

Creative Technical Community Coronavirus Meeting (CTCM)

Date: Thursday 14th May 2020

First Meeting: Initial meeting aimed firstly at Technical Managers, Leaders and Specialists

Attendees: See list in Index

Introductions:

Keith Hill is the Associate Director of Technical Services at the University of Reading. As Associate Director, it is Keith's responsibility to ensure that appropriate and sufficient technical support is provided to three Schools of the University, specifically the Institute Of Education, the School Of Arts And Communication Design, and the School Of The Built Environment. Keith was chairing the meeting to ensure we had a flow of discussions taking place. Keith can be contacted at k.a.hill@reading.ac.uk.

John-Paul Ashton is a business consultant and specialist advisor as well as Executive Support Officer for the IST; the professional body for workforce technical staff across all sectors supporting the technical community. JP is leading on the Creative Industries Project and has developed the new registration framework with IST colleagues and collaboration with the sector. JP has been instrumental in managing and directing the development of a software package at the NTDC that allows users the ability to record and track CPD online, on-the-go, with other applications such as setting tasks and aligning supervision to teams. JP was taking minutes and notes for the meeting as well as keeping check of the technical side of zoom technology! JP can be contacted at j.p.ashton@istonline.org.uk

Joan Ward is Deputy CEO of the IST and works with JP and Natalie on the Creative Industries Framework. Joan's background was in Science but more recently is focused on ensuring that the IST is all inclusive of every sector, in particular the often overlooked Creative Industries sector. Joan can be contacted at joanward@istonline.org.uk or office@istonline.org.uk.

Natalie Kennerley, is Technician Development Manager at Manchester Metropolitan University, and Director of the National Technician Development Centre. Natalie is also an executive member of the IST working on the Creative Industries project. Natalie can be contacted at n.kennerley@ntdc.ac.uk.

Introductions from all group members involved in discussion which were present at the meeting (see attendees list in Index). Introductions included organisational roles and where they were based.

In this document:

1. Creative Industries Registration Framework
2. Common Themes
Experiences, extent of working and challenges during COVID-19
3. Continuing Conversations (Platform Doodle Responses)
4. Next steps and Topics to discuss still
5. List of Attendees and Index

1) Creative Industries Registration Framework

Natalie Kennerley spoke about what the IST have been upto on this project to bring the group upto date with where the project is at.

Background: Research a few years ago identified how creative technical professionals viewed the professional registration in place currently. It was seen that the current registers are so science-focused, they are not attractive or useful to those with arts backgrounds. IST have held several creative arts meetings; there was a strong confirmation that registrations were too science-focused. Across the UK, technicians from within the creative industries felt they needed their own register.

What we have been doing: IST are putting together a registration framework for creative industries professionals. The final part of this was to engage directly with creative technicians. To this end, many technicians were invited to be part of Registered Practitioner pilot – IST now have a large cohort of practitioners who have achieved this registration, an amazing achievement for those involved. The new framework will build on this existing register.

IST have also been looking at a competency matrix and competency reports, to provide a way to evidence key skills, knowledge and code of conducts as well as aligning to language and ideals that apply to the creative sector. This is an extensive piece of work, where the image has been completely redesigned, the language modified and key aims directing this register to fit within the creative sector. IST have used plenty of examples to show how this fits within the creative remit. The competency matrix, highlights that more registers will be possible, with the potential to ultimately develop a register that will recognise professionals at a chartered status level.

Many technicians and managers have been engaging. Lots of work is taking place in the background. This project has been a very collaborative one. IST want to thank all the organisations and individuals involved and we hope you will continue to engage and support this project as it is almost there!

Next steps: Approaching Creative Industries Council (CIC) chairperson and IST are developing new partnerships with UKRI Arts and Humanities Council alongside our long standing partners.

This project will be really important for professionals to demonstrate and recognise the value that we all bring to our profession and organisations, and give this a home within the creative sector.

JP has also been working on a CPD toolkit software package – **CPD Central** – this aligns very nicely to professional registration and CPD recording. If anyone is interested and want to know more, please get in touch. CPD Central can support several applications to aid you in the workplace, including diary recording and setting tasks, particularly if you are in an apprenticeship/team leader role.

See Index Items at the end to view the documents, please contact the IST if you have any questions.

2) Experiences, extent of working and challenges during COVID-19

Keith led the conversation starting with his own experiences, and several members contributed their own experiences, and ways in which they were working, from home and on site, identifying the challenges, creative inspiration and working. The following are notes discussed from the meetings to help inform others in the creative sector working with these issues. We have identified common themes that can and will be discussed further.

