

CHEAD Conference 2020

The Challenge of Change: The value of creative education supporting inclusion and diversity

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**Understanding the Learner-consumer: market-led Higher Education, diversity and inclusive practice**

Leadership in HE requires the development and implementation of strategies for change, in response to the increasing number of pressing challenges which are facing the sector, including, (amongst other things), the creation of a market economy in HE, and the changing demographics of its markets. This presentation is intended to stimulate debate about how leaders in HE art & design can respond to these challenges, by questioning prevailing views about student engagement which reinforce culturally-specific values and normative notions of student behaviour, and develop a new approach enabling innovative practice to flourish.

Although British art schools have always pioneered 'student-centred' learning, and have in the past decade demonstrated a strong commitment to inclusive and co-created curricula in response to the alarming attainment gaps between different groups of its students, the persistence of these attainment gaps points to the continued existence of a 'hidden curriculum' which privileges the cultural capital of some students above others.

To address this, we need to develop an understanding of the learner-consumer, to transcend the binary opposition between Student-as-Partner and Student-as-Consumer which underpins prevailing approaches to student engagement, by recognising that *all* students are actively engaged (as all consumers are) in the development of their own identities through a wide range of learning styles and modes of interaction.

2019 was the year that Generation Z became the biggest consumer cohort globally; a generation of students who choose their brand loyalties even more carefully than their predecessors, and whose criteria for assessing 'value-for-money' reveal stark contrasts between academics' assumptions and students' expectations.

The marketisation of HE is often perceived as a threat to its accessibility, but it can be argued that it is only a threat if we cling to a culturally conservative belief in value-free learning, which serves only to reproduce the values of the white intelligentsia.

HE is lagging behind the creative industries in its failure to value its consumers as drivers of innovation. A marketised environment provides us with the opportunity to actively demonstrate our commitments to student-centredness, by embracing the concept of the learner-consumer and developing a new approach to student engagement which will enable us to explicitly recognise and value the diversity of our students (i.e. to become more inclusive), and to co-create learning experiences which reflect the expectations of *all* students, and allow these expectations to drive innovative practice; in short, to become properly market-led.

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