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LEARNING AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT IN A FRAGMENTED INDUSTRY

THE CASE OF THE UK TELEVISION SECTOR

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ABSTRACT

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Learning and skills development in a fragmented industry. The case of the UK television sector.

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This thesis discusses how the restructuring of the UK television industry in the 1980s and 1990s has affected learning and skills development in the sector. It is based on 71 semi-structured interviews with television freelancers and key informants in the industry, and a case study of a small regional independent company developed through semi-structured interviews and three months of participant observation.

To investigate the current learning and skills development mechanisms, this thesis engages with community-based learning theories. These are discussed in relation to industry characteristics such as commissioning and independent production and labour market realities related to freelance work and educational provision.

The findings reveal that the traditional on-the-job learning mechanisms within communities of practice are challenged under the new structural context characterised by unrestricted entry and progression and short-term projects within an uncertain employment context. Commercial pressures affect both the access to learning opportunities and the learning experience, mainly because of the lack of legitimate and gradual experiential learning possibilities, short-term involvement in the industry under pressures to perform. The thesis also discusses the realities of the work in a small

regional independent production company as well as its benefits and limitations as a venue for community-based learning.

This thesis concludes with several policy recommendations which address some of the main challenges to the sustainable skills development in UK television. These recommendations subscribe to the need for introducing legitimate traineeships, entry rules and detaching learning from the commercial pressures in the sector.