Creative & Cultural Skills Podcast - Episode Zero - Transcript

CATHERINE   Covid has been this massive magnifying glass on our society, and inequalities that we've been able to ignore for a number of reasons - we're having to stop having these conversations, and we need to.

ALEX   When things like the furlough scheme ends, or even two years down the line and potentially Kickstart finishes, then we'll start to really, really see those impacts.

CATHERINE   For me, with caring responsibilities and full time job, actually knowing that I can watch the recording of it later, that I can join a Zoom session and not have to get a babysitter... It's been amazing. So there are some really great opportunities for us to seize in building a culture of learning.

ALEX   We've been in positions before as tiny business when we first first started, where, you know, organisations were like "can you come and just work for free?" "Do this and we'll give you some exposure." Is it volunteering, or is it working for free? Because they are two very different things.

POSY   This is the Creative and Cultural Skills podcast. Conversations and key questions about the future of our cultural sector. Here's our host, Rob West.

ROB WEST   Hello, I'm Rob West, and welcome to the Creative and Cultural Skills podcast, where we talk to professionals in the cultural sector about some of the key issues affecting our industries today. At the time of recording this podcast, the UK government have just announced a roadmap out of lockdown, in response to the coronavirus pandemic that's been sweeping the world. During the past year, young people have suffered, with their education being disrupted, their schools and colleges have been closed. And for those outside education, many have either lost their jobs, or face a future of high youth unemployment. Building back better post covid for the cultural sector could therefore offer threats, but also opportunities. Will we see a situation that results in regress or progress? Across this podcast series, we'll be having conversations about this, and the need to create fairer access to the cultural sector. Joining me on this 'Episode Zero' to lay the groundwork, and discuss some of the many upcoming themes that you can hear and take part in across our first set of episodes, we have Alex Porter-Smith, Co-Founder and Head of Production at High Tide Media. Hello, Alex.

ALEX   Hello. Glad to be here.

ROB   Alex completed a modern apprenticeship at Creative Scotland from 2012 to 2013, creating video and photography content about projects that the organisation funded. Since leaving, she set up a video production company, High Tide, which creates promotional film and video content for the creative industries in Scotland. And Catherine , who's head of learning and skills at the V&A Museum of Childhood. Catherine has developed creative careers education at a number of organisations, including Somerset House, Design Museum, and now at the V&A. Catherine is a fellow at the Royal Society of Arts, and until recently, Vice Chair of the Board for the London Design and Engineering UTC. In 2018, she was awarded a Creative and Cultural Skills Award for Design Skills Education. Hello, Catherine.

CATHERINE   Hello Rob. It's funny. It surprised me when I won that award - "oh, I forgot!"

ROB   Well, I must admit, when I was doing the bio, I'd forgotten you've got that. (LAUGHS)

CATHERINE   (LAUGHS) Yeah, I'd completely fo- "that's nice. Oh, thank you. Thank you CCSkills."

ROB Can I start by inviting you both to give your views on what you believe are the key threats and opportunities, in relation to creating fairer access to the cultural sector? Alex, as we hopefully enter a period where we finally emerge from this pandemic, do you see a cultural sector where there's further access that's better, or further barriers for people from disadvantaged backgrounds?

ALEX I really hope that there's going to be less barriers and there will be more access. I think what lockdown has done is kind of made everybody really aware of youth unemployment - and in one way, that's probably quite a good thing because then we're probably more aware of all those challenges. So I think in that sense, that's going to be really positive for employers actually getting to grips with the challenges that young people face in terms of the Kickstart scheme and stuff - I think that's going to be a really good opportunity. I hope that what doesn't happen is that employers have to focus on their own small businesses because of the pandemic, and then they ignore those issues. So I'm stuck in the middle, I hope it goes the good way.

ROB Catherine, what do you feel about this? Do you think there are threats, but also opportunities - particularly for young people?

