

APRIL 2018:  
**DESIGNING THE FUTURE:  
HOW CAN CREATIVE BUSINESSES  
ENGAGE THE NEXT GENERATION?**

Contents:

- 01 **Introduction**
- 03 **What's missing?**
- 04 **Why university is not the only route**
- 05 **Nurturing the next generation**
- 10 **Final thoughts**

# Introduction

The UK is a world leader in the creative industries, and growth in the sector has certainly accelerated in recent years.

Covering disciplines as wide-ranging as design, film, sport, tourism and digital, the creative industries contributed a record **£92 billion<sup>1</sup>** to the economy in 2017, and this upward trend is only expected to continue.

Largely, it is down to the combined efforts of universities, well-known brands, creative agencies and innovative start-ups, as well as major institutions like the Creative Industries Federation, Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), British Film Institute (BFI) and the Design Business Federation (DBF).

The Government too is firmly committed to the sector, seeing it as key to its Industrial Strategy<sup>2</sup>. As part of the Creative Industries Clusters Programme, it has **pledged £80million** to help businesses and universities work more closely together, promoting collaborative research and creating highly-skilled jobs<sup>3</sup>.



The creative industries contributed a record

**£92 billion<sup>1</sup>**

to the economy in 2017

<sup>1</sup>Source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/creative-industries-record-contribution-to-uk-economy>

<sup>2</sup>Source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-unveils-industrial-strategy-to-boost-productivity-and-earning-power-of-people-across-the-uk>

<sup>3</sup>Source: <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/newsevents/news/cicp-launch-greg-clark>

With Brexit on the horizon, it's no surprise that the government is investing heavily in a sector that is so clearly booming. Developments in 3D technologies, artificial intelligence (AI) and virtual reality (VR) are bringing exciting new opportunities, though it remains to be seen whether the UK jobs market can supply the necessary skills if migration from the EU falls.

But while initiatives such as the 'Clusters' programme are clearly welcome, there is still a great disparity between academia and creative businesses. Fundamentally, we must ensure the next generation is equipped, not only with strong creative skills, but also with real work experience and a strong grasp of today's commercial challenges and opportunities.

**Without these, even the most ambitious and talented young creatives limit their chances of progressing up the career ladder, and the industry suffers as a result.**

As such, we set out to address this, and the following report serves to highlight the positive ways universities and creative businesses can work more closely together to support graduates and the wider industry.



"In a 2015 survey, 65% of DBA members agencies felt that UK higher education was not good at preparing graduates for employment and business success in the creative industries, and little has changed in the intervening years.

"In my discussions with leaders of creative businesses they are constantly despairing at the lack of 'real world' skills in design graduates. An understanding of timesheets, working to a deadline (and a budget), as well as interpersonal skills to manage client relationships are scarce in graduates.

"Those that have picked this up stand head and shoulders above the rest. With Brexit possibly leading to a restriction on hiring talent from the EU it is now even more important for the UK education system to provide graduates ready for the workplace into what is the UK's fastest-growing sector."

Adam Fennelow,  
Head of Services at Design Business Association



**dba** design  
business  
association

# What's missing?

**When recent university-leavers arrive in a creative business, their skills, knowledge and awareness in key areas are often lacking. Those who have not yet experienced a real studio may also come in with a sense of entitlement about what their role will be – which is perhaps understandable after three or more years of study and a hefty student loan to pay back.**

Graduates who have undertaken a work placement, on the other hand, tend to know that if they want to be the next Alan Fletcher, Susan Kare, Ana or Hermeti Balarin, they just have to decide which path to take and then continuously hone their craft.

At Michon, we have received ad hoc work experience applications from students and graduates, who are still a long way off joining the jobs market. But, with stronger partnerships between creative agencies and academia from the very beginning, it's possible to create structured training opportunities that benefit businesses, students and universities.

While a trainee would never be given responsibility for a client's project, it is essential they know how a creative agency works with live and realistic campaigns. Design professionals must be prepared to show students and graduates the tools of the business including specific creative software, while giving them an insight into client briefs, schedules and commercial considerations.

The high number of SMEs within the creative industries means it's particularly important for graduate designers to grasp what is expected from the start, since small agencies may not have the resources to spoon-feed them.

**The skills shortage could be costing the UK economy**

**£5.9 billion**

**per year**

“The growing design skills gap is deeply concerning. We estimate that skills shortage amongst those working in design-skilled occupations cost the UK economy £5.9bn per year.

“Alongside the dramatic drop in take-up of Design and Technology GCSE and lack of additional design training provided by firms, we need urgent action from the Government and industry, as design and technology change the way we work and live.

“With design skills contributing £209bn to the UK economy each year, it is clear that design skills are not an enrichment – they are a necessity to the UK, and it is time to act.”

