**Professionalisation & Identification in UK Higher Arts Education**

This chapter frames the relationship between UK Higher Arts Education (HAE), government policy, and the emergence and maintenance of professional pedagogies in creative education. Its focus is on art schools[[1]](#footnote-1) and artists’ experiences and views of their fine art education and professional curricula. This has been developed from my 2021 study *Artists and The Art School* which investigated a 30-year period between 1986-2016 in London art schooling. In section one, I discuss the socio-political history of UK art schools, focussing on significant cultural and higher educational policy that shaped the adoption of professionalisation in creative pedagogical activity alongside the institutionalisation of art schooling. In section two, I define the parameters of the arts as professions and artists as professionals, situating the role of professionalisation in UK HAE today. Finally, section three details artists’ experiences and views of skilling and professional development, as well as considering how artists’ form professional identities through/against this.

**Section 1:**

**Professionalisation****: Policy & Pedagogy**

According to Houghton (2016) six distinct art and design pedagogical models have existed across Europe, including in the UK. They are; the *Apprentice* (circa European Middle Ages), the *Academic* (circa Italian Renaissance), the *Formalist* (circa 1900/60s), the *Expressive* (circa 1950/60s), the *Conceptual* (circa 1970s onwards) and finally, the *Professional Curriculum* (circa 1990s onwards) (ibid.). Some models have left indelible marks on today’s fine art teaching in the UK, including; from the *Apprentice Curriculum*, the masterclass (see Newall, 2019); from the *Academic Curriculum*, the traditional life drawing room and the notion that being an artist ‘is not fundamentally about practical skills, but something of higher value, status and even calling’ (Houghton, 2016:110); from the *Expressive Curriculum*, leaving students ‘to express themselves and develop their talent’ (ibid.:113); and from the *Conceptual Curriculum*, the emphasis on process and critical theory (ibid.:114‑115). Some of these claims can be critiqued, such as access to formal and technical skilling, and that the notion of talent is contingent on varying degrees of capital that students have at their disposal affecting development (Bourdieu, 1986; Banks, 2017). Nonetheless, the present *Professional Curriculum* is understood to embody many of these elements, as well as being deeply interconnected with government agendas. Below, I outline this history of UK art schools and the policies that have formed them, discussing influential political ideologies and the interrelation of changing pedagogical paradigms that have together shaped the *Professional Curriculum*.

**1.1 Art Schools 1760-1960**

UK Art schools have endured strong ties with political agendas since their inception. The primary aim of the first government schools, those of Edinburgh’s *School of Art and Design* in 1760, London’s *Royal Academy* in 1768, and later, in 1837, the *Government School of Design*, today known as the *Royal College of Art* (RCA), was to plug a deficit in skilled British designers to compete in these industries with Europe (see Strand, 1987). These schools fulfilled a role by inscribing standardised styles, producing generically skilled useful graduates to compete in the design and manufacturing economy. While perhaps a seemingly bygone purpose, it is not too different from today’s creative education and its’ instrumental position provisioning access to the cultural and creative industries (CCIs) (McRobbie, 2011; Banks & Oakley, 2016; Taylor & Luckman, 2020). Nor, when contemplating the art school’s role as an organisation of the institutions of both education and art, the latter described as the ‘art machine’ that includes, ‘arts schools, galleries and dealers, art critics, auction houses, fairs and art events, (private and public) collectors, and museums’, which act as an ‘interlocking framework of legitimation’ (Rodner & Thompson, 2013:16).

Until the mid-twentieth century, the cornerstone of the UK’s original art schools were the exacting standards required of students in drawing the ‘‘accurate’ representation of the visible world’ through compulsory classes in ‘figure drawing, modelling, still life and pictorial composition’ (Lord, c.2008). Elsewhere, vast pedagogical changes were occurring in creative education in Europe and North America[[2]](#footnote-2). In particular, the influence of the Bauhaus movement, which began in Germany in 1919, was transforming the entire pedagogical/conceptual framework and outputs of art education with its Modern formalist approach that instilled ‘abstraction, performance and material experimentation’ (Thorne, 2019) over standardised representational techniques. The Bauhaus closed down in 1933, curtailed by Nazi demands (ibid.), and some say under ‘the pressure of its own contradictions’ (de Duve, 1994:23), perhaps alluding to its desire to free art education from the rigidity of the academy yet simultaneously instilling rigorous rules that governed formal art making (see Newall, 2019:75). Nevertheless, its influence persisted through Bauhaus artists working in exile from Nazi Germany elsewhere (Malherek, 2018), and it rippled throughout HAE in the UK. It was seen as the only coherent rival to the ‘old academic model’ (de Duve, 1994:23), and though its lasting effects are contested for having only a ‘residual influence that it once had’ (Llewelyn, 2015:17), many accept it still influences creative pedagogies today (Orr & Shreeve, 2018; Newall, 2019).

It’s ripples certainly encouraged the policy reforms implemented through the *First* (and *Second*) *Coldstream Reports* of 1960 (and 1970 respectively), which transformed UK HAE. The two reports were devised by artist and educator Sir William Coldstream, who was both chair of the National Advisory Council on Art Education (NACAE) and Principal of Fine Art at *The Slade School of Art*, one of the UK’s oldest art schools, established in 1871, and notably existing within the university framework as a collegiate of *University College London*. Independence and institutionalisation are prominently debated contexts of art schools underscoring discussion on professional pedagogies, which I situate further shortly. The reports profound shift for HAE emphasised giving ‘a good deal of freedom to art schools within the limits of a single framework’ (Coldstream, cited in Strand, 1987:213). While liberating art schools to devise their own pedagogies was a main aim, the new HAE policies also academicised the schools who sought more intellectual students for the new fine art courses they established. This was achieved through implementing tougher entry requirements, including needing five ‘O’ Levels[[3]](#footnote-3), plus the establishment of an extra tier of study in the Foundation Course[[4]](#footnote-4) (or Diploma in Art and Design/Dip.AD), which had to be passed to attend. As well, compulsory History of Art and Complementary Studies were introduced, equating to 15% of student marks achieved through the introduction of written papers and specific classes conducted by accredited teachers (Banks & Oakley, 2016), changing the landscape not only for students but for teachers too. These new systems sought to bring arts courses in line with other disciplines in universities (Strand, 1987), understood to have been influenced by Coldstream’s position as professor at an art school that already existed within a university (Massouras, 2012). Raising visual art’s academic credentials met the goal of disassociating it from its historical alignment with the trades. The lasting influence of the *Coldstream Reports* is widely considered to have brought the most substantial change to HAE of any reform before or since (Beck & Cornford, 2012; Massouras, 2012; Banks & Oakley, 2016; Willer, 2018). It also had an accumulative institutionalising effect on art schools, which I discuss next alongside professionalisation, and influential political ideologies and policies administered since.

