GRADCORE

SHIFT

SHIFT EVALUATION PROJECT REPORT

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Royal Conservatoire of Scotland

THE GLASGOW SCHOOL OF ART

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SHIFT Evaluation Project Report

Executive Summary

SHIFT is a leading entrepreneurial development programme for creative arts students and graduates in Scotland. It comprises a progressive week of interactive workshops, activities and break-out conversations and reflections facilitated by leaders in the performing and production arts, visual arts, screen, curation, design and creative project management from Scotland and beyond. SHIFT is a collaboration between Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, The Glasgow School of Art and Queen Margaret University. The programme is designed to support students and graduates emerging from creative education into their professional context, including setting up as micro enterprises, becoming sole traders, and being ready for successful freelancing in the creative industries.

The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (RCS) commissioned this research to help both evaluate the success and impact of the programme since it began in 2019 and test the appetite for further development across the Higher Education Network in Scotland. In addition, the project includes making recommendations for the future delivery model and positioning.

Key Findings and Recommendations

This report presents key findings from our research with key stakeholders from across the SHIFT programme, including reflections and case studies from our knowledge across the HE sector. It outlines the context and unique challenges for creative industries education, alongside key recommendations to achieve future ambition.

The report is structured around the following key areas: report contexts; Gradcore's STEP principles; programme design and delivery; impact and value; future ambition and scaling up; and learner materials.

The final section proposes **next steps** for prioritising recommendations and implementing a future-focused strategic approach.

Top 10 Insights

It is evident the SHIFT programme fills an important specialist entrepreneurial space in creative education, is highly valued by a broad range of key stakeholders and has a lasting impact on individual participants as they progress their creative career pathways and set up their businesses and freelance portfolios. Since 2019, almost 500 students and graduates have benefitted from the broad range of enterprise skills and experiences encapsulated within the innovative SHIFT programme.

#1 The impact of the programme on individuals and their enterprise skills, especially confidence and resilience, shows the potential impact on jobs and entrepreneurial activity within the Scottish economy. There is significant potential to upscale the programme but key stakeholders are keen to retain 'the essence of SHIFT' and protect the tripartite partnership.

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#2 SHIFT prepares participants for active engagement with the gig economy, prevalent within the creative industries, by preparing them for flexible self-employment opportunities, for example as a sole trader or micro enterprise.

#3 SHIFT enables participants to fast-track their enterprise ideas, accelerating potential impact on individuals, the Scottish economy and the wider creative industry ecosystem.

#4 SHIFT fills a gap in undergraduate/postgraduate studies which focus on developing creative practice but not on the practical application of career development skills or entrepreneurship for creative practitioners.

#5 The interdisciplinary nature of SHIFT is noteworthy since creative practitioners want something that speaks specifically to their discipline, but they also value opportunities to share ideas and practices with other creative sectors.

#6 SHIFT enables the development of enterprise skills and also wider employability (or transferable) skills, providing an opportunity to 'unwrap' the learning in a broader sense, for those choosing alternative career pathways.

#7 SHIFT delivery partners, including Snootie Designs and the Creative Entrepreneurs Club, are credible as successful creative practitioners, sharing their expertise and lived experience to support the endeavour of developing creative practitioners and provide a helping hand up the ladder.

#8 SHIFT delivery partners are well connected across the existing ecology of creative entrepreneur support in Scotland, affording the opportunity for collective advocacy for creative education and creative enterprise support.

#9 SHIFT can play a significant role in removing barriers and enabling equitable career pathways for creative students/graduates by supporting marginalised voices such as those experiencing social-economic disadvantage.

#10 Demand exists for continued support after completion of the SHIFT programme, including coaching, mentoring, networking, showcasing success, collaboration and connection with a wider creative community.

Top 10 Recommendations

This report presents a number of recommendations to move SHIFT into the next phase of development, maximising the impact on individuals, the Scottish creative ecosystem, and beyond. In section 8 of the report, Table 4 shows all of the recommendations, their potential impact, and the possible timeline.

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#1 Create a celebratory event to highlight the achievements of SHIFT alumni, further develop the creative community, and demonstrate the impact of the programme.

#2 Leverage this evaluation report to enable policy conversations, potentially collaborating with other HEIs to help influence Scottish government policy.

#3 Enhance resources and activities to support students to recognise the full range of enterprise and employability skills they have developed during the SHIFT programme.

#4 Work with Alumni and Development teams to capture case studies and vignettes to map alumni career journeys and leverage success and impact.

#5 Consider introducing the Creative Attributes Framework (CAF) developed at the University of Arts London to measure impact.

#6 Extend the reach and impact of SHIFT by expanding participants numbers to 150, enabled by collaboration with additional HEIs, whilst still maintaining the 'essence of SHIFT'.

#7 Agree and implement a suitable method for collecting EDI data on applicants and participants to ensure equality of access and participation.

#8 Consider new ways to increase reach and showcase impact, such as introducing an asynchronous, online enterprise programme by leveraging existing resources and assets.

#9 Replace the 'Notes and Resources' PDF with an e-portfolio to future-proof resources and embed the Creative Attributes Framework (CAF) developed by the University of Arts London to help students/graduates to evidence their skills development.

#10 Expand pre-programme communications by developing material to ensure undecided students/graduates are encouraged to sign up and guarantee their sustained engagement with the programme and minimise the dropout rate.

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1. Introduction

This section outlines the scope of this research and the methodology adopted, provides background information about Gradcore, and introduces the report contributors.

Report Scope

We were asked to evaluate SHIFT since it began in 2019 and to make recommendations for the future delivery model and positioning, with particular emphasis on the following:

- Evaluate the success of the SHIFT programme in terms of its design, structure and fit regarding the needs of emerging graduates from creative education (see section 4).
- Explore in more depth (than current evaluation and feedback processes have allowed) to investigate how SHIFT has affected its participants (see section 5).
- Test SHIFT's impact of approach - i.e. its effectiveness - and begin to assess its impact as part of the ecology of creative practitioner support in Scotland and its value for participants (see section 5).
- To co-design a study to track the next steps of a number of past participants - perhaps as case studies, or with focus groups etc. - to explore the medium-term and longer-term outcomes of participation (see section 5).
- To evaluate the potential for SHIFT to incorporate participation from a wider network of Scottish HEI's engaged in creative education (see section 6).
- To articulate SHIFT's positioning within, and the contribution to Scotland's Entrepreneurial Campus strategy (see section 6).

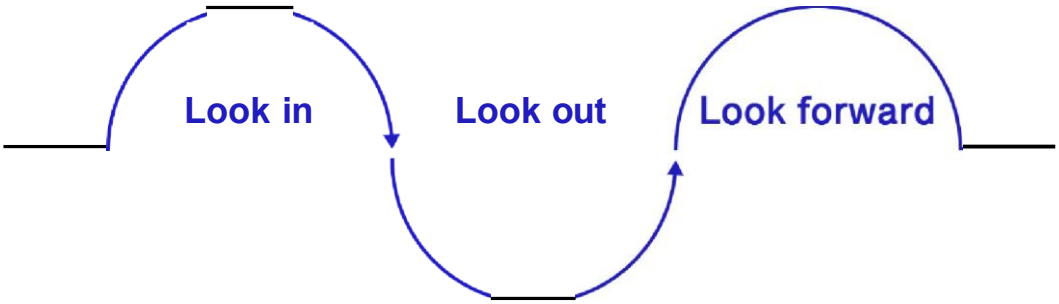
In addition, we offered to provide:

- Insight from Gradcore's **STEP model** (Scalable, Targeted, Embedded, Personalised) to help position SHIFT in sector terms (see section 3).
- A **review of participant-facing materials** {pre-programme comms, resource packs, reflection tools) to support future refinement (see section 4).
- A light-touch **post-evaluation briefing or workshop** for internal stakeholders (see section 8).

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Methodology

Our Approach



Look in - Review current practices and activities and establish a clear understanding of existing initiatives and baseline data.

Look out - Explore and incorporate external examples, case studies, and recognised good practice.

Look forward - Synthesise all findings into a practical set of recommendations, supported by an evidence-based report.

Gathering Insights

All our research and insight activities were conducted under clear ethical guidelines following RCS approval of the **Application for Ethical Approval of Research** in July 2025 We undertook a wide range of consultation and insight activities in August and October 2025, including:

- Extensive data and document review of key documents, data outputs and learning materials
- 22 in-depth interviews as shown in Table 1:

Stakeholder Group	Number	Pseudonym
Delivery partners	5*	DelPart
External partners	4	Ext
Alumni	13	Alum
Total	22	

* 1 each from RCS, GSA and QMU, and 2 founding partners

Table 1: Primary Data Respondents

There was a challenge with alumni engagement which is not unusual in this type of research, and is particularly common during the summer months when people are not always readily available. Additional targeted communication was therefore sent to former participants from the RCS and QMU to produce a representative sample. In addition, just one alumnus

attended the scheduled focus group, and this response was therefore included as an interview.

The interview approach was discursive and open-ended allowing for responses that illuminated both positive aspects and provided the opportunity for constructive criticism. Meetings with participants were conducted in confidence, and therefore nothing within this report is attributed to an individual. We utilised Microsoft Teams to facilitate online meetings, including informed participant consent where recordings were involved and transcripts produced (for accuracy purposes).

In addition, this report is influenced by insights from relevant professionals across the Gradcore network, including creative practitioners from a range of discipline areas, and HEIs such as the University of Arts London, Bath Spa University, Leeds Arts University, the Institute of Contemporary Music Performance, and Arts University Plymouth.

