

# DEVELOPING DESIGN GRADUATES AS ENTREPRENEURS

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## **ABSTRACT**

In an economy where the Creative Industries are recognised as an important contributor, Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) acknowledged the importance of preparing product design graduates with the appropriate entrepreneurial skills necessary to enable them to capitalise on their creative skills, contributing therefore to the continued success and competitiveness of the Creative Industries. A Postgraduate Masters programme was developed and introduced with the objective to create graduates who could better understand how to exploit their creativity, manage innovation, recognise and assess the credibility of their ideas and know how to implement them.

*Keywords: Product, Design, Development, Business, Postgraduate, Creative Industries*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

This paper firstly examines the need to address the shortfall of business skills acquired by design graduates in order to capitalise on their creative skills. Secondly, it will consider the rationale behind, and the success of, a unique Product Design and Development, Postgraduate Masters programme introduced by GCU. This programme was designed to further develop graduates in the Product Design sector by encouraging them to advance their ideas into commercially viable propositions. Thirdly, the concept of an industry partnered Masters programme, currently being developed by GCU, in the area of Creative Industries Management is discussed.

## 2 CREATIVITY AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Creativity is considered to be a significant driver of social and economic change. The UK is also considered to be one of the worlds most creative and innovative nations. The Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) reported in 2005 that the creative industries employ two million people in the UK and account for a twelfth of the economy, more than in any other country [1]. Furthermore, exports by the Creative Industries totalled £13 Billion in 2004, indicating widespread recognition of UK creative talent. In addition, The National Endowment for Science Technology and the Arts (NESTA) reported in 2003, that in the last 100 years 54% of patents filed worldwide originated in the UK [3]. However, whilst the UK may be good at inventing they are not so good at exploiting these inventions and in recent years it has become evident that there is a definite need to marry creativity and entrepreneurship in order to successfully exploit ideas in the emerging knowledge economy. Furthermore, design industry research carried out by the Design Council in 2005 [4] reported that 93% of designers think that business skills are either essential or useful in the design curriculum whilst only 54% of design colleges agreed. From these statistics, it would appear that design students are not being trained appropriately to enable them to successfully secure

jobs in the professional sector or indeed to set up their own professional practice. In addition, only 39% of new appointments are made direct from College or University.

### 3 THE ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Sir George Cox, in the recent Cox Review [5] highlighted the need to give every student likely to work in, or with business, a wider understanding of business practice and recommended that Universities go further and introduce Masters programmes that bring together different elements of creativity, technology and business. As a result, an education and skills working group was formed as part of the UK Creative Economy Programme to consider the contribution that education and skills can make to the Creative Economy agenda. The group highlighted that the creative sector is one of the most highly educated with around 43% having degrees or higher-level qualifications, significantly more in some sectors, compared with 16% of the workforce as a whole. Also, the group recognised that graduates from creative disciplines are more entrepreneurial than their peers with over one third of all self employed first-degree graduates coming from these disciplines, the highest figure across all subject categories [1]. Whilst this statistic may seem encouraging it only serves as a measure of entrepreneurial ambition and not necessarily entrepreneurial success as it fails to incorporate any measure of sustainability. Furthermore, research suggests that graduates in the creative sectors leave education largely unprepared for the business world which tends to result in poor management, uneven growth and ultimate business failure [6].

As creative companies are characteristically small and self-employment has been identified as a principal employment option within the sector, it is clear that Higher Education have a responsibility to prepare and develop student's abilities to thrive in this environment. However, the destinations and reflections survey [7], a study of the careers of art and design students, suggested that graduates did not feel that University had prepared them adequately for careers in the Creative Industries. It also claimed that although graduates valued business and professional studies elements of their programmes, they felt these elements were lacking from many undergraduate programmes.

One argument from academia opposing entrepreneurship education is that by encouraging students to consider the commercial implications of their work hinders their opportunity to exercise total creative freedom. Contrary to this, it is believed that failure to educate students of real industry issues and commercial realities makes the transition from education to workplace very difficult, often resulting in graduates having an unrealistic view of what they can achieve and what will be expected of them.

NESTA [8] have acknowledged the skills gap of creative graduates and have initiated a number of programmes to address this shortfall. These programmes recognise the potential of equipping creative graduates with business skills with their primary aim focusing on developing creative entrepreneurs. The most successful of these programmes, the Creative Pioneer programme, provides business training, early stage funding, mentoring and the necessary expertise to enable graduates to turn their ideas into successful business ventures. However, whilst this approach is both commendable and successful, only a handful of the most innovative graduates benefit each year.

Research undertaken by NESTA [9] to support the development of their Creative Pioneer Programme indicated that what works for business students generally doesn't work for the Creative Industries who are often 'turned off' by traditional enterprise programmes. This highlights another important area of concern for creative graduates which is the language barrier. The language and words used by the creative sector, by

business, by educators and by government are incompatible and inconsistently applied. This failure to speak and understand a common language makes it difficult for creative entrepreneurs to secure investment and sell their services effectively. Clive Goodwin, Creative Manager of Samsung Design Europe encapsulates this well, “Today you have to be a salesman as much as a creative, talking marketing and design using the same business justifications. If you do not communicate business language you do not communicate at all” [4].

#### 4 MSC PRODUCT DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT

A Postgraduate Masters programme in Product Design and Development was developed and introduced in 2002 to provide creative students with the skills, knowledge, and support to develop their ideas into commercially viable propositions. Research informed that creative entrepreneurs learn best by ‘doing’ and reflecting on ‘doing’ [6]. Therefore, the primary focus of the programme became that of providing sufficient opportunities for contextualised learning by ‘doing’ followed by active reflection. The objective of the programme would be to, inspire entrepreneurial understanding, encourage entrepreneurial behaviour and to transfer entrepreneurial knowledge.

