

THE ROLE OF THE CREATIVE MENTOR: A REFLECTIVE REVIEW

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Rinova Creative Mentoring Exchange

BRIDGING THE GAP



T.M.
Talent Matching Europe

MENTORING IN CREATIVE CULTURE
TALENT MATCHING EUROPE

AN INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIP FOR
WHO ARE SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE
AND CAREERS IN EUROPE'S CULTURAL
SECTOR

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MENTORS AND MENTORING

“In the knowledge society vocational skills and competences are just as important as academic skills and competences.”

The Bruges Communiqué on enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training.



<https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/default/files/document-library-docs/bruges-communique.pdf>

In recent years, mentoring has flourished as a method of informal learning, yet few people would describe themselves as a mentor. This form of passing on skills through creative exchange is a vital element in the growth and vibrancy of the creative economy. Bridging the Gap is part of a series of linked projects over a period of more than 10 years concerned with surfacing, understanding and validating the role of mentoring in a European context, bringing vocational education and training into alignment with the culture and practices of the creative economy.

Between 2018-2021 a group of six organisations from the UK, Spain, Italy, Slovakia, Poland, and Greece, specialising in supporting creative enterprise, collaborated to develop a programme of entrepreneurial training and development for professionals who advise and mentor young people, in a variety of social, economic, and cultural contexts. The project makes a significant attempt to improve the capacity of the creative sector to empower young people to embark on creative careers.

The Bridging the Gap project originates in a series of European Union funded social innovation projects. These projects explored the role that cultural learning and non-formal learning could play in providing alternative pathways into careers in the creative sector. The profile of the creative mentor, central to Bridging the Gap, began to emerge through these earlier projects: Talent Matching Europe, Aspire2create, and European Cultural Learning Network (ECLN). Later the Creus project,

identified as an exemplar of best practice in Erasmus Plus, focused on mentoring young people in unconventional spaces outside formal education. Bridging the Gap aimed to evolve this work with a specific emphasis on creative enterprise and the creative enterprise mentor.

The role of the creative enterprise mentor and the Bridging the Gap project have emerged within the vocational education and training (VET) and non-formal learning sector. Made up of SMEs, charities, non-profits, independent providers, and social enterprises, the sector receives less attention than the formal education sector and so is not as easily understood.

These organisations work at grassroots level in their communities and are powered by people who are co-creators, innovators, and problem solvers. They come from the creative sector. Their minds are focused on local and global issues, and they understand how the two connect.

CREATIVE ENTERPRISE: THE SECTOR DNA

"...in Greece entrepreneurs in the Creative Sector have rather limited chances of receiving guidance on entrepreneurship and business start-ups... We decided to get involved in the project because we wanted to offer our art students and young Greek people more opportunities to gain entrepreneurial skills and knowledge and do our part in reducing youth unemployment in Greece."

Vaso Anastasopoulou, Dimitra



High rates of youth unemployment are a persistent challenge in the UK and Europe. When Bridging the Gap launched in 2018, Greece's unemployment rate was the highest in the EU, more than double the average across the rest of Europe. Dimitra joined the project motivated to offer their students and other young Greek people the opportunity to gain entrepreneurial skills and knowledge and help to reduce youth unemployment in Greece.

The creative sector in Europe and the UK is predominantly made up of SMEs and micro businesses, engines of job creation and economic growth. In the UK, almost 1 in 8 UK businesses are creative businesses and 95% of them employ fewer than 10 people (2). Statistics from 2018 showed that micro businesses employed over three quarters of the total workforce in Europe's design and photography sectors (3). The figures are similar in other creative sectors.

Working or starting a business in the creative sector offers unemployed or underemployed young people a route to the labour market. Bridging the Gap has devised a strategy to equip young people with creative

entrepreneurial skills to boost their employability or build a creative start-up, these skills are transferable and can be used by young people in many different sectors and contexts. Although particularly relevant for business start-ups there is also overlap with creative employees in small businesses and freelancers, both need to be agile, resilient, and ready to deal with uncertainty, just like the entrepreneur.

Research and intelligence gathered by the partners during other international projects revealed a lack of vocational provision in entrepreneurship. Careers advisers, trainers, and youth workers supporting young people in non-formal and informal settings often have creative sector expertise but no structured mentoring training. Others specialised in enterprise and start-up, and artists and creatives employed in careers, youth, or community arts settings had a specialist practice, but no enterprise or mentoring experience.

To address this gap, the partners drew on the results of qualitative research with creatives across Europe and the UK to develop an occupational profile for the role of Creative Enterprise Mentor, a professional with a hybrid of creative sector expertise, business,

and enterprise experience, and coaching and mentoring skills. Building on this work, the partners formed peer review development groups to support the creation of an accompanying set of learning outcomes as the basis for a more formalised modular curriculum mapped to The European Entrepreneurship Competence Framework and aligned with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).

