Creative careers making social impact

Kayleigh 0:00

We've all been there, justifying our creative job to Mum and Dad; explaining what our job is to Grandad; brushing off jokes about freelancing from our mate who works in finance. But times are changing, and the value of creativity is being recognised. The creative industries are the fastest growing part of the UK economy, and the least likely jobs to be taken over by robots. I'm Kayleigh Mcleod and this is 'Get a Proper Job', where I'll be talking about the issues that matter.

Chris Hill 0:31

We all really need to be working together because it's not just only individuals, it's sort of every like kind of sector. And I think that's really, really key in terms of helping to build those bridges and learn from other sectors and you discuss best practice. Really breaking down those barriers.

Kayleigh 0:46

In today's episode, we're exploring new jobs in the creative industries, particularly those connected to emerging social issues with Chris Hill, and Becky Davies.

Hello, and welcome! In today's episode, we'll be exploring the future of work in the creative and cultural industries with a focus on some of the new jobs which are emerging to address societal issues. We'll be asking how the creative and cultural industries might lead the way.

To discuss these new roles, we're joined today by Becky Davies; Theatre Designer, Artist and Creative Access Coordinator, and Chris Hill; Green Manager for Film Cymru Wales. Welcome to you both! Thanks for joining us.

Great to have you here. We're also working from home so we're recording our third series of 'Get a Proper Job' remotely. Apologies in advance if you hear any sounds of real life in the background. This global pandemic has forever altered the world of work and so over the next few episodes, we're looking to explore what that means for creative workers. Becky, can you kick us off by telling us a bit about your career to date, please?

Becky 1:58

Oh, it's been a bit epic. It's been a giant journey to where I am now. So, I started off training as an undergraduate student in costume design on a course called Theatre Design at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, and soon after that, I started working with a company called Taking Flight Theatre Company, who are an inclusive and accessible theatre company based in Cardiff that have just gone from strength to strength over the years. And I've sort of been with them ever since and now I'm an Associate Artist over 10 years later with them. I started to experiment with every show that I worked on in terms of how I can integrate access creatively and meaningfully alongside creatives with disabilities. And it's been a really fulfilling career to date on that front.

Alongside that, I've been working as a senior lecturer at the University of South Wales in Creative and Therapeutic Arts. And so, my learning from that theatre design background has then fed into my teaching and so I'm also teaching students to work with organisations such as the National Museum

and Art Gallery of Wales to create creative access resources for some of their permanent collection (so now my work is sort of extending into the galleries).

I'm also an artist and illustrator so during the pandemic, that's really pushed access further again. And I've been creating all sorts of 2D resources that I've had to come up with really creative ways to make them accessible for people via post and online. There's lots of other things that I've been up to over the past, God knows how long, but those are the things that have directly fed into my career as a creative access consultant.

Kayleigh 3:45

Wearing lots of different hats by the sound of it.

Becky 3:49

I think that's because there isn't a specific training for this sort of work and so you're having to come at it, having tried lots of different creative avenues that gives you a really rich foundation to then start this work from.

Kayleigh 4:03

Bringing lots to it from your own experiences.

Chris, can you tell us a bit about your career journey before Film Cymru Wales, and then a bit about what your new role at Film Cymru Wales, is?

Chris 4:15

Yeah, sure. Mine probably isn't like the creative route. Yeah, so I actually did a degree in Marine Biology at Bangor University and a core aspect of that was kind of really understanding the kind of impacts that us as humans have on marine ecosystems across the world and how they interconnect and how species connect with their environments. So that's really where mainly my experience comes from - that kind of knowledge there.

I also previously worked as a kind of social economic research consultant. I've managed a lot of research, evaluations, and consultation projects in kind of various sectors. But I mainly specialised in the field of recent research and development in technology. I've managed a few e-funded evaluations of technology centres across Wales. So very, very different. But again, this was a kind of a role for me as being the Green Manager. I'm effectively responsible for developing and implementing the green initiatives for the film industry and Film Cymru Wales.

