

4 Features

This section has been compiled by Dr Andie Robertson (Buckinghamshire New University) and Catherine McConnell (Northbrook College of Further and Higher Education). Their articles (pp.16-22) summarise findings of two related projects co-funded by ADM-HEA and Skillfast-UK, the Sector Skills Council for Fashion and Textiles examining employer engagement, work-related learning and the student experience. Their 'Conversation' (pp.17-19) provides some practical advice and solutions to challenges encountered by students, tutors and work-placement providers in developing mutually beneficial work-related learning.

Learning on Placement: An investigation of work placement opportunities within the designer-maker community

Author's name: Dr Andie Robertson

Institution: Buckinghamshire New University

Keywords: Designer-makers; employer engagement; work placement experience; work-related learning; work-based learning; fashion; textiles; accessories; entrepreneurship; skills training

Introduction

When students choose a degree course, the opportunity of a work placement tends to influence their decision. It is particularly valuable for HE textiles and fashion design students in preparing them for the workplace. Getting a job in the current employment climate is hard, and a placement stands out on any graduate CV.

However, faced with fewer work placement opportunities within larger UK textile, apparel and accessories companies, HE art and design students have been imaginative in creating their own opportunities. Students – rather than tutors – identified and capitalised on the potential for vocational learning within the thriving designer-maker community (small to medium-sized enterprises – SMEs), and in doing so, have helped universities grow links with a thriving employment sector. >>



This *Learning on Placement* research project, funded by ADM-HEA and Skillfast-UK, set out to identify the relationships that currently exist between the fashion and textiles student, tutor, course and designer-maker business, as seen from the perspective of designer-makers. The data collected during the project, while valuable to the specific subject area, raises important issues around skills training, learning experiences and entrepreneurship.

Over a period of 10 months the project was organised into four phases, with a range of research methods used to assess the impact of placements on the SMEs. In the first phase, research began with an online investigation of current makers and their companies. The interviewees consisted of the network of contacts at a number of universities and colleges in the UK, through net searches, and word of mouth in textiles and fashion communities. This led to the second phase and a review of current work placement practices conducted through an online survey. The survey results produced the basis for the third phase and interviews with design makers, face to face. Phase four involved focus group work with designer-maker collectives.

The designer-maker is part of an extensive network of small businesses that follow a complex timetable of making, developing new ranges for trade shows and other selling events across the UK. Their studio and working situations are varied and sometimes are in their own home, shared studios, offices and collective spaces. Consequently the project's in-depth interviews were co-ordinated around trade shows, open studio events, family activities and making. The interviews were digitally recorded rather than filmed, a preference of the designer-makers, and provided valuable insights into the demands and advantages of running a design business.

Designer-makers spoke about their business experiences and were equally enthusiastic when describing their dealings with students. The designer-makers cooperation and generosity in discussing their own placement experiences as a student was very informative. They explained how this first hand experience has shaped their placement planning; information which proved crucial to the development of this project. During the project's final phase I held a focus group with Cockpit Arts in London (Holborn Workshops) which completed the gathering of qualitative data. This material has subsequently been edited for an archive in line with best research practice.

The data from interviews and the online survey also touched on the limited availability of small business funding, UK and international manufacturing

and identified the importance of personal relationships with tutors and art and design programmes. Towards the end of the interview phase a consensus of opinion regarding good work placement practices and skills learning was formed within this field, emphasising the need for an examination of the skills and making opportunities to HE students across the professional community.

Who is the designer-maker?

Fashion and textiles designer-makers have tended to be degree qualified, most had MAs and came from a strong making background, through a design or humanities subject¹.

The group under review for this project also proved to be highly skilled, ambitious, and resourceful designers who have chosen to set up a bespoke fashion and textiles related business that reflected their personal design and making ethics. They regularly employed freelance designers or recent graduate makers to support commission work and product production. They have a wealth of knowledge and are actively engaged in mentoring other designer-makers as well as students (from school to postgraduate level).

