

# Opportunities and Barriers for Creative Futures

Boram Lee (Corresponding author)

Accounting and Finance Division, Stirling Management School,  
University of Stirling, Stirling, Scotland, UK, FK9 4LA  
(E-mail: [boram.lee@stir.ac.uk](mailto:boram.lee@stir.ac.uk)).

Ian Fraser

Accounting and Finance Division, Stirling Management School.  
(E-mail: [i.a.m.fraser@stir.ac.uk](mailto:i.a.m.fraser@stir.ac.uk)).

Ian Fillis

Marketing and Retail Division, Stirling Management School.  
(E-mail: [i.r.fillis@stir.ac.uk](mailto:i.r.fillis@stir.ac.uk)).

## ABSTRACT

Career prospects for graduating fine art students making the transition to self-employed artists remain challenging. We investigate both the opportunities and barriers facing them with a case study of the New Contemporaries exhibition and follow-up exhibitions provided by the Royal Scottish Academy as ‘platforms’ for emerging artists. We undertake interviews and focus groups with 37 individuals including exhibiting artists, public visitors and the organiser. The majority of artists who participated in our study agree that the platforms served as ‘stepping stones’ for their transition. They indicate that the platforms provided opportunities such as recognition of artistic quality and public exposure; networking and exclusive experience; supported marketing and sales; as well the inspiration to develop higher ambition. The artists also recognise barriers which the platforms fail to alleviate. Artists lack experience of external market conditions, have fear of the ‘unknown’, and exhibit a tendency to under value themselves and their artworks. A lack of available financial help prior to the exhibition means that most artists were financially challenged. Nevertheless, many artists express no interest in developing marketing or management skills and pessimistic views as to being awarded public funding. Some artists exhibit an anti-entrepreneurial mind-set. Only a few artists proactively search for further exhibiting opportunities with sales potential. Given the lack of available support from government and other institutions, we suggest that it is critical to establish systems to foster emerging artists in order to achieve both emotional well-being and pecuniary durability and to nurture the creative futures of both society and the artists themselves.

**KEY WORDS** new contemporaries; transition; platform

## **1. Introduction**

The UK Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) reports in January 2015, via the Creative Industries Economic Estimates Statistical Releases, that the Gross Value Added (GVA) of the creative industries was a record £76.9 billion in 2013, contributing 5% to the UK economy. Annual increases in employment in the creative industries of the order of around 4% are also reported since 1997 and the creative industries provided around 1.7 million jobs in 2013. Based on the economic impact of all creative occupations, including those external to the creative industries themselves, the DCMS claims that the UK's creative economy is proliferating, and that its world-leading status sustains the overall economic growth of the nation.

It is a contentious issue as to whether or not UK cultural policy has been a catalyst for creativity. UK cultural policy has been perceived as divisive by some; for example during the Conservative governments led by Margaret Thatcher (1979-1990). Although the UK creative industries have clearly flourished over the past 25 years, some might argue that government policy in the 1980s had a detrimental effect on the creative sectors. Arguably the majority of attention given by government and other bodies to the creative industries has focused on job creation, with a view to enhancing the economic benefit to the nation as a whole, rather than explicitly on the creativity of the sector per se (Holden, 2004; 2006). Visual art, while clearly a key component of the creative industries, may be closely connected to profitable innovation (Crossick and Kaszynska, 2014). Since art is experience based (Boorsma 2006), this has a role in determining cultural value. Slater and Armstrong (2010) found that value was expressed through involvement. Chen (2009) found that collectors of art and visitors to art collections express different desires based on their perception of value.

A significant problem, however, is to define and measure all the possible permutations and dimensions of the value generated (O'Brien, 2010). Assessing the cultural value of the

visual arts has been problematic and the research carried out so far has been limited (White et al. 2008a; Walmsley 2011). Value may be defined as instrumental; contributing to economic, social and policy outcomes (Belfiore 2002; Belfiore and Bennett 2008) or intrinsic; referring to the value of the art 'in its own right' (Oliver and Walmsley 2011). White et al. (2008b) found that creativity and the creative process result in cultural value, and therefore impact, beyond the art product itself. Existing approaches to measuring cultural value, however, are perceived to have limitations from both definitional and methodological perspectives (Mulcahy, 2006). These problems are significant given the methods used by the UK Treasury to allocate arts funding.

Since the visual arts have largely been both investigated and valued by politicians and economists on the basis of instrumental rather than intrinsic perspectives, the applied arts, with their clearer career orientation, have been a more popular choice for government investment than the traditionally defined fine arts. The usefulness of the applied arts, e.g. design or advertising, has been perceived as much greater than that of the fine arts by utilitarian-orientated governments. According to the UK Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), over twenty thousand students enrolled for courses in design studies each year from 2004 to 2014, while only about five thousand students enrolled for fine art undergraduate degrees.

Decisions to study fine art to degree level can be difficult for students, particularly during challenging economic times, given the significant uncertainty in career prospects. Difficult trade-offs may require to be made; economic comfort may have to be sacrificed in order to secure freedom of creative expression (Bain, 2005). Menger (2010) defines the artistic labour market as predominantly project-based with an oversupply of casual workers. Both Throsby (1994) and Alper and Wassall (2006) find that artists suffer from both low income as well as significant income variability. Huge income inequalities are typically

witnessed as the art market often operates on a ‘winner-take-all’ basis (Frank and Cook 1995) and the ‘superstar effect’ (Cowen 2000) is often evident. Many artists finance their art work by having subsidiary occupations, often multiple, and at times external to the creative domain. Lives of artists in the 21st century may appear not dissimilar to those featured in Puccini’s 19th century Opera, *La Bohème*.

Menger (2006) argues that despite the high risk endemic to artistic occupations, non-monetary rewards, which he describes as ‘psychic income’, have a high degree of significance for artists. As discussed by Jeffri (1991) and Throsby (1994), artists are argued to pursue not just a career but a ‘calling’, motivated by an ‘inner drive’ to live as an artist, without distinguishing ‘working’ from ‘living’ (Menger 2006). Stohs (1989, 1992) argues that so-called intrinsic factors persuade students to study fine arts degrees over applied arts studies. Such students may be inspired to fulfil their artistic desires despite lower (or even negative) short, or longer, term economic returns from their educational investments.