A lot of that has really pulled together my experience and my knowledge, and sort of my passion as well for film, to really give me that that role - which was really looking at that and combined everything together (which is film sustainability and R&D all in one) which was a really great opportunity for me. Yeah, it's a really, really great role. I'm really interested. Part of my role is kind of just managing the Green Cymru program, which was first developed by Film Cymru in 2019. But the key aim for that is to really support the screen sector in Wales to achieve its kind of net zero carbon emissions by 2050. And now, also, as part of that, recently, we've been working with Cluster to develop this challenge fund, which hopefully looks at solutions to the environmental challenges that we have in the sector. This would be a multi-disciplinary Innovation Fund, which hopefully connects up those within film (with those outside film as well) to look at new products or services that will help us be more sustainable. So hopefully, that's maybe a long summary of what my creative role is.

Kayleigh 6:24

It's just really interesting to hear about both your journeys. And you know, we have been talking in our other episodes about there not being a linear path in the creative industries, there's lots of different directions we can be taken in.

If we come on to talk a little bit about skills and qualities that are required. Becky, in your role as an access consultant and access coordinator, what do you need to have? And what do you do day to day in order to get your job done?

Becky 6:51

So at the moment, there's not particularly one standard of creative access coordinator or consultant. And actually, I should clarify that recently I've decided to adopt the term 'Coordinator' rather than 'Consultant' and the reason being is, although I'm personally neurodivergent, I can't speak from lived experience for a whole range of different needs. And so, what I tend to do is obviously drawn from my own experience of how to embed access creatively over the years. That truly comes from my skills as a set and costume designer: just knowing how to make things, understanding how a show comes together, or an exhibition comes together, understanding the mechanics of that, but also the creative and conceptual process or the curation process that goes around that. And because I have such experience in that area, I can really advise about how the two worlds meet: the creative world, and the accessible world in a way which is integrated. So having that skill, those skills of the processes that go in putting something together is really essential.

However, what I tend to do is bring in – again, this is something that I'm trying to do more and more in my practice – is to bring in people with lived experiences (so creative practitioners with lived experiences). And what that means is that I'm not speaking for the community and instead, they're speaking for themselves, but I'm making sure that I'm being a good ally, and that access isn't just slapped on at the end. And it's something that's integrated really beautifully and creatively, and that's always been my passion and my talent; is to come up with really innovative ways to do that.

Saying that though, in terms of a skill set, there's not one predefined skill set. As I said, there's not sort of one qualification for an access coordinator or consultant. And so, what tends to happen is that different consultants or coordinators have different specialisms. There will be for example, a consultant with lived experience, it might be a deaf consultant, a BSL consultant, it might be physical accessibility, wheelchair access, etc. So different people have different specialisms. What I tend to have is an awareness of everything, and an understanding of everything. But when it comes to second checking things and making sure that things are embedded in an authentic, meaningful way where we haven't missed anything, that's when I'll bring people in with lived experience.

So, in terms of your knowledge base, it's quite challenging because things are developing things are moving on all the time and every single Practitioner with a disability that I work alongside or with will give me another nugget of knowledge from their own lived experience. So, in addition to you know, governmental guidance and documentation, I'm also having to draw upon that interaction with lots of different people from all these different communities of needs, as it were. So it's a constant job of learning,

Kayleigh 9:56

That sounds like a really collaborative role as well, you're always working with people.

Becky 10:01

Definitely and that way, it means that I'm sort of preaching the good word as it were, when it comes to access and then hopefully, it's something that comes naturally to different companies and organisations rather than me coming in and telling them something that's almost like me speaking in a foreign language. Which sometimes it can feel like and sometimes it's a bit of a shock to the system when people realise how much thinking and how much preparation and consideration goes into something.

But very quickly, once you've done one job with an organisation, it then inspires them to think in a much more authentic way to what their companies are about access so that it feels like a natural part of their practice. So, what I'm also trying to do is inspire them to see the possibilities, rather than them seeing it as: "Oh, gosh, that's another thing we've got to manage" and trying to get them up or steer them away from any kind of negative feelings around access, and you know, the financial implications of access. And instead see as a wealth of really exciting and wonderful possibilities, and also a whole community that you're enabling to be part of what you do as a company. It has a far-reaching impact in terms of the people I work with, but also the audiences and gallery visitors that I work with as well.

