found across foundation, undergraduate and postgraduate courses.

Some staff spoke of the logistical difficulties of making placements compulsory or even optional elements of all courses. This related to the level of resourcing required to manage placements:

'I know there was some talk years ago about whether we should make it an integral part, but frankly if we have to go and inspect a premises to see if it's safe for health and safety purposes and fill in copious amounts of paperwork in order for somebody to go and do a week's work experience, we just don't have the resources to do it. In terms of higher education and what the priorities are, we should be out getting students onto the courses, not ensuring students have employment or work experience.'

There was also uncertainty as to whether the arts and cultural sector could provide placements for all students because of more students seeking placements than were available. This has important consequences for the ways in which HEIs can support students wanting or requiring placement opportunities.

Staff in all five institutions stated that students were strongly encouraged to take up independent placements outside their programme of study, and that these were common. One staff member from the participating HEI that offered no formal placements suggested that when too much emphasis is placed on the quality of a student's placement, it can be disadvantageous:

'The quality of your degree is very much determined by the quality of your placement I think, which I think is slightly worrying.'

He suggested that it is better for students to complete their studies first before they undertake placements, and that those students who 'put less effort into being employed' are the most employable. Instead of offering formal placements, this HEI provided opportunities for students to engage with and explore the industry via other means, such as research projects with companies that simulate a work experience environment and may eventually lead to work placement opportunities. This HEI has strong links with employers that enable this kind of

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learning. The HEI encourages students to gain work experience in their spare time. One member of staff reflected that there is less need to make placements a formal and assisted part of their programme of study because they have a largely middle-class student cohort:

'We have a much more middle-class student body here. It's much easier for them to obtain work placements: they have better contacts, they have more confidence and they know how the world works a bit better, I think. And so it's more common here for students to get a work placement. We can rely much more on their self-motivation.'

While this member of staff recognised some of the advantages middle-class students have in finding placements (such as greater access to industry contacts), there is a risk of neglecting the needs of those students who are not middle class, or other equality issues that may face disabled or BME middle-class students. There is also a sense in which advantage is interpreted as personal value: contacts and confidence are equated with self-motivation.

Management, coordination and support for placements

Some of the participating institutions had dedicated placement teams or units supporting placements, including advertising opportunities, guiding students in their search for placements, and supporting CV-writing and interview techniques.

Only one of these institutions had a dedicated placement unit that served all students. In the other institutions, placement units or teams served only particular courses or faculties. Elsewhere, placement guidance and support was devolved to programme level, either through a placement coordinator or through academic staff. Two of the larger specialist institutions had centralised careers services that advertised placements and provided general guidance to support students on placements.

Institutions reported a range of methods through which students located placement opportunities. These included: responding to advertised placement opportunities available on a central careers service or placement unit website, using a course-based directory of organisations known to offer placements, using academic and placement staff's industry contacts, or through active relationships that the university has forged with alumni who offered placements. One institution

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encouraged students to build up their own online presence, such as a website or online portfolio, to help when searching for placements.

In most of the institutions, however, there was a common notion that, where possible, students should use their own contacts to locate placements or take an active role in locating opportunities if they do not have industry contacts. In many cases this was seen as a way of preparing students for the realities of looking for employment in the sector, and it was suggested that students gain more from their experience when they are active in finding their placement:

'It's absolutely our philosophy that if we give them something now then they won't know what to do when there isn't anybody to give it to them later so we'd much prefer to make them understand why it's important and to teach them the skills they need to get it.'

However, this emphasis on students finding their own placement was also referred to as a resource issue:

'We've over the years made students much more responsible for finding their own placements because there are a lot of students and it's quite a task for us.'

While there are clear benefits for both staff and students when students take an active role in the placement process, an onus on self-directed placements can neglect the ways in which some students may struggle, lacking contacts in the sector and the knowledge of how to locate placements and approach employers.

The level of support offered to students in preparing for placements also varied across and within the institutions, depending on the course and the types of placement students were undertaking. In some institutions and on some courses, students were offered extensive support by placement unit staff in searching and preparing for placements, such as help with writing their CV, and some were given key information and checklists to guide them in making the most of placements. Some provided workshops on what to expect while on placement and how to overcome potential problems, such as when students feel they are not getting much out of the placement.

In only a few cases did extensive support for students continue throughout the placement, by way of a placement mentor who would visit the student on

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placement or provide regular email contact. This was most common on sandwich placements in one of the participating institutions where placements were coordinated and managed by a dedicated placement unit. In these cases, the students we interviewed valued this ongoing communication, which provided them with essential support as and when problems arose.

However, on the whole, support tended to be lost once students had found their placements. This was particularly the case for independent placements, where students were very uncertain what support they were entitled to – even though undertaking placements in their spare time was felt to be strongly encouraged, if not expected, by the institution. Almost all institutions reported that limited resources restricted the levels of ongoing support that staff were able to provide to students while on placement. While staff stated that they wanted to make more placement visits, making these visits, especially when there are a high number of students doing a placement at any one time, can be logistically difficult.

Staff acknowledged a range of methods they use to safeguard students and ensure students get the most out of their placement. These included sending employers a placement pack with key information and guidance on the placement, requesting employers to sign an agreement that students would be undertaking a placement at their company, and checking that employers had relevant health and safety and insurance documentation.

Where institutions had dedicated placement units, extensive procedures had been developed to support and prepare host organisations. This included sending them placement packs with information on pay legislation, checklists to ensure they were prepared to help placement students, and a template learning agreement or contract between the HEI, host organisation and student outlining anticipated hours and duties.

Interviews with students revealed some uncertainty about whether employers had completed and returned the documentation sent by HEIs. Some staff also raised concerns that employers found such paperwork burdensome, and so had made some efforts to keep paperwork as brief as possible:

'There is a health and safety form which we ask them to complete. It is quite brief and we do try and keep the paperwork as brief as possible otherwise they probably won't look at it.'

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In response to the limitations on staff availability to conduct monitoring visits, it was suggested that staff rely on students to make them aware of any problems as they arise:

'We would love to go and visit everyone but I think keeping the relationship with the student while they are there, we just monitor it that way.'

It is clearly very difficult for HEI staff to visit every student on placement. It is important that students take a proactive role in their placement learning. However, the onus on students to report problems can overlook the challenges that some students may face in doing so. Some may lack the confidence required to report these issues, or may be uncertain about how to articulate their dissatisfaction. Others may fear that they may not be taken seriously, or that if they complain, it will have a negative impact on their career prospects upon graduation. Students may worry that the employer may withhold a useful reference; or, due to the relatively small size of the sector and its highly connected nature, students may be concerned that complaining about their placement may earn them an unfavourable reputation. One HEI points students to their students' union as a key mediator and provider of support if they are unhappy with their placement and feel uncomfortable talking to staff in the placement unit.

Evaluation and feedback

Evaluation procedures were found to be similarly varied across and within institutions. In the case of formal placements, some courses required students to complete feedback forms about their placement. The students interviewed often reported these as box-ticking exercises and were unsure of the extent to which feedback was taken on board. In some cases, employers were also asked to complete feedback forms; however, staff reported some difficulties in ensuring that employers returned these. Others received more informal feedback from employers with whom they have an ongoing relationship.

Other feedback mechanisms following placements included student presentations to peers and staff about their placement, reflective journals and reports. One student produced a short film about her placement. In one institution, a course blog had been set up where students were asked to submit regular blog posts while on placement, sharing their experiences with staff and fellow students.

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In a few instances, there were no formal opportunities for students to share their experiences. This was particularly the case for (although not restricted to) independent placements. As there is a clear expectation and encouragement of students to seek independent placements within the sector, it would be worthwhile for institutions to consider how they can make more opportunities available for students to bring these experiences into their formal learning.

Procedures for addressing equality

Staff in all the institutions spoke of having an institutional equality and diversity policy, but it was unclear how these policies extended to cover work placements. Instead, they focused mainly on students' experiences within the university, or on issues around accessibility to placements or careers services. One HEI specifically acknowledged equality issues in work placements in its race equality policy, stating that staff responsible would provide employers with a copy of their policy, keep data on access, and report complaints of discrimination. However, this did not appear to happen in practice.

Staff responses varied as to whether any equality issues exist within the placement process, with staff struggling to identify any significant barriers in the work placement process. Most spoke positively about their arrangements:

'I've no knowledge of any equality issues. I've heard of nothing.'

'We've had no issues at all in terms of equality or odd behaviour in the workplace, and I think the fact that it's not something you think about it kind of highlights the fact that it's not an issue. It's not considered. You know everybody feels that they're being treated fairly and equally.'

One member of staff suggested that all students on a programme are equally eligible to take up placements if they form part of a programme of study:

'I struggle with this. If you've got students on a programme and you are offering placements or encouraging students to do them, I'm not sure there should be any values to equal opportunities with placements. Nothing has come to my attention. When we enrol students we do so irrespective of their appearance or any other aspect of their personality or orientation. If they're on the programme equally, they are all equally eligible for what the programme offers.'

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Such a statement mistakenly assumes that equality in recruitment of students on to those courses transfers into students' experiences of finding and undertaking placements. It also fails to take into account any underlying bias and attitudinal barriers that may exist within the institution, which can inform the very recruitment of students (McManus, 2006; Burke and McManus, 2009). Furthermore, it suggests a personalised view of equality as something relating to individual personality or appearance, and tends to ignore structural factors such as gender and race.

Staff generally suggested that gender, ethnicity or disability did not have a negative impact on students' placement experiences. As with previous research (Özbilgin and Tatli, 2006), it was common for staff to suggest that students' choice to do placements and their success in the placement experience was a matter of individual motivation and input. Additionally, staff reported that instances in which students had encountered difficulties as a result of their gender, disability or ethnicity were uncommon. This can be problematic, as it suggests that staff may not recognise equality issues unless they have direct experience of students reporting these. This neglects not only the fact that some students may not do placements because they are excluded at the point of access, but also that some students may not report such issues. Indeed, one member of staff interviewed did reflect that these issues may exist but are just not reported:

'I've never come across any students who have come to me and said 'well I don't think I got that because of my colour or my disability' or anything like that. But sometimes those things can be so subtle it's very difficult to show and prove.'

Dyslexia was the most commonly identified impairment in relation to disabled students, and staff members' discussion mainly focused on providing support for students in disclosing their dyslexia. A few members of staff reported that dyslexia is very prevalent in the industry and therefore may be less of a barrier for students than if they wanted to enter sectors of the labour market outside the creative industries.