CATHERINE We are still calibrating what the impact of all of this is on all of us as a society. This pandemic has been unlike many other historic traumas in the past, in that we've all been locked away in our own homes, separated from each other. We've kind of understood there are lots of hidden barriers that people have been facing, and personal traumas and tragedies through this, and we haven't really been able to be together to understand what that means as a society. So we're listening a lot, we're learning a lot from each other, and we're desperate to reconnect - and so that's a huge opportunity. I heard DCMS, for example, is seeking views on how they can prioritise out-of-school provision for young people, and it's wonderful to know that a government department is asking what young people need outside of formal education, and what they need to be doing themselves to hear that young voice. And so, because we've all been separated and we do need to learn, it's really exciting that we've got that moment to hear each other, and to really understand each other - because we talk about making space, this is a moment when we can do that. Can you hear all the banging in the background, by the way?

ROB We can, it's good fun.

CATHERINE Okay. (Laughs).

ALEX I think we don't quite know it yet, and I think when things like the furlough scheme end, or even two years down the line when potentially Kickstart finishes, then we'll start to really see those impacts. And then there's that kind of funny age group as well, like 25 to 27, who've maybe just missed the young young people support, but they're being made redundant too. And so yeah, I think we're not going to see that impact for a long time

ROB Because, of course, a number of young people suffered from not having the equipment that's needed.

CATHERINE Yeah, there's been a lot of talk about digital divide. This is another one of those double edged sword, isn't it? Where this pandemic of in-real-life engagement has meant huge, fast learning for lots of organisations and individuals about how to engage, you know, all generations needing to connect with each other digitally, because it's the only way to do it. I guess the commentary by and large has been; "this has just accelerated things that were a trend that were coming anyway, we were all going in this direction". But it's been fascinating to see how people have adapted, particularly in education, to delivering learning online and digitally. But that has really highlighted some of the inequalities in society - who

is lacking not just devices, but stable connections as well? And they really do have an impact now on how you're able to participate. And so, it's really just heightening our understanding of what disadvantage really means, and a real challenge and a clarion call for us to think about how we might address that. It's a real infrastructure issue, actually. Talking to educators in the cultural sector, particularly in museums and galleries, it does seem there's no going back in terms of that blended approach - that we've missed some aspects of doing stuff in person, having authentic access to museum objects, for example. Hands on creative, and creative learning in terms of making and doing through school delivery online, has really suffered, because not everybody's got those materials, that space at home, and it's just really difficult to teach. But on the other side, the geographical barriers of access are completely broken down. When you're working digital, you can have experts from all over the place. I heard a story - this is much younger children, but I heard a story about year 1s - so they're five and six year olds - learning about under the sea, and having a Zoom with a deep sea diver to ask about what it was really like underwater. Just those examples. So it's about using digital to its advantage, thinking about what's special and unique about it, and what we need to do together - and I think we've really re-evaluated that jerk response that if you're not in person, it's not a valid way of learning.

ROB   Hmm. I can understand that very much with museums and theatres and venues, probably been on a steep learning curve, but, Alex, in terms of your field, in terms of video of media making, have you seen any progressions in that area?

ALEX   Yeah, I think a couple. So I think, firstly, when we contact brands and agencies that we want to work with, we're very much like, "okay, we'll do a day in Glasgow, and we'll try and contact everybody that we can get in contact with there. And now we're talking to people all over the country, and we could be talking to people all over the world if we wanted to. And, you know, we're having networking events with maybe nine or 10 other people, and that's really impacting our work - to be able to reach people further. And then secondly, in terms of the content that people are putting out, I think there's a real shift towards like, "okay, we need this". Whereas I think a year, year and a half ago, it felt like it was a "nice to have", and some brands were all over video content, but there was a lot of catching up to do. And I think, as Catherine says, that's just accelerated that quite significantly. People are going, "okay, this needs to be at the centre of what we do in terms of marketing" now. So, that's exciting.

CATHERINE Whilst museum doors, for example, might not be open seven days a week, all through the year now for a period of time through build back as well, actually, the amount of output probably just shifts to another space. You know, there've been some really amazing bits of theatre in people's front rooms; live streamed. Being able to see an opera or a ballet that I never would have been had to go out the house to go and see. And so it might just require, again, that continuum we've seen started 15 years ago where digital skills, digital understanding, and innovation, will just be a really important part of everybody's portfolios.

ROB   I spoke earlier about the outcome of the pandemic being regression or progression, or revert back or reform - and the creative industries have clearly suffered during this pandemic, but they have a good track record for recovery. It seems to me there's a very clear choice, isn't there? We either go back to what we were doing, and thank goodness that's over now, or you pick up some of these things like digital, and blended learning, and other groups, and going "actually, we could relook at the way we do things here". What might stop an organisation from thinking that way?