About Gradcore

Gradcore is an organisation focused on graduate employment and employability. We work on employability strategy with more than 70 higher education institutions (HEIs) across the UK and globally, help embed employability and work-integrated-learning in curriculum, run various coaching programmes, and manage several corporate and SME graduate schemes. Our aim is to help 'future-proof students' by providing real-world learning and recruitment experiences, integrated within an institutional approach to careers and development.

We are part of the Unseen group of companies which specialises in developing early years talent, working with educators and employers to enable successful student transitions and positive graduate outcomes.

Report Contributors

Whilst several members of the Gradcore team have been involved in generating insights, analysing the data, and making recommendations, the key contributors are:

Dr Louise Rutherford, Director of Consultancy at Gradcore, is a highly experienced HE consultant, former University Head of Employability and Social Mobility, and leads strategic employability reviews across the sector. Her work spans multiple settings, including creative industries, where she brings a student-centred approach to institutional strategy, curriculum design, and graduate transitions. Louise has developed a deep understanding of employability ecosystems and strong sensitivity to context with emphasis on meaningful, scalable impact. Her doctoral research investigates how universities and employers collaborate to improve graduate outcomes.

Dr Neil Radford is a higher education senior consultant. He has over 22 years' experience in the HE sector, with an extensive record of programme development, delivery and quality assurance at all levels from undergraduate to postgraduate research provision. As a senior university leader, he led doctoral training programmes and established a university Doctoral College. He is an experienced researcher with an excellent record of 15 successful completions as a doctoral supervisor.

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2. Report Contexts

This report is situated within a multi-faceted policy and practice context:

Global Context

This review has taken place at a time of enormous global flux: UK higher education institutions are operating within an increasingly complex global context that significantly affects graduate employability. Graduates now face a labour market that demands not only academic achievement but also employability and enterprise skills to build a sustainable career, either within an organisation and when self-employment.

Geopolitical instability, including conflicts and economic uncertainty, affects international student mobility and job opportunities. HEIs must adapt to fluctuating international enrolments and support students whose career prospects may be affected by visa restrictions or unstable job markets abroad.

Diversity and inclusion remain global imperatives. Institutions are under growing pressure to address structural inequalities that impact graduate outcomes for underrepresented groups. Ensuring equitable access to experiential learning opportunities, professional networks, and career development resources is critical to improving employability outcomes across all demographics.

Dynamic labour markets, shaped by rapid technological change and evolving sector demands, require HEIs to continuously update curricula and careers and employability services. Graduates must navigate frequent the challenges of self-employment, job changes, portfolio careers, and emerging industries where traditional qualifications may hold less weight.

Artificial Intelligence is both a disruptor and an enabler. While automation threatens some graduate entry roles (especially in the creative industries}, AI also creates opportunities in data analysis, software development, and ethical governance. HEIs must equip students with the skills to work alongside AI, adapt to technological change, and maintain a competitive edge in an evolving global economy.

No university strategy or employability strategy exists outside the influence of these matters, and there is a growing need to look at intersecting strategies around future employment and employability within this complex, dynamic context.

Higher Education Context

In the UK context, higher education institutions are facing a range of domestic challenges that shape graduate employability. Economic uncertainty, cost of living pressures, and regional disparities in employment opportunities are placing additional strain on graduate outcomes.

The UK government's emphasis on skills, productivity, and graduate outcomes has intensified the focus on employability as a core measure of higher education value. Within the Scottish landscape, commitments to access, retention, progression and outcomes, are driving institutions to demonstrate the positive impact of their programmes. This has led to increased investment in careers services, employer partnerships, and data-driven approaches to monitoring student progress.

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Finally, the rise of AI and digital innovation within the UK labour market demands that HEIs align teaching and skills development with future workforce needs, ensuring graduates are prepared for both the opportunities and challenges of a technology-driven economy.

Creative Industries Context

HEIs also face specific challenges in supporting students entering the creative industries, where the importance of becoming a creative entrepreneur is significant. These sectors, often characterised by freelance work, informal recruitment networks, and lower initial pay, can present barriers to sustained, high-skilled employment. Graduates may need additional support to access professional networks, secure paid experience, and navigate non-linear career paths.

Graduates entering the creative industries need to be adept at managing and navigating a portfolio career, being prepared for continuous skill development to keep up with a fast-paced and dynamic job market. Graduates must be proactive in self-promotion and networking to maintain a fulfilling career in this environment.

Measuring the employability success of a student entering the creative industries and setting up as a creative entrepreneur is more difficult to determine than in fields with clearly defined career paths and established graduate outcomes. Audience engagement, recognition, self-fulfillment, sustainability, legacy, and influence are some of the main key drivers for creatives. These are more nuanced motivators and are difficult to track but it is important that this is taken into consideration when determining and evaluating effective employability and enterprise strategies and initiatives.

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3. STEP Approach

To achieve the wider, more ambitious goals for the SHIFT programme, the following Gradcore **guiding principles** will be helpful in the delivery of a STEP change:

- Scalable
- Targeted
- Embedded
- Personalised

SCALABLE **Concept:** Impact and value of a programme is maximised by scaling provision. **SHIFT Evidence:** Current content and format is highly relevant and engaging, and there is a positive impact on individual participants and the wider enterprise ecosystem. The online format enables scaling up. **SHIFT Opportunity:** Increase participants to 150, engaging with additional external partners to scale provision and recruitment.
TARGETED **Concept:** Given finite resources, it is important to ensure enterprise provision for creative practitioners is well-targeted. **SHIFT Evidence:** Programme content and delivery are strongly tailored for creative practice students. Uptake from GSA is consistently high, whilst RCS and QMU quotas are sometimes underutilised. **SHIFT Opportunity:** Ensure all partner institution places are filled each year, and target other HEIs with creative education programmes to facilitate further development of the sector.
EMBEDDED **Concept:** Enterprise and employability skills are embedded throughout the programme, with a clear underpinning approach to teaching and learning, enabled by reflective practice. **SHIFT evidence:** A range of both enterprise and employability skills are embedded within the SHIFT programme (see Table 2). **SHIFT Opportunity:** Support participants to 'unwrap their learning', enabling them to articulate an extensive portfolio of skills in a range of career development settings.
PERSONALISED **Concept:** Delivering the right enterprise and employability provision, for the right participant, at the right time. **SHIFT evidence:** The diverse range of participants and contributors enables personalised responses to questions raised both during the programme in Q&A sessions, and before/during/afterwards via the Slack channel. This is enabled by a supportive, collaborative learning environment created by the delivery team and the tools deployed. **SHIFT Opportunity:** Continue personalised support by reviewing and enhancing alumni support following completion of the programme.

Where possible we have suggested recommendations underpinned by these **four guiding principles** that will support the future development of the SHIFT programme.

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4. Programme Design and Delivery

Interview questions posed to both SHIFT alumni and the stakeholder groups aimed to evaluate the SHIFT programme in terms of its design, structure and fit regarding the needs of emerging graduates from creative education. This section reports findings about design including content, structure/mode of delivery, and 'fit' for creative practitioners.

In addition, alumni respondents were asked to describe the SHIFT programme in one word; these words fall into two clusters (see Figure 1):



Figure 1: Describe SHIFT in One Word (Alumni)

- Cluster 1: Encouraging, Engaging, Focused, and Adaptable - these words reflect positive experiences of the SHIFT programme delivery.

- Cluster 2: Energising, Stairway, Igniting, Abrasive, Revitalising, Illuminating, and Empowerment – these words are all are future-facing relating to how the participant feels they can respond due to engaging in SHIFT.

These responses illuminate incredibly positive feelings towards SHIFT from all alumni respondents. Even 'abrasive' was used in an optimistic manner to suggest the programme stimulated personal reflection and movement in a positive direction.

> *There's an intensity. It's almost quite all-encompassing to a degree as well. Like it's very in-your-face and it's almost like demanding as well. …. like I think its abrasive, just because there's a sort of like you're tussling with it while you're trying to learn all these things…. Bit of friction, a lot is going on at once. It's very in-your-face, but it's once you finish that encounter, you come away with it with a lot of knowledge gained and learned. (Alum#5)*

Insights

This section provides insights and recommendations on: programme design and content; structure and mode of delivery; and 'fit' for creative practitioners. It also includes areas of good practice surfaced during the research process. Several participants stated that

contributions from key individuals enabled the successful development of SHIFT in these areas; these included Rachael Arnold, Medeia Cohan, and Sandy Thomson from the Creative Economy Commission (CEC), as well as Abbie Freeman and the team from Snootie Designs.

Design and Content

The origins of SHIFT lie in the recognition that some creative education programmes do not include the necessary enterprise and employability skills to enable graduates to transition into paid work – in whatever form they choose.

> *The content of the SHIFT programme was highly praised by all respondents. This was put very succinctly by one respondent; saying that the programme had 'too many good things' (Alum#4).*

A common theme was that **SHIFT fills a perceived gap in respondents' undergraduate or postgraduate studies which focus on developing creative practice but not on the practical application of career development skills or entrepreneurship for creative practitioners.**

> *Like how do you keep a creative enterprise alive? Basically, is what I was more interested in and the masters (course) I studied was applied .....But I didn't realise it didn't have any of the big business insight aspect because I've never had a chance to study that specifically and I was also at the time helping a friend of mine run their own game studio stuff, get that set up and as we're going through business options, I realised that SHIFT was an option and I realised well that's a good opportunity….(Alum#5)*

> *I think the value for this programme is time and space to focus on some fundamentals. But in a way that's complementary, aligned with your values as an artist and doesn't seem like a separate bit of you that has to go off and sell and charge people. It becomes a holistic part of you and your development. (DelPart#4)*

Gradcore researchers attended 4 sessions during the 2025 SHIFT programme, a combination of main sessions and electives. The **dynamism, enthusiasm and commitment** displayed during these sessions was exemplary. The credibility as successful creative practitioners of the presenters employed by SHIFT is a powerful tool and participants valued the expertise and lived experience (including honest discussion of the difficulties associated with careers and entrepreneurialism in creative practice). Observed sessions provided a genuine sense of wanting to support the endeavour of developing creative practitioners and provide a helping hand up the ladder (that the presenters have already climbed).