Employment opportunities for those graduating from undergraduate fine arts courses may be challenging. According to the UK Annual Population Survey 2010/2011 statistics, 77% of artists in the visual arts sector are self-employed. It is common for fine art graduates to begin their careers by looking for residencies or commission-based projects in order to continue delivering specialities such as painting, sculpture, prints, installation, and performing arts. Although being self-employed may appear to be the quickest way to escape from unemployment, coping with high levels of competition in the market, as well as the uncertainty of contractual and contingent work in the creative industries, can be extremely challenging given the current economic climate, especially for recent art college graduates. There are more students graduating from art colleges every year. Anecdotally, young artists appear to struggle for at least three to five years after graduation due to a scarcity of available residency opportunities. The transition period from university education to self-employed

artist can be both stressful and demanding for emerging artists.

In this paper, we investigate both the opportunities and barriers facing recent fine art graduates transitioning to self-employment. Given the lack of support available from government and other institutions, we suggest that it may be critical to establish systems to foster emerging artists to achieve both emotional well-being and pecuniary durability in order to nurture the creative future of both society and the artists themselves. In the second section of the paper, we compare the characteristics of self-employed individuals in the creative industries with those of the entrepreneur and discuss our objectives, and in section three we discuss our empirical study focused on the Royal Scottish Academy New Contemporary Exhibition together with a case-specific conceptual framework and methodologies. We discuss our findings in section four and present our conclusions in section five.

## **2. From the Self-Employment to Artist Entrepreneur**

The visual arts are an essential part of the cultural and creative industries. Individually, a visual artist may not generate significant financial turnover, but collectively, not only the economic but also the cultural value of the sector is considerable. Empirical research has attempted to measure the relationship between economics and culture for some time (e.g. Bonus and Ronte 1997; Throsby 2001), resulting in perceived benefits for individuals and communities such as health and well-being, learning, development and identity, attitude and behaviour, diversity and social inclusion (Matarasso 1997; Jermyn 2001; McCarthy et al. 2004; Mills and Brown 2004). These examples are instrumental in that they have economic or social influences which go beyond the artistic experience itself.

Menger (1999) identifies the uncertainty of the cultural industries as a driving force for artistic innovation, arguing that when outcomes are unpredictable the potential of artistic invention is limitless. Freed from ‘routine’, artists have more freedom to express their

individual creativity, hence enabling self-actualisation through artistic activities and creating social value (Fillis and Rentschler, 2010). The high number of self-employed artists may indicate that the visual art sector is driven by relatively entrepreneur-minded individuals. Menger (1999) defines several attributes of self-employed artists which mirror entrepreneurial traits, such as a strong sense of personal achievement, strong self-discipline and a high degree of commitment to their work. In addition, self-employed artists prefer independence and have a high risk tolerance similar to that of entrepreneurs. Douglas and Shepherd (2002) argue that those who choose to be self-employed perceive that the expected utility they may derive from being self-employed is greater than that of any other alternative employment options. They define the total utility which results as comprising financial income, the positive feeling deriving from being independent and risk bearing as well as other privileges of being 'free'.

Nevertheless, to survive as a self-employed artist is challenging, as is to remain visible in the art 'scene' (Gill 2007). The art world is categorically different from the business world, and sustaining artistic aspiration as well as maintaining artistic integrity as a self-funded artist cannot be easily achieved without support from government. In addition, while the artist and the entrepreneur may share certain characteristics, such as acceptance of a higher than normal degree of business risk, there may also be a fundamental difference in philosophy between them. The artist may prioritise self-expression rather than commercial gain and accepts, as a consequence, high financial uncertainty. The classic entrepreneur also accepts a high degree of risk but in a more overtly calculative way. The ultimate entrepreneurial objective remains the identification of highly profitable opportunities in the form of a product or service which is attractive to an identifiable market (White et al. 2009).

Even in a purely business sense, the meaning of entrepreneurship is unclear. Traditionally, an entrepreneur has sometimes been regarded simply as anyone running their own (typically, small) business. Such individuals, however, might arguably be regarded as

replicative rather than innovative (or ‘true’) entrepreneurs and Henrekson and Sanandaji (2013) argue that many small companies are in fact stagnant enterprises and that the amount of small business activity in an economy does not provide a good measure of true entrepreneurial activity. In one sense, at least, some (e.g. so-called, ‘cutting edge’) artists may fit easier with the model of the innovative, rather than the replicative, small-business, model. The great majority of artistic enterprises, however, are unambiguously small businesses whether their artworks are innovative or not. Even if their outputs are highly innovative, such enterprises only rarely develop into highly profitable businesses which make their owners very high net-worth individuals. Some very high profile and successful artists such as Damien Hirst may constitute an exception to this while, to varying degrees, artists such as Jack Vettriano, or the Scotland-based artists, John Lowrie Morrison (‘Jolomo’) or Jennifer Thompson, might be regarded as artists who have developed highly successful businesses while being (arguably) relatively less innovative but no less market orientated. Many artistic enterprises, however, might be characterised as neither particularly innovative in an artistic sense nor successful commercially. In some cases, such enterprises might be described as essentially non-commercial, as the ‘entrepreneur’ essentially rejects profitability in the interests of artistic integrity or some other motive. That is a choice for the individual artist. Inevitably, however, the artist-entrepreneur may have to consider, to at least a degree, the potential market for their work. We consider the tensions between artistic integrity on the one hand and the exigencies of entrepreneurship and the market on the other in the empirical sections of our paper.

According to Stohs (1989, 1992), the number of surviving self-employed artists decreases dramatically over the time since graduation. Almost half of graduates who major in fine art move to either applied art or non-arts occupations. How can artists be encouraged to remain as artists? Despite the *Creative Britain: New Talents for the New Economy* report by

the DCMS in 2008 which aims to help creative talent to flourish by revising skills needs, vocational training, and employment conditions in the cultural and creative industries, there is as yet no support programme sponsored by either government or educational institutions for recent fine art graduates. In this paper, based on a case study analysis of the 2014 New Contemporaries exhibition of the Royal Scottish Academy as a platform for newly graduated fine art students, we highlight the role of galleries and comparable institutions as supporters of emerging artists. We also discuss why it is important to support artists during their initial transition from university to the professional world and why providing such a platform at an early stage of their careers may help them to remain as artists as well as enhancing their career paths. We find that improving emerging artists' understanding of the commercial art market is crucial. In order for them to deliver their art independently, emerging artists should incorporate entrepreneurial thinking and the available guidance provided in terms of pricing and valuation of their art works.

