



A subject-based aspect report on provision in Scotland's colleges by HM Inspectors on behalf of the Scottish Funding Council



**Creative Digital Industries**  
16 October 2009

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## Introduction

The HMIE publication, *External quality arrangements for Scotland's colleges*<sup>1</sup>, specifies that HMIE will produce a number of subject aspect reports over the four years 2008-12. These aspect reports complement in a subject-specific context the generic evaluations of learning and teaching in HMIE's reports of external review of colleges. Colleges should act on the recommendations contained in these reports and college inspectors will monitor action towards implementation of these recommendations as part of their normal dialogue with colleges. They will also wish to discuss issues arising from subject aspect reports during annual engagement visits.

This report evaluates programmes in the creative digital industries delivered within art and design departments in Scotland's colleges. For the purposes of the report, this covers programmes in graphic design, illustration, photography and digital-imaging, and, in a small number of instances, creative and design aspects of animation and interactive media. These are programmes which use digital technology as a primary tool to realise creative concepts. They are offered at levels from Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) level 4 to level 9, though the report only evaluates non-degree programmes at level 9. The programmes provide education and training for a rapidly developing industry sector which makes a significant contribution to Scotland's economy and provides employment for a large number of people.

## Methodology

To establish the context and background of the aspect task, HMIE undertook a desk audit of relevant documents along with face-to-face and telephone interviews with key stakeholders from industry and Higher Education Institutions (HEI) across Scotland. Teams of two HMI or associate assessors made two, one-day fieldwork visits to twelve colleges at different points throughout session 2008/09. These visits included interviews with college managers, staff, learners, local employers and representatives from partner HEIs. They also included observation of learning and teaching and examination of learner work. Short reports were prepared for individual colleges following the second visit. HMIE convened a focus group of staff involved in creative digital industries programmes across Scotland's colleges at the midway point of the task. Early findings from the fieldwork were shared with this group, and the event helped to inform the focus of the second round of visits.

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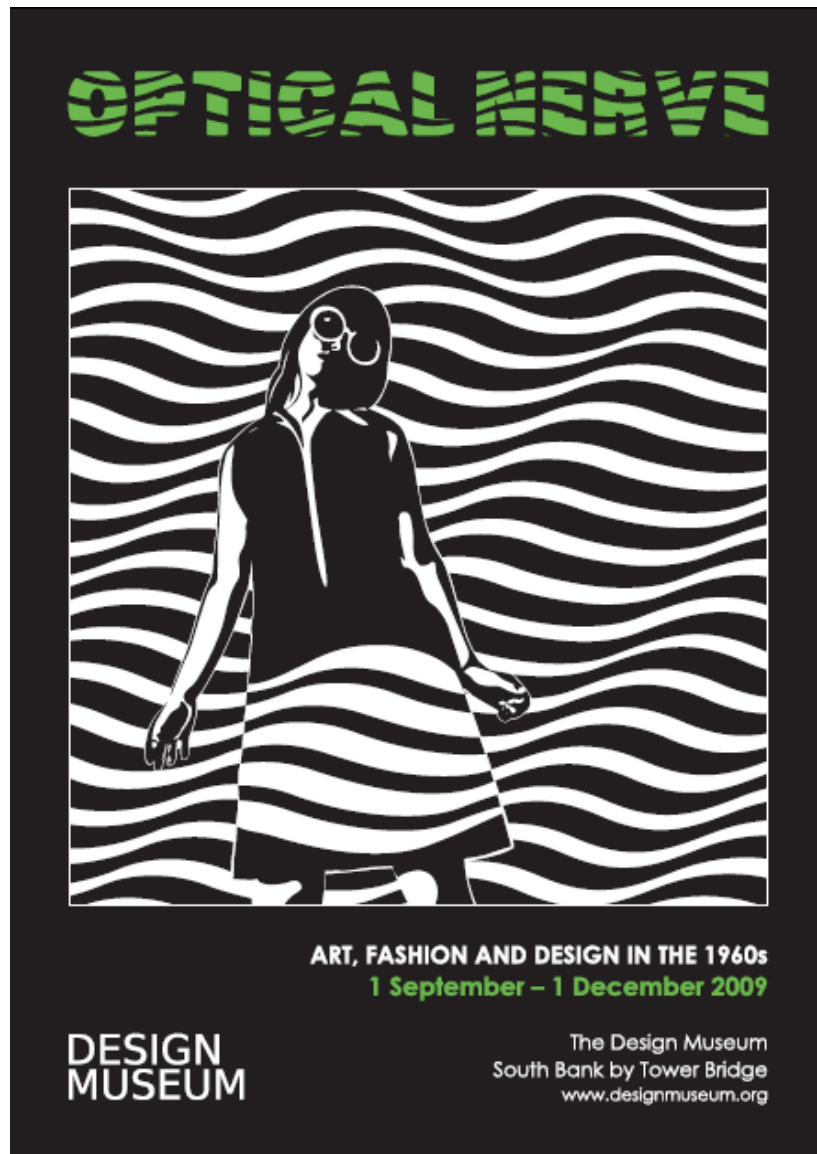
<sup>1</sup> HMIE, September 2008

The report includes recommendations and provides case studies of sector-leading, innovative or excellent practice. Examples of learner work illustrate the report throughout.

The report uses a number of terms which have specific meaning within its context. These are detailed in the glossary on pages 47 and 48.



*Astra Plepe-Bunga, Stevenson College, Diploma in Professional Photography  
(SCQF level 6)*



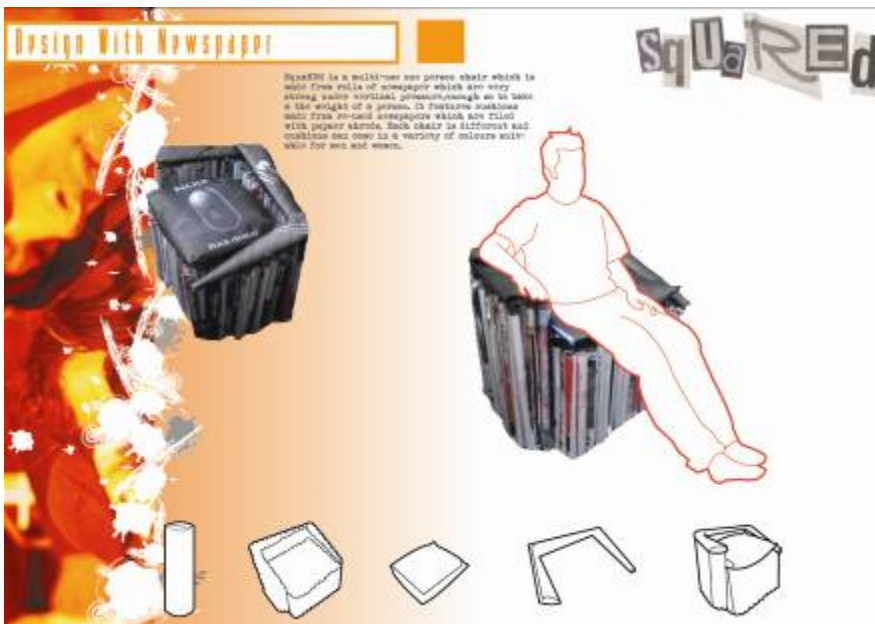
*Louise Todd, Dumfries and Galloway College,  
HND Visual Communication (SCQF level 8)  
Design museum information included with kind permission.*

- Most programmes in the creative digital industries deliver a high quality learning experience and prepare learners successfully for progression in relevant subject areas.
- In most colleges, learner recruitment to programmes is consistently healthy.
- In most colleges, programmes in the creative digital industries are well resourced and well supported by senior managers.
- Almost all colleges offer a range of programmes which provide appropriate entry and exit points. In more than a few colleges, very well-considered pathways between programmes offer flexibility and choice for learners.
- Most colleges work very well with employers and representatives of HEIs to design and deliver programmes which take account of their requirements. There are examples of highly innovative practice in joint working between colleges and employers. However, there is scope to develop practice further across all colleges, especially around opportunities for work placement.
- There are a few examples of successful programmes jointly designed and delivered by staff in both art and design and computing departments which build on the strengths of both, but in most colleges this is insufficiently developed.
- Almost all programmes are well designed and provide increasing levels of pace, challenge and independent learning as learners progress.
- Most learners engage with and enhance their learning well, through developing personal responses to project briefs, undertaking background research for project work and exploring the potential of digital technology independently to realise their ideas.
- Almost all learners work well with others, through engaging in group projects, presenting and discussing their own work and providing constructive evaluation of the work of others. More than a few colleges are successfully piloting the use of social networking technologies to enable learners to share their work and provide useful comment on each others' work. Most colleges recognise that this could be further developed.