> *I wasn't expecting that it [SHIFT] will be this outgoing and it was so wonderful to discuss the questions with like-minded people and also listen to the live journeys of different creative professionals who work in different fields. (Alum#10)*

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... it [SHIFT] was aimed specifically for creative practises because, you know, there are probably loads of kind of like business courses that are just business courses or can be like applicable to anything. But it [SHIFT] was really nice that all the speakers and all the tutors that were there really took into account, you know, the practise that people are involved, which is like creative and really like personal engaging…. (Alum#6)

I always think that the ways that programmes can be enhanced is by people coming in who have done the programme and made the successful jump to entrepreneurial ventures……this is what looks like when somebody's been going for a couple of years and they can talk about the challenges and the opportunities that they've had as a result of going through that, because I think that brings it really alive. (Ext#4)

Engagement by participants varied across the groups we observed, with some fully engaged in chat and asking questions, whilst many more were attentively listening but not openly engaging further. However, a range of approaches and tools are included in the design and delivery of the programme to offer participants different ways and times to engage. For instance, chat on the Slack channel was extensive and inclusive, and the use of breakout rooms to facilitate discussion during longer sessions was valued by participants, affording them opportunities to share ideas with a range of practitioners.

I really liked all the breakout sessions where they kind of gave us a task or a thing to talk about and stuck us with a bunch of other people. Those were the most helpful bits for me was like I said, seeing the way the other creative people approached these same issues. (Alum#11)

However, some respondents felty that breakout sessions could have been longer to allow for greater discursive opportunity.

I think the only thing that I might change is perhaps how the breakout rooms go about. I suppose I feel like some of them were quite good, but because of how short they were … It felt like there wasn't always a time to fully develop an idea related to the task or idea. (Alum#5)

[...] breakout rooms where we could go in one-on-one to people. And I'd say one thing was a couple of the people that I wanted to talk to, I maybe didn't get a chance to talk to. (Alum#9)

We noted there was good participant engagement on the Slack channel – it is highly interactive, messages are sent and received in real time, and the 'public' responses are visible to all channel members. However, there is a question around whether this is the most effective way for people to access information, potentially (many) years after the programme. For example, after completing SHIFT in 2019, participant Alum2 moved to study at the Royal Northern College of Music and wanted to connect with SHIFT fellow participants in 2025 regarding potential collaboration – they were not sure how to do this and had not tried to access the slack channel or the website for this information.

Structure and Mode of Delivery

SHIFT operates as an intensive 5-day programme (Monday to Friday), delivered fully online in early September. Alumni comments were evenly split between a) liking the 5-day intensive delivery and b) suggesting more time for reflection built into the programme. Alternative delivery suggestions included a two-week programme and a one day per week programme.

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I feel like practically 5 days is really a good thing because it's sometimes easier to just block out one week and commit to it. It was quite intense, I remember that, but it was enjoyable for me, but I would like more time for kind of like networking, which mainly maybe can be like, you know, an additional. (Alum#6)

A suggestion would be to spread the course over 2 weeks to allow for greater opportunity to reflect and process between sessions. Perhaps allowing more of it to sink in and become even more useful. Also allowing for more network/community time between sessions. (Alum#4)

To think about perhaps building in more time to allow people (with specific needs) to process (information), for all sorts of reasons that people would like more time to process things, to reflect, and then come back with questions. (paraphrased from Alum#12)

Whilst observed sessions did include sign language interpreters, the latter comment (Alum#12) does suggest that the intensity of the programme could be reviewed to consider wider needs. Similarly, intense online delivery of the programme could present issues for neuro-divergent participants, as highlighted by one respondent with ADHD.

… even for people like me with ADHD or other neuro-divergences, staying on one screen the full day, it's awful. (Alum#7)

Currently, no Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) data is gathered about participants. This makes it difficult to identify barriers and potential solutions for specific (groups of) students/graduates, such as those with additional needs, and potential participants that are unable to engage with the intense 5-day programme or withdrew from programme due to work commitments.

Many respondents saw the convenience and logistical arguments for wholly online delivery, and some favoured that mode, but overall, the potential inclusion of some in-person portion of the programme, network event or celebration opportunity was welcomed. Many felt that networking opportunities could be more effective in-person.

The online (mode of delivery) was quite effective because then I had my own space to do my own notes and just focus on and then I could turn off my camera …or put my camera on... it made it a lot more convenient for just taking notes and studying because I had a space to myself to then think about things. If I was in a space with other people, I feel like I would get very easily distracted (Alum#5)

I think it's very convenient to do it online, but maybe I will try to make three days online and two days in person. The people have the chance to meet each other and network in person as well. (Alum#7)

I think I get the practical logistical reasons for that (online SHIFT delivery), and I think that's probably something that shouldn't change. I would love to do it in person. I would have loved to have done it in person, (Alum#11)

'Fit' for Creative Practitioners

Engagement with the creative practitioner community was a particular strength of SHIFT. The importance of having a mix of disciplines and creative practices represented both among contributors and participants was highlighted by many respondents. They also highly valued that SHIFT is specifically for creative practitioners, with many stating they did not know of any other programme designed for developing entrepreneurship in the creative industries.

This represents a valuable USP (unique selling point) for SHIFT. Creative practitioners want something that speaks specifically to their discipline, but they also see great value in opportunities to share and compare ideas and practices with other creative sectors. The interdisciplinary nature of SHIFT is a noteworthy aspect, raised by many participants, since sparks new attitudes, ideas, and ways of working.

So, it was really nice in SHIFT that there were loads of people from different disciplines because this is what I enjoy about my own practice, you know to, just to collaborate in different settings and bring music in. (Alum#6)

'co-interdisciplinary aspects' of great value, seeing entrepreneurship/employability from the perspectives of different creative areas – [I] wanted even more opportunities for this and comparing practice across creative disciplines. (Alum#4)

I think it was useful [referring to having different disciplines attending SHIFT] to see the kind of range of different projects that people were working on and also where there were commonalities and differences between how people did things and where those disciplines could connect as well …(Alum#9)

I don't know if this makes sense in terms of pipeline but understanding how the business side intersects with all parts of a creative industry because they [SHIFT] talk about a lot of creative industries and kind of going through all those examples, seeing all those trials and tribulations ……. seeing it kind of made it easier for me to understand how business intersects with certain creative industries and what you should account for…..(Alum#5)

I think with a lot of events like this, you end up stuck with a bunch of (other) actors and a lot of the ideas end up being the same. And so having a bunch of different disciplines, but all in the creative sector just shifted the mindset…..Yeah, it was the range of ideas and the different approaches that I actually liked having conversations with. Musicians and textile artists I was able to go, oh, I can see how I could apply that actually to what I'm doing, the breadth of other participants and the way that sessions were structured to be open to everyone, I think really encouraged that kind of creativity. (Alum#11)

It was evident the programme had been designed with creative practice and setting up as a creative entrepreneur at the heart. It therefore aligns strongly with the needs of students and graduates entering their area of professional practice and exploring career pathways. It demonstrates what is possible by showcasing different discipline areas, business models, and enterprise structures. The timing of the programme, running in early September is also intentional – designed to capture both recent graduates and final year students:

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Everything about it is intentional, from the minute we're on camera to the minute we're off camera, it's intentional. (DelPart#5)

After the summer is actually a good sweet spot in terms of catching people who have maybe just graduated, have had the summer and then a moment to go, right, where am I? And also, those who are maybe going into their final year and thinking ahead and it's before the noise of their study starts. (DelPart#4)

Whilst SHIFT clearly meets the needs of creative practitioners in general, for some respondents there was a feeling that SHIFT could be more inclusive of a range of career ambitions. Examination of the programme content reveals development of enterprise skills and also wider employability (or transferable) skills (see Table 2). There is an opportunity to 'unwrap' the learning in a broader sense, for those choosing alternative career pathways.

SHIFT Enterprise Skills: for students/graduates starting own business or work freelance	SHIFT Employability Skills: for students/graduates seeking employment with an organisation
Opportunity recognition and creativity	Communication and teamwork
Self-management and resilience	Problem solving and critical thinking
Financial literacy and commercial awareness	Digital literacy and data skills
Networking and relationship building	Professionalism and reliability
Strategic thinking and adaptability	Adaptability and continuous learning

Table 2: SHIFT Enterprise and Employability Skills

Underlying assumption perceived that SHIFT is aimed at participants that wish to 'fully make a living' from their creative endeavour, however, I feel that there could be a greater focus on transferable skills, making the programme more supportive of / additionally aimed at those that see their creative practice as part of a portfolio or want to use their creative practice skills but in more secure/traditional work environments. Advice in SHIFT on how to do that could be an additional attraction for the course. (Alum#4)

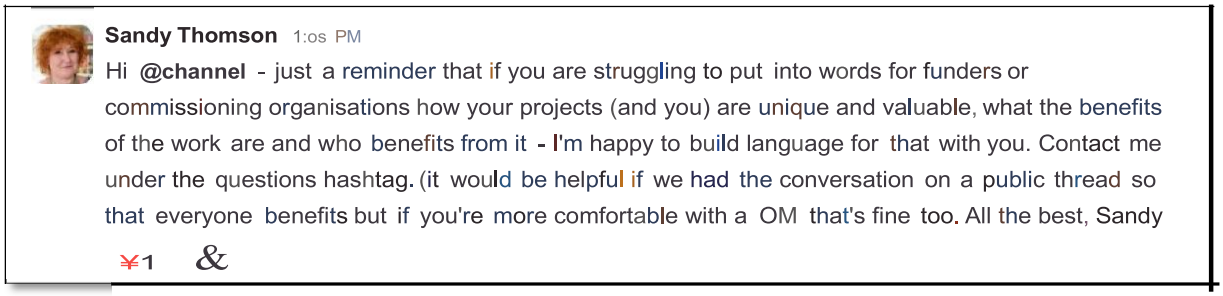
A final insight relating to the design and delivery of the programme, was the distribution of responsibilities is by agreement amongst the partners, with each contributing budget accordingly. In addition, they each provide awareness raising and recruitment activities within their own institutions.

