



Building soft skills in the creative economy: Creative intermediaries, business support and the ‘soft skills gap’



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ABSTRACT

In recent years, the UK government and policymakers have sought to maximise the impact of the creative economy via a programme of targeted intervention. Intermediary agencies – those organisations that sit between government and policymakers on one hand, and creative practitioners and microbusinesses on the other – are increasingly seen as crucial to the functioning of the creative economy. This article reports on the activities of one creative intermediary – Cultural Enterprise Office – based in Glasgow, Scotland. CEO’s remit is to help creatives become more ‘businesslike’, and they provide or facilitate access to training and skills development. The article draws on interviews conducted with CEO staff and clients, and ethnographic material gathered from observation of CEO’s working practices. I explore how creatives narrativise their personal and professional development in relation to intermediaries, and demonstrate the tension at the core of CEO’s practice – between their remit to support a skills and employability agenda and their understanding of the limitations of this agenda. I also explore the emotional component of business support, which arises in response to the extreme individualisation associated with creative work, and the precarious working conditions that creatives face. The rationale for writing this article stems from the fact that the creative economy is now a globalised concept, with many countries looking to the UK for guidance on growing the sector. Yet little is known about what services creatives draw down from intermediaries, why and when, or how they understand the role of intermediaries.

1. Introduction

In the UK, we are rapidly moving on from what McRobbie (2010:32) has called the ‘creative decade’ wherein creativity came to be understood as a key driver of the national economy. In recent years, the UK government and policymakers have sought to maximise the impact of the creative economy via a programme of targeted intervention. As it stands in the UK this ‘intervention’ consists in part of a draw-down programme of funding and support that will help creative practitioners develop a business from their talent. To this end, intermediary agencies – understood as those organisations that sit between government and policymakers on the one hand, and creative practitioners and microbusinesses on the other – have come to be seen as key to the functioning of the creative economy, working as they do to organise and govern creative production and to keep creative practitioners aligned with high-level cultural and creative-economic policy.

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The article is based on qualitative research conducted with Cultural Enterprise Office (CEO) and their clients, throughout 2013 and 2014². CEO is a small, Glasgow-based creative intermediary agency that provides support for creative practitioners and microbusiness in the Scottish creative sector. CEO's remit is to help creatives to become more 'businesslike', and to provide or facilitate access to training and skills development. The rationale for writing this article stems from the fact that the creative economy is now a thoroughly international concept, with many countries looking to the UK for guidance on growing the sector. Yet an upsurge in the volume of theoretical work on intermediaries has not, to date, been matched by exploratory empirical research. As a result, we know relatively little about the nature of the 'oscillations' that intermediaries perform as part of their role, and how competing pressures find expression in organisational practice. We also know relatively little about what services creative practitioners and microbusinesses draw down from intermediaries, why and when, nor how they perceive of the practical role of intermediaries.

The article draws on interviews conducted with CEO staff and their clients, and ethnographic material gathered from observation of CEO's working practices. I demonstrate several tensions at the core of CEO's practice, including between their top-down remit to support a skills and employability agenda and their situated understanding of the limitations of this agenda, and between government and funders' desire for macro-level impacts, and CEO's interventions, which tend to come at the micro-scale. I also explore what creatives value about CEO's services, and how they narrativise their personal and professional development in relation to creative intermediaries such as CEO.

The article proceeds in four sections. In the first, I review the literature pertaining to current debates concerning the role of intermediaries in the creative economy, and briefly summarise some of the key issues concerning the training of creative practitioners and microbusinesses. In the second, I introduce the case organisation, how they are positioned in the Scottish creative landscape, and the various routes through which they seek to support their clients. The third section deals with three main issues arising from the empirical material. I demonstrate how agencies like CEO are instrumental in supplementing the training provided by Higher Education (HE) institutions, and thus are particularly important to creatives at the beginning of their careers. In line with what others have argued, I also document the "portfolio" (Schlesinger and Waelde 2012: 22) nature of creative careers, and demonstrate that work in the sector is still characterised by extreme precariousness (Banks and Hesmondhalgh, 2009). In the Scottish case, this is arguably exacerbated given the well-documented 'pull' of London within the UK's creative economy. I then demonstrate (following Schlesinger et al., 2015a) that the emotional component of business support is crucial yet often under-recognised by both advisers and clients, and that the need for this arises largely in response to the isolation and individualisation often cited as a key feature of creative labour. In the final section I offer some conclusions, and recommendations for future work in the field.

2. The rise of the creative economy

The UK's long-running focus on creativity, and the assumed role of the so-called 'creative economy' in ensuring national, regional and local competitiveness is at this point well examined (Andres and Round 2015; Cunningham 2002; O'Connor, 2010; Schlesinger 2009). The creative industries have been central to the UK's economic growth strategy since the 1990s (Oakley 2004). According to the Centre for Economics and Business Research, the creative industries contributed £5.9bn to the UK economy in 2013 (CEBR 2013: 17). In the last five to ten years there have been very significant – though unevenly distributed – improvements in information and communications technology (ICTs), leading to growth in digital creative production, distribution, and consumption. As Bahkshi et al. (2013) have written, the creative industries³, and the so-called 'digital industries' are often now grouped together as a separate economic sector – the 'creative economy'. Similarly, the spread of creative-economic ideas from their initial genesis in London during the New Labour years, throughout Europe, North America and Australia, and into the Global South has been well documented (see Booyens 2012; Farr-Wharton et al., 2013; Gregory 2015). Schlesinger et al. (2015a) have argued, however, that the term 'creative economy' is increasingly unhelpful, in that it forces us to think in terms of the sectors designated as 'creative' by national governments, and closes off avenues to investigate the non-economic activities that help to constitute the sphere of creative production (see also McRobbie 2010, 2016).

2.1. Cultural intermediaries

Latterly, 'creativity' is understood as a panacea for a range of economic and social problems, and moreover, is seen as a synonym for "dynamism, growth, talent formation and national renewal" (Schlesinger 2013: 29). As a result, the creative industries' influence on the economic, social and cultural life of the UK, and other developed economies, shows no sign of diminishing. As Schlesinger et al. (2015a: 22), have noted "for those adopting a creative industries development strategy [...] having established a new focus or object for policy the task is to try and make it work better". One key way in which governments seek to do this is to charge intermediary agencies with developing the creative economy.

