

Graduate meets employer – a model for embedding industry professional involvement in the development and assessment of student portfolios

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Intellect

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Graduate meets employer – a model for embedding industry professional involvement in the development and assessment of student portfolios

Mark Thorley

Abstract

The benefit of higher education institutions working with industry professionals has received significant attention in literature and policy. Despite this, the challenges in institutions themselves, and the nature of the music industry makes this concept challenging to manage. In response to this, a project was funded by the Higher Education Academy for Coventry University to examine a model for embedding the involvement of industry professionals in the development and assessment of Music Technology student portfolios. This article explains the background, the rationale, realization and outcomes of the project. First, it outlines the issues of employability within music and creative industries courses as reflected in the literature. It then examines the contextual challenges of the music industry and higher education. It continues by describing how the project embedded industry professionals in student portfolio development and assessment. Finally, it outlines the outcomes of the project, its implications and the key risk factors to its implementation in other disciplines and institutions.

Introduction

The provision of degree courses centred on music, music technology, music production and similar fields has grown significantly in the era of ‘widening participation’ in the United Kingdom. As Davis et al (2014) point out, this growth has been at the same time that the informal apprenticeship system within the music industry has been in decline. Provision has grown with increasingly varied names to attract students. The diversity of names reflects the fact that much of the attraction of such courses is grounded in career aspiration – that is, students are interested in making a living from the subject rather than its ‘academic’ challenge. Despite this, for a number of years, Universities have been able to operate without providing too much focus on employability in such courses of study. Government policy (in particular the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education survey [DLHE]), the rise in tuition fees, and increased access to information on careers in the music industry has changed this situation however. It has brought the need for an effective approach to employability in all courses, including those based around music, music technology, music production and other related areas. The nature of the music (and wider creative industries) does however, present particular challenges. For this reason, a project aimed at developing and evaluating a model for embedding industry professional involvement in the development and assessment of student portfolios was initiated at Coventry University and funded by the Higher Education Academy (HEA).

This article explains the background, rationale, realization and outcomes of the project. First, it outlines the issues of employability within music and creative industries courses as reflected in the literature. It then examines the contextual challenges of the music industry and higher

education. It continues by describing how the project embedded industry professionals in student portfolio development and assessment. Finally, it outlines the outcomes of the project, its implications, and the key risk factors to its implementation in other disciplines and institutions.

Background literature

The literature concerning employability in the curriculum specifically for preparation to work in the music industry is limited. There are, however, some key themes covered when music, music technology, music production and other related courses are seen as part of the Creative Industries as defined by the UK's Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)(2006). Alongside music, the sector includes advertising, architecture, crafts, design, fashion, film and photography, software, computer games, performing arts, publishing, television and radio. It is therefore a diverse sector focused on 'those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have the potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property' (DCMS 2001:4).

The numbers of students of disciplines related to the sector has increased since 1996/1997 (Brown 2007), alongside an increased recognition of the creative industries as a sector. As Brown notes, the increase of 37.9 per cent in music provision is particularly significant. According to the DCMS (2006) however, despite the attractions of creative industry-related subjects, the employment openings for creative arts students (and in particular, music, dance and drama) can be more limited than in other subjects. Furthermore, when focusing on employment

for Music Technology graduates, Priest (2010:63) notes that advancing communications technology has made entry into an already competitive field even harder. Other studies reflect a slightly different view though, particularly for music graduates. For example, a study undertaken by the Institute of Employment Research at Warwick showed that the number of music graduates in ‘graduate-track’ jobs was found to be above those coming from Humanities, Languages and Social Science (Brown 2007). This does, however, relate to employment outside what may be thought of those graduates’ ‘core’ music skills and knowledge. Taking routes more soundly based around those core skills, according to Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) (1998), in music schools which offered vocational training, music graduates remain active in the profession and 85 per cent found employment in the industry over a five-year period. Crucially though, this research was with Conservatoires that offer clearly orientated vocational training.

Additional challenges for higher education

Additional challenges emerge from recent developments within higher education in the United Kingdom. Most pertinent of these is the reporting of data from the DLHE, produced by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (replacing the previous ‘First Destination Survey’ in 2003). As part of this process, six months after graduation, graduates are surveyed (independently of their institution) and asked what job, course of study, or other activity they are engaged in. When processed, this data can be broken down by course, department or institution and is available for interested students, prospective students, graduates and employers. It is therefore not sufficient

for an institution to offer well-managed courses of study to suitably motivated students.