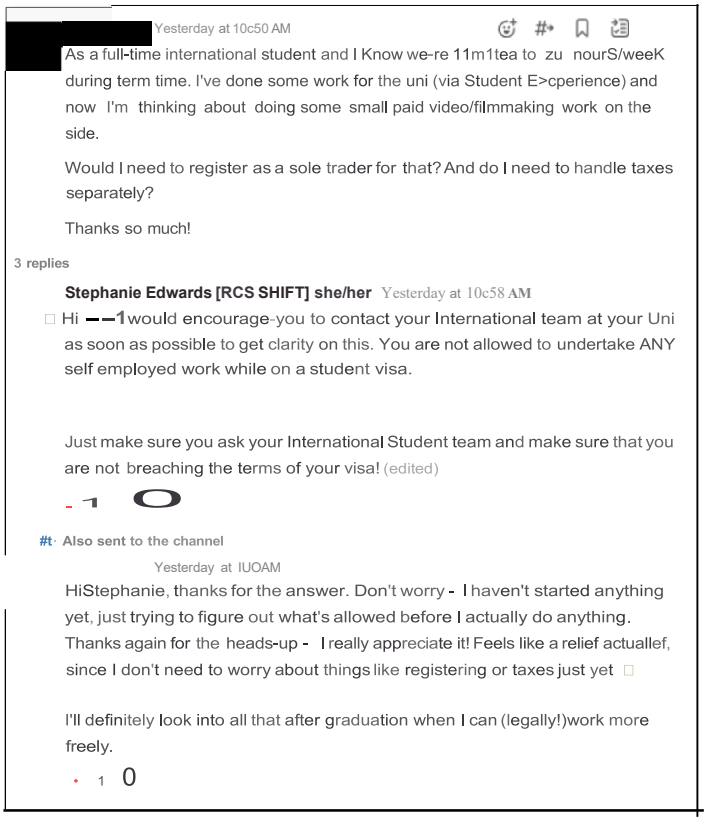
Examples of Good Practice

Our research revealed many excellent examples of good practice – programme content, delivery and relevance for creative practitioners all revealed excellent teaching and learning activity. We provide just a couple of examples here.

There was **much evidence of contributors providing a tailored approach for participants, giving personalised support but with the aim of benefitting all.** A wide variety of questions were raised and it was great to have an extensive range of contributors to address such

queries. There was also helpful signposting to relevant services and resources. For example, taken from the Slack channel:





We see there is the opportunity for participants to receive a qualification for successfully completing SHIFT, if they attend Masterclasses and submit a portfolio. The RCS **Award in Creative Entrepreneurship** (formerly known as SHIFT Plus) is open to all participants, free of charge. Sessions are also available with the RCS Creative Enterprise Development Office (CEDO) Advisor, and Masterclasses on preparation of the award portfolio are also available. This award helps students and graduates to evidence their learning, put their ideas into practice with additional support, and evidence their enterprise skills to a wider audience.

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Recommendations

1. **Review programme content and delivery to ensure all learner styles and needs are catered for, with alternative options for participants with specific needs.** We do note, however, this is dependent upon participants self-reporting or declaring specific characteristics or conditions, and that they do not always elect to do so.

2. **Create a celebratory event to highlight the achievements of SHIFT alumni, further develop the creative community, and demonstrate the impact of the programme.** In order for this to have maximum impact, we suggest a hybrid event could be considered. We noted the desire for in-person interaction from alumni, but also recognise alumni are distributed globally and this may limit physical attendance.

   This could bring together all alumni, not just the current cohort. This has potential to allow more effective longer-term networking, promote the benefits to confidence and resilience, and also showcase successes. If timed to coincide with the student decision making cycle, such an event could form a valuable part of the SHIFT recruitment process. Wider engagement could bring multiple benefits: alumni could further enhance networking and collaboration opportunities; academics could understand the impact of SHIFT and promote it more actively to their students; potential applicants could see the value and apply for a place; members of the wider creative community could fully appreciate the value and impact of SHIFT. Sponsorship for this event could be explored.

3. **Agree and implement a suitable method for collecting EDI data on applicants and participants to ensure equality of access and participation in the SHIFT programme. Greater inclusion** will help to accommodate participants with additional needs, conflicting commitments (work/caring responsibilities), and different career aspirations for their creative practice. We advise reviewing data already collected by the partner institutions for current practice and areas of importance. Reference can also be made to the Student Characteristics adopted by the Office for Students (see Appendix 1) - this is the regulatory body for England but provides a useful classification, including protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.

4. **Support students to recognise the full range of enterprise and employability skills they have developed during the SHIFT programme.** This will enable those seeking alternative career pathways to articulate their skills in alternative settings, such as employer interviews or assessment centres. For example, Gradcore has designed a programme which supports academic staff to embed employability and enterprise in the curriculum1. This approach could be adopted with the SHIFT content, applying the same principles to ensure the learning and skills development is explicit to participants.

5. **Develop the RCS Award in Creative Entrepreneurship to enable SHIFT alumni to demonstrate their enterprise and employability skills and expertise to potential clients,** funding bodies, investors, or employers. This RCS award is a stand-alone, generic offer which can be added onto other enterprise programmes and modules. This flexibility allows wider adoption, and we recommend underpinning the award with the UAL CAF to help participants fully articulate a full range of enterprise and employability skills.

[1] The Gradcore Equip Academic Development Programme - further details available upon request

5. Impact and Value

In order to evaluate the impact and value of the programme, it is important to **consider how SHIFT is promoted and the associated recruitment process.** This offers the first set of insights in this section.

Attention then turns to the **impact and value for individuals;** interview questions aimed to *illuminate* perceptions of benefits, impacts and how the SHIFT programme was valued by its participants. Delivery partners and external stakeholders were also asked to comment on these aspects of SHIFT. This section presents findings around connections and networking, and confidence, resilience and changing mindsets.

Finally, insights on the **wider impact** of SHIFT, in reference to the ecology of practitioner support, is considered.

It is important to note, our insights and recommendations in this report build upon the existing data on participant skills collated before and after attendance on the programme. This data, collected annually since 2019, provided valuable evidence for the team to inform the design, delivery, structure, and content of the programme. Amendments have been made year-on-year to reflect participant responses, especially to maximise student/graduate engagement and the impact on developing entrepreneurial skills.

Insights

Promotion and Recruitment

We got the impression that GSA appear to easily satisfy their quota each year, whilst RCS and QMU traditionally underfill places. The allocation begins with 30 places for each of the partners each year. It will be useful to bear this in mind for future promotion and recruitment activity, to maximise the impact of the programme.

We were **unable to make any comment of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in relation to SHIFT since no data is currently collected on applicants or participants.** This has been previously considered by the SHIFT team and recognised as desirable but no agreement has been reached on the most appropriate way to implement this. Since HEis are committed to delivering fair access and positive outcomes for all groups of students, highlighted by, for example, Outcome Agreements with the Scottish Funding Council, this is an important aspect for future consideration (see recommendation #3)

Interestingly, one respondent was keen to point out **the importance of SHIFT in supporting creative practitioners who represent marginalised voices.** They were reassured that SHIFT allowed for all voices, specifically in this instance those experiencing social-economic disadvantage. Recent research on visual artists shows arts careers remain classed and unequal, with most artists coming from higher income or fee-paying school backgrounds[2]. **SHIFT can play a significant role in removing barriers and enabling equitable career pathways for creative students and graduates.**

[2] Who gets to be an artist? (2025)

There is less working class artists every year as well, which is important as well because working class artist will send messages to the world and these are these are disappearing fast. Working class people don't have the time or the access to make art or to go to the art school. Yeah, just for me. It [SHIFT] was like reassuring. (Alum#7)

Each partner utilised existing structures in their institutions responsible for **promoting the SHIFT programme to potential participants**; GSA through the Student Careers, Employability and Opportunity Manager, RCS through Creative Enterprise Development Programmes (CEDO), and QMU through Knowledge Exchange. There are also a range of methods used to reach potential participants, such as through academic teams, and a variety of marketing tools e.g. emails, newsletters, campus plasma screens with a QR code. Other enterprise initiatives were used to identify potential participants, including the Santander X UK Awards – University category for new businesses looking to launch, and the Converge Challenge.

About 60% of alumni respondents reported hearing about SHIFT via newsletters, emails (e.g. from their Careers Service), and posters/internal marketing. 40% had SHIFT promoted to them via word-of-mouth by previous alumni or course tutors. Participants from GSA were more likely to hear through this word of mouth/tutor method than participants from RCS who were more likely to report that they had heard about SHIFT through emails. That said, RCS recruitment seems to have benefitted for the 2025 cohort through in-class presentations from CEDO.

Direct recommendations from SHIFT alumni, programme tutors, and career services and access to alumni success stories seem to offer greater influence on potential participants. Ther is also an appetite amongst delivery partners to capture alumni journeys. This aligns with Gradcore's experience across other HE extra-curricular employability and enterprise programmes.