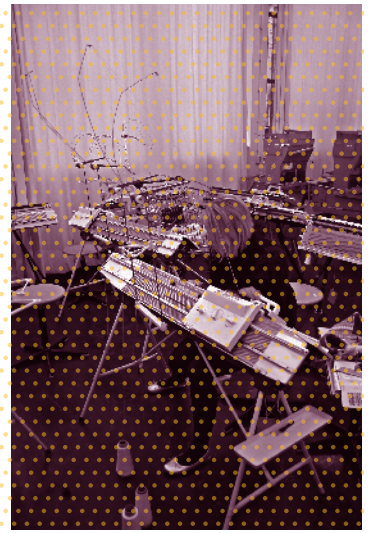
In profile, the survey and interview subjects were:

- Sole trader designer-makers
- Designer-maker with part time employee²
- Sole trader designer-makers without workers
- Sole traders with seasonal freelancers
- Two person partnerships
- 5-10 person studios (employees and freelancers)
- SMEs, 10+ employees or freelancers
- Collectives operating as a single business
- Family companies making bespoke fashion and textile products

Those interviewed described their businesses as being either:

- In development, 6 months into establishment
- Recent, set up within a year
- A new business, 2-5 years old
- Established, operating for 5 years or more
- Trading for 15-20 years
- Trading for 20 years (or more) as a recognised brand >>

The opportunity to engage with a designer-maker who is closely involved in all aspects of running a small business, from making to costing, portfolio development, small scale manufacturing, licensing, retail, financing and marketing, is considered equally beneficial to the undergraduate student as any traditional work placement experience.



The designer-makers' area of designing/making encompassed:

- Fashion designing and making (bespoke)
- Fashion and accessories designing
- Textiles making: woven, knitting, printing (digital and by hand), embroidery
- Combined fashion and textiles making: knit, embroidery and print
- Combined textiles and interior product designing
- Combined fashion, textiles and accessories (lifestyle product)
- Textiles sample or swatch designing
- Textile Art making
- Surface designing, including footwear and interior materials

The areas of practice also touched upon: jewellery; millinery; ceramics; glass; illustration; book design; interior product; gift; architectural services; spatial design and environmental design, all approached from the perspective of fashion and textiles design. This reflects the convergence and diversification of practices in the creative industries today.

The majority of the designer-makers questioned recounted their first experience of work placements as undergraduate students. These placements frequently occurred within a commercial design studio or with a UK manufacturer, although in some instances international placements were undertaken and were integral in the designer-makers choice of a first degree programme.

Designer-makers unable to access work placements during their own studies, because of funding difficulties, age restriction, or time constraints, regretted the limited experience of the fashion or textiles industries and the context they would have created early in their careers. It was this profile of designer-maker that tended to put greater importance on providing opportunities³. Designer-makers had a wealth of industry experience to pass onto students, as many have stepped out of a fashion and textiles design career often in direct response to poor employment and environmental practices within the industry.

On placement findings

Almost all respondents felt responsible as alumni. Many presented themselves as having a strong tie to their former university or college. As a consequence they were most likely to make time to follow up enquiries from students at their former institution. Nearly all respondents said they valued their ability to provide work placements, as a way to 'give something back' to the next generation of student designers and the institute that helped them on their way.

Many designer-makers interviewed received a high volume of enquiries regarding work placements, in one case over 150 in one month. Therefore

designer-makers rarely had to approach institutions for appropriate placement opportunities⁴. According to those interviewed, contact via e-mail is now the preferred method of first approach; telephone contact is also favoured as this indicates how the student may perform while on placement.

According to one designer-maker,

Most approaches to do a work placement don't progress beyond initial emails, as I'm put off by 'text-speak', incredible informality and the lack of understanding for my business. If an applicant can't be bothered to actually read all the information on my website, or recognise that a level of professionalism is necessary when writing letters or emails, then I find it very difficult to justify the time it takes to reply to them asking them to send me a CV and proper covering letter. Interestingly, every time I have had to do that (and I am always polite!) I never hear from them again!⁵

The first impression of the student always influences the designer-makers' decision to reply, although on the whole they prefer students to contact them directly rather than going through a university work placement co-ordinator. One designer spoke for many when she said, 'I quite like (it) that those students who do get in touch have done so on their own initiative. I often get quite a few emailing but then when I ask for a CV and images of their work, they never reply - thus screening out the ones that aren't really that interested.'⁶

A first informal interview is often arranged some considerable time prior to the placement. This enables the designer-maker to develop a making plan and put aside work for the student. The student is not always expected to have the necessary skills and breadth of making experience suited to the business. Level 4 students were, in some cases, said to be better prepared for a placement than Level 5 students/ graduates, while school students aged 15 and 16 were described as more enthusiastic than HE students and tended to work harder during placement.