Additionally, the institution now needs to show that it is able to deliver graduates into positions that they would not have attained had they not taken the particular course of study. It therefore presents the higher education institution with a need to be accountable in a further, employment-focused way. This presents a particular issue for many jobs in the creative industries as they are often short-term, freelance or held at the same time as other positions.

Industry context

Much of the interest in studying subjects which result in work in the creative industries can be attributed to the excitement of the work itself. However, in recent years, the sector's contribution economically as well as culturally has received more recognition. For example, according to Henry and Johnston (2005), the creative sector generates £100 billion per annum, employs two million people and contributes approximately 8% of GDP. It is also a sector that has shown significant growth – by 6% between 1997 and 2003 compared with 2% growth across the remainder of the economy (Carey and Naudin 2006). Between 2011 and 2012, it grew by 8.6% compared with 0.7% for whole economy (DCMS 2014). These figures serve to make working in the creative industries even more attractive in that, in addition to the interest in the work itself, the sector is now viewed as a valued and important contributor to the country's economic well-being. These figures give the impression that working in the sector can be thought of as a 'proper job', which produces a real salary and a real contribution to the economy.

The various parts of the creative industries can, however, be significantly different, and for these reasons, there are particular challenges in embedding employability in the curriculum for the breadth of music related degrees in existence. The first issue is the large amount of self-employment, freelance or part-time working. In the music industry, approximately 90% are working on a part-time or self-employed basis (Brown 2007). According to the Arts Council of England (2009), 42% of individuals are self-employed in music. Taking a broader view, according to the DCMS (2014), seven out of ten Music, Performing and Visual arts jobs are self-employed. By comparison, only 12.6% of population as a whole is self employed (Ball 2003). This is not just the case in the United Kingdom though – it is the same in other countries such as the United States (Carey and Naudin 2006) and Australia (Bennett 2009). This situation brings different challenges to that of preparing students to work in, for example, blue chip companies or even small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). Much of the traditional expertise and capability within higher education institutions can therefore lack relevance.

A further problem emerges from the fragmented nature of the music industry. Whilst this has always been the situation, fragmentation has been further accelerated by digital technology breaking down the traditional barriers to entry (Lewis et al. 2005). This means that the practices of individual businesses or freelancers vary as they endeavour to differentiate their own service or product. There is therefore no ‘accepted’ or ‘standard’ way of operating such a music business. This makes it difficult to obtain a consensus view on what particular skills a graduate will need to work within the sector. As a result of this, it is challenging to prepare a student for work in a particular role within a particular business as it will be markedly different to the same role in another business. Furthermore, the dynamic nature of the sector means that skills needs

can change quickly particularly under the onslaught of emerging digital technologies and techniques.

The concept of the 'portfolio' career is also one which has gained recent attention and is common in the music industry. In a portfolio career, an individual may hold down several part-time roles, or combine self-employment with a part-time employed role and so on. Whilst praised for its variety and interest, it does present the need to be flexible, more comfortable with risk, and to be able to research and market the next job before the present one has finished.

Challenges of involving the music industry in courses

The work of involving industry practitioners or embedding an employability focus is not always straightforward. First, considerable latitude exists within higher education institutions over how much and what type of industry involvement should be in any one course. Whilst many institutions insist on some sort of consultation with an industry professional when a course is developed or revalidated, this is not always the case, and the type of consultation can be inconsistent. For example, if the team trying to lead a course through a validation process is looking for mere 'approval' of a course, a sympathetic (rather than critical) industry reviewer is likely to be sought. This approach clearly limits the effectiveness and impact of the industry involvement.

Furthermore, this process relies on an industry reviewer being well placed to critique, support and guide a course development, though their ability to do so is far from guaranteed. First, given the fragmented nature of the industry already outlined, no one individual can possibly take an industry-wide view. They are more likely to have a polarized view based upon either what their business relies on, or perhaps the kind of individual, which their business has experienced difficulty in contracting. Second, given their emersion in industry work, they are unlikely to fully appreciate the rigours of Programme Specification document development, quality procedures and so on. The work of Joint Audio Media Education Services (JAMES) goes a considerable way to address this in accrediting courses on behalf of the Music Producers' Guild, the Association of Professional Recording Services, the UK Screen Association, the Music Managers' Forum and PLASA. However, the absence of benchmark statements in its accreditation process also highlights the fragmented and inconsistent nature of the industry.