### **3. Research Methods**

#### ***3.1 Case study***

The Royal Scottish Academy (hereafter, *the gallery*), located at the heart of Edinburgh, Scotland, is an independent, privately funded institution led by eminent Scottish artists and architects. Since 1976, the gallery has presented an annual student exhibition, designated as the New Contemporaries exhibition from 2009, to support emerging Scottish artists by providing a 'level playing field'. After their degree shows, there are limited official platforms available for newly graduating fine art students to engage with public audiences, other artists, and art professionals; one such platform, however, is the *New Contemporaries* exhibition (for more information see, Fillis, Lee and Fraser, 2015). In 2014, 64 emerging artists were selected by a panel nominated by the gallery from around 450 graduates from the five art



colleges and five architectural schools in Scotland. About 300 artworks including drawings, water colours, oil paintings, prints, sculpture, installation works, interactive pieces, performance and architecture were exhibited from 15 February to 12 March 2014, attracting over 7,000 visitors (based on the ticket sales and invitations for the opening). Most works were for sale, enabling investment in Scotland's up-and-coming talent at realistic prices. In addition to offering various prizes and awards, for the first time in 2014, the RSA provided an opportunity for further selected artists to showcase their work at the Fleming Collection, a high-profile venue in London. The exhibition toured from 24 March to 31 May 2014 under the title of *New Scottish Artists: a Royal Scottish Academy exhibition supported by the Fleming-Wyfold Foundation*. Celebrating 25 years of Contemporary Art in Scotland since Glasgow was selected as the European Capital of Culture for 1990, a series of exhibitions all around Scotland was instituted in 2014 under the name of *Generation*. The gallery presented the *Generation: Open Dialogues* exhibition from 28 June to 31 August 2014, featuring new works by six artists, one artist selected from each of the *New Contemporaries* exhibition from 2009 to 2014. By providing these platforms, the gallery aims to facilitate emerging Scottish artists to make an easier transition from arts education to the professional sector. In the current paper, we aim to evaluate the success of the gallery regarding this ambition.

### **3.2 Conceptual Framework and Methodological Approach**

We develop a tripartite conceptual framework (see Figure 1) with three Platforms, the value creation points, and three major value recipients (*The Artist, The Organiser, and The Public*) within value creation channels. These three parties not only receive value from The Platform, but also create value to, within and between the parties, and over time to other communities and stakeholders. Our conceptual frameworks adopt a holistic approach by capturing both intrinsic and instrumental values, and further taking account of direct and indirect values created over time. We classify *Intrinsic Value* as the value of the exhibition itself; the value of

artists themselves; the value of artworks themselves, the value of the organiser; and the value of the experience for all parties. *Instrumental Value* can be defined as cultural, monetary, socio-economical, educational, social values created by and exchanged to all three parties, and from the platforms. *Direct Value* is created by those who physically experienced the exhibitions, and *Indirect Value* created for those who did not physically experience the exhibition. The three consecutive platforms create indirect values via word of mouth, and archival history. The artists are exposed and recognised by other art professionals and the public who missed the exhibition through the availability of publicity. Previous sale records and marketing materials can influence future sales and inform other artists, galleries and public. It is possible also for indirect experience to inspire people, and provide impactful experience.

Based on the conceptual framework, a qualitative methodology is applied as presented in Table 1. We recognised a need for in-depth conversation with all three parties to focus on their actual experiences (Panel A of Table 1). More specifically, we investigate the opportunities and barriers experienced by artists whilst exhibiting at the given platform. We held three focus groups with 9 volunteering artists from the *New Contemporaries* exhibition 2014 (Platform 1 in Figure 1). Among those artists, there were 4 artists who were further selected to exhibit at the Fleming collection in London, which is specified as Platform 2. We also organised two additional focus groups with 5 artists from the *Generation: Open dialogue* exhibition (Platform 3), four past *New Contemporaries* artists including 1 artist representing the *New Contemporaries* 2014. In addition, we undertook two focus groups with 5 visitors of the exhibition. In total, we held 7 focus groups with 19 individuals.

As shown in Panel B of Table 1, we also interviewed 18 individuals from the other two parties, the Organiser and the Public. From the Royal Scottish Academy staff, we interviewed the President, the Director, the gallery communications manager, and programme

co-ordinator. We also interviewed the member of selection panel and the gallery convenor. In addition, we interviewed personnel relating to the Fleming Wyfold Collection and other prize givers who are partners to the gallery, visitors to the exhibition and other artists in Scotland who were not invited by the gallery to exhibit their works.

During the focus groups, the questions we addressed to artists included whether the *New Contemporaries* exhibition helped them as a ‘stepping stone’ for their career transition; what factors were most challenging when preparing for the exhibition; whether the galleries provided their services to add value to the experience; how they valued their own artwork in monetary terms; and how to enhance the current contemporary scene in Scotland for emerging artists. During the discussion, the artists not only discussed with us, but also shared with each other, their feelings and experiences for both the period after their degree shows and that subsequent to the exhibitions. The artists participating in each focus group shared their ideas and opinions, suggesting potential solutions to the issues that they mutually experienced.

#### **4. Empirical Findings**

Through undertaking focus groups with the New Contemporaries 2014 artists, we identified how they perceived the exhibition and the opportunities and barriers which they faced during the experience. The majority of artists participating in our study agree that the New Contemporaries exhibition and follow-up exhibitions were useful platforms which they were able to use as stepping stones to becoming professional artists. Other opportunities resulting from participating in the platform include recognition of artistic quality and public exposure as an artist. The artists find it valuable to be able to network with established art practitioners from the gallery, selection panel and other artists, as well as enjoying an exclusive experience. Supported marketing by the gallery and sales of artworks provided artists with direct financial benefits. Through the experience, they indicated that they were able to develop higher

ambition and were inspired by viewing others' works.