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- Almost all teaching staff are well qualified and have an up-to-date understanding of industry practices. This is reflected well in their teaching.
  - In almost all art and design departments, staff and learners enjoy positive and mutually respectful working relationships. In most colleges, this has resulted in the development of genuinely creative communities.
  - Standards of learner art and design work on all programmes are high overall. In a majority of colleges, learners at Higher National Diploma (HND) (SCQF level 8) and, where relevant, advanced diploma level (SCQF level 9), produce work of a standard well beyond the minimum requirements of their programmes.
  - Retention and attainment rates are high on the majority of introductory and National Qualification (NQ) programmes, but are too low in a few programmes. In a few colleges, both rates have improved significantly within the last two years.
  - Retention and attainment rates are high on most Higher National Certificate (HNC), higher National Diploma (HND) and advanced diploma programmes.
  - Most learners at introductory (SCQF levels 4/5), NQ, (SCQF levels 5/6) or Higher National Certificate (HNC) level (SCQF level 7) gain appropriate skills and are able to progress internally to the next stage of learning. However, a few introductory programmes are too general to enable learners to easily transfer to HNC programmes.
  - Most learners at HND or advanced diploma level develop sufficient specialist and key employability skills and personal attributes to be able to progress externally to further learning or to enter employment.



John Larkins, Dumfries and Galloway College, HND Photography (SCQF level 8)



Craig Howie, Glasgow Metropolitan College, HND 2 Product Design, (SCQF level 8)



### 3 | Background and context

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The creative and cultural industries, which include visual art and design, performing arts, creative digital industries, audio-visual industries and aspects of culture and heritage, are a major contributor to Scotland's economy. In 2006, the creative and cultural industries were estimated to have a turnover of approximately £5.1 billion, a figure which had almost doubled in real terms in the previous eight years. Approximately 70,000 people were employed in its various sectors at that time, and the Scottish Government recognised that there was strong capacity for growth.<sup>2</sup> In 2007, as part of its Economic Strategy, the Scottish Government proposed:

*'a particular policy focus on a number of key sectors with high-growth potential and the capacity to boost productivity, through enhanced support across the Strategic Priorities...'*

These sectors included the creative and cultural industries, considered to be one of those with the capacity:

*'to expand Scotland's areas of international comparative advantage.'*<sup>3</sup>

In the past year, in common with most other sectors, these industries have suffered a downturn and many of the current figures for employment and turnover are unavailable or unreliable. This has been particularly significant for creative digital and audio-visual industries dependent on advertising and printing.<sup>4</sup> Overall however, these industries are predicted to recover and grow, and to continue to make a strong contribution to the economy through both generation of business, and support for other industrial sectors through advertising, marketing or communication.

Two sector skills councils (SSCs) have responsibility for those creative digital industries encompassed by this report, that is, for graphic design, illustration, photography and digital imaging, and for creative and design aspects of animation and interactive media.

*Skillset*<sup>5</sup> is the SSC for animation, computer games, facilities (post-production), film, interactive media, photo imaging, publishing, radio and television. In 2006, just under 27,000 people were employed in the sectors covered by *Skillset* in

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<sup>2</sup> Creative industries profile, internal Scottish Government briefing, 2008  
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/917/0066179.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Economy Strategy, Scottish Government, 2007 page 40 ISBN 978-0-7559-55480

<sup>4</sup> Skills, Businesses and Impacts of Downturn issues paper, Alliance of Sector Skills Councils – Scotland 2008 <http://www.sscalliance.org>

<sup>5</sup> [www.skillset.org.uk](http://www.skillset.org.uk)

Scotland. This represented approximately 1200 companies, roughly 5% of the UK's workforce in these areas. Almost all were either small-to-medium enterprises or micro-businesses.

*Creative and Cultural Skills*<sup>6</sup> is the SSC responsible for art and design, including graphic design, craft, performing arts, culture and heritage. This SSC is well established outwith Scotland but is relatively new in this country. Within the sphere of *Creative and Cultural Skills*, there are approximately 36,800 employees, 7% of the UK workforce.

In 2010, the Scottish Government plans to launch a new arts body, *Creative Scotland*, to draw together the work of the *Scottish Arts Council* and *Scottish Screen*, and to promote and support the development of the creative and cultural industries. Responsibility for the promotion and support of these industries currently lies with *Scottish Enterprise (SE)* and *Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE)*. In one or two industry sectors, especially computer games and animation, there is significant global competition in specialist production and design, with work in UK companies being regularly outsourced to freelance workers based in countries such as India and South Korea.

Both *Skillset* and *Creative and Cultural Skills* have action plans to support the future development of their industries. These plans include close working with education and training providers and with awarding bodies, to develop training which is suitable for current and future employees. Action plans from both SSCs acknowledge the complex range of programmes and qualifications within colleges and universities across Scotland and the rest of the UK. In Scotland, *Skillset* has been highly involved in initiatives to rationalise qualifications, including through the revision of Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA) Higher National (HN) qualifications in relevant areas. In June 2008, *Creative and Cultural Skills* published the document *Creative Blueprint Scotland, the sector skills agreement for the creative and cultural industries*.<sup>7</sup> This presented a ten-point action plan for closer liaison between training providers and industry, which included qualifications reform and the introduction of modern apprenticeships in the creative industries. Both SSCs work closely with the Scottish Government to address the aims of better consultation with industry contained within *Skills for Scotland: a lifelong skills strategy*,<sup>8</sup> published in 2007.

Along with the SSCs, most industry and HEI representatives recognise that skills requirements within the creative digital industries sector are diverse,

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.ccskills.org.uk>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.ccskills.org.uk/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=DTCYR2b67v4%3d&tabid=90>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/09/06091114/0>

cross-cutting and difficult to categorise. These industries also encompass different types of organisations and different modes of employment, including freelance working. It is therefore challenging to identify skills shortages and gaps in a sufficiently clear way to help education and training providers design programmes specifically tailored to industry requirements. Employers themselves often struggle to articulate clearly what skills they require in recruits. There are many more applicants than openings for employment in all creative industries, whether from colleges or universities, and often their portfolio of work, prior work experience or personal attributes is deemed to be as important as a formal qualification. There are currently no formally accredited workplace training programmes within the creative digital industries in Scotland.

Entry-level employees need, therefore, to be sufficiently motivated to learn on the job and to develop sufficient transferable skills to move their own careers forward.

Most stakeholders agree that, as well as relevant specialist skills for each industry sector, there are generic key employability skills and personal attributes for successful working across all creative digital industries. These are:

- creativity;
- adaptability;
- the ability to learn quickly;
- technical skills across different digital platforms;
- communication skills;
- the ability to plan and organise;
- effective working with others who have different skills; and
- skills in working with clients.

In 2006, the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) supported the establishment of *Creative Loop*,<sup>9</sup> which involves a partnership of six colleges in Scotland together with Scottish Screen, *Skillset* and the SQA.<sup>10</sup> This initiative aims to develop better links between colleges delivering programme in the creative digital industries and other audio-visual industries. The initiative involves upskilling of college staff, events and workshops for staff and learners, and the development of a shared repository of online learning resources. In 2007, this group of colleges became Scotland's first *Skillset Media Skills Academy*. In February 2009, the SFC injected a further £5.8 million to boost training in these specialist areas, primarily within HEIs, but also within the *Skillset Media*

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<sup>9</sup> [www.creativeloop.org](http://www.creativeloop.org)

<sup>10</sup> The six colleges are Dundee, Perth, Aberdeen, Cardonald, Reid Kerr and Adam Smith.

*Academy* colleges.<sup>11</sup> An independent evaluation of the *Creative Loop* initiative has been commissioned by the SFC and will report later this year.

Between 2003 and 2008, the SQA carried out a major revision of HN qualifications in all subject areas, including the creative digital industries.<sup>12</sup> This exercise was undertaken by practitioners drawn from across all colleges in Scotland, liaising closely with the industry and with representatives from *Skillset*. The revision resulted in a rationalisation of qualifications, a substantial reduction in the number and duplication of individual units of study and clearly defined opportunities for learners to specialise in particular subject areas. The revised HN awards also included a graded unit at HNC and HND levels. The impact of these new qualifications is described in more detail in the section on HN programmes. In 2009, the SQA also launched an NC Group Award in Art and Design at SCQF level 6 which mirrors the structure of the new HN awards.<sup>13</sup> This framework includes clusters of units in the creative digital industries. It has plans to launch a similar NC group award in photography later in 2009.

The curriculum in schools and colleges in Scotland is currently undergoing a major revision following the launch of *Curriculum for Excellence*.<sup>14</sup> This initiative aims to develop four capacities in young people so that they become:

- successful learners;
- confident individuals;
- responsible citizens; and
- effective contributors.