Many courses do involve industry professionals though, with industry guest talks and panels being the most obvious. However, these activities can be limited in their impact. This is because industry professionals are coming in 'cold' and are unlikely to have an in-depth understanding of what the student audience is in need of. This is partly because of time – if the visiting professional is being paid (and this is far from guaranteed), they are unlikely to want to spend a significant amount of time preparing. Also, when bringing in visiting speakers, institutions are often trying to impress the visitor with the institution, its facilities, and by virtue of that, the quality of its graduates. The ubiquitous tour of the recording studios often forms part of this, though the premise that good facilities always result in good learning is not established. The

ineffectiveness of this approach is that the industry professional is not exposed properly to the students' environment or more importantly, the work that they produce.

Project realization

The significant challenges emanating from the industrial context and the ways in which industrial involvement often takes place are clear to see. In response to this situation, a project was initiated that aimed to examine the impact of embedding industry professionals' involvement in the development and assessment of student portfolios. The project was funded by the United Kingdom's HEA because of its innovative approach to assessment and its potential to find impact beyond the host institution.

The project realization took place within an existing module within the Music and Creative Technologies Programme at Coventry University. The existing module was centred on Personal Development Planning (PDP), and aimed to provide students with the opportunity to put their achievements, expertise and capability within a work environment context. PDP is usefully defined by both the QAA and the HEA as 'a structured and supported process undertaken by an individual to reflect upon their own learning, performance and/or achievement and to plan for their personal, educational and career development' (QAA 2009:2). The project's innovative involvement of industry professionals resonated with this concept, particularly in the area of career development.

As Figure 1 shows, the module involved a number of activities all of which then form part of an assessed portfolio. First, students undertake a capability audit where they list and reflect upon the knowledge, skills and experience which they have attained up until that point. This process is an essential ‘starting’ point, suggesting possible careers routes based upon their capabilities. They then go on to research and develop three job descriptions of roles that could realistically be undertaken based upon their existing and likely future capabilities. The job descriptions have to be based upon rigorous research into the roles, and must follow the accepted structure of a job description. This task is important as it means that the student must attain a deep understanding of the role covering everything from the qualifications needed through to the likely working hours. They then present the job description as part of a formative assessment event after which they further develop the three job descriptions, focusing upon one around which to develop the portfolio. At this point, they are then able to make the links between their own capabilities and the requirements of the chosen job. This link is expressed within the portfolio by including evidence of their capability mapped against the chosen job. At this point, the Music Technology student starts to see the wide range of artefacts that can be used as evidence. For example, a technical report can show capability in assessing the acoustic characteristics of a recording studio or performance space. A recording can show capability in choosing and placing microphones to record a live band. A video clip can show capability in sound design for visual use. This exercise is therefore useful in ‘unpacking’ various artefacts that they have produced, and reflecting upon the skills, experience and knowledge demonstrated. Lastly, based upon the premise that the student is unlikely to possess all of the prerequisites for the chosen job, an action plan is produced indicating precisely what steps they will take to develop their capabilities. This could,

for example, include learning more skills, finding an internship, finding a mentor or going on a training course.



Figure 1: Existing module structure.

The existing module suffered from many of the problems of reflecting work in the music industry and from the challenges of involving industry professionals. The project therefore sought to address this by embedding industry involvement in the manner outlined in Figure 2. This figure shows how the module was experienced from the perspective of student, academic, and industry professional. That is, the academic delivered lectures and seminars up until providing formative assessment of the three job descriptions. The academic then continued with further lectures and seminars before assessing the portfolios. However, for the purposes of this project, the module was changed by the additional involvement of industry professionals, this taking place at two key stages. First, after the presentation and formative assessment of the three job descriptions had taken place, an industry panel was set up. This took the format of six panel

members and one academic serving as chairperson. The panel was asked a series of questions related to their entrance into the music industry, how they developed their careers, skills and so on. The student audience could also ask questions, and importantly, the panel could discuss and present different perspectives on the same question. The panel therefore aimed to address the problems already outlined. Second, the panel of industry professionals assessed the student portfolios at the end of the module.

