

## The Creative and Cultural Skills podcast: Build Back Fairer Episode three: Apprenticeships work for other sectors, do they work for ours?

Apprenticeships play a vital role in widening entry routes into the creative and cultural industries, addressing skills gaps and diversifying the workforce by opening employment opportunities to a greater section of society.

If this is the case, why aren't more employers from our sectors embracing them? What are the barriers and challenges for employers, potential apprentices, and training providers? Has the pandemic set the apprenticeship agenda back?

During this episode we hear from **Bendy Ashfield**, Apprenticeships Manager at the [Royal Opera House](#) and **Jakki Jeffery**, Head of Faculty for Creative Industries at [Edinburgh College](#) as they discuss their experiences of working with apprentices. Throughout the episode we also have insight from two former apprentices who are now thriving in their cultural and creative careers, **Emma Blake Morsi**, a multidisciplinary Arts Producer who was the CCSkills Apprentice of the Year 2016 and **Ellen Johnson**, Project Officer at [Culture Bridge North East](#).

The podcast is hosted by Robert West, Director of Partnerships and Delivery at Creative & Cultural Skills.

### Transcript

- Bendy Ashfield** The lack of income from many, many organisations and venues, and the whole ecology, it means that actually the apprenticeship conversation has gone back.
- Emma Blake Morsi** Young people are leaders now, and you're not simply giving a young person a helping hand...
- Jakki Jeffrey** But what about those people who started training in the sector, left to have families or whatever, and want to come back in? Why don't we have something for them?
- Ellen Johnson** And the fact that they're so important to everyone but they aren't taught about as loudly is everything else, is just... It's just shocking, and it desperately needs to change.

- Posy Jowett** 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** Creative and Cultural Skills has been involved in apprenticeships since 2008, when we first supported the development of the Creative Apprenticeships Frameworks for the industry. Since then, we've seen thousands of apprenticeships start in the sector, supporting people to pursue an alternative route into employment. But whilst apprenticeships are very much part of the career path for certain industries, there's still the question of whether they work for the creative sector. Joining me to discuss this, we have Bendy Ashfield - since 2006, Bendy has worked as Apprenticeships Manager for the Royal Opera House. In this role, she set up the Royal Opera House Apprenticeship Scheme, from which 66 apprenticeships have since graduated. The apprenticeships have covered areas, including scenic art, armour, costume, and community arts. Welcome, Bendy.
- Bendy Ashfield** Hello.
- Rob West** Jakki Jeffrey is Head of Faculty for the Creative Industries at Edinburgh College. Edinburgh is one of the largest colleges in the UK where they offer a range of apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship opportunities. Welcome, Jakki.
- Jakki Jeffrey** Hello.
- Rob West** And we've also been talking to Ellen Johnson and Emma Blake Morsi, two former apprentices now working in the sector, and they've shared their thoughts and experiences with us.
- Ellen Johnson** Hi, I'm Ellen Johnson. I did a Community Arts Administration apprenticeship in 2019, and now I work as a Project Officer for an arts organisation in Newcastle.
- Emma Blake Morsi** Hi, I'm Emma Blake Morsi, and I did an apprenticeship in 2016 / 2017 as 'Digital Marketing Apprentice. But now, I'm both a Multidisciplinary Arts Producer, and a Content and Partnerships Manager for an ethical marketing & PR agency.
- Rob West** And if you're interested in hearing our full conversation with Emma and Ellen, you can hear more on our website - [CCSkills.org.uk](https://CCSkills.org.uk). I wanted to start by inviting both Bendy and Jakki to respond to a provocation: Apprenticeships seem to work well in other sectors, but do they work in ours?
- Bendy Ashfield** Firstly, it depends what you mean by "work well". I was looking earlier at the top hundred apprentice providers for 2020, and what struck me is actually all those companies and organisations operate at a real scale that we find very hard to match, I think. So that always puts us on a slightly different footing. My experience at the Opera House is that we set up our apprenticeship scheme with some very specific aims, and we have been quite successful in achieving those aims through the apprenticeships. It's difficult as well because, certainly for us at the Opera House which is a big organisation we have lots of very niche roles, in terms of creating the qualifications that run alongside apprenticeships. No one is ever going to create an armoury apprenticeship qualification, but we've been quite good at thinking laterally about how we can use other standards to work for us. I was listening to Ellen's interview earlier and she was so eloquent on the

perceived value of apprenticeships as opposed to degrees. And I think that is an issue.