Some staff members alluded to difficulties in ensuring students are treated fairly by employers when they may not wish to disclose their disability. This relates to a common challenge encountered by HEI staff in supporting disabled students to disclose their disability (ECU, 2008). This makes it difficult to ensure that a duty of care is extended when students enter work placements:

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'If the student does not want the employer to know they have a disability, how can they be fairly treated? To give them fair trial we need to be able to tell the employer at the beginning. But we can't unless the student is happy to declare it. We always encourage students, at least at interview stage, to declare, and if they need support at interview to tell the employer beforehand. A majority of students do, but there are some that don't want to. The grey area in the problem is that employers are a third party, they're not part of the university so you do have to get permission from the student to disclose.'

Other members of staff described difficulties in regulating employers to ensure they are fair in both selection and treatment of placement students:

'We can ensure that the employer has diversity policies but we can't control who they do and don't take on, because they're a business and its sometimes very difficult to identify they may not have taken on students maybe because they're disadvantaged and that can be difficult to measure.'

'I think it's in the pack that we send employers to ask for a copy of their equal opportunities statement. I must admit I don't often get them sent through, and it may be something we should be chasing up more, but sometimes it's very last-minute and short-notice placements, and so we don't always get that through, but it is something we do request.'

A small number of HEI staff reported incidences where there was a restriction of the choice of placements available to students with mobility-related disabilities, but that this was something that students generally work around. One placement officer spoke of how a wheelchair user wasn't able to do a placement at a small post-production company in Soho because the building was inaccessible. Despite the placement officer's attempts to locate alternative opportunities for this student, there are clearly issues of inequality of choice for the student. With smaller companies unable to facilitate students in wheelchairs, the onus appears to be on disabled students to adapt to the workplace or otherwise find somewhere that he or she fits, rather than the workplace adapting to the students and potential employees.

The prevalence of smaller employers in the sector and their capacity to make reasonable adjustments for disabled students was raised by staff in other institutions. It was also suggested that smaller organisations, which are highly competitive, are less likely than larger organisations to have fair selection

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procedures, and may not 'really understand about discrimination and ill health'. Two institutions reported incidences where students with mental health conditions faced difficulties in their work placements. One member of staff described how these difficulties were related to the fast pace of the creative sector, which may not be able to accommodate such students. Again, this suggests that the sector is inflexible to meeting the needs of students: students must adapt or leave.

Staff felt that international students whose first language is not English may be discriminated against because of employers' concerns about their communication skills.

Some staff thought that students from disadvantaged socioeconomic groups may face greater barriers in the placement process because of the prevalence of unpaid placements, and the reliance on social networks to find work, from which many are excluded:

'It's an industry that's so much about people you know, that if you're from a family that know people you're incredibly privileged. It's also about confidence, perhaps that's another thing for those demographics, if you don't feel confident it's extremely hard to go out there and sell yourself.'

Staff in three of the institutions worked actively to locate greater numbers of paid placements for these students, and pointed to the possibilities of offering students bursaries to support their placement learning.

Several members of staff described the dilemmas they faced in regulating employers to ensure they abided by fair practice in relation to pay. This included concerns that the culture of unpaid placements is too embedded to challenge it, but also that challenging employers who don't pay students fairly may have a negative impact on the opportunities available to their graduates:

'We go along with the national minimum wage council guidelines – that we only want it to be unpaid if the student is genuinely learning a lot. I don't know what happens in reality and we slightly turn a blind eye to it. It's a really tricky one because on the one hand I think it's wrong that the creative industries don't pay people who are working for them and I'd quite like to do something to change that, but I don't want to sacrifice this kind of cohort of graduates. We could say to employers 'we won't post your vacancy unless you pay' but then we would lose lots of vacancies.'

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Several staff members suggested that encouraging employers to pay students fairly can be difficult, especially because of the effects of the current recession on small employers in particular. In another institution, while staff encouraged students to look for paid placements, they were aware that some students will be out of pocket through getting a placement at a 'good' company:

'We also say to the students that, you know, they shouldn't be putting themselves into lots of debt to do a placement. Some of them want to go and work for Vivienne Westwood or whatever, and they were happy to pay whatever its costs just to be there and get it on their CVs.'

Such sentiments suggest a hierarchy of value attributed to different placements (where some companies look better than others on a student's CV, and will help them get a better job after they graduate). This can be exploited by companies who know that, because students are desperate to undertake a placement at their company, they can offer these as unpaid. Furthermore, this later 'pay-off' for doing unpaid placements in such companies means that those who have the financial resources to do so will be at a further advantage upon graduating.

While most staff interviewed felt it important, albeit difficult, to challenge the culture of unpaid placement, a member of staff in one HEI raised questions about whether students should be paid on placement or if, in fact, they should pay the employer:

'I think probably students gain far more from work experience than a company gains. You could argue that the students should be paying the company for the experience in some ways. I know what the benefits are to a company having work experience students there because they might come across somebody who is very good who they want to employ. But the chances are that that's not the case and it's very altruistic. You know, to have somebody in your studio has all kinds of risks attached to it, to be honest. And so it's a bit of give and take.'

In one HEI, where a dedicated placement unit served students doing sandwich-year placements, staff work with a range of agencies within the HEI, including mental health practitioners, disability coordinators and welfare officers, to ensure that a range of support mechanisms is available for students wishing to do placements, including students with children, and international students whose first language is

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not English. Thorough discussions with students help to ensure their specific needs are taken into account when finding them a placement. This member of staff also mentioned the importance of diversity training for careers and placement staff in ensuring they are able to support students from a range of equality groups; this was not mentioned by any other HEI. In another institution, the central careers service appeared to have strong relationships with student services as well as external professional organisations, such as the Royal National Institute of Blind People, which enabled them to direct students to specific help as and when they needed it.

However, in some HEIs there appeared to be a lack of joined-up work between careers and placement staff or academic staff and student support services. Some staff did not know what support was available to students while they were on placement. It was also evident that there were limitations to how this support carried over into the placement. For example, while careers staff in one HEI made reasonable adjustments to ensure their services were accessible to students, continuing these adjustments when students were on placement was deemed outside their remit.

Monitoring

Similarly to previous research in the area (Özbilgin and Tatli, 2006), this project found that none of the participating case study institutions had procedures to monitor the impact of work placements on student satisfaction among particular groups, such as disabled students or BME students. There were also no procedures to monitor the uptake of placements by students from different demographic groups. A placement unit in one HEI was developing equality-impact procedures to look at how their services are reaching certain groups, including international students and disabled students. However, it was unclear whether this will include monitoring the impact of placements on these groups. Another HEI was considering mapping which students take up placements via the central careers service. A lack of monitoring procedures clearly limits institutions' capacity to identify and address equality issues in the work placement process, including issues of equality of access, equality of experience and equality of outcome.

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Summary of research findings

- ⇒ Work placements were understood by HEI staff as central to enhancing students' career prospects, developing their real-world understanding of work, improving confidence and providing access to key contacts. However, staff in one institution raised concerns that placements can distract students from their studies, and that it may be better for students to pursue placements after graduating.
- ⇒ The types of work placement undertaken varied greatly across and within institutions. All but one of the HEIs had at least some courses that offered placements as a compulsory or optional element. This illuminates a lack of consistency in the role of work placements across higher education arts and cultural institutions, and across courses. Where placements are not offered as a formal part of a programme of study, there can be an over-reliance on students' self-motivation, which can neglect those students who may require support in locating and undertaking placements.
- ⇒ Even when work placements are offered as part of a programme of study, there is a strong emphasis on self-directed placements. This can neglect the barriers some students, particularly students from disadvantaged socioeconomic groups, face in this process, such as a lack of industry contacts or knowledge of where to look for opportunities, and how to 'sell yourself' to employers.
- ⇒ Staff raised concerns about the availability of placement opportunities in the sector, which restricts HEIs from making placements a formal or compulsory element of every course. The underlying issue of over-supply of graduates for the sector has important consequences for the ways in which HEIs can support students wanting or requiring placement opportunities.
- ⇒ Arrangements for supporting and managing placements varied considerably across and within the institutions, with some having specific placement units or officers providing dedicated support.
- ⇒ The level of placement support available to students varied considerably, and tends to focus on pre-placement support.
- ⇒ Work placements are a resource issue. Staff reported considerable restrictions on the level of resources available to manage placements and provide ongoing support to ensure students are treated fairly, such as through monitoring visits. This can leave students vulnerable. However, there were some examples of valuable ongoing support in the form of a placement mentor.

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- = Opportunities for students to feed back on their experiences varied. This may be a missed opportunity for HEIs to identify equality issues.
- = Many staff struggled to identify equality issues in the work placement process. Disclosure of dyslexia, access for wheelchair users, and language difficulties among international students were the most common issues raised. Some staff referred to the difficulties faced by students from disadvantaged socioeconomic groups in undertaking unpaid placements.
- = None of the institutions monitored the take-up or impact of placements among different student groups. This makes it very difficult for HEIs to identify and address equality issues.
- = In some institutions, there was evidence of embedded and joined-up working between different staff within the HEI to support placements, such as between placement staff and academics, or between careers services and key student support services. However, this appeared to be absent in the majority of institutions.

6 Employers' work placement arrangements

The research findings presented here do not seek to represent the practices of the whole of the arts and cultural sector or its subsectors. Rather, this section reports on the work placement practices of those employers interviewed for this project, and identifies some of the key equality issues within these practices.

Motivations for offering placements

There was consensus among all the employers interviewed about the importance of students undertaking work placements in the sector. They described a range of benefits to students:

- = developing a better understanding of the realities of work
- = learning how to apply their knowledge in real-world settings
- = enhancing students' skills
- = helping students decide what part of the sector they want to enter
- = building students' confidence
- = dismantling students' preconceptions of what working in the sector involves

Employers' motivations for offering placements varied. The smaller employers tended to have more informal placement arrangements, and the decision to take on a placement student at a particular time was generally prompted by a specific need, such as developing a new area of business, or wanting an additional pair of hands. For these employers, placements were very much centred on a skills-exchange model:

'I feel it's important that they learn something, but also that I get something out of it too. I've got someone to help me with things, so it's useful to them and useful to me.'
Self-employed silversmith

'We train them up and they're very useful for our company. It certainly benefits the company but it's also beneficial to the student. They wouldn't get this experience anywhere else.'