This focus on the development of the whole person resonates with the Scottish Government's aim that learners across all education sectors develop skills for life, learning and work.<sup>15</sup> These encompass the key employability skills and personal attributes identified above. Most expressive arts practitioners in

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<sup>11</sup> [http://www.skillset.org/training/san/nations/article\\_6385\\_1.asp](http://www.skillset.org/training/san/nations/article_6385_1.asp)

<sup>12</sup> [www.sqa.org.uk](http://www.sqa.org.uk)

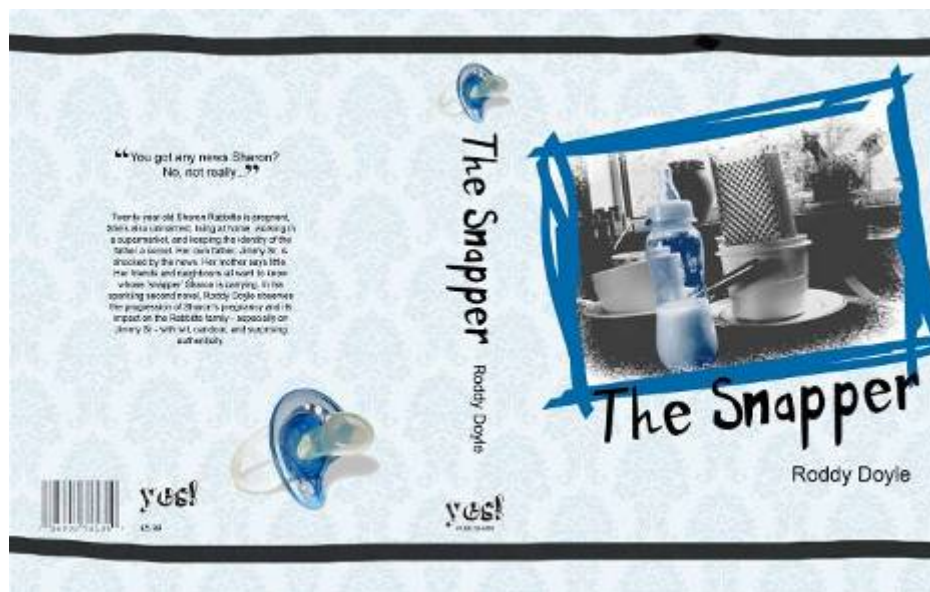
<sup>13</sup> [http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files\\_ccc/Arrangements\\_NC\\_Art\\_Design\\_level6.pdf](http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files_ccc/Arrangements_NC_Art_Design_level6.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> Curriculum for Excellence, Scottish Executive 2004, ISBN 0-7559-4373-2

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/26800/0023690.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/curriculumforexcellence/assessmentandachievement/recognisingachievement/skills/index.asp>

schools and colleges consider that the learning processes involved in creative work link very naturally with the development of the four capacities, both in specific subject areas and in cross-school or cross-college initiatives. Many colleges are currently mapping their art and design provision, including programmes in the creative digital industries, against the expressive arts experiences and outcomes within *Curriculum for Excellence*. This is in order to ensure that not only is there synergy between school and college provision, but also to ensure that college programmes provide breadth, depth, pace and challenge, and focus on an appropriate mix of skills.



Caroline Park, Aberdeen College, HND Visual Communication (SCQF level 8)



*Jamie Mowat, Perth College, HND Visual Communication:  
Graphic Design (SCQF level 8)*

Art and design is a popular curriculum area within Scotland's colleges, with 34 out of 42 colleges offering programmes within that area. Of that number, 24 colleges offer full-time programmes in subjects within the scope of this report and 13 offer part-time programmes. Almost all of these colleges offer a range of programmes at levels that provide appropriate entry and exit points for learners with different backgrounds and experience. Most offer programmes at introductory (SCQF levels 4/5) and/or NQ level (SCQF levels 5/6) and also at HNC (SCQF level 7) or HND level (SCQF level 8), but a few smaller colleges offer programmes at one level only and rely on links with other colleges to provide a full range of entry or progression options for learners. Seven colleges offer programmes at SCQF level 9, either in the form of advanced diplomas, degrees validated by universities, or professional development awards. A few more colleges are in the process of developing this provision, or converting advanced diplomas to degrees, in partnership with HEIs.

For many colleges, programmes in creative digital industries represent a significant amount of provision and contribute positively to the college's environment and reputation. Learner applications to almost all programmes are consistently high and in many cases programmes are oversubscribed. In all colleges which offer programmes in creative digital industries, senior managers support them well. Colleges have invested well in facilities and resources, particularly those colleges which have recently undertaken building development. Most have well-advanced plans for increasing provision in these areas and further enhancing facilities and resources.

Colleges work hard to ensure that programmes meet the requirements of learners with a wide range of progression plans. These may vary from internal progression underpinned by a slow build-up of confidence and skills, to full entry into employment involving high-level professional training, or entry into higher education with a requirement for well-advanced critical thinking and writing skills. At HN level in particular, several demands might well feature within the same class group. All colleges respond well to the challenge of designing programmes which help learners to keep their options open while developing a useful portfolio of broader skills. In most cases, programmes demand increasing levels of personal response, independent learning and self-management. A few colleges provide very well-considered pathways between programmes at different levels, and most colleges make considerable efforts to offer as much choice to learners as possible. However, because of the very competitive nature of employment or progression in creative digital industries, a large number of learners will not achieve their ambition to move on to employment within their chosen area. Colleges do not always do enough to help learners identify those key employability skills and personal attributes,

acquired through learning on programmes in creative digital industries, which would help them flourish in other employment sectors.

A few colleges enable direct entry to HNC or HND programmes in the creative digital industries by school learners with one or two Highers and a suitable portfolio of artwork from school. Where colleges offer specialist NQ programmes, it is more common for learners applying direct from school to commence their college study at this level, even if they have academic qualifications at the same level. While young people may have developed a general understanding of design processes, the school art and design curriculum does not necessarily prepare learners specifically for programmes in the creative digital industries. Therefore, colleges consider that direct entry to HN programmes is too demanding in terms of the technical skills required. Most learners who undertake NQ programmes consider that they provide valuable foundation skills which have helped them at later stages of learning. Learners studying Standard Grade or Higher Graphic Communication often apply unsuccessfully for graphic design programmes and there is an element of confusion as to the content and purpose of these very different subject areas.

In almost all colleges, staff delivering creative digital industries programmes in art and design departments work constructively with employers to design programmes which take account of their requirements. This is especially evident in colleges based in larger population centres. There is good underpinning awareness of the work of the SSCs amongst college staff, especially within the six *Skillset Media Academy* colleges, but industry knowledge stems mainly from direct contact with employers. There are several examples of very imaginative and innovative approaches to involving employers in curriculum design and delivery, with employers providing work placements, hosting visits, setting and evaluating projects, commenting on learner work or mentoring individual learners. A few colleges operate successful industry liaison groups which meet regularly and keep the college up to date with current developments. A few colleges are less successful at making links with external employers and rely on the industrial experience or contacts of their own teaching staff to maintain their understanding of real working practices. All HN programmes include units which introduce learners to professional practice within specialist industries and usually encompass legal and business aspects. A few colleges deliver this particularly well and involve industry specialists in particular aspects. A programme in enterprise and employability developed by the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA) is due to be offered to all colleges in session 2009/10.



**Reid Kerr College: industry sponsorship of HN units**

*After reflecting on ways of involving design industry practitioners more in college learning, teaching staff have recently launched the industry sponsorship initiative. Rather than financial support, this type of sponsorship requires knowledge, experience and small amounts of time. It involves practitioners in selecting individual NQ or HN units across a range of programmes, and engaging with their delivery in specific, pre-agreed ways. This uses the very limited time practitioners have available in a highly focused way and therefore makes involvement in college programmes attractive to them. Their involvement includes a range of possible activities, for example, setting of project briefs, feedback on learner work, guest lecturing, learner access to their facilities and supply of materials. Learners and staff have benefited greatly from the input of design practitioners. The practitioners themselves have also benefited from contact with enthusiastic learners and have felt able, through this well-considered initiative, to ensure that the next generation of designers is as thoroughly prepared for real working life as possible.*



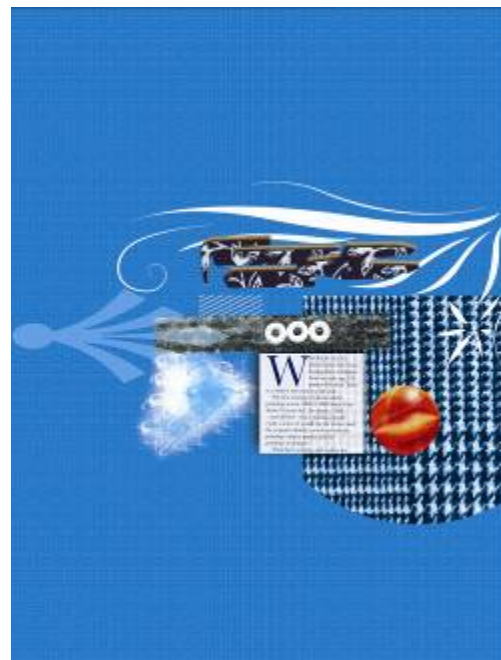
Gavin Shirkie, Reid Kerr College, HND Photography (SCQF level 8)

### **Edinburgh's Telford College: Industry Mentoring Scheme**

*Teaching staff have enhanced working relationships between learners and industry practitioners by inviting local design practitioners to take part in an Industry Mentoring Scheme. This only takes up a small amount of their time, but focuses it on specific roles and projects. Mentors are allocated two learners from the HND Visual Communication programme at the start of the academic year and provide support and feedback to them as they undertake a set project during the first semester. During the second semester the mentors advise the learners as they prepare their portfolios prior to undertaking work placement, applying for jobs or for further study. A highly successful Industry Night completes the scheme at the end of the academic year. This enables learners to discuss their final portfolios with their mentors, prospective employers or HEI representatives. The mentoring scheme has greatly enhanced learner understanding of industry expectations and working practices through supportive one-to-one relationships with practitioners.*



*Ottavio di Sotto, Edinburgh's Telford College, HND Visual Communication: Graphic Design (SCQF level 8)*



*Jeff Burns, Dumfries and Galloway College, Certificate in New Media Creation, (SCQF levels 5/6)*

Most colleges encourage learners to undertake work placement and a few help them to establish suitable ones. However, work placements are not mandatory in any programme and most colleges leave it to the learners themselves to organise them. In practice, this often results in learners not undertaking work placement and therefore missing opportunities to experience real industry-context learning. In some areas of Scotland, there are very few relevant local employers and this makes work placement very difficult to organise.

