

Continuing Professional Development in Liverpool City Region's Arts and Cultural Sector:

Exploring needs, engagement and the role of Higher Education

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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1 INTRODUCTION

The 'CPD needs' project was commissioned by Culture Campus Liverpool in association with Liverpool Arts and Regeneration Consortium (LARC) Thrive programme, with financial support from the North West Development Agency (NWDA) Innovation Voucher scheme. The work forms part of a wider strategic commitment to:

- Enhancing continuing professional development (CPD) in the city's arts, cultural and creative sector(s).
- Improving the relationship between professional arts, cultural and creative practitioners and the city's higher education institutions (HEIs).
- Developing a more cohesive higher learning community in the city.

The Arts Council England-funded national Thrive programme "aims to provide a systematic approach to helping cultural organisations gain the expertise needed to respond to and influence a rapidly changing environment". The Liverpool Thrive project¹ includes CPD as a core activity in its key aim of developing the sector's civic leadership capacity. Culture Campus² aims to support innovative collaboration between higher education (HE) and cultural sectors "so helping to attract and retain the talent and creativity, vital to the future success of the City Region".

The project was designed to analyse the current CPD needs and expectations of the cultural sector workforce in the Liverpool City Region, with a particular focus on HE provision. Within this broad aim, individual objectives included:

- To identify and profile current CPD needs amongst the sector workforce in terms of skills, professional practice, knowledge and expertise
- To explore levels of engagement in CPD activities both locally and nationally
- To investigate attitudes towards HE provision including perceived advantages, disadvantages, barriers and incentives towards participation

The research findings and recommendations summarised below are subsequently intended to be used constructively in developing and sustaining a more cohesive, appropriate and effective CPD relationship between HEIs and arts, cultural and creative sector(s) in the Liverpool city region. This in turn can help to create a 'virtuous circle' of collaborative opportunities for both sectors in relation to professional practice, teaching and learning and research.

A multi-method approach was used throughout the project – for a full description of research methods used and detailed analysis of findings, including illustrative examples from the data, please refer to the **final report**. The views expressed are those of the project participants,

¹ More information available from <http://www.larc.uk.com/projects/liverpool-thrive>

² More information available from <http://www.culturecampus.co.uk/>

subject to researcher interpretation, based on systematic analysis of data collected throughout the project, in consultation with commissioners and key stakeholders.

2 SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

2.1 Defining CPD

At the beginning of the project it was considered important to structure the research around a single, comprehensive definition of CPD, which would establish an intellectual and practical understanding of the term between researchers and participants, and help to guide meaningful discussion on the topic. As such, the following definition was chosen:

Any process or activity that provides added value to the capability of the professional through the increase in knowledge, skills and personal qualities necessary for appropriate professional practice.

The need for a comprehensive definition of CPD proved to be significant throughout the research process, as the term is often interpreted differently by different cultural and creative practitioners, and by academics and HE personnel alike. Implications of and reasons for this are discussed throughout the report.

The definition given above provides the substance for recommendations emerging from the research, particularly in light of the need to redefine many (particularly informal and non-accredited) HE activities as meaningful CPD opportunities, and to raise awareness of these activities within arts, cultural and creative professional communities.

2.2 The sector's CPD relationship with Higher Education

Who? Where? When? Limited knowledge and awareness of HE's CPD offer

The majority of arts, cultural and creative practitioners have no knowledge or awareness of what CPD opportunities exist within Liverpool's HEIs, and do not receive information directly from them, despite receiving, or having access to, frequent and regular information from a wide range of other providers concerning CPD opportunities.

Active engagement with CPD in HEIs was subsequently marginal amongst research participants.

Those with personal and professional connections within HEIs are more likely to be aware of HEI courses and opportunities, and to be proactive in engaging with the HE community. It is acknowledged that there are 'pockets of brilliance' within universities.

Those with no existing personal or professional connections find it difficult to engage with HEIs, and do not know 'who to speak to' within 'faceless' HE organisations. Even amongst those practitioners who have a reliable contact within HE, it can be difficult to navigate the organisation beyond their initial point of entry and 'pocket of brilliance', reflecting a lack of connected working and professional linkage in HEIs.

Initial versus continuing professional development and HEIs

HEIs are most commonly associated with entry-level qualifications, and with providing an initial programme of learning that qualifies practitioners to *begin* working in the arts, cultural and creative sectors.