ALEX   I think it's just that needs to have connection with people, you know? Like, this is great that we're doing this over Zoom, but in an ideal world, we'd all be in the same room together - because it just flows so much better, and you can read people's body language. I think that's like a real need for that at the moment, I think everybody's really feeling that. So I think there might be like a burst of that when we first go back; of, like, we move away from digital

really quickly, and then we might move back again. And I hope that would be the situation, rather than just reverting back completely to the way things were.

CATHERINE I agree. I think there's a little bit of - for those of us in sectors that perhaps have more of a heritage aspect in culture - more kind of received traditions about ways that things have done. This very rapid change to the way that we need to operate has shown that innovation can happen really quickly, and actually some of the barriers that we might have found in the past which were stopping us actually needn't be there at all. And so, I feel really optimistic from from that perspective. People won't want to stop doing some things that have been really successful, that have worked in terms of reach, engagement, quality, enjoyment. But Alex is right, you know, we're social beings and a lot of aspects of the creative and cultural sectors are about bringing people together. And so it'll be interesting to see where the lessons sink in, and where we have a real need to slip back into some old ways that were valued. I don't know what the answer is, but I do hope that there's an increased recognition of the ranges of employments, and the benefits and the drawbacks - and perhaps less of a "this is the way we always do it", and more of a "what's the best way, what's the most ethical way to employ people in order to get this thing done?" And how do we safeguard both the knowledge and expertise in their own organisations? Because losing that brilliant freelancer you've worked with for four years is a devastation to institutional organisational knowledge, as well as to the individual as well. So, I think it's an opportunity for just a bit of a rethink about how we go about stuff.

ROB Many organisations are obviously fighting to survive until the next quarter. But it does seem imperative that we don't just build back better, but we build back fairer as well, and embrace this chance to be more inclusive. But to pick up on your point, Catherine, about freelancers, which is another theme of ours in our podcast series... We know there are a significant proportion of freelancers who work in the cultural sector, and we know that they've been particularly hard hit by the effects of the pandemic on their opportunities. Alex, do you think freelancers will suffer further, or do you think they will survive as time goes on?

ALEX I think it really depends on the sector, to be honest with you. I know we're talking about the cultural sectors generally, but I think stuff that goes back first, I think there's going to be a real hunger for events, and even smaller events. And so I really hope that those freelancers will have a really busy summer. But I do think that they probably are realistically going to struggle; in one of the most categories, having regular contact with clients, and clients have other priorities. We noticed that when we first came out of the first lockdown, we thought "everybody's going to want content". And, no, they were concentrating on all the other important things for them. So I think some of the creative industries and freelancers will be like second or third priorities, in terms of the work that needs to be given.

ROB How about you, Catherine? In terms of freelancers, what kind of future do you see for them? Short term, and more medium and long term?

CATHERINE Sorry, I didn't have a crystal ball. (LAUGHS) The really striking thing for me has been a better recognition of where the expertise really comes from, where the skills are, and who's got them. And how we pay for them; what cost that is. How vulnerable so many routes of employment are in the creative and cultural sectors, because of flexible working; that is an advantage for some people. But you kind of probably need to be pretty well set up for it to be advantageous to you - and if we are interested in diversity, we've got to think about ways that people can have a quality of life, a dependable quality of life. I've seen lots of freelancers just completely in limbo, actually, through this whole pandemic, struggling to find work, because what they do really requires a venue and being open. There are fewer jobs at the moment, there is less money. This has cost a huge amount, hasn't it? The flexibility in part time working will be an opportunity for some people. It's been quite stuck to me, actually: The value of stability, and a regular income and access to things like the

furlough scheme have probably... Those policies, whilst they've been really important, have probably favoured particular types of traditional employment. The employment practises of the creative and cultural industries have always really benefited from a flexi approach, a seasonal approach, because of the patterns of the work, and it will be interesting to se how that works out. But for individuals themselves, it's always a kind of a clarion call to keep innovating, keep thinking about how you're fresh, and what you're offering as well.