Small architect firm

This model of a two-way relationship was also present among publicly subsidised host organisations, who spoke of the benefits that students bring:

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'Being a charity we have a lot of work that needs to be achieved and it wouldn't necessarily fall into a role, so there is a huge benefit by having a placement because we can get them to both learn and be able to do some of the groundwork for us.'

Community arts organisation

Other motivations mentioned by host organisations included enhancing the company's creativity by bringing in people with fresh ideas and perspectives, spotting talent, and developing the future workforce. One host organisation saw placements as providing professional development opportunities for their employees through experience of leading, mentoring and supporting young people who want to enter the sector.

Most host organisations saw offering placements as an opportunity rather than a duty. Two specifically identified increasing the diversity of the sector as a motivation for offering placements. 'Shaking off' the image of the sector as being middle class was identified by one of these organisations as a key objective that informs their placement arrangements. A number of host organisations also suggested that their workforce must be as diverse as the audiences they cater for, illuminating more instrumental motivations for increasing diversity in the sector:

'Our audience is really diverse and our staff aren't as diverse. We want to try to marry that up. If you have the same people from similar backgrounds with similar values sitting within your development team, they're all going to come up with the same ideas.'

Large independent television production company

Four of the 11 host organisations offered permanent employment or freelancing opportunities to placement students.

Types of work placement

The types of placement that host organisations offered ranged from sandwich-year placements to shorter placements of two to four weeks, with some mid-length traineeships or internships of three to six months. Some placements were full-time, others part-time or just once a week, depending on the length.

It was commonly stated that placements were much more effective for students when they lasted for longer than just a few weeks, with an ideal of 12 weeks per

6 Employers' work placement arrangements

placement. These longer placements allowed students to get a greater sense of the organisation and obtain something beneficial from it. Longer placements also provided benefits for employers, who could gain a better understanding of a student's performance, helping them to identify young talent.

One host employer who offered regular placements suggested that the investment he puts into training placement students demands longer placements for him to see a return:

'I don't want anyone for under 20 days. It's not worth it because I teach them and show them a lot. It should be a two-way thing. And so if I show them and then after 10 days they go off, I have nothing from that experience. I just invest my time for nothing.'

Self-employed silversmith

It is clear that there are many benefits to longer placements for both host organisations and students. However, not all students are financially able to undertake longer placements, especially when they are unpaid. Some students may also have other responsibilities, such as part-time jobs or childcare, which limit the time they can dedicate to placements. Therefore an important consideration for HEIs and employers when designing placement opportunities should be how to balance the benefits gained from longer placements with the financial and practical circumstances of students.

One host organisation offered only placements that lasted no longer than four weeks, and explained that this was seen to be financially viable for students:

'You get organisations that have these long internships where they're paid a small amount of money, and that's really predicated on coming from a wealthy family with independent income who can afford to work for no money for a long period of time. So our work placements recognise that this is a short period of time, and so it should be financially viable.'

Large broadcaster

Two larger host organisations offered shorter placements for reasons related to pay. One organisation offered only unpaid placements of two weeks. This duration was explained as determined by principles of fairness, and was informed by government guidance on a suitable length of unpaid placements:

6 Employers' work placement arrangements

'It's going with the guidelines that the government has set. We don't want to take advantage of people. We try to keep the placement as genuinely work experience, not just free labour. That's why we say two weeks is enough.'

Large independent television company

Such sentiments raise questions about what counts as work experience, and what counts as work that should be paid. While students are likely to be learning and gaining experience of the sector while on placement, it is also likely that in some – if not most – cases, students are undertaking labour that is of benefit to the company. This was reflected upon by one interviewee, who mentioned the potential costs and risks involved in offering placements:

'In many ways, we don't need to do placements, and you can actually get into more of a quagmire once you do because there are stories of people going to tribunals about not getting paid, etc, and even though we work within the lines of it, I think it's quite a blurry area in terms of 'are they at work' or 'are they a volunteer'? So I think it's an opportunity to offer placements, but it's probably easier not to, because then you start getting into that, especially now with the big argument about abusing the trust of students.'

Large theatre company

This grey area of what can be considered simply work experience, and what should be regarded as work that contributes to the profitability or running of the host organisation, needs to be tackled as a wider issue. Specifically, clearer guidance is required on students' legal rights in relation to pay, not just to support students, but also to assist employers.

Recruitment for placements

Host organisations reported using a range of methods to recruit work placement students. It was common for employers to report receiving letters and CVs from students interested in undertaking a placement in their organisation. Larger organisations had dedicated spaces on their websites through which applications are made online. Some host organisations reported word of mouth as a major route through which students approach them, via either fellow students or websites such as www.ratemyplacement.co.uk. One host organisation had advertised on a placement website for students and graduates. In most cases, employers reported receiving many more applications than they could accommodate, illustrating the great demand for placements in the sector.

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Some host organisations had links with specific universities and colleges from which students are directed via tutors or placement officers, or through advertising on university careers websites. One large host organisation, which offers over 200 sandwich-year placements in fashion, runs a university presentation roadshow to promote its placement scheme.

One self-employed interviewee reported asking HEI staff for recommendations for particular students. Another had received a recommendation of a student from a friend, rather than from the HEI at which the student was based.

Several host organisations had set up procedures designed to widen diversity in the work placement process. Larger host organisations that received applications via their websites saw this as a way of ensuring fairness and recruiting placement applicants beyond higher education students and those whose friends or family members work in the organisation. One host organisation also had a dedicated six-month paid placement scheme for people with disabilities.

One host organisation had developed a new training placement scheme, specifically designed to support diversity in the sector. It publicised the scheme to HEIs, schools, colleges and community organisations in order to open it up and recruit students from a range of backgrounds, rather than 'going through the same group of people'.

However, 'diversity issues cannot be addressed simply through statements of intent and commitment. Diversity and equality are not only processes but they are also outcomes' (Özbilgin and Tatli, 2006). When asked further about what 'diverse backgrounds' meant, this host organisation focused on disciplinary backgrounds rather than gender, social class, ethnicity or disability:

'We're interested in people that are not just from a film and television background. We're interested in people with a history degree, a science degree, people who maybe just didn't think television was for them.'

Large independent television production company

Thus, while there is growing attention to issues of diversity among host organisations, there is some uncertainty about what diversity looks like in practice.

What makes a good placement student?

In most cases, a selection process was used to recruit students for placements. More formal criteria included age (for example, at least 18 years old), whether they are studying a course in a relevant and related discipline, whether they have an awareness of and interest in the organisation and its output, the education sector they are in, what institution they are enrolled at, and the time they have available to undertake placements of particular lengths.

There were also more unwritten criteria that appeared to inform host organisations' selection processes, as well as their evaluation of the success of a student placement. One host organisation, a television company based in London, has an unwritten rule that students have to live in London, or state on their CV that they are willing to relocate for the duration of the two-week placement. This was driven by the requirements on placement students to be able to arrive early or stay late on set. This can be particularly problematic for ensuring equality of access to students nationally, and for those living in rural areas, as a large proportion of the creative sector is located in London and other large cities. Furthermore, while some students will be assisted by their family in paying for accommodation in London, this is not the case for all students.

When describing what makes a good candidate and who will 'fit' in a workplace, it was more common for host organisations to provide a list of personal attributes rather than particular skills or knowledge. These attributes and individual qualities included reliability, commitment, drive, enthusiasm, a good work ethic, autonomy and 'get up and go':

'It's about having all the qualities that you would be motivated, organised and punctual, attitude, attitude, attitude.'

Large broadcaster

As discussed below, not all students are able to present themselves in this way, as 'go-getting' and 'self-motivated'. Host organisations' perception of the 'ideal candidate' can thus lead to the tacit exclusion of students from equality groups.

For smaller employers, a lack of time and resources to support students appeared to enhance the premium on students' capacity to work independently and autonomously:

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'I hadn't taken on students before because of the amount of time I'd have to invest, so whoever I take on has to be very self-sufficient.'

Self-employed web designer

This can create particular equality issues with regard to the types of students that smaller organisations and sole employers will be willing to take on. Concerns over resourcing mean host organisations can unwittingly discriminate against students who may need, or appear to need, additional support while on placement.

One host organisation suggested that students who undertook placements outside their studies, for example in their holidays or after graduation, were generally more motivated and driven, and thus 'better', because they had undertaken a placement through choice. This host organisation felt that, in contrast, those who do a placement because they are required to do so by their university or college can be 'a bit slack'. This replicates the greater value placed on self-driven placements among HEI staff, and students, which this report has identified as intensifying equality issues in the work placement process. Not all students are able to undertake placements, especially placements outside their course.

One host organisation talked about a 'personality match' between organisation and student:

'It would have to be a personality match. If they're easy to get on with, if I tell them to get on with something, they do it. If somebody works here, they've got to be funny and have a laugh. There's all those sort of personality fits, that's a prerequisite. If they're grumpy and not funny, or miserable, or not prepared to do things, or they bore easily [...] all things like that, I can't cope with.'

Self-employed web designer

The presence of these unwritten criteria can create inequality in the work placement process and contribute to the homogeneity of the sector. Host organisations' selection of students is clearly, although perhaps unwittingly, informed by a desire to select someone who is 'like them'. As the sector is currently characterised as predominantly middle class, white and male, some students will not fit with this vision of a 'good' candidate.

One host organisation, which recruits students through receiving applications and CVs from students themselves rather than via HEIs, also said that students from particular institutions are 'better' than others.

Management, coordination and support during placements

Host organisations reported a range of practices and processes in managing placements, ranging from formal structures to more relaxed and ad hoc arrangements.

Some host organisations described having formal inductions or pre-placement meetings for students, in which there were opportunities for students to discuss their expectations and what areas of the organisation they wanted to work in, or what skills they wanted to develop. Some much larger organisations had dedicated parts of their websites to providing guidance specifically for work placement students. Smaller employers used more informal procedures.

Some host organisations had dedicated members of staff responsible for managing and supervising work placement students. Again, this was more common in larger organisations, where managing placements was a key aspect of someone's role. One large host organisation also offered its placement students the opportunity to undertake a paid training course.