Smith Maguire and Matthews (2012) – in their influential review of scholarship on cultural intermediaries – write that to date, this scholarship falls into two broad (though by no means mutually exclusive) camps. They note that the first, following Bourdieu

² Note that following funding cuts in late 2014, CEO now runs with a smaller staff, and no longer has a formal base in Edinburgh. The last two years have seen significant changes in staffing, and in CEO's working practices. This article of course deals with CEO as it existed from 2013–2014.

³ The Department for Culture, Media, and Sport (DCMS, 2001: 4) describes the creative industries as: "those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property". The DCMS recognises 9 creative sectors: advertising and marketing; architecture; crafts; design (product, graphic and fashion); film, TV, video, radio and photography; IT, software, and computer services; publishing; museums, galleries and libraries; music, performing and visual arts (DCMS 2015).

(1984, 1996), understands cultural intermediaries as “exemplars of the new middle class, involved in the mediation of production and consumption”; whilst the second sees cultural intermediaries as “market actors involved in the qualification of goods, mediating between economy and culture” (Smith Maguire and Matthews 2012: 551). Jakob and van Heur (2014: 357) have identified various kinds of cultural or creative intermediaries – “arts and cultural councils, policy networks, economic development agencies, foundations and unions to artist collectives, cultural centres, creative industries incubators, festivals and tradeshow” – that are engaged in the further development of the creative economy. An upsurge in the number of intermediaries charged with developing the sector has been coupled with increased academic attention, and, as Nixon and du Gay (2002) demonstrate, given the volume of scholarship concerning intermediaries, the term may be losing analytical purchase. Increasingly, it appears that the term ‘intermediary’ is used to refer anyone with a (real or perceived) role to play as a taste-maker.

Making the case for the continued usefulness of the concept of cultural intermediaries, Smith Maguire and Matthews (2012: 553, *my emphasis*) note however,

[T]he work of cultural intermediaries is *not* common to all because of its expert orientation [...] Furthermore, cultural intermediaries are not a monolithic occupational group, nor do they legitimate particular goods, services and practices just as they please.

Smith Maguire and Matthews (2012: 553) therefore encourage us to remain attentive to the expert dimension of intermediary activity, the interpretive and ‘legislative’ power of intermediaries, and the factors that constrain their activities. It is here that this article seeks to make an intervention, outlining the activities of a specific kind of cultural intermediary, a skills-development agency that sits between individual creative practitioners on the one hand, and policymakers, funding agencies and employers on the other. Whilst very recently, research has investigated the roles that intermediaries play in relation to: urban regeneration (García 2004); the creation of cultural quarters (Comunian and Mould 2014); developing community economies (Vanolo 2013) and the fostering of creative citizenship (Burgess 2010), one area which has yet to attract sustained academic attention is the role intermediaries might play in supporting skills development. Put simply, research on skills-development focused intermediaries such as CEO is important because it explores both how value becomes ascribed to goods, services and ideas in market economies, and how norms around career-development, work/life balance, and conduct of creative work become established and reified.

Some seventeen years ago, Raffo et al. noted (2000: 215; see also Lange et al., 2000) that whilst microbusinesses and SME’s are recognised as the ‘building blocks’ of the creative economy,

A parallel theme emerging from mainstream political agencies, policymakers and commentators is that although micro and small businesses have been earmarked as the potential champions for future growth and prosperity, there still remains a skills gap between what they can and should deliver and this gap is the result of training needs that have not been realised.

Recent research released by skills development bodies Creative and Cultural Skills (CCS) and Skills Development Scotland (SDS) suggest that Raffo et al.’s (2000) statement remains relevant. For example, CCS (2011: 44) state, “the most commonly cited skills gaps across the sector include software development and ICT; management and leadership, customer facing skills, marketing and business development, technical and craft specific skills”. Similarly, a core element of SDS’s (2016) plan for the development of the Scottish creative sector is to “support creative leadership, critical confidence and management skills”. A report commissioned by Creative Skillset (Armstrong and Page 2015) also identified a lack of management and leadership skills as hindering the growth and development of the creative industries in the UK. Whilst CCS, SDS and Creative Skillset recognise that technical and craft-specific skills are lacking across the sector, for these organisations, the real issue seems to lie in the so-called ‘soft skills gap’.

2.2. The characteristics of creative labour

A set of pervasive stereotypes have attached themselves to the experience of creative work. Creative work is perceived as being a meritocracy, as having low barriers to entry, and as being inclusive (McRobbie 2016). It is perceived as collaborative, fulfilling, unpredictable, ‘fun’, and as affording creatives an enviable degree of freedom compared to salaried ‘desk jobs’. However as Warren and Jones (2015) and others (Banks and Oakley, 2016) show, recent research on the experience of working within the creative economy demonstrates that barriers to entry are considerable (according to the DCMS, over 40% of UK creative workers have degrees, compared to 16% in other sectors (DCMS 2006, cited in Warren and Jones 2015: 2). Moreover creative work remains insecure and precarious, there is a culture of long hours, and an expectation that creatives will work for free in order to ‘get a foot on the ladder’, or in an attempt to secure further work (Schlesinger and Waelde 2012). Coupled with this is the expectation of hyper-mobility, and hyper-flexibility both in terms of the type of work that is taken on and the roles that creatives are expected to play within projects or businesses – for example, creatives may balance freelance and salaried work, collaboration and project management, and so on (Munro 2016; Schlesinger et al., 2015a).

Banks and Hesmondhalgh, (2009) have written that despite the reality of the conditions of creative work recent UK creative-economic policy propagates the view that with enough drive and determination, anyone can succeed within the creative industries. For Banks and Hesmondhalgh, (2009) and others (Kelly and Champion 2015; Oakley 2014; Schlesinger et al., 2015a), framing the creative industries as a sector where the only prerequisite for success is ‘hard work’ ensures that creative workers take responsibility for developing the skills required by the market, such that they form a reserve pool of exceptionally highly-skilled and flexible labour. For Banks and Hesmondhalgh (2009: 422) this reserve pool matters in terms of national competitiveness more generally. They state that in many recent policy documents, “the enhanced and enforced mobility embodied in the idea of ‘flexible labour’ is identified as a positive ‘spillover’ effect of the creative economy. High degrees of labour turnover and increased levels of second-jobbing are

presented as useful external economies”. The oversupply of labour within the creative industries encourages creative workers to seek employment in sectors not traditionally considered ‘creative’ (Banks and Oakley, 2016). In this way, the oversupply of highly-skilled and flexible workers is understood as helping to stimulate innovation across the economy as a whole⁴ (Bakhshi et al., 2013).