I looked at the material online and sort of the kind of testimonials from previous people, and I went along to a couple of the, I think, ……zoom consultancies just to talk a little bit about career options and things like that. And the people there recommended I have a look at the SHIFT stuff and it sounded like it provides some quite useful skills, so that's what caused me to join it basically. (Alum#9)

SHIFT has now delivered its seventh cohort (since 2019), and some respondents felt that there was **greater scope to leverage case studies and vignettes from alumni of the programme, as resources to be used in the programme and as promotional material for recruitment**.

Well, one of the things that I feel is missing is five years' worth [referring to the longevity of SHIFT] of capture and resource because I was quite surprised because I was looking for case studies…… and I was thinking it'd be great if we had a case study on this that actually was talking from a participant's point of view in terms of the value of aspects of the programme……But I was quite surprised that the website hadn't evolved to be able to

showcase that in some way. I also I'm curious about participants longitudinal outcome, you know, was SHIFT supportive of them actually launching a creative business? (DelPart#2)

There was also a suggestion to **invite high profile creative practitioners to contribute to SHIFT and this could be used in promotional materials to attract more applicants.** For instance, public figures awarded an Honorary degree may be approached to 'endorse' or contribute to programme content.

I know that they have sort of legends slots and things, and I was thinking, after the graduations this year, I saw that there's honorary degrees given […] and like Ashley Jensen was one of them. And I thought, oh well, that would maybe be a good connection [for SHIFT]. (DelPart#3)

There was a suggestion to **improve promotion through organisations with a geographic focus** – this would raise the profile with relevant contacts possibly currently unaware of the programme and the opportunities it provides, especially for recent graduates.

Creative sector support organisations. Some of them are quite focused on the geographical location, like Creative Edinburgh, Creative Dundee, organisations like that. Pretty certain a lot of those wouldn't be aware of SHIFT. (Ext#3)

Connections and Networking

A unique selling point of SHIFT is that it focuses on the career needs of the creative sector but is inclusive of a wide range of creative practitioner disciplines. Participants recognise the benefit of this for making connections and leading to collaborations. However, the sustainability of the sense of community developed during the programme is questionable and provides an area for future development.

And also, I've met, you know, like I've made a connection through SHIFT. That has made me really happy…. we collaborated together later in the year. (Alum#6)

Yes, it's just it [SHIFT] gave some confidence to build a network and don't be afraid to make mistakes, and you know some people might not be interested in cooperation, some of them might be interested in cooperation. Just takes time and a little bit of effort …. (Alum#10)

But when it comes to sort of talking to people about my work or kind of sharing my work, I quite often find that a wee bit challenging at times, so I found that the experience doing SHIFT was good actually probably to kind of give me some practice about talking about my work with other people. […..] I've been more, I think, proactive in trying to find networking events since SHIFT and kind of using my network. (Alum#9)

Some respondents did not seem to have followed up on networking opportunities post-SHIFT and some felt that the networking aspects could have been enhanced through inclusion of in-person activities. The SHIFT delivery team has considered this but there are financial and logistical constraints. Slack is excellent for informal chat and rapid replies, but lacks sustainability. Several respondents mentioned they did not know, for example, they could access alumni through the website, after the SHIFT workspace had been archived.

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I think in the networking sense, I think that's one of those things where if had we met in person, I think that would have been much more strongly. (Alum#11)

One really good networking event every year might be just a really nice thing to do, but I know it's not in our plan, we've been so busy with other things we've maybe just parked it a bit. But actually, I think there's probably a lot of good mileage to have from one or two big networking events for any SHIFT alumni from any year. (DelPart#4)

Changing Mindsets

An important aspect of SHIFT is that it enabled creative practitioners to see their work from a business perspective, providing the tools, knowledge and mindset to take their creative practice forward as a career. This is a primary goal of SHIFT and responses provided evidence that it is successful in this aspect. Furthermore, by demonstrating the possibilities of building a sustainable career and lifestyle based on their own creative practice, programme contributors provide participants with motivation, belief and inspiration. This was mentioned by both SHIFT alumni and by delivery partners.

Because I never really considered to view creative practice or music as a business project before, it [SHIFT] did kind of open a door of possibility to me that actually it's not bad to consider it as a business project, actually. And on top of that… the project that me and my friend came in to SHIFT for, it's still going and we're taking it pretty much as a business project……. (Alum#6)

I would hope that by the end of it, that they're leaving feeling inspired rather than feeling overwhelmed….I think that the programme itself is intense and I understand it could be overwhelming, but I would hope that by the end of it, the main thing that they're feeling is, oh, there's a lot of work to do, maybe, but I'm inspired to do it, and I guess that they know more where they can go for continued support. Delivery Partner Participant (DelPart#3)

Building Resilience and Confidence

A common theme in alumni responses concerned improved resilience and confidence in relation to following their creative practice goals, and overcoming setbacks.

There was lots of stuff that was covered about resilience and especially during periods of time where you're maybe not working as much. How to make use of that time effectively that's stuff [from SHIFT] that I've been thinking on quite a lot recently as I've been searching for work….I've been developing, kind of building, the sort of mental kind of fortitudes that's needed to be effective in the job market and stuff [that] has been a big thing. (Alum#9)

….. all the tasks and exercises that we're doing, you know, like with finding our audience, finding our ideas kind of like marketing …… aiming our project towards a certain goal and all this kind of stuff. Kind of helped me just to get my head around what I might like to do, and I just remember that it gave me some feeling of grounding and also just you know that if I were to

take a project or develop a project, I would know how to do it. So, it wasn't as scary anymore (Alum#6)

One respondent estimated that engagement with SHIFT had allowed them to progress their career goals much faster than they would otherwise have been able to achieve.

And so, I think like confidence and awareness of how some of these things work, it [SHIFT] has definitely made it easier to continue the path that I was sort of heading in…..Not just more confidence, but like I think I'm achieving things much quicker than I would have. I don't think I'd be in this position now. I think I'd be a year or two behind still where I'm at, yeah. (Alum#11)

We made an autobiographical verbatim show in the style of a series of shows in the 90s,……. I got Creative Scotland funding for it and they funded and paid for the whole thing. I was very, very excited and pleased to be able to do that and part of SHIFT was just gaining a bit more confidence about the ability to do that in terms of talking about how you apply for funding. (Alum#11)

Participants were also able to identify how SHIFT helped them to develop broader employability and enterprise skills, to help them progress in employment as well as developing their own enterprise.

The rules that you learn are hugely beneficial and it shows to employers that you're doing something above and beyond just going to university, which I think is good. (Ext#4)

Ecology of Practitioner Support

Part of this project brief included testing SHIFT's impact of approach - i.e. its effectiveness - and begin to assess its impact as part of the ecology of creative practitioner support in Scotland and its value for participants. Positive impact begins with the number of participants that have successfully engaged with the programme (Table 3). Almost 500 students and graduates have benefitted from the broad range of enterprise skills and experiences encapsulated within the innovative SHIFT programme. We know that many SHIFT participants have gone on to engage with a wider community of creative practitioners across Scotland (and beyond) and spread the influence of their own entrepreneurial activity – this is strongly evidenced in the alumni interviews. We note engagement and participation have fluctuated over the years, and several of the recommendations in this report signpost ways to increase and stabilise these levels.

Year	Total Participants	RCS	GSA	QMU	Other HEI
2019	64	20	22	22	0
2020	92	18	38	27	9
2021	83	23	34	26	0
2022	65	18	29	18	0

2023	64	17	35	10	3
2024	77	13	42	6	16
2025	54	19	15	12	8
TOTAL	499	128	215	121	36

Table 3: SHIFT Participants By Year 2019-2025

Whilst it is difficult to state the full impact of SHIFT on the Scottish ecology of creative practitioner support, it is clear that the programme fills an important gap in creative education, is highly valued by a broad range of key stakeholders, and it **has a lasting impact on individual participants.** Establishing broader impact requires **alumni career journey mapping** (see recommendation #8).

However, what we can say is **SHIFT delivery partners are well connected across the existing ecology of creative practitioner support in Scotland.** This affords the opportunity to provide **collective advocacy for creative education and for creative enterprise support.** The impact of the programme on individuals and their enterprise skills, especially confidence and resilience, shows the potential impact on jobs and entrepreneurial activity within the Scottish economy. In addition, alumni interviews showed SHIFT prepares participants for active engagement with the gig economy, prevalent within the creative industries, by preparing them for flexible employment opportunities, for example as a sole trader.

Beyond strategic connections with the Scottish Government and Creative Scotland, a range of programmes and initiatives were highlighted, including:

- Creative Entrepreneurs Club - connecting, upskilling and empowering creative freelancers and businesses with around 4,000 members
- Converge Challenge -for novel business propositions with solid IP foundations, high commercial potential and scalability. Open to postgraduate and undergraduate students from all Scottish universities. Collaboration with the RCS led to the creation of the Performing and Production Arts Challenge

This affords several SHIFT opportunities, such as:

- Promotion to a wide pool of potential applicants
- Relevant collective of successful contemporary creative practitioners to contribute to the programme
- Access to relevant professional networks for alumni
- Access to resources, funding, and opportunities for creative practice students/graduates
- Potential marketplace for entrepreneurial activity for alumni

These opportunities could be built upon further in the event of future upscaling of SHIFT.

[3] This limited offer was funded through Scottish Ecosystem Funding which highlighted the demand for specialist advice services.

Furthermore, several alumni participants mentioned they had developed their enterprise ideas since attending SHIFT, but that often took several years after completing their studies. This highlighted the need for ongoing alumni support as they progress their enterprise activities and creative careers. This could be achieved in a variety of ways such as online resources, tailored events, or mentoring. This could contribute further to maximising the impact on the national ecology of practitioner support.