**Ellen Johnson** I think there are definite barriers, and a lot of negative associations with apprenticeships. I don't think that many people know about apprenticeships in the creative sector. I'm not fully convinced that people, especially young people who have recently left the security of education, know where to look. I think the negative associations surrounding apprenticeships is that they're often compared with academia in a way which belittles the impact that apprenticeships can have on the development of young people. There's a certain stereotype of apprenticeships; being that people don't have the intellectual standing to make it through university, which is still very much an issue that must be addressed. It's important to note that apprenticeships aren't for any person in particular, and just because a person chooses to learn through an apprenticeship doesn't say anything more about the person's abilities than it does when a person decides to go to uni. There's an unequal footing between the public prestige of university and apprenticeships that I don't believe is been combated enough. And, to be honest, the very fact that they're often pitted against each other is the thing that makes this open dialogue harder to come by. And this exists in the cultural sector as well; it's not innocent from the kind of hierarchy of learning. University and apprenticeships should be considered as just different avenues to take. It's the hierarchy that not only still exists, but is stopping a lot of young people from choosing the right path for them in the cultural sector. Because, when I was going through that job site looking for arts opportunities, when I didn't know that apprenticeships existed, the arts opportunities that I did find... You needed a degree, or you needed to have had unpaid internship experience, which for a lot of people is not accessible. And so how are they supposed to access the sector and fulfil their creative potential if they're being just roadblocked at the first step?

**Bendy Ashfield** Maybe the combination of apprenticeships being less valued and the arts being maybe a more questionable career choice - which I wholeheartedly disagree with, obviously - that doesn't really help us. So I think sometimes it's in the marketing and the comms that needs to be done. So we've just advertised for eight apprenticeships at the Opera House, and we've had 811 applications. So clearly, there is a demand out there, but we have thought very carefully about how we promote them and how we talk about them and how we communicate what exceptional (we think) opportunities they are. So I tend to disagree. I think they do work. I think they could work better, maybe, is my qualified response. That's really sitting on the fence, isn't it? [LAUGHS] Sorry!

**Rob West** They work well, but they could work better.

**Bendy Ashfield** Yeah.

**Rob West** Jakki, is that a statement you agree with or disagree with?

**Jakki Jeffrey** I would agree with a lot of the things that Bendy has said. Usually the big apprenticeships could be in customer care, construction, engineering, and yeah, they do it at scale, at mass. And I would say that probably governments tag them as priority areas anyway, so they've got a real focus, with incentives for employers to take them on. So I would say that in the creative sector, we are quite bespoke and quite niche. And I do think a lot of our students go into a

freelance career, so that creates all kinds of issues with 'who's the employer?' The normal apprenticeship is you take the apprentice on, you train them for two years, and then you keep them on a job with you. Well, within the creative sector, we're very different, so I think we need to relook at the frameworks and the setups, and perhaps government support, especially in Scotland. We give a lot of money to Higher Education where there's no fees, etc., and I really would like the Scottish government to look a little bit more about apprenticeships, and actually funding and channelling some of that money so that there's an even parity between vocational skills versus academic skills.

**Rob West** Thanks, Jakki. Bendy, you referred earlier to the top 100 apprenticeship employers for 2020, and I don't know if you were looking at the same piece of research I was from High Fliers...

**Bendy Ashfield** Yes.

**Rob West** But it also looked at the overall commitment to employing apprentices, and the creation of new apprenticeships, and the diversity of new apprentices, and progression, and further apprenticeships, and employment... But there was no organisation in that top 100 from the creative or cultural sector. So, is it just about scale, or is there something else that's stopping our sector embracing apprenticeships?

**Bendy Ashfield** I think for that piece of research, it very much is about scale. Because of course, there's the requirement for public sector organisations to have, I think it is something like 2.3% of their staff need to be apprentices. There was a lot of NHS trusts in that list. And then there's big companies like Land Rover, and the Army; they operate in a way that the creative sector is never going to. It's very difficult when surveys like that are done, because I would say the Opera House's apprenticeship scheme is one of the larger ones in the industry, and that's really not vast at all. We take on about roughly eight apprentices a year, comparative to some of these other organisations...! Anecdotally, the other organisations I know and work with and partner with, we actually have a good reputation for supporting our apprentices. As Jakki said, the freelance nature of work is difficult, and that means that there's many employers in the industry who can't currently, under the current set up, offer apprenticeships. I think that actually, a lot of the apprenticeships that are offered across the sector are very thoughtful, with increasingly a lot of support, and well thought out and well delivered. So, I don't think it's 'poverty of achievement' that we're not in that list, really.

**Rob West** Certainly, the employers who we've heard from who properly use apprenticeships readily report the benefits of them. Our workforce has issues around technical craft-making, business operational skills, that you would think apprenticeships are well placed to address. But, Jakki, you're Head of Faculty of Creative Industries - do you find that those distinctions help? Would an employer in the creative industry actually think about an apprenticeship being offered for Business Administration, for example, or a technical area? Do you see anything internally within colleges about how that works? Do they only talk to you about creative industries?