2.3. Creative entrepreneurship and the role of Higher Education

Oakley (2014) has noted that entrepreneurship is often represented as a key attribute in capitalist societies, being absolutely central to the functioning of the economy. Bilton and Cummings (2010: 107) have suggested that entrepreneurship works as ‘the bridge between the art of innovation, and a viable market’, though Schlesinger et al. (2015a) have noted that this formulation appears to work more as a theoretical “ideal-type” than as a descriptor. Oakley (2014) and others (Bilton 1999; Ellmeier 2003; Henry 2007; Taylor et al., 2011) have empirically investigated the contours of specifically *cultural and creative entrepreneurship*, noting that creative entrepreneurship refers to self-employed cultural and creative workers – who juggle freelance work, portfolio work and other, often non-creative work – as well as micro and small business owners. Bridgstock (2011: 10), notes that creative careers are often “individually navigated”, with little in the way of opportunity for stable employment or career progression within a single organisation (see also Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002; McRobbie 2016). In this context, as Oakley (2014) points out, ‘entrepreneurship’ is often forced (in that there is no alternative orientation to take towards creative labour), or at the very least emerges as a coping strategy in the face of precariousness. The individualism that characterises work within the creative economy is almost certainly a contributing factor in the lack of management and leadership skills identified by intermediary bodies such as CCS, SDS and Creative Skillset.

Increasingly, as entrepreneurialism is seen as a key attribute for success in the creative industries, attention has turned to whether or not entrepreneurialism, like talent, is something that individuals are ‘born with’, and merely requires honing or directing, or alternatively, something that can be taught. In this context, the actions of HE providers and the training given within creative degrees assumes great significance. Ashton and Noonan (2013: 2) outline the competing pressures that HE institutions and creative students and graduates find themselves under, noting that “the intersections between cultural work and HE are hugely significant and enacted at a macro level through government policy interventions and employer-led demands for ‘industry-ready talent’”. The dynamic nature of the creative industries, and advances in technology mean that skills quickly go ‘out of date’, and HE providers struggle to keep training current, placing further emphasis on intervention via external skills development providers.

Speaking from the Australian context, Bridgstock and Carr (2013) demonstrate that graduate employment measures fail to take into account the distinctive nature of creative careers and their portfolio structure. Bridgstock and Carr’s (2013) work resonates with the picture in the UK, where the Office of National Statistics (ONS) – whose statistics are the mostly widely-used by other government bodies and agencies such as the Higher Education Statistics Authority (HESA) – aligns its occupational and industrial definitions with international standards, making it difficult to adequately measure employment within the creative industries, insofar as they are defined by the DCMS. According to HESA’s most recent figures (for HE-leavers 2013/14), 77% of creative arts and design graduates were in employment 6 months after graduation, with the three top destination industries of creative arts and design graduates (2011–2013) identified as: the wholesale and retail trade (23.4%); the arts, entertainment and recreational industries (14.3%); and professional, scientific and technical activities (14.1%) (HESA 2015: np). Of course these industrial sectors do not align cleanly with the DCMS’s definition of the ‘creative industries’, hence, understanding the fit between creative degree programmes and qualifications, and industrial sectors is more difficult than it at first appears. Furthermore, the figures collected by HESA suggest that whilst creative arts and design graduates are no more likely to be unemployed 6 months after graduation than, for example, graduates in computer science, engineering and technology or business and administrative studies (HESA, 2015: np), the collated figures make it difficult to adequately gauge underemployment, and do not take into account the short-term, project-based working upon which the creative industries relies.

Despite these apparently encouraging statistics, Bridgstock and Carr’s (2013) qualitative research found that many creative arts and design graduates feel ill-prepared for the challenges of freelance employment and portfolio work, and of running their own businesses. Ball et al. (2010) further note that “graduates express continuing career development needs, and this highlights the importance of progression and the relationship between undergraduate learning, postgraduate study, on-the-job training and continuing professional development (CPD)”. These scholars’ recognition of a series of skills gaps – most pertinently around business management and leadership, networking, client-facing activities but also IT skills (see also Raffo et al., 2000) – accords both with the findings of industry bodies such as CCS, SDS and Creative Skillset, and my own experience of researching Cultural Enterprise Office.

3. Cultural Enterprise Office

CEO is a small, primarily publicly-funded creative business development agency based in Glasgow, Scotland. Its focus is on microbusinesses and individual creatives working within the creative sector in Scotland. When it was launched in 2001, CEO’s remit was to support recent graduates from creative courses, helping them to become ‘business ready’ by developing their entrepreneurial

⁴ Over the last 20 years ‘innovation’ has been understood as key to ensuring national competitiveness. Bodies such as NESTA – set up in 1998, as a body intended to ‘support and promote talent, innovation and creativity in the fields of science, technology and the arts’ (NESTA, cited in Oakley et al., 2014: 305) – have become increasingly influential, and have succeeded in ensuring that discourses of ‘creativity’ and ‘innovation’ are central to government economic policy, but also to education and skills policies. Oakley et al. (2014) have documented the rise and rise of ‘innovation’ as a concept, and the key role played by NESTA in this process.

skills. In the interim, CEO has been shaped by the priorities of consecutive Scottish governments, and other public agencies such as the Scottish Arts Council and its successor, Creative Scotland. One key tenet of CEO's practice is that, as a business support agency, they refrain at all costs from judging clients' *creative work*, rather they offer advice only in relation to business matters⁵.

There is a great deal of dependency between the Scottish government and the UK government when it comes to the governing of the creative economy (Schlesinger et al. 2015a, 2015b). Generally speaking, the Scottish government has taken on board the same set of assumptions that drive the development of creative activity elsewhere: that the creative and digital industries are high-growth sectors, central to the development of the wider economy; that they are potential drivers of economic and social regeneration, and that intervention is key to ensuring that creative microbusinesses and individuals fulfil their potential within the sector. Small intermediary agencies such as CEO are therefore embedded within an extremely complex and dynamic policy landscape, and have to be flexible in order to keep up with policy directives formulated at a range of scales. Like many intermediaries, CEO is also precarious – funding is competed for on short cycles, which makes it difficult for the organisation to act strategically.