Barriers that artists recognised at the exhibitions are inexperience of the external market, fear of 'unknown', and a tendency to under value themselves as artists, as well as the artworks created by them. They lack confidence when it comes to pricing their artwork and most of them were unable to find anyone to give advice. Without receiving any financial help prior to the exhibition, meant most artists were financially challenged. Most of the artists we have spoken to had no interest in developing either marketing or management skills. They had pessimistic views as to the prospects of gaining public funding, and they find it difficult even applying for it. We also observed, however, that a few artists were proactively looking for further exhibition opportunities and intermediaries in order to generate sales. We discuss our findings in detail in the following sub sections.

#### ***4.1 Opportunities generated by the Platform***

##### ***4.1.1 The Platform as a Stepping stone for Transition***

Artists themselves recognised that there is a big hurdle between leaving university and becoming a self-employed artist. Consequently, most find that being selected to exhibit at the New Contemporaries exhibition soon after their degree shows help them to focus their work with a clear, identifiable aim. Most of the artists selected for the exhibition are aware of the opportunity prior to their degree shows, having seen the previous exhibitions as well as receiving a talk given by the gallery director who visits 4<sup>th</sup> year students from all art colleges in Scotland in order to publicise a variety of other opportunities including bursaries and residencies available from the gallery. Thus artists hoped to achieve this opportunity. It also provided an opportunity for them to develop new works based on their degree shows.

*Finishing your degree is very daunting and you think "what next?" so it's like a good motivation to have something else to work towards especially something so big, it's really good. (Female, Sculpture)*

*I think it was a great support. It is obviously a bit of a step since we left art school. It's great to have something to end up in instantly and can just kind of work towards it. (Male, Painter and Architecture)*

*Every year so many graduates and all the art colleges I think the RSA actually giving time to emerging young artists is really important to showcase the young people to the public. (Male, Media artist)*

*I in no way had any thoughts that I would be chosen! It's nice to see everybody else and we're all in the same boat. We've just graduated and everything is exciting and new, and so even just showing in such an amazing building that has so many visitors is new so there are specific awards that are given out and I was lucky enough to get an exhibition and a bursary. (Female, Performing Artist)*

*We're new, we're only just starting to make work basically. So we've got so much to develop onto so it's nice at this stage if anyone says 'I like your work'. It's nice that people will see, with the Fleming collections getting selected... it's saying that we know that you'll carry on to make work and you're develop, like you won't get stagnant and you have a place to keep making. It sort of cleared a path a little bit I suppose ... you don't want to be a one trick pony and to just have an amazing degree show and keep making the same work sort of thing. (Female, Sculpture)*

*I think it's kind of make or break. Sometimes after art school you can hit a bit of a wall and burnout slightly sometimes and I think with me I'm at my most creative when I'm just at the end of making something because I'm just finding out how to do it, I've just reached that point. So then therefore for me the New Contemporaries was the whole thing that kind of kept me going when I got out and I don't feel like I've ever stopped. Life for me is still quite similar to what it was at art school so yea I think that time for me was really important for me just to keep me going. (Female, Sculpture and Painter)*

#### *4.1.2 Recognition and Exposure*

Given the fact that only one in six students is chosen, it is a mark of distinction to receive recognition as a New Contemporaries artist. Artists mentioned that this would 'look good' on their CVs as well as increasing the possibility of getting further exposure or financial support from other bodies.

*From my point of view it's something that is on my CV and I'm appreciative somebody thought I was good enough to take through to that so that's good. (Female, Painter)*

*You can apply for different quality production or just gives you more access to funding and it shows that you have been able to do things. (Female, Sculpture and Painter)*

Through publicity and the availability of the platforms, the artists are recognised by the media, the art professionals, the public, and other stakeholders directly.

*Getting written about like the Herald, the Scotsman all these people are writing about the shows like if you have a show in a coffee shop or something you're not getting that exposure. Like you can tell you can send out press releases and only so much will be written about it. At least in major print places and then you have people now with their blogs and stuff and they'll do like best in degree show and there is lot of other stuff happening around degree shows. (Female, Performing Artist)*

In similar fashion to the arguments made by Florida (2005; 2012), those artists who toured with their artworks to the Fleming Collection in London indicated that the experience further added value.

*It was a whole different crowd really. It was in Mayfair, so it was different, big money. That wasn't why I went there thinking they are rich. It's London, it's such a huge audience to appeal to and it's a different audience as well. I think that's the main thing that excited me about it. Like in the same way as this, it's a whole different kind of exposure and so is that, even though it is smaller venue but it's a different group of people seeing it I guess. That's the most important thing. (Male, Print maker)*

*Going to the Fleming and Wyfold collection is probably the biggest thing for me...going to a new city especially somewhere like London its notoriously hard in the art scene so it's great to get down there. It is nice to know that a wider audience will see your work with total fresh eyes. (Female, Sculpture and Painter)*

#### 4.1.3 Networking and Experience

One of the attractive aspects of the exhibition is that it provides a chance to meet recent graduates from other art schools who were educated in different styles and philosophies. Emerging artists from different art colleges in Scotland, bond together under the aegis of the New Contemporaries alumni. Among themselves, as well as with the gallery organisers and the public, they build an invaluable network. Being 'selected' exhibiting artists, the artists enjoy an exclusive experience. That provided an additional layer of excitement to artists as described by Konrad (2013).

*I think when it comes to what's best thing it was kind of nice to meet other artists because before from our perspectives cities and schools. Maybe if you think of expanding on because it was really great to meet other people in the space and talk to them about their practice, kind of networking but more fun. (Female, Painter)*

Some artists find that benefits of emerging artists mixing with established academicians are huge. Some installation artists were able to meet and interact with more experienced artists who were hanging the exhibition, 'creating value' with respect to artistic practice, philosophy and debate.

*It was a really good opportunity to be able to in a space like this and to be involved in an exhibition of this scale as well because just understanding how an exhibition like this comes about, like curating, working with the curators and the set up and the hanging process was quite interesting and problem solving like with logistics of fitting to a space a like this. Yes, I would say a really good opportunity. I really enjoyed it! (Female, Sculpture)*

By being able to interact with older established artists, this maintains their motivation levels and pushes them creatively.