**Jakki Jeffrey** Well, no. I mean, they talk to us about a lot of things. And actually, we have computing as one of the areas within creative industries, which is not a natural thought of people. So obviously there's a lot of computing apprentices, and that's

really super successful. But I do think it comes down to those niche businesses, and it is about being able to fund it and offer the job opportunity at the end. And also, as Bendy mentioned, I don't think we do enough about... Not only to pupils, but also to parents about the benefits. I mean, let's be honest, these days we're all going to have to work at least 50 years in a job, so let's make sure it's something that's really brilliant and get you out of bed every day.

**Rob West**

Yes, absolutely. Bendy, help us understand the challenges that employers face when they're recruiting new talent, and the flexibilities they need with their training provider and a college.

**Bendy Ashfield**

One of the slight misunderstandings is; I remember when apprenticeships first came in and there was lots of talk about the funding available, and now we have the levy (that process to fund for bigger employers), but actually what no one mentions is who funds the wage. As we've said before, lots of employers either are freelance, or very small employers, and there's a totally understandable fear about: If your staff are not massively paid over the minimum wage, to pay that same wage to someone that you've got to train can seem really daunting. There are ways that you can understand the benefits of that investment, but actually in a balance sheet approach, actually, that's quite a hard argument to swing. And if you've got a small theatre in the region, of maybe a council venue with a staff of 10, to take on an extra person you've got to train and pay them the same as you might be able to train a college leaver (you know, someone who'd done a two year course) is quite a big ask, and requires quite a jump in commitment, I think. So in terms of working with training providers, the absolute key is communication. The training providers that I feel I can a) get someone on the phone, you know, it's a good start and [LAUGHS] you know, have a really good conversation... I've been doing this far too long, I suppose, but when you approach new training providers and you say "can you come and see our workshops?" And the ones who are there immediately are going "yes", and then looking around and asking questions, and you can see they're thinking, "well, how can this work? Maybe this standard might work." Where there's other training providers who are like oh well, we do this, and that would be fine, I'm sure". The wheels come off then, because so much of the standard is about the evidence from on the job learning, and you're trying to fit a round peg into a square hole if they're doing a standard that they just want to deliver to you. I'm certainly aware that I'm in an enviable position because training providers want to say they work with the Opera House - but actually, that's no good if it's not fit for the purpose of the career that the young person's going into. I was interested to hear what Jakki was saying about computer apprenticeships, because actually there's so much engineering increasingly, backstage in theatre particularly. And we have at the moment, I think, four apprentices on engineering frameworks, which really surprises people. But you think... If you've been to any of the Harry Potter shows, or Wicked, or the Lion King, the way that the automation and the mechanics and the engineering is really mind blowing, and that's only going to increase. But we don't really have a pool of those people ready to go, currently, in our industry. So the engineering apprenticeships that we do - we have trouble keeping them because they just get snapped up by other organisations really fast. One of the issues we have is that our apprentices are brilliantly practical. They're really gifted with their hands. They want to work, they want to make, they want to do. The college training part is always the harder bit to persuade them that it's fun because they want to be doing the exciting stuff. So, as soon as they start not going, or being late, or there's a problem; if you don't resolve that really fast, it gets out of hand

so quickly, and it balloons, and then it becomes a much bigger thing. Whereas, if your training provider is straight on the phone, then you can really get the root of those problems. We've had quite a lot of success with young people who haven't been successful in education up to 18. They've not enjoyed it, they've not been attending, they've not been productive. And actually, when you give them the chance to learn about something they really enjoy, they can suddenly see how transformative education can be. But that's not without its bumps. You need to be able to respond to when things go a bit awry really fast. And if your training provider doesn't even have a very good register, or isn't really bothered, then that's really difficult for the employer to get the apprentice back on track. It's absolutely communication.

**Rob West**

Jakki, I'm sure you're the better end of that communication and engagement at Edinburgh College. In fact, I know that you are. But, what happens with some of the training providers I talk to is they push back a bit by saying "but where's the demand for this?" So, do you recognise what Bendy was saying about colleges or training providers starting from the apprenticeships they want to offer, rather than what a creative sector employer might want?

**Jakki Jeffrey**

Yeah, that could potentially be it. I mean, altogether, it's a partnership. I'm doing some work at the minute to try and start up Scottish Screen Apprenticeships. That's kind of picking the whole thing apart. So it's looking at the college becoming the employer, and the training provider, and working with local studios. So that's very different. And obviously seeking funding for that. It's early stages. But it should be seamless: It should be putting the young person at the heart, and it's an individual journey. It shouldn't seem like it's separate to the apprenticeship - it is part of the apprenticeship. It should be able to be online learning, it should be on demand, and it should be in partnership. Because, as you say, young people have a lot of other issues. In Scotland, we've really heavily invested in "meta skills", which is that whole self-management, social intelligence and innovation. Because we need to get those building blocks right for their skills to take off, because employers - anyone who's taking young people - need them to be able to address and be responsible for themselves, especially when they're going into something like the screen sector, because they've got to know what their job is there, what they can and can't do, and actually use their intuition very quickly when things change. Because, as you can imagine, it gets very emotional and very heated. That actually employers ask what they want of an apprenticeship, rather than saying what we can deliver.