**1.2 Political Ideologies & Professionalising Policies**

The *Coldstream Reports* of 1960 and 1970 have been considered main progenitors of professionalised pedagogies in UK art schools (see Massouras, 2012). The liberalising and academicising effects these policies had on the new courses are certainly part of the historical professionalising of art and design pedagogies. However, to fully understand art school’s *Professional Curriculum* (Houghton, 2016) of today, recognising the influence of political contexts and policy objectives of the latter half of the 20th century is also necessary. Many overlapping factors have contributed to the professionalisation, and interconnected *institutionalisation*, of art schooling. The most predominant is the overarching and successively maintained neoliberal political ideology of UK (and many international) governments since the 1970s. In the UK, this was initially fostered through an allegiance between the then US President Ronald Reagan and UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who together instigated the ‘privatisation, deregulation, financialisation and globalisation’ (Radice, 2013) of the public sector, and according private ones (i.e. banking and finance), that became the central tenets of neoliberalism. Later, during the 1980s and 1990s, under successive Conservative (1979-1997) and New Labour (1997‑2010) governments, even while some dispute the latter’s policies as distinctly neoliberal (see Hill et al. 2013; Hesmondhalgh et al. 2015), the dominant ideology was continued through the initiation and embedding of *New Public Managerialism* (NPM). The mission behind NPM was to impose the ‘values, structures and processes of private sector management…upon the public sector’ (Radice, 2013:408), some say enforcing ‘brutalistic, finance-driven, authoritarian forms of management’ (Hill et al. 2013:60) on public services. This included higher education, shaping its steady privatisation, embedding an ‘audit‑culture’ (Radice, 2013:413) through ‘increased forms of surveillance and control’ (Hill et al. 2013). In addition, in 1999, the Bologna Declaration (EHEA, 1999) standardised EU member’s higher education policies and practices into a three‑cycle system of BA, MA, and Doctorate programs. Signatories, including the UK, agreed to adopt a system of comparable degrees. This is considered part of ‘a coordinated strategy to place higher education in the service of economic growth and global competitiveness’ (Whelan & Ryan, 2018:31), in line with neoliberal expectations. These key situations have all influenced the centralisation of art education’s management and its institutionalisation.

For art schools, though alignment with fulfilling government needs began much earlier, the slippage towards institutionalisation, as discussed, had begun in the 1960s with Coldstream’s academicising reforms that aligned art and design education with other disciplines of the university. Then, in 1965 another significant transformation occurred with the dawn of the *Polytechnic Era* (Llewellyn, 2015). This saw the extensive restructuring of UK higher education with the establishment of seven new universities and thirty polytechnic colleges between 1968 and 1973 (Pratt, 1997). The polytechnics were formed by merging local technical colleges, existing art schools, and other colleges together. The impact on independent art schools[[5]](#footnote-5) was significant, reducing their numbers by absorbing them into umbrella institutions. This move essentially cut ties (and funding) with local authorities and moved towards a centrally funded (and governed) set up that imitated universities (Pratt, 1997:303). Amid these changes came resistance however. In 1968 a rebellion broke out in the UK art schools[[6]](#footnote-6) against these and previous art educational restructures (see Tickner, 2008). A wave of art school protests and ‘sit‑ins’ (ibid.) emerged, beginning at London’s Hornsey School of Art. The students were frustrated by a perceived ‘lack of relevance to contemporary society, limited or even inadequate facilities, and distant, inaccessible management and decision-making processes’, and opposed ‘new course structures and requirements’ (Lyon, c.2008), particularly the entrance qualifications implemented through the *Coldstream Reports*. Their central aim was ‘to set the terms of their own education’ (Walton, 2018). However, in 1992, more changes came which would challenge this, as the *Further and Higher Education Act* (Great Britain, DfE, 1992) was implemented. This initiated the *University Era* (Llewellyn, 2015), which swiftly condensed polytechnics into universities, diminishing the number of independent art schools further as they became colleges or departments of universities, advancing their entrenchment within the institution of education as a result (Harvey, 2012). The substantial, and probably irrevocable, changes of this period for UK art schooling are striking when considering that in 1959 there were 180 independent art schools, and by 2012 this had depleted to around a dozen (Beck & Cornford, 2012), the rest had been culled, absorbed, or institutionalised through the *University Era*.