There are a large number of well-established progression routes from colleges to further study at HE level, including to programmes at SCQF level 9 within the colleges themselves. Apart from progression to this level within colleges, the most common progression routes involve programmes in graphic design, illustration, time-based art or animation at art colleges, or creative digital technology, computer art, photography and graphic design at universities established after 1992. Most progression from HND (SCQF level 8) is to either:

- SCQF level 9 provision in colleges which offer it; or
- Year 2 (SCQF level 8) of degree programmes at post-92 universities or at art colleges.

Student Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS) funding supports learners making this latter transition, even though it is technically at the same level. A few learners progress from HND to year 3 (SCQF level 9) of degree-level study at HEIs.

A few learners at HNC (SCQF level 7) or even NQ (SCQF levels 5/6) also progress to year 1 of degree study (SCQF level 7) but most expect to progress internally within the college system at this stage.

Progression to HEIs is offered in almost all cases on the basis of a portfolio of artwork which demonstrates the creative potential of an individual. There are no formal articulation routes for learners undertaking programmes in the creative digital industries delivered within art and design departments.

Most colleges invite representatives of HEIs to discuss degree programmes with learners, provide portfolio workshops or describe interview processes. In a small number of colleges, representatives from HEIs set project briefs or deliver parts of programmes, and successfully help learners bridge the transition

between HND and degree-level study. However, this practice is not widespread and several colleges are actively seeking to increase such activity as part of measures to enhance links with HEIs.

Many specialist skills relevant to the creative digital industries are developed within both art and design and computing programmes in colleges, with art and design departments focusing mostly on creative aspects, while computing departments focus mostly on technical areas. Within a few colleges, there are constructive arrangements for communication, the sharing of good practice, joint planning and joint delivery of programmes that play to the strengths of staff in each department. This applies mainly to a small number of programmes in animation and digital or interactive media, and is particularly prevalent in those colleges which are structured so that computing and art and design are housed within the same department. A small but increasing number of colleges are piloting introductory programmes which provide pathways towards programmes in either art and design or computing. However, in most colleges, art and design and computing departments operate as separate entities, with quite different approaches to skills development and limited contact with each other. Occasionally, quite differently orientated programmes with similar-sounding titles are offered within the same college by both art and design and computing departments, which is potentially confusing for entry-level learners, schools and parents.

### **Full-time programmes**

#### **Introductory and NQ programmes**

Most colleges offering programmes in creative digital industries, design programmes at introductory and NQ level which successfully introduce learners to an appropriate range of subjects and prepare them for their next stage of learning.

#### **Introductory programmes**

The design of introductory programmes varies a great deal between individual colleges. All are locally devised and most comprise SQA units which cover basic art, design and digital technology processes, with an introduction to more specialist areas. In a few colleges, they also encompass units in music technology or video, or combine art and design and computing units. Almost all

programmes at this level also include core skills development. In most cases, units within these programmes are at SCQF level 5 or, where appropriate, at level 4. One college offers units from the National Open College Network<sup>16</sup> instead of SQA units. Introductory programmes are usually aimed at learners with little prior experience in subject areas and with widely different backgrounds, who are as yet undecided about a specialist route. In most cases, these programmes achieve their aims of supporting learners to embark on careers in the creative digital industries and progress to either more specialist NQ or HNC programmes. However, in a few colleges, introductory programmes are so broadly based that learners find it difficult to bridge the gap between them and HNC programmes.

A few colleges offer introductory programmes at SCQF level 4 or below, which are aimed mainly at young, disaffected learners re-engaging with learning through a general interest in digital technologies, particularly sound technology. Most programmes are based on holistic projects relating to the interests of the young people and in most cases they successfully help them develop first-level creative and technical skills. These programmes aim to develop foundation skills which will help learners to progress to programmes at higher levels, though not necessarily in creative digital industries. Most learners who complete them do progress successfully to higher level programmes. Colleges recognise that they should build more on the success of programmes like these to address the needs of both this group of young people and others who have become disengaged from learning.

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.nocn.org.uk>

**John Wheatley College: digital media programme for young learners**

*This programme was delivered in partnership with a local secondary school. It involved 29 S3/S4 pupils identified as being less likely to achieve qualifications in school, attending college part-time. They engaged in a range of digital media activities in the college's industry-standard multimedia suites. These included internet broadcasting, music making, sound recording, image manipulation and presentation. The exciting and friendly learning environment helped learners engage very well in their work. Key to learner success lay in building on their own interests while learning fairly complex software packages. They particularly enjoyed working in the recording studio. The programme also encompassed real-life digital media situations and included audio-visual recording sessions with well-known people working in the creative industries. Learners developed good employability skills by attending regularly, becoming punctual, developing positive attitudes, working with others and developing organisational skills. Whilst the programme was designed holistically, the opportunity to gain SQA certification was built in to match its key elements. All 29 young people gained at least one unit at SCQF level 5. This was a very positive outcome for the learners and provided a major boost to their confidence. Several progressed to further learning within the college.*

**NQ programmes**

The majority of colleges offer locally-devised NQ programmes, comprising units at SCQF levels 5 and 6, in clusters of specialist areas which successfully provide foundation study for specific HN programmes. A few colleges incorporate Highers or A levels into these programs. For a few colleges, these programmes represent the first level of entry for learners, but in most others, they can progress to them from introductory programmes, either within the college or from other colleges. Most learners who undertake these NQ programmes have some prior experience and are clear about their career plans. It is not known yet how many colleges will offer the recently launched SQA NC Group Award in Art and Design<sup>17</sup> (SCQF levels 5/6) in place of their current programmes, but many colleges welcome the move to rationalise and clarify programme aims and content at this level. An SQA group award in photography is also due to be launched later in 2009 which will address out-of-date aspects of current NQ photography units.

<sup>17</sup> [http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files\\_ccc/Arrangements\\_NC\\_Art\\_Design\\_level6.pdf](http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files_ccc/Arrangements_NC_Art_Design_level6.pdf)

## Core skills

All colleges incorporate core skills development into introductory or NQ programmes, usually with units at SCQF level 4 or 5. In most programmes, *problem solving* and *working with others* are successfully embedded into mainstream programme activities, and *information technology* is usually embedded well into specialist NQ programmes. Aspects of *communication* and occasionally *numeracy* are also developed in day-to-day learning activities, though this tends not to be clearly enough signposted to learners. In most colleges, subject and servicing staff work together well to contextualise *communication* successfully within specialist areas through relevant written reports. In a few cases, core skills units are delivered discretely without this contextualisation. These units are undertaken less enthusiastically by learners, who often fail to understand the relevance to their chosen fields of study.



Paul Rankin, Cardonald College, NQ Graphic Design (SCQF levels 5/6)



*Amanda McEwan, Adam Geoghan, Jemma Hartley, Forth Valley College,  
Access to Creative Industries (SCQF levels 5)*

## **HN programmes and advanced diploma programmes**

Following the SQA revision of HN qualifications there are now a number of key HN group awards in creative digital industries. Overall, there are four SQA cognate groups: art and design, media and communication, creative industries and computing, which offer HNC/D frameworks orientated towards aspects of the creative digital industries. There is a considerable element of overlap in some subject areas offered within programmes in the different cognate groups.

Group awards delivered mainly by art and design departments include:

- HNC/D Visual Communication;
- HNC/D Computer Art and Design;
- HNC Filmcraft and Animation; and
- HNC/D Photography.

HNC/D 3D Animation has been revised and the new group award launched in session 2009/10. Both it and HNC/D Interactive Media are primarily orientated



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towards technical skills but also contain aspects which demand art and design skills, and the ability to create content. These programmes are usually offered within computing departments but occasionally are offered within art and design departments, or else elements are delivered by art and design staff.