**Bendy Ashfield**

You know, it is absolutely a partnership. And, you know a training provider is good when the assessor, or whoever they're working with from the training provider, is doing an observation and the manager of the apprentice knows who they are, says "hello, nice to see you again". And what Jakki said was quite right - the young person, or the apprentice, however young or old, absolutely has to be at the heart of the whole process.

**Emma Blake Morsi**

Within the sector are so many jobs and there's so many roles. I think actually when you do an arts or creative course, it's almost a disservice to the opportunities that are in and around the sector, because you don't really get to understand the breadth of what you can do. I just know, even from just going to the previous Creative and Cultural Skills conferences, and seeing the absolute range of jobs; whether it's within the craft sector, and then you've got people doing pyrotechnics, and there's so many levels of it that just... There's so many

opportunities to grow within this sector. And you might start off loving one thing: I did a Digital Marketing Apprenticeship, and really, that taught me in many ways how actually just being digital isn't something I wanted to always be stuck into. But equally, now I'm in a place that I actually call myself a Multidisciplinary Arts Producer, because I've actually understood that I love to be able to do multiple things. I love that I can go from photography, to illustration, to working on events, and then graphics, or words. And I feel like that really is the skill base that I really want to champion and hone into. But then there's not many other sectors that you can really tap into all your interests like that - and so, I find that as much as it requires a lot of passion, and time, and maintaining that continuous motivation and inspiration, I do feel super fortunate to be able to work around, and do stuff that I love every day. [CHUCKLES]

**Rob West**

Ellen Johnson and Emma Blake Morsi refer to those extensive range of opportunities in the arts in terms of job roles that you've both mentioned here. But I want to challenge you both a little bit, though, on this notion of the creative sector being particularly niche and small organisations, because hospitality also has small organisations. As do food and drink, hair and beauty, and hairdressers... They engage with apprenticeships. Are we in danger of hiding behind this thing of "oh, well, we're very niche and we're very small." Is there something else, some other barrier that's preventing creative sector employees from engaging with apprenticeships?

**Bendy Ashfield**

A lot of those industries you named, Rob, we've all seen hairdressing apprentices in salons. I can remember them from when I was really young and my mom used to take me to have my hair cut. So I don't think people automatically think about apprenticeships.

**Jakki Jeffrey**

Often within creative environments, they can become more bespoke to a role. It's not cookie cutter skill sets. [LAUGHS] People will have niche specialisms, and therefore not big enough to employ more than a couple. And I think maybe we need to shout a bit more about what we do, and our successes. We've probably just not advertised a lot more about what we do.

**Bendy Ashfield**

There has been an issue, and I know that CCSkills particularly has worked really hard, along with lots of other organisations. The idea of internships, and free internships, and this very closed nature of the industry where you knew someone, and then they got you some six months free work experience, and of course that plays to a very specific demographic, and... Maybe that's what some people think our apprenticeships are like. I know the industry has really made massive headway in recent years in not standing for free internships - obviously we do work experience, but they're very much not job roles, they're very time limited. And at the Opera House, we always pay travel and some money for lunch, because we're aware that coming into the West End is an expensive endeavour if you live in London, but even more if you're coming from further afield. So, I think that people have this idea that to get into the industry, you need to work for free, and I wonder if people think that our apprenticeships are still a version of that.

**Jakki Jeffrey**

I would agree with what you say. It all comes back to education. It comes back to showing really good evidence of different career paths that people have made, and where they've gone into - and if it's not working, if the current frameworks

are not working for the sector, then let's look at how that might change, and become more industry-led. Maybe taken on board a bit more APL (Accreditation of Prior Learning), a bit more lifelong learning, making sure that it's funded enough for people from SMID 10 areas (Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation). There's lots of different things, I don't think it's just one.

**Bendy Ashfield**

I think as well that there's a bigger problem for arts specifically - it's that people just don't know about the careers full stop. There's such an obsession about performing - Saturday night T.V. Is full of people wanting to be on The Voice, Britain's Got Talent, all of these things. And yet there's one person on a stage, maybe four, if there's a group, and we all know that behind that, in that event and that filming, there are probably over 100 support staff. Actually more, there must be more when you think of cameras, lighting, makeup, catering, stage management, all of those people - not even the technical and production or craft skills, but lots of theatres have finance departments, IT departments, H.R. departments, marketing... And so actually, if you're interested in the arts, but that's not necessarily your skill set, you could be in a marketing team in a theatre, or an events company, and that would marry some interest and skill. So, however good our apprenticeships are, if people aren't thinking about those areas to work in, or don't know they're an opportunity, then that's a real problem. And one of the problems we have is that because people don't know about these careers young enough, particularly if you want to do our engineering or making skills, that actually there's some GCSEs and A-levels that can be really helpful. And if they don't know early enough, then they've made their choices much harder by not taking some GCSEs that might really help them get into the industry. There's lots of work being done recently in trying to draw together all the online resources, and have a presence at these skills events and career shows, to say these are viable careers - exciting, viable careers - and there are more of them than you could ever imagine.