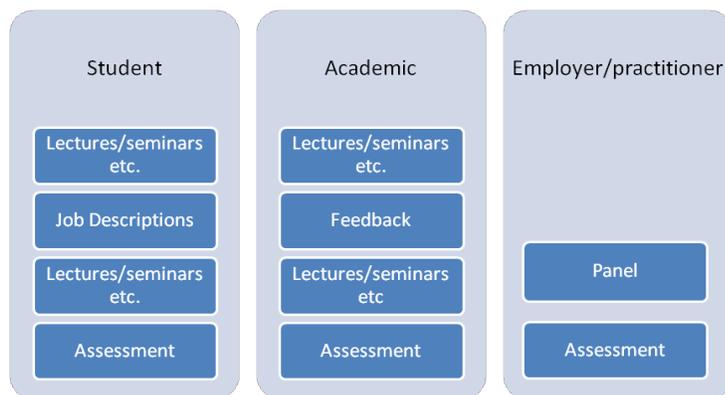


Figure 2: Experience from student, academic and industry professional viewpoint.

The choice of industry professionals is clearly pivotal. The decision was therefore taken to reflect the music production chain in the panel. As Figure 3 shows, the music production chain can be considered in terms of composition, performance, recording/production, distribution/marketing and consumption. Additionally, technical roles exist in the provision of equipment and facilities to produce music – particularly in terms of hardware and software design and manufacture for the production of music, and the acoustic design of facilities in which to record and produce music. Given the relationship between Music Technology (or

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production) and this chain, panel members were needed to reflect all of these aspects except distribution/marketing and consumption. The project therefore included a graduate of Coventry University's Music and Creative Technologies programme, a music producer/engineer, a recording engineer, a mastering engineer, an acoustic engineer and a high-end console marketer.

In common with industry professionals, Music Technology students use digital (and indeed analogue) technologies extensively in their work – in the recording and production process, and for the distribution of artefacts. The use of emerging digital technologies is also revolutionizing how work is managed, and new 'participation' tools allow the sharing, exchange and joint development of work. To reflect this situation, a variety of digital technologies were used as part of the project. At its core, students were involved in editing, mastering and packaging digital media-based material, be it audio, video or text. Additionally, 'participation' tools such as YouTube and SoundCloud were used to present work. The portfolio itself also took a digital form with students opting to use e-portfolio software such as Mahara or bespoke website development tools. Lastly, social media was used extensively both to maximize the benefit of the industry professionals' involvement, and to disseminate the project. So, students could comment on each panel member's involvement and suggest themes for discussion before and after the event and share the project with their colleagues. Similarly, academics and students from other institutions could follow the project, and make use of the concepts which emerged not just at the end of the project but also, during its realization.

