



## Embedding employability into the curriculum

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The work of the Employability Research Group at Rose Bruford College, with funding from the Higher Education Academy as part of its Strategic Enhancement Programme.

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24th July 2015

*In partnership with:*

**Rose  
Bruford  
College**  
of Theatre  
& Performance

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# 1. Introduction

## The aim:

*To develop a framework at Rose Bruford College that allows students, staff and alumni to effectively engage with the industries we aspire to populate, whilst investigating processes of professional and personal development planning both within and in addition to core curriculum themes and content.*

## The team:

- Mark Simpson, CHAIR; Module/Year Coordinator, School of DMTA.
- Kathy Dacre, Director of Learning, Teaching and Curriculum.
- Andrew Scanlan, Head of Development and Alumni Relations.
- Anthony Sammut, Interim Head of Productions; Lecturer, School of DMTA.
- Alec Brand, Head of Marketing.
- David Matthews, VLE Development Manager; Lecturer, School of Performance.
- Jayne Richards, Programme Director, School of Performance.
- Thomas Wilson, Module/Year Coordinator, School of Performance.
- Rob Sayer, Senior Lecturer, Bath Spa University.
- Maureen Tibby, Consultant, HEA.

With this institutional aim in mind, the team sought to deliver what is essentially a *strategic analysis* of our work towards employability, by applying the AMOSSHE<sup>1</sup> model of impact assessment:

- What are our intended objectives?
- What are our deliverables?
- What are our outcomes, what changes do we want to see?
- What are our indicators of achievement?
- What data can we gather to support these indications?
- Where does this take us in the future?

## Intended outcomes

- To improve graduate employment statistics.
- To improve student engagement with the employability agenda.
- To improve relations between the world of HE and the world of work.
- To introduce skills seminars to support curricular activity.

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<sup>1</sup> Theoretical and practical guidance for managers looking to understand the value and impact of the services they deliver amidst the rhetoric of fees, student experience, widening access and key information. <http://www.amosshe.org.uk/news/viplaunch>

## Indicators

- NSS and other surveys.
- Ongoing dialogue with employers and placement hosts.
- Ongoing dialogue with alumni.

## Data

- Graduate employment statistics.

## Deliverables/output

- To develop a Professional Preparation module that is embedded throughout a student's three years at university, with formative assessment at Levels 4 & 5, culminating in a summative assessment at Level 6 asking them to evaluate their readiness for the world of work.
- To develop new graduate mentorship scheme.

And finally, we will need to be mindful of competition in our sector, by:

- Considering our response to the technological advances that are seemingly better funded in the FE sector.
- Considering our response to the growing apprenticeship market. Perhaps by considering *Higher Apprenticeships* or *Apprentice Partnerships*.

In order to engage with this research, some development of key questions was necessary:

- What is the college's definition and understanding of employability?
- How can we improve delivery of, and engagement with, this important agenda?
- In what ways might we better make connections between the world of education and the world of work?
- How might we improve relationships with alumni and the industries we aspire to populate?
- What are others doing in this area?
- What are our strengths, our weaknesses, our opportunities and challenges?

And even at the outset, we already felt it important to identify two quite specific recommendations that gave us focus and purpose:

- That we should explore the creation of an online resource that acted as both employability skills reference tool and/or a student/alumni networking platform for both placement and job opportunities.
- That employability attributes were built into the curriculum and assessed as such, including professional awareness, notions of self-as-business, the psychology of self-employment, the ethos of fund-raising and an understanding of Enterprise and Entrepreneurship.

## 2. Current delivery at Rose Bruford College

As a starting point, it might be useful to examine what we already offer here at Rose Bruford College. We are a college of Vocational Higher Education, but perhaps we should define "vocational".

*vocational*

*adjective:*

- > *relating to an occupation or employment. "vocational training".*
- > *(of education or training) directed at a particular occupation and its skills. "specialized vocational courses such as fashion and catering have been popular among students"<sup>2</sup>.*

By definition then, students entering vocational HE are looking to improve their *employability*. So do we deliver at this level? Do we understand our very real worth as providers of both education and vocational skills training? Where does the balance lie?

### **Professional Preparation in the School of Design, Management and Technical Arts**

The Level 6 Professional Preparation module in its current iteration has now been running for three years (two for Costume Production and Theatre Design) and has been tweaked each year to reflect programme requirements.

After an introductory session that focuses on the college ethos towards employability and professional preparation, students are expected to engage with their own programme teams in order to develop ideas to inform the completion of the assignment. Programme teams also take on the responsibility for organising sessions on CV building, applications, interview technique, portfolio development, networking and *self-as-business*, alongside mock interviews as either formative or summative assessment, depending on discipline.

In addition, alongside talks from discipline specific associations and practitioners, students are also offered sessions from the following organisations and/or on the following extra-curricular topics over the course of the year:

- > Stage Jobs Pro (careers promotion and opportunity).
- > Equity (union).
- > BECTU (union).
- > Wise & Co (tax accountants).
- > Practical tax (self-assessment).
- > An introduction to the basics of web design.
- > Impact training (networking and presentation skills).