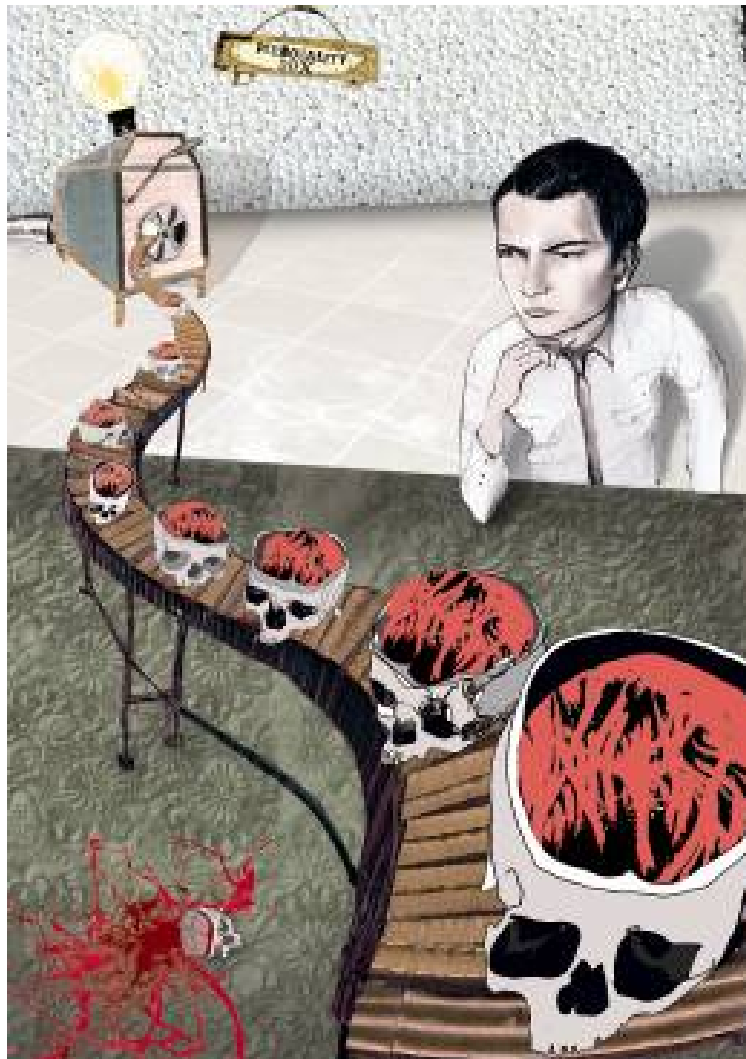
The most common framework used by art and design departments is HNC/D Visual Communication, which is offered by a majority of colleges with programmes in creative digital industries. This framework has been structured to enable colleges to offer pathways in graphic design, illustration, new media and information graphics. Half of the colleges offer HNC/D Photography. More than a few colleges offer HNC/D Computer Art and Design, which aims to develop digital skills mainly orientated towards digitally-based fine art but with elements which would support employment in the creative digital industries. HNC/D Filmcraft and Animation is currently offered by one college. Within all HNC/D group awards, core skills are embedded and signposted within specialist unit descriptors and are not delivered or awarded discretely.

Almost all colleges are enthusiastic about the revised HN qualifications in creative digital industries. Although most colleges are at a relatively early stage of implementing the revised frameworks, most consider that they are more relevant to industry than previous ones. Planning for their delivery has enabled teaching staff to revise and refresh their skills and their own teaching approaches, and support each other in trying out new ideas. The graded unit has introduced a challenge and a competitive edge for learners to which they have responded with enthusiasm. Most colleges employ staff who were involved in developing the qualifications and they support their other colleagues well.

Three colleges offer locally-devised advanced diploma programmes in either photography or graphic design which comprise SQA units at SCQF level 9. These programmes are highly geared to meeting the demands of industry and focus strongly on live projects and work-related learning.



*Rory Wemyss, Dundee College, HNC Photography (SCQF level 7)*



*Jonathan Wilson, Cardonald College, HND1 Visual Communication (SCQF level 7)*

### **Part-time programmes**

Thirteen colleges offer part-time programmes in creative digital industries. These programmes mainly take place in evening classes on campus or, in a small number of colleges, within community venues. They attract learners who wish to develop their technical skills for personal or leisure reasons. Four colleges offer part-time day or evening classes certificated to HNC or HND level, with each level undertaken over two years. Most colleges also offer part-time study tailored to learners' personal requirements by enabling them to

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attend parts of full-time programmes. By far the most popular subject for part-time study is photography, particularly evening programmes which include traditional monochrome processing and printing or digital photography.

Almost all learners work well on part-time programmes and enjoy them. Many part-time learners have attended programmes for a long time and have built up their technical and creative skills to very high levels. Occasionally, learners use portfolios of work generated in evening or part-time classes to support applications to full-time college programmes. Working relationships between staff and part-time learners tend to be particularly relaxed and supportive.

A small number of colleges offer part-time programmes to school pupils in S3, S4, and S5 to study programmes in digital photography, animation, digital music technologies or video. However, *Skills for Work* programmes in digital media have been developed by qualifications development teams in computing and will not normally be offered in art and design departments. Most school pupils enjoy attending college programmes in the creative digital industries and many enter relevant full-time programmes as a result of the experience. They are able to access equipment and resources not always available to them in school and many develop high level technical skills.

A small number of colleges offer part-time programmes in creative digital industries in the community. Most colleges recognise that this is a potentially important area which needs more development, and acknowledge that building skills in digital technologies can develop learner confidence and empower hard-to-reach learners to explore and express their personal views.

**John Wheatley College: Glasgow East Women's Aid Project**

*The project assisted the Glasgow East Women's Aid Project to use multimedia techniques to portray the experience of violence against women, and to prepare an audio-visual presentation for the National Conference for Violence against Women in Glasgow in 2009. This was an exciting but challenging project for all involved due to the sensitive nature of the subject matter. Partnership working was key to its success. Building trust, understanding and confidence was as important as gaining technical skills. The training was delivered by staff from the creative industries department in the college's multimedia and sound recording suites. The women formed themselves into different learning streams, some working on poetry, songs, stories or the generation of images whilst others concentrated on editing and production. The project was completed in ten weeks and resulted in a high quality presentation. More importantly, the women gained confidence and new media-related skills. The presentation at the conference was very well received by other organisations, and the material is now being circulated to other women's groups and support agencies in Scotland for training purposes. Learners described the projects as a 'helpful, comfortable and exceptional experience'.*

Over the last five years, colleges have registered a downturn in employed learners seeking part-time programmes aimed at updating their skills. The following two SQA initiatives aim to address this issue.

In March 2009, SQA launched a National Progression Award in Digital Media at SCQF levels 5 and 6, based on units contained within the new NC Art and Design Group Award. This part-time programme is designed to provide a range of complementary, digital-media-based art and design skills. The programme is aimed at employed learners wishing to develop their skills or learners wishing to study part-time prior to undertaking full-time programmes. The programme includes three units in animation, video and web-based digital media content. It is too early to predict uptake at this stage.

Three professional development awards at SCQF level 9 have been recently validated and will be offered by a few colleges from 2009/10. These will be offered in three specialist areas: advanced animation and illustration; advanced new media and animation; and advanced graphic design. These awards have been developed following consultation with employers in a range of creative digital industries, including computer games and interactive media. Employers are generally positive in principle about this new award, but it is too early to predict uptake across the creative digital industries sector.



*Beth Alexander, Aberdeen College, HND Photography (SCQF level 8)*

Most learners on introductory or NQ programmes work well in classes and enjoy attending college, though occasionally attendance and timekeeping are erratic. Most learners are enthusiastic about their studies and have clearly articulated plans to continue studying, though not always in the creative digital industries. In almost all colleges, learners are supported very effectively by teaching staff who know them well and help them to build on their personal interests and strengths. Learners on NQ or introductory programmes usually begin by undertaking tasks designed to help them understand basic design processes, appreciate the aims and practices of different industry sectors, develop technical skills and build their capacity to generate original ideas. Learning at this early stage usually includes frequent demonstrations or presentations by teaching staff. Most learners respond to this approach well and rapidly develop confidence, creativity, and understanding of basic industry practices. Throughout their programmes, they undertake progressively more challenging, independent tasks and projects, and most learners become more proficient at developing creative ideas. By the end of introductory or NQ programmes, most learners are producing artwork of an appropriate standard and are ready to progress. In a few colleges, however, drawing and research could be carried out more rigorously, while in a few others, the standard of learner work on these programmes is well above the minimum standard required.

Within HN programmes, all colleges build effectively on the skills developed within NQ, and in a few instances, introductory programmes. This involves increasing the levels of self-direction and self-reliance as learners progress through these programmes, and teaching staff reinforce the development of key employability skills and personal attributes. In HND or advanced diploma programmes, most learners successfully undertake projects which are progressively more challenging and demand high levels of personal response, creative thinking and independent approaches to their implementation. Most learners develop appropriate skills in drawing on these programmes, including on animation or interactive media programmes located within art and design departments. On occasion, as part of their design work, learners are challenged to undertake research into subjects unfamiliar to them, for example social or historical themes. This helps to develop learning skills and adaptability.