The three modules in the curriculum: Ideas and Opportunities, Resources and Into Action, contain learning content that the partners curated to meet the needs of the creative enterprise mentor who supports young people, in a range of different social and cultural contexts, and at different stages of their entrepreneurial journey. The content is practical and intended to develop skills and expertise in a holistic way, going beyond the narrow frame of skills needed to start a business, and instead encouraging a more expansive view of entrepreneurship with creativity, ideas generation, ecosystems, business planning, and networking at the centre, while still leaving space for essentials such as budgeting and cashflow forecasting.

The modules do not follow a linear structure so mentors can pick and choose, accessing different resources suited to the motivations and learning preferences of the entrepreneur. The modules broadly reflect the phases of business start-up which makes for easy translation into the real world. By curating existing online resources, the project signposts professionals to different organisations, approaches, methods, and models which makes for a richer non-formal learning experience.

Qualifications and learning programmes founded on sector and occupational standards can be narrowly defined. By mapping the modules to EntreComp the partners succeeded in designing a flexible framework applicable across the creative sub-sectors. In co-curating a set of resources and materials that both support the development of entrepreneurial skills and cultivate an entrepreneurial mindset, the modular curriculum becomes relevant as a professional development framework for those with a mentoring role both inside and outside the creative sector. The decision to focus on the upskilling of the professionals who advise and support young people, as opposed to creating a straightforward skills development course, is a welcome

strategic approach. Research by the CULT committee identifies capacity building and upskilling as vital for the creative workforce (4). Developing the entrepreneurial mindset of mentors enhances their capacity to inspire and enthuse the same spirit in a new generation of creatives.

Projects like Bridging the Gap cannot compete with the extensive resources of organisations like The Khan Academy, Disney, Study.com and others. Recognising this the project used an innovative approach, aggregating existing content from large organisations and signposting users to industry standard learning resources, which come at entrepreneurship from different social and cultural perspectives. As the modules and learning content are online, the project can enhance and expand the resource based on suggestions from users, new discoveries from mentors and mentees, or in response to trends and innovations in the creative sector.

² <https://www.creativeindustriesfederation.com/sites/default/files/2019-12/UK%20Creative%20Industries%20Infographic.pdf>

³ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Culture_statistics_-_cultural_enterprises&oldid=449346#Structural_business_statistics_E2.80.94_size_class_analysis

⁴ [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/652242/IPOL_STU\(2021\)652242_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/652242/IPOL_STU(2021)652242_EN.pdf)

CREATIVE MENTORING



In the creative sector mentoring happens informally in different contexts and access to a mentor can depend on where you live and who your connections are. Creative businesses housed in old industrial warehouses and factories in cities and towns form creative hubs which cater to their creative community with networking events, courses, and business advice. In this environment, new start-ups connect to and learn from other creative businesses further along the journey than them. These creative ecosystems can also be highly competitive spaces with businesses competing for work or a target share of the market. Upskilling and reskilling are a necessity. In the wake of the Covid pandemic, the co-working spaces pioneered in the creative and tech sectors have entered the mainstream of office provision, as employers seek to adapt to the demand for more flexible work patterns.

The partners in Bridging the Gap work in different contexts, with different target audiences or beneficiaries, and across several economic sectors. From this viewpoint they have identified the transferable skills of professionals working both inside and outside the creative sector and the opportunity for non-creatives

and creative entrepreneurs with sector specific knowledge and most importantly lived experience, to train as creative enterprise mentors and support a new generation of creative talent.

In Bridging the Gap, mentoring centres around the specific needs of the young creative entrepreneur, working with them to understand the skills and support they need to achieve their goals or seed their business ideas. Traditional business support or creative sector funding can pigeonhole projects and people, which leaves less room for experimentation and innovation. Projects and ideas are squeezed out of shape to fit into funding criteria. In the project's creative mentoring model, entrepreneurs are not following a formal course in which they must achieve x, y, and z results. They have the time and space to reflect and develop at their own pace in a way that directly relates to their career ambitions.

There is no doubt that the project model and project momentum was disrupted by the pandemic, and much of the work the partners had scoped out in the earlier stages of the project, pre-pandemic, had to be delivered virtually. The partners that had integrated digital tools, methods, and technologies into their business model mentored

the other partners to support their development in this area. This enabled the partners to continue the project design online. The project tested and evolved the resources described in the previous pages with teams of senior mentors from each country, paired with colleagues or professionals from their wider network of partners interested in training as creative mentors. As the mentoring groups included people from inside and outside the creative sector this created opportunities for cross pollination of skills. The structural frame of the project's creative mentoring reflects the model the project proposes for the creative sectors, namely, peer to peer exchange of knowledge and reflective practice.

Partners engaged with professionals from both public organisations and more commercially focused businesses. Teachers working in the public sector struggled to understand the informal working patterns of the creative sector. The creative sector job market was entirely new to them, precarious and project to project based work was not a feature of their sector. This experience highlights the challenge of training people from outside the creative sector to be mentors.