Can we ground it with mentoring? Can we ground it with a next steps mentor, you know business support. (DelPart#2)

Recommendations

6. Ensure applications open in **sufficient time to capture students' attention** and maximise reach i.e. ideally before they finish taught sessions end February/beginning March.

7. Utilise **wider range of promotion methods.** Emails and internal marketing work well, but these should be augmented by working with programme tutors to ensure they actively promote SHIFT to their students, in-session presentations to course groups and greater presence of SHIFT alumni case studies/vignettes through websites.

8. **Work with Alumni and Development teams to capture case studies and vignettes to leverage success from the SHIFT programme.** This could also contribute towards **mapping alumni career journeys** to demonstrate the longer-term impact of SHIFT. Resources produced from these cases can be used to engage SHIFT alumni in future SHIFT programmes, e.g. create videos, become involved in teaching sessions (in person or virtual) and facilitate Q&A sessions /panel sessions.

9. **Further enhance the marketing and promotional material by partnering with high profile creatives,** such as those awarded honorary degrees by RCS, GSA and QMU.

10. **Supply institutions with a digital marketing pack to promote SHIFT, maximising reach across Scotland.** For example, the Converge Challenge is promoted by distributing a link to HEIs with brand guidelines, campaign posters, promotional images, and 'Guide to Applicants' document.

11. **Review support for SHIFT alumni to establish how their needs can be addressed after completing SHIFT, as their ideas and careers develop.** This could be enabled by exploring alternative ways of maintaining relationships. The ongoing support for alumni could take various forms, including online resources accessed asynchronously, tailored events (online, in-person, or hybrid), regular communication such as via a newsletter, or mentoring support when they have progressed to a certain stage and require more personalised support. Partners should consider how potential further support would align their other existing provision and that of external providers.

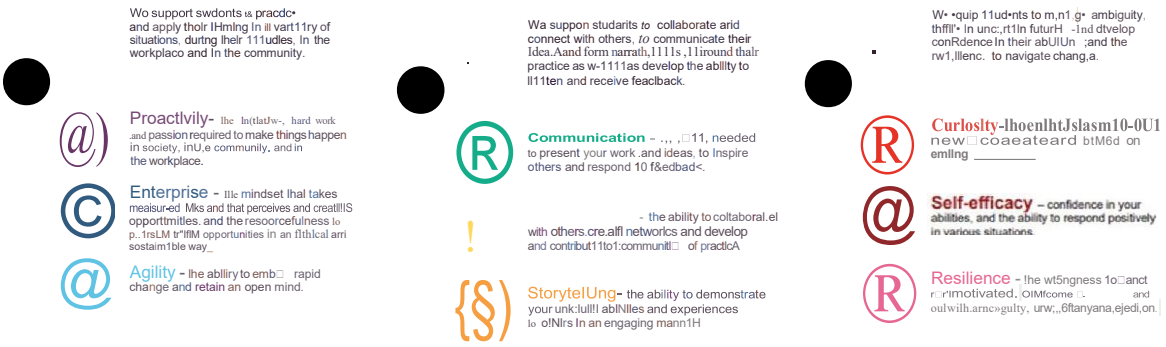
12. **Consider introducing the Creative Attributes Framework (CAF) developed at the University of Arts London to measure impact.** The CAF could streamline the process, and maximise staff and student commitment. By applying the CAF to SHIFT, it would bring a consistent way to measure skills development before the programme and

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afterwards - demonstrating the distance travelling by participants. This can be implemented year-on-year to show the impact.

Furthermore, the CAF empowers students to develop skills relevant for their entire professional career - whether starting their own enterprise, working as a sole trader, or in a graduate job. Case studies and alumni development activity can be based upon the CAF to bring consistency, maximise engagement, and further demonstrate the impact on the Scottish creative sector.

Case Study 2: Graduate attributes for the creative industries - the Creative Attributes Framework from the University of Arts London



More CAF resources for Programme teams, students and graduates available here:

6. Future Ambition and Scaling Up

Insights

This section considers the implications of upscaling SHIFT on: programme design and delivery; impact and value; and the wider national contribution.

Programme Design and Delivery

Whilst both delivery partners and external partners recognised the value in expanding the reach of SHIFT, there was a commitment to maintaining the 'raison d'être' of the programme. There were concerns that expansion could result in losing the unique strength delivered in terms of participant opportunities to engage with successful creative practitioners in a meaningful way. Participants currently feel comfortable asking questions and interacting with others but there is a concern this may be compromised in a much larger group. In short, partner participants recognised it would be beneficial to open up to more students, but did not demonstrate a clear motivation to significantly upscale.

The actual essence of shift shouldn't be diluted. (DelPart#5)

The sessions that I dialed into seemed quite interactive and if it was a larger cohort, I don't know if you'd lose that level of being able to feel that you were involved and having those real time discussions, and maybe some people would feel less confident or inclined to sort of speak up if they were speaking to a bigger room of people, or there'd be less opportunity for people to contribute to ask the question. (DelPart#3)

Exploration of the impact of upscaling SHIFT revealed some technical considerations. Nevertheless, it was felt a positive learner experience could be maintained with up to 150 students using the current delivery and content format. This would require additional resourcing to ensure student active engagement and participation. For example: enhanced university partner staffing for recruitment and onboarding; extra facilitators and note takers during the programme; and potential tutor groups for pastoral care to support students with different learning needs.

What became evident during our research is that SHIFT is not the primary job role of any one person – whilst everyone involved is fully committed to the programme, their contribution must fit around other work responsibilities. The implications of this on necessary resourcing should be considered in any future conversations around upscaling SHIFT.

The **impact of AI was not raised in any significant way** amongst interviewees. However, this is having a considerable impact across all areas of Gradcore's work within HE and the workplace. The use of AI, perhaps more for streamlining process and saving time rather than for creative practice itself, is an area for future consideration.

Maybe in a SHIFT context it's more about what it [AI] means for your funding agreements, for your collaborative practices, or ethical sign off. (DelPart#4)

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Impact and Value

All participants and delivery partners were supportive of SHIFT incorporating participation from a wider network of Scottish HEI's engaged in creative education. For example, the Edinburgh College of Art, and Gray's School of Art Robert Gordon University Aberdeen. In addition, the possibility of collaborating with more 'traditional' universities that offered creative programmes was mentioned, such as the University of Glasgow. It is evident SHIFT operates largely due to the successful partnership between RCS, GSA and QMU – each providing funding, 'in-kind' contributions, and wider support – and the impact of introducing new partners must be considered carefully.

We would highlight **expansion is still worthy of consideration in order to sustain the long-term future of the programme**. We observe there are very few enterprise programmes designed specifically for creative students and graduates that have survived HE's current financial changes. For instance, the programme identified most similar to SHIFT was a 7-day immersive course run by the University of Arts London from 2014-16. 'Discovering The Post-Digital Art School' was developed to find new ways to prepare students for a meaningful career in today's creative industries. It provided experiential interdisciplinary learning and demonstrated significant impact on participants. However, funding was withdrawn since it involved a relatively small number of students and the cost per head was deemed too high to be regarded as good value for money.

This evaluation report shows the 2025 SHIFT programme comprises engaging and meaningful content, designed specifically for students/graduates on creative programmes – this is part of the USP. Financial constraints have resulted in a **lack of such tailored teaching, learning and assessment material for creative higher education.** We suggest there is an opportunity to increase the future impact of SHIFT by making some of the resources available to other HEIs. For example, creating an asynchronous, online enterprise programme could increase the reach and impact of this valuable, intentionally curated set of resources. Expanding the dissemination of learning materials and content would necessitate agreement from contributors, including the possibility of exploring a licensing agreement.

I think there's a chance to make it for this next generation of creative entrepreneurs where it's short videos of information of a creative practitioner speaking. It's the information that runs through its dynamic material that is about launching business, which is relevant to today's cohort needs. (DelPart#2)

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National Contribution

One of the strengths of SHIFT is the successful partnership between RCS, GSA and QMU. They have pooled resources to collectively fill a gap in the creative education offer, and raise the profile of creative practitioners. We suggest this could be promoted more directly, to demonstrate the contribution of SHIFT within the national context. For example, an award submission to the AGCAS Academic Employability Awards 2026 could be beneficial in this regard.

It (SHIFT) is a very good example, and to our funders, the Scottish Funding Council, who asked us as institutions to collaborate and be more than the sum of the parts. It is a great example of where we've been able to do that with a really good partnership. (DelPart#4)

Included in the project brief was beginning to assess SHIFT's impact as part of the ecology of creative practitioner support in Scotland and its value for participants. **There is resounding evidence of the positive impact on participants, with the impact lasting for several years after programme completion**. For example, three respondents from the initial programme in 2019 cited recently using SHIFT resources and the desire to reconnect with fellow participants and contributors. In addition, one participant took their original 'project' from SHIFT, had the confidence to seek collaborators, and developed the idea to instigate the debut of the Edinburgh International University Film Festival (EIUFF) in 2025.

In the long run, we are trying to make the Film Festival a bit more profitable. So, what I wanted to mention is that actually all of the information that SHIFT provided me and all of the knowledge is literally what went into the Film Festival establishment. So, we established a CIC company, which the first time I ever heard about the structure was at SHIFT, so I stuck to my little booklet with all of the information, we are using it quite a lot. (Alum#8)

The point was made that **SHIFT has a role to play in helping graduates to progress who are currently underemployed** – for instance, it is common for many students to remain in a job they did whilst they were studying, after they graduate, moving from part-time to full-time hours in that role. By demonstrating possible career pathways and helping to develop enterprise skills, SHIFT encourages and enables students to focus on their practice, moving into their preferred specialism or position.