*Being here when I was installing for a week it was really nice because people would come and give the critical feedback in a constructive way and that was a huge help...I had time to experiment with something and it didn't really work but then one of the guys gave me a suggestion and I went with it and it worked really well. So it developed completely in this new way but because I felt really supported by everyone because they want the show to go really well. And there are people who work here who've done their careers, teaching or they've done art for 50-60 years so lots of knowledge. It's really useful to have as an undergrad and that's what our tutors were for but when of the things when you leave education you're like 'there is no cries, no shared studios full of students' it's as if all the great resources have gone and it hurts a little bit and that's why you guys are going to have cries and different things in your collection and so you have to build that for yourself or the New Contemporaries exhibition was a way of offering that. They were really supportive and saying that these are great opportunities but also they're not just handing it to you. They're saying if you can work hard and get to the level we think you can get to, if you can do great work you can show in the show. (Female, Performing Artist)*

One artist was lucky enough to participate in all three platforms. When the artist was asked about his favourite moment so far, he answered:

*Maybe the Generations; it's been really nice meeting other artists in the same position with a wee bit more experience. (Male, Media artist)*

Oakley (2009) argues that the value attached to networks has also been recognised by government as in need of support for the cultural and creative industries, since entrepreneurs work better at clusters, as they can acquire ideas, information, resources, contacts, as well as establishing mutual support within partnerships (Oakley, 2006). Mingione (1997) highlights the greater possibility of obtaining a job having enjoyed social links.

#### 4.1.4 Marketing and Sales

The gallery works as an intermediary between the artists and the public who wish to possess artworks. With a view to prospective transactions, the gallery provides marketing for the artists.

*I'm gauging it by my social network I've got 30 new followers on my Facebook, Instagram and twitter and it sounds really shallow but you have to notice things like that. My twitter feed was totally inactive before the show and now I've got things happening, people talking and some random girl tagged me on twitter saying the show was great and stuff. So things like that people know your name and then find you on whatever to look at your website. (Female, Sculpture and Painter)*

When sales are made, the gallery makes commission (40% plus VAT); the artists earn profit, and the investors possess the artwork.

*It was very beneficial for me. I was able to make quite a few sales of pieces of my work. I seemed to get a lot of positive feedback. I won a couple of prizes as well. I got selected to go to the exhibition at the Fleming collection in London as well. It was a good few weeks for me. (Male, Print Maker)*

*I was quite lucky to sell one piece and it covered my transport to the gallery so that was I think I came off that actually a lot of people did. (Female, Painter)*

Also, exhibiting at the gallery can provide marketing materials for artists for further use.

*Yea we had to get a friend who was a photographer who happened to be going round the thing to take photographs for us. I'm pretty excited to be able to have them because it shows the work in such a bigger grand space. For my next proposals I can hand in really good images of it or a really good video from it and that's definitely the best thing I can get out of it for applying for everything else because if I've got a good set of images makes a massive difference for my work because it's not very easily explainable. (Male, Mixed media Artist)*



#### 4.1.5 Ambition and Inspiration

These platforms work as stepping stones for the artists to advance along a career path. Such events provide an opportunity for all parties involved to be inspired and take further risk in their artistic practices.

*I made all new work and a big departure from what I had done in the degree show... this is the work I need to make and want to make and so it was a risk because the gallery could've just said no... What a scary thing, but we're meant to be making the art we want to make and they're interested in it and that's why they want to give us this opportunity or this platform I guess and so that's what I thought 'well I'm going to make what I need to make'. (Female, Mixed Media Artist)*

Artists are committed to their art and linked to their community of fellow artists whatever degree of success in the market they may meet.

*I think before the show I'd built it up like "if I don't get this then what will I do next" but I've realised now that I've got lots of friends who were in the show or weren't in the show and they're still making. It doesn't stop you or it shouldn't stop you but the whole experience has just pushed me more. It's given more confidence that you're doing ok, that you're allowed to make what you want to make and people will accept it. (Female, Painter and Sculpture)*

Most artists expressed their determination to succeed in their work and continue seeking for similar opportunities in the future.

*Well, it was a really good step for me to make work for the future. We can show that we can do this and it was quite strategic in one way. This would be a good opportunity to show this, and maybe with that we could try and apply for other things. I think that would be something we could get out of it in the long term. I guess that is naturally what you are trying to do. You're trying to affect people and whether or not that's instant or over a long period of time you can't really tell but you'd hope it would happen in some way. (Male, Mixed Media Artist)*

To deliver their ambitions, they indicated that they are inspired to take some time to carry out research and to experiment with their ideas after the exhibition.

*Because it's the only way we can get to where we're going. You need that time just to experiment and to make and then finally suddenly there will be something you can show or possible make money from or something but there is a lot of time spent working it out but it is research just like research and development just like it is in other job or any other project. (Female, Painter and Sculpture)*

*It's like research what we're doing. It sounds weird but we're doing research and development in a way but we don't know what the outcome is going to be and so it's like all other avenues, say science and the different things they say 'oh of course we need this period of research and development' but for art it's not seen maybe in the same way because we're just playing around with things but our play is important. (Female, Performing Art)*

Additionally, one artist expressed her ambition to start a collective with her fellow artists.

*Obviously our experiences are both really different because our practices are so different but in my area, painting, we had a bunch of people we were really close friends and we always said after art school we're going to go and start a collective which we've just set ourselves up as a company now. (Female, Painter and Sculpture)*

## **4.2 Barriers which remain after participating in the Platform**

### **4.2.1 Self-perceived barriers to artists' career progression**

While then it was clear that the RSA NCE and its related platforms provided some significant opportunities for newly graduated artists in developing their careers, participants in our artist focus groups also articulated concerns about either a lack of career-enhancing initiatives or limitations in those that were so provided. Such concerns may be categorised as self-perceived barriers to artists' career progression. Additionally, however, and more subtly, other factors emerged from the interviews which might also be categorised as career inhibiting, but which were not necessarily perceived as such by the artists themselves. We explore both categories of barrier here. It was obvious that a significant number of artists perceived the lack of readily-available business advice to be a significant barrier. The lack of such provision by either the RSA or the institutions from which artists had graduated was highlighted.