Three host organisations have particularly meaningful relationships with local HEIs, where they were given extensive support in offering and facilitating successful placements. One local HEI held special events for host organisations to introduce them to what placements involved and outline some of the key issues and anxieties students may experience when going on a placement. However, few host organisations described any similarly embedded, ongoing or particularly meaningful relationships with HEIs when students were undertaking a placement as part of their course. Communication between host organisations and HEIs mainly included requests for health and safety documentation, signing agreements or contracts, and sometimes receiving guidance from HEIs on what information students need to know (such as appropriate workplace behaviour and key members of staff). This mirrors findings of previous research (Özbilgin and Tatli, 2006) and reflects the emphasis on pre-placement support within HEIs' practices, where students often felt they were left to their own devices once they were on the placement.

Some host organisations welcomed this minimal involvement, and some, particularly small employers, found such intervention burdensome:

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'I can understand things like health and safety, the documentation I had to complete, but I'm self-employed in a competitive industry and I don't like regulations that hamper me. Really it's a case of 'these are my rules and you will fit in with those'. With a big company they've got health and safety policies, they've got people who they can allocate to these sort of things, but with me if I'm fiddling around doing something that's not earning money, I'm not earning money, so I minimise those things.'

Self-employed web designer

These resourcing issues are highly significant to employers' capacity to ensure they can support inclusive placements. This poses a challenge for HEIs to forge positive relationships with host organisations that ensure students are supported and protected, while not enforcing burdensome procedures that employers ignore.

It is, of course, still possible for an effective relationship to be forged between host organisations and students without the intervention of a third party. However, a limited presence of HEIs within the placement arrangement can be problematic and may leave some students vulnerable if they are not offered a positive working environment. As was confirmed in interviews with students, a lack of communication with HEI staff while on placement can mean students are left without a mediator or recourse to address equality issues that can arise.

Evaluation and feedback

Smaller employers reported having very informal feedback procedures. As the student was working closely with the employer, feedback was given informally and regularly throughout the placement.

A number of host organisations mentioned having their own internal feedback and evaluation systems. This included post-placement evaluation meetings or appraisals where students and their assigned line manager discussed how the placement had gone and how this would inform their future learning and career plans. Such procedures were seen to provide essential opportunities not just for the student, but also for the host organisation to learn from students' experiences and adapt their practices for the future.

Some host organisations completed feedback forms for HEIs when a placement finishes, providing information on basic areas such as the student's punctuality,

or how many days they worked, as well as more evaluative assessments on their performance. Another host organisation spoke about an enquiry project, where students were asked to conduct a small piece of research on an aspect of the host organisation's work while they were on placement, and to provide a written report at the end. This formed part of the students' assessment of their placement, and the host organisation also used this research to inform its practice.

Only one of the host organisations received any formal feedback from HEIs after the placement, which consisted of the results of a students' satisfaction survey conducted by the HEI. This sharing of student feedback between host organisations and HEIs can be extremely valuable to help all parties develop their practice.

Procedures for addressing equality issues and supporting students from equality groups

Several of the host organisations interviewed had equal opportunities policies that informed their work placement arrangements. Some of the larger organisations also had dedicated members of staff or teams working on diversity and equality within the company, who worked closely with members of staff working on placements. Smaller employers were more likely to report that they did not have such policies, and took a more relaxed approach to dealing with any issues that may arise. These host organisations were also less able to identify equality issues in the work placement process and a lack of diversity in the sector, and they interpreted success as a matter of individual personality, skill and self-motivation:

'I'm not really aware of those issues. Basically, in the creative industries it's down to the quality of the work, and it's very easy to spot whether somebody's good enough to do it or not. If the portfolio's not good enough, they don't get the job, simple as that.'

Self-employed web designer

Some of the larger host organisations were aware of equality issues in the work placement process and had a range of strategies and procedures they deployed to support and recruit students from equality groups, such as BME students and students from disadvantaged socioeconomic groups. Strategies mentioned included ensuring advertisements for placements are accessible to a range of candidates, making a clear commitment to HEIs to recruit students from a diverse pool, and making sure that initial discussions with students provide them with

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opportunities to raise any needs they may have. However, one host organisation had some problems in opening up such a dialogue:

'That's a conversation that can be difficult for the student to have, which is why, with the HEI, we have said that as part of the preparation before going into the placement it's a good idea to say "these are the questions you will be asked by the host, and think about how you're going to respond"'

Community arts organisation

As with interviews with HEI staff, host organisations struggled to identify any occasions where they felt students from particular groups faced problems in the work placement process. Few host organisations had experience of students doing placements who had a disability, beyond dyslexia. While most asserted that they would do their best to accommodate these students, many were unclear as to how reasonable adjustments could be made to accommodate students with particularly physical disabilities, such as wheelchair users. This means that host organisations are often reactive to the requirements of disabled students, rather than proactive in ensuring their workplaces are set up to be inclusive and accessible to incoming students and employees. However, one large broadcaster has a dedicated access unit which ensures reasonable adjustments are in place for students.

With some host organisations that had hosted disabled students, there was an emphasis on the student's adapting to the needs of the workplace (especially the fast-paced, unpredictable and intensive nature of work in the creative sector), rather than the workplace seeking to meet their needs. For example, one interviewee described how dyslexic students can be incorporated into the workplace if they are able to 'manage' their disability:

'My current placement student has dyslexia. He is very good at checking his work and he's very articulate and good at English. I had somebody else on work experience who desperately wanted to be a designer and he had dyslexia and it was hopeless. It just isn't going to happen. In this work, you're dealing with images and words and it was hopeless because he couldn't spell and he couldn't recognise the fact that something was misspelt so you basically had to do all the work for him and it didn't work, and I couldn't explain this to him. He got upset and said 'that's discrimination' and I said 'it isn't; it's practicality'. But with my current placement student, he's just so attentive of that sort of thing, it's not an issue. You wouldn't know he has dyslexia.'

Self-employed web designer

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One host organisation, an independent television production company, said that while they would not discriminate against any applicant on the basis of their disability, it could be that students with particular impairments may be put off from applying for placements within their company because of the nature of the work. In this host organisation, placement students generally take on the role of 'runner', which implies a very specific capability. A few host organisations identified how some students may be excluded from undertaking placements because they lack the financial resources, and sought ways to better support these students. However, in some cases the normalisation of unpaid placements in the sector was unchallenged.

Several host organisations made it clear that students would be paid for placements, and that they felt it was important for students to be paid. This included sandwich-year placements, which included a payment of around £14,000 to £15,000 for the year; and a six-month traineeship placement, which paid students a salary plus expenses. One host organisation offered only unpaid placements, but these were only two or three days a week, which was seen to enable students to work around the lack of payment. This organisation was also looking to develop funded placements through a central government scheme, in order to level the playing field for students from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds. However, this was only in the early planning stages at the time of the interview.

For smaller employers, finding the resources to pay students can be difficult. One self-employed interviewee had no set procedure for paying work placement students, and described experiencing difficulties in paying students up front, only for them to disappear. Whether he paid students, and how much he paid them, varied depending on how long they were on the placement and how engaged they were with it. Evidently there are equality issues here, where more motivated students may be financially rewarded. Another host organisation emphasised the importance of placement students earning their pay:

'Being a one-man band, I can't afford to have someone sitting there to just do nothing, just being an overhead, so he has to earn all the time he's here, or at least cover his salary plus a little bit more. He gets £14,000 for the year.'

Self-employed web designer

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One self-employed fashion designer had paid her placement student and reclaimed money back through an employability and business development programme.

A number of the host organisations had procedures to monitor the types of students who undertake placements. This was generally by gender, ethnicity and disability. However, information on social class was not included on monitoring forms. It was also unclear how host organisations used this information to inform their future practices and procedures. Self-employed interviewees did not have such mechanisms, reflecting their more informal work placement procedures. It may be that, as they directly work with placement students, such employers do not feel the need to monitor this regularly. One large host organisation did not have monitoring procedures in place, but regarded this as an area for development.

Summary of research findings

- = Host organisations' motivations for hosting placements included bringing in fresh ideas to the organisation and developing future talent. A number of organisations discussed the role placement students play in the organisation's success through the additional labour they provide. Most saw placements as an opportunity rather than a duty. Some of the larger organisations also discussed the important public duty of widening access to the sector.
- = Placements lasting more than a few weeks were perceived to be much more effective for both students and host organisations. However, these may exclude students from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds.
- = There is evidence of a lack of clarity around what is considered work experience, and what is contributing to the profitability or running of an organisation. This is likely to lead to exploitation of students, and suggests an urgent need for greater guidance on students' legal rights related to pay.
- = Host organisations discussed a range of unwritten criteria that informed their selection of students, including students' self-motivation, reliability, independence and autonomy. This raises equality issues where employers may discriminate against students who may not appear confident or who may be seen to require additional support.

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- = Few host organisations reported meaningful relationships with HEIs. Some suggested that intervention from HEIs can be burdensome. While some student–employer relationships can be productive without a third party, this lack of mediation can leave some students vulnerable.
- = Despite a commitment to diversity and equality among some host organisations, there was some uncertainty about what this meant in practice. Smaller and sole employers took a more relaxed approach to equality and diversity and did not have policies in place.
- = Very few host organisations had procedures to monitor the types of students who undertook placements. When this did take place, it was generally by gender, ethnic group and disability. While some host organisations talked about the creative sector as a middle-class space and recognised the barriers faced by students from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds, host organisations were unsure of how to monitor and gather information on students' socioeconomic background.
- = Host organisations typically did not see gender or ethnicity as equality issues. Few had experience of disabled placement students beyond those with dyslexia, and in some cases there was uncertainty as to how reasonable adjustments could be made to accommodate students. There was an onus on students to adapt to the needs of the workplace, rather than on the host organisation to seek to meet the needs of the student. This is likely to exclude students from equality groups who do not feel they can 'fit in'.
- = Some host organisations recognised that students from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds are excluded from work placements, and some were looking to make placements more accessible for these students. However, on the whole the normalisation of unpaid work placements was unchallenged.

7 The student experience: overarching and specific equality issues

As previous research has identified, the creative sector (and the labour market as a whole) is not a model of equality and diversity, and this plays out in the work placement process. However, our research reveals that students were not really aware of these inequalities, or were resigned to an acceptance that this is just the way it is. At the same time, there was a tendency for students to hold on to the ideal that success will be rewarded on merit, and if they tried hard enough, were motivated enough and displayed the 'right' attributes, they could overcome these potential inequalities.

However, research about social inequality reveals the ways in which inequalities are reproduced because some groups have more resources (not just financial, but also cultural and social) that enable them to get ahead.