Furthermore, there is evidence of impact beyond the Scottish economy. For example, an international PhD student mentioned transferring the learning from SHIFT to their research project which will be implemented in their home country.

A further aim of this project was to articulate SHIFT's positioning within, and the contribution to Scotland's Entrepreneurial Campus strategy. Within our interviews, **we found little reference to the Entrepreneurial Campus strategy unless specifically prompted**. However, there was a clear recognition of the contribution of SHIFT alumni and how this might be built upon further.

There's a drive across Scotland, certainly about promoting entrepreneurialism and enterprise and building these entrepreneurial campuses and cultures. And I think one thing that QMU would like to do is to try to engage with our entrepreneurial alumni and bring them kind of back in and use that

as a way to develop an entrepreneurial culture. Sort of, I guess having people that have been where our current students are and seeing what they've done and how they've gotten there and the routes that they took to do that and what how the university could support them in doing that so. DelPart#3

What did become clear is that **the prominence of the creative industries highlighted in the** UK's Modern Industrial strategy **is not reflected in Scottish policy**. The former presents a 10 year plan to deliver investment in the high growth sectors, including the Creative Industries Sector Plans. The sector plan acknowledges the contribution and the potential for growth, and shows a commitment to direct funding. It also states, "*We will build on strong foundations of world-renowned education providers*" (page 5), recognising the expertise of HEIs. Whilst this report evaluates one programme for a relatively small number of students/gradates, it is hoped it may be used to **enable policy conversations**. It provides evidence of the positive impact and value, but also highlights the need the infrastructure required to support sole trader and portfolio working for creative practitioners.

Recommendations

13. **Further leverage positive engagement and citizenship established *during* the SHIFT programme through Slack.** This can be achieved by implementing something *alongside* Slack that **captures durable contact points and keeps a sense of community alive** over time. For instance, a neutral email point connected to SHIFT rather than one of the institutions could be used for a couple of updates each year – including a newsletter, information on new projects, event invites, funding opportunities, etc. This branded email (e.g. SHIFT Alumni, or Creative Connections) could include an 'Update your Details' link so people can easily resubscribe if their contact details change. Gentle 'nudging' – *"It's been a year since SHIFT – tell us what you are working on"* can help to **maintain relationships and also track alumni career journeys.**

    A LinkedIn Group could also support this to encourage connectivity, inviting everyone to connect via Slack before the end of the programme, with a minimum annual prompt for re-engagement. Whilst recognising not all creative practitioners engage with this platform which is sometime seen as #too corporate', LinkedIn profiles are more stable than email addresses, require minimal upkeep, and enable direct 121 contact.

14. We recommend **extending the reach and impact of SHIFT by expanding participants numbers to 150.** This will maintain the positive learner experience and sense of community, providing additional resources are secured. This can be achieved by **proactively building relationships with other relevant HEIs engaged in creative education**. Suggestions include the Edinburgh College of Art, and Gray's School of Art Robert Gordon University Aberdeen. In addition, consider collaborations with more 'traditional' universities that offer creative programmes, such as the University of Glasgow. Building further upon existing connections could also highlight SHIFT, such as the Creative Entrepreneurs Club, Glasgow Creative Clinics, and the Converge Challenge.

    However, the impact of introducing new partners must be **considered carefully to ensure it does not disrupt the current successful partnership**.

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15. **Leverage the report to enable policy conversations, potentially collaborating with other HEIs to help influence Scottish government policy.** It could potentially be used to further demonstrate the case for removing barriers for early career creative practitioners, and providing the infrastructure essential for freelance and portfolio career pathways.

16. **Consider ways to showcase the USP and impact presented by SHIFT more widely.** For example, explore the option of **creating an asynchronous, online enterprise programme, leveraging existing resources to increase the reach and impact of SHIFT.** This would need to consider a range of issues, such as IP and licensing agreements, but also provides a way of exploring revenue-generation to support future growth and expansion. Alternatively, there is an opportunity to **franchise the SHIFT programme** to have a more significant effect on the creative ecosystem, within and beyond Scotland. Earlier comments about IP and licensing are also relevant here. Due to resource constraints, such activities are often outsourced to a third party, such as Gradcore.

17. **Make an award submission in 2026 to gain recognition for SHIFT.** The AGCAS Academic Employability Awards Enterprise and Entrepreneurship category focuses on skills for freelancers and self-employed graduates, supporting entrepreneurial ventures and developing an enterprising mindset.

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7. Learner Materials

In addition to the original project brief, we offered to conduct a **review of learner materials** to support future refinement and development.

Insights:

Pre-programme Communications

Prior to the start of the programme, information and updates are sent via e-mail. We understand this is quite transactional, rather than relational, and suggest there is an opportunity to enhance the recruitment and selection process.

The Participant Pack: Information to Get You Started for SHIFT, is shared with participants just before the programme starts. This includes information on tools: Zoom is used for 'watching talks, participating in exercises, meeting peers, and developing ideas'; whilst Slack functions as a bulletin board or a central hub providing important information such as:

- Schedules and links related to the schedule
- Notes from each session and speaker resources
- Communication with peers, messages outside of Zoom, and further connections with experts

There are also details on SHIFT being a **'professional to professional space',** highlighting speakers and electives, and next steps and links, including:

- Sign up on SHIFT website
- Sign into SHIFT Slack and create your profile
- Fill out release form (for permission to record)
- Look into the speakers

Our observation is that whilst the Participant Pack is informative, it is text-heavy, predominantly in one colour, with many separate links to information. Such an approach does not lend itself easily to a variety of learner preferences and needs.

Resource Packs

A range of formats and styles for sharing notes and resources have been trialled since 2019, such as PDF workbooks and physical resources, and they have evolved over time. They are intended for use both during the programme and afterwards. The content is extremely informative, tailored for creative practitioners, and covers an extensive range of topics and links presented during the programme. However, they are also almost exclusively text-based and may feel a little overwhelming; for instance, the Notes and Resources 2025 comprises 27 pages of text with just one diagram.

Participants are encouraged to reflect on their ideas and ambitions throughout the programme. This assumes participants are familiar with reflective practice and feel confident and skilled to carry this out competently; they may benefit from a framework to enable reflection.

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RCS Award in Creative Entrepreneurship Guide

This is designed for SHIFT alumni that elect to **seek accreditation through an assessment portfolio, building on programme content and applying it to their creative practice.** This includes tasks and reflective activities, enabling participants to consider and articulate their learning.

The portfolio intentionally provides an action plan for what a participant needs to do in order to achieve their aims as a professional creative practitioner or for their business. There is no template for the portfolio, allowing participants to draw upon their own creative practice and creativity. We note the intention of this but suggest including some examples and digital templates may be useful.

Recommendations:

18. **Expand pre-programme communications by developing material to ensure undecided students/graduates are encouraged to sign up and guarantee their sustained engagement with the programme and minimise the dropout rate.** This could include alumni case studies to demonstrate the positive impact of SHIFT, teaser videos to introduce the speakers, hints and tips on developing reflective practice, an enterprise quiz with further resources to start thinking about their ideas, and polls to establish how they are feeling about joining SHIFT. This begins to create a 2-way relationship earlier in the learner journey, and may help to inform programme content, especially for day 1 content to build the sense of community and collaboration.

19. **Maximise participant engagement with all learner materials by replacing some of the text with infographics, images and video content** (including animations with voiceovers). For example, a format similar to the AGCAS Transitions Timeline (Figure 2) could be adopted to illustrate the 5-day SHIFT timeline {potentially adding in next steps, after programme completion, to enable career journey tracking}, with links to a glossary of terms, speaker profiles, case studies, further resources etc. Participants would be able to access all information through active links or QR codes (both during and after the programme) from a one-page visual, rather than navigating extensive pieces of text. Furthermore, this approach lends itself to servicing different learner needs.

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Figure 2: Example of Timeline Infographic for Learner Resources

Source: [AGCAS Task Group Graduate Transitions Timeline (2024)]

20. **Replace the 'Notes and Resources' PDF with an e-portfolio to future-proof resources and help students to evidence their skills development.** This could be more interactive during the programme itself, helping participants to develop their reflective practice. It could ensure students fully articulate the range of enterprise and employability skills they have developed, and then apply them in a variety of settings. This would provide a live document that alumni could continue to build upon following SHIFT completion, thereby creating a more sustainable resource. Institutional graduate attributes or the Creative Attributes Framework (CAF) developed by the University of Arts London could be used - the latter provides a tailored approach specifically for creative education.