When our project began in 2013, CEO was a small organisation, employing 20 core staff, with bases in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dundee⁶. CEO provided information (via its website, by email, or over the phone) to creatives and microbusinesses in order to help them improve their business skills⁷. In addition to this, CEO provided one-to-one advice sessions with general creative business advisers and artform-specific advisers, and also ran one-to-many training events across Scotland. This triad – of information, advice and events – formed the 'core' of CEO's activities, although they also ran a range of competitive programmes that offered more comprehensive and tailored training. At the time of the research, these programmes included Starter for 6 (a programme tailored towards start-ups, that offered four training events, coaching or professional development, and the chance to pitch for up to £10,000 of funding); Fashion Foundry (a programme for fashion businesses that included coaching, professional development, networking events and subsidised studio space), and Flourish (a mentoring programme that encouraged growth and internationalisation in businesses that had been trading for longer than two years).

The organisation was led by the Director and a small team of Senior Managers. The managers oversaw a large team of 'floor' staff (who were responsible for updating the website, relaying information by email and over the phone, and organising and managing the booking of events) and the small team of advisers (who led one-to-one advice sessions and fronted the one-to-many training events). The 'specialist' artform-specific advisers were employed on a freelance basis.

4. Methodology

As part of the research, we conducted 26 interviews with CEO staff and board members; 12 interviews with CEO's advisory team; 17 interviews with CEO clients, and 11 interviews with CEO stakeholders. In this article, I draw on interviews conducted with client facing staff, and clients themselves. I also draw on ethnographic field notes (taken as part of my participant observation within CEO, within advice sessions and client meetings, and at events organised by CEO), and present material in the form of ethnographic 'vignettes', adapted from my field notes (Gertler 2003; Humphreys and Watson 2009). In other publications arising from the project, myself and other members of the research team have discussed CEO's development and practice (Schlesinger et al., 2015a), and the experience of conducting team ethnography (Schlesinger et al., 2015b).

In a separate examination of the intricacies of conducting KE in the creative economy (Munro 2016), I deal with some of the ethical issues that arise when such comprehensive access is granted to an intermediary agency such as CEO. To summarise these briefly here, in the event (prior to my appointment as Research Associate), the Principal Investigator and the Co-Investigator on the Arts and Humanities Research Council grant drew up a comprehensive non-disclosure agreement that was ratified by the University's legal team, and accepted by the partner organisation. In an early meeting with gatekeepers within CEO, we agreed to the standard conventions of anonymization for CEO clients, but not for CEO staff (given that this was a co-produced research project). We felt that it was particularly important to protect clients, given that there was the possibility for sensitive personal and financial data to be shared (such as for example, when 'sitting in' on advice sessions⁸). Whilst we of course employed discretion when reporting on organisational strategy, working practices, and staff opinions – particularly when dealing with more 'junior' staff – we felt that fully engaging with and reporting on exactly how CEO and their staff worked was essential in order to properly illuminate the full complexity of CEO's activities, and of the landscape that they negotiated.

5. 'Starting out': turning creative degrees into creative careers

CEO was originally set up in 2001 with a remit to help 'pre-start up' creative businesses to find their feet, as there was concern

⁵ This is of course difficult to do, and requires CEO staff to tread very carefully in interactions with clients (and, as I note in 5.1, it is a rule that is occasionally broken). It may sound arcane to structure CEO's work in this way, but this rule exists for a reason. Until it was superseded by Creative Scotland in 2010, the Scottish Arts Council (SAC) was Scotland's primary cultural and creative funder. SAC ran 'Artist's Panels' which functioned very much like the 'crits' common to most art schools – artists presented their work to a panel of experts, and sought feedback on their practice. When CEO was set up, the rule about not judging 'the work' ensured there was no overlap between CEO's role and the role of the Artist's Panels. When Creative Scotland superseded SAC, the Artist's Panels were done away with, leaving creatives to rely on peer networks should they require feedback on their work. Many of our interviewees expressed a desire to see the Panels return in some form.

⁶ Following funding cuts in late 2014, CEO now runs with a smaller staff, and no longer has a formal base in Edinburgh.

⁷ CEO referred to creative practitioners who sought information, advice and training as 'clients'. In this article, I use the terms 'client' and 'creative practitioner' interchangeably to refer to individuals who seek advice from CEO.

⁸ Of course clients were asked whether they were willing to have researchers sit in on advice sessions, and on group training events. Consent forms were completed for all research 'interactions', except sit-ins on group training events, which were governed by Chatham House rules.

from government and funders that business skills training within colleges and universities was lacking. This remit meant that CEO was particularly important in terms of guiding recent graduates through the process of setting up their own business. In this respect, CEO was initially envisaged – partially at least – as a ‘follow on’ service from the training received as part of formal arts or creative education programmes. In later years, CEO has restricted student access to its core services (students can apply to programmes such as Starter for 6), although graduates are still catered for.

Clients that I spoke to felt that arts and creative education programmes still did little to prepare graduates for the reality of life as an artist or creative practitioner, and thus one of CEO’s key roles was in helping creative graduates in Scotland to build a business from their practice. One visual artist recounted her experience of art school, and the lack of business training that was provided:

Well. We only got one professional development talk and that was a sort of two day seminar in final year, and then we had somebody talk about the legal issues – you know, whether or not we had copyright of our work – and we had different people come from galleries. So some [gallerists] said, ‘Don’t approach me, I will choose who I want to have come to my gallery’, and others said, ‘Yes, you could come and make suggestions to me’. But it was very brief and it wasn’t well structured and we were like rabbits caught in the headlights with it. And I remember immediately leaving art school, people said to me, ‘We’re not prepared for this, we don’t know what we’re doing’

A jeweller who attended a different Scottish university told me how the years immediately post-graduation had been difficult for her. She had struggled to turn her practice into a business, and as a result had taken on a full-time job, and had turned her practice in to a hobby. She told me:

The rejection and the knockbacks and [turning my practice back] into a hobby just filled me with so much doubt and so much resentment towards my university, because I felt I’d been taught how to make jewellery but not how to be a jeweller [...] It was just like, ‘Why don’t I know this stuff? Why don’t I know how to write a business plan? Why don’t I know how to market myself? Why do I not know how to even write a 50-word blurb about my work?’

These interviewees contacted CEO relatively soon after graduating from their respective art schools, suggesting that the soft skills gap identified by SDS, CCS and Creative Skillset is, in part, due to creatives’ expectation that business skills will be a part of their training at art school or university. In this respect, clients often ascribed great importance to CEO when narrating the development of their businesses, stating that the organisation had helped them to ‘make the leap’ from art school or university to the world of business.