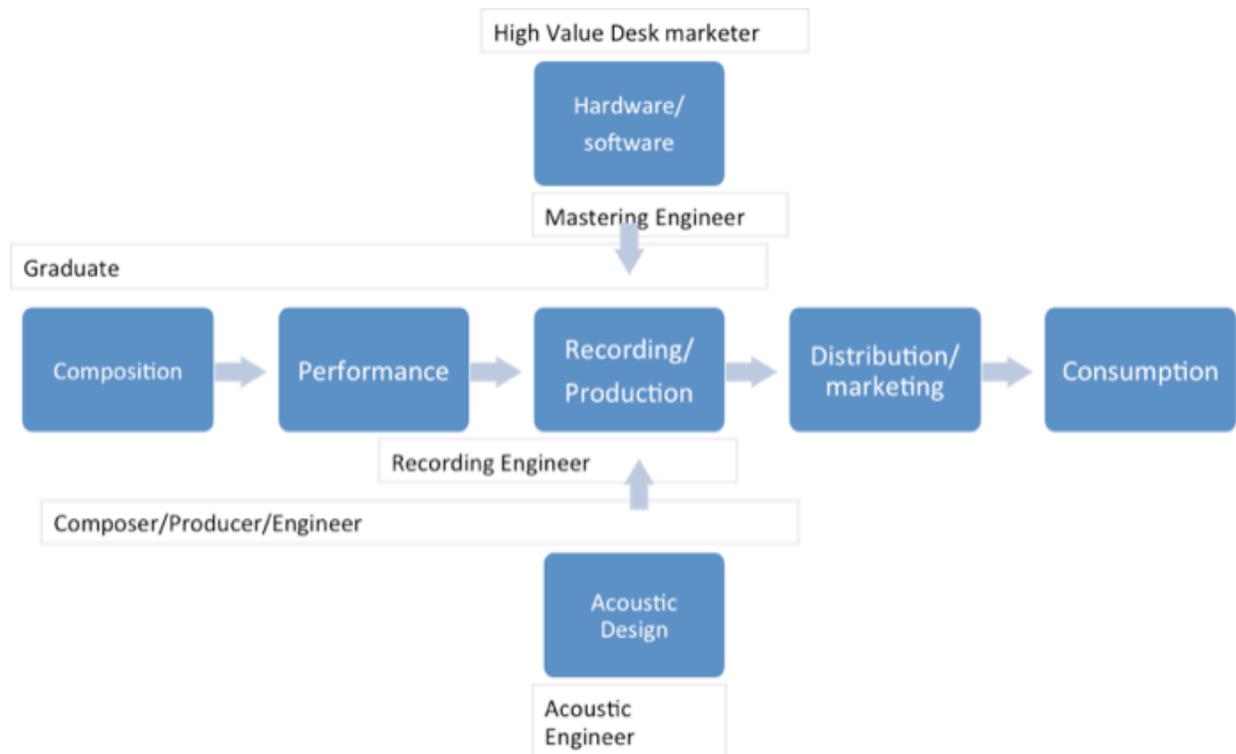


Figure 3: Industry Professionals’ positions in the production chain.

Outcomes and evaluation

The impact of the project was examined using a participant observer approach to which there are a number of benefits. As Manis and Meltzer (1967) note, such an approach is appropriate where interpreting the experiences and meanings can only be done through participation. The challenge of interpreting the very different cultures of undergraduate students and established industry professionals was also best served in such an approach, facilitated largely by the experience of the researcher. In this instance, as noted by Robson (2011), the researcher is the instrument of research and therefore best placed to demonstrate the necessary sensitivity and personal skills for

the collection of worthwhile information. The emersion into both cultures also served to guard against the dangers of ‘going native’ (Spradley 1980, DeWalt et al. 1998).

The academic view

The host institution undertakes extensive evaluation of teaching through module feedback and course feedback. Whilst this could serve as a useful measure of the impact of the project, there are problems in comparing one student cohort with those on the module in previous years, as many other variables exist. However, there were a number of changes seen in the module when the embedding of industry professionals took place compared with other iterations. First, active participation in the module increased compared with previous years and students were seen to be engaged with the content and the teaching methods. As the project sought to bring meaningful professional input into a module that purported to put student work in a professional context, this would perhaps not be surprising. Attendance at the panel was, however still not 100 per cent even given the extensive experience of the professionals involved. Whilst students who did not attend realized that they had missed a beneficial experience after the event, it seems that its value was better communicated afterwards by their peers, rather than previously by academics.

Second, from the submitted portfolios, the depth of understanding of the professional environment improved when compared with previous iterations of the module. It is a common misconception to imagine a music industry job as being made up of the core (often technical) skills. For example, perceptions of the job of a recording engineer commonly emphasize the technical responsibilities but neglect project management, team working, dealing with clients

and financial planning. In this instance, however, there was a much greater understanding of these broader skills in the portfolios. This was evidenced specifically in the job descriptions (which more accurately reflected the reality of the jobs) and the evidence, which was related better to the jobs in question. This could be attributed to the panel input, as interestingly, the discussion was less about technology and techniques and more about routes into and through the industry, typical projects, and the breadth of skills needed to effectively deliver those projects.

The student view

The impact of the industry professionals was also observed from the student perspective and is examined here around the two interactions – the first being the industry panel, the second being the assessment of student portfolios by the industry professionals.

Before the panel, greater interest in the module was seen when compared with other modules and previous interactions. Students used social media in particular to express their anticipation of the panel. They also began to prepare for the panel as a shared ‘learning experience’ (as opposed to listening to an industry guest speaker merely recalling their own experiences). In this way, they were active learners rather than passive participants in the event, as is typified by the following comment:

As one of my personal motivations is to work in recording, I will be looking forward to finding out what skills are required to work consistently with artists such as these. What

the professional demands on a recording engineer in this industry are and how to maintain a consistent portfolio of work.