This section begins by looking at these overarching issues in greater detail, before examining the more specific issues encountered by students from the three equality groups considered here. The quotes are drawn from interviews with students; the boxed examples use pseudonyms.

Hidden inequalities: unquestioned norms and personalised responses to inequality

While students discussed a range of challenges and barriers within the placement experience, there was great ambiguity around how to articulate and respond to these. Students' understandings of, and responses to, the challenges they encountered in the work placement process must be understood within the context of wider embedded cultural practices within the creative industries sector.

Firstly, a common response to issues of inequality in the work placement process among students – and among many of the HEI staff and employers who participated in the research – was the perception that 'this is how it is' within the sector. As such, issues of inequality or unfairness had to be accepted. For example, the culture of long hours, the prevalence of unpaid work, and a masculine work culture were often described as 'normal' or 'industry standard' and too embedded to challenge. Inequality within the sector was seen as an individual rather than a collective struggle that students just had to accept and deal with alone.

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Secondly, there was a common belief that students' success in the placement process was largely due to their own efforts and determination as individuals. Being successful in getting and completing a placement was about being the particular type of person required for the sector: driven, flexible and self-motivated. This was particularly evident in the expectation, expressed by all respondents, that students would undertake placements in their own time, often unpaid, and find them through their own contacts. It was suggested by some participants that these self-driven placements demonstrate motivation and employability to potential future employers:

'You have to drive your career. I have taken control of my own career path in that way and so the fact that my placement wasn't organised for me could only be an advantage, really.'

'If you really go for it and do unpaid work experience, you've got some really interesting things on your CV. That means they think you've got some kind of drive and are worth taking on.'

'I've done it for a month and I wasn't paid. I think it just shows a bit of commitment, really.'

Ed is studying broadcasting. He is 20 years old and from a middle-class family.

Ed considers himself to be entrepreneurial and is well focused on his goal of producing music videos. He started his own production company with his housemate, and received guidance and financial support for this from his family.

Ed has undertaken numerous placements with television and film companies, some advertised by his university and others that he found through a friend. Placements are not compulsory for his course, but are strongly encouraged:

'They suggest that you get work experience because it's more important than what they are teaching you. You have to make contact and you have to get out there, but it's not necessarily compulsory. It's just a strong suggestion. You won't fail the course if you don't, but you probably will fail your career if you don't.'

He thinks his university is very supportive of students doing placements, and often advertises opportunities via email. But he thinks that students have to be self-driven in finding placements:

'You should go looking for placement opportunities because it's not going to come to you [...] You have to make your own way.'

7 The student experience: overarching and specific equality issues

As discussed below, some students are better placed than others to take up this 'go-getting' approach. Understanding students' success in the work placement process as an outcome of individual motivation and drive, rather than being related to the social, economic and cultural resources they have available to them, is highly problematic. It can mean that for students such as Mel, having a bad work placement experience is seen as a fault of the individual:

'I found it really hard. I spoke to someone else who had done a placement at the same place and she had a much better time and experience of it. Maybe she had tougher skin. I don't know, it says something about me.'

Students also took a personalised approach to understanding and negotiating inequalities and unfair practices in the sector. Students struggled to identify or name discriminatory practices, and suggested that motivation and hard work as individuals determines how well people do in their placement:

'Well, I don't think there's discrimination. It's all down to the way you work and who you are, I believe.'

'I just think "I'm just here to learn, so deal with it"'

Even when students identified challenges associated with their gender, disability, ethnicity or socioeconomic status, they suggested that it was for them to adapt to the workplace, rather than for the host organisation to seek ways to meet their particular needs. For example, students talked about 'just dealing' with unpaid work, 'just being more driven' when encountering gender stereotypes, or creating their own solutions to challenges rather than asking for help. This was particularly evident in discussions with disabled students on the topic of disclosure, where it was common for students to assert that their disability was something they had to work around:

'My general attitude is, being slightly hard of hearing, I just sort of ignore it or pretend like I'm fine.'

For a few students, being identified as a member of a minority group was perceived to be an asset that gave them an advantage in getting a placement or finding work more generally. For example, some disabled students, such as Nikki, who has attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), discussed how they could be at an

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advantage over non-disabled students because of the introduction of employer schemes to recruit more people from equality groups into the industry:

'I could be at an advantage. The government has helped me a bit because they've put in this clause that you've got to have a certain amount of disabled people.'

A similar view was raised by BME students such as Ed. Ed has a mixed ethnicity, and sees this as something that made him stand out from the crowd:

'Sometimes you have to be realistic that race or gender can stand against you, but it can also work in your favour if you are sensible. I use my diversity in my favour, it makes me unique, different, so I just see that as a positive rather than a negative thing.'

However, some cultural, ethnic and social groups face more discrimination than others, and not all students can capitalise on their identity in this way.

Unequal access to resources required for a successful placement

Students' success in undertaking effective and enjoyable placements in the sector varied in relation to the level of resources to which they had access, including financial support, access to industry networks through which to locate placement opportunities, knowing how to communicate with colleagues, and knowing how best to present themselves to employers. These resources or 'capitals' (Bourdieu, 1986) provide advantage, but are not evenly distributed across different groups in society. Often, those from more affluent families also have high levels of social and cultural resources. In this research, students who had limited levels of such resources were disadvantaged in both finding and successfully completing work placements.

Social resources

A consistent theme in interviews with students was the premium placed on students locating placements themselves. Greater value appeared to be given to those self-directed placements that students found using their own contacts rather than asking for support from their university. This reflects a wider culture of word-of-mouth recruitment within the sector.

7 The student experience: overarching and specific equality issues

One consequence of this was that students who had friends or relatives in the creative industries, or were part of a social scene that surrounds the sector, had a clear advantage in locating placement opportunities.

Having access to the networks through which to source placements and to knowledge about the sector gleaned from people who work in it (Ball and Vincent, 1998) was considered to be an advantage in locating good placement opportunities:

'It's about being lucky enough to have a contact through a friend or family or something.'

'There are some sectors, like the sector that I want to go into, fashion, it's more about who you know than how good you are. Whether you know someone who's in that sector. It's very undermining.'

Masato is an international architecture and design student. Both his parents work in the arts and cultural sector. Masato took up an optional sandwich-year placement at an architectural firm in Spain, where his family lives. He found this through a personal contact of his father, who is an architect. The post was full-time and unpaid.

As a result of the placement, Masato felt more enthusiastic and engaged with the sector, and was planning a career in the industry. He enjoyed his placement, but felt that the company took advantage of his position. He worked long hours, sometimes from ten in the morning to ten at night. He believes all firms should provide more training and payment for placement students.

Not all students had the social resources through which they could locate placement opportunities, and many discussed the frustration they experienced in trying to get placements through other means. This included being highly persistent in cold calling employers or anonymously responding to adverts, which some students felt were less likely to result in a placement than if they had been recommended.

Some students said that having good relationships with academic staff was central to finding a good placements, and a number found their placements through being recommended by course tutors. Staff were regarded by students as having

7 The student experience: overarching and specific equality issues

valuable industry knowledge and contacts, which could assist students in locating placements in the industry. However, some students raised concerns that staff did not share their knowledge or contacts equally with all students, as discussed below.

Cultural resources

Having the right types of knowledge about the creative sector and knowing how to display this was a key factor that informed students' experience of the placement process. Getting a placement requires knowledge of how the placement process and the industry works: for example, knowing where to look for opportunities, or how to get your CV noticed amongst hundreds of other applicants, and being able to talk confidently and articulately about art and culture in interviews. However, these cultural resources are distributed unevenly across different social classes and ethnic groups.

Nada is a mature international student of mixed ethnicity. She is studying graphic design.

Nada took a summer internship doing graphic design for a publishing house. The placement was originally for two weeks, but lasted for almost three months. This was non-compulsory but strongly encouraged by the college. Nada was informed of the opportunity informally by her course tutor, who she is 'got on really well with' and whose husband worked at the publishing house as the creative director.

Nada felt that having contacts and motivation are key to getting a good placement. She felt that she was lucky to have contacts through her tutor. She also felt that, being a mature student, she had the confidence that other students didn't have:

'If hadn't had such a good relationship with my tutor I probably wouldn't have got this job, but not everyone has that confidence to go out there and sell themselves. There are a lot of other students out there who need some more motivation, and the college needs to take that on board and provide students with more information, there need to be more openings as well.'

7 The student experience: overarching and specific equality issues

Other research in higher education shows that these cultural resources inform student–staff relationships. McManus (2006) found that, in admissions to art and design courses, higher education staff look for students with attributes of confidence, motivation and enthusiasm for the subject. While these are seen as fair practices, McManus claims that staff’s image of the ideal candidate favours middle-class students who are familiar with the conventions of interviews and with ‘highbrow’ culture (for example, listing art-house films and literature as their influences, as opposed to popular film). Middle-class students were thus able to talk their way onto courses (McManus, 2006; Burke and McManus, 2009). It is possible that staff’s image of the ideal student also informs who and how they support students in the placement process. Carlo, a black, working-class student, spoke of his concerns that staff did not support all students equally in the placement process, but had their favourites who might be more ‘like them’:

‘There are favourites, and certain tutors did help certain students more than others. A lot of students didn’t get that extra help. Tutors recommended people for placements. I don’t know whether it’s because the favourites speak the same way they do, or are from the same region that they’re from.’

Financial resources

The financial strain of undertaking unpaid or low-paid placements meant that many students were selecting placements on the basis of their financial situation: for example, undertaking only paid placements or, where unpaid, only short-term placements. Other students followed different strategies that allowed them to ‘survive’ unpaid placements. These are discussed below.

There is great inequality in this process, where students from more affluent families have greater choice in which, and how many, placements they can undertake, and for how long. Mel compared her own ‘struggle’ to undertake placements with the experience of other students who had the social and financial resources to support them:

7 The student experience: overarching and specific equality issues

'I only did the one placement. Other people did additional stuff but a lot of them like the London scene, and they were having a lot of funding from their parents: they had their flat paid for them, all their degree paid for them. They didn't work the whole time they were at uni because they could do it in their spare time literally, but for me it was a struggle. My uni work did suffer because I was working part-time in a bar as well, until really quite late. I couldn't afford to go and do six weeks unpaid at all.'