**Glasgow Metropolitan College: interdisciplinary collaboration**

Two learners on the MA Creative Writing course at the University of Glasgow, have set up the 'Brown Williams Journal'. Their first edition is in the form of an artist's book, entitled, 'Triangle', which was a collaborative project between artists working in different disciplines. Triangle involved students from the Masters (MA) Creative Writing programme, music students from the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama (RSAMD) and year 2 HND Graphic Design learners at Glasgow Metropolitan College. Triangle started out as a single piece of text which was then responded to by three other authors, with no guidelines or limitations. Next, the music students responded to these texts by composing a score, which was produced as an audio CD. Finally, the graphic design learners illustrated, collated and presented the materials in the form of prototype artist's books. The design learners were encouraged to respond creatively in the broadest possible way, and many extended their skills by exploring techniques in book binding, jewellery and product design. The project has not only generated some very successful pieces of creative work but also highlighted the exciting potential of inter-disciplinary collaboration.



Victoria Haining, Glasgow Metropolitan College,  
HND Visual Communication (SCQF level 8)



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Almost all learners at HN or advanced diploma level work very well in classes, and are highly committed to their subject areas. There is usually a purposeful but relaxed atmosphere in classrooms and studios, characterised by learners absorbed in their work and managing their own learning effectively. Creative and technical standards of learner work on HN and advanced diploma programmes are very high overall, and consistently well above the minimum levels required by SQA units. In a few colleges, the standard of drawing on illustration or animation programmes is particularly high.

Most learners on programmes at all levels gradually develop a clear understanding of industry expectations of planning and organisation, though they do not all successfully achieve them, especially in the early stages of their training. A few colleges do not enforce project submission deadlines stringently enough and this can be de-motivating for learners. Learners at advanced diploma level are largely self-directed, with tutor support as required. Learners at all levels, but more often at HN or advanced diploma level, regularly undertake 'live' projects which successfully allow them to work with real clients. This type of project, along with other activities which help learners interact with employers, has a particularly positive impact on learning. Learners, particularly at HN level or above, also develop broader understanding of industry practices from external trips and visits. In one college, learners have used trips and visits as a basis for work of a particularly high standard.



*Alan Rennie, Stevenson College, PDA Photography (SCQF level 9)*

### **Stevenson College: documentary photography in Paris**

*This two-week project aimed to give HND and PDA photography learners the opportunity to explore and document the culture of another European capital city in challenging real-life working conditions. HND learners were also undertaking the SQA unit Documentary Photography. The project was funded by the Leonardo da Vinci Lifelong Learning Programme and during the visit learners and staff worked closely with learners from a college in Paris. Each learner carefully planned their individual approach to the project including logistical, technical, aesthetic, moral and ethical considerations. Throughout the two weeks the learners rose to challenges very enthusiastically. They worked each day, often early in the morning and late at night, to get the best light and to capture the essence of the French capital city. They were largely self-directed, but were supported through regular consultation with teaching staff. The project had significant educational benefits for all involved, and all HND learners attained the unit. One learner said:*

*'My training in Paris was excellent. This project has given me great confidence in my problem solving abilities, something which will be of great use to me once I leave college and enter the world of work. Overall the trip has made me a confident and better photographer.'*

*One photograph from each student's documentary project was exhibited in Paris, at the French Institute Edinburgh the work was also published in book form.*

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Almost all programmes in the creative digital industries support learner engagement in learning very effectively. Because learning within programmes in the creative digital industries mostly involves the exploration, generation, testing and refining of ideas, it demands self-dialogue, personal expression and effective communication. Learners generally find this learning process represents a compelling, challenging and rewarding personal journey. Furthermore, learners who undertake these programmes usually do so because they are very interested in the subject and therefore tackle projects of increasing levels of challenge with enthusiasm and energy. Most learners at HNC or HND level also understand that they are training for a highly competitive industry and for many this raises their aspirations for success and therefore their performance levels.

Learners spend most time on individual projects, but many also often participate successfully in group activities. This introduces them to the type of teamworking demanded by industry. Occasionally, major group projects can be difficult to sustain, especially if there are learner absences.

Most programmes also incorporate regular learner presentations of their work to staff and peers. Although many learners find this daunting at first, most build confidence in their skills in oral communication, and accepting constructive criticism, which is essential for success in the creative industries. In a few colleges, learners are very skilled at evaluating their work and using this to adjust their creative ideas. Most learners also develop the ability to evaluate others' work, which provides reference points for their own ideas. They also learn to be constructive and supportive in their comments to their peers, which contributes to a positive group ethos and enables all learners to contribute actively to learning within the group. The majority of art and design departments are successfully exploring social networking technologies to enable learners to share and comment on each others' work, or provide access to teaching materials. A few colleges use college virtual learning environments (VLEs) very effectively to support learning but many art and design departments have successfully developed their own limited access social networking systems as a more effective way for learners and staff to communicate with each other.

**Cardonald College: online forum**

*Graphic design staff and learners have launched their own online forum. This enables both staff and learners to share information, discuss design trends, and provides links to useful resources such as websites. It is also a successful way for staff to disseminate programme information. Learners use the discussion boards to explore ideas for assigned work, inform each other about competitions, discuss general course issues and organise social events. The forum uses an interface familiar to students who use social networking sites. Responsibility for managing it resides primarily with learners, but in a safe, structured environment monitored by staff administrators. Participation rates in the forum are very high and include learners who do not always contribute to class discussions. It has broadened learners' understanding of current design trends and issues and become a central focus for shared learning. One learner said:*

*'I check the forum weekly. It's excellent for finding research pointers and inspiration. I love the fact that students and lecturers can all share the great sites and resources that they come across.'*

Learners at all levels and stages use resources and equipment competently and with increasing independence. They acquire skills in digital technology very effectively through contextualisation within creative projects. This enables learners to focus on the potential of technology to help realise their own design objectives and most learners find this approach relevant and interesting. A number of learners are developing very high level technical skills, especially at more advanced stages of learning. In a few colleges, these learners regularly provide informal technical support for other learners or even for teaching staff. Most colleges have identified successful ways of introducing learners undertaking other programmes in art and design departments, for example textile design or fine art, to digital technology. For many of these learners, its potential to realise and expand creative ideas adds an exciting dimension to their creative development.

**Dumfries & Galloway College: digital media projects in HNC Art and Design**

*Teaching staff delivering the HNC Art and Design enhance learner skills by exploring digital media technologies within a fine art context. Staff understand that digital media is a steep learning curve for many of these learners. They have adopted a holistic approach that supports learners' artistic sensibilities, but also raises their awareness of the potential of digital media to enhance their ideas. Teaching sessions are structured with two tutors teaching simultaneously. One tutor is an artist with a background in painting, drawing and environmental work. The other is a photographer with an extensive knowledge of new media. The project starts with presentations of digital artworks supported by software demonstrations on how they were created. Learners experiment with combinations of sound, light, photography and animation allied to core themes explored in their art classes. The art tutor works with learners to help them develop their creative ideas, while the photography tutor acts as a facilitator, guiding learners through the technology. Through this approach, learners have acquired technical skills relevant to their work rapidly and confidently. They have produced work of a high standard which includes adapted drawings and paintings; combinations of film, art and poetry; montage and animation.*

Almost all staff delivering the programmes are well qualified in their subject areas and have up-to-date knowledge of industry practices. Many are active practitioners in their field and almost all permanent staff have appropriate teaching qualifications or are in the process of gaining them. Teaching staff find that it is particularly challenging to maintain their skills in the rapidly changing field of digital technology but most manage this successfully through informal peer support, personal learning and information from industry contacts. Teaching staff who have undertaken staff development or focused discussions with staff from other colleges have found this a highly effective way of extending their own skills and knowledge and sharing good practice. However, opportunities for these joint discussions are currently only at an early stage of development. Several staff in the *Skillset Media Academy* colleges have benefited from staff development programmes, though these are mainly aimed at the audio-visual industries, like television and radio.

Most teaching staff use information and communications technology (ICT) effectively to present projects, demonstrate technical processes or for history and professional studies classes. Most staff work very well in teams, either in joint projects and events, team teaching in open-plan teaching areas or in sharing good practice. Almost all teaching staff in the creative digital industries are very enthusiastic about their subjects and are therefore highly motivated to generate similar enthusiasm in learners. Working relationships amongst staff and learners are almost always supportive and constructive. In a few colleges,

staff invite comment regularly from learners on their own professional work, which empowers learners and enables them to develop confidence in their ability to form professional judgements. In almost all art and design departments, staff and learners enjoy positive and egalitarian working relationships. In most colleges, this has resulted in the development of genuinely creative communities.