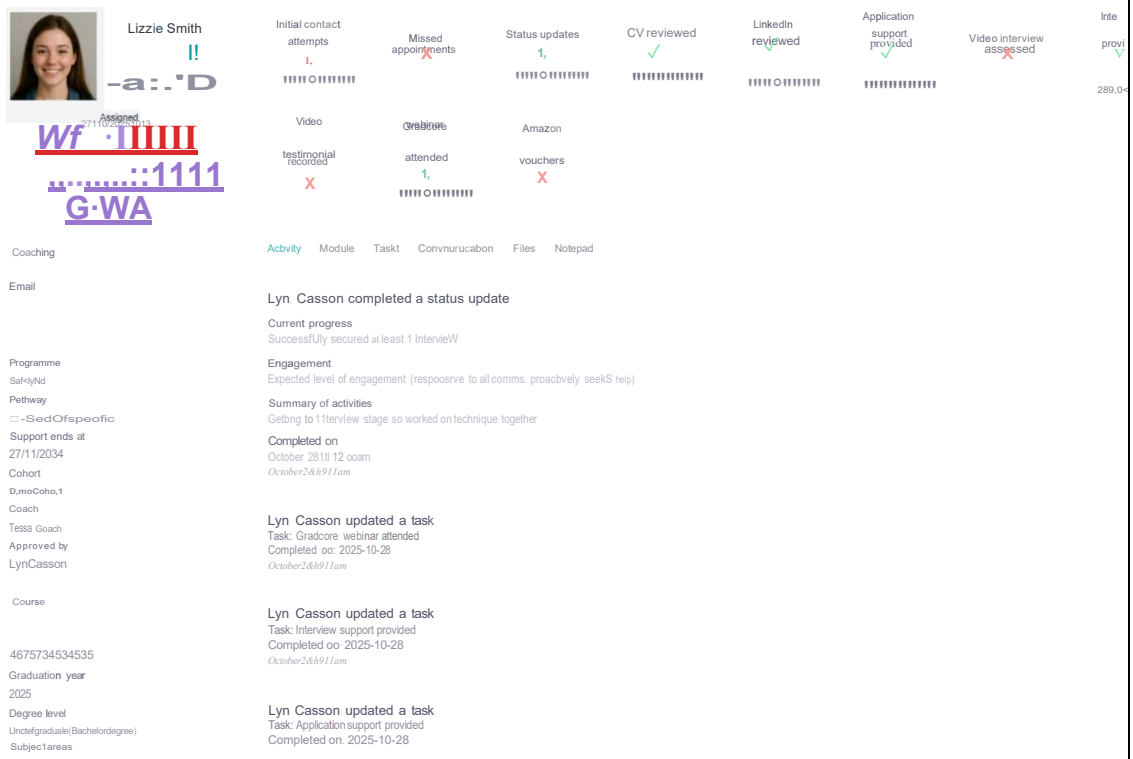
21. **Consider introducing a platform designed to give participants a personalised space to record and reflect upon their enterprise and employability learning.** This provides sustainability, and the ability for institutions to monitor task completion. For participants,

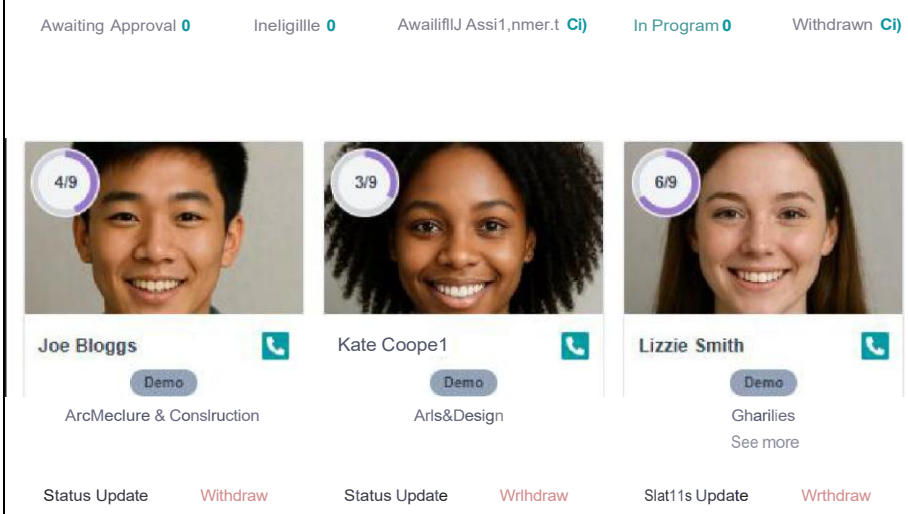
a percentage completion bar can support motivation and progression.

Such a platform could provide one space for all alumni to interact, seek new professional connections, and access support materials which are updated each year for the new SHIFT programme. See Case Study 1: 'Gradspace' below as an illustrative example.

CASE STUDY 1: Gradspace - an interactive engagement platform

For illustration purposes, at Gradcore we have developed 'Gradspace' to provide an interactive platform to engage, inform, and communicate with students and graduates across various learning packages. The functionality of the platform enables reporting on participant status updates, engagement monitoring, and task completion





8. Next steps

Following consideration and socialisation of this report, we recommend defining the level of future ambition, prioritising the recommendations, and developing an implementation plan.

Recommendations, Potential Impact and Timelines

This report proposes several recommendations, including tactical measures to achieve short-term goals **(quick fix),** intermediate activity to build capacity **(transition planning)** and more strategic measures to realise longer-term ambitions **(lasting foundations).** Table 4 summarises the recommendations and timelines, including the short-term (1-year), medium-term (1-2 years), and long-term (3+years).

Recommendation		Timeline
#1	Review programme content and delivery to ensure all learner styles and needs are catered for, with alternative options for participants with specific needs.	Short-term
#2	Create a celebratory event to highlight the achievements of SHIFT alumni, further develop the creative community, and demonstrate the impact of the programme.	Long-term
#3	Agree and implement a suitable method for collecting EDI data on applicants and participants to ensure equality of access and participation.	Short-term
#4	Support students to recognise the full range of enterprise and employability skills they have developed during the SHIFT programme.	Short-term
#5	Develop the RCS Award in Creative Entrepreneurship to enable SHIFT alumni to demonstrate their enterprise and employability skills and expertise to potential clients, funding bodies, investors, or employers.	Medium-term
#6	Ensure applications open in sufficient time to capture students' attention and maximise reach i.e. ideally before they finish taught sessions end February/beginning March.	Short-term
#7	Utilise wider range of promotion methods.	Medium-term
#8	Work with Alumni and Development teams to capture case studies and vignettes to leverage success from the SHIFT programme.	Medium-term
#9	Further enhance the marketing and promotional material by partnering with high profile creatives.	Medium-term
#10	Supply institutions with a digital marketing pack to promote SHIFT, maximising reach across Scotland.	Short-term
#11	Review support for SHIFT alumni to establish how their needs can be addressed after completing SHIFT, as their ideas and careers develop.	Long-term
#12	Consider introducing the Creative Attributes Framework (CAF) developed at the University of Arts London to measure impact.	Medium-term
#13	Further leverage positive engagement and citizenship established during the SHIFT programme through Slack.	Medium-term
#14	Extend the reach and impact of SHIFT by expanding participants numbers to 150.	Medium-term
#15	Leverage the report to enable policy conversations, potentially collaborating with other HEis to help influence Scottish government policy.	Long-term

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#16	Consider ways to showcase the USP and impact presented by SHIFT more widely.	Medium-term
#17	Make an award submission in 2026 to gain recognition for SHIFT via The AGCAS Academic Employability Awards.	Short-term
#18	Expand pre-programme communications by developing material to ensure undecided students/graduates are encouraged to sign up, create sustained enqaqement and minimise the dropout rate.	Short-term
#19	Maximise participant engagement with all learner materials by replacinq some of the text with infoqraphics, imaqes and video content.	Short-term

Table 4: Recommendations, Potential Impact and Timelines

Developing a Future-Focused Approach for SHIFT

We suggest a workshop to define ambition for the SHIFT programme, identify priorities, and agree an implementation plan i.e. to produce a roadmap for the way forward. It will provide a platform for collaboration and innovation. This could be either externally facilitated to bring an independent approach with employability expertise or internally facilitated providing a full understanding of institutional context and the student profile.

The aim is to develop an approach to SHIFT where strategies, policies and plans around enterprise and pathways to professional practice are more visible, measurable, and impactful than at present. This needs to be developed in partnership with key internal and external stakeholders to ensure commitment, engagement, and a unified approach across individual institutions and partners. It will provide an opportunity for stakeholders to collaborate, share their knowledge and expertise, and develop a strategic approach to enhance opportunities to support student/graduate entrepreneurialism and maximise impact.

Proposed activities:

1	**Welcome and introduction:** Setting the intention for the workshop
2	**Presentation:** • Creative Industries Entrepreneurial Landscape • Findings and recommendations from Gradcore Evaluation report, summarising current position, recommendations, and key priorities •
3	**Group activities: participants work in small, mixed groups to:** • Discuss and share ideas on key elements of SHIFT, both now and in the future • Develop a proposal for a specific aspect of SHIFT, such as mapping creative career paths, programme design, and delivery, generating meaningful data, scaling up, and targeting students most in need
4	**Plenary:** Groups present their proposals, including an opportunity for feedback and further suggestions
5	**Next steps:** Based on discussions and proposals, a roadmap for developing a future-focussed approach for SHIFT

Conclusion

This report has gathered extensive, evidence-based insights, and proposed a number of recommendations to achieve short-, medium-, and long-term goals. The future of SHIFT is extremely positive as it continues to span the gap between creative education and sustainable creative career pathways for students and graduates. This report provides the foundation for further development of SHIFT to build upon its existing success, impact and reach.

Acknowledgements:

Thank you to all SHIFT stakeholders that generously gave their time and views to contribute to this report.

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Appendix 1: Summary of Office for Students Student Characteristics Data Categories

Source: Student characteristics data: technical document

- Associations between characteristics of students (ABCS) access quintiles
- Associations between characteristics of students (ABCS) continuation quintiles
- Associations between characteristics of students (ABCS) completion quintiles
- Associations between characteristics of students (ABCS) progression quintiles
- Age*
- Adult HE quintile
- Broad subject of study
- Care experience
- Disability*
- Entry qualifications
- Estrangement
- Ethnicity*
- Free school meals eligibility
- Geography of employment quintiles
- Household Residual Income (HRI)
- Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI)
- Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)
- Individual Disadvantage
- Parental Higher Education
- Participation of Local Areas (POLAR4)
- Religion or belief*
- Service child status
- Sex*
- Sexual orientation*
- Socioeconomic background
- Study location
- Subcontracted students
- Tracking underrepresented by area (TUNDRA)

*Relates to one of the protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010