In combination these policies institutionalised UK HAE. The subsumption of art schools into universities meant the structures and policies of the university would permeate art schools as part of legitimisation processes of institutionalisation (Lammers & Garcia, 2017:199-200). The universities’ ‘social processes, obligations, or actualities [could] take on a rule-like status in social thought and action’ in the art schools, ‘driven as much by external forces as functional requirements’ (ibid.). It raised deep concerns that HAE would become ‘subject to the same kind of generalising academic and professional pressures that have always been applied in the governance of university subjects’ (Thomson, 2005, cited in Beck & Cornford, 2012:63). Indeed, a new set of policies (and pressures) were applied to universities throughout the late 1990s and 2000s, felt in the art schools that were now faculties and departments in these institutions. These included New Labour’s introduction of tuition fees in 1998 of £1,000 per year. Subsequent rises have continued, increasing to £3,000 per year in 2003 (New Labour), £9,000 per year in 2012 (Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition), and to £9,250 per year in 2017[[7]](#footnote-7) (Conservative). The discrepancies paid by artists I have studied (see Scarsbrook, 2021), range from those who attended art school in 1989 and paid nothing (plus received material stipends from local authorities), to some who, by 2016, paid £27,000 for their fine art education. This highlights the sharp increase in the cost of higher education, resonating with injustices linked to decreased attendance of working class or disadvantaged students, particularly in creative subjects (see Banks & Oakley, 2016; Banks, 2017)[[8]](#footnote-8). Also notable is the shift towards the individual student paying for their education, rather than this being supported through taxation (see McGettigan, 2013).

Further pressures on universities, and institutionalised art schools, came in 1999/2002 with government employability agendas (Great Britain, DWP, 2002). These have defined the vocationalisation of higher education, based on the reasoning that, ‘given the substantial public investment in university students, it is particularly important that they are employable upon graduation’ (Rt. Hon. Gordon Brown, Chancellor of Exchequer, 1999, in Smith et al. 2000:382). The development and delivery of ‘the individual’s employability skills and attributes’ (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005) became paramount as work-ready graduates were (and still are) anticipated to slot into the according industries that (notionally) await them. Employability and enterprise policies have been exposed as an unscrupulous and transparent mechanism to ‘ensure that [governments] and the banks are repaid [the student debts]’ that are a ‘financial condition for entrance into higher education’ (Federici, 2017). They are linked to disproportionate marketisation and unsustainable expectations of higher education in provisioning the work force, seen as especially unfeasible for creative subjects (Smith et al. 2000; Mason et al. 2006; Wheelahan, 2010; Belfiore & Upchurch, 2013). There are considerable difficulties for subjects like fine art in preparing/skilling individuals ready for artistic ‘employment’, as well as somehow measuring that, when employment itself is indeterminate for many art school graduates.

Measuring taught and applied employability skills have become demands placed on art schools within universities, since a series of performance assessments were launched following the employability agendas. In line with NPM’s instilling of competition through the generation of comparable datasets, the aim has been to evaluate the effectiveness of institutions and specific courses, and then pit them against one another. This is achieved through synchronising data from the National Student Survey (NSS[[9]](#footnote-9)), the Research Excellence Framework (REF[[10]](#footnote-10)), and the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF[[11]](#footnote-11)), introduced in 2005, 2014, and 2017 respectively. The metrics from these are compared against data gathered on graduate employment. Furthermore, since 2017 institutions can raise tuition fees in line with inflation (Universities UK, 2022) according to the results of these market driven audits. Under the alias of providing students with ‘choice’ (Great Britain, DfE, 2017) by supposedly ‘placing students at the centre’ (Gourlay & Stevenson, 2017:391), there are deep concerns these methods could ‘fundamentally alter the market viability of certain university courses’ (Morris 2017, cited in Kenning, 2018:3). Fine art courses are particularly vulnerable, because employment outcomes are exceptionally difficult to trace when artists’ working lives are known to be complex, often precarious, and insecure (Gill & Pratt, 2008; Hill et al. 2013; McRobbie, 2016; Taylor & Luckman, 2020). That artists’ employment patterns cannot be sufficiently measured means the data is unreliable and works against HAE in an audit‑driven educational climate. Moreover, since the advent of tuition fees, the creation of student‑customers/consumers has been widely criticised as damaging and unfair (Bishop, 2012; Tomlinson, 2014; Bunce et al. 2017), whereby situating artist‑students[[12]](#footnote-12) in a ‘student-as-rational-investor model’ becomes a ‘seriously ‘bad bet’’ (Kenning, 2018:2). This has placed unrealistic expectations and transactional values on arts education, students, and teachers. However, it is easy to see how the *Professional Curriculum* is prevailing, and those planning HAE courses have found it increasingly necessary to instil professional practice as core curricula activity, certainly since the educational reforms and political ideologies of the 1960s and 1970s, and absolutely against the backdrop of the past thirty years. The timeline below (figure 1) presents an overview of the events and policies discussed above.



Figure 1: Timeline of Influential Policies on UK Art Schooling

**1.3 Current Perspectives, Acceptances, & Alternatives**

In contrast to HAE’s challenges I present above, more optimistic outlooks on the allegiance of art schools and universities also exist. Banks and Oakley (2016:2) see that ‘many precarious institutions appear to have had their lives extended by becoming absorbed into singular or federal partnerships within the university system’. Others suggest, that though it is thought art schools have compromised to fit into the academic confines of the university, the university is also learning about and accepting new forms of practice‑based knowledge from art schools that ‘helps stretch university ideas about what counts as knowledge’ and ‘has relevance across the disciplines’ (Orr & Shreeve, 2018:157). With practice-based research having been recognised by REF (ibid.), a cynical perspective might conclude it resembles another co-option of knowledge to be measured, benchmarked, and marketised under neoliberal ideologies. Nevertheless, other benefits are suggested, such as that ‘art school staff have had to articulate to others, which has helped them understand the nature of their pedagogy and practices’, leading to ‘more literature about creative, studio-based pedagogy that can be shared more widely’ (ibid.:156), and that the justification of these practices has meant they ‘have become more rigorous’ (ibid.).