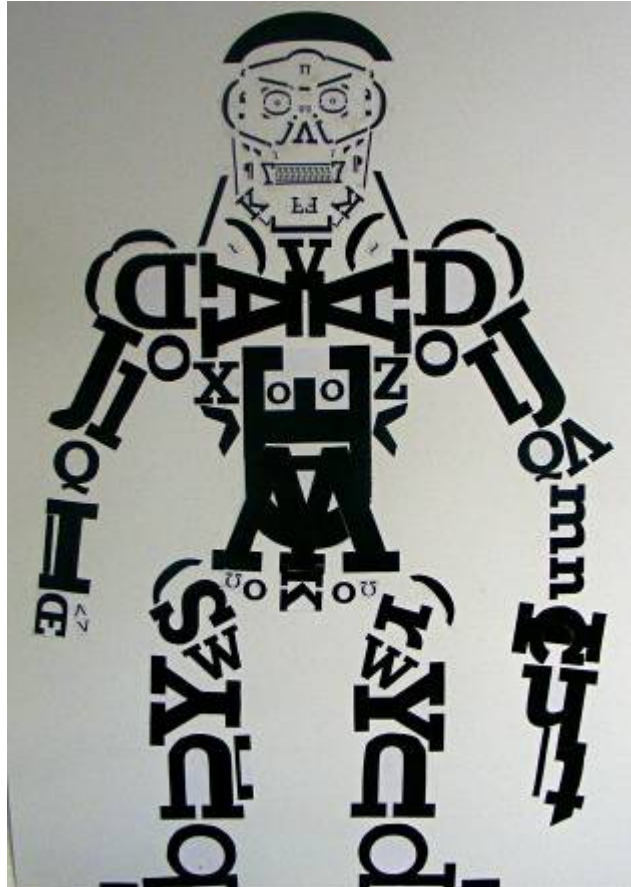
***Perth College: self-directed learning using video tutorials***

*A member of teaching staff in graphic design at Perth College has designed video tutorials in specific technical topics for learners. This is part of a wider research initiative within the college to explore how ICT can aid self-directed learning. The tutorials enable learners to learn or revise complex design software processes in their own time and at their own pace. Tutorials can be accessed from outwith the college. Key aspects of processes are demonstrated using the lecturer's voice and incorporating easy-to-follow on-screen demonstrations, relevant to the type of design work being undertaken by the learners. The video is structured in clearly signposted chapters that allow learners to easily access and repeat specific topics. Learner feedback has been very positive, with almost all enjoying this form of learning and finding the tutorials very useful for learning or practising new skills. Learners have particularly welcomed the personalised, tailored approach and have found it a much more accessible learning experience than using paper handouts or standard software instructions. Plans are underway to extend the project to include more software packages and further enhance interactivity.*

Teaching staff make good use of formative assessment to enable them and learners to evaluate progress. They provide helpful oral feedback and, in one or two colleges, very detailed and useful written feedback. However, in some cases, assessments could be better planned and integrated, and feedback could be more timely. Staff in almost all colleges provide useful one-to-one tutorial support which helps individual learners keep track of their progress and set targets for improvement. A few colleges hold very effective events to advise and support learners who wish to progress to employment or further learning. However, in many colleges, career advice is mainly provided informally by teaching staff.

***Forth Valley College: partnership working with an HEI to inform learner progression***

*For the last three years creative industries staff in Forth Valley College have delivered a very successful portfolio and information workshop hosted jointly with Dundee University, (Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art). Schools from Falkirk, Stirling, Clackmannanshire and West Lothian attend this event. University staff display a selection of the best entry portfolios from the current year one degree students, which represent entrants from both schools and colleges. Staff from both the college and university promote their programmes to school pupils and progressing college learners, and answer queries from teachers and learners. The workshop enables school pupils to explore the full range of progression options available to them, including the college route to degree. The event is therefore beneficial to the college, the university, and learners. It is also a useful for both school and college staff, as it helps them reflect on their practice in portfolio preparation. Although open days are provided by all of the HEIs offering art and design programmes, this event is particularly well attended and appreciated, as it is tailored to local requirements. It also helps maintain the important and positive relationships between the college and its local schools.*



*Paul McDonald and Michael Shirra, Forth Valley College,  
HND Visual Communication (SCQF Level 7)*

All colleges promote and celebrate learner achievement through displays of their work within departments and throughout college campuses. All hold very well-presented end-of-year exhibitions of learner work which attracts families, friends, potential employers and usually, local media interest. Most learners value greatly opportunities to display their work. A few colleges successfully use the services of external publishing companies to present learner work very attractively. A few colleges also display learner work in the form of electronic galleries or teaching department websites. A small number of colleges incorporate design or photography competition specifications regularly into project briefs, but competition entry is generally left up to individual learners and uptake is low across Scotland. This results in missed opportunities for learners to undertake challenging projects and to benchmark their work nationally. In a few colleges, success in national competitions is high, and greatly enhances their national and international reputation.



**Reid Kerr College: online publishing of learner art work**

*For photographers, presentation of the final outcome is a vital aspect of the process. With the advent of digital technologies, staff consider it important to address potentially under-developed learner skills in producing photographic prints to a high standard, alongside electronic presentation. Staff researched cost-effective ways of achieving this and have piloted the use of online printing and publishing services. This has been highly successful. HND learners undertaking their graded unit have presented their final images in a shared published book, to a professional standard, with minimal cost to each individual. In some projects, notably a fashion design group project, this method of presenting work has enabled staff to easily assess group work by seeing how well the images work together and how each learner has contributed to the overall project. The books provide learners with a very attractive record of each others' work. Learners have acquired useful skills in online image presentation, generating a clear accompanying narrative and layout design. They have also learned to work well together for a common purpose.*



*Sharon Dalgliesh, Reid Kerr College, HND Photography (SCQF level 8)*

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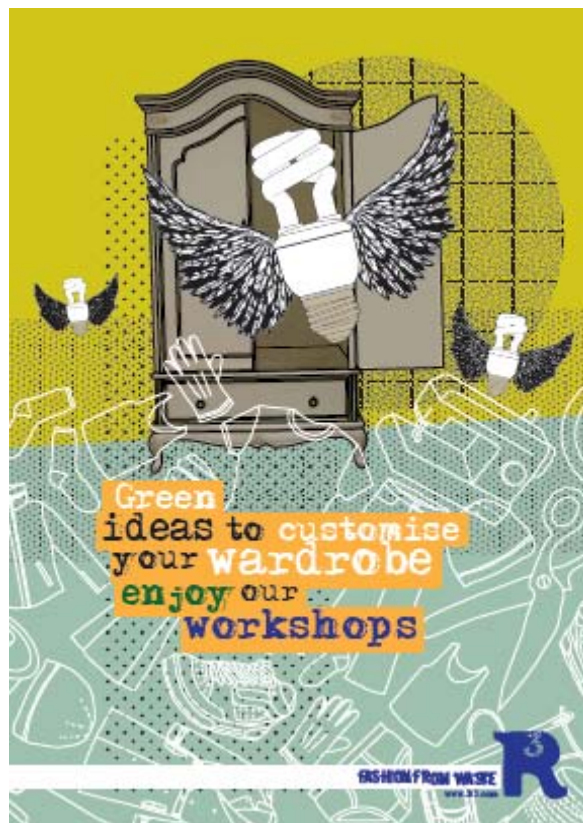
Most colleges offer programmes to learners with additional support needs, either as discrete foundation programmes, in the form of individual programmes of study or with access to extended learning support. However, while learners with substantial additional learning needs learn well on introductory programmes and enjoy the experience, the demands of next level programmes mean that it is often difficult for them to progress beyond this level and this can lead to disappointment.

Teaching staff within creative digital industries programmes participate in college-wide initiatives to promote equality and diversity, and are generally very welcoming and supportive to learners with different backgrounds. However, there are only a few examples of specific initiatives to encourage learners from different backgrounds to undertake programmes in the creative digital industries. Most colleges regularly provide project briefs which encourage learners to investigate social or citizenship issues. Almost all colleges provide good access to resources and equipment for learners with mobility difficulties.

## 6 | Programme evaluation

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Almost all teaching staff regularly evaluate programmes and contribute to team meeting and reports. However, in most colleges, written self-evaluation reports do not reflect the ongoing discussions about learning and teaching that take place informally and instead focus primarily on practical issues like timetabling or resources. Only a few programme teams analyse low retention or attainment rigorously enough in the few programmes where it occurs, beyond describing individual learner circumstances. All colleges appoint class representatives who contribute to programme evaluations and most departments also ask learners to carry out regular evaluations of projects or units. A number hold focus groups sessions with learners. These useful processes lead to the identification of actions for improvement, but most learners also engage very regularly with staff in informal discussions about projects, resource issues or other aspects of their learning. On the whole, almost all learners feel that their voice is welcomed and listened to, and there are several instances of improvements directly attributable to learner views.



*Alazane Amadoz, Edinburgh's Telford College,  
HND Visual Communication: Graphic Design (Year 2)*

### **Retention and attainment**

Retention rates on NQ and introductory programmes are generally high with exceptions for a few programmes. In one or two colleges, the implementation of robust action plans has improved retention rates on introductory and NQ programmes over the last two years. Attainment rates on these programmes generally parallel retention rates, and are high for most learners. The criteria for programme success vary from college to college, within a range from 70% to 100% of programme units. Given the variation of types and numbers of assessed units within locally devised programmes, this leads to wide variations in what constitutes programme attainment and makes comparisons between colleges difficult.

At HNC, HND and advanced diploma levels, retention rates are mostly high and attainment is also high for those learners who complete their programmes.