**Jakki Jeffrey**

And I know that in Scotland, Skills Development Scotland have done a lot in pulling out foundation apprenticeships, and one of them is in creative digital media, and it is very, very popular. The second year is all about work experience, and that then gives them a really good avenue to think, "actually, do I want to go into a modern apprenticeship, or do I want to go to a university?" So is starting, and if you want to make changes, you have to start at the beginning and work your way up, and then eventually, a couple of years down the road, you'll start to see it come through.

**Rob West**

I want to take you back to something you said earlier to do with other industries, and their response to apprenticeships. When you talked about the culture and the history of certain industries being that's the path they follow... Do our employers help themselves in the fact that so many cultural organisations continue to ask for graduate qualifications even when the positions they're recruiting don't need them? Why does that still happen?

**Jakki Jeffrey**

I think they just need an education. And actually, to be honest with you, probably they ask for graduate skills because they assume that the young person will have a level of essential core skills, and some meta skills that I was talking about. So they are probably assuming that to take on a 16 year old is probably not as great as taking on a 21 year old, because maybe they'll come and they'll be a bit more well-rounded. But I suppose it's just for us to challenge that - and actually, with the foundation apprenticeships, if we can get them in there on work experience,



then they meet them and go, "actually, you know what? You'd be great." So I think we need to educate them.

- Bendy Ashfield** I mean, the degree thing drives me absolutely nuts. And I think Jakki is absolutely right that people think, "well, if we ask for graduates, they're going to have a level of literacy, they're going to have these meta skills." And that may be true, but it also may absolutely not be true.
- Rob West** Well, the creative industries employ more graduates on average than other employment sectors, and that gap appears to be widening now. So do you think the pandemic has made things worse for apprentices?
- Jakki Jeffrey** The creative industry sector has been really hard hit, just as the hospitality sector, absolutely. But going against that, the screens / film sector is going \*phwoar\* because we're all at home watching T.V.. Parents want a secure future, and they see a secure future is going from school to university and coming out the other end. And I think we need to do a lot around looking at an agile system, looking at "are frameworks fit for purpose for us in the sector?", especially in the creative industries sector, and just really getting everyone coming together to say, "well, this is what we want." And actually, have you looked at other options of taking young people on, other than what you're doing at the moment?
- Bendy Ashfield** Well, it's just implicit in the fact that we have to call the more advanced apprenticeships "degree apprenticeships". We still have to tie up with academia - that drives me nuts. Most teachers have come three degrees, so I think they talk about what they know and they feel confident to talk about.
- Rob West** So, again, we're talking about this thing of "some things happen just because that's the way they've happened before", and people default to that.
- Bendy Ashfield** Hmmmm.
- Rob West** Do you think that the pandemic has actually pushed back some of the advances we've made? Are we going to have to go back to conversations we were having two years ago in order to catch up again?
- Bendy Ashfield** I think the pandemic has been such a disaster for the creative industries - the lack of income from many, many organisations and venues, and the whole ecology, it means that actually the apprenticeship conversation has gone back. So you need to pay people a decent wage; they're working in the creative industries, they're working long hours, they're working unsocial hours, and they will very, very quickly become productive. But I think in the current financial situation, and with things so uncertain, all the advances we'd made and just starting to change people's minds, that, actually, that investment was worth it... And the argument for a greater diversity of workforce was a really strong one - that apprenticeships can really help you achieve that in a really proven way. But actually, now when we're going back to people with much more constrained budgets, I imagine, going forward for the next few years because of the last 15 months, that's going to be a difficult argument again - to use that same wage for someone that you invest in, you train, and you support, as opposed to someone else. And I think there is a bit of a problem for the workforce going forward; that a lot of people further on in their careers may have just over the last year thought "actually I've have had enough". You know, "I've done my 20 years in the

creative industries, actually I've really enjoyed this year, I've done different things, and maybe it's time." Because a lot of our roles are really physical, and you travel a lot, and freelance life - many people maybe have just had a bit of a reassessment, and moved out of the industry. So I think there are going to be bigger skills gaps than we've foreseen prior to the pandemic, and actually we need to be totally upping our apprenticeships and investment in them.