It could appear from this that art schools have accepted their fate under the *University Era* (Llewellyn, 2015), that some operating within the institution (teachers, students, curriculum developers, critics) have stopped challenging the systematic marketisation of art education, and the concomitant entrepreneurialisation of art practice. Indeed, in 2009, some arts educators were still demonstrably torn, asking, ‘should the art school turn itself into a monastery that protects students from the evil forces outside or should it invite the market in and become a kind of lively bazaar?’ (Birnbaum, 2009:238). In contrast, more recently, other arts educators seem more convinced, instead asking, ‘how can we capitalise on the opportunities that a more entrepreneurial approach to HE provides for students, staff, academic institutions, communities and the wider cultural and creative industries sector?’ (TCCE, 2019). These differing positions demonstrate wider acceptance and absorption of employability and enterprise as deliverable outcomes of HAE. Some art school’s complicity in this can be seen in their coordinating and hosting conferences that directly aim to embed employability and enterprise agendas[[13]](#footnote-13) (see CHEAD, 2015, and TCCE, 2019). In leading the discussion on this, these art schools interlock this agenda into their pedagogies, embedding an entrepreneurial ideology into their brand identities, and the identities of their students. Indeed, the ‘entrepreneurial ethos’ entrenched through employability policy and professional curricula, ‘offers more than career and professional sustainability advice: it targets student subjectivity itself’, influencing ‘attitudes and forms of behaviour thought likely to advantage the individual within established, competitive market conditions’ (Kenning, 2018:4), a notion I return to later through discussion around skilling.

The picture described above characterises art schools as functional and compliant organisations, that have experienced much adversity in their incorporation into universities in the neoliberal era. There are studies however, that emphasise art schools within universities can take ownership of pedagogical design despite the regulations imposed by policy (see Crippa, 2014). Other ways of dealing with the hyper‑marketisation and audit-driven culture of HE can be seen in the current bloom of alternative art schools that are non‑accredited and independent from the demands faced by HAE (for example: Open School East (2020), The Other MA (2020), School of the Damned (2020), Islington Mill Academy (2020), Fairfield International (2020), and AltMFA (2020)). Alternative models embed ‘pedagogical practices as art practice or artist‑driven education’ (Kalin, 2012:43), or ‘art‑as‑pedagogy’ (Bishop, 2012). However, mostly, what remains is arts’ and art education’s entanglement with institutionalisation, professionalisation and entrepreneurialisation, which I consider next as I outline the arts’ and artists’ relationships with professions and professionalism.

**Section 2****:**

**Visual Arts as Professions & Artists as Professionals**

It could be that the arts (and artists) have been institutionalised since becoming a profession, and not necessarily vice versa as positioned above. Indeed, theorists of New Institutionalism[[14]](#footnote-14) suggest that ‘professions are institutionalized occupations’ (Abbott 1988, in Lammers & Garcia, 2017:197). In this section, I consider this as I outline a historical context of the professions, the arts as a profession, and artists as professionals. After, I define the current situation of visual artists’ professional and professionalised identities in relation to HAE and the neoliberal backdrop, and outline a working definition of artists’ professional identities that are shaped by professional pedagogies.

**2.1 The Arts & The Professions: Parameters & Participation**

The professionalisation of visual arts practice in UK art schools is considered ‘an increasingly significant component of higher education study in the UK’ (Kenning, 2018:1). It is also considered the ‘enemy of the arts’ (Saltz, 2003, cited in Daichendt, 2012:25), because the newly ‘professionalized discipline…values the intellectual and the philosophical over the craft and technical origins of art education’ (Daichendt, 2012:25). This rhetoric implies the recent professionalisation of the arts and artists. However, within this, the meaning of ‘professional’ needs defining (or redefining), because the arts have been recognised as a profession and artists as professionals in a European context, according to Durkheim (1957), since medieval and prehistoric times. Ancient craft guilds of Rome (around 600 BC), initiated under King Numa (715-673 BC) and later in the time of Cicero (106 BC), thrived as training and organising bodies of professional arts (ibid.:17). One British guild, *The Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths* founded in twelfth century London, formed Goldsmiths Technical and Recreative Institute in 1891, becoming Goldsmiths College in 1904 under University of London, and establishing Goldsmiths School of Art that still exists today. The arts have seemingly sustained their position as a profession since the guilds (see Freidson, 1986:54), barring fluctuations in historical documentation between the 1300s and 1700s (Prest, 1987), during which most professions were ‘somewhat overlooked’ because they ‘largely served and were recruited from the gentry and nobility’ (ibid.:8). I continue to discuss access to professional participation shortly, however, the arts resurface again as professions in the 1800s through the Arts & Crafts guilds[[15]](#footnote-15). But, by the end of that century, debate was emerging over whether Architecture, the founding discipline of *The Art Worker’s Guild*, a major professional organisation for artists and craftspeople, was a ‘Profession or an Art’ (Stamp, c.1975). This question has continued to be asked of the arts in varying degrees since.

During the First Industrial Revolution (c.1760-1840)[[16]](#footnote-16), the ‘professional classes were coming of age’ (Donkin, 2001:106). The status of professionals (skilled labour) was being pit against the industrialists (unskilled labour) who were usually uneducated, whereas professionals had ‘the benefit of classical education’ (Donkin, 2001:105). At this point, being educated became a prominent defining factor of the professions, separating professionals and amateurs. Another crucial change for professional parameters and participation was significant democratisation after England’s 1832 electoral reforms that opened up professional careers to the middle classes (Larson, 2013[1977]). Along with education this positioned ‘merit against birth and patronage’, initiating ‘a novel possibility of *gaining status through work*’ (ibid.:5 original emphasis). Considered a ‘great transformation’ (Polanyi, 1944, cited in Larson, 2013[1977]:xvi), another came at the turn of the 20th century, which shifted the entire socio‑politico‑economic landscape towards a market economy that was ‘dominated by the reorganisation of economy and society around the market’ (Larson, 2013[1977]:xvi), which ‘the professions could hardly escape the effects of’ (ibid.:9). These changes significantly impacted who could become a professional. Similarly, today’s political ideology of neoliberalism continues to influence access to the professions, especially through constricting access to higher education (Burke et al., 2015), that is a common route into creative careers (Taylor & Luckman, 2020).