Kayleigh 11:17

So many great opportunities.

Chris, what about you in terms of the skills and the qualities that you've discovered that you need to be a Green Manager in this new role? Any thought there?

Chris 11:28

Yeah, I think it's great to hear from Becky as well about that, because I can see some similarities as well.

I think very much key for my role is, I think when it came to it, was very much your communication is really key and just talking to people. Talking to different industries, companies, organisations, I think it's really key to kind of learn from what their kind of challenges are, or barriers there are to achieving that maybe a shared goal or a shared improving, and things of that. So I think that's really a really important kind of skill to have and you kind of build that. Because I think when we have something so high up on the agenda at the moment, such as climate change, I think we all really need to be working together because it's not just only individuals it's sort of every kind of sector. And I think that's really, really key in terms of helping to build those bridges and learn from other sectors and you discuss best practice. Really breaking down those barriers in terms of how we can figure out solutions together. So I think that's really the key.

I would say as well, it's really interesting to see that obviously, we're in the creative industry - I think we all love to talk, we all love showing off and kind of looking at different areas. And because, I think with climate changing as another point, is that we're at the creative industries in a great opportunity to kind of really showcase complex science to wider audiences and really help people digest these big, in some cases very scary scenarios that are being talked about. It's really quite interesting how the creative industry can be in that position to work maybe with academia to really showcase how to get out to wider audiences, see what we can improve. The more people know about, the more knowledge they know that they can do to help and support and we can make a change in the industry as well.

Kayleigh 13:03

I mean, as you touched on there, we recently had the IPCC report, which was a 'Code Red' for humanity. That is how it was described by the UN. And at the same time, there was a government study which said that 84% of people in Wales believe that we need to substantially change the way we live our lives in order to address the climate emergency.

Another organisation here working in this space are Albert's - the environmental organisation aiming to encourage the TV and film production industry to reduce waste and to reduce its carbon footprint. And they believe that the screen industries have a crucial role to play in solving climate change, both through reducing footprint, but also in shifting mindsets. Like you were talking about there so making positive environmental behaviours, the mainstream.

How do you think Chris, that Wales as a screen sector can really lead the way in green media production, and in lowering people's environmental impact?

Chris 13:58

I think we've got a great opportunity. Wales has a great media and film sector and screen sector, a lot of great productions and clusters in South Wales as well have an opportunity. There's already best practice happening at studios which are trying to be more environmentally friendly. I know that because like every other sector, I think film and screen is definitely very resource intensive. A lot of the environmental impacts come from the energy usage like transportation and water usage, and also there's waste as well to the materials we use. So it is, for Wales it's very important. And as you said with those kind of figures and the importance. We're at a kind of urgent time now to really build on this momentum, make those changes.

I know with Film Cymru Wales, they have the Future Generations Act goals so we can be a prosperous Wales, but also a very much responsible Wales as well, globally responsible and I think that's key for Wales and that's what sets us apart. We're very good at kind of looking at how we can better protect natural resources, which again could be used as locations for films and TV as well. And if we lose that, then it would just be a shame.

I know it's very important for Welsh Government in their new programme for government in focusing on climate change, looking at the loss in biodiversity, and just protecting our natural resources as well. It is really key and I think Wales are very forefront as well to use the sector as a basis to think that we can be the key leader in this, we can show that all our connections and areas can work together to hopefully influence the supply chains we work with and other people as well to kind of make those changes. And also, there's behavioural changes, as you say, which are very important. And I think it's a really interesting time now, it will just be great to see what how it comes about from these films and the different examples.

Wales is obviously very good at recycling as well, one of the tops in the world. So, I know there's new policies, such as One Planet Cardiff coming out as a great opportunity to really connect our industries and connect up the film sector as well. Just making it so much more easier for people to make the right - I say right choices, there's loads of choices that you have to think about and it always feels quite overwhelming and I think that's also an interesting one for film. They have to think about a lot of things during filming, and financials so it shouldn't be seen as a burden, because it should be seen as a benefit, it'll be great. It's like you can save money, you can improve environmental, like your processes and help make a difference by the programs we produce as well.