In limiting students' choice of placement, the prevalence of unpaid placements ultimately has an impact on diversity in the sector, as was reflected on by many students:

'In Elle or Vogue it's run by upper-middle-class girls who live in Notting Hill and Daddy pays rent. That's why a lot of the industry looks like what it does, because people who work there work there for free. They have to be able to afford to be able to do that.'

Racial differences and discrimination

Students generally did not feel their ethnicity created any barriers for them, and the research uncovered few incidents of overt racial discrimination in the work placement experience.

One incident was shared by Natasha, a black fashion student who undertook two placements in fashion design companies in her sandwich year. In one of these placements, Natasha experienced racial discrimination by a colleague, where she was called 'the black girl' in front of other staff. Natasha was also very aware of being one of the only BME people at the company, which may have compounded the effect of this statement.

'There was a new lady that started. Once I spoke to her in her office then I went back out to where I was working she came up and said 'where's that black girl' kind of thing. I don't know if it was because she didn't think it was offensive or, I don't know, just the way that she said it as well. She said it out loud so everyone heard.'

Even though Natasha's placement was formally recognised by her institution and located through a dedicated placement team serving her course, she reported a lack of communication from her institution. Because of this lack of contact, she

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did not feel able or confident enough to report the incident to her university. This clearly makes it difficult for institutions to identify and respond to equality issues and fulfil their responsibility to ensure students do not face discrimination while on placement.

It is important to point out here that BME students are not a homogeneous group (Connor et al, 2004). BME students from the UK and those from overseas may experience different equality issues in the work placement process. Firstly, the profile and experiences of BME home students, who tend to come from disadvantaged socioeconomic groups, is likely to differ from those of international BME students who are able to finance studies overseas. Equality issues of race and ethnicity can thus be compounded by those of socioeconomic status for home BME students. We also found that a number of the international BME students interviewed had industry contacts in their home country, which they were able to draw upon for work placement opportunities as well as paid work when they returned home. All were proficient in English language and literacy. However, as discussed above, there was anecdotal evidence from staff and students that some international students were disadvantaged in the placement process, either because they lacked the social networks through which to locate opportunities, or because employers did not want to recruit students with a first language that is not English because of concerns regarding their communication skills.

Gender barriers in the work placement

Many of the female students we interviewed who did their placement in sectors of particular gender imbalance encountered negative gendered perceptions of 'women's work' and challenging work practices and cultures.

Some female students, particularly those who had undertaken placements doing technical or manual work, such as camera operation or set-design, felt that low expectations were placed on their capabilities to do work. This reflects research that illuminates women's experience of sexist comments and derision among colleagues in male-dominated fields of the industry (Skillset, 2009). Some female students felt they were being tested by men on their placement – for example, being told to carry very heavy equipment to see if they could do the work:

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'There is the attitude of well, actually, we know better: "we are men, she doesn't know"'

'There is a little bit of that inner "ah, you're trying to play on a boy's playground, then you're going to play hard"'

Other research shows that women working in the creative industries find the long hours and intensity of work contribute to a work culture that is hostile to women (Marcella et al, 2006; Skillset, 2009). This view was shared by many of the female respondents. For example, Mel felt she didn't experience sexism in the design company where she did her placement, yet reported that she was seen by male colleagues as too emotional, too communicative, and not tough enough:

'The guys were quite tough and "I'm getting on with my work and I don't really want to talk to you". The men particularly seemed really moody. I think the director preferred boys. I don't know, maybe boys have a stronger personality? Not as emotional? I suppose they think guys are better to deal with the intensity of the work. I do think the women have to act harder. The other woman who worked there would be really intense and uber-confident, sleek businesswoman kind of thing, and underneath I saw little bits of doubt, but you have to hide them.'

Many of the female students felt that in order to succeed, both in the placement and in the sector more generally, women need to be more determined and driven than their male counterparts:

'You have to go with all guns blazing, otherwise they think they know better.'

'I will be looked down as a woman, I know I will. But that's where it's up to me to prove my worth and that's where it's up to me to prove that yes, Asian girls can pick up and lift equipment, and yes, Asian girls can sit down and edit a whole programme, and to be able to prove these things to people who are very narrow-minded, I think is very important.'

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Polly is studying broadcasting and has done several placements, mainly in television. These were not compulsory, but she thinks placements are really encouraged by her university. On one placement she worked as a camera assistant. It was unpaid, but she thinks it's important to gain as much experience as possible. Polly managed to do the placement financially because she lives with her parents, has a student loan and works part-time. The placement required long hours, meaning she had to get up at 4.30am to travel to the placement and often didn't leave until about 8pm.

As a woman she is often in the minority on placements, and she sees the industry as 'very male-dominated'. She says she is well aware of the gender imbalance in the industry. On her placements, she has noticed that most of the camera and technical work is done by men while women tend to work in the office or doing make-up and hair:

'It was a little bit of a shock to the system at first because they are men and some of the jokes they come out with [...] It is a male environment.'

Polly never felt her placement work environment to be hostile, but just felt that people had lower expectations of her capabilities:

'Sometimes they might look at me and think "how can little old me handle it?" I do feel that sometimes it is going to be a disadvantage.'

However, she also thinks that it could work to her advantage over other candidates 'because you just stand out more because you're the only girl'.

Some of the female students described how negotiating these male-dominated environments involved adopting 'male traits' in order to be accepted by male colleagues:

'What do you need as a woman to make it, then, in that kind of industry? Balls!'

However, one student, who undertook her placement in an advertising agency, discussed the difficulties women face in taking on the assertive behaviour that is valued in that environment:

'Women who are angry get seen as hysterical because it isn't seen as ladylike, whereas for men it's seen as attractive, so it was hard to get my voice heard.'

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Finally, a number of female students who raised these concerns identified the importance of seeking out other female employees while on placement (or among staff at their institution) who provided inspiration, advice and a template for how to progress in male-dominated environments. This reflects other research suggesting that having female role models and mentors in the industry is a key factor in women's success in the creative industries (Skillset, 2009).

Disability, disclosure and access to support for disabled students

The disabled students we interviewed demonstrated very mixed feelings about their disability as a potential barrier in the work placement process. In part this reflected resistance among many of these students to self-identify as disabled, a resistance that has been found in other research with disabled students (Riddell et al, 2005). While many identified themselves as having specific impairments that come under the Equality Act 2010 definition of disability and were in receipt of the DSA, not all students identified with the term and did not see disability as part of their identity. It could be that students' refusal of the label 'disabled' is associated with a fear of being judged as incapable. This was captured by one student with dyslexia:

'It depends how you see yourself. You can say I have a disability because I can't read and write properly, but I'm not disabled in that I can't handle myself.'

This ambivalence around disability as an aspect of their self-identity was significant to how students understood their work placement experience. While some of these students felt they were able to deal confidently with employers in disclosing their disability and negotiating adjustments, some students reported dealing with any challenges they encountered on their own rather than asking for help or support.

For some students, there was uncertainty about how their disability would be viewed by employers. Some students hadn't disclosed their status to the host organisation while on work placement, or had struggled to do so.

In many of these cases, there was a fear among students around being seen as 'stupid' or 'not capable', and of not wanting to be singled out for special treatment. For example, Ruth, who has epilepsy, explained her fear of being judged negatively:

'I didn't tell anyone about my epilepsy, just because I felt like I couldn't trust them. I just don't like people sort of judging me, looking at me differently. I like people to get to know me first.'

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Clare is studying product design and has dyslexia. She is undertaking a work placement at a small, local design firm, which she arranged for herself, and does not form part of her course. Clare emailed many local companies looking for a placement opportunity:

'I harassed so many people. It took me ages to get it.'

She went for one day a week and the placement was unpaid.

Clare disclosed her dyslexia only to her manager, but says she was never sure whether to disclose it. She was fearful that people would discriminate against her because she worked differently from others:

'It's just scarier. I don't want to make them think I'm stupid, but I don't work like everybody else. I'm worried that I get penalised because I work differently or think differently or maybe I do things differently.'

Some disabled students were uncertain about how much employers understood about the nature of their disability. Some felt that employers may not take their disability seriously. This was particularly expressed by students with 'invisible' mental health conditions and learning difficulties such as dyslexia, rather than more visible, physical impairments:

'I don't think employers take dyslexia seriously.'

For students who did their placement with smaller employers, the difficulty of disclosing their disability was compounded by the size and set-up of the business. Faheem did a placement external to his studies in a small web-design company. He described how awkward it was to disclose his dyslexia because his only option was to disclose this either to the director, or to the designer to whom he reported directly. He felt there was no middle man to help mediate and ask for adjustments to be made to assist him in his work:

'It's very awkward, disclosing your dyslexia because you're then showing that you're not capable of doing a job. But if there's someone that you can talk to, that's not the director, that's not the designers, someone like the HR guy, maybe that's my own insecurity, that if I told the director I would kind of feel that somebody's looking over my shoulder just to double check.'

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It was also evident that some of the disabled students were undertaking placements in organisations with which they were familiar, or that they felt would be more equipped to make appropriate adjustments. This included students who did placements in public sector organisations, which were felt to be better able to support disabled workers. One student did a placement in a school that she had previously attended and that had prior knowledge of her ADHD. Joan, a mature student with severe osteoarthritis, chose to work in a local gallery she attended regularly:

'It could have had an impact on my placement. But I think that was one of the reasons I chose that particular place to approach because it's local and they know I've got a disability, because I had known them for a while and I had done workshops there. And so they know what I can do and how far I can go.'

This selection of placements that students believe will be more amenable to their needs means that disabled students do not have the same choices as other students.

One student with dyslexia who undertook a sandwich-year placement reported having part of his DSA support withdrawn because he was on placement and not recognised as a student for that year. While this issue was mentioned by only one student, it raises important questions about how support for disabled students is extended, or not, when they leave the university setting to undertake work placements as part of their study programme.

Being in the minority: who 'fits' in the workplace?

While few concrete incidences of discrimination were reported by students, many spoke of more subtle and intangible feelings of 'not fitting in'. As discussed in the background literature (Hutton et al, 2007), the creative industries workforce is characterised by a lack of diversity. Women, disabled workers and BME employees are in the minority, particularly in some subsectors and regions, and the profession is predominantly middle class. This lack of diversity did not go unnoticed by the students who took part in this research, and affected how they felt about their work placement experience.