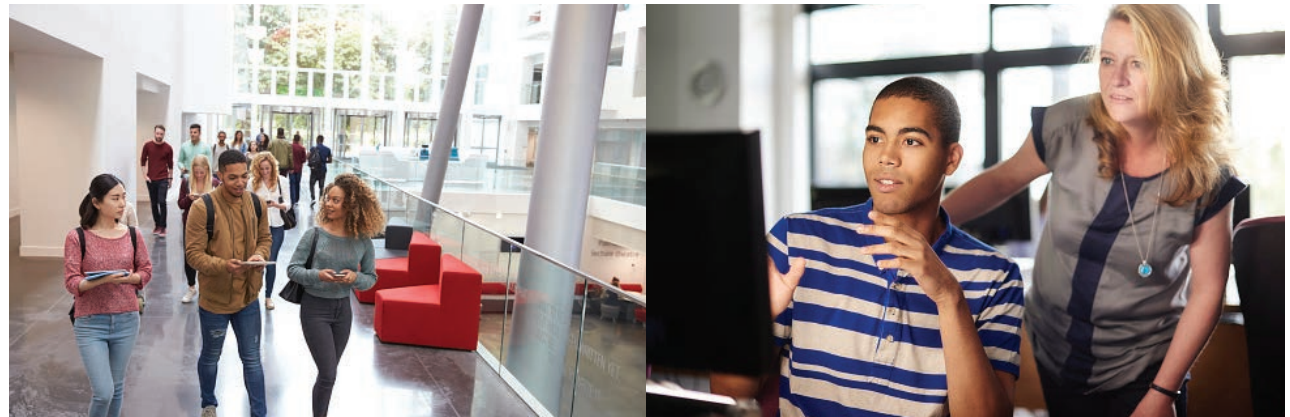
Sarah Weir OBE, Design Council CEO.



# Why university is not the only route

**Despite a drop in the number of applicants last year, Creative Arts and Design courses are still among the most popular university options, attracting more than a quarter-of-a-million students in 2017.<sup>4</sup>**

But, with UK university fees now at record levels, apprenticeships in creative disciplines are a legitimate alternative route for school leavers. With on-the-job training, and an opportunity to earn a wage, these young designers are arguably in a stronger starting position than their university-educated peers, who graduate with plenty of theoretical knowledge but little work experience.



**Apprenticeships in creative disciplines are a legitimate alternative route for school leavers.**

<sup>4</sup> Source: <https://wwwucas.com/file/115931/download?token=n-dpq8pP>



# Nurturing the next generation

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**For creative professionals, they should think back to what helped them at the beginning of their careers. Perhaps it was an inspiring mentor, who instilled a strong work ethic, or the problem solving learned by working with clients on a daily basis. For those that might have felt initial training was inadequate – they are in a better position to make improvements for the next cohort of creatives.**

The extent to which businesses can contribute to teaching the next generation depends very much on their size and resources, yet it's important to have a formal structure if it does take placement students in any capacity. Without one, they risk losing out on talented individuals who can put the company on a strong footing for the future.

Geographical location is also becoming less important and, thanks to digital technology, traditional boundaries between London and regional towns and cities are becoming more fluid. This is good news for agencies outside the capital, since the pool from which they can recruit becomes much bigger.

Furthermore, many of the UK's best up and coming creative talent is now being honed outside of the M25, ensuring graduates don't necessarily have to up-sticks and head to London for their dream role. For agencies, building closer bonds with local higher education institutions will only keep more of the best creatives in the region - creating better campaigns and attracting bigger clients.

"Many graduates don't realise there are major agencies outside of London, so we need to show them there are exciting opportunities across the UK."

Jeff Michon, Managing Director at Michon



**Thanks to digital technology, traditional boundaries between London and regional towns and cities are becoming more fluid.**

## Agency side: The view from Michon

**“Around 18 months ago, we began to actively engage 18-21 year-old university placement students. They had little experience of commercial environments and some struggled with the reality of delivering to a schedule and lacked confidence.**

“Our strategy as a business is to nurture new talent, so we decided to grow our links with Nottingham Trent University (NTU), which actively prepares students for the world of work.

“By going into universities and colleges early, and starting a dialogue with university lecturers and students, we can explain exactly what businesses like ours look for. During these sessions, you see the enthusiasm and confidence of undergraduates grow as they discover how design theory has a real-world application. They then start to learn what they need to do to secure a job in the profession.

“Our student placement scheme is managed under a strict mentoring programme and guidance of our senior team. Our student placements involve real work wherever possible, including planning, insight, strategy and participating in creative briefs. Our students attend film and photo shoots, supplier visits and demonstrate their design skills on projects. We don't simply wave them off when they have finished their work experience, we regularly check in for updates on how their careers are progressing.

“Another new initiative has seen us work alongside NTU's Employability Team to offer graduate students a six-week paid placement in our business, with an opportunity to extend beyond that. You'll also find us actively scouring end-of-year degree shows, looking for the most talented creatives.”

Victoria Carroll, Marketing Communications Director at Michon



## What the universities say

“Professional life skills make students more employable and are now a key government directive for universities, as can be seen through the TEF (Teaching Excellence Framework) accreditation scheme.