*It's very interesting because obviously when you're in university and studying, there isn't that kind of work on the business side because that's not what their focus is. You're working on your craft but you're trying to figure out what your voice is, what you want to make and maybe at the end they'll have a day-long thing where it's like out-serviced. It's perhaps a lecture; it's like a day or two. It's not part of it because you're working on your dissertation and your studio work. (Female, Performing Artist)*

Unless the artists were selected for grants or awards by the partners of the RSA, they had to self-finance their new production as well as the transport of the artwork. Financing their studio space, materials, and labour have made some artists financially worse off after the exhibition.

*I would have to say that it actually left me feeling financially worse off. I do installation which will probably never sell at an exhibition. I think it is more keeping in contact with buyers who have a support network from them, which is probably what I got most from the experience. (Female, Film maker)*

#### 4.2.2 Lack of business education in art colleges

This artist highlights the marginal status given, perhaps appropriately, to business education in art colleges. At the same time she highlights a potential tension between prioritising business education and a potential tension between the artistic experience, or ethos, (e.g. ‘trying to figure out what your voice is’) and a business focus. The disadvantages accruing from a lack of any business knowledge were, however, highlighted by other artists. Clearly, for example, pricing is a key dimension to entrepreneurship and several interviewed artists highlighted the paucity of advice available to graduating artists.

One graduating artist highlighted what she viewed as the absurdly generous prices charged by her competitors:

*They [i.e. the gallery ] had these beautiful, beautiful architectural models and they were just amazing sculpturally as well and they were like £100, which meant [the artist] would be getting £50, and I was thought there is no way you could produce that for that amount of money, I was flabbergasted by that. (Female, Sculpture)*

Another artist, a sculptor, highlighted her lack of knowledge, volunteering that she had been completely dependent upon her employer for such advice. The advice given, however, while clearly well-meaning, appears to have resulted in this artist pricing herself out of the market.

*It was my boss. I worked with him in an art gallery in Glasgow and he kind of has much more of a clue about pricing works than I do. I had a really low price to start with and then found*

*out that if it did sell I would make a loss because they take money off and all that. So, I had to ask advice and the price that I put on it at the end so ridiculously high and I was embarrassed and I should have said 'not for sale' but that wasn't an option. (Female, Media Artist)*

This artist highlights here her lack of knowledge as to how even basic features, such as commission, of the saleroom and gallery work. There is an obvious need for education to be provided to graduating artists on such basic business matters. This artist also highlights the twin pitfalls of pricing into which newly emerging artists may fall; pricing your work so low that labour, materials and other costs are not covered or unrealistically high due to mistaken ideas about the work's value; whether that might be market price or, alternatively, some notion of intrinsic value. Both extremes were highlighted by our interviewees.

*I think a lot of people would look at a [price] label [and think that gave an indication of quality]. That's what one of my friends was saying "if you undersell your things people will think it's not worth looking at" and even things like getting awards are perceived as important. So it's like as soon as the plaque goes up people are saying "this must be good" because a lot of the time people let themselves be told what to like. Do you know what I mean? This is especially the case with contemporary art. I always hear people saying "I don't get this" and you're like "if you don't like it, you don't like it" but I think higher prices can sometimes [give an impression of quality] (Female, Sculpture and Painter)*

#### 4.2.3 Fear of Unknown

This artist highlights the fear of newly graduating artists that if they price their work too low it may be perceived as of being low quality. Both price labels and prizes and awards are perceived to serve as quality benchmarks by artists. This is especially so for contemporary art where it is recognised that many potential customers lack the confidence to make their own judgments about quality. For those artists now graduating from most art colleges this is likely to assume particular importance. It is recognised that most such institutions emphasise the conceptual rather than the traditional in art education with traditional skills such as classical painting deprioritised. Thus most graduating artists may work in oeuvres which are relatively unfamiliar to at least some potential customers.

Young artists tend to under value both themselves as artists, as well as the artwork they create. They are lacking in confidence when it comes to pricing their artwork.

*We threw away our artwork. So the value of 400 pounds we priced didn't exist, but when we put it in the skip, it was worth nothing to us. It was worth more to us skipped than it was having to carry it back to where we were going! So the value is really strange. So the value was in the performance and the action of having it there. The value was lost immediately when the exhibition finished. Well... the value is in the photographs and the documentation now. (Male, Mixed Media Artist)*

Senior figures at the RSA, as well as others, highlighted another pitfall for the commercially unaware artist; pricing work unrealistically either because of exaggerated notions as to its self-perceived worth or because of a need to recognise all labour costs even where these might be best categorised as 'training' or 'learning' costs. One very senior figure elaborated:

*Because I taught printmaking quite a lot of the time I used to find that the most common problem that my students had would be to see any print they made as a unique object and I remember one girl who was doing printmaking and she said "I'd like some advice on pricing" and I said "well let's start off with what price you would put on it" and this was a black and white etching. "So I think about £300". I said "well do you know John Bellany?" "Oh yes, yes". "Well a John Bellany etching that size costs £150 and he's in every major collection in the world". "Oh but I couldn't possibly sell it for that, it took me ages to do". I said "yeah, but it took you ages to do because you'd never done it before and you were learning how to do it from scratch, you know, in 6 months' time you'll be able to do these things in a couple of hours, you know, and that's how you price it". You can't price for incompetence, in the nicest possible way. (President of the Gallery)*

Here the apparent reluctance of the artist to recognise that for an entrepreneurial, even a 'stagnant' but sustainable, business, the pricing decision requires to recognise prices charged by both potential competitors and operators in the market whose work is perceived to be of (in this case, notably) higher quality. Despite the obvious need highlighted here for there to be some provider of basic business advice to what may be one of the largest cohorts of commercially naive artists this senior figure argued that it is not up to them to provide a pricing structure on anyone. It may be that this is perceived to be an inappropriate function for

institutions such as the RSA; clearly commercial galleries, however, see it as their role to provide such advice to their exhibiting artists.