Common Themes

Supporting staff and students

- Practical work re-imagined.
- Alternative tools, resources and repurposing materials.
- Managing changing expectations.
- Ensuring an equal experience across disciplines.
- EDI: access to facilities and equipment accounting for demographics of students and staff.

What should and can be taught online?

- Technicians involved in development of teaching materials, course content, policy and infrastructure.

What should be done on-site?

- Risk assessments and owning the process.
- Technicians involved in core planning groups, informing policy and infrastructure.
- Working shifts and the impact on less capacity due to distancing.

Access to specialist equipment that is only available on-site

- Outlining service available, constraints and support.
- Zoning-off areas, reconditioning new and old spaces.
- Is it appropriate to 'cluster bubble' students?

Managing loaning of equipment (Including disinfection)

- How do we manage this? How do you control access to pick up and drop off?
- Knock-on-effects of precautions.

Working from home

- How do we access kit and equipment at home?
- How do we refer tasks/decisions and when is it necessary?

Pre-planning

- What resources can we focus on now?
- What are the priorities for re-opening?
- Making PPE for staff and students.

Problems & Solutions

- Sharing best practice.
- Common online technical resources and 'Guerrilla Guides'.
- Discipline specific and cross-disciplinary issues.

Furloughing Technicians

- Are we furloughing the right people?
- What is the impact of universities that do not understand the roles of technicians?

Any more to add? Please email JP on j.p.ashton@istonline.org.uk

The following information is a breakdown of the themes and topics discussed in this meeting.

- i. There have been major differences in how the crisis has been handled. Practical arts projects are handled differently to science and engineering practical projects. One view is that the science disciplines had to blanket-cancel their projects and no practical work could be done at the start of the lockdown. Assessments were completed based on predicted grades. For the arts; projects were marked on what they had achieved so far, and assessments were continued using video recording. The arts have tried to continue as much as possible with practicals as it is possible to work virtually. *“Many technical staff in HE have been involved in policy and infrastructure work so that practicals can continue.”*
- ii. Arts technicians have been actively supporting working at distance, engaging with new technologies and learning new skills. Providing innovative solutions to problems. Giving advice to students on limited budgets and limited space. Rethinking ideas, rethinking how to conduct artistic practices without the normal tools. Making use of limited resources that they can access from home. Considering the expectations of students and staying ‘on-the-ball’ in how they can best adjust to support staff and students, sometimes at short notice.
- iii. As the situation becomes clearer in the future, *“the UK university teaching in the autumn term of 2020 is very unlikely to look the same at previous years.”* Most universities appear to be pursuing a hybrid model, involving distance teaching, and limited and altered practicals to ensure they are ready for elements of social distancing, hygiene precautions and regulations that will be in place in September/October.
- iv. Many organisations have closed buildings, one institution reported the only people allowed in are technicians, but this was by appointment only. Many teams are using this time to do background work that they would be doing during the summer.
- v. Plans are being put in place to support students when restrictions are lifted. One hurdle that people have experienced is that some courses/disciplines are practical heavy, in some cases all three years contain practical elements. *“How do we manage changing expectations as policy keeps changing day-by-day?”* We are constantly having to re-imagine what we do.
- vi. Some technical staff have not been allowed on site during the restrictions and will not be going back as they can work from home. Most creative technicians are adjusting very well and are busy supporting students electronically, contributing to social events using specific skills to engage their students and are focusing also on preparing content for the next trimester. Many people have been wanting to go more online for a long time now. *“This challenge has accelerated our move to common online technical resources, it is key that any resources we develop now, can be used in the future.”*
- vii. It is strongly agreed that over the last few weeks, our HE technical posts have become extra critical and much of the planning is down to the tireless work of our technical teams, in conjunction with academics. There have been discussions as to what can be taught online, and what should be taught on line. Technicians have been involved in the critical planning of what should be done in universities through social distancing. *“Creative technicians exercise creativity, finding new ways of doing things in a challenging environment.”*