“However, many vocational courses have ‘professional practice’ embedded into their learning outcomes and for courses such as ours this has been a key component for the students learning experience for many years. All students are encouraged to gain commercial work experience within their chosen field, however this alone is not the most effective way to prepare students for successful graduate employment.

“Industry exposure is invaluable and something that can be gained through a variety of situations e.g. guest lectures, industry workshops, live briefs and portfolio surgeries. When woven through the entire course at various points it helps to build the students’ confidence and skill set in a more immersive and thorough way.

“Through a range of scenarios students have an opportunity to practice and develop their skills, putting learned theory into practice in an authentic industry situation but within a nurturing and familiar environment. This broader approach allows time for them to independently start to foster industry links, build on their professional skills and prepare for industry placements and graduate employment.”

Hannah Halliday,  
Lecturer of Graphic Design at Nottingham Trent University.



**Professional life skills such as time management and respect, which make students more employable, are now a key government directive for universities.**



## Focus on... Young Creative Awards

**In supporting and recognising young creatives, Michon played a key role developing a creative partnership and strategy for Young Creative Awards (YCA) in Nottingham, aimed at 13 to 24-year-olds.**

We co-created the brand and, as such, we worked closely with the trustee group, core stakeholders and students, to produce content for the charity itself and its annual awards. Young Creative Awards winners could secure creative industry placements at companies including Speedo, Splendour Festival and Michon.



The awards recognise the best local creative talent in areas including visual arts, filming and creative writing, and for Michon, working with organisations such as YCA provides a pivotal link between prospective industry employees and their first potential entry point to the sector. These types of partnerships not only make commercial sense for creative businesses; they also create a talent pipeline of future staff, while providing critical opportunities for individuals to further expand their skill sets.

**Last year, the team from Michon set a competition for second-year graphic design students at Nottingham Trent University to win a four-week placement at the studio to design the YCA programme.**

Working collaboratively with local organisations such as the YCA ensures we live up to the brand strategy of co-creation, while students from across the region can work on a live project under the same commercial boundaries we operate within. It's also important for our own development, since both junior and senior team members help with mentoring and training placement students once they join us.



"I felt really excited about experiencing the industry for the first time and knowing I would be working on something for such an influential event was a great feeling. I loved the fast pace and energy around the business.

"I feel incredibly lucky to have had this experience so early on in my design career – it really has taught me things you can't necessarily learn at university and outlined the type of business I hope to be a part of in the future."

Kirstie Hamilton, Intern at Michon and Undergraduate Student at Nottingham Trent University.

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## Key takeaways for creative businesses

- **Become a guest lecturer at local colleges and universities and explain exactly what students need to do to succeed.**

Reach out to your local further and higher education establishments and investigate the possibility of assisting with course content and guest lectures. This could provide the direction and inspiration that design students need to continue their inroads into the sector.

- **Consider mentoring young people, sharing your industry insight and experience.**

Giving up a couple of hours a month to offer your guidance and support to young people will allow them to experience communicating directly with an established industry professional. This could focus on helping to develop their design skills specifically, provide a platform to offer suggestions and advice about their next point of study or simply, just act as source of inspiration for the next part of their creative journey.

- **Pinpoint the technical skills students and graduates lack, for example, this might be unfamiliarity with business or creative software or equipment.**

Offer guest seminars or workshops for university students to come into your studio and witness how industry professionals utilise these products for live briefs and creative campaigns.

- **Instil the importance of 'soft skills' like time management and teamwork, alongside commercial awareness.**

When placement students are working in a business, it's important that they are treated as a full time member of the team when it comes to delegating tasks. Providing structured deadlines that will allow them to develop crucial time management skills that will be called upon in all busy creative agencies.

**From a cultural point of view, it's crucial that interns are encouraged to get involved in idea generation and work closely with various members of the team. This will aid greatly in expanding their confidence of working within a creative environment.**

**It's important to help young people gain insight into delivering against a real brief - from understanding outcomes and objectives, core features and benefits, to customer behaviour and user experience, all delivered against a multi-channel campaign strategy and to strict timings.**

## Final thoughts

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**There is a clear commercial incentive for creative businesses to engage with the next generation. It's the responsibility of everyone in the industry, from CEOs to young creatives who are only just embarking on their own career, to help shape the future of the sector.**

By giving young people an opportunity to work on real projects, helping them to develop the right technical skills and recognising their successes, they'll be ready for a rewarding career in design.

It's always going to be a collaborative effort between the agencies and educators to engage students as much as possible. Get this right, though, and the sector will remain buoyant for years to come.



# About Michon

## **Commercial first. Creative Always.**

Michon is a creative branding agency. We help our clients build new brands from the ground up, we also work with established brands. We create effective campaigns and communications that drive action, deliver results and enhance customer perception.

**[michoncreative.co.uk](http://michoncreative.co.uk)**

**[hello@michoncreative.co.uk](mailto:hello@michoncreative.co.uk)**

**0115 9331000**

## **The report's authors**

Jeff Michon, Managing Director

Tony Michon, Creative Director

Trevor Ede, Senior Art Director

Victoria Carroll, Marketing Communications Director