**Jakki Jeffrey**

We're talking about people leaving the sector maybe, and going on to other jobs, but what about those people who started training in the sector, left to have families or whatever, and want to come back in? So what about res-killing and up-skilling? How easy is that? If someone came to you tomorrow and said, "I've worked in that industry for 20 years, took time out to have a family, I've been out for five years and need to come back in again." Why don't we have something for them? So that's investing in lifelong learning, it's investing in people who may be on the unemployment register or whatever, it's investing on just giving that person a bespoke polish and an update, and straightaway they can come back in and start again, and work.

**Rob West**

One of the things we do is talk about apprenticeships almost exclusively as if it's a young person's route. And you're absolutely right in that you can be an apprentice at any age. Emma and Ellen, our two former apprentices, were making the point of how much apprenticeships can do for people such as those with caring responsibilities, who have situations where if they went to university, or they went to other routes to try and get in the industry, they wouldn't be as supported as they can be within this sector.

**Emma Blake Morsi**

I was really fortunate enough to be in an amazing team, and have a really supportive boss who during that time, and still even now... I had been a child carer for my mum, so there's a lot of other responsibilities I had outside of work. The level of nurturing, and actual understanding that went into that... When you work with people from diverse backgrounds, and just generally speaking, there's a lot of different needs that people have. And in order to make a space - like any other sector, in order to make space more inclusive, more diverse, when you want to work with diverse people - you've got to consider actually; what needs can you offer? And how do you create space and workspace around them that is that supportive?

**Rob West**

Bendy, what do you do to care for your apprentices?

**Bendy Ashfield**

The support for each apprentice is bespoke to that apprentice. We're lucky at the Opera House - so the apprentices are in a department, they have a line manager, but they also have me as additional support. It's having that slightly external person from your department that, if you feel that you're not getting on with someone in your apartment or your manager, there's someone else who you can go and bounce things off. And also, I've got time. Sometimes life goes awry for anybody, all of us, but particularly when you're young you don't necessarily have the resilience, or the tactics or the strategies, to marry up balancing what can be quite stressful at home or whatever, and a job or learning stuff all the time, and you're expected to be producing work. Having that extra person who can really bring that external view, but also just support you, or just be there to have a cup of tea and listen, and get to know you in a slightly different way. I hope that they feel like they've got someone really there fighting their corner. You know, sometimes you just need that person going, "you can do it, go on, push yourself,

try." And I think we've all got those people informally in our professional lives. For me, that's the absolute joy of my job. Some of my friends recently have become fathers, with partners that they met during their apprenticeships, and I do sometimes feel like I've got 66 surrogate children, which is not really what I intended when I got into this. But... [LAUGHS] And I think some of the ones, I'm sure Jakki's the same with some of her students, you know, the ones that have had really tough times and really triumphed, that's a brilliant thing. It's naive to think that you get apprentices in and you can not give them-- you know, they do need extra support from time to time. And often when you provide that support, you get something really brilliant back.

**Ellen Johnson** So you had a group of people that you learn alongside with - people similar to my age. They were already supportive. And then, in the workplace, all my colleagues were super supportive, always asking me how I was doing, giving me just the right amount of opportunity so that I could really focus and hone in on the skills that I needed. The sheer positive energy that I was in, in that workplace...

**Emma Blake Morsi** It's just so beautiful to be in amongst a space where you get to meet other people who are having just gone through a similar process in their apprenticeship... The fact that you have all these conferences, where you get to meet others, and can network and connect with people. And the support I've gotten from the Creative and Cultural Skills throughout, even in the last few years, has been so meaningful. And so, it's beautiful to have that continuous relationship, even though technically my apprenticeship finished, like, four years ago! It's just crazy to think! [LAUGHS]

**Rob West** Emma and Ellen, our former apprentices, both talked about the importance of a supportive environment within the workplace, and the positive experience they had working alongside other apprentices. Jakki, what happens when the apprentice goes back to the college to do that kind of training - going back to college? They feel like this isn't necessarily "where I want to be, or how I want to be". So. So what do you do to overcome that?

**Jakki Jeffrey** Because we just have a few technical theatre apprentices, and luckily they were all in the same company, when they come back to college we try to pair them up with equivalent students with skill sets, and they can compare and contrast what they're doing. It's really important that we look at everyone as an individual on an individual journey, but also to let them know all the people that are rooting for them and they're there for them. Because the staff within the college are also the staff they go with in the workplace, it kind of seems more seamless - because I can imagine that if you're in the workplace, and then you come to college one day a week into a great big, ginormous building with ten thousand people in, it can be really daunting, and they feel that they may be missed out. So you just have to highlight that, and make sure that they're supported, and they have a base where they can go to, and they recognise the members of staff, and also the wider support functions that we are able to have in college to do with finance, counselling, etc., etc..

**Rob West** You're probably better set up in some ways to offer that support that's there. Emma and Ellen made the point about how apprenticeships can break the perception that learning and work are separate things.