ROB   And freelancing is going to be one of the topics we want to look at in this series of podcasts. Another is volunteering, and to pick up on Alex's point about how it could be different in different sectors, Catherine, you work in the museum sector - that involves a strong volunteering element, particularly around the small independent museum sector. It's a fine line, isn't it? To pick up on what you were just saying between volunteering and unpaid work. So what are your thoughts on volunteering, and its role in the survival of cultural organisations?

CATHERINE   So volunteers are this amazing resource, and I feel really conflicted about volunteering in a way, because I think it's really important that we care for each other, and we contribute in different ways. And certainly the first time that furlough came around, I was furloughed. Many, many colleagues, senior colleagues in other cultural organisations were furloughed. And there was just this mushrooming of opportunities to contribute to your community as a volunteer in many ways. And that kind of civic care, and civic service in volunteering, is a really important aspect of our culture in our society. So, I wouldn't want to denigrate it, but I do think it then poses challenges again; who can afford to work for free? Only particular people. And that's problematic as well. And for me, the best examples of volunteering is when there's a transaction - where you are bringing skills, knowledge, and time, in exchange for learning and growth and social interaction. Then, there's a kind of a fair exchange. When you're just filling a gap, or filling a role, you know, someone organisations wouldn't function without that. But it comes at a cost, and it comes at a cost for the diversity of the paid workforce as well, sometimes. So it's it's a really, yeah, a really tricky one to navigate.

ROB   Yeah, I'm absolutely in agreement with you, that volunteering has its benefits and is absolutely key, as I say, particularly for the small independent museums, windmills, groups that just wouldn't exist without that as well. But Alex, do you think volunteering perhaps just perpetuates inequality of opportunity that exists in our cultural sector?

ALEX   Yeah, I do think it does come down to the definition of the word. Which I know is maybe a bit obtuse, but it's like; is it volunteering or is it working for free? Because they are two very different things. And I think if it's a charity and you're donating your time, or if it's a really good cause, not necessarily a charity, and that feels like volunteering, then that's brilliant. But we've been in positions before. As a tiny business when we first first started, where organisations are like "can you come and just work for free? Do this and we'll give you some exposure." That is not volunteering. And actually, as Catherine says, that transactional thing, where we would try and say, "OK, well, we'll do it for free, but we want X, Y and Z out of it." And often, we're either turned away on that, or just false promises were made and it didn't happen. So I think it needs to be clearer whether it's volunteering or working for free.

CATHERINE   Totally. But it's not just the definitions of it, and who's working for free and who's not, it's understanding the impact that it has; by making the decision to make this a voluntary opportunity, or a paid one. Volunteering has, in the past, (I don't know so much now, but) used as a barrier to stop people from from entering employment as well. "You don't have enough experience, go volunteer." And actually, we've seen a huge growth in internships and apprenticeships and training opportunities, particularly in the cultural sector, but in the creative sector as well, that is addressing some of these challenges - and start to eradicate

this trend of expecting particularly young people to work for free at the start of their careers, as well.

ROB   Yes, you're absolutely right. I mean, to volunteer, you have to have the time to volunteer, and you have to have the money and the resources to be able to volunteer. If you do have those, that's great, but it does seem to be something else that works against people from disadvantaged backgrounds - of being able to get that experience that supposedly you need, and barriers being put in the way. Alex, the way you were talking there, it seemed like there'd been some experience from your past - have you experienced volunteering when you started out in your career?

ALEX   Yeah, I think it's always dressed up in a bit of a different way. It's like, "would you want to come and be a sponsor?" And so then we're sponsoring them with our free time. But then again, I look at the work experience I did, particularly before I did my apprenticeship. I was shadowing someone - and that was a brilliant learning experience, and, of course, I did that for free. Then when I went and did my apprenticeship, that was paid. And so, that made a huge difference too - and it wasn't a huge amount of money, but at the time it was a massive amount of money, you know? So, yeah, I think the experience has been slightly different at different stages in career, for me.

ROB   So there are all these different things which we want to pick up on in the podcast - freelancing, volunteering, and you've just raised there, Alex, apprenticeships as well. And at Creative and Cultural Skills, as you know, we're well known for our work in terms of promoting and developing apprenticeships for the sector. And as you say, Alex, your entry to the profession was through an apprenticeship - and apprenticeships work for sectors like engineering and construction, but do they really work for our sector?