Becky 16:22

I was just going to chime in there, Chris, because I was thinking of an example of one show that I designed and I think this is the only time it's really occurred for me where it was in my contract that I was to look at local suppliers, local artisans, makers, and wherever possible to choose the most suitable materials that would have the least environmental impact. And particularly in theatre as well as in the film industry when you are under such time crunches, I think the creative teams, they'll go for the quick and efficient solution, which isn't always the most environmentally friendly solution. And coming up with these creative solutions and having that in your mindset from the very beginning is a beautiful design challenge. Like Chris was saying, it shouldn't be a burden. It needs to be something that we embrace in the same way that we embrace the usual challenges of creative processes.

Kayleigh 17:19

Yeah, I think that's a great point that. Thinking about it from beginning to end all the way through how you source it, and then how you pass it on.

Chris, do you feel like you're in quite a unique position here, as a Green Manager in the film sector in Wales? It's quite new, do you feel like there's a lot of responsibility?

Chris 17:37

It is very interesting and sometimes it can feel very high up and that's why I'm saying like communication is really key because you need help from other people and other organisations as well, to help you get over that line and achieve those sort of goals. It is a very unique role. In the film industry, they are doing a lot more of these roles as well for example, on productions, you have a lot of maybe eco managers or environmental stewards I think. They really just make sure you're all looking at the ways that you're making it more sustainable in film or just not being as wasteful as well. Maybe an example would be catering as well, like there's a lot of food waste that may come from that and making sure that we use that and give that to maybe other organisations to support Food Banks.

Those roles will come about but I always like to think it shouldn't be down to that one person. Because it is, that's really tough for someone on a film set to feel that: "oh, you're telling people off for doing the wrong thing" or that's where I think everyone should just keep thinking and know, and increase their knowledge about how what their actions are doing and just thinking from the beginning.

And how that would start for film, would be putting in the script or the pre-production stage where you're trying to plan out what's the best way to make this sustainable and maybe more kind of efficient. And that's how we can work with that. But I think there's going to be more and more crossovers. Definitely.

The creative industry, as I said can support other sectors and can be in other roles as well such as science when trying to help with that. And yeah, it's really interesting within the film and creative sector as well.

Kayleigh 19:01

There is a collective responsibility is what you're saying and all this learning that we're gathering - we should be sharing with each other, across different creative sectors and then across different economic sectors as well. I think creatives are very well placed to tell those stories.

We covered environmental sustainability there which is a huge issue at the moment. Access is another area which has grown in the public consciousness especially during COVID-19 and we shall not be removed as an intersectional UK disability Arts Alliance formed as an emergency response to the pandemic. They worked in partnership with other organisations to create a guide for the arts and entertainment sectors to support disability inclusion. And the focus of the Seven Principles for an inclusive recovery is to ensure that deaf, neurodiverse and disabled people are not discriminated against as the creative work begins again. Venues are reopening, people are returning to venues…

Becky, how does your work align with the "We shall not be Removed" Seven Principles? Tell us a little bit more about that and the work you've done in that area?

Becky 20:03

Well, I think the pandemic's been really critical in creating a culture shift and also an opportunity for people to start afresh with some better practices. It's been this natural pause, an unwanted pause for a lot of theatres. But actually, it has been a time for people to reflect on the fact that during the pandemic, we simply couldn't continue with the practices that we were used to so we had to think differently. So whilst we are thinking differently, how can we make things accessible?

And the biggest thing that I think has come out of this period, is the idea that we don't only have to experience theatre, or an exhibition to physically attending a gallery; through physically attending a theatre space. We need to be able to reach out to those people who are, for example, older adults in care homes, or it might be that they're experiencing extreme anxiety or mental health challenges about leaving their homes. It might be people who are physically housebound, etc, etc. so people that just can't get to the theatre. But equally economically, it's cheaper to watch a West End show from your TV screen at home than it is going to London, for example, to see a show or to the Wales Millennium Centre. Not that I don't want to advocate for people returning to theatres. But the point is, is that those who don't have the disposable income to engage with these sorts of activities finally are able to afford to do so.