HE conversely is not readily associated with *continuing* professional development, or as providers of CPD learning opportunities that are relevant to professional practice.

Respondents have identified a number of alternative providers of CPD opportunities within the region, some free of charge, which are considered to be reliable and appropriate to their needs.

The HE community is also more commonly associated with research, which in itself is valued as a form of CPD, particularly within fast-changing commercial creative sectors. Participants also report limited knowledge and awareness of what research exists within HE, and that they usually have to 'dig deep' to find out about it.

Contingency value and resistance to the 'hard sell'

Despite such criticism, a high contingency value is placed on HEIs in the city and in their potential as CPD providers. They are respected institutions, and cultural practitioners value having the option to engage with them.

In an 'ideal world', many cultural and creative practitioners aspire to and express an interest in postgraduate study, but do not feel able to commit the time, money and energy required in a real world professional context.

Practitioners are extremely resistant to what they perceive to be a 'supply and demand' sales pitch from HEIs, whereby arts, cultural and creative sectors and organisations are the customers. Participants felt 'over consulted and under engaged' by universities in terms of establishing a meaningful professional development relationship between the two sectors.

Practitioners are however very interested in improving dialogue and communication with HEIs, and moving towards a mode of co-production and co-delivery in terms of a CPD offer. In this respect, HEIs will be providing CPD opportunities 'with' and not 'for' the sector.

2.3 CPD in the cultural and creative sector: context and conditions

The culture of cultural CPD

CPD with an emphasis on long-term professional or career development is still in an emergent stage within the city's arts cultural and creative sectors.

Those organisations with a CPD lead, e.g. designated HRD co-ordinator, are more likely to be proactive in supporting CPD and embedding a culture of professional development.

Consortia arrangements such as LARC and COOL have been particularly effective in enabling an improved CPD culture within the sector in terms of learning from one another, cost savings etc. This illustrates the value of collectivism and collaboration in the sector.

Practitioners and sector leaders alike express a strong desire for a culture shift in terms of support for CPD, and a more embedded systematic approach to long-term career development.

Sector heterogeneity and implications for CPD: interpretation and relevance

The professional characteristics of the wider arts cultural and creative sectors are extremely diverse, and as such CPD needs vary according to sub-sector, artistic and professional practice, commercial/public sector orientation, size of organisation/business, and roles and responsibilities within them.

It is therefore inappropriate to think of the wider sector as a homogenous professional community with a 'one size fits all' CPD market.

Where CPD needs are superficially common, they can be interpreted differently by different types of cultural practitioner, e.g. leadership in a commercial SME can have a different orientation to that in a large publicly-funded organisation. The former practitioners are more likely to think of leadership as a form of *business acumen* linked to commercial growth and development; the latter will perceive leadership as a form of *political acumen* linked to negotiation and more tacit forms of personal leadership.

There is also a tension between 'generic' and 'sector-specific' CPD needs, and preferences within arts cultural and creative communities. Some practitioners are happy for example to engage in generic leadership training programmes that are targeted towards a range of sectors and professions, others prefer tailored leadership training opportunities that are set within the context of their own professional practice.

Currency, timeliness and value

As it stands, CPD needs are often instant and approached on a needs-must basis, e.g. keeping on top of technological developments, project-based skills needs etc. Arts, cultural and creative practitioners work according to different time-scales, and skills gaps often need to be filled as soon as they are identified.

In this sense, HE curricula and the bureaucratic process in universities is slow to respond. On the flip side, universities are trusted, reliable sources of learning and development, thus creating a tension between what is instantly available to sector practitioners and what is potentially regarded as a high quality product.

CPD needs are often set within the context of wider public policy agendas, and may not be explicitly associated with arts cultural and creative practice. The Find Your Talent programme for example required relevant practitioners to expand their knowledge on health and well-being, child development etc.

CPD providers therefore need to anticipate sector needs, and be responsive on an inter-disciplinary basis. Universities should not assume that practitioners will only look towards arts and media departments – business and management, education, health and social science departments are just as relevant.

2.4 The practice of CPD in the sector

CPD needs and development priorities

As a snapshot of current CPD requirements, the following broad categories are most commonly represented:

1. **Management** skills and expertise (e.g. HRM; project management)
2. **Business** skills and expertise (e.g. Business planning; marketing)
3. **Professional** skills and expertise (e.g. Curating; choreography)

Specific CPD priorities include leadership skills; business/strategic planning; HRM/line management; applied [evaluation] research.