Education and access are still markers and hurdles separating professionals and amateurs. Pay is also a factor. Today’s professionalism, for artists and more widely, is tightly interwoven with the neoliberalised ability to centralise remuneration, coupled with the ability to brand and market oneself to meet the dominant (free market) economy demands. A far cry from the vulgar and ‘grubby’ notion of ‘commercial transactions’ and ‘receiving money directly from clients’ (Donkin, 2001:105) that professional classes of the 19th century would stoop to. Mostly, professionals, including barristers, lawyers, or the clergy, did not ‘extend their hands for payment’ (ibid.). Artists were also exempt from this, being supported by patrons of the church or monarchy. I note the historical existence of professionals’ condescension of the vulgar business‑end, and artists’ patronage, because of its relevance to artists who have experienced and attempt to reject these kinds of professionalising effects of art schooling (see Scarsbrook, 2021). The vulgarity of the business-end attested to by artists (ibid.) may well signify a traditional professional stance of not wanting to be involved in those dealings, as well imbricating historical and somewhat mythologised ideals of patronised and supported artists, notions which can disrupt professional pedagogies. Next, I situate changes in professionalism and the dynamics that have shaped it.

**2.2 Professions & Professional(ised) Identities**

While the arts have been considered professions for centuries, what constitutes a profession, and a professional individual or artist, has significantly altered, shifting with changing social and political paradigms. In sociological (Macdonald, 1995) and cultural policy (Paquette, 2012) accounts of the professions, different schools of thought have attempted to define what a profession, being a professional, or having a professional identity means. Modern sociological mapping begins with the functionalist’s (Parsons, 1939, 1963; Durkheim, 1957; Wilensky, 1964) definitions of the early to mid-20th century, who claimed the professions had a rigid set of traits, and compiled lists of qualities for the ‘ideal-typical profession’ (Macdonald 1995:3). However, these parameters are now considered narrow and restrictive, such as distinguishing professions by formal ‘technical knowledge’, ‘professional norms’, regulatory ‘associations’, and ‘monopoly of the practice’ (Paquette, 2012:4). Professional identities were related to a ‘function of prestige’ (ibid.:5), which though might be still inherent, is not all they are. Later, the interactionists (Becker, 1963; Freidson 1986), from the 1960s onwards, repositioned the professions within a broader ‘cultural dimension’ as ‘ritualised social behaviour’ or ‘stabilized social practices consistent with the pressures of a given social world’ (Paquette, 2012:5). They centralised the ‘inner life’ (ibid.) of professionals, engendering the notion that individuals were capable of professionalising themselves; the term professional became an act. Professional identity was foregrounded and became connected to ‘the individual’s negotiation between social contingencies of the social world of work he or she evolves in’ (ibid.:6).

During the 1970s and after, understanding professions incorporated understanding power dynamics between institutions. These were recognised as shaping the professions and individuals, who were acknowledged as being able to negotiate their professional identities. Larson’s (2013[1977]) theory, the *Professional Project*, encapsulated this combination of social power and collective action as ‘the quest for professional status and the strategies that mobilized to gain this status’ (Evetts, 1999, cited in Paquette, 2012:7). By that time, art schools were firmly embedded within higher educational institutions through the *Polytechnic* and *University Eras* (Llewellyn, 2015), meaning they became more influential as institutions that could shape the profession of visual artists, and significantly, artist‑students could individually and collectively negotiate professional artistic identities through art schooling. More recently, identities (professional and otherwise) are thought to ‘represent patterns of negotiation between an individual’s social aspirations, desires, expectations, and the different forms of socialization one encounters’ (Dubar, 2000, in Paquette, 2012:10). This shift has meant that professional identities can be ‘inherited, learned, attributed and sometimes rejected by the individuals who enter a professional world’ (ibid.), being that they consist ‘of both identifying with and establishing a distinction from certain values and norms’ (ibid.). As well, identities are also considered manifold, in that, ‘rather than having one fixed version of who we are, we all move between multiple identities’ (Silverman, 2007, cited in Butler‑Kisber, 2018:12). Professions and professional identities are consistently in flux due to the changing nature of the complex dynamics that shape their existences. The political ideologies, changing social and institutional powers, and the individual and collective negotiations of identities that create professionals and professions I discuss here underlie this.

**2.3 Situating Professional(ised) Artists’**

In terms of what this means for artists, and in defining parameters of what an art schooled professional(ised) artist entails, is that there are many negotiations to consider. Such as, first and foremost gaining access to the institution/art school; not a simple feat when met with homophilic recruitment processes granting entry only to similar others (Banks, 2017). Furthermore, when access has been granted, navigating professionalising pedagogies that embed entrepreneurialism, as noted before, as a ‘potent form of self‑identification’, entrenching a ‘state of mind’ that ‘merges with an artistic persona’ (Kenning, 2018:9), and operates on the same level as self-employment as a thinly veiled fallacy for autonomy (see Ryan, 1992, and Banks 2010); it is an understandably challenging arena to navigate. However, art schools are considered key sites of professional identity work (Orr & Shreeve, 2018:81), and given HE (and HAE) responsibilities in delivering employability agendas for specific industries, industry‑related professional identity work could also take place. Though, the notion of an industry in which artist‑graduates might ‘evaluate their own work and behaviour in the context of a work‑place environment’ (Paquette et al. 2016, cited in Orr & Shreeve, 2018:130), as other professionals are considered able to do, seems antithetical and is contested (Bain, 2005). Rather, for artist-students it is anticipated there are a ‘range of practices into which they will establish their own version of art practice or practices’ (Orr & Shreeve, 2018:130) awaiting them for further negotiation post art school.