ALEX   Yeah, I think so. Yeah, absolutely. When we did our apprenticeship, there was meant to be one of us at Creative Scotland, and our line manager ended up picking two of us because he couldn't decide between the two of us - and, actually, that's now who I run my business with. And so that was a huge, huge impact on us and our life. So, yeah, I think they really, really have a place, and the contacts that came out of that for us. I think a lot of people in our industry - there's someone in their family, or a family friend, who've helped them get in - and neither of us had any of that. But that apprenticeship brought us up to that level, do you know what I mean? To be in line with everybody else. I've just realised as well, Catherine and I are volunteers for the board of Cultural and Creative Skills.

CATHERINE   I was going to say that. (LAUGHS) I'm volunteering right now!

ALEX   Yeah. And so I think in terms of like that transactional thing, we get so much out of that. We got to help people, and we get to support this brilliant organisation, and that's what volunteering should be. It's not like CCSkills are taking the Mickey out of our time or anything like that, and we all know why we're here. And I think that's really, really important.

ROB   It makes absolute sense that knowing why you are here, knowing why you are volunteering - it's to do with the power relationship as well. One of the definitions of 'volunteer' is you can decide whether you're going to attend that day, or not.

ALEX   Mmhmm.

ROB   And there are situations where volunteers are told "you must be here at this time to do this". Well, actually, then the relationship has changed - and for me, that becomes... In a sense, if you are a volunteer,, and everything is reliant on you, you're doing a job, aren't you?

CATHERINE Potentially. There are small grassroots, community led, amazing creative provisions, cultural provisions, community provisions, that absolutely require huge amounts of work that people are willing to give to you. So it is a really fine line. Yeah, it's a really fine line.

ROB I'm going to push us back to apprenticeships then, because Alex is a is a great example of an apprentice success.

ALEX Thanks. (CHUCKLES)

ROB Catherine, in terms of your view: Apprenticeships for our sectors - do they work?

CATHERINE It's really fabulous hearing, again, about Alex's experience. It's such an exemplar, and so encouraging. And through CCSkills, I've met and heard about some really fabulous successes, through apprenticeships in their creative industries. But standing on the other side of it - particularly in my role at Somerset House, which is one of the largest concentrations of creative organisations in London, if not the country, lots and lots of SMEs - I've met so many people that are absolutely terrified. You know, wonderful, agile, creative organisations, terrified of apprenticeships, and just really struggling to navigate and negotiate how to get involved in them. One thing that really struck me, Alex, and what you're saying about where you are at now, and what you gained from that experience - whatever you call it, apprenticeship, traineeship, however it's dealt with - a paid opportunity to learn on the job is so important. And I think there are lots of intelligent and flexible ways that we can go about doing it. But this is an important aspect to the mix, and an important one, I think, for the creative sectors to think about how they compare with other industries as well, and making sure those entry routes are there. I've heard anecdotes of young people drifting from one traineeship to another because they're still facing the same barriers that we're facing - only they've got a first foot on the ladder, they can't get to the next point. So, in a sector where we don't have huge luxuries in smaller organisations (in terms of HR expertise, budget, you need to get someone in quick), we fall into bad habits in terms of employability, employment, but also in terms of professional development, and training, and opportunities to learn and grow. It's like if you're not learning on the job in that kind of informal way, that's the kind of expectation - I still do that to myself sometimes, and we neglect professional development in our teams and individuals. I think that's quite an important aspect to sustaining progression and increasing diversity in the sector as well.

ROB So you seem to be saying apprenticeships are like a first step on what should be a longer journey, really, that carries on. One of the things that's always struck me about apprenticeships is - particularly because they're so relatively new in our sector - how do you know if you're on a good apprenticeship or not? I think in engineering or construction, you'll be able to tell that. Another key theme we wish to explore through our podcast is the need for greater diversity in the workforce, in the cultural sector. Our own data shows that despite decades of initiatives to create opportunities, we still see many cultural organisations failing to reflect the communities that they serve within their own workforce. So, what's stopping organisations being more diverse?