- viii. Student expectations are really important and the feeling is that students expectations may be fairly low due to the fact that quite a lot can be achieved online. Key points raised were to ensure continued communication and feedback to students. This is imperative to assist in the student experience, engagement and to check-in with them, even to be a friendly face.
- ix. Some disciplines require access to specialist equipment, such as glass ceramics, sculpturing, band saws. *“There have been several successes within the technical community, such as technicians producing videos, one example being on how to make oil paints using household items.”* The key message here is to help students to rethink ideas and use alternative media.
- x. Another organisation have deployed similar ideas by creating ‘Guerrilla Guides’ on various creative solutions to content creation, by utilising what is readily available around the home. For instance, a guide to stop-frame animation using a phones or lighting with homemade supplies (making reflectors with cardboard and tinfoil etc.)
- xi. The ways in which students are supported has changed. It was acknowledged now as being a very time consuming and exhausting job, as it is essential to be imaginative. When normally it would take a few seconds to carry out a task or answer a question in the classroom, now the task takes much longer to achieve the same result. One example was answering a question as to how a particular software works, the technician working with the student here carried out a WhatsApp video chat to also look through with the student on their other device to identify solutions. This is essential going forwards, as it is important to repurpose materials to give support to students. It is evident that we will not know what people’s needs are, but we need to be agile to react to their needs when they become apparent.
- xii. There are big questions as to *“how we manage and disinfect resources?”* For example, TV studios and technical equipment (bandsaws and television sets), how are we to disinfect these? Do we quarantine for 72 hours, a week? How do we give access to students? How do we sterilise equipment before they go out, and then when they come back in? UV light is not suitable as it can destroy plastic. Wiping down doesn’t kill all of the virus. Also it is important to consider the knock on effects of loaning equipment with procedures in place and getting these to the next people, as the capacity levels will be heavily affected.
- xiii. A suggestion made was to look at re-shuffling and modifying modules, so that we can offer long term loans; by stripping kit down to the bare minimum and allowing students to use these for the whole semester.
- xiv. It may be important to consider arrangements when students can have access to facilities. In Wales, the 2m rule is law-enforced. It has been good practice to develop risk assessments that cover many safety aspects including; identifying clear zones for workshop space, booking sessions and dividing this up throughout the day, as well as knowing exactly who is coming in and what people are expecting to do. Implementing traffic control will be key with walking and access being unidirectional. To combat technical staff and student anxieties, it is great advice and practice to *“carry out the risk assessments themselves so that they have confidence in their own measures and so that they have ownership of the process.”*
- xv. Other suggestions involve setting days aside as to who has access to workshops, instead of students attending in mass. Equipment booking systems in place to ensure gaps are left in-between visits.

- xvi.** A suggestion was made as to the merit of buying duplicate equipment for students and staff. Questions surrounding this would be 1) are universities expecting to take heavy losses on student recruitment and income and therefore 2) what can and what can't we invest in.
- xvii.** It was noticed that when supporting students and *"after speaking with university students, they respond better to materials that are presented (even if it is a recorded video) by the technician that they have met, worked with and have that personal link and contact with."* This also helps demonstrate how vital technicians are to the student experience. Often, if one student has had contact with a technician, they tell their student colleagues and very soon, many of them are emailing that technician to ask for help, advice and support.
- xviii.** It is very likely that in September, that very few staff or students will be back full time and there will be a blend of online and on-site activity. It is important to remember that all disciplines are different. There are differences in the way we support a fashion student, compared to a gaming student for example. Those students will be expecting a parity experience of support and resources.
- xix.** One point made was that at the start of the crisis, course assessment submissions were difficult, as previously we have relied on technology such as USB sticks and 'old fashioned methods' of submitting. This has been good for organisations to develop new platforms and to use more mobile-laptop based solutions.
- xx.** Technical staff have been heavily involved with making personal, protective equipment (PPE) for the NHS and they know how to do this effectively. Therefore, it is essential to do this for our own colleagues, staff and students.
- xxi.** *"It was importantly noted that there is a big EDI issue pertaining to access. This is essential to manage, as it is important to allow access to equipment and facilities for everyone"*, making sure that everyone has equal opportunities. How do we ensure demographically that everyone has access to these resources, equipment, facilities, advice, help, etc.?
- xxii.** Furloughing technicians was an important point discussed. It was noted that all places differ and have varying approaches to furloughing their workforce. More universities are taking a soft approach and there are a lot of individuals wondering whether universities are eligible. Some organisations have furloughed their operations technicians, these are the technicians who are responsible for maintaining facilities or equipment that don't need to be maintained right at this time.
- xxiii.** It is important to note that technicians who have a key role to play in student contact and, either teaching technicians or demonstrators, should potentially not be furloughed, as they are essential for that student experience mentioned previously. Mass furloughing is not ideal. It will be essential for organisations to understand the roles of their technicians so that they don't furlough the wrong people. This is likely to ultimately raise the profile of the technical workforce.
- xxiv.** It will be important for this group to come up with a list of suggested best practice and to share good ideas. Organisations might not be able to take on all the ideas, but one point may be important for them.