Practitioners also have a 'rolling programme' of other generic CPD needs associated with public-facing organisations and services, including customer care, health and safety etc.

A wide range of other CPD needs were identified in smaller numbers, illustrating the diversity and complexity of the wider sector.

CPD activities and engagement

Preferred CPD activities and methods invariably involve taking time and space away from the workplace, e.g. *external* conferences, exhibitions, courses and training events.

Indicators of effective CPD opportunities include opportunity for networking; peer support; currency and relevance; time/space away from workplace; active problem-solving; applied learning.

Respondents instinctively cite limited 'time and money' as a barrier to CPD engagement, yet sector leaders indicate a willingness within organisations to provide support for the 'right' CPD opportunities.

Group discussions revealed that different types of CPD needs are more appropriately met by different types of learning opportunities and environments, indicating the need to tailor CPD opportunities to both learning need and practitioner profile.

Information, quality and guidance

Arts, cultural and creative practitioners have access to and receive a wide range of information relating to CPD opportunities and training providers. This can often be difficult to discern due to volume, but respondents did not report any significant problems in 'finding' information, other than in relation to HEIs.

Email alerts are the preferred/most accessible source of information, and these are available [and widely used] from a range of sector-based organisations.

In choosing CPD opportunities, some degree of quality assurance is preferred amongst practitioners.

In this context, practitioners will often return to providers that they have used before and value, rely on peer review and recommendations, and seek out providers that are perceived to be credible, trustworthy and reliable – this is where HE can have a competitive advantage.

3 RECOMMENDATIONS

If HEIs are serious about their intentions and commitment towards effective industry engagement, and delivering relevant continuing professional development opportunities to the arts, cultural and creative sectors, it is a priority for them to improve their **communication infrastructures** and methods for sharing information with extended professional networks.

All recommendations are intended to re-emphasize the shared definition of CPD used throughout the project as follows:

- *any process or activity that provides added value to the capability of the professional through the increase in knowledge, skills and personal qualities necessary for appropriate professional practice.*

In this context, the following **short and long-term** recommendations are made:

3.1 Short-term recommendations

These relate to what can be done on a practical, short-term basis with respect to improving the CPD relationship between HEIs and arts, cultural and creative practitioners.

CPD Audit

It would be beneficial for each HEI to undertake an audit of all CPD opportunities on an *interdisciplinary* and *cross-faculty* basis, avoiding assumptions about what is relevant to arts, cultural and creative sectors, and to include informal, public and non-accredited events. These could include for example the Educational Visions Professorial Lectures series run by the Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure at Liverpool John Moores University (2010). This would ensure greater awareness-raising of what opportunities already exist within HEIs, and enable a consideration of how these can be effectively marketed towards cultural and creative sectors, along with other professional communities.

CPD Good Practice-sharing within HE community

Considerable good practice already exists within Liverpool's HEIs in relation to CPD opportunities and connected working with the arts, cultural and creative sectors, as suggested by the 'pockets of brilliance' alluded to within the research. It was not the purpose of this project however to profile and evaluate existing practice. Researchers acknowledge that this would be useful from a knowledge sharing perspective, and subsequently encourage and recommend that HEIs do more to learn from one another. During the Culture Campus CPD workshop in April 2010 for example, delegates learned about a mutually impactful

collaboration between The Bluecoat and Liverpool Hope University, whereby a member of The Bluecoat's curatorial team teaches at Hope University on a voluntary [unpaid] basis, enabling a working relationship with academic colleagues to emerge, which has also facilitated student volunteers, work placements and other 'fit for purpose' exchanges between the two organisations.

Sustaining Cross-sector Dialogue

In a knowledge-sharing context, it is strongly advised that members of both professional communities use to greater effect existing brokerage platforms and networks within the Liverpool City region, including Culture Campus, LARC, COOL and the newly formed Institute of Cultural Capital³ (ICC) in order to develop and sustain effective dialogue. The LARC HRD group for example provides a link to the sector with a clear professional development remit.

Communicate, share and promote

It is absolutely imperative that HEIs are more proactive in communicating, sharing and promoting their CPD opportunities, both as individual organisations within own marketing strategies, and collectively as part of a higher learning community. This includes on-line, print and digital media information sharing tools, which match preferences outlined in this study. The CPD portal – a linked Culture Campus initiative under development at the University of Liverpool – will be significant in achieving this and should be supported by each HEI. Effective CPD audits, as recommended above, will be the 'first step' in ensuring that a CPD Portal contains all relevant information, enabling HEIs to introduce and re-engage professional sectors where there is a desire to be part of a wider higher learning community.

