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EXAMINING COMMITTEE

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Brave Creatives: Research Partnerships Between Universities and Companies in the Creative Sector

ABSTRACT

This study examines the opportunities and challenges of research partnerships between universities of art and design and companies. Using qualitative phenomenological research methods, fifteen interviews were conducted with university faculty, company directors and government research-funders.

The study’s findings indicate that while universities of art and design have become more willing to form partnerships with companies, this relationship is underpinned by two significant incentives. First, the importance of government funding as an enabler of university-industry research partnerships cannot be understated. Second, there is a significant driving force for businesses to source talent and hire students and university graduates. Also evident in the results of the study is the shifting cultural gap that exists between universities and companies. This cultural gap begins with a weighty disparity in objectives. Companies are driven by product cycles and profits and seek to protect research results, while universities are driven by societal needs and seek to create and disseminate new knowledge. Despite the cultural differences, this study shows that the university community is gradually adopting the attitudes and values of the business community. There is a growing presence, and quite possibly dependence, on commercial activities such as university-industry partnerships, which support the corporatization of universities. Yet, despite their differences, the majority of study participants from universities, companies and government funders regarded their research partnerships as sustainable models of innovation.

An indisputably collaborative endeavour at best, university-industry research partnerships unleash talent and spark innovation. At worst, they undermine academic freedom and impede curiosity-driven research. While focused on university-industry research partnerships, this study raises issues far beyond universities and companies by offering a glimpse into the inescapable contagion of public-private partnerships within public institutions.

Keywords: Post-secondary education; university-industry research partnerships; public-private partnerships; sustainable innovation; marketization of public universities; neoliberalization of education; creative industries