Advice when asked for by artists, for example within their own educational institutions, appeared to be of variable quality and, at times, potentially confusing:

*Well, in terms of they looked at the work I had on the walls they said 'well, I wouldn't sell that for less than so and so, is that an original print one off? Well, you should charge £200 for that'. .....and I said 'well I've worked out how much it is going to cost me and I wouldn't sell it for less than £800' and he said 'well that's probably.....so that's the advice I've had up until now and as an emerging artist going into the RSA which is obviously a completely new big experience. (Female, Painter)*

#### 4.2.4 Anti-entrepreneurial mind-set

Our research very clearly indicates one category of barrier to the development of artistic careers or entrepreneurial attitudes; a (in many cases, self-perceived) lack of business awareness or commercial *nous* on the part of newly graduated artists. The remedy to what is recognised as an inadequate understanding of basic business or accounting practice appears relatively simple in this case; provision of basic business education by the art education institutions themselves or by some other provider. Of course such provision may not synchronise successfully with artists' own perceptions of their works' worth in certain cases.

Some artists indicated varying degrees of dissonance between commercial and artistic attitudes as well as the significant confusion experienced when trying to price their work:

*That [artwork] took weeks and weeks to make and I had to go and stay at my friend's house for weeks to make that and we had to transport it with all the wood and everything that it took to make it and petrol and the other work .....so there's a lot of money in that and so that was what it was maybe worth at that point and then we tried to say £500 and then we lost the work, but I don't know, value is a really hard thing for me as an artist. I know the [financial] value is the lesser part of value, the main dimension of value would be the actual chance to get to make it and to have the space to show it in because I can't show that in my living room at home. (Male, Mixed Media Artist)*

In some cases, artists' rejection of the market economy went further and there was an almost explicit rejection of the entrepreneurial attitude and ethos. One interviewed graduating artist put it this way:

*I don't really generally care about selling the work. I know that sounds odd, but I've never sold anything and it's never really bothered me and I'm happy to spend money making new stuff. It's more I suppose the feedback and knowing people enjoy it. I've be lucky I've been selected for a few things between that and the New Contemporaries (Male, Painter and Architecture)*

Clearly there is nothing here to suggest that this individual, one day, may not be a commercially successful artist.

*I suspect for a lot of people who are artists, perhaps the personality that you have, or why you do, or what makes you do it, is kind of contrary to the personality of the person who is really good at marketing and putting themselves out there. That kind of self-promotion for me is quite alien. (Female, Painter)*

In the short run, however, he effectively disavows such a possibility. In one sense, therefore, this is an example of a self-constructed barrier to (conventional) notions of career progression and entrepreneurship. Such attitudes support the arguments of Plattner (1998) who, although not primarily focused on the work of emerging artists, describes the contemporary fine art market as a market where producers don't make work primarily for sale, where buyers often have no idea of the value of what they buy, and where middlemen routinely claim reimbursement for sales of things they've never seen to buyers they've never dealt with.

In summary, then, barriers to artists' developing successful careers along relatively conventional quasi-commercial lines are evident from interviewee perceptions. In the case of the more obviously articulated of these, there are possible solutions in the shape of entrepreneurial or business education for graduating artists; such provision, however, also needs to engage with artistic notions of value and the artistic experience. In some other cases, however, barriers appear more unsurmountable, or at least challenging, with near explicit

rejection of commonly recognised entrepreneurial attitudes or business practice. Such artistic attitudes may sit uneasily alongside conventional notions of a career.

## **5. Conclusion and Discussion**

Although it might be possible to put a price on an art product (Throsby and Withers, 1983), it seems impossible to determine any ‘true’ value as there are so many alternative permutations of value in addition to economic value (Throsby, 2003). The meaning of economic value itself is contested. Regardless of the difficulties involved in determining value, however, we argue that the overriding imperative of cultural policy and practice should be the ability of arts and cultural experiences to transform people and to help determine society’s well-being. Non-financial outcomes in the form of intrinsic benefits have been under-researched and, since these are related to instrumental outcomes, also need to be investigated so that we understand more as to why and how they contribute to cultural value. The visual arts and related cultural phenomena represent activities that hold value and benefits for government. Governments and policy makers concerned with the allocation of scarce resources, and the demise of traditional economic drivers for development, have turned to these sectors as areas of potential growth. To achieve sustainable developments in art and to build cultural capital, policy makers’ understanding as to the necessity of supporting emerging artists is crucial.

Based on our study with recently graduated fine art students, we observe that they are concerned as to their uncertain future economically, and desirous for further support and guidance perhaps by way of some form of mentoring. Thus we believe the provision of platforms to enable them to exhibit their work to the public and to interact with other artists is of considerable benefit to them during their transition period. They greatly enjoy the engagement with the public and the building of networks with other artists which such platforms facilitate; such interactions motivate them to continue their creative practices. Thus we argue that in supporting emerging artists, the roles of institutions and of appropriate



cultural policies are vital. The provision and enhancement of such platforms is crucial, especially during the transition period from art students to artists. In utilising the findings from our study as a representative lens, we suggest that understanding the potential for similar events nationally and internationally in assisting new graduates to begin a career in the visual arts is fundamental.

Our work, however, also suggests that platforms such as the New Contemporaries exhibition would benefit from further development and enhancement. For example, to meet the need for graduating artists to develop business understanding and commercial awareness, art colleges should consider establishing elements of their curricula which cover subjects such as marketing, business studies, entrepreneurship and basic financial management in order to help and prepare student for life after graduation as practicing artists. Encouraging artists to work with other practitioners in the form of a collective might also help them to develop key skill-sets. Exposure to a business ‘mind-set’ could be usefully introduced earlier in artists’ careers to help them become truly entrepreneurial (Robinson and Sexton, 1994).

We do not suggest that such remedies necessarily constitute a ‘one size fits all’ solution and the indifference, or even occasionally, the antipathy, exhibited by some artists to a commercial or entrepreneurial paradigm, mean the not all art graduates, or even a practicing artists, may necessarily welcome such initiatives,

In general, however, specific new initiatives might be introduced by quasi-governmental bodies such as the Creative Scotland, Art Council England, or by voluntary bodies such as the Royal Scottish Academy, in order to provide mentorship from senior or more experienced artists, and to provide some form of financial assistance in order to assist recent graduates to survive as self-employed artists. Although the New Contemporaries exhibition provides a very significant resource to newly graduated artists, some expressed concern that they had to present existing artworks from their degree shows, rather than

completely new work, due to the financial constraints facing them. In many cases the financial barriers facing new artists may appear unsurmountable; this may have negative consequences for the cultural future of societies or nation-states. Due to the fact that the Royal Scottish Academy invite only one in six of the artists graduating from Scottish art colleges to come and exhibit, many graduating artists have no opportunity available to participate in this or a similar career-enhancing platform. More such platforms with access for new graduates on a much larger scale than is presently the case will help develop the careers not just of the selected artists but may impact the cultural dimensions of society more generally. The time may be opportune to develop a long-term investment strategy to nurture the visual arts and to develop further innovative cultural sectors within the UK and internationally.