Many of the female students we spoke to were aware of a gender divide in the creative sector which was highly visible within their work placement. Students

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observed occupational segregation where female employees predominantly did the communication work in offices or worked in hair and make-up, while men were more visible in technical and creative teams. Polly, who worked as a camera assistant on a television drama for her placement, described her experience as the only woman in the team:

'There were women in the make-up department and wardrobe, but with the technical crew like camera, lighting and sound it was all middle-aged men, basically. Then there was little, 19-year-old me, and I certainly was a fish out of water.'

Some students from disadvantaged socioeconomic groups also discussed feeling out of place because they didn't share the same accent, lifestyle or confidence as the middle-class employees in the company.

Mel is studying graphic media. She is a working-class student and the first in her family to attend university. She has always worked part-time to fund her studies.

Mel has undertaken a range of placements. In her second year, she won a four-week work placement at a London-based design company in a competition held by her university. The placement was external to the course. Mel was not paid, but was given money for lunch and travel.

Mel didn't really enjoy the experience. She found that the atmosphere was 'fake' and didn't feel she really fitted in:

'You feel that you're lower than them, it was even the way they talked. You know like really proper. Obviously you should talk properly and all that, but it just throws you off a little bit when you arrive. It's like you've not got enough money and the people you work with have a totally different lifestyle. In the future it's going to be about finding a space where I'm going to fit in.'

Several of the BME students talked about an awareness of being in the minority at their work placement. This included Faheem, who undertook two unpaid placements, one in an art gallery and another in a small web-design company:

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'I always kind of felt a little out of place. At the gallery, the first two times they had private views I was already aware that I was the only Asian person there. With the web-design placement I didn't see or feel any discrimination, I just noticed that it was this big white building and this big white box and these big white tables and big white computer and the people who worked there were white.'

These feelings of being 'a fish out of water' and of being 'out of place' can have consequences for students' aspirations and career decisions, where students may feel they will not be able to 'fit in' within specific sectors.

Financial barriers

As discussed above, students with fewer financial resources were restricted in their choice of placements. Students' selection of placements was often based on the financial means they had available to them. The prevalence of unpaid placements meant that some students were only able to take up one placement or shorter-term placements.

Almost all students were unaware of the legislation surrounding payment for work placements, or at best were confused by how it affected them. While a number of students raised concerns about the prevalence of unpaid placements, it was common for them to suggest that there was little they could do about this, because it was 'industry standard' and getting experience was so valuable:

'To be honest, I don't expect to get paid in work experience. It's just the way it is.'

In this research, we found a number of incidences where students were undertaking unpaid placements for which they should have been paid minimum wage. This included placements which students took externally to their course and where students were clearly doing work that went beyond shadowing. However, as discussed above, there is a problematic lack of clarity about what is considered work experience, oriented around students learning and developing their knowledge of the sector, and labour undertaken by students while on placement that is considered to contribute to the profitability and running of an organisation. This lack of clarity requires urgent attention.

Students reported a range of different strategies they used to cope with the lack of payment. Strategies included undertaking additional paid work outside the work placement and their studies, living with family or friends rent-free, staying

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with relatives close to the placement if it was far from home, or simply using their own money to fund the placement. The strategies that students took up to survive unpaid placements depended on a range of factors, including their financial circumstances, living arrangements and locality. One middle-class student was given money from her parents to stay in a hostel in London over her placement. Needless to say, not all students can afford to do this. Some of the disabled students discussed how the financial support they received from their DSA was central to enabling them to do the placement.

Carlo is a BME student and is studying fashion. He did a compulsory, accredited, three-month placement at a men's tailor. It was unpaid and payment of travel or lunch expenses was not offered.

On the placement Carlo worked normal office hours, but feels that he was lucky and that this was an exception. He thinks there is an unfair expectation on placement students to work long hours and to work unpaid. Carlo is not financially supported by his parents and survives on his loan and his part-time job in a hotel. He was told by staff at his university that unpaid placements are normal:

'I thought they could have at least paid for transport, but there was nothing. The university told me that usually in those sort of places they only pay you if you're a specialist. For three months that is quite a lot of time to work unpaid. During those three months, yes, I learnt a few things, but I didn't have much money. If I didn't have work, then I don't think I would have managed.'

While Carlo thinks placements are useful, he doesn't think he can undertake another one because of his part-time job and studies:

'I don't physically have the time or the energy to do placement, do this work and then study as well, it's just too much.'

The difficulty of undertaking unpaid placements was also compounded for some students by a culture of long hours experienced within the host organisation. While many of the students interviewed worked regular hours and did not feel that they were expected to stay longer, a number of students felt they were judged negatively if they had a lunch break or left the office at 5 or 6pm when other employees were working into the evening:

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'The hours were 9am to 6pm. When you went they didn't really talk. You feel like you can't be seen to be walking away from your desk or leaving early. Sometimes I didn't go for lunch. You're expected to stay at your desk, it's just so committed that people felt uncomfortable to even go for lunch. You have to look completely and utterly 100 per cent committed otherwise you're out.'

Navigating this culture of long hours was particularly difficult for students who had to undertake other part-time work after their day's work on the placement, and therefore simply couldn't satisfy the unspoken expectation that they would stay late.

'I had another job at a pub directly opposite the work placement offices and so at 6pm I just had to run down the stairs as fast as possible and put on an apron and start pulling pints. There was no possibility for me to stay late, but the culture with all those kind of businesses is that your day finishes at 6pm but actually you stay until 7 or 7.30pm. I think sometimes they thought I was just running away. I said, I have to do another eight hours now! They weren't very supportive. I think their expectations of interns are extremely high. They play a really hard game.'

While our research did not include any students with dependent children, it is vital to recognise how this culture of long working hours can be particularly challenging for these students.

Summary of research findings

- = Students found it difficult to identify and address equality issues in their work placement experience. The normalisation of issues of inequality meant that students were often resigned to an acceptance that this is 'just the way it is'.
- = Students felt they had to deal with or work around issues of inequality as a personal rather than a collective matter.
- = Success in the work placement process is highly dependent on students' access to financial, social and cultural resources, which are not equally distributed.
- = Academic staff can provide students with essential industry contacts and advice; however, there were some concerns as to how equally these are shared among students.
- = Getting a 'good' placement was considered to be largely due to students' capacity to be driven, confident and entrepreneurial in where to look for placements and how to 'sell themselves' to employers. Not all students were able to take up this approach.

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- = The normalisation of unpaid placements was difficult for students to challenge and led to many students selecting placements based on their financial ability. Students took up strategies to work around the lack of pay, such as taking on additional jobs, staying with parents or friends rent-free, or simply going out of pocket. Other students felt unable to take up further placements because they couldn't afford to do so.
- = There was evidence from students' experiences that a lack of clarity and awareness around students' legal rights in relation to pay can lead to exploitation.
- = Some students were expected to work long hours and felt they would be judged negatively if they did not do so. This can be particularly restrictive for students who have part-time jobs or family commitments.
- = Students reported few direct or concrete incidences of discrimination related to their gender, ethnicity, disability or socioeconomic status. However, many reported feelings of 'not fitting in', which can affect students' future career decisions and ultimately the diversity of the sector.
- = Female students undertaking placements in areas of female under-representation spoke of encountering gender stereotypes and hostile, macho work cultures. Many found these difficult to challenge and felt they had to work harder to prove themselves to male colleagues.
- = There was some evidence of disabled students selecting placements on the basis of an organisation's capacity to make adjustments for them, for example, undertaking placements at organisations with which they are already familiar.
- = Students who come under the Equality Act 2010 definition of disability felt great ambivalence about the label 'disabled'. This informed the ways in which students approached issues of disclosure in the placement process, with some students fearing that employers would see them as incapable or in need of special treatment.
- = A lack of mediation between host organisations, students and HEIs can leave students vulnerable to challenging and unfair work practices.

8 Conclusion and recommendations

Work placements can provide an important way for students to gain skills, knowledge and industry contacts that enhance their employability. This is particularly true for students who wish to enter the arts and cultural sector, where students have to go the extra mile to get a foot in the door and where employers place great value not just on qualifications and skills, but also on industry knowledge.

This research provides fresh evidence on the barriers that students from equality groups face in trying to access and survive higher education work placements, specifically within the arts and cultural sector. Tackling these barriers is central to the wider challenge of overcoming the lack of diversity in the sector and dismantling the profound inequalities of access to one of the key growth sectors in the economy (Cabinet Office, 2009).

This study has revealed that, while there is enormous value placed on the benefits that work placements can offer students, there is a lack of parity in the role of placements across and within arts and cultural HEIs. Some students lack access to formal opportunities to undertake placements as part of their programme of study, even though these are not just strongly encouraged, but are expected. Restrictions on resources inform the ways in which HEIs are able to manage placements, particularly in light of an over-supply of arts and cultural students. A lack of structured opportunities to undertake placements that are supported by HEIs can lead to inequality of access by placing the onus on students to locate placements themselves and to undertake these outside their programme of study. As we have seen, some students are in a better position than others to take up such independent and self-directed placements.

The research has illuminated an overarching expectation on students' self-motivation and drive both in finding placements and in making the most of them. Not all students have the resources available to take up such an approach, and subsequently they are not on a level playing field when it comes to finding and surviving placements. Deeply embedded notions of the 'ideal student' and 'ideal work placement candidate' were uncovered in this research that work in favour of middle-class, white, male and non-disabled students.

8 Conclusion and recommendations

It is important to recognise that the research focused on the equality issues experienced by those students who had undertaken placements. This research was therefore unable to speak directly about the equality issues faced by students who are excluded at the very point of accessing work placements. It is important to tackle assumptions and expectations that place the onus on students to be active, autonomous and self-driven in finding and organising their placements, in order to support all students in undertaking inclusive and effective work placements.

The normalisation of unpaid placements was highlighted across the research as a significant equality issue. This not only leads many students to select their placements on the basis of their financial circumstances, but also does little to address the predominantly middle-class character of the workforce. A lack of clarity among students, staff and employers regarding what counts as work experience, and what can be considered as work contributing to the profitability or running of the organisation, which should be paid, needs to be tackled in order to reduce the exploitation of students identified in this research.

The research uncovered an absence of equality discourse available to staff, students and employers to identify and discuss inequalities. For students, this led to a personalised approach to negotiating inequalities, as many felt unable to challenge negative practices and hostile working cultures that they encountered within their work placements. To address this, a safe environment in which students can raise such issues is required. Furthermore, the lack of equality discourse among HEI staff and employers contributed to a lack of critical engagement with issues of inequality in the work placement process. Despite a stated commitment to equality and diversity among both HEI staff and employers, it was unclear what this looks like in practice. Practices and procedures through which HEI staff can explicitly and systematically address equality issues within work placement arrangements need to be developed.