As CEO moved further away from its initial remit to support recent graduates they had maintained their commitment to helping very early-career or pre-start-up businesses by entering into a commercial relationship with many of Scotland’s art schools and universities. As part of this relationship, they were often called upon to deliver Starting Out⁹ to groups of undergraduate students. Although this clearly demonstrates that Scottish art schools and universities are attempting to improve the quality of vocational training for their students, for many creatives that I spoke to CEO’s involvement came too late, and their inclusion did not make up for a wider neglect of the issue of professional development within creative degree programmes. A photography client of CEO’s told me:

It’s good that they’re getting CEO in, but that sort of training needs to be built into the structure of the degree, not farmed out. And at the very least, it needs to come earlier, not in the final year when people are struggling to put degree shows and portfolios together. That is a fundamental issue with the system, and I think it is changing, but very slowly from what I hear

Supporting early-career and pre-start-up creatives, then, remained one of CEO’s key roles, even after this commitment was officially decoupled from their funding agreement. As noted above, however, as the Supporting Creative Business team’s time in the field came to a close CEO was struggling to deal with the impact of severe cuts to their funding. At this time, the Director and senior managers were engaged in difficult discussions about whether CEO should be providing a service that, it could be argued, should be the responsibility of HE institutions. Whilst CEO’s commercial partnerships did bring in significant amounts of money via the trading arm of the organisation, the drain on resources was keenly felt within the core service areas of business support and advice.

5.1. Precariousness and portfolio working

Recent research on the conditions of working within the cultural and creative industries has highlighted the precarious nature of creative careers. Above, I have demonstrated how one key ‘crisis point’ for creatives is at the point of transition from art school or university, to the world of business. Indeed, many of the creatives that I spoke to found that the early years of their careers – whilst they were still ‘making a name’ for themselves – were particularly precarious. A mixed-media client of CEO’s summed this up:

There’s this idea that because you do a specific thing at University, that’s what your business is. But it’s not that simple. I did photography, but I don’t just take photographs for a living. A lot of those early days is about taking on lots of different jobs, making a bit of money, making a name for yourself, and deciding what you want to do, deciding what your business is

Problematically, the dynamic nature of the creative economy meant that many of the creatives that I spoke to felt that, even as they moved on from the pre start-up phase and became established, they remained precarious. This was largely due to the short-term, project-based working that characterises the creative economy. As others have argued this requires that creatives build up a ‘portfolio’ of activities in order to survive (Schlesinger and Waelde 2012). One of CEO’s key strengths as an intermediary is their practical,

⁹ Starting Out is a workshop tailored to businesses at the pre start-up stage, and is one of CEO’s most popular workshops.

situated understanding of the myriad freedoms, stresses and strains associated with this type of working. In large part, this is due to the fact that most of CEO's staff are adviser-practitioners, meaning that many of them have been through the creative education system, and have experience of running a creative business. Furthermore, many of CEO's staff continue to run a creative businesses or keep up a creative practice alongside their 'day job'. One member of CEO's senior management team summed up how this impacted the day to day work of supporting clients:

Interviewer: *So [...] CEO actively wants to support the part time business, the portfolio career, the 'Whatever-you-have-to-do-to-successfully-manage-a-creative-life'?*

Senior Management Team Member: *Yes, we do support it and I think because of the people that are working here they understand that most people are motivated by more than money, you know [...] There is empathy and there is an interest.*

One CEO adviser summed up why she felt CEO was different from other business support agencies. The following is adapted from my fieldnotes:

I spent the morning sitting in on advice sessions in CEO's offices. Chatting to the adviser before the session started, I asked her how she approached advice sessions, and the work of giving advice. I wanted to have an idea of what I was about to see. She told me that the most important thing for advisers to do was to listen to the client, and to take into account the whole person and the range of activities they might be involved in. In particular, she told me that CEO staff are well-placed to offer hard-headed, practical advice on how to juggle work that was personally and creatively satisfying with work that 'pays the bills'. So even though CEO claim that their advisers are there to offer business advice, often this did mean 'breaking the rules' and interjecting on many different aspects of the client's creative practice

One client told me that CEO's willingness to engage with the portfolio nature of her career set them apart from other business support agencies in Scotland:

[The client] told me that often, she felt like a "jack of all trades", and what appealed to her about CEO was that they knew what it was like to be pulled in all different directions by a portfolio of work, and could advise her on how to "organise the chaos", as she put it

When discussing the issue of portfolio careers, many of the clients that I spoke to articulated how different familial circumstances had a bearing on first, the extent of the 'portfolio-ness' of their careers (i.e. how far they had to deviate from what *they understood* as the 'core' of their practice in order to build a sustainable living) and second, how they felt able to manage precariousness. The photographer quoted above noted that for her, building a business was made difficult by the fact that she had no support from family.

Photography client: *We all know that getting sorted after uni is a tough time, and most of us have to draw on family etc. But for me, I didn't have any of that – no family home to go back to, no-one to borrow money from, nothing.*

Interviewer: *So you became used to [being precarious], and to having to do lots of different 'bitty' things to survive?*

Photography client: *Yes, and the reality is that these days, this isn't just something that artists do, it's just what the labour market is like for people like us¹⁰.*

At a Knowledge Exchange event hosted by the University of Glasgow in November 2015, a former CEO employee spoke passionately about how business support and skills development agencies needed to pay more attention to the various barriers that prevented people from accessing support, echoing Negus's (2002) assertion that we must not assume that intermediaries necessarily play a pluralising role in the creative economy. She singled class out as one barrier that skills development agencies had been slow to tackle:

Somebody who comes from a working class background and someone who comes from a middle class background, or someone who comes from upper class background, have 3 really different experiences of developing their own talents. You know from an upper class, middle class, they've got the ability to take time out and develop their practice and to be supported along that way, by maybe supportive financially parents [sic] which is brilliant. But the working class person doesn't, so how do we support that talent?

The research participants quoted above note that graduates have to demonstrate an entrepreneurial approach to personal and professional development – one that required flexibility as well as hard graft. Both also note that social class has a huge impact on creatives' ability to be entrepreneurial. In an echo of Banks and Oakley, (2016) recent work, these participants stated that young people without 'family' money struggled considerably when starting out in the creative sector, because of the need to juggle skills development training, the upkeep and further development of their creative practice, and the practicalities of setting up a business.