So, all of this learning is something that we're really pushing and continuing so when I'm talking about accessibility with companies now, it's also thinking about those who are housebound, or people who are accessing the work from home. And equally, we're no longer thinking about it solely being a process where people come to the final show or to the final exhibition. It's about community engagement throughout and how we make those resources accessible and available to them and so even if they engage in one small part of that process, it means that we have benefited our community and included them in some way, which is on their terms rather than saying you either come to the show, or you're not part of it at all.

It's strange, my role is sort of becoming about economic inclusion, it's about the lifespan and really thinking about access in such a huge, huge way, in a huge, diverse way. It is quite a big job is getting bigger by the second but at the same time, I'm so excited that the pandemic has meant that people are naturally starting to think about these things. You know, you have to put captions on something when you're watching it on a screen from home and so now they're thinking, right, how do we put that in a standard practice? How do we create creative captions that are in keeping with the design of the show? And equally echo the you know, for example, if you can't hear the production, how do they echo the sentiment, the emotion, inhabit the space as a loud voice word, you know. So really thinking creatively about how we integrate that access, particularly because when we're watching something on the screen from home, we've got to be really inventive with how we create that experience so that it is as immersive and engaging as being in the theatre or being in a gallery.

All of that learning is something that people are very much wanting to take forward to the future and no longer is it a one mode production or exhibition. It has its multimodal, and that is something that I think is fantastic in terms of us continuing forward with and something that I'm very much pushing.

Kayleigh 23:34

I mean, we had a great and innovative experience at Creative Cardiff working with you for the Our Creative Place Project, something that we originally thought would maybe be a physical exhibition, and actually due to the pandemic, we moved entirely online.

Are you able to maybe tell our listeners a bit more about how you worked with creatives from across the city region on that project?

Becky 23:56

Yes, definitely. So, they all had to create work that didn't necessarily have to be made digitally, but had to have a digital presence online so whether it was filmed, it was photographed, they made an online flipbook, a soundtrack, etc. And then what I did was introduce - how I always introduce in a crash course of creative access - I introduced the five senses, and remind people that when your work is adhering to a certain number of the five senses, where are the gaps? How do you fill that gap of that sense that isn't being met? And obviously, within the time and the pressure of working from home during the pandemic and not necessarily having the usual resources that you would have when you're free to move about, free to work in studios and workshops and work alongside other people perhaps as you ordinarily would - we really had to think really innovatively about how do we enable access to still be embedded within the confines of all of that?

And that's something that I've been pushing for a long time. It's how do we not necessarily rely on what would be the most polished, expensive way of achieving access? But actually, how do we bring it back to your average person at home with limited resources? How can they embed access and you know, producing a QR code that you scan on an image of your work in order to hear the sound of your work. That is something that somebody can produce for free without any specialist software. There are so many different apps now that we can download onto our phone in order to film for example, a stop motion of your making process. Equally, how we apply automatic captions onto our videos and things like that.

So all of these free and 'easy to use it' resources were things that I was really pushing for during that period. So again, it was something affordable for artists and creatives, and also that they saw how easy it was in order to apply those areas of access onto the work. But it was a fascinating process because I was working with a woman at a UV puppet maker and then the next minute I was working with-

Kayleigh 26:05

An ice sculptor!

Becky 26:06

An Ice sculptor yeah I was!

But then and then the next minute an animator and the next minute, with somebody that just like roaming around the hills in Caerphilly in a Bigfoot costume, you know, so the variety of work was epic.

But actually, the principles of access were the same for all but then they got to take those principles as artists, and reinvent them and embed them in the work in a way that was meaningful and it was such a privilege to have been brought into the process right at the start before they even got started on their Commission's. And then being able to mentor them in creative access without impacting on their creative thought processes, you know, and who they are as artists, but just being there to support them, and really push the creative access element in a way which was collaborative.

