**Project Title**
‘So what do you do?: Tracking creative graduate outcomes in Australia and the UK’s Creative and Cultural Industries’


**Summary**
Since the 1990s the Creative and Cultural Industries (CCIs) have become increasingly central to the mission of Higher Education providers and the career aspirations of students. However, evidence suggests creative graduates face unique employment challenges.

Funded by the Australia Research Council (ARC), So what do you do? draws together an international team of scholars from communication and cultural studies, labour market economics and cultural geography, in order to better understand the employment outcomes of creative graduates. It will draw on quantitative data, including longitudinal graduate destination surveys (GOS-L and LDLHE) and the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia survey (HILDA), in order to understand creative graduate outcomes, and the significance of key variables for these outcomes, such as gender, geography and skills utilisation.

To do this, it will apply the international UNESCO framework for cultural statistics (UNESCO 2009). The UNESCO model of the CCIs model includes all traditional cultural industries – such Media, Creative Arts and Heritage – as well as the new Creative Industries, such as Advertising, Interior Design and Games Development.

The study will report on and critically analyse graduate outcomes in Australia and the UK through four lines of inquiry:

1) **the labour market value** of degrees oriented towards the CCIs relative to all other degrees, in terms of graduate salaries;
2) **the employment conditions** for creative graduates, such as employment type, multiple job-holding, skills utilisation, and outcomes in the CCIs;
3) **the concentration and mobility** of creative graduates working in the CCIs; and
4) **the embeddedness** of creative graduates outside the CCIs

**Background**
Creative Industries policy making in Australia and the UK has always been accompanied by a concomitant focus on the education and training of a creative workforce and the need for educational reform (Hartley and Cunningham 2001; NACCCE 1998). Appearing approximately ten years after the dissolution of the binary systems of Higher Education in both countries, and strongly informed by new industry-oriented cultural policy agendas of the Keating and Blair Labour governments, the concept of the Creative Industries provided an attractive vocational mission for the schools of Media, Communications and Creative Arts that spread quickly through the newly unified sector on the back of strong student demand. However, as the Creative Industries agenda proceeded, the issue of creative and cultural work has become increasingly central to discussion from both normative and critical perspectives.

Firstly, the policy concept of the Creative Industries evolved away from sector-based definitions towards a more fine-grained account of the specific contexts in which ‘creativity’ was understood as a high-value input in the creative economy (Herrmann et al 2008; Cunningham 2011). Secondly, the ideology critique of Creative Industries policy making (e.g. Garnham 2005) has evolved into an increasingly evidence-based set of studies on the quality of CCI sector work (such as job security, financial remuneration, and the professional autonomy of creative work) in a manner that might be actionable by cultural policy (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2010; Murray and Gollmitzer 2012). Creative labour studies has sought to document the poor returns in the creative
sector, noting that the creative and cultural industries appear to be subsidised by the low costs of labour due to an oversupply of underemployed workers (Menger 1999; Mièg 2011; Hesmondhalgh 2007). However, new accounts of the transferable creative skills held by ‘embedded creatives’ working outside the cultural sector have been developed (Hearn et al 2014).

As a result of the massification of university education in both countries following the dissolution of binary HE systems, with a notable HE policy emphasis on ‘graduate employability’ and ‘student demand’, and in the context of rising university fees, the focus on graduate creative labour has gained some urgency (Brook 2016). In the UK, Roberta Comunian and Alessandra Faggian have led a series of major studies drawing on HESA data to study labour market returns to creative degrees. Their findings demonstrate the significant labour market penalties experienced by British graduates with degrees oriented towards the Creative Industries, reporting somewhat surprisingly that incomes and job security within the Creative Industries were in fact higher for graduates with non-Creative Industries oriented degrees (Comunian, Faggian and Li 2010). While these findings clearly demonstrate the difficulties confronting creative graduates seeking work in Creative Industries and university course planners seeking to prepare students, they also raise the question the assumption that creative skills are valued in the sector. Similarly, a recent economic study of the private rate of return to Australian university graduates found that degrees in the creative, performing and visual arts were ‘not a good financial investment for either men or women’ (Daly et al 2015, 12. See also Haukka 2011), consistent with the established findings of cultural economists in relation to artists’ labour markets – i.e. that there is no human capital argument for tertiary arts training (Filer 1990; Towe 2006).

However, to date Australian studies have been limited by the absence of longitudinal graduate destination survey data, with most acknowledging that the survey window of 6 – 18 months is simply too early to for a meaningful discussion of graduate outcomes in the CCI. The development and release of GOS-L data, which includes a second wave graduate survey at 3 years, provides an opportunity to address these concerns.

Works cited
National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCCE), 1999. All Our Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education. London, Department for Education and Employment.