5.2. 'We are our clients'

CEO is a precarious organisation, and has been for much of its lifetime, and this added a further layer of complexity to advisers' interactions with clients. Until 2015, the majority of CEO's funding came from Creative Scotland. As is the case with all organisations funded through Creative Scotland, decisions on funding are made on short cycles, meaning that CEO needs to be fleet of foot in order to keep up with changing policy directives and fashions in creative-economic support, and must constantly re-state its position within

¹⁰ At this point, the interviewee gestured towards me. We were the same age, and had already discussed our approximate class positions and family circumstances. At the time I was – and still am – on a short-term research contract, and we had discussed our respective experiences of precarious employment.

the business support landscape, and provide evidence of its impact on the Scottish creative workforce.

In order for CEO to demonstrate its continuing worth to its funders, the organisation needs to be seen to fit in to the top-down skills and employability agenda prescribed by the UK and Scottish governments. The values that underpin CEO's work – concerning open access to their services, and the desire to help even very early-stage, pre-start-up business – of course aligned cleanly with this agenda. However, based on their long-term experience of working with creative practitioners and microbusinesses, front-line CEO staff were aware of the limitations of this approach. For example, CEO staff were aware of the fact that the working conditions within the Scottish creative economy were far from ideal, and that currently, there was an oversupply of skilled and flexible labour, leading to a 'race to the bottom' where creatives were required to eke out a precarious existence on a portfolio of activities:

In the staff meeting today it was clear that staff were concerned about the increasingly poor working conditions and the lack of opportunities for clients in the creative sector in Scotland. One adviser, seeking advice from colleagues, asked: "How do you advise someone who has done everything right, but is still struggling?" There was a sense from advisers that this was a dilemma that they faced often, and that being unable to advise left them feeling helpless

At the same meeting, another of CEO's advisers summed up the net result of this 'race to the bottom',

She noted that the current climate of extreme competition, coupled with forthcoming cuts to the Scottish cultural budget, meant that the lure of London was becoming even more of a problem than in the past: "We are losing people to London, and we've no way of stopping it". The alternative, she said, was that people would just drop out and relegate their creative practice to a hobby, rather than trying to make even a part-time career out of it. Addressing her fellow advisers, she said, "We should be honest about the rate of attrition, but we can't, because we need to keep advising"

In this respect, CEO – by virtue of their deep-seated values, and of course, the desire to keep the organisation going and fulfil their commitments to funders – found themselves complicit in shoring up the skills and employability agenda, at the same time as their deep, embedded knowledge of the Scottish creative sector told them that it was riddled with deficiencies.

I return to the issues raised in this section in the conclusion to this paper. Here, however, it is important to note the deep level of reflexivity – and at times, cynicism – with which creatives viewed creative business support:

It must be frustrating for [CEO staff], and you know, I have a lot of respect for what they do. They know there's real problems about the quantity and quality of work out there, but they keep having to peddle this, 'But the creative industries are fun! They're freeing! Be your own boss!' stuff [...] Because without people desperately trying to monetize their creativity [sic] the wheels come off the whole system, don't they?

Another former client referred to creative business support as an 'industry' in and of itself, telling me:

It has become an industry. I don't blame CEO for keeping on keeping on – they need jobs too – but it's head in the sand stuff. When are people actually going to start tackling the fundamentals? The lack of work, the bad pay, the fact that so many people have to go to London

At an awards event held in Edinburgh in November 2014, this same client spoke of the 'feedback loop' that acted as a driver for the creative industries in Scotland,

Like many of the creatives we've spoken to, she told me that she'd rather CEO were there, than that there was no dedicated creative business support service in Scotland. And so she used CEO, and dutifully filled in the feedback forms with glowing feedback because she knew that was what would be collated and sent to Creative Scotland as proof of CEO's impact. She knew this because in her role as a project manager she had had to collate those forms, and send them to Creative Scotland in order to prove that her project had been a success and that she should be awarded funding in the future. Moreover, for her to secure funding, it looked good for her to be engaging with organisations like CEO, as it demonstrated a commitment to professional development. She said, "The whole thing acts like this loop, where nobody says what they really think because we're all just trying to get by"

It is worth noting also that other, more mundane, elements of CEO's day-to-day practice sat at odds with their situated understanding of the reality of life within the creative economy. For example, creatives that I spoke to often articulated how they felt locked in to a double-bind, where the precariousness of their ventures meant that they felt unable to devote time to training opportunities with one eye on the long-term, because of the need to ensure that business decisions had an immediate payoff. At a Marketing training event run by CEO in summer 2014, I met a designer, who spoke of the difficulty of factoring in time in a precarious, portfolio career for training in soft skills:

She told me that even though she knew her business would benefit from her improved marketing skills, she would have to work 'overtime' this weekend in order to justify taking the day off to work on her 'soft skills'. Throughout the morning, she admitted that she had found it difficult to concentrate on the tasks set as part of the workshop: "I ended up checking my phone every five minutes". She said, "for people to actually want to come and give up their time [to a training opportunity] it has to be absolutely bang-on, up-to-date. This isn't, so people are restless".

Here, the designer identified one of the main problems with CEO's one-to-many training events, which is that within any group there will be a great deal of heterogeneity and participants will have different needs, hence despite their best attempts to do otherwise, CEO often end up replicating problems with general (non-creative-specific) business support agencies. Yet in order to 'prove' their worth within the creative support landscape, and to satisfy funders, it was important for CEO to demonstrate impact: in part at least, this meant reaching as many creatives as possible. Reaching large numbers of creative was of course more readily

achieved through one-to-many events than one-to-one advice sessions, although CEO knew – and articulated to us, on many occasions – that their clients placed a premium on one-to-one advice, coaching and PDP, and that demand for these services was extremely high.

Throughout this paper, it is possible to see some of the tensions that [Smith Maguire and Matthews \(2012\)](#) identify in the work of intermediaries writ large in CEO's practice, and in the way that their clients conceive of their role. Some of these are tensions that many creative intermediaries – particularly small to medium-sized ones – face, such as: balancing the requirements of funders against those of clients, and negotiating their precariousness whilst attempting to provide a stable base from which to build relationships with clients, and to network locally, nationally, and internationally. Many cultural intermediaries also struggle to fulfil their desire to act as advocates for the sector and drivers for policy in the face of squeezed budgets and increased pressure on staff time. Managing all of these tensions will inevitably have negative consequences for how well intermediaries can mediate between policymakers, funders, and clients, or how they can act as 'taste makers', fitting clients to the demands of the creative economy as it appears *in situ*. In CEO's case, they also need to negotiate other, more specific tensions such as their sympathetic and embodied understanding of the limits of the skills and employability agenda coupled with the conditions of their funding, which has the effect – intended or otherwise – of shoring up this agenda and of contributing to a continuing oversupply of skilled labour in the field. Relatedly of course, CEO must also negotiate between the kinds of data – in-depth, qualitative – that they produce, and that the creative sector in Scotland would benefit from taking on board, and the kind of aggregated, quantitative data that is preferred by policymakers and government. Additionally, CEO's core principle of 'don't judge the work', results in frequent slippages as a deepened adviser-client relationship means that 'the work', and 'the business model' can no longer be kept apart.