Of the studios visited during this project, approximately half had students on placement at the time. Over half of the students were from a business or marketing course, and had no making experience other than as a hobbyist. They were on placement to assist in non-design activities such as: updating client databases; trade show logistics; website design; updating promotional material; managing orders; corresponding with suppliers; new product promotion, business planning and answering the phone. This created time for designer-makers to work on new product ideas or commissions. It is also worth noting that having a second language was highly advantageous in a work placement candidate.

Placement feedback

From the interviews it appeared that nearly all placements with designer-makers proceeded well, and a long term friendship between the designer and student often developed. Placements tend to result in a development of core making and interpersonal skills, which help students figure how they will make a career >>

virtually all designer-makers interviewed worked hard to ensure placements incorporated a balance of making, business experience and trade show preparation. They put considerable time and effort into developing a work plan. In many instances the designer-maker also arranged accommodation, travel and provided extra curricula entertainment and support for placement students.

after graduation. However, a concern repeatedly expressed was that a few students were not ready for the real workplace when they arrived - poor time keeping and patchy attendance were often noted. Some students were often glued to their mobile phones in the studio and texting friends during work hours. Some were only prepared to put in university or college hours on placement.

There was a preference for design students who had CAD knowledge and good office skills. However, virtually all designer-makers interviewed worked hard to ensure placements incorporated a balance of making, business experience and trade show preparation. They put considerable time and effort into developing a work plan. In many instances the designer-maker also arranged accommodation, travel and provided extra curricula entertainment and support for placement students.

One concern often voiced by interviewees was that students had attempted to obtain designer-maker's supplier lists and client base. The designer-maker may have taken years to develop a contacts book, and while incredibly generous with materials and time, this lack of ethical practice reflects badly on some UK design courses.

Conclusion

The final research report will be available in full on the ADM-HEA website and at Skillfast-UK. A series of publications and conference papers are planned for 2008-2009 academic year.

Recommendations from the research will be used to create placement guidance materials for students and tutors. It is evident from the research that the designer-maker, tutor and student all require support in placement planning. A simple statement of placement responsibility addressing the do's and don'ts,

skills to be acquired and ethics would make the practice of placements clearer. Broadly however, more than at any other time work placements provide an excellent bridge between education and professional practice.

Endnotes

1. Within the study group, approximately 1% of designer-makers have no formal training or degree; 2% of designer-makers have a degree in a humanities subject but no qualification in making or designing; Moreover 60% of makers questioned had sought additional training to learn new techniques for making; 70% of designer-makers questioned had a postgraduate qualification.

2. On many occasions part timers worked for more than one designer-maker.

3. In some cases this limited connection to industry was cited as a principal reason for applying for postgraduate study.

4. If designer-makers approach a course, it is usually for a specific skilled student to work on a set task. The quantity of e-mails that are received at any one time may reflect a specific time of year, a work placement term, a new product marketing campaign, magazine coverage, recommendations from other students on their design programme, but in most cases after an exhibition or trade show, whereupon the volume of student work placement enquiries increases exponentially.

5. Respondent to the Learning on Placement: On-line survey 2008. The way in which students approach the designer-maker was discussed at some length in every interview and this is clearly a very haphazard process for the designermaker. Some students send friendly, informal e-mails that include text message abbreviations, use no surnames and are poorly written. Others follow a standardised layout that is somewhat bland and more akin to a business studies exercise, although occasionally a highly finished and carefully designed CV with CD showing images of design work, drawing and ideas for making during the work placement is carefully wrapped and sent through the post often with a special hand made gift enclosed for the designer.

6. Learning on Placement: On-line survey 2008.

Note on contributor

Dr Andie Robertson is Course Leader of the BA (Hons) Textiles, Surface & Fashion programme at Buckinghamshire New University. She also has responsibility for the MA Accessories: Fashion and Interior Textile Product Course and is a PhD supervisor.

