

Rebalancing London's ideas economy: the Creative Mentor Network

The young people's mentoring charity on a mission to transform the creative sector

The creative industries have a problem. Although employment opportunities are growing at four times the rate of other sectors, this burgeoning jobs market is all but closed off to huge sections of UK society. In design and fashion, 8.7% of employees are from BAME backgrounds. In film and TV production roles, it's 3%. And in journalism, 80% of the top echelon of editors is privately educated, even though only 18% of Britain's population has been to private school. For many young people eager to get into a sector in which up to 60% of job openings are unadvertised, the way in is either through a pre-existing connection on the inside, or an unpaid internship – which in London requires reserves of around £1,000 a month just to carry on living.

What statistics like these make clear is that the entry points into a creative career are largely limited to the well-educated, the well-connected, the well-off and the white.



Photography by Dan Wilton.

CREATIVE MENTOR NETWORK

PRESS RELEASE, 19 October 2017

This isn't just a question of representation. The lack of diversity across the creative landscape has economic implications too. Organisations with a broader range of backgrounds among their team have been shown to be 70% more likely to capture new business (Harvard Business Review); tend to communicate more effectively; and have wider and more varied resources to draw on when it comes to problem-solving. Diversity breeds creativity, after all.

The labour market is changing rapidly, traditional jobs are becoming obsolete, whereas jobs demanding lateral thinking and innovation – creative jobs – are the future. But, according to [Teach First](#), the UK will face a shortage of up to 3 million highly skilled workers to fill these roles by 2022 – and that's ignoring any impact that Brexit has on future immigration controls.

To survive, Britain's creative businesses are going to have to break the pattern. The [Creative Mentor Network](#) was set up to help them do exactly that.



Photography by Dan Wilton.

'I believe in the role employers should play in helping students and their parents understand the labour market, the skills that are most in demand, and which sectors hold the most opportunity. If employers are serious about being more inclusive, they need to start reaching out to students from low-income communities at a younger age, and to parents too.'

Unfortunately, things are not moving fast enough. It feels as though we are very far away from preparing our young people for the jobs of the future. And it frustrates me that businesses talk a lot about wanting to be more diverse, but are often not willing to spend the time and money it takes to change things. Talking about diversity is very different from doing something about it.'

– **Isabel Farchy**, Creative Mentor Network founder

THE PROGRAMME

In 2015, Isabel Farchy was a teacher of English and media at a West London academy. Her students were talented, capable and creative, with many obtaining good exam results and going on to respected universities.

But, again and again, she found that many of them believed that the creative industries offered only precarious careers, knew no one who worked within them, and were unaware not only of the opportunities that existed but also of what creative jobs entailed in the first place.

The **Creative Mentor Network** was born of her frustration. The non-profit organisation pairs A-Level students from London schools that have a high number of students on Free School Meals and high levels of ethnic diversity, with mentors from a growing range of top-level creative businesses, spanning advertising, design, film and TV.

Over the course of weekly one-hour mentor meet-ups, students are exposed to the professional reality of work in the creative sector, getting a clearer picture of the roles available, the routes in, the skills needed and the likely pay structure – even simple, easily overlooked things such as what people wear to work or how they talk to each other – before they leave school. For their part, the mentors gain direct access to untapped young talent and a fresh perspective on their own work, business and approach to leadership. In some cases, they may even be meeting a future employee.

Every potential mentee is assessed by online application and in-person interview before being matched with their mentor, and the network works closely with teachers to ensure those who would most benefit from mentoring receive it.

Each cohort of mentors takes part in a five-session in-person training programme over the course of the 16-week mentorship. This course explores the relationship between social mobility and the creative industries, provides guidance in coaching strategies and develops leadership skills.

To date, organisations signing up to the programme include agencies such as Wieden + Kennedy, Analog Folk, Grey, WCRS, Way to Blue, Rapha, Lucky Generals and Havas; film and music organisations Pulse Films, the BFI

CREATIVE MENTOR NETWORK

PRESS RELEASE, 19 October 2017

and XL Recordings, and, from the art/design world, Tribal, Big Creative, IDEO, Assemble, RIBA and Transport for London (Art on the Underground).



Photography by Dan Wilton.

'It's a real two-way process. It gives you a different perspective on your own work. It's very easy when you work in the creative industries, and you're a middle-class white man, to think everyone shares the same views – you end up advertising to yourself. Having a fresh, younger perspective on stuff has been really interesting to me.'

– **Jasper**, mentor

THE IMPACT

By providing the structure and training necessary to build bridges between creative professions and a hitherto neglected segment of young people, the Creative Mentor Network has already had a significant impact in the two years since its establishment.

CREATIVE MENTOR NETWORK

PRESS RELEASE, 19 October 2017

In response to research suggesting that young people who make four or more professional connections before leaving school are five times more likely to secure work, and on average earn 18% more, the network aimed to ensure that mentees leave the programme with at least four connections inside their chosen sector. By building up social capital in this way, they gain access to an alternative to the hidden networks that often exclude them from securing a creative career.

After completing the programme, 80% of mentees have gone on to access further work opportunities, and 85% agree that participating has given them a better understanding of the different roles and career paths within the creative industries.

'The Creative Mentor Network has been one of the turning points of my life; it has shaped me to become a more rounded creative.'

– Louis, mentee

THE FUTURE

In 2018, Isabel has plans to extend the Creative Mentor Network from 25 to 50 schools, enlist 50 creative businesses, and offer mentorships to almost 200 young people. At the same time, the charity is exploring the possibilities of expanding into other UK cities with strong creative economies, such as Manchester, Bristol and Glasgow.

The network may still be in its early stages, but with increasing sign-up from an ever-widening spectrum of creative businesses (including freelancers), previous cohorts of mentors spreading the word within their own organisations, and more and more schools seizing the opportunity to improve their pupils' career prospects, there is every chance that London's creative landscape will at last begin to reflect the ethnic and economic make-up of its population.

Website: www.creativementornetwork.org

Instagram: @JoinTheCMN

*For more information about **Creative Mentor Network**, product images and interviews, please contact Jodi Moss at jodi@zetteler.co.uk, or on +44 (0)7910 705147.*