5.3. Business support as emotional support

The anxieties of creative labour are clear to see throughout the empirical material presented in this paper, and in this final section I explore the ways in which CEO deal with this on a practical, day-to-day level, by providing emotional support to clients as part of their business support services. In an earlier examination of CEO's business support services, [Schlesinger et al. \(2015a: 68\)](#) note that "clients' creative work was more than just a job or a business venture; it was also deeply woven into [...] the fabric of their home lives". In this context, then, the provision of business support often required great sensitivity, as the success or otherwise of creatives' businesses was likely to be tightly bound up with their sense of self, their personal lives, families, and relationships.

Given the high numbers of freelancers, sole traders, and microbusinesses working within the creative industries, isolation is a key feature of creative work. Despite a recent upsurge in the popularity of creative co-working spaces (see [Gandini 2015; Lange 2011](#) for academic examinations), few of our interviewees could afford to work in this way. During our time in the field, it became clear to us that the personalised service offered by CEO was designed in many ways to tackle this sense of isolation and individualisation. In the main, CEO staff were seen as always 'on hand' to help, particularly through difficult periods, echoing [Raffo et al's \(2000\)](#) suggestion that creatives often draw down support in a situated and reactive way – often in times of personal or professional crisis. One fashion client of CEO's told me:

I feel like my practice is going well most of the time. But sometimes, when I'm low, and I've been muddling along on my own, I just need to see [adviser] and have her tell me it's going to be ok, or say, 'Have I thought about [doing] this or that?' Sometimes, just the chat is enough, it's a confidence boost.

CEO's advice sessions were one key area where we saw the convergence of business support with emotional support. In advice sessions, CEO staff's adviser-practitioner status proved useful, in that the entanglement of professional and personal lives particularly common to creative labour was something that many of the advisers recognised, empathised with, and had themselves tackled. The following excerpt from my fieldnotes illustrates the way advisers positioned themselves in relation to their clients:

In our post-session discussion, CEO's adviser noted that many of the conversations that happen within advice sessions tend towards the confessional. She suggests that one way of managing this is to empathise with the client, and try to inhabit their 'space' – what they might be thinking and feeling, and how it is preventing them from moving forward. In so doing, she said, "You can start to understand the client's problems a bit better". The adviser suggested that to some extent, creatives' concerns were universal – many worried about money, how to build up a portfolio of activities, how to access funding, how to balance creative and commercial concerns – and so on, and that having experienced all that themselves, advisers were well-placed to help. The adviser noted the limitations of this approach however, noting that a further tactic that she sometimes employed was one of 'critical distancing' – "I say to myself – I know what this person needs, and then I try to steer the conversation towards the things I know to be important". There is an issue here around the advisers' relationship with clients – on the one hand they feel they have an unspoken affinity, but on the other, they worry that this may hinder them when trying to critically assess the needs of the client and their business and they have to position themselves accordingly.

Advice sessions frequently became emotional, and advisers often found themselves having to balance the twin tasks of comforting and caring, and also providing advice that would give the client something to work towards, so, balancing very real short-term needs against more abstract longer-term ones. This was not always easy, as one specialist adviser told me during a meeting at CEO's offices:

The adviser was clear that tears were a common feature of advice sessions. She said, 'People often manage to hold it together till they get through the door, and then it all comes out. They'll have been stressing for ages and the second someone asks, 'So how are you?' they crumple". She also told me that whilst she had to be sensitive to clients' emotional state, she also needed to offer concrete, practical advice even if the client doesn't seem willing or able take it in. She said she was aware that in these situations she might come across as cold or

insensitive, but that it was important to make sure that the client felt personally and professionally supported, and that when they left the session they had something to work towards in the medium to long-term.

It is worth noting that, at times, the convergence of emotional support with business advice spilled over into problematic territory, where advisers found themselves in situations where clients came to them for counsel on very personal issues. Whilst this did not happen often, it sometimes meant that clients presented advisers with extremely difficult material. The following is adapted from my fieldnotes, and has been very carefully anonymised:

In response to the adviser's opening question "How is everything going?" the client explained that her business had stalled due to personal pressures. The client says that she has long-standing problems with depression and anxiety. She feels that in recent months, these problems have been exacerbated due to problems in her relationship. She explains that her partner can be volatile, and unsupportive of her creative practice. He does not allow her time or space to work on her practice. The adviser lets the client talk about her relationship issues, and demonstrates concern, but notably she does not prompt or respond directly, rather, she talks about the effect these issues have on the business. Afterwards, the adviser was clearly extremely concerned, but felt that there were limits to how far she could advise in that situation. She told me, 'It's important to remember that you are only hearing one side of a story, and you're dealing with a person who is by their own admission really, really low right now. Having said that, I am not sure I know what to do about all this'. She made a note to check in with the client soon, to see if things had improved and 'to let her know I'm here'.

It was common for CEO staff to understand themselves as providing forms of 'therapeutic' support to clients. As Illouz (2008) and others (Cruikshank 1993; Trilling 1955) have noted, the model of the therapist-patient relationship is a powerful cultural trope – highly visible within popular culture, as Becker (2005) has noted – which "speaks to individuals' desire for self-improvement and unconditional support" (Schlesinger et al., 2015a: 68). In this context, it is perhaps unsurprising that adviser-client interactions sometimes came to resemble forms of therapy; however as illustrated by the vignette above, individual CEO staff dealt with the fluidity of the boundary between what could crudely be termed 'emotional support' vis-à-vis 'therapy' in very different ways. Some advisers – by virtue of their training or life experience – felt more able to deal with interactions that strayed close to 'therapy', whilst others preferred to adopt a more self-consciously professional demeanour, or to employ 'distancing' techniques, as previously noted. CEO did not, at the time of our research, offer dedicated training in how to deal with 'emotional' staff-client interactions.