Ascertaining the outcomes of these negotiations, that might situate what an art schooled professional artist is, is a challenge that becomes deeply complex. Efforts to delineate the parameters of artists’ professional status have been attempted. Some, from a cultural economics standpoint (Frey & Pommerehne, 1989, in Zanti, 2015:45) suggest eight criteria can be considered. These include, ‘time spent’ on and ‘income derived’ from artistic work, an artists’ ‘reputation’ and ‘recognition’ among ‘the general public’ and ‘other artists’, the ‘quality of artistic work’, ‘membership’ of professional bodies, ‘professional qualifications (graduation from art schools)’, and the ‘subjective self‑evaluation of being an artist’ (ibid.). Though these are not unproblematic and difficult to ascertain/evaluate, they are broad in range, and crucially, the last measure is asserted by and discussed as key to artists I have studied (Scarsbrook, 2021). Elsewhere, other criteria lists have been developed. For example, Artists’ Union England (AUE), an organisation which supports artists’ rights concerning their artistic work and remuneration, has established professional status benchmarks that it uses to determine membership eligibility. This includes ‘regularly making and exhibiting’ and receiving ‘professional grants’, to being ‘featured in an art publication’, ‘represented by a gallery’ or having ‘a degree in visual or applied arts at undergraduate, post‑graduate, BTEC or Diploma level’ (AUE, 2020). However, while many of these might be relevant to artists’ working lives, they are object/attainment centred. Critically, they do not incorporate the understanding of more nuanced attempts, such as Frey and Pommerehne (1989), that professional identification is also defined as ‘one’s professional self‑concept based on attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences’ (Ibarra, 1999, in Slay & Smith, 2011:85), rather than having been commissioned by a public institution (another of AUE’s criteria). I believe it remains that, as Bain (2005:34) suggests, ‘there are no official prerequisites or credentials to distinguish artists from non-artists, professionals from amateurs’, and with no ‘clear definitional parameters’ (ibid.:26) to distinguish them, it is difficult to fully accept criteria lists as defining artistic professionalism when melded with the complexities of identification. I propose an understanding that artists’ professional identities are flexible, ambiguous, and contextual negotiations, certainly influenced by art schooling and professional pedagogies, as well as being blended through past, present, and future identifications (Oyserman et al., 2017). Next, I discuss some of the skilling artist‑students experience during art schooling through which they negotiate these professional identities.

**Section 3:**

**Skilling**

**3.1 Skills, Talent, & Pedagogy**

The concept of skilling artists is a relatively recent phenomenon (de Duve, 1994). Art and skills were not always equated with each other, rather, art was usually perceived through the lens of talent (ibid.) and underscored by artistic myth which decrees artists’ special creative talents are preordained, God‑given, or mystically ascribed innate traits (Kris & Kurz, 1979 [1934]; Soussloff, 1997; Røyseng, 2007). Today, skilling is expressed in binary debates which have divided skills into hard vs soft, practical vs conceptual (Willer, 2018), and, art *can* vs art *cannot* be taught (Elkins, 2001; Newall, 2019). The latter is usually associated with the argument that creativity is a fundamental human urge (Hickman, 2010). Accordingly, many advocacy reports deem various practical skills necessary from professional art school pedagogies (Slater et al., 2013; Allen & Rowles, 2016; Rowles, 2016), including networking, preparing CVs, pricing work, and how to fill out HMRC self‑assessment forms[[17]](#footnote-17), the latter being related to assumptions that artists will necessarily become self‑employed. This label, seen as ‘a category of the tax office, a state-imposed identification’ (Kenning, 2018:6), is discerned as distinct from becoming an entrepreneur (ibid.). However, both are entangled with artists’ identities. Being self‑employed is considered ‘something artists can maintain as separate from their artistic identity’, and being an entrepreneur, as noted previously, is thought to be ‘embodied in a set of behaviours’ which merge with identities at ‘the most intimate, subjective level’ (Kenning, 2018:6). Artists’ identities are at stake in these debates, given that, art schools also provision a ‘rich source of resources’ for ‘identity work’ (Taylor & Littleton, 2012:135), and that skilling is entangled with this and the anticipation of accepted art-schooled artist identities by different ‘art machine’ (Rodner & Thompson, 2013) stakeholders (curators, gallerists, the art world etc.).

Alternative fine art skills, and ways to teach them, have recently surfaced in pedagogical theory stemming from art schools/university art departments. Suggestions of more equitable pedagogies which encourage students to design/regulate personal curricula (Beech, 2014; Orr & Shreeve, 2018), or propose students and educators become closer equivalents (Baldacchino, 2015), appear to take identity work into account. Pedagogical imperatives centralise embodied knowledge and the development of ‘prosthetic pedagogies’ (Garoian, 2015) as ways of knowing and being in and through the body, and there is acknowledgement of the need to adopt new onto‑epistemological(Barad, 2007, cited in jagodzinski 2018:83) modes of enquiry, and pleas for the ‘reawakening of curiosity and wisdom’ (jagodzinski, 2018:90), felt to have been lost in professional pedagogies. This is considered key if artist-students are to ‘fabulate’ in ‘an incompossible New Earth’[[18]](#footnote-18) (ibid.), enabling art schools to orientate artist-students in the age of the post‑human, post-anthropogenic, post‑ontological Chthulucene (Haraway, 2015, cited in jagodzinski, 2018:83). Though a distinctly different approach to considering HMRC form filling, there is still some concession to these ideas. jagodzinski (2018:90) admits, whether new modes of enquiry are adopted or not, art educators (and I would add, artists) necessarily continue to ‘toil within global capitalism’s accounting system’. A notable consideration among others which surface when artists discuss their views on professional development, as outlined next.