As you said earlier Kayleigh, there's still things for them to learn because it was their first foray into access - for a lot of them - and I think it's a lot to take on board. And also, within a limited commission in terms of time and money, etc. However, they all did brilliantly at their first sort of Crash Course and in foray into creative access and I hope that's then going to inspire them to go to work with all of the different companies and people that they work with, and start spreading the good word of creative access. That's what I'm really hoping comes out of that commission. I'm really proud of the work we did.

Kayleigh 27:27

Yeah, I think you should be. We learned so much as an organisation and I know all of the creatives involved learned a lot which they are now passing on. Passing on the good word, like you said.

We're actually totally out of time, I could talk to you both all day. We're just maybe going to have one final question about the future, which sounds huge and overwhelming, but what we're going to focus on is what is next for you.

So Chris, what's coming up, you know in next couple of months?

Chris 27:54

We've got this challenge fund, actually. So, we're looking at people bringing in their ideas to see what those products or services they might want to look at to make it more sustainable. So I'm really interested to see what organisations and collaborations come to us and come to Cluster as well to look at products and services that we may be able to use, widely acceptable in the film industry in Wales. Which would be really great and very interesting to see that we're actually making a change and seeing how we can change our processes, or whatever we do. So that's really what's coming up in the next few months.

Kayleigh 28:25

Great and Becky, the rest of 2021. What does that hold for you?

Becky 28:30

Well, I'm actually working on the largest show I've ever worked on as a creative access coordinator at the moment. It's huge, and I'm working with marketing departments, participatory departments, and then the technical department and the design department and the acting department.

So, it's huge! I'm having to permeate a really large group of people at the moment, and I'm loving it. And that's with the Tin Shed Theatre Company on a production called Rocket Launch Blaenavon Iron Works.

But also, I've got lots of commissions on the go with illustrations where I'm integrating access into that illustration work. I'm in my new term, my new Autumn term with my students, where I'll be giving my third years a really intense course in creative access to support them in creating resources for the gallery space.

Kayleigh 29:19

Super busy times, we'll put links to everything that you've both mentioned into our show notes.

We're going to end with a really quick recommendation, if you don't mind. So do you have a resource that you'd encourage creators listening to engage with when thinking about their careers, when looking for some creative inspiration? Could be about creative access, or about environmental sustainability, could be a podcast, a book, a social media account. You don't need to limit your imagination. Becky, do you have any thoughts?

Becky 29:47

My starting point when I ever introduce creative access is looking at the Tate Sensorium that won the IK Prize a few years ago and watching some of the videos and reading some of the articles and resources around that. I particularly recommend the video. It talks about the five senses as a sort of sensory smorgasbord for you to experience when going to view art in a gallery.

Kayleigh 30:14

Now, that's a great tip, and we'll check that one out. What about you, Chris?

Chris 30:18

Well that's a hard one to follow, as well. I'd say from… I know with Film Cymru Wales, we are a part of the Sinner Reggio European network of European funds and a part of that subgroup is a Green Reggio (which we share best practice on sustainability and film) and they do have a report recently, which shows like all the kind of examples of ways film is doing to improve their sustainability and kind of reduce their carbon footprint as well. So, I'd say that's a really great place to start and look at what's out there already what's going on, which is really good.

David Attenborough just always, always great.

Kayleigh 30:54

Always.

Christ 30:55

Blue Planet all the way. It's one of my favourites ones to follow. Obviously, being in marine biology.

Great kind of way of just showing the amazingness around the world and we need to protect it as well. So great and inspiring for any creative, I'd say,

Kayleigh 31:09

Oh, what a fantastic place to end I think we can't get any better than David Attenborough. Thanks, both of you for joining me today. I've had a great conversation.

Becky 31:18

Thank you, Kayleigh.

Chris 31:19

Thank you.

Kayleigh 31:21

And thanks to you at home for listening. We'd love to hear what you think are the next jobs in the creative industries are you doing one already? Something that's trailblazing… we'd love to hear about it and of course any thoughts on our topics and our guests today.

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