3.2 Long-term recommendations

From a long-term perspective, the following perhaps more ambitious recommendations are made. Researchers acknowledge the additional resources, strategic and operational

³ The Institute of Cultural Capital (ICC) is a strategic collaboration between the University of Liverpool and Liverpool John Moores University in the UK. ICC aims to improve policy-making around cultural innovation in Europe, drawing on the city of Liverpool's experience in delivering and researching major culture-led regeneration programmes of international significance. Through critical research and its holistic synthesis with policy and practice, the Institute will seek to encourage and unlock cultural potential and creativity to promote social inclusion, health and well-being, economic innovation and urban regeneration.

commitment required to fulfil such initiatives, but believe that these will provide the infrastructure for a more sustainable and appropriate cross-sector CPD relationship.

A CPD Fellows scheme

Time and time again, participants in the CPD needs study referred to the need to know 'who' to contact within HEIs, and that those contacts once identified should have relative knowledge and awareness of the professional sector from both strategic and operational perspectives, and of relevant opportunities and programmes across the HE community.

The following recommendation involves the selection and appointment of CPD Fellows⁴ within the city's HEIs – this scheme would follow the practice of established Teaching Fellow [or Enterprise Fellow] initiatives and should operate as follows:

- One CPD Fellow per academic faculty [all faculties]. This is essential to overcome the isolated 'pockets of brilliance' and poor navigation issues in HE and to ensure greater synthesis within universities.
- Each Fellow paid a nominal salary/stipend as formal acknowledgement of CPD role (recommended £2-3k salary increment).
- Each Fellow spends a suggested one day per week working on CPD objectives in collaboration with all CPD Fellows and arts cultural and creative practitioners.
- The CPD Fellow network then works on the following core objectives:
 - Identifying and promoting existing inter-disciplinary CPD opportunities across all HEIs.
 - Identifying and consulting with key personnel in university business functions/departments such as marketing and communications, graduate development and careers, business development and knowledge exchange etc.
 - Consulting with practitioners in the sector on CPD needs on an ongoing basis.
 - Designing, developing and delivering new, responsive and inter-disciplinary CPD opportunities across all HEIs.

⁴ A similar system is already in place at Liverpool Hope University, using cross-faculty CPD champions as part of a clearly constructed CPD strategy. The University has for example produced a positioning document on how it might provide CPD opportunities for LARC members, and through its Creative Campus initiative is seeking new collaborations with cultural and creative sectors. Under the spirit of the '*CPD Good Practice-sharing within HE community*' recommendation made above, it is advised that commissioners share further information on Hope University's specific CPD practices with Culture Campus members.

- Fellows should be carefully and appropriately selected and appointed according to the following criteria:
 - Interest in and aptitude for applied learning and CPD philosophy and practice.
 - Interest in, knowledge and experience of, and care for the arts, cultural and creative sectors.
 - Willingness and capacity to actively engage in discussion and dialogue with a range of professionals and practitioners.
 - Willingness and ability to balance responsibilities and core professional objectives.
 - Active enthusiasm for all of above.

The system should, in time, be replicated by the arts, cultural and creative sectors via the selection and appointment of CPD Champions for example. The strong existing network of sector representatives, lobbyists and advocates via initiatives including Culture Campus, LARC and other agencies including COOL and ACME may have a limited life-span – LARC will not have a secretariat beyond the current funded period for example. A capacity building function that replicates the CPD Fellow scheme would help to maintain cross-sector connections.

The key outcomes of this research relate to the existing limitations of HEIs in the city with respect to communicating with sector-based practitioners and professionals, and this should rightly be the focus of emerging recommendations. Once established, the CPD Fellow network would provide a foundation from which further initiatives can be developed, including the following recommendations:

Models of delivery: Re-thinking the accepted advantages of HE offer

Despite the limitations described above, there exists a strong desire within the arts, cultural and creative professional communities to engage with HE, to participate in (particularly postgraduate) programmes and be part of a higher learning community. HEIs must consider adapting both their formal learning and CPD offer to suit the preferred learning modes of arts cultural and creative professionals, working more closely with practitioners themselves. The following suggestions are made in light of this:

Portfolio of Professional Development/Practice Model

Once a CPD Fellow network is in place, universities in the city could collaboratively initiate a certificated, mentored Portfolio of Professional Practice scheme. This would help to:

- Embed a philosophy and practice of long-term, career orientated professional development within arts, cultural and creative sectors within the city.