CATHERINE What I've seen of many initiatives over many years, as a person of colour who is underrepresented both in terms of class and ethnicity in the sector, is that initiatives focus on one thing. We talk about women in the sector, we talk about ethnic minorities in the sector, we talk about class in the sector. We don't think about intersectionality, and how disadvantage is layered up, and makes the situation more complex, and requires listening and intelligence and responsiveness. So I think that's one thought. And the other is that. From an organisational perspective, I kind of hit upon a 'Golden Triangle'; which is that you need to address diversity in your workforce, but it also needs to be represented in your programme, and your outputs. That becomes a bit of a virtuous circle / cycle that kind of pushes, prompts, and provokes the change that you need to see. If it happens in one area

or another area, it kind of stops, it hits a bit of a brick wall, because then the representation doesn't follow through, and the questions and the challenges that you need to focus on don't also. But I suppose this year has also felt like a wake up call, in terms of the issues and the inequalities in society. Covid has been this massive magnifying glass on our society; and inequalities that we've been able to ignore for a number of reasons; and this summer; and the tragedy around George Floyd, and Black Lives Matter; and all of these initiatives - just suddenly thinking about what this really means in terms of our history, and our present and our future; what this means for young people; what this means for intergenerational communities. We're having to start having these conversations. And we need to. It's interesting for me as an individual, just speaking very personally, that things that I hadn't even really acknowledged, I suddenly think "that was probably discrimination. And this is probably something that I've been not acknowledging." It felt like we were in a very polarised place for a while. But I feel like we're beginning to talk in a more open and honest way - which is another thing that needs to happen in order for these changes to take place, and to be sustained. It's painful, and it means giving over power in ways some people are going to have to move over, and we're going to have to think about different ways we can work together, and different ways we can think about what 'talent' looks like, and what represents the workforce of the future as well.

ROB   That's going to be very - I know you've said it's complicated - but it's going to be very difficult, isn't it, with an ageing workforce where people are going to be working longer? So we've got, at one end, we've started off talking about youth unemployment, and where the opportunities are, and some of the entry routes. And yet you are going to get this thing of the working population being bigger, and then in theory, less opportunities. And in theory, if diversity hasn't been embraced by the cultural sector before, what's to make it start to be embraced now? So, I return to Alex my terribly unfair question - what's stopping organisations? Is it, as Catherine was talking about, giving over power? Is it as simple as that? Actually, in order for people to move out the way, they have to move out of the way, (CHUCKLES) and that they're not necessarily willing to do that?

ALEX   I agree with Catherine. That's complicated. (LAUGHS) I think, yeah, Catherine really hit the nail on the head there. I think the awareness thing is so important. It is really over the last two years that it's really been brought to our attention, totally. I think, as well, there's a lot of learning involved. We take class, for example - hopefully this awareness stuff is that we all are starting to educate ourselves. And I think last year that was really, really important. I'm like, "oh God, I need to really reflect on myself, and have a look at our own practises, and my own thinking process". And yeah, I think that's what's stopping people. But as Catherine says, it's so complicated and such a big topic.

ROB   Is there something about where the initiative is coming from as well? Because I remember sitting on a panel with Bonnie Greer at one time, when the buzz phrase at that time was 'cultural diversity'. And she said "the thing that always gets me is what's the culture we're diversifying from?" Is there something that's about a lot of these initiatives are coming from an organisation saying, "become one of us, do things in the same way. You know, let's again, not reform, let's revert. But you two could be a director of this kind of theatre company. You two could be like me." When actually, you want things to be different.

CATHERINE   It's evolution or revolution, right? We need one or the other. One is more painful and unpleasant than the other. I think you're right, Rob, this is deep ingrained, unfortunately, in cultural education. Earlier in my career, I'm remember thinking, "am I just coaching kids to take on the values of a different class, and a different set of cultural aesthetic kind of outfits? Is that what I'm doing through education?" And it's probably similar, in terms of employability and employment - there's this need to fit into office culture. And I'm sure all of us, with work with young people, have learned such a huge amount about how we are unconsciously exclusive. You know, "let's all go for lunch on a Friday." Well, I don't have the money to get home because I've got to do other things with my salary. So is that an