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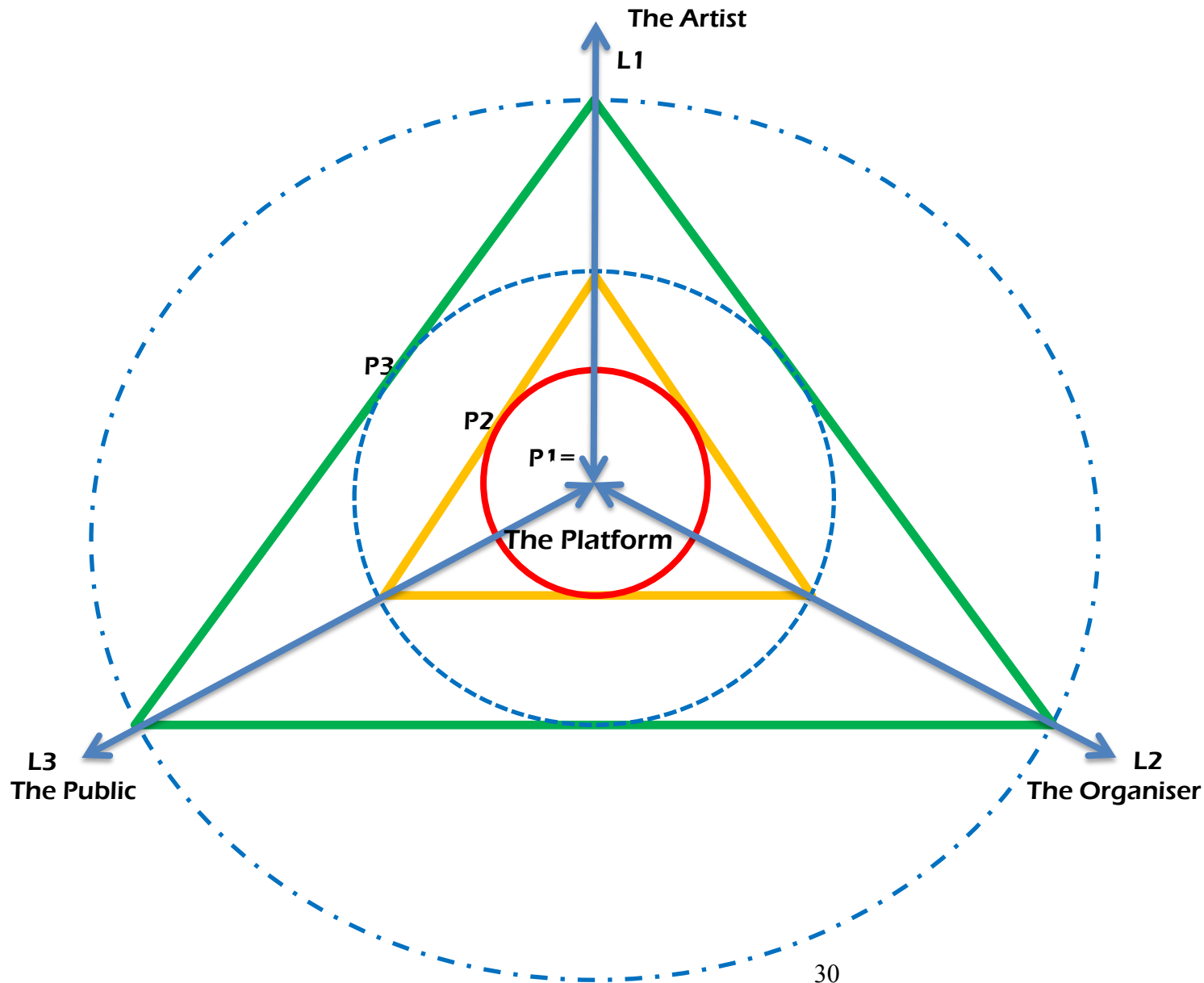
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**Figure 1 Conceptual Framework of Value Creation of the Platform Over Time**



The figure depicts the values created by and exchanged between the Platforms (Ps) and all three parties in Lines (Ls) over time. We include our case study specifications in bracket underneath of each term.

**P) The Platforms - Time Varying**

**P1** – Initial Exhibition

(New Contemporaries Exhibition)

**P2** – Touring of the Initial Exhibition

(New Scottish Artists at the Fleming Collection)

**P3** – Secondary Exhibition arising from the Initial Exhibition.

(Generation: Open Dialogues)

**L) The Value Exchange Lines**

**L1 - The Artist**

(Selected New Contemporary Artists)

**L2 - The Organiser**

(The Royal Scottish Art and the Fleming Collection Staff)

**L3 - The Public**

(Visitors; other art institutions and funding bodies; investors, future and present art college students.)

**Direct & Indirect values:**

**Straight lines)** Direct value created

**Dotted lines)** Indirect value created

**Table 1. Methodological Approaches**

Panel A Number of Focus Groups conducted

<b>Category</b>	<b>No of Focus Groups</b>	<b>No of Individuals</b>
2014 New Contemporaries Artists	3	FG1 – 2 FG2 – 4 FG3 – 3
2014 Generation: Open Dialogue Artist	2	FG1 – 3 FG2 – 2
2014 New Contemporaries Visitors	2	FG1 – 3 FG2 – 2
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>19</b>

Panel B Number of One-to-One Interviews Conducted

<b>Category</b>	<b>No of Individuals</b>
Royal Scottish Academy Staff	4
Royal Scottish Academy Selection panel	2
Fleming Collection Staff	2
Prize givers	3
Public - Artists	2
Public	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>