**3****.2 Perceptions of Professional Development**

An extensive discourse exists on professional development in UK HAE, centring on both its delivery through embedded or distinct curricula (Rowles, 2016), and whether professional skillsets for artists exist (Ferguson, 2009), and can be agreed upon (Birnbaum, 2009; Bauer, 2009). Others question whether artists should be ‘professionally’ developed at all, seeing ‘art as a de-alienating endeavour that should not be subject to the division of labour and professional specialisation’ (Bishop, 2012:3). Such views may stem from desires to protect art’s specialness, that is considered to hold symbolic market value (Kenning, 2019:2), or to avoid the further collapse of art and artists into commodified products of neoliberalised capitalism attributed to professionalisation. It is possibly neither and both, but representative of a field in a state of ‘incomplete professionalization’ (Teather, 1990, cited in Paquette, 2012:11), encountering ‘contradictory pressures, some pushing toward professionalization, others preventing it’ (ibid.). Whether ‘complete’ professionalisation is attainable (or desirable) is disputable, however, other arguments suggest it is ‘essential to provide a codified professional development program as part of a wholesome curriculum’ (Louden, 2019). It is ‘codified’ to avoid instrumentalisation through ideas that, ‘“the market” is the dominant way for artists to make a living’, considered, ‘misleading at best and *completely* irresponsible at worst’ and ‘based on a flawed perception of what it takes to sustain a creative life’ (Louden, 2019, original emphasis)[[19]](#footnote-19). What is clear, across the debates, is an evident distrust of the market, and continuing anxiety over the slippage of art education into becoming an incubator for creative industry workers, whose focus is on the production of a commodified art object that professional development programs are feared to exacerbate.

Artists I have studied consistently align professional development with unattractive commodification and business practices they preferred not to identify with (Scarsbrook, 2021). This is echoed in other studies that indicate ‘artists do not see themselves as entrepreneurs and regard associated business practices as unbecoming’, that they, ‘demand recognition through the works of art, but regard sales generated as a result of entrepreneurial behaviour as not providing artistic reputation or high-valued standing among their peers’ (Wesner, 2018:36). Other accounts show artists deliberately distinguish ‘‘commercial’ from ‘personal’ work’ (Taylor & Littleton, 2012:26) as ways of maintaining reputations and protecting their artist identities. These concepts are significant when positioning experiences of professional development alongside the navigations of artistic identities that occur through art schooling. It also helps to understand why artists often do not recognise skills they take from art school as professional development, but instead offer them as resistance to acknowledging being explicitly professionally developed (Scarsbrook, 2021).

The pattern of business alignment is apparent when artists define professional skills they took from art school as making websites, contract writing, and writing a proposal or CV (ibid.). Professional development itself is heavily disparaged, and as noted earlier, it was seen as ‘vulgar, to talk about the business end’ that, ‘it was supposed to be…known, magically. But not actually taught’ (Artist P6, cited in Scarsbrook, 2021). This artist, who graduated in the 1990s also perceived differences between themselves and more recent graduates, claiming art schools ‘now…make much more of an effort to teach professional development…we weren’t as professionalised…it’s probably gone a little too far into the direction of professionalising art students’ (ibid.). They also described having minimal classes in professional development, recalling ‘only…one session, for a couple of hours’ (ibid.). Its nascence in 1990s art schooling perhaps explains this, however, this perception prevailed across artists from different graduate groups in the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s. A recent graduate disputed its existence entirely, not remembering ‘any real discussion about it’ (Artist P12:ibid.). Others said, ‘it was not explicit’ recalling ‘there may have been one lecture on the business of art in the third year’ (Artist P2:ibid.), and another stated ‘there was never talk about what happens next’ (Artist P4:ibid.). Vague recollections of CV support (Artist P1:ibid.) and receiving the advice, ‘as long as you’re always thinking about your art, you’re still an artist’ (ibid.) were remembered by others. Another noted a ‘bunch of workshops’ conducted in ‘some sort of half‑ironic way’ (Artist P7:ibid.) which was (ironically) considered unprofessional. They added they were not interested in how to ‘advertise for myself, or making PR for myself’ (ibid.), rejecting business-like practices. These comments made by artist-graduates from London art schools indicate professional development was either forgotten, went unnoticed or unattended if delivered through specific classes, or was deliberately disavowed and disparaged.

These assertions indicate selective self-regulation over professional identities, commensurate with other studies that show, ‘knowledge, attributes and beliefs’ at art school are ‘taken up or rejected or modified to suit previously held positions…in pursuit of the student’s individual version of a professional identity’ (Orr & Shreeve, 2018:81). To protect these identities from being perceived as something considered unbecomingly business-like, commodified, and vulgar, artists denied having been affected by professional development. Artists situate their preferred image of an artist based on imagined possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986), which appears to be one that eschews formal professionalisation. Studying under professional pedagogies and undertaking professional development, or being perceived to have, is entangled with artists’ professional identities, and a particular form of self‑identification.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has outlined key historical moments in the formation of professional pedagogies in UK HAE, defining the influential people, governments, and their policies that have shaped this. This is acknowledged as occurring most significantly since educational reforms in the 1960s, and with increasing force under neoliberal agendas during the past thirty years. Political ideologies and policies that have affected this are highlighted as aligning HAE with government aims, provisioning industry with trained individuals; whether plugging deficits in numbers of designers in the 1800s through the establishment of the first art schools, or meeting employability and enterprise agendas for the creative industries today.

The lineage of professionalisation in UK art schools is defined, demonstrating how they became institutionalised into universities, and how the arts as a profession, as well as professional identification, relates to professional(ised) artists today. In recognising the interconnected relationship between professions and institutions, I highlight that the arts and artists have historically been considered professions and professionals. Additionally, the understanding that professional identities are mutable is notable, and a definition for artists’ professional identities is distinguished around this. This encompasses not only social prestige and education, but a persons’ sense of professional self-concept, based in past, present, and future possible (and impossible) selves (Oyserman et al., 2017) that are negotiated through institutions as well as aspirations and expectations (Dubar, 2000, in Paquette, 2012:10).

Professional development is shown to be a cautiously navigated aspect of an artists’ creative education. It is often rejected, in part owing to its consistent connection with markets and business practices, but also as part of assertions of a professional identity which eschews having been professionally developed. These negotiations within creative education, as well as alignment with business, employability and enterprise are currently a mainstay in UK HAE, and appear set to continue under the prevailing (and increasingly) *Professional Curriculum* era.