It was recognised that, *“Technicians and technical staff are vital to the efforts to combat this crisis. Many technical staff were the last to leave, and many will likely be amongst the first to move back on site.”*

3) Continuing Conversations (Platform Doodle Responses)

The consensus from the meeting was that people would like to carry on the conversations. It has been suggested to do these fortnightly, so that people can drop in when they can and if they are not free for one meeting, then at least the next meeting will not be far away! The group want to find ways to carry on conversations in-between meetings. This can be done via email chat or forums. It will be important to cover what we haven't talked about. Keep dialogues going. Sharing Good Practice Sessions.

We have not recorded the meeting, but we can keep a copy of the notes in the chat box and we have made extensive notes to ensure that the information is passed around the group. All of us have lots to offer, therefore Keith and JP will meet upto discuss next steps.

Email groups were suggested by quite a few individuals during the meeting – a mail base for creative topics. Slack would be useful for hashtag categories. For some people email is quite formal. Therefore, it was recommended that a doodle poll would be useful to choose a platform that most people would prefer to use.

We would encourage people to share best practice, good new stories and to raise the profile of technicians working throughout COVID-19 by letting IST know what they have been upto. We can showcase these on our websites, blogs and various publications.

Doodle Poll:

A doodle poll was carried out amongst people involved with this group and a significant number of individuals responded. Response is overwhelmingly for the use of email groups, followed by Slack.

		Slack	Email Groups	Twitter	LinkedIn	Glip	Flock	Other (please email us)
26/35 participated	+	✓12	✓25	✓4	✓10	✓0	✓0	✓2

We believe the best way to make the most of these discussions and sharing information will be:

Utilising mailing lists for information drops, but encouraging discussion via Slack (you can set up with very little personal data input).

4) Next steps and Topics to discuss still

1. Set up platform for conversations in-between meetings

- Utilising the email group and slack communications: JP and Joan are setting up this so that we can commence with discussions as soon as possible. Including information on how to use both ways to communicate effectively.

2. Set up regular fortnightly meetings

- Next Meeting for your diary: **Thursday 28th May 2020**

3. Start to put together a list of good practice suggestions/sessions

- Building on our common themes and contributing the discussions carried out through email groups, slack and future virtual meetings.

4. Topics to discuss still:

- Expectations of the end of lockdown,
- Experiences and good new stories on how staff are working throughout crisis,
- Good practice sharing,
- Large scale event to showcase technical work across the sector.

Other topics we need to discuss, please email JP – j.p.ashton@istonline.org.uk

5) List of Attendees and Index

List of Attendees:

Name	Organisation	Discipline
Gary Anderson	University of Lincoln	Arts and Crafts
John-Paul Ashton	IST / NTDC	Neutral / Marketing / Technicians
John Ayers	Glasgow School of Art	Art
Owen Baxter	Nottingham Trent University	Art and Design
Camilla Brown	Belfast School of Art, Ulster University	Fine Arts
Peter Brownhill	University of Hertfordshire	Art and Design
Kevin Burns	Belfast School of Art, Ulster University	Textiles and Fashion
Anita Cobourne	University of Derby	Creative Media
James Davoll	Newcastle University	Arts and Cultures
David De La Haye	Newcastle University	Music and Research
Loraine Evens	Plymouth College of Art	Arts
Philip Gibson	Belfast School of Art, Ulster University	Graphic Design, Animation, Gaming and Photography
Andrew Harbert	Falmouth University	Architecture
Michaela Hawes	De Montfort University	Art, Design and Humanities
Keith Hill	University of Reading	Neutral / Film and Theatre
Daniel Jagger	ARU Cambridge	Art and Design
Jason Jones	Hope University	Fine Art, Design and Graphics
Richard Kelly	University of Hertfordshire	Creative Arts
Natalie Kennerley	NTDC / IST	Neutral / Technical Services
Gavin Kew	De Montfort University	Art, Design and Humanities
Mark McDonnagh	Staffordshire University	Art
Leighton Moody	Manchester Metropolitan University	Digital
Sam Pidoux	University of Lincoln	Journalism and Public Relations
Martin Robinson	University for the Creative Arts	Art and Paint
Graeme Shaw	Brunel University	Music and Theatre
Marie Slater	MMU Fashion Institute	Fashion
Kerry Truman	Nottingham Trent University	Product Design
Joan Ward	IST	Neutral / Technical Teams
Lawrence Woolston	University of Suffolk	Arts
Martin Williams	Cardiff Metropolitan University	Film, Video and Electronics Design, Animations and Virtual Learning

Individuals involved in the discussions at the meeting are representative of the entire Creative Industries disciplines as well as due to the amazing response of engagement, there is also a good representation of the whole of the United Kingdom.

Technical Representatives across the four nations.



We are always looking to expand our networks, following from the meeting we are opening up conversations to include the University of Edinburgh and Middlesex University.

Index

Creative Industries Framework Project:

