UWE Bristol: Enterprise and Innovation Studios in the Creative Technologies

Case Study for the HEA 2018 Symposium: An Enterprising Mind-Set for Employability

> "An Enterprise Studio is a space within a department that creates a bridge for students between their academic course and the industry they will eventually work in… These opportunities enrich the student experience and prepare them for work at a level not normally possible through curricular or part-time work".

> (Carina McLane / ESN, 2016)

Enterprise and Innovation studios are a continuing initiative, within the Faculty of Environment and Technology (FET) at UWE Bristol, set-up through the use of the Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF). Their primary goal is to enhance the student experience around employability and professional skills development in undergraduate students through authentic, often paid, real-world projects and business engagements via co-curricular, non-credit-baring activities. This proposed case-study will reflect on the operations of the two pilot studios situated within the Department of Computer Science and Creative Technologies, **PlayWest** (Games Technology MSc/BSc) and **Impulse** (Music Technology BSc).

Both Games and Music Technology are fairly modern disciplines within Higher Education with relatively targeted vocational outcomes within the digital and creative sectors. While these are often seen as being at the forefront of the UK's global industrial, economic and cultural offering (Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, 2017), they are the target of a severe graduate paradox found in many skills based destinations. In particular, the increasing number of graduates fuelled by headlines of skills gaps and expanding sectors (Bazelgette, 2017) is met by criticism of graduates' lack of market awareness and professional soft skills (Shadbolt, 2017), often epitomised by the feedback loop of entry level positions requiring experience to be hired, but one requires that hiring to get the experience.

Our studios try to address this paradox by scaffolding experiences for undergraduates so that they construct their professional behaviours and identities enacted in and through context specific practice (Murphy & Hall, 2008). Central to this, is a move from industrial simulation to industrial activity elevating the priorities of stakeholders other than the students and with that a critical need to develop, practise and prioritise the behaviours, attributes and competencies of the professional world over the academic.

The studios activities have resulted in a number of high profile practice-led outputs with industry partners and internal UWE stakeholders, for example, the BBC, Bristol Music Trust, and Horizon 2020 Research. In addition, they have facilitated interdisciplinary collaborations across faculties and departments with the University, and enabled practitioner-academics to reconnect with their industries.

The pilot studios were designed to be disruptors and find innovative ways to navigate the institution's structures and systems. This use of "Intrapreneurship" (QAA, 2018), demonstrates the application of enterprising approaches (risk taking, problem solving, innovation) within large organisations to better facilitate relations with a quickly moving professional world.

In achieving this we have encountered a number of interesting challenges relevant to other disciplines, for example the perception of students and university as cheap/free labour; the effects of perceived undercutting on the wider industry; managing the expectations of partners while maintaining parity with industry; and, navigating the limited ability for large institutions to operate in a quick and agile manner.

Aside from internal KPIs of student engagement numbers, income revenue and impact case studies, it remains difficult to asses the personal impact on the graduates leaving university using conventional means, for example DLHE data. Therefore, we have committed to our own study through qualitative means with ex-participants of the studios to investigate their trajectory post-graduation and reflect on the studios' impact upon this (due to begin in the summer 2018).

Our studios' "praxis", reflections and commitment through action (Kemmis & Carr, 1986) has revealed a wealth of new understanding for our students and ourselves and I would very much appreciate the opportunity to further share our experiences with peers at this HEA Symposium.

References

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