6. Conclusions

In describing the activities of CEO – a small creative business support agency based in the Central Belt of Scotland – this article has done two things. First, I illuminated the business support services provided by CEO. I noted that CEO's support portfolio is divided into 'core' services and programmes, with core services free to access and programmes accessed via a competitive application process. Of the core services, CEO's unique selling point is the way that online advice and one-to-many events are supplemented by the availability of one-on-one advice sessions with either general creative business advisers, or specialist artform or sector-specific advisers. In describing the inner workings of CEO, and their relationship to government and policymakers on the one hand and creative practitioners on the other, I have used CEO as a means of interrogating the multiple, and complex "regimes of mediation" (Cronin 2004: 349) that intermediary agencies working in the creative economy must negotiate. The second thing I have done in this article is report on how, why and when creative practitioners draw down support from CEO, what values they ascribe to the various forms of support on offer, and the character of the relationships that they forge with CEO staff. Unsurprisingly perhaps, creative practitioners felt that one-on-one advice was the most valuable form of free-to-access support that CEO provided. CEO also emerged as particularly important for recent graduates seeking to build a career in the creative industries, and pre-start-up businesses. However, it is clear that the demand for one-on-one advice sessions, plus the drain on resources due to the inability of HEIs to provide tailored business training for creative graduates, was jeopardising CEO's existence at a time of increased demand, and budget cuts.

This article has also made three key interventions that both extend current work on cultural and creative intermediaries, and offer directions for future research in this field. In attempting to describe the multiple "regimes of mediation" (Cronin 2004: 349) that CEO must negotiate, I have sought – following Smith Maguire and Matthew's (2012) call – to draw renewed attention to the expert dimension of intermediary agencies, their interpretive and 'legislative' power, and the factors that constrain their activities. The first key intervention I have made in this article is to demonstrate the tension inherent in many intermediaries' remits, in this case, between CEO's remit to support a skills and employability agenda, and their understanding of the limits of this agenda. As evidenced by interviews with both CEO staff and clients, CEO emerged as a space where the ills of creative labour – long hours; poor pay; barriers relating to class, race and gender – were acknowledged, but where there was limited potential to change things¹¹. CEO staff were bound by the conditions of their funding to help creative practitioners to become more 'businesslike', to turn talented creative graduates into productive creative businesses, and to work towards aggregated, macro-level impacts in terms of the contribution of the creative industries to economic growth. This meant that in practice, it was rare for CEO to advise creative practitioners to give up on a business venture, or to position their work as 'amateur' or as a hobby, or for them – as one advisor put it above – to "be honest about the rate of attrition". In this respect, despite their genuine desire to help their clients, CEO were arguably complicit in the reification of a skills and employability agenda, and in the shoring-up of the widely-held view that with enough drive and determination, anyone can succeed within the creative industries (see Banks et al., 2000).

¹¹ I am grateful to one anonymous reviewer for this succinct summary of CEO's role.

With this in mind, the second key intervention this article has made is to illuminate the emotional or ‘therapeutic’ component to creative business support, which has to date been little-explored. This article has demonstrated the tendency for creative business support to veer close to ‘therapy’, and has explored some of the potential reasons for this. The individualized nature of work in the creative economy meant that creative practitioners often worked in isolation, under precarious employment conditions, with relatively few opportunities to co-work, collaborate on projects, or develop team-working skills. The resulting feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and a lack of self-confidence were mentioned by large numbers of our interviewees as characteristic of creative employment. Practically, this meant that creatives placed a premium on one-to-one support from CEO, as it was seen as allowing a supportive space to work through some of these issues. Questions must be asked about whether skills-development bodies are suitable places to do this work, however from interviews with CEO staff, it appeared that clients’ tendency to ‘get personal’ was inevitable, given the conditions they were working under. As a result, staff saw further training as the only practicable way to deal with the issue. Indeed, after we left the field, CEO took measures to ensure that all core staff were trained as coaches, with skills in deflection, distancing and basic therapeutic techniques.

The third key intervention that I have made here concerns the ‘feedback loop’ that exists within the creative economy in Scotland. CEO staff and clients demonstrated a sound understanding of issues around cultural funding, and the pressures faced by intermediary agencies, yet they were – at times – scathing in their assessment of their utility. One of my interviewees noted that creative business support had become ‘an industry’, and that whilst she did not begrudge those in the business support industry their security, there was a sense of circularity in the way that creatives’ use of intermediaries was used as justification for their existence. This feedback loop precludes the potential for honest and critical feedback on the part of creative practitioners and, arguably, takes away the impetus to do creative business support differently. This also signals a problem with the way that creative practitioners and intermediaries are funded; increasingly, creatives and intermediaries are competing for the same pots of money, and creatives know that drawing down support from business support agencies helps them to prove their worth to funders. However the alternative is to let dedicated creative business support agencies like CEO fall by the wayside, and for creatives to draw down support from general business support agencies. Many of the creatives I spoke to recognised this as an unpalatable scenario, because general business support agencies’ staff will likely have little knowledge of the distinctive nature of creative labour, nor would they be able to offer a direct link to the networks that are central to the functioning of the creative industries (see Banks et al., 2000).

Practically, one relatively minor change that the Scottish Government could make to ameliorate this scenario would be to ring-fence funding for intermediaries such as CEO (thereby removing any sense – real or perceived – of ‘competition’ with individual creative practitioners, microbusinesses and SME’s). Additionally, if funding for intermediaries was guaranteed for longer spells – 5 or 6 years, say – this would allow organisations the freedom to challenge existing models for cultural support without fear of losing their footing. The fact remains that solutions must be found for this dilemma, as at the moment, the feedback loop prevents agencies like CEO from acting as policy drivers. CEO are in an excellent position to feed into policy debates, given the wealth of in-depth, qualitative information that they gather from clients about the state of the creative economy in Scotland. Yet as it stands there is no way for them to report back to government and policymakers on their areas of expertise. First, they have neither the time nor the resources to do so, as demand soars and budgets are cut. Second, as I have shown elsewhere (Schlesinger et al., 2015b) evidence is mounting that ideas about creative-economic support, minted in London some 25 years ago are not as one-size-fits all as government, policymakers, consultants and think-tanks seem to suggest. However within policymaking circles, where macro-level data and trends are both the basis for action and the desired end-result, there appears to be no demand for the challenging, qualitative, micro-level data that bodies like CEO produce.

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