After the panel, students commented positively on the experience, continued the discussion and centred upon particular aspects such as the multidisciplinary needs of their chosen field. This is reflected in the following comment:

The panel was a great way to gain a lot of industry knowledge, through speaking to and taking on board the vast experience of the professionals on the panel. I personally came away from the afternoon with a better understanding of working within the music industry and the commitment that is needed to become successful in my chosen field of work. I found listening to and talking to the panel very motivational, in the sense that it made me think about things a little deeper and really push to start my own freelance occupation. I think that anybody that missed the panel on that Monday afternoon really missed out!

It was also evident that students gained awareness and perspectives that could simply not have been attained by more traditional learning methods. The breadth of experience on the panel, the way in which they interacted and the manner in which they could directly respond to student needs brought novel and effective perspectives as is typified by the following comment:

I felt that the session with the panel was not only a great opportunity to gain a critical insight into the music industry and modes of operation but to also gain knowledge in how someone would get to be it that in position in the first place. The combined knowledge of

the panel, as well as their contrasting experiences I felt was a great way to learn about the jobs in the industry, the panel themselves were very forthright about the industry.

The second stage of interaction consisted of the industry professionals assessing the student portfolios (in contrast to the usual practice of an academic assessing student work). Students expressed a feeling of uncertainty with this process, and an increased need to apply themselves to the task knowing that the industry professionals would take a different view. Uncertainty such as this is more akin to the situation in which an industry professional decides whether to interview, employ or contract a graduate – it is therefore more reflective of ‘real’ life. The assessors were not familiar with students’ backgrounds or previous work and there was therefore risk associated with the future implications of any opinion formed. For example, a student may approach an industry assessor for employment three years after graduation, and it would be more difficult to create a new impression at that point. In this way, their capability was not just set at that point in time, but also, to some extent, into the foreseeable future. The student cohort was also aware of their contribution to the industry assessors forming an opinion of Coventry University Music Technology graduates collectively.

Lastly, students commented on how the panel allowed them to engage in a ‘partnership learning’ approach with the panel. In some ways, the inclusion of outsiders changed the dynamic of the session and broke down the usual relationship between academic and student, as, through the chairing of the session, the academic was clearly looking for answers too. This reflects Freire’s (1998) concept of the partnership where all participants are simultaneously teachers and students.

The industry professionals' view

The project was initiated and funded for the benefit of the students involved and the wider academic community. However, it soon became evident that the role of the industry professionals was crucial, based on Ashton's (2010) point of the need to increase networks and collaboration between academia and industry. There were a number of outcomes based upon their perspective, which are highly relevant to the concept explored by the project.

It became quickly evident that the industry professionals required considerable guidance and coaching on their role within the project. The panels chosen were highly experienced, committed and very enthusiastic, though they were also aware of the considerable impact that they could have on the project. Though some had experience of giving guest talks at Universities or Colleges, none had been involved in a concept such as this. For this reason, the project needed explaining in detail at the start and throughout. The biggest challenge for the industry panel came in assessing the student work. The main issues were their unfamiliarity with assessment methods, and the lack of comparison with other work. To mitigate against this issue, a number of steps took place – an academic also assessed the work, the industry panel did not award a mark (they merely provided feedback), and a further academic from another Faculty assessed the work by way of moderation. Even with all this support, the industry panel took much longer than planned to assess the work. This was partly due to the need to juggle the work alongside their commercial projects. However, the largest constraint came from the time needed for them to reflect upon their own comments, to be guided, supported and re-assured over the process, and for them to put together constructive feedback. This presented an issue with the return of module marks and feedback as they were delayed beyond the University's usual time deadlines.

In terms of the feedback, the industry professionals' opinion largely matched those of the academic assessing the work and the moderator. The generic nature of researching jobs, providing evidence and writing action plans meant that these could be equitably judged whatever the assessor's background. However, the comments from the industry panel were particularly valuable because they were from the perspective of someone who would look to employ a graduate. The language used was significantly different and employed industry-focused terminology and concepts. It avoided the usual clichés of academic assessment feedback and thus, from the student perspective, had more meaning for their development as professionals.