Andie Robertson

andie.robertson@bucks.ac.uk •



Fashion, Textiles and Related Industries: Work-related Learning and the Student Experience

Author's name: Catherine McConnell

Institution: Northbrook College, Sussex

Keywords: Employer engagement, work experience, work-related learning, work-based learning, employability, fashion, textiles, portfolio employment, personal development, professional development

// **This paper outlines the findings of recent research exploring employer engagement activities currently taking place across a number of HE and FE institutions delivering fashion and textiles curricula. In addition, the article also seeks to examine the staff and student experience of work-related and work-based learning in the fashion and textiles educational sector and identify some of the challenges faced by educators in this field and effective responses to these.**

Recent data published by Skillfast-UK (2008) clearly suggests that employment in the fashion, textiles and the related industries is increasingly affected by a

change in work patterns, leading to a number of practitioners in these fields undertaking 'portfolio' careers, for example working freelance, as designer-makers or within small to medium sized businesses.

A portfolio career is often characterised by multiple part-time jobs, self-employment, temporary contracts, freelancing positions, and flexible working hours. Managing a portfolio career demands many skills and personal attributes, for instance self-management, flexibility, resilience, entrepreneurship, negotiation, problem solving, and motivation, amongst many others.

Research Questions

In this context, the main focus of the research questioned how successful relationships between higher education and employers in this field are initiated, developed and sustained; how staff and students perceive current opportunities for work-related learning; what can be learnt from students' experience of periods of learning in the workplace; and, can these experiences inform future models of successful work-related learning collaborations, and contribute to vocational curriculum developments in these and other design disciplines? >>



Final year fashion student work

Photo: Northbrook College

The project was designed to investigate ways in which higher education initiates and maintains relationships within the fashion, textiles and related industries, and how employers contribute to the development and delivery of work-related learning.

In addition, the project identifies relevant, valuable and equitable work-related learning experiences through examination of the staff and student experience, and presents in-depth enquiry into the perceptions and experiences of students prior to, during, and after a period of work-related learning.

Methods

In addition to a small scale literature review, the primary research methods aimed to capture the experiences of two stakeholder groups – academic *staff* and placement officers involved with work-related learning in fashion and textiles, and *students* preparing for or undertaking a period of work experience.

The research methodology focused upon gathering qualitative data through semi-structured interviews, an electronic questionnaire aimed at academic staff and placement officers, and a paper based questionnaire used with students studying a range of fashion and textiles related courses.

Fashion and Textile programmes that came forward to participate reflect a range of discipline areas, such as Fashion Design, Textiles and Surface Design, Millinery Design, Performance Sportswear Design, Fashion Media and Promotion, Fashion Design and Technology, and Fashion or Textiles with Business, across a range of qualification levels including BA (Hons), FdA (Foundation Degree), HNC, and MDes (BA with integrated masters programme). Institutions providing the above programmes were chosen to represent a range of different geographic regions, for example from the North West, Midlands, South West, South East and London.

15 academic staff and placement officers across eight further and higher education institutions took part in the online questionnaire, of which nine participants were followed up with face-to-face interviews. The face-to-face interviews enabled staff to describe their experiences of both academic and employment related curriculum development, and also put across key recommendations for policy makers in the fashion and textiles industry sector and in higher education.

A total of 29 undergraduates took part and interviews were documented through the use of a structured questionnaire. The students sampled are currently studying at level one, two, three, and in the case of sandwich courses, level four across five institutions, including further education colleges delivering higher level qualifications. In addition, a number of the student participants were also willing to share their experiences in the form of their online reflective placement journals, work experience reports, and through focus group discussions on return from a period of work-based learning.

Findings

Literature published by the Higher Education Academy on the practice of work-related learning within the higher education curriculum points to the development of self awareness and confidence as well as the technical ability required from the discipline.