Professional preparation has, this last year, also been included as part of the shared module curriculum at Levels 4 and 5. However, it appears that the Professional Development strand of these shared modules will be rather reduced in a proposed alterations to module delivery, thus we need to find other ways in which to embed it within the curriculum for the future and I put forward recommendations to do so later in this report.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/>

## **Professional Preparation in the School of Performance**

Professional Preparation is delivered in slightly differing ways across the School of Performance.

### **European Theatre Arts**

The ETA Programme takes a blended approach, recognising that students need to take a holistic view of their development. Tutors work under the following general principles:

- > Demystifying the world of work.
- > Responding to student needs.
- > Accommodating changes in student aspiration and expectation.

At Level 4, the focus is on career modelling: what sort of relevant jobs are out there?

At Level 5, skills development; focusing on workshop leadership and facilitation in an academic context

Then at Level 6 all this culminates in ET606 Professional Preparation. This is a portfolio-driven industry study module for which students make contact with a European theatre company to analyse its business model, planning and strategy, in order to contextualise their learning in a real-world environment. A major component of this analysis is to explore the balance between creative and business decision-making.

This work is supported by the preparation of an individual student SWOT analysis looking at personal branding, marketing, tax and funding; with additional workshops on photos and CVs.

In addition, programme staff value alumni engagement and have developed a graduate network that includes members in Iceland, Spain, France, Germany, Australia, Hong Kong and the US.

Graduate talks and discussions with lunch and expenses maintain alumni engagement with the college and act as very real connections between the worlds of education and work.

### **Acting and Actor Musicianship**

Within the Acting and Actor Musicianship programmes there is a specific recognition that students are engaging with education for a career and as such, everything they do is related to professional preparation.

At the end of Level 5 into Level 6, this recognition becomes a reality with the introduction of the marketing tools a performer requires to succeed over the first few years of their career.

Starting with "headshots" towards the end of Level 5, students are encouraged to consider their image and how they should portray themselves to the performing arts industries. With tutorial support they are then able to engage a photographer and provide thumbnails for selection at the start of Level 6.

With Level 6 come classes in CV development, "Spotlight" profiles, personal marketing, social media and self-as-business (tax and self-assessment), with the focus on realising a USP (unique selling point) in terms of casting. Students are given seminars and lectures from agents and casting directors, alongside actors and other performers offering personal insights in the real world of freelancing as a performing artist.

Many of the supporting classes are led by high-achieving Rose Bruford alumni, who not only provide expertise but are excellent role models for the students.

In addition, students are given sessions on audition technique along with up to 15 opportunities for audition practice with high-level practitioners.

This delivery is brought together by students producing a "marketing package" (CV, headshot and profile) that they put to the test as part of an audition in front of a panel consisting of casting directors and agents. As a result of the feedback from this panel, the students then have an initial USP with which to progress through Level 6 and into their early careers.

At the end of Level 6, students give an assessed viva analysing their self-promotion, providing evidence of career development, job hunting and networking. If a student has not yet secured an agent, they will be offered additional support at this stage.

Along with voice reels, show reels have been introduced and there is a much greater emphasis on entrepreneurial spirit as part of professional preparation.

It is clear that experience of broadcast media techniques is becoming increasingly important for performing artists and there is a thrust to improve our offering in this area.

### **American Theatre Arts**

In the American Theatre Arts programme, Professional Preparation is delivered at Level 6. Students are encouraged to consider their image and how they should portray themselves to the performing arts industries. They are given classes in CV development, letter-writing, "Spotlight" profiles, personal marketing, "headshots" networking, branding and self-as-business (tax and self-assessment), with the focus on realising a USP (unique selling point) in terms of casting. In support, students are given seminars and lectures from Spotlight, Equity, agents and casting directors, alongside actors and other performers offering personal insights in the real world of freelancing as a performing artist.

### **Part-Time Acting**

In the Part-Time Acting programme, students tend to have more maturity in terms of life experience. The course is very much a practical training and as such there is a specific recognition that students are engaging with education for a career and that everything they do is related to professional preparation.

## **Online Theatre Studies**

A range of generic and transferable employability skills are embedded in the programme design. Students' attention is drawn explicitly towards the skills they are developing alongside (behind, underneath, through) teaching and learning activities. Self-reflexivity and awareness of process is bound up in all modes of assessment.

### **In summary**

At Rose Bruford College, we appear to understand the very real value in linking academic credentials to professional qualifications, thus a preparation for the world of work needs to be holistic in nature and woven throughout any programme of study for the Performing Arts.

In compiling this information, it was encouraging to note that our delivery of Professional Preparation across the college explicitly recognises the vocational nature of what we do; we are indeed *educating for industry*.

### 3. Project work – first stage

Acceptance onto the HEA Strategic Enhancement Programme for *Embedding employability into the curriculum*, in Autumn 2014, allowed us to put our plans into action and attendance at the first networking event in London contextualised them further.

#### Networking event 1

##### London, Wednesday 29th October 2014

This first day was spent exploring themes of employability and it seemed that our colleagues elsewhere often struggle with the fact that their taught disciplines are so diverse that they don't know where to start. My argument here was that whilst we at Rose Bruford College are aware of this diversity, our delivery was based on a holistic overview of what we want all of our students to achieve, and that whilst each programme may have a somewhat different iteration of module classes and assignments (certainly in the School of Design, Management and Technical Arts (DMTA) case), the ethos behind these classes and assignments was broadly the same.

Discussions following on from this event focused on engagement with the employability agenda from all stakeholders: staff, students, alumni and employers, leading us to consider specific methodologies by which we could explore these issues, including:

- An employability conference.
- An alumni focus group.
- Student discussions.

#### Networking event 2

##### York, Wednesday 4th February 2015

The focus for this meeting was on sharing practice, networking and the following key themes:

- Evaluating the impact of our project/report.
- Engage alumni in both curriculum development and the employability agenda.
- Further engagement of industry in curriculum development.
- Incorporating student development (PPD) within the tutorial process.
- Explicit recognition of Enterprise, Entrepreneurship and Employability within the curriculum, both as it stands and in development.
- Branding vs mapping of skills and attributes within the curriculum.
- Strategic use of placement opportunities.
- Recognising the reality gap between the world of education and the world of work.
- Academic language vs industry language.

Whilst there were no specific answers to any of the questions raised by these points during the day, we were able to further reflect after the event, this reflection informing the development of our plans for our conference.

Later in February 2015, we were awarded funding that allowed us to fully realise our ambitions to engage with the employability agenda and it is this funding that has allowed us to prepare this report.

Bringing this information together allowed us to better focus on the tasks ahead. The project VLE page may be found here:

<http://vle.bruford.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=773>

This page contains all the material gathered as part of this project alongside the various digital outputs referenced below.

In addition, back in 2012/13, the College incorporated some of its curriculum work on employability into its OER *Reflecting on Learning and Teaching in the Performing Arts* and would seek to enhance this study area and develop a focused OER on *Employability in the Performing Arts*:

<http://rltperformingarts.org/rltpa-study-area7/>

## **The EMPLOYABILITY WORKS! Conference**

### **London, Wednesday 15th April 2015**

The project team organised a conference day at this year's Rose Bruford Research Symposium which involved members of the team and the following panellists:

- > Tony Graham, Theatre Director.
- > Fumi Gomez, Site Manager, Casting Call Pro.
- > Robin Townley, CEO, ABTT.
- > Naomi Ludlam, Interact.
- > Christopher Cheeseman, Branch Manager, Santander.

Our focus:

1. To refine the college's definition and understanding of employability and employability skills.
2. To consider ways in which we can improve the delivery of employability skills to our students.
3. To look at ways in which we can better make connections between the world of education, and the world of work, by building relationships with alumni and the industries we aspire to populate.
4. To develop ideas for an Open Educational Resource (OER) to support the delivery of teaching in this area.
5. To demonstrate the college's engagement with this important field of understanding.

After lively discussion in the morning, we convened in a stiflingly hot studio for our conference panel. Key points from the panel discussion are noted below:

## **Embedding employability**

1. Employability is specifically related to a job, not abstracted from it; matching student talent with opportunity is part of the game.
2. Attitude is important, students need to be positive and confident in knowing what their brand is and portraying it.
3. Being a team player is essential; this is often not recognised as important by students.
4. There is high mobility in this sector so flexibility and resilience is key.

## **Embedding employability in HE teaching**

Training institutions, notably programmes in 16+ further education, tend to embed notions of employability as a natural part of a student's development; how do we in higher education match up to this competition?

1. We can coach, mentor and provide techniques.
2. We can provide placement experiences and access to employers.
3. We can provide a process, an approach; yet how well students engage with employability and make the most of the opportunities is up to them. Students need to have ownership of the process, it is personal. It is about them.
4. By 'doing', students learn; work-based and work-related learning is crucial in enhancing employability, raising students' awareness and helping them to make the connections between study and world of work.
5. We have moved away from traditional notions of skills sets for employment, students need to be encouraged not to restrict themselves, be allowed the freedom to explore. We can support them to develop the confidence they will need to do this and to be resilient.

## **Embedding employability in the curriculum**

1. We need to enable students to make links between what they are studying and the world of work, ensuring that they recognise the relevance.
2. We need to provide opportunities for students to reflect on what they have learned and why and how it has enhanced their personal development and employability.
3. Reflective learning is an essential part of embedding employability in the curriculum.

4. We need to support students in articulating their achievements and development.

### **Industry experience within the curriculum**

1. Work-based learning or placements are seen to be an important part of development for some disciplines, how do disciplines without such opportunity introduce experience of and preparation for the world of work?
2. The one thing it is impossible to offer in any way is longer term experience; how do we see this as an opportunity rather than as an obstacle?
3. Placements are so important in raising awareness and enhancing employability but need to ensure it is a quality experience for both the student and employer.
4. The student must be supported to record and reflect on their experiences.
5. Access to opportunities to experience different roles and work places and use and