- Ellen Johnson** My apprenticeship really helped me begin my career, essentially, because an apprenticeship fosters such a new way of working - because it's the combination of working and learning. It breaks the common perception that you learn, and then you work, and that there's a clear difference between the two. But apprenticeships show you how learning and working can complement each other perfectly. And now, even though I've finished my apprenticeship, and I've begun my path in the industry with this organisation, I still approach my work with that same element of curiosity that was just consistently fostered in my apprenticeship.
- Rob West** Is that an approach that you both take from your perspectives, that learning and work is all part of the same journey?
- Jakki Jeffrey** Yeah, I would, absolutely. Depending on your apprenticeship, you can be doing some of the practical training skills; it can either be within college, or within the workplace. It's important that there isn't such a distinction, and that we try and show that that's just different parts because we want you to do different things at different times. It's important that we show that all of us are part of that person's journey.
- Rob West** A recent study revealed that 48 percent of people would prefer their child to get a vocational qualification over university or work. And people with vocational qualifications are believed to be more technically skilled, or work ready; more adaptable than university graduates. And most people believe that vocational education should be given at least priority to academic education. So if academic training is reduced in higher education, does this leave a space for growth of higher technical training opportunities elsewhere?
- Jakki Jeffrey** They're just different routes people choose to do. And I think there is space for all of them, but what isn't there, if I'm being very honest, it's between Further Education and University. That's been going on for so long, but obviously working in Further Education, a massive advocate, because we are attached to industry from day one - which I think is what universities aren't necessarily. They're probably getting better at it, I have to say, with graduate apprenticeships and stuff. But we've always been very connected because, let's be honest, Further Education in the main is to get people from school into the job market, or onto university. So, I think that it should be seen as the same because actually; articulation routes. We can have people that come from school, come into college, and then articulate into university at exactly the same time as if someone went to university from day one. But I would say that the skillset of the person that spent a couple of years within Further Education is better when they go to university, and they often succeed more because of that.
- Rob West** Bendy, you were talking earlier about careers and that need to raise awareness of the careers. Ellen and Emma talked about how in their experiences, apprenticeships aren't highlighted enough to young people.
- Ellen Johnson** I think in order to remove these barriers, the sector needs to champion that public voice of apprenticeships. It needs to not only be stronger, but more prevalent in early education. I didn't find out about apprenticeships until I was 21 years old - which is, to be honest, about 15 years too late. Because once the stereotypes of apprenticeships are ingrained in you, it's half the battle to re-programme the way you think about different ways to educate yourself. It's fair

to say that a lot of young people continue to miss out on opportunities in the cultural sector that apprenticeships can bring, because they aren't properly taught about them from an early age, or they're not consistently mentioned in education just like university is. I remember my college experience; from the first day of college, I was taught about university, I was taught about how to write a UCAS application. I was taught about all of these things, all of the various options that university can bring, but never once was apprenticeships mentioned to me. And that's something that the cultural sector can really work on.

**Rob West**

If I were talking to Ellen and Emma again, I might push back on that a bit; because, certainly in my area, I've seen more promotion of apprenticeship opportunities in schools and colleges than I have in the past. So I'm wondering whether they are talking about this from their time or finding out apprenticeships. But what have you seen? Have you seen apprenticeships being promoted more or less?

**Jakki Jeffrey**

I've probably seen them being promoted similarly, but also with the focus on the careers that we are talking about within construction, within engineering, within I.T.. So I've still not seen a big ramp up of creative apprenticeships.

**Rob West**

And why do you think that is?

**Jakki Jeffrey**

Well, for all the reasons we've said before, I don't know. I think weirdly for our sector, who are usually great at shouting about lots of things, I think that we've probably not used the evidence and generated the pathways and the jobs, and actually got industry behind us to help us do that.

**Bendy Ashfield**

I think as well, there's just the funding issue, isn't there? Many, many arts organisations operate right at the edges of their funding and income all the time. I can't think of an arts organisation that's like, "oh, yeah, we got loads of money." [LAUGHS] You know, it's just not the way the industry works. To do some of those big pieces of work are costly. Is it the Army or the Air Force who has that really brilliant apprenticeships campaign? It's really clever, and it's really exciting. And, you know, my son, it's made them really think about things differently. I mean, they're much younger, but it's a brilliant campaign. I guess as an industry, we could do that. But a) we don't have the number of starts; if everybody who has sat in the living room [watching the advert] was excited and engaged, we'd be totally overwhelmed. We don't have those opportunities. And b) we just don't have that kind of money. I think that's one sad truth. But the fact that I've had 811 applications is good. Clearly, when reading through them, that is a result of the pandemic - because there were all those people that left production art B-Techs (which is a massive feeder for ours). Or just textiles A-Level, for example; lots of people come into costume, but we're clearly seeing two years of graduates. So, there's people that graduated last year and have been doing all sorts of jobs since to get through, and people who've graduated this year. But the fact that we had a really good response I think shows that, actually, people do know that our opportunities are there. It's been a theme throughout that we just, as an industry, we don't have the scale of opportunities available for many reasons.