It is important to situate these issues in the wider historical context, which has seen a decline in the volume of apprenticeships across all labour market sectors over the past 30 years or more, including the arts sector, for which the apprenticeship was a standard route. This has been coupled with the expansion of higher education, which has been encumbered with the dual role of educating its students as members of society and training them for the workplace. The flooded job market

puts employers in a position of advantage by providing an abundance of potential employees, which contributes to a lowering of their wages to the point of working for free. These wider reasons why work placements have become the norm in the arts and cultural sector can help develop a dialogue about what an equal and diverse arts and cultural sector might look like.

Some of the issues highlighted by this research relate to deeply ingrained and embedded cultural practices and unspoken norms within the arts and cultural sector, which are difficult to challenge. These norms are that being a successful worker in the sector means being highly individualistic, self-confident and a totally flexible person. Any differences from this norm are perceived as personal problems. This positions issues of ethnicity, gender, disability and class that emerge in work placements as personal problems that students must solve themselves. Yet at the same time, there is strong desire within the sector to make an opportunity out of diversity. In order to harness this opportunity and maximise the value of diversity for the sector, there is an urgent need to recognise and address existing inequalities and to question the unspoken norms that currently exclude students from particular equality groups. This requires action by all parties: employers, industry bodies, workers' unions and students' organisations – and HEIs, which can play an important and integral role in this process.

Recommendations for addressing equality issues in higher education work placements in the arts and cultural sector

This research has generated a number of recommendations for HEI staff in addressing equality issues in work placements within the arts and cultural sector.

A toolkit has been developed, based on the research findings, which is designed to assist staff in their daily practices. This is accompanied by a toolkit for students www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/diversity-equality-and-access-toolkits.

The following general recommendations aim to support HEIs in developing more inclusive and effective work placement practices and policies.

8 Conclusion and recommendations

Collaborative working and reviewing procedures

- = Equal access to and delivery of work placements needs to be recognised as an equality issue, which should be reflected in existing equality schemes and met with systematic, joined-up procedures. This should be developed through collaborative working and dialogue between all relevant staff and agencies within the institution, including academics, equality and diversity staff and support staff as well as careers and placement staff. All have an important role to play in addressing and identifying equality issues.
- = HEIs should review work placement arrangements and policies to address equality issues in accordance with guidance provided by the existing public sector duties. Central to this is the importance of developing procedures to gather feedback from students and monitor the take-up and impact of work placements by different equality groups (gender, ethnicity, disability and socioeconomic status). This can include monitoring which students undertake placements and which do not, the types of placement undertaken (paid, unpaid, length and sector), and the impact on student satisfaction.
- = Feedback and monitoring data should be analysed regularly to inform policies and procedures.
- = Equality and diversity training should be developed specifically to attend to equality issues in work placements, including the different resources available to students that help or hinder success in placements. This needs to involve all staff involved in placements in some way, including academics, equality and diversity staff and support staff as well as careers and placement staff.
- = While HEIs have equality policies that guide their practice, these are often institution-wide and can leave equality issues within the work placement process unaddressed. HEIs should consider developing an equality policy that is specific to work placements.
- = Equality procedures need to go beyond dealing with overt cases of discrimination to recognising and attempting to overcome the ways in which the institutional systems and structures in place might create inequalities.

Developing equality and diversity discourse

- = HEIs should think about how they can assist students to discuss, identify and address issues of inequality. This can help remove some of the stigma around 'complaining' about employers and relieve students' fears of talking about challenging experiences. Creating effective mechanisms for students to feed back and share their experiences is central to this.
- = It is also useful for HEIs to think about how they can embed a language of equality and diversity more broadly within the curriculum. Enabling students to identify and think about equality and diversity now gives them the potential, as the future workforce, to transform and have a positive impact on their practices within the future workplace and as cultural producers. This might take the shape of a module on equality issues in the arts and cultural sector.
- = Similarly, HEIs should develop dialogue with employers about equality issues and the opportunities for diversity within the sector.

Better support for students

- = HEIs should work to develop and widely promote funded placement opportunities for students and graduates, such as bursaries, Access to Work funds or other government initiatives.
- = HEIs should identify and promote work placement schemes specifically targeted at particular groups, such as BME or disabled students.
- = As resources available to manage work placements can be restricted, HEIs should assess how these resources could be used to provide the maximum support for students on placement. This would ideally be through a placement mentor for each student, who maintains contact and makes visits. Ongoing support could also include online forums for students to keep in contact with staff and other students while on placement.
- = HEIs should ensure students are aware of their legal rights and what is acceptable practice regarding pay, hours and fair treatment in the workplace. This needs to go beyond posting information on careers websites and placement packs, and should be embedded in preparation for placements, for example in seminars and tutorials.
- = It is not just placement and careers staff who can help students when looking for placements. Academic staff can provide essential knowledge and industry contacts, and staff should think about how these can be shared openly and equally with students.

8 Conclusion and recommendations

Wider recommendations

- = Better publication of the legislation around pay during work placements, for both employers and HEIs.
- = Better publication of social class inequalities as identified by this report and that of the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions (Cabinet Office, 2009), and a move towards formal recognition of issues around work placements as an equality issue.

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Appendix: Diversity, equality and access issues in the creative industries

At present, the creative industries are not representative of the UK population as a whole and suffer from a 'chronic lack of diversity' (Hutton et al, 2007). BME people, women and disabled people are under-represented within the workforce. The following statistics illustrate how representation of women, BME people and disabled workers varies considerably across different subsectors and occupational roles within the wider sector.

Gender representation in the creative industries

- = While 31 per cent of architectural students are female, only 14 per cent of architects are female (de Graft et al, 2003).
- = 38 per cent of workers in the audiovisual industries are women, and their representation varies dramatically across different subsectors and occupational groups. Women and men are equally represented in terrestrial television, but women make up only 21 per cent of the post-production workforce. While women form 87 per cent of the workforce in make-up, hair and costume, they are only a small minority in technical roles such as camera (16 per cent), broadcast engineering (15 per cent), cinema projection (13 per cent) and lighting (eight per cent) (Skillset, 2006).
- = Men are under-represented in visual arts and cultural heritage (Creative & Cultural Skills, 2008a).
- = 39 per cent of designers are women. This figure is lower among freelance designers, where only 21 per cent are female (Design Council, 2005).
- = 33 per cent of the feature film workforce are women (Skillset, 2005b), with the majority of women in costume (70 per cent), make-up and hair (88 per cent), and production and script development (66 per cent). Women are a minority in most other occupational groups, including direction (26 per cent), construction (five per cent) and camera (nine per cent).

Appendix: Diversity, equality and access issues in the creative industries

- = While journalism is one of the few subsectors where there is equal representation of women and men (49 per cent female), their representation varies between sectors. In national newspapers, 55 per cent of journalists are male, whereas women are now in a majority in magazine and television journalism. Female journalists earn less than their male counterparts, and are twice as likely to feel they have been disadvantaged at work because of discrimination (Publishing NTO and Skillset, 2002).
- = Women represent 34 per cent of workers in music, 35 per cent in craft and 44 per cent in advertising (Creative & Cultural Skills, 2008a).
- = There is a male majority in advertising (56 per cent). Female representation varies significantly across regions of the UK – from 89 per cent in Yorkshire to 21 per cent in Wales. 71 per cent of women in advertising earn less than £10,000, compared with just 12 per cent of men (Creative & Cultural Skills, 2008b).
- = Within the craft subsectors, women are a majority only in textiles. In contrast, women represent ten per cent of workers in heritage and rural crafts, 11 per cent in stone, and 19 per cent in glass (Creative & Cultural Skills, 2008c).
- = The unpredictability of contract and freelance work, prevalence of unpaid or low-wage labour, and limited job security pose many barriers for those from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds and women with caring responsibilities (Galloway et al, 2002; Marcella et al, 2005).
- = More female freelancers work longer hours a week than their male counterparts (Skillset, 2009).

BME people in the creative industries

- = 18 per cent of all architecture undergraduates are BME people, but this does not reflect conversion to the sector, with only two per cent of BME people registered architects (Barnes et al, 2004).
- = BME representation in design stands at six per cent (Design Council, 2005).
- = While representation of BME people in the audiovisual industry is slightly higher than the UK labour market average (7.4 per cent in comparison with the UK average of seven per cent), representation is much lower than average in London (Skillset, 2006).

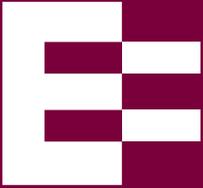
Appendix: Diversity, equality and access issues in the creative industries

- = BME representation varies by subsector within the audio visual industry. Representation is very high in cable and satellite television (20.4 per cent) but very low in animation (2.6 per cent), film distribution (3.8 per cent) and computer games (3.9 per cent) (Skillset, 2006).
- = BME people are under-represented in journalism (Publishing NTO and Skillset, 2002).
- = BME representation in the performing arts is six per cent (Creative & Cultural Skills, 2010).

Disabled people in the creative industries

- = Figures on the representation of disabled workers within the audiovisual industry vary considerably: from one per cent in Skillset's employment census (Skillset, 2006) to five per cent in its workforce survey of the audiovisual industries (Skillset, 2005a).
- = Skillset suggests that 'the discrepancy between these two figures is almost certainly due to the difference between the two approaches to the two different surveys and reflects the methodological difficulty of the census in collecting such data via employers, who may or may not monitor such information on their workforce' (Skillset, 2006).
- = Of those who self-identified as disabled in Skillset's (2005a) workforce survey, most (34 per cent) reported having 'other disabilities', which included physical or mental conditions such as diabetes, epilepsy, arthritis, asthmas, speech impairments or facial disfigurement. 29 per cent said they had a learning disability (including dyslexia), 14 per cent said they were deaf or hearing impaired, and three per cent said they were blind or visually impaired.
- = Disabled workers in the audiovisual industry are more likely to be self-employed and to work freelance (Skillset, 2006).

Although every effort is made to ensure the information contained within this publication is accurate and up to date, ECU cannot be held responsible for any errors or omissions. The information is not a substitute for legal advice, and should you require more specific advice you should consult an appropriately qualified professional adviser.



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