In the self-employment couplet the emphasis is upon graduates knowing what their strengths, weaknesses and career goals are, and searching for a job or career that meets those needs and plays to one's strengths. Learning about the self, therefore, is an important aspect of work-related learning. (Moreland, 2005 p.8)

Knight and York (2004) cited in Moreland (2005) suggest that an employability curriculum, work-related and work-based learning at higher education level should be concerned with

- the development of *understandings about work*
- *skilful practices* (the deployment of skills in different and/or new situations)
- *efficacy beliefs* (legitimate self-confidence in one's capabilities to achieve and succeed at work)
- *metacognitive capabilities* (individual knowledge of one's own learning processes)

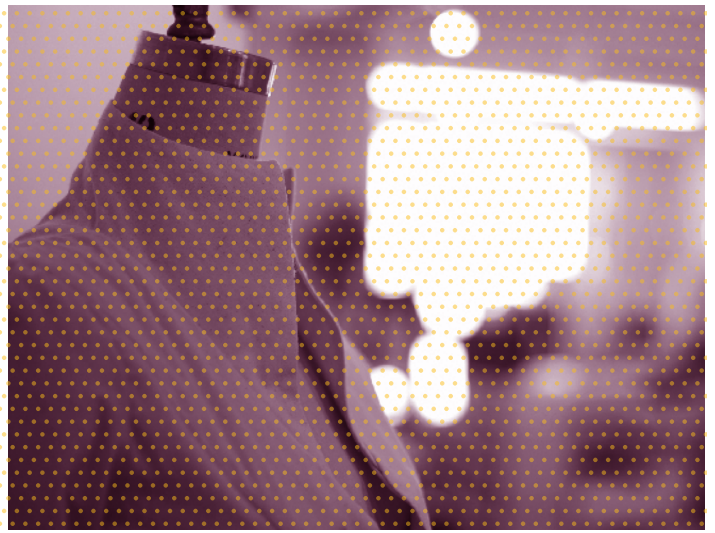
The learning processes and reflective practices afforded by periods in the workplace or connected with the world of work help students to make sense of future career possibilities and become flexible learners able to learn in a wide range of situations. These learners will be better placed to translate their work-related experiences into academic development, for example through personal and professional development activities.

It is probable therefore, that students who are able to develop those skills associated with employability, such as reflective practice, critical judgement, self-awareness and professional communication, will also be able to apply such skills in a self-employed context.

The online survey completed by staff and placement officers produced some interesting data pertaining to the range of work-related learning activities that take place within the curriculum, which include:

- 'Live' client led project briefs
- Attendance at trade fairs
- Contact with recruitment companies
- Maintaining links with graduates
- Engagement with museums and galleries
- External examiners from industry
- Industry advisory boards
- Industry set competitions
- Visiting lecturers
- Visits to design studios
- Work experience/work placement opportunities
- Knowledge transfer partnerships

These types of collaborative activities with industry are regarded as being extremely effective, and some participants gave qualitative examples >>



of how engagement at programme level can be of significant benefit to future graduates.

Contact with the sector is continual, both through the placements programme and also the Business Studies element of the course. Practitioners are invited to present formally to students, and businesses also become involved with live projects, all designed to bring students in touch with the commercial world. Arrangements are made each year for a number of companies to recruit junior designers from our final year student cohorts. [...] The placement programme allows the industry to assess the potential of students in a workplace setting and feed back to the department in each case. In some circumstances students receive offers of permanent employment once they have graduated. (Industrial Liaison Coordinator based in HE Institution)

The face-to-face interviews with staff captured more in-depth experiences from course tutors and placement officers, often revealing the difficulties faced by institutions in engaging with industry from a practical perspective.

One issue that emerged was that the increasing health and safety regulations enforced upon employers hosting placement students, particularly those from further education colleges delivering higher education, is adding to a breakdown in employer – institution relations. As one institution observed,

If work placement is part of the GLH (general learning hours) of a course, the college must conduct a risk assessment of the employer's premises and practices and obtain a copy of the employers' own risk assessment, visiting the premises before the start of the placement and then half way through. (Course Leader, HE in FE Institution)

All of the face-to-face interviewees commented upon the increase in administration of placement schemes, driven by health and safety legislation, legal requirements, and proof of employers' liability insurance documents. These measures go in some way to ensure the health and safety and welfare of all students and as students on placement are 'employees' they are owed a duty of care.

Whilst large scale employers normally have these procedures securely in place and often employ a health and safety representative, the implications of such procedural compliance to small and medium size enterprises (SMEs) act as a barrier, as many are operating from small shared studios or from home and do not have the time nor resources to accommodate such measures, particularly at short notice.