inclusive thing? Or, working with a young person through a hot summer, and just having to think differently about her work load through Ramadan - because it was just hot, and really difficult, and she could contribute at a really high level, but we needed to think differently about how we pace the day. And so there are all sorts of different things - and that's why, going back to Alex's experience of apprenticeship, I think working in cohorts, supporting young people or diverse people to connect with each other in the workplace, but figuring out how we can have open and honest conversations, is the really big part of it. There's a lot of listening culture and learning culture that is important in this journey. But I always say that "it is a journey", that it's not the kind of - we are we've done now, we've fixed it. Because there will always be people that are excluded. There will always be challenges, there always be inequalities, and we have to just stay open and alert. And I think that's one of the big shift - just that acknowledgement that it's not just like "if we implement this policy, if we do this thing, it will all be done". I think recognising the complexity of us supporting each other, and creating genuine equality and inclusion, is a continuum that we need to just keep working at - because it'll never be perfect, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't try at it.

ROB   In one of your earlier answers, Catherine, you used the term class. On one of our podcast episodes, we want to try and look at that, and ask "is there class prejudice within the cultural sector?" In your experience, Alex, is that something that you felt has been quite overt?

ALEX   It's hard, isn't it?

ROB   Complicated, we've agreed, is (CHUCKLES).

ALEX   Complicated! Yeah, I do think it's probably... You know, I look at myself who comes from quite a middle class background - and there was one summer where I was a runner for a production company. That was before we set up our production company. And that was such a helpful experience to me. And would I have got that job as a freelancer if my mom hadn't got a new car the year before, and gave me her old one? No. I just simply wouldn't have got that job if I don't own a car. So I can see, definitely, how that has a huge impact on... There's just these assumptions of like "you're a runner, you're going to need to drive, then you need a car". (CHUCKLES) And just the way the industry is entirely set up. So, yeah, I do think it must be very hard, depending on your class. But I think there's opportunities in that, too. I think the pandemic is hopefully opening that up, and allowing people to see that as organisations we should be reaching out to these young people, and giving them the same opportunities as everybody else who don't own a car, for example.

ROB   So, do you think the pandemic has affected it in that way? That the divide could potentially become less? Or has the pandemic, yeah, exacerbated that divide?

ALEX   Yeah, hmm. I think I hope, I suppose, it's similar to what I said at the start. Like, I really hope that it's made - I think people have had that time to think, and think, "oh God". Like, just everybody's thinking about other people a bit more than just themselves, and their day-to day lives, because we've all slowed down. And so I hope that really emphasises that we, "okay, we need to be doing things differently". So as we do come out of this, that we remember that, and we think about it as we come out of this. But, I suppose on the other foot of that, as we said at the start, we could all just go back to the way it was, and just get on with the way we used to run things.

ROB   Well, there is a risk, isn't there? That employers are going to entrenched back into poor practises, driven by extreme economic conditions - which is one of the other factors that I would say is stopping some of this coming forward. And early data is suggesting we've become less diverse during covid, in fact. Catherine, what more do you think about class prejudice within the cultural sector? I mean, has pandemic affected that, or exacerbated it?

CATHERINE   There's a lot of fallout yet to come. And, I think we still in that listening mode. We're still in a national lockdown right now, at the time of recording. We've got this path to kind of opening up through the next few months. But we don't know a lot of these answers, and we don't know what the fallout is going to be, and we have to keep gathering data, and listening, and seeking out experiences to really understand what has happened, and what is going to happen. But we know that the lower paid jobs, the less secure jobs, have also been potentially the first ones to go, as budgets have become constrained. And so, you can't help but think again when you think about the layers of identity, that this is probably going to be a massive factor. I'd say just in general, in terms of class, my lived experience is that I kind of have to put my credentials on my sleeve, still. You know, 20 years later, it's like "actually, I've got two degrees. Actually, I might have gone to a comprehensive state school, and been the daughter of first generation immigrant, but actually I can be as middle class as you." And I was by no means grubbing around in the gutter, but you do find yourself; "can you speak correctly? Can use the right cutlery? Can you present in a way that..?" - You know, it's all about blending in, and I do think some of the challenges from the last year have been less tolerant of the need to - or the requirement to - blend in, and have been better at acknowledging where difference brings strength, and diversity in the best ways. And I also think, in terms of employment, that as the realities of the economic crisis coming out of this hit even more, that I hope that workforces will be valued for whoever they are, and that we think really preciously about what skills and experiences people do bring. But going back to the question, I think age is another really big factor in this, in terms of who's going to be flexible enough and attractive enough to be employed in the sector as well. Yeah, lots of layers that come in. And again, that takes me back to that horrible word, intersectionality. But I do think that it's the meeting - we're not one thing or another thing, and that's it, we're all complex individuals. I suppose policy and organisational responses, and their own practises, need to respond to that.