Professionals who lost work due to the pandemic had the opportunity to work with a creative mentor, re-evaluate their career and switch to the creative sector. This created many new mentees who needed guidance and the curriculum gave the senior mentors a framework to co-design a plan for professional development with the mentees. For some partners the creative mentoring method was useful for organisations trying to encourage older members of the workforce to embrace an entrepreneurial culture and learn new methods and technologies. The peer-to-peer mentoring approach was used to support the transfer of skills between generations, vital for the local micro enterprises and SME's.

The creative enterprise mentoring model which the project has developed is an entirely flexible non-formal style of personal and professional development. For young people from less advantaged communities, with no formal qualifications or little connection to formal institutions, formal education is often not even on their radar. Similarly, for young creative entrepreneurs who need investment for a start-up, freelancers who need tips to effectively manage a portfolio career, or artists who want to sell their work in new international markets, a formal

course isn't always necessary, or practical. Young people struggling to find work, entrepreneurs, and freelancers all have little time or money for training, there is no dedicated department interested in their continuing professional development. This makes the creative mentor role a vitally important one for the continued growth of the creative sector. The developmental and supportive one to one approach of creative mentoring allows mentors to go through a process of professional and personal growth, with many inspired to mentor the next generation.

"Ending UK participation in Erasmus - an initiative that has expanded opportunities and horizons for so many young people - is cultural vandalism by the UK government."

Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon



THE WAY FORWARD:
SUSTAINABILITY

“The UK’s decision to leave Europe, and particularly the withdrawal from EU funded programmes, offers no tangible or intangible benefits to our company, but we will be as flexible and entrepreneurial as we can to continue our international work in different ways, that’s what we have done.”

Rick Parkes — Founder and Director of Rinova

For Rinova, the UK Government’s decision to withdraw from Erasmus and other programmes means most European funded work in the UK ends in 2024. Meanwhile, Bridging the Gap’s European partners can continue their work with other partners in Europe. The future for the UK seems uncertain. However, Rick Parkes, Rinova’s founder and director is doubling down, “The UK’s decision to leave Europe, and particularly the withdrawal from EU funded programmes, offers no tangible or intangible benefits to our company, but we will be as flexible and entrepreneurial as we can to continue our international work in different ways, that’s what we have done.”

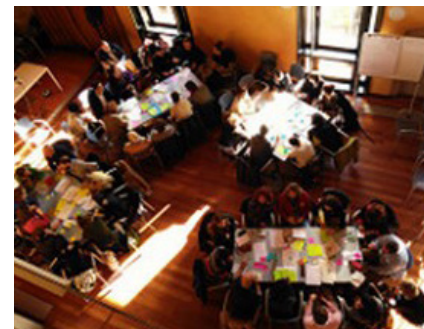
ARTeria Foundation’s Anna Ochmann found working with international partners a huge inspiration in their work with artists and creatives in Poland. The work with Rinova, particularly the opportunity for cultural and knowledge exchange, has had a huge impact on the organisation and the sector’s development. Dr Denise Stanley-Chard partnered with some of the Bridging the Gap partners on earlier projects when she worked with Collage Arts. For her the value lies in creating networks and being part of an international community of practice.

In 2018, Rinova launched Rinova Malaga to continue their involvement in European projects from Spain. For all partners the work they develop and test in the lab-style environment of projects like Bridging the Gap is put into practice or evolves into other projects. MateraHub’s widely used creative model canvas, a visualisation tool for creative projects, originated in the European funded Break in the Desk programme. CLOCK, founded by Dr Denise Stanley-Chard, is an international professional development programme for creatives, with roots in earlier European funded projects. Project partner Dimitra have embedded the learning materials from the project in their vocational classes, national workshops, and mentoring procedures.

Rinova London and long-standing European partners have identified Horizon 2020, the European Union’s largest research and innovation programme, as a potential new source of funding to potentially scale and advance their work. Horizon 2020 emphasises collaboration, co-creation, and digitisation. Partners seem well positioned to take their experience and expertise, not least in relation to sustaining international partnerships, to build on their work to date in this space.

CREATIVE MENTORING EXCHANGE: A HOME FOR CREATIVES

Rinova was focused on a longer-term strategy to ensure the sustainability of their work even before Britain decided to leave the European Union. The organisation has committed to investing in and building on the legacy of their practice with the Creative Mentoring Exchange, a space for creative practitioners and artists working as educators in creative industry-linked, non-formal and formal contexts, a field that Rinova's leading staff have supported for over 20 years.



The exchange will continue to operate in a European context, bringing together practitioners and artists, in both digital and physical space, to support their entry to creative careers and career progression in the creative sector. Although in its formative stage, the network is responding to a need to share resources, experience, and practice in a newly emerging and still under-recognised field. Extensive learning resources are already available and there is an established network of mentors and educators who have participated in their piloting and testing, using informal and non-formal learning methods. As Rinova develops future projects, the creative mentoring exchange will be a continuing legacy for this work: a flexible European network, responsive to the changing needs of diverse practitioners to share knowledge and expertise.

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Join Rinova Creative Mentoring Exchange
<https://www.linkedin.com/groups/9086923/>

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