### **Achievement of skills**

In all colleges, learners who attend regularly and are committed to their studies develop confidence in their creative abilities and gain specialist skills appropriate to their programme levels. Although qualifications are important for progression, an equally important passport to the next stage is a portfolio or showreel of well-presented artwork. Almost all learners who complete programmes achieve this, even where they have not achieved all learning outcomes or programme units. Most colleges recognise that strong performance on creative digital industries programmes is often linked to learner maturity. If portfolios demonstrate sufficient levels of creative potential, colleges often allow learners to progress to the next stage and undertake catch-up tasks to address gaps in their knowledge and skills.

In all colleges, learners gain progressively greater levels of key employability skills and personal attributes for the creative digital industries though these are obviously developed to a more basic level at introductory and NQ programmes. By the time learners complete HND or advanced diploma programmes, almost all are able to:

- think creatively;
- learn and adapt quickly;
- demonstrate proficiency in a range of digital technical platforms;
- communicate, plan and organise;
- work alongside others with different skills; and
- work with clients.

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At this stage, almost all learners have gained sufficient skills to progress. Nevertheless, most recognise that in order to be fully proficient in their chosen careers, they will still have to invest a great deal of time and effort in learning in the future.

Overall, most employers who are planning to employ learners from colleges consider that, at HND level, they display a good balance of specialist and essential employability skills and a strong understanding of industry practices. Many employers consider that HND graduates have a stronger grasp of technical aspects than degree-level graduates, especially from art colleges. However, a few employers consider that learners applying for work do not have a sufficiently well-developed sense of working to deadlines, or a full enough grasp of technical detail around print or web processes, and require support in these areas when they start work. Most HEI representatives also consider that HND learners' applications to years two and three degree level study demonstrate an appropriate range of skills. However, a few feel that though technically competent, some of these learners lack sufficiently well-developed creative or drawing skills. Where learners are applying to highly technical degree programmes, learners may not always demonstrate sufficient academic proficiency, especially in mathematics. Many HEI representatives consider that commencing degree-level study at SCQF level 8 rather than at level 9 helps learners address gaps in these particular skills and qualifications.

Most learners undertaking programmes in the creative digital industries gain skills in citizenship through working with their peers to mount exhibitions and events, or by working supportively with each other in the classroom and in group critiques. Teaching staff often invite other college departments to act as clients. This enables learners to consider and respond to the needs of staff and learners within the wider college and this also helps them develop skills in citizenship. In a few cases, colleges have also used external clients in the form of charities or small businesses or have based projects around local social issues. This has helped broaden learner awareness of issues within their wider communities.

### **Dundee College: work placements within college marketing department**

*During the last six years, HND Visual Communication learners at Dundee College have undertaken a rolling programme of work placements within the college's marketing department. These two-week placements enable approximately ten learners to experience a real working environment each academic year. Within the placements the learners spend most of their time creating publicity materials for the regular dance and theatre productions undertaken in the college. The learners participate in all stages of the design process. They begin by discussing the project briefs with the director of drama and theatre production prior to commencing their work placement and during it they present their design concepts to this client, before taking their ideas to finished artwork and printing stage. During the course of their placement they are supervised by the creative director of marketing. They are introduced to new software programs and experience at first hand the pressure of production schedules and procedures. Importantly, they become familiar with the work of marketing staff with different roles and responsibilities. The work placement programme has proved to be highly beneficial for the learners. They develop their employability skills in a real life but supportive environment while contributing to the work and life of the college by supporting other learners in their work.*



Sam Cumming, Dundee College, HND Graphic Design, (SCQF level 8)

Most learners who complete introductory programmes progress internally to programmes within the same broad subject areas, at a higher level, at NQ or HNC. For a small number of learners, experience of an introductory programme, though successful in its outcome, serves to confirm alternative career aspirations, and these learners progress successfully to unrelated areas of study. Most learners on NQ and HNC programmes progress internally to programmes at a higher level within the same broad subject areas.

Accurate information on progression to employment from HND programmes is difficult to obtain because learners do not always keep their colleges informed about their destinations. Also, HND design or photography learners often enter relevant employment eventually, but this can take several months as they build up their networks and work on short-term or freelance contracts. This makes data from single-year destination tracking unreliable. However, almost all colleges are able to analyse information on learner employment to a certain extent, and overall, it is estimated that of the 20% of learners with an HND graphic design-related qualification who do not progress to higher education, approximately half are employed in relevant areas within two years. For learners with an HND in photography, this figure is higher because so many photographers start up their own businesses. However, it is not known how many are still working in photography two years later.

For learners graduating with qualifications at advanced diploma level, progression to employment is estimated to be very much higher, in the region of 70–80%, but the learner numbers on programmes encompassed within the report are so small as to be statistically unreliable.

Colleges are able to provide more accurate figures on progression to degree-level or advanced diploma level study from HND programmes. Approximately 80% of learners progress to further study at this level. Where colleges themselves offer advanced diploma or degree level articulation, most learners progress internally. It is not known how many learners who progress to HEIs progress thereafter to SCQF level 10, and the level of honours degree award they gain if they do. There are currently no comparative studies about performance from HND learners against learners who commence university study at year one. However, for HEIs with articulation arrangements with colleges, current research indicates that the creative digital industries represents one of the most popular programme choices in post-92 universities, representing a significant amount of provision for these institutions.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Research currently being undertaken by SFC South West Articulation Hub

## 8 | Recommendations

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The Scottish Funding Council should:

- work with colleges, HEIs and employers to improve methods of tracking the longer-term career progression of college graduates.

Colleges should:

- increase and build on successful practice in involving employers in planning and delivery of programmes, particularly around work placement;
- involve HEIs more in joint planning to ease the transition between study at HND and degree levels;
- increase the number of introductory programmes in creative digital industries for hard-to-reach learners, either in schools or in the community;
- further develop the use of social networking technologies to enable learners to share and evaluate their work;
- improve links between staff in art and design and computing departments, in order to design and deliver programmes which build on the strengths of each;
- monitor and analyse areas of low retention and attainment, and implement action plans to improve them; and
- encourage teaching staff to work with staff from other colleges more regularly to extend their own skills and knowledge and to share good practice.



### **Glossary of terms**

The report uses a number of terms which have specific meaning within its context.

#### **Programmes in creative digital industries**

Programmes in graphic design, illustration, photography and digital imaging, animation, computer games design and interactive media, where they are wholly or in part based within art and design departments.

#### **Creative and cultural industries**

This term is used within industry and includes visual art and design, the performing arts, creative digital industries, audio-visual industries and aspects of culture and heritage.

#### **Industry sector**

Individual specialist areas within any of these broad categories above.

#### **Art and design department**

Department which delivers programmes described within the report. Some may also include music technology, media or computing. The report does not include programmes in creative digital industries that are delivered solely within separate computing departments and are not subject to joint planning or delivery.

#### **Department**

Includes school or faculty.

#### **Curriculum managers**

Staff with responsibility for specific curriculum areas. Within the report, this also includes programme coordinators or leaders.

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## **Teaching staff**

Any college staff involved in programme delivery who have direct contact with learners including instructors.

## **Introductory programmes**

Locally-devised entry-level programmes aimed at learners with little or no prior experience of creative digital industries, mostly involving units at SCQF level 4 or 5.

## **National Qualification (NQ) programmes**

Locally-devised programmes which provide foundation skills in specialist areas.

## **National Certificate (NC) programmes**

Recently launched SQA Group Awards in art and design.

## **Advanced diploma**

Programmes offered within colleges at SCQF level 9, excluding degree programmes.

## **Specialist skills**

Specific creative and technical skills required within individual industries.

## **Key employability skills and personal attributes**

Skills and attributes identified by the relevant sector skills councils and other stakeholders as being particularly important for successful working across all creative digital industries. Elements of this wording have a broader meaning within *Skills for Scotland: a lifelong skills strategy*<sup>19</sup>.

<b>FES</b>	Further Education Statistics
<b>HEI</b>	higher education institution
<b>HMIE</b>	Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education
<b>HN</b>	higher national
<b>HNC</b>	Higher National Certificate

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<sup>19</sup> [www.scotland.gov.uk/publications/2007/09/06091114/0](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/publications/2007/09/06091114/0)

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<b>HND</b>	Higher National Diploma
<b>ICT</b>	information and communications technology
<b>NESTA</b>	National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts
<b>NC</b>	National Certificate
<b>NQ</b>	National Qualification
<b>SAAS</b>	Student Award Agency for Scotland
<b>SCQF</b>	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
<b>SFC</b>	Scottish Funding Council
<b>SQA</b>	Scottish Qualifications Authority
<b>SSC</b>	Sector Skills Council
<b>VLE</b>	virtual learning environment

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## Colleges involved in the fieldwork for the report

Aberdeen College  
Cardonald College  
Dumfries and Galloway College  
Dundee College  
Edinburgh's Telford College  
Forth Valley College  
Glasgow Metropolitan College  
John Wheatley College  
Perth College  
Stevenson College  
Reid Kerr College  
The Adam Smith College



*Mary Overmeer, Stevenson College,  
Degree Foundation Photography (SCQF levels 5/6)*

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<http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/curriculumforexcellence/curriculumoverview/index.asp>