ROB   So, you've demonstrated intersectionality, in terms of the themes for episodes - because I'm already thinking "OK, well, actually just focussing on freelancers, how can you talk about that without talking about class? How can we talk about diversity without talking about volunteers?" And all of those things there. So, we are with our series of podcasts going to section things off a bit, and hopefully do a bit more of a deep dive into some of those particular areas - which both of you of wonderfully started the debate on. What would you hope a series of podcasts on some of these themes could achieve? Alex, what would make this a success for you?

ALEX   I think it's just to get people thinking about these things, you know? When I was asked to do this, I was thinking about a podcast I regularly listen to, and that's really about running a creative business. But it always just makes me think about things, you know? 20 minutes at the start of my day, and then I'm thinking about it for the rest of the day, and it's stuff I wouldn't normally think about; you know, maybe get a bit bogged down in the day-to-day. And so I really hope that this podcast does that for all the listeners - let's just take a little bit of a step back from our usual day-to-day, and just allow us to think about the bigger picture, a little bit.

ROB   Catherine?

CATHERINE   I love the idea that this is a tool for insight and for learning. We've talked about the need for listening, and this is a hearing opportunity - to potentially hear new voices, new perspectives, that can enrich our understanding of what we're all going through. So it's a really important moment to be doing this. And I really commend CCSkills for kick-starting it, and for picking up on some of the key themes where we all need a bit of reflection space, a bit of breathing space, and a bit of, you know, "oh, I hadn't thought about it from that perspective". And just figuring out what's going on out there, while we've all been our literal bubbles. (LAUGHS) So, I'm really optimistic about that just being a chance to get

informed, and I don't think the expectation is that this will just tell us what we already know, but that actually, as new thoughts are emerging, as new understanding is emerging, that this is a place to share that stuff. So I'm really excited about it.

ROB   Well, I hope we'll be able to check in with both of you going forward. And you'll be following our podcast and giving us some feedback on whether we're doing that, giving people something to think about. And it's interesting, the day-to-day focus; because on some of these terribly unfair questions I've put to you, when you ask the question "well, why doesn't that happen?", in some ways there isn't a logical reason. But, as you're suggesting, we haven't necessarily had the time to step back to think about some of those things. We've literally been firefighting, in terms of this over the past few months.

CATHERINE   Absolutely.

ROB   So maybe now is the time to just breathe, and take a step back, and see where we are. Try and move forward in a better way. Alex Porter-Smith, Catherine Ritman-Smith, thank you very, very much for being our guests on Episode Zero of the Creative and Cultural Skills podcast.

ALEX   Thank you.

ROB   Thank you very much.

CATHERINE   Thanks Rob.

ALEX   See you.

ROB   And thanks to you for listening. These are the kind of conversations that we're going to be having across these episodes. And you'll have heard from Alex and Catherine just how much room there is for further exploration of these topics. More opinions, more voices, more divergent points of view. From this point onwards, we're particularly keen to hear from you, as we set out on this journey, exploring these topics that we've introduced today. Whether it's about apprenticeships, diversity, volunteering, class prejudice, or building back our sector post covid, we want to truly represent an array of voices from across our sector. To join in the discussion and share your thoughts with us. please get in touch. On Facebook and Twitter, you can find us @CCSkills. With thanks to our guests Alex Porter-Smith from High Tide Media, and Catherine Ritman-Smith at the V&A Museum of Childhood. Until the next episode, bye for now.

POSY   The Creative and Cultural Skills podcast was hosted by Rob West, and produced by Jay Sykes. I'm Posy Jowett. To join in our discussion, and share your thoughts with us, please get in touch. On Facebook and Twitter, you can find us @CCSkills.

ROB   I enjoyed that, that was good. Great. Great to have a chance to have a good chat.

CATHERINE   Did you notice my children coming in at one point? I got a bit of fruitcake out of it.

ALEX   Oooh. Nice.

ROB   Oh, that is good.

ALEX   Torturous!

CATHERINE   (LAUGHS)