

Research / Surveys Tools & Resources United Kingdom

The Collapse in UK's Creative Further Education

CREATIVESUNITE

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An alarming collapse in the take-up of creative courses in further education in the UK is revealed in new findings from the Creative PEC report. The growing demand for creative skills is not being met by increased participation in creative learning due to socio-economic barriers, the marginalisation of the arts in the student curriculum and geographical limitations.

New data shows a collapse in uptake for creative courses in UK's Further Education. The newly published Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (Creative PEC) report, funded by the UKRI Arts and Humanities Research Council shows that, in the last decade, there has been a 57% fall in England, 68% in Wales, 28% in Northern Ireland, and a 20% drop in Scotland. Several factors seem to contribute to this.

Firstly, as teachers report, students are being denied opportunities to enter the arts from an early age, exacerbated by the exclusion of arts subjects from the English Baccalaureate. This has particularly impacted state sector students, while middle-class students with family resources or those attending private schools are less affected. The marginalization of arts in the curriculum diminishes its perceived value and limits student exposure and interest in creative fields.
The same goes for funding cuts that have significantly impacted the availability and quality of creative education. Reduced financial support for arts programs leads to fewer resources, less qualified teaching staff, and diminished extracurricular

opportunities, making creative courses less attractive to students.

Furthermore, systemic socioeconomic barriers prevent students from pursuing creative education. The high cost of materials, limited financial support, and lack of career guidance in the arts affect students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, reducing their participation in creative further education. Although there have been efforts to extend work-based learning programs such as apprenticeships, growth in these areas has been insufficient to counter the wider declines. The take-up of creative apprenticeships remains very low in all nations, limiting practical and professional pathways into the creative industries. Additionally, creative FE programs are predominantly located in urban areas, with limited access in rural regions. This geographic disparity restricts opportunities for students in rural areas to engage with creative education and pursue careers in the arts.

Future Directions

To conclude, the creative industries in the UK have seen remarkable growth, with over 2.4 million jobs filled by 2023. Projections indicate that the sector will add 300,000 more jobs in the next five years. A striking 95% of roles in this sector are high-skilled, compared to just 46% in the broader economy, and 73% of workers in creative jobs hold a degree. It is evident that there is a sector's growth potential, despite the fact that there are ongoing concerns about skill shortages. The findings of the Creative PEC's report, underscore the importance of sustained policy commitments to strengthen FE, particularly industry-facing technical training for the creative industries. Common principles guiding individual skills reforms include encouraging lifelong learning, greater inclusion in learning, and enhancing program responsiveness to meet geographical and sector labor market needs.

Future studies should expand to encompass skills developed across the education system, both creative and non-creative, and strive for a coordinated approach in data collection and reporting across the UK's skills systems. Detailed research into learning pathways, course content, and delivery, as well as employer engagement with the skills system, is essential to ensure the continued growth and diversification of the creative industries, aligning educational outcomes with current and future skills needs.

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Newcastle University with the Royal Society of Arts and funded by the UKRI Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). Read it in full here.