In some circumstances, sole traders and SMEs that have agreed to a college representative visiting their premises and talking them through a health and safety checklist have reported that the process had actually been very helpful. In some cases, small scale employers are worried about 'getting found out' about the health and safety of their working environment, and the risk assessment serves to raise awareness of the key issues and helps to clarify future considerations when expanding their operation to include a greater number of employees.

Course teams also face challenges in maintaining employer engagement through work placement links when institutions stipulate the undertaking of risk assessments, increased administration and visiting premises.

The semi-structured interviews that took place with students on a range of courses provided some insightful qualitative data relating to their experiences of work based learning and it was possible to identify how these experiences fit with Knight and Yorke's (2000) recommendations for the development of understandings about work, skilful practices, efficacy beliefs and metacognitive capabilities.

I designed ladieswear for two teams; I had to research and liaise with manufacturers, suppliers, machinists and technical staff. Every aspect of the job was challenging, but a great experience. (Fashion Design and Technology BA (Hons.) Student Interview)

I had thought it would be making tea, packing boxes et cetera but I started stitching trims, linings, bindings, making feather mounts, stitching crowns and brims together. (Millinery Design HNC Student Interview)

The benefits of my placement are that it has given me confidence; I can now see the possibilities and opportunities and am learning design approaches that are transferable. (Millinery Design HNC Student Interview)

Looking back at my experience I feel I have gained a big insight into the world of commercial textile design. I have also learnt really useful practical weave knowledge which I should be able to take with me and use in my final year work once I return to [college]. (Textile Design BA (Hons.) Student Interview)

In addition, the access to students' reflective journals gave a thoroughly insightful view of students' experiences in the workplace, suggesting that the range of placements available to students is variable, and that responsibilities that students are given in the workplace can not always be described as equitable.

Students encounter a number of difficulties when arranging and carrying out placements, such as financial constraints, travel arrangements, family commitments and managing additional part-time work.

The commute is killing me physically [...] and financially.... £82 just to Victoria [from Brighton]! I am working on finding somewhere to stay....to ease the purse strings. (Fashion Design BA (Hons.) Student Excerpt from reflective blog)

I have made many sacrifices during my placement, on things such as travel expenses, long distance journeys and long hours, and they have all been worth it. My experience has been very intense but enjoyable. (Fashion Design BA (Hons.) Student Excerpt from reflective blog)

My placement was able to accommodate my flexible working hours, as I have a young child I need to be able to pick him up from school. (Millinery Design HNC Student Interview) >>

I have made many sacrifices during my placement, on things such as travel expenses, long distance journeys and long hours, and they have all been worth it. My experience has been very intense but enjoyable.

Conclusion

It is anticipated that the findings from this investigation, along with the key recommendations made, will be disseminated through a range of publications and conference papers relevant to staff and policy makers from various disciplines and organisations. The recommendations centre on issues such as: the opportunities that HEI and HE in FEI staff need to be able to engage with the sector; the potential for course design that acknowledges portfolio and freelance employment paths and appropriate careers terminology; agreements that explore opportunities for a sector placement charter, learning agreements (from both student and employer), statement of responsibilities and support with health and safety compliance in the workplace.

Overall, this is an early piece of research into the changing nature of working patterns in the fields of fashion and textiles and has identified further need to investigate how these developments in portfolio employment paths can be better reflected within curriculum design.

Bibliography

Moreland, N. (2005) *Learning & Employability: Work-related learning in higher education*. Higher Education Academy.

Skillfast-UK (2008) Competitive brands in expert hands - five year skill strategy for the fashion and textiles sector. Skillfast-UK. eVersion available on <http://www.skillfast-uk.org/publications-audience.cfm?AudienceID=6&ActivityID=59>

Note on contributor

Catherine McConnell is currently a Lecturer in Learning Development based in the Centre for Learning and Teaching at the University of Brighton. She also has responsibility for the coordination of work placements on the BA(Hons) Fashion Design and Fashion Media and Promotion at Northbrook College, Sussex.

Catherine McConnell

c.mcconnell@brighton.ac.uk •



Designing Effective Work-related Learning

Dr Andie Robertson and Catherine McConnell discuss some practical solutions for students, tutors and work placement providers

CM: How can students best prepare themselves for a placement with a designer-maker?

AR: Any student thinking of contacting a designer-maker should consider creating a condensed pictorial CV of their greatest hits. This can take any format, such as a hand made or printed book or a web page that only the designer-maker can access. Many designer-makers were impressed by hand made CV's. Researching the designer-maker company is also important. The designer-maker would expect the student to recognise their making specialism, for instance fashion knit, interior print, woven products or millinery, and have awareness of the designer-maker's latest product range. Students should also question their ability to travel or stay near the designer-maker studio. It is essential to have a realistic idea of how to get there on time each day. The designer-maker will offer advice about local travel and accommodation if asked at an interview.

CM: In addition, how is it best to approach/engage with designer-makers?

AR: Contact by e-mail is a good start. This e-mail should be well written and formal in its first approach. The student should use an e-mail address that just includes their full name, as this is taken more seriously. Contacting the designer-maker by telephone at an appropriate time of the day is also advisable. Visiting trade shows and designer-maker selling points can help the student understand the company; this is a good conversation opener.

CM: What advice can designer-makers offer educators in terms of supporting placement learning?

AR: Designer-makers have suggested a professional approach to e-mail writing and CV creation is more likely to lead to an interview and a placement opportunity. How to respond to a reply from the designer-maker is also

important as this can often be the point at which the student ends the enquiry. Assisting the student in their placement arrangements would also be a way to introduce a one page statement of responsibility for the placement; supported by a discussion about time keeping and professional behaviour in the studio and placement expectations.

CM: Having now interviewed many designer makers, what are the main needs of the placement provider, in other words some recommendations for policy makers in industry?

AR: Greater recognition for the skills training and the resources designer-makers provide to students should be recognised by policy makers. Designer-makers are preserving UK making skills, innovating new products and exporting their work around the world. They work incredibly hard at promoting their making business and they pass this knowledge on to students. Web-based guidance materials for students who are considering a designer maker work placement, including advice about the initial approach, CV planning, the designer-maker calendar and appropriate professional conduct would be a way for the designer-maker to redirect student enquiries if needed.

CM: What are your top tips for designer-makers hosting work placements?

AR: If overwhelmed by placement enquiries consider adding a work placement e-mail button to your website; this will direct placement e-mails away from your business e-mail inbox. Be prepared to ask students if their course tutors or careers advisors are aware of their placement enquiry. Designer-makers should set guidelines for the placement, for instance request a statement of responsibility at the start of the placement so that the designer-maker and student can clarify their placement expectations. Don't be afraid to ask a student to leave the placement early; this can be discussed at the beginning of the placement and can be included within the statement of responsibility agreement. >>

AR: What are the preferred ways for HE staff to engage with the sector?

CM: Many staff that I interviewed found they had little or no time to spend on networking with industry. Those that were actively engaged had friends, previous colleagues or graduates in the sector that they could call upon to assist with placements or invite in to deliver master classes. Course teams do need more time set aside to attend conferences and networking events that are aimed at educational and industrial audiences and time for these types of professional development activities needs to be recognised by managers within institutions.

AR: How can careers advisory services advise undergraduates on portfolio career paths?

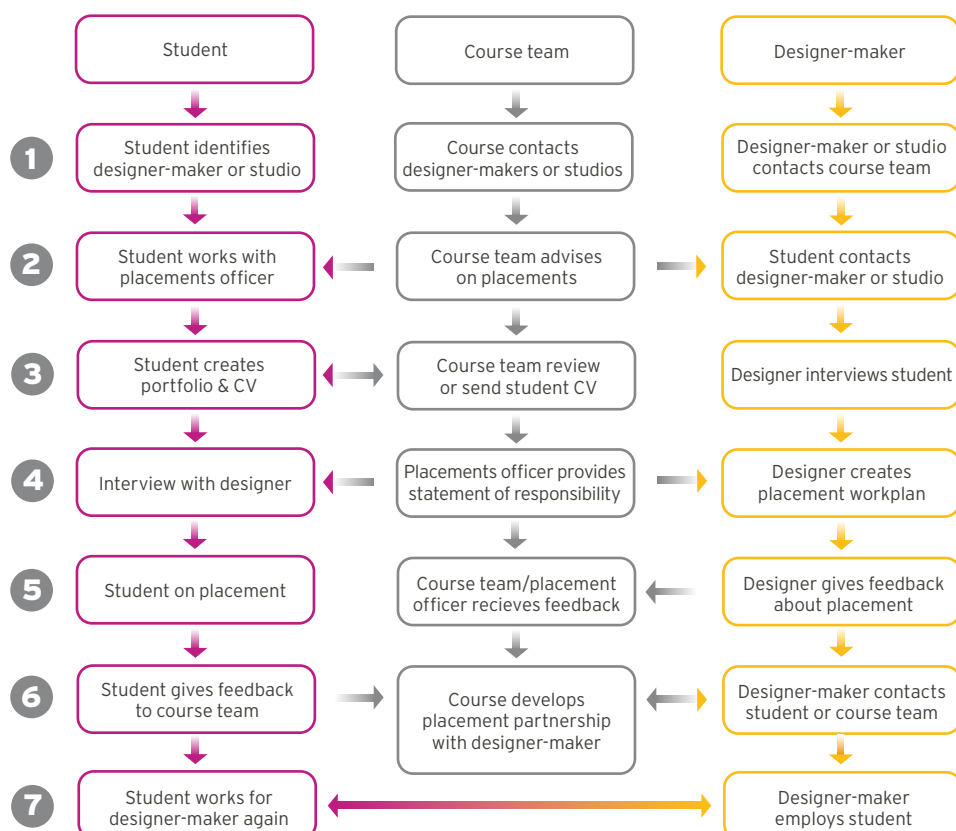
CM: Specialist careers advisors working within the art, design and media disciplines have a wealth of information relevant to those interested in starting a career within the creative industries. As well as the national advisory services available such as Prospects (www.prospects.ac.uk) and

the Designer Forum (<http://www.emtex.org.uk/df/designerforum.asp>) that offers advice specifically for the fashion industry. It is often useful for students to visit their institutional careers centre as they may be able to offer more regionally specific advice about setting up in the local area. In addition, they will have information about tax requirements, intellectual property, and possibly access to business mentors that can offer one-to-one advice.

AR: How can students learn entrepreneurial skills within the curriculum that can support their portfolio/freelance career upon graduation?

CM: Entrepreneurial skills can be developed across a number of settings and within the curriculum it is important for students to develop and try out a number of capabilities, such as problem-solving, working in teams - particularly multi-disciplinary teams, organisation and working under pressure, communication and negotiation skills. Setting group assignments that have an enterprising focus can help students contextualise what strengths they already bring to a team, as well as identifying the areas in which they need to develop. »

Designer-maker and studio placements



Many institutions already have a great deal of experience in managing and supporting work placements. This flow diagram highlights one of a range of processes that can be adopted by course teams to facilitate placements, and recognises the role of the student, course team and host designer-maker.

The diagram focuses specifically on the stages concerned with a designer-maker placement experience and highlights the informality of communications between course teams and host companies. However, alongside these HEI employer engagement activities, the student should be encouraged to follow formal procedures to secure the placement and operate professionally whilst undertaking placement.

AR: What would a placement charter provide and why is it needed?

CM: A placement charter should help employers to acknowledge the educational aims and objectives of the placement. It could also help to raise practical issues that are key in supporting the student to have a successful placement experience such as acceptable hours of work, contributions towards travel or subsistence, insurance, health and safety, regular supervision and opportunities for feedback. A charter can also be used in an induction with the student to raise issues of professional conduct such as confidentiality in the work place and intellectual property, to go in some way to ensure that the placement provider is protected.

AR: What are your top tips for Course Teams?

CM: I would encourage course teams to engage with small businesses and designer-makers in their local area. As found in your research, some designer-makers would welcome the opportunity to make use of equipment and resources available in further and higher education institutions, and there is opportunity here to exchange expertise and resources leading to mutual benefits. Also, to make links with other disciplines delivered within the college or university that could form the basis of an undergraduate collaborative team project; linking with disciplines such as business, marketing, photography, communication design and many others has the scope to foster student partnerships that facilitate valuable knowledge transfer across courses. •

Student work placement interactions