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1. The term *art school* refers to the art departments, colleges, or academies, that are today commonly set within, or have become universities since they were merged under government schemes in the 1960s and later in the 1990s (Llewellyn, 2015). Historically, these art schools were independent of central government, and were local authority funded educational institutions that focussed on visual arts training (Beck & Cornford, 2012). Artists I have studied prioritise using the term art school over ‘university’ or ‘college’ to refer to the sites where they studied fine art. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The USA’s Black Mountain College (1933-1957) was an influential art school with an avant‑garde approach, which rejected ‘rote learning’ and embraced minimal structure, influenced by the Bauhaus (see Newall, 2019:91). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The GCE ‘O’ Levels, or General Certificate of Education ‘Ordinary level’ was the secondary school qualification for compulsory education in the UK, the GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) replaced this in 1988, and is still used today. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The Foundation Course is a one-year Diploma course required for entry onto most art and design undergraduate degrees in the UK. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Until that time art schools had remained relatively independent as local authority funded colleges, but with significant autonomy from central government’s HE policies (Beck & Cornford, 2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. This occurred among wider socio-political unrest in 1968, most notably in Paris, where protesters challenged the ‘conservative establishment’, opposed ‘the negative impact of industrialised work processes’, and demanded ‘more effective participatory democracy’ (Lyon, c.2008). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Tuition fees continue to be reviewed. In May 2019 the Augar Report recommended decreasing tuition fees to £7,500 per annum, reintroducing maintenance grants for disadvantaged students, and increasing repayment plans to 40 years (ibid.), meaning, in real terms, more interest would be paid. It received criticism for being most damaging for arts courses (see Wright, 2019), for not considering student housing costs (see Kingham 2019), and for not offering robustly supported/financed delivery of lifelong learning (see Callender, 2020). In 2022, The Lords Committee recommended it be reviewed, stating it ‘did not take a holistic approach to the funding of universities and made no attempt to assess the potential impact of its recommended changes on the funding of research in universities’ (UK Parliament, 2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Of artists I have studied, those identifying as working class doubted their financial capacity to attend art school now (Artists P3, P10, and P9 cited in Scarsbrook, 2021). They felt students are consumers/customers of education today (Artists P3 and P5 cited in Scarsbrook, 2021), contradicting government predictions upon introducing fees that stated, ‘we do not believe that students will in the future see themselves simply as customers of higher education but rather as members of a learning community’ (Dearing, 1997:64). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. NSS gathers ‘feedback from final-year undergraduate students about the quality of their course experience’. While ‘helping applicants to make informed choices of subject, program and institution’ and contributing ‘to public accountability for teaching’ (Bòtas & Brown, 2013:47), it is criticised for producing generic results attributable to its inability to account for institutional differences (ibid.:50). It has been boycotted by students for its role in tuition fee increases (UCU, 2020). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. REF assesses ‘the quality of research in UK higher education institutions’ (REF2021, 2020). However, in valorising only a ‘narrow model of research’ it is condemned as a ‘an instrument of neoliberal governmentality...designed to force institutions to compete for finite amounts of public money’ (O’Regan & Gray, 2018). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. TEF consists of three measures: ‘teaching quality, including student satisfaction; the institutional environment in which students learn; and student outcomes, including the performance of under‑represented groups’ (Gunn, 2018). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. I borrow the term ‘artist-student’ from Buckley and Conomos (2009:6), who use this when referring to ‘artist-teachers’ and ‘artist-students’ in highlighting that those in art schools, whether educators or students, are/see themselves as artists. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. The 2015 conference *What is the Point of Employability in Art and Design?* (CHEAD, 2015) was hosted by Chelsea College of Arts for art and design educators/curriculum developers to discuss how to embed enterprise and employability at the core of creative education (ibid.). In 2019, the *Culture Capital Exchange Creative Entrepreneurship Forum* was co‑organised by UAL colleges Camberwell, Chelsea, and Wimbledon Colleges of Arts (CCW), to discuss ‘the coming together of academic life, enterprise and entrepreneurship’ (TCCE, 2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. *New Institutionalism* is defined by ‘the symbolic role of formal structure (rather than on the informal organization)’ (Lammers & Garcia, 2017:199) in which the organisation is ‘constituted by the environment in which it was embedded’. It is distinct from *Old Institutionalism*, which ‘focuses more on specific organizations than on environments’ (ibid.:198). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. These guilds originated through the UK Arts & Crafts movement (c.1860s-1920s), led by artists John Ruskin and William Morris. In reaction to ‘the damaging effects of industrialisation’ and ‘the relatively low status of the decorative arts’, they reformed ‘the design and manufacture of everything from buildings to jewellery’ (VAM, 2020). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. In the UK, the First industrial Revolution (c.1760-1840), moved from agrarian and crafts‑based economies to coal and steam powered manufacturing and industry (White, 2009). The Second Industrial Revolution, (or Technological Revolution) (c.1860-1940), was epitomised by chemical synthesis of materials and mass-manufacture technologies enabled by the factory (Britannica, 2018). The Third Industrial Revolution (c.1960-2000) is categorised by IT and electronics, nuclear power, and robotics (Schwab, 2018). Today, the Fourth Industrial Revolution encompasses digital, the Internet and Smart technologies (ibid.). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. HMRC (Her Majesty’s Revenue & Customs) Self-Assessment is the UK system for collecting Income Tax and National Insurance from self-employed persons who are legally required to complete this annually to pay their tax contributions. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Incompossible refers to that which seems ‘paradoxical but mutually existent’ (jagodzinski, 2018:85). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Louden’s comments come in reaction to the inaugural *MFA Fair* (2019) in NYC, calling itself the ‘link between academia and industry’ its purpose is to ‘introduce [the] graduating class to the market’ (The MFA Fair, 2019) by selling stand space to art schools who in turn sell this to their students. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)