**Rob West**

And is there ever anything we can do about that? Or do we just...?

**Bendy Ashfield**

We could reform the levy. I mean, how long have you got, Rob? [LAUGHS]

- Rob West** Well, let's have that as a question, then. What are your final thoughts on how we could make apprenticeships work for our sector effectively, as they might do in other sectors?
- Jakki Jeffrey** Yeah, I think funding. I think different ways of funding, so, grants to small businesses, small/medium sized enterprises... More of the levy being directed to certain areas... Making sure that any sort of media, or any way of discussing apprenticeships, is always on a par with graduates... Just asking for help and support to the creative sector because of covid - I know that's not the route of thinking in England, but let's just hope for it, that they will recognise that it is a successful industry, it generates so much. And if they're just looking at the economy, why can't they look at it for mental health and wellbeing? Everyone needs the arts. So for goodness sake, support it.
- Bendy Ashfield** There are reforms being talked about, in terms of portability of apprenticeships and modular apprenticeships, and those could really start to unlock work for people who work either as freelancers or in an area where there's very seasonal work - so festivals, pantomime... But also, we have a pool of casuals who work maybe around three or four of the big London theatres, and actually, if they could be doing units at a time, modules of an apprenticeship, actually we'd all be investing in up-skilling that pool of casuals. That would be a great idea. We know the statistics prove that, when we're operating normally, our industry massively contributes to the economy. But actually, that doesn't ever seem to translate into some funding to increase the numbers of apprenticeships. And I also think, in a workforce that doesn't have brilliant statistics for diversity, apprenticeships have been so proven to improve diversity. And I think that's just such a powerful argument in terms of all sorts of diversity - socioeconomic, ethnic, employ more people with disabilities - all of those we know to be true when you use apprenticeships well, and you can leverage them effectively. So I think it's frustrating, and a missed opportunity.
- Rob West** You've both referred to the fact that the pandemic has potentially pushed things back a bit. Final question: What can be done to build back fairer?
- Jakki Jeffrey** The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development did a report on the Scottish apprenticeship system just last year, and some of the key findings that we're talking about now, about fair and responsive funding, about recognition of prior learning, about an employer driven system, and also about parity of funding for the creative sector rather than other sectors that the government deemed to be the areas that they want to grow, like engineering, construction, data science, etc... It is a massive sector, and I think that if we came together collectively, then we'd be a bigger voice. And I think, maybe because we are a bit broken and fragmented, there our voice is not being heard as strong as it could be. But I think better funding, definitely the real wage funding for all apprentices, is definitely needed - with built-in pension schemes as well, right from day one. So, yeah, just to make it attractive for young people, for parents to see that it's a really viable pathway, and actually the creative sector could share apprentices so that they could share the costs of it as well.
- Rob West** Bendy, how do we build back fairer?

**Bendy Ashfield** One thing you could do is just say that there is no tolerance whatsoever for unpaid internships, or work experience for more than 10 days. Absolutely no. That's not going to be a thing anymore. I think a lot of it is about making people at a younger age, a broader section of society, aware of the careers. I do think that we've got to resolve how we can pay apprentices a proper wage across the board.

**Rob West** Bendy Ashfield, Jakki Jeffrey, thank you very much for taking part in this Creative and Cultural Skills podcast.

**Jakki Jeffrey** Thank you very much.

**Rob West** And thanks also to Ellen Johnson and Emma Blake Morsi for their contribution to the podcast. Remember, if you'd like to hear the full interview with our two former apprentices Emma Blake Morsi and Ellen Johnson, it's available as extra content on our website - [CCSkills.org.uk](http://CCSkills.org.uk). And thanks to you for listening. Bye for now!

**Posy Jowett** 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 West** Ta daah!

**Jakki Jeffrey** [LAUGHS]

**Bendy Ashfield** [LAUGHS] I enjoyed that!

**Jakki Jeffrey** Yeah, I did too! If only we could make it all happen.

**Bendy Ashfield** I know, and if I work with you as a college, Jakki, that'd be great.

**Jakki Jeffrey** Really? \*Hooray\*.

**Rob West** There you go!

**Bendy Ashfield** Brilliant, well done.

**Rob West** A link has been made.

**Bendy Ashfield** Don't think we can though, can we, because you're in Scotland, sadly.

**Jakki Jeffrey** But you never know - just on the wider thing for the sector, though.

**Rob West** Where there's a will, there's a way, yes.

**Bendy Ashfield** Yeah, it was interesting. I mean, there was so much similarity to what we were saying, I think... Probably just makes for a really boring podcast! [LAUGHS].

**Rob West** [LAUGHS]