- Strengthen the CPD relationship between the two sectors with an explicit, branded, mutually beneficial and significant initiative which is co-produced by both sectors.
- Align the universities' non-formal, non-accredited events and opportunities with professional development e.g. open lectures and seminars, exhibitions, performances.

Operationally, the scheme would emulate CPD schemes run by professional associations and bodies such as the Museums Association⁵ and Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP), and have the following structure:

- Participants register for the scheme and pay a nominal fee e.g. £200.
- Participants are allocated a professional [sector based] and an academic mentor (CPD Fellow in first instance)
- A personal development plan is devised with key objectives, to be achieved over a 2-3 year period.
- Participants build a portfolio of professional development. Mentors help in pointing to relevant events/opportunities in both sectors and providing support and guidance. Given practitioners' resistance to investing in the time and commitment required to complete a postgraduate award, the scheme should not be demanding in terms of requiring participants to complete coursework or equivalent. The scheme should be genuinely flexible and accessible.
- Towards the end of the agreed period, participants reflect on and evaluate their experience [in conversation or writing] and are given some form of HE approved CPD certification.

It is worth noting that the professional community is already engaging in mentoring schemes via LARC – the proposed initiative could build upon existing examples. It is dependent upon an effective CPD Fellow scheme – a priority would be to make sure that mentor-mentee partnerships are suitable and appropriate – and is put forward as a sequential recommendation rather than as a priority development.

Graduate trainee delivery scheme

It is not the intention of researchers to completely undermine the potential significance and value of formal, accredited postgraduate HE programmes within the context of continuing professional development. The project revealed that there is a high aspirant and contingent value placed on higher level study and qualifications. When synthesised with the view that universities are more commonly associated with entry-level qualifications and initial training and development, universities can potentially increase their postgraduate market, aligned with

⁵ For more information please see <http://www.museumsassociation.org/download?id=37023>

a CPD orientation and a more seamless route through undergraduate programmes, work experience, professional practice and postgraduate awards.

The graduate trainee model, as used in legal and library and information professions enables a more seamless approach:

- Graduates [from any BA/BSc discipline within a Liverpool HEI] are appointed as a Graduate Trainee within an arts, cultural or creative organisation/business for 12 months.
- This is based on the understanding that on completion of traineeship, graduates then undertake an arts, cultural or creative postgraduate degree, again within a Liverpool HEI.

The proposed benefits of the scheme include:

- Improved graduate retention in the city.
- Greater synthesis between both sectors, and between taught programmes and professional practice.
- Improved market for postgraduate programmes and their relative CPD identity.

The Graduate Trainee post should preferably be paid, full-time and offer the same employee benefits, terms and conditions as all paid members of staff. There are of course cost implications of this. An alternative layered approach could build upon existing voluntary work practices and internships in the city, for example the successful Liverpool Biennial volunteer programme, and internships offered by RLPO. Similarly postgraduate students could study/volunteer on an equitable part-time basis. To make it credible, authoritative and attractive, similar to other professional models, it should be a paid scheme that reflects sector commitment and investment.

4 IN SUMMARY

The research complements and supports existing Culture Campus and LARC initiatives, reflecting a shared commitment to enhanced arts cultural and creative sector collaboration and connectivity with higher education in Liverpool. A significant component of this is the CPD Portal, currently in development at the University of Liverpool. It is imperative that this is successful, to help alleviate some of the issues identified by the research concerning poor communication from HEIs on their CPD offer. The CPD Fellow network will enable a personable approach to effective communications, and help to build a powerful, cohesive strategy that includes the portal, print and other multi-media methods.

The culture of CPD in the cultural and creative sectors has been widely commented on in this report. Of equal significance is the culture of CPD within HEIs, including organisational commitment to providing a meaningful CPD offer alongside formal, accredited higher education learning opportunities. Discussion on what is possible between the city's HEIs is encouraged, including a reflection on where good practice already exists. It may be more appropriate for one perhaps more vocationally orientated HEI to lead in this area with agreement and support from others. A collective commitment to CPD will also complement other collaborative initiatives in the city, most notably the Institute of Cultural Capital, in reinforcing the mandate to build relationships between academics, practitioners and policy-makers, extend the physicality of campus boundaries and build a cultural critical mass.

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