The project also produced an unexpected outcome for the industry professionals in that it gave them a far more accurate picture of the challenges that graduates face breaking into a competitive and fragmented industry. They were better placed to understand the skills, knowledge and experience that graduates commonly possess, and the issues of articulating these to a potential employer. As such, they could be better placed to recruit graduates or develop recent graduates who they may work with in their careers. The unexpected development of the industry professionals therefore meant that they shared in the partnership learning and also, in accordance with the principles of PDP, developed their own expertise.

A model for the future

The project should be judged as successful in a broad sense in that it had a number of positive benefits to the student group which, due to its adoption within an existing module can be seen to be related to the embedded involvement of industry professionals. From the academic perspective, participation was better, and a better depth of understanding of the professional environment was seen in the job descriptions and the evidence of capability. From the student perspective, social media was used to build up to and prepare for a shared learning experience, students were more active in their learning, information which could not be gained by other means became available to them, and the uncertainty of being assessed by industry professionals brought some anxiety and a sense of risk and focus. From an industry professional standpoint, the feedback largely matched those of the academic and the additional moderator. However, the language and terminology used was different and produced a prompt to action much more aligned to industry practice. The approach also brought an unexpected development opportunity for the industry professionals as they better understood the perspective of the graduate industry aspirant.

Crucially though, the project needs to be viewed with due attention to the fact that it was initiated and funded in response to the relevant literature, the challenges for higher education, and the context and challenges of the industry. There were a number of ways in which the project responded to the issues raised in the literature. First, given the rise in students in music-related subjects (Brown 2007), the skills developed could offer a way for students to differentiate themselves from the competition. This is particularly important in the era of visibility of DHLE

data. Second, the uncertain nature of employment and the limited openings explained in the literature was reflected particularly well in the panel discussions and therefore the portfolios. Students could understand the reality much more effectively having heard about it first hand, this allowing them to better prepare for the realities. Third, the project brought a more vocational approach to a subject which is actually very broad and contrary to opinion, not that focused on a particular role such as, for example, the recording engineer. This could potentially increase the proportion of graduates who remain active in the field in a similar way to the success of conservatoires outlined by HEFCE (1998).

In terms of the industry context, a number of aspects were successfully tackled in the approach. First, the prevalence and challenge of self-employment was reflected in the panel discussion and student portfolios. This was a student-need-based view presented as a professional response. Second, the issue of fragmentation was dealt with in that the panel had many differing experiences and used different approaches to their work. Third, the concept of a portfolio career was outlined, and it was interesting to see that the professionals themselves actually developed as part of the experience.

The industry involvement was more meaningful when compared to many other methods such as guest talks. The industry professionals were not working cold, the institution was unconcerned about trying to impress them, and they came to better understand students' needs. Additionally, the panel approach and student engagement ensured a non-polarized view.

The approach is not without issues however, and there are a number of factors that have to be considered alongside the possible risks. First, the cost implications can be considerable if the industry practitioners are to be paid a commercial rate for their time on the panel and in assessing the work. If the task is to be taken seriously, then there is every justification for the panel to be paid their normal commercial rates. This can present a problem in some institutions however, as the cost can be high and the results (in the form of improved employment prospects for the students) may not necessarily be that immediate. Second (and closely related), the choice of panel members is important given their pivotal role in the project. The panel members need to have sufficient professional experience to have a degree of kudos with the students. This could take the form of working with well-known recording artists or working in particularly well-known studios. They also need to be committed to the project, be interested in the concept, and be empathetic to the learning needs of students. Paradoxically, industry professionals with the greatest professional kudos may have difficulty in relating to the needs of the project, and may not be sensitive to the situation that the students are in. This presents a challenge to adopting such an approach, as the effectiveness of the industry professionals is not fully known until the assessment stage. Even if an appropriately qualified and experienced panel is successfully formed, the project approach still takes considerable time for the academic responsible. This time is typically spent in meeting the panel, preparing for and managing the panel discussion, briefing the panel on the assessment process and providing advice and guidance along the way. Lastly, the project approach brings in new elements of risk to the perception of the course, as students and their work become the ambassadors. This is in contrast to the approach that most institutions take where they endeavour to impress employers with institutional facilities. Instead, industry practitioners gain a deep understanding of the work that students are producing. Obviously, this

is crucial for the project, but their opinion of the course is then well formed and may well be shared with other industry professionals. As such, facilitating student work as the ‘showcase’ is somewhat risky for a course due to its unpredictability.

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