It was also recognised, that as well as creative and business skills, creative entrepreneurs also require soft skills such as communication, team working, presentation and project management. These skills are encouraged and nurtured throughout the programme. The students also benefit greatly from working with authentic mentors that have sympathy for, and an understanding of, the socio-economic and cultural context within which creative entrepreneurs operate [6].

The basic academic model for the Programme is represented in Figure 1. Although obvious crossover, (represented by the dashed lines) the fundamental role (represented by solid lines) of the mentor is to encourage the student to behave in an entrepreneurial manner. The external specialists inspire the student to understand the creative entrepreneurial role and the teaching modules are responsible for the transfer of appropriate knowledge to the student.

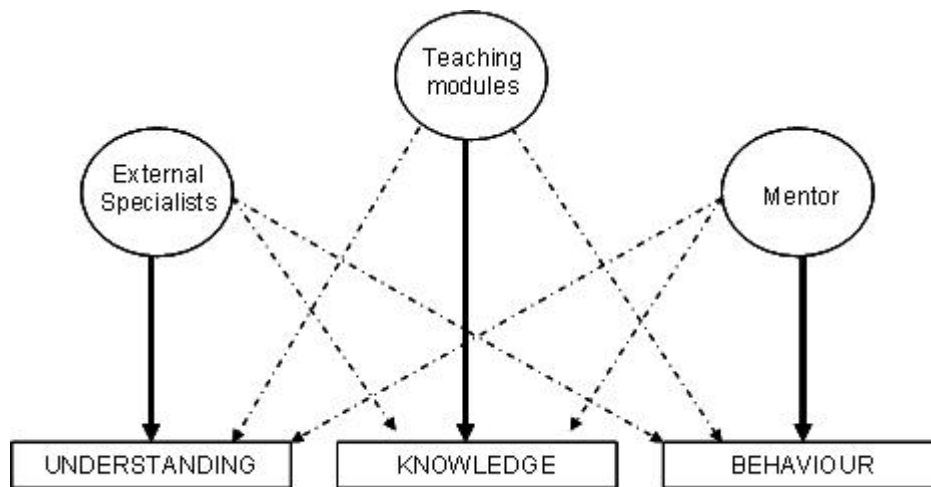


Figure 1 Basic academic model of MSc in Product Design and Development

#### 4.1 Core Modules and Project work

As well as the core modules in; Design and Development; Project planning; Visual Presence; Service Sector Processes; Ethics; and Implementation and Commercialisation, each student undertakes an individual project which through its length, complexity and rigour acts as the vehicle for extending, in the student, a range of personal, interpersonal and communication skills. In addition, it serves to develop and extend a range of high-level thinking, analysing and synthesising skills and encourages the student to demonstrate initiative and creativity in a major piece of technological work. In essence, the project is the process of contextualised learning by 'doing' and is overseen by a mentor who shares their creative passion and understands the commercial context of their venture. Students are also required to write a dissertation as part of the programme. This substantial piece of independent work is based on an area of interest to the student and includes an honest reflection of their work. The dissertation achieves the final learning objective of reflecting on 'doing'. The individual project and dissertation, supervised by their mentor, support the 'behaviour' development of the student.

Throughout the duration of the programmes, a number of external specialists give advice and run workshops/seminars for the students on topics such as funding opportunities, intellectual property, company start-ups, freelancing and managing and working in a creative company. The specialists provide the necessary insight, knowledge and support to encourage the 'understanding' of the student.

#### 5 DISCUSSION

The research highlighted in this paper suggests that entrepreneurial education is key to the continuing success of the Creative Industries, which are a significant contributor to the economy. How this education is delivered and at what level is still up for debate; however GCU have clearly demonstrated the advantages of delivering focused entrepreneurial education at postgraduate level. Key to the success of the programme has been the balanced and flexible approach incorporating a 'doing' followed by reflection on 'doing' process and involving external specialists and an appropriate mentor as well as academic teaching modules. This model, although challenging from an academic assessment point of view is greatly rewarding from a student development perspective. Graduates of the programme have been enthusiastic about the experience gained and feel it has given them the confidence to set up on their own. Graduates have also valued the role of the mentor and the external specialists in developing their understanding and behavioural attributes. By contextualising the teaching modules through their individual projects, students were able to better formulate and realise their ideas into real commercial propositions which they could present to investors. Furthermore, by encouraging students confidence in their creative ability and by providing them with the skills to value and sell their products and services effectively, enabled a number of graduates to undertake freelance work and has provided the motivation, drive and relevant business acumen to enable a select few to set up their own businesses.

#### 6 FURTHER WORK

The success of the current MSc programme together with further consultation with managers of creative companies and informed research from a PhD study in creative business management [10] has encouraged GCU to review the current MSc programme with the view to expanding in order to cater for graduates from a wider range of creative disciplines. The revised MSc programme is proposed in collaboration with an industrial

based partner and would enhance the student experience by offering each student a guaranteed industrial placement at a leading creative company. This additional element to the programme would allow students to, not only benefit from an academic model similar to that of the MSc previously described, but also to have a live experience in a successful creative based company. The intention is that students from any creative discipline would be eligible and in addition to the academic experience they would also be exposed to a real experience of Design Management by spending a semester in a multidisciplinary creative company working on live projects. The outcome would be graduates who not only have appropriate academic knowledge but also an industry informed toolkit of skills to take with them into practice. It is envisioned that this programme would also be of interest to creative agencies seeking to put a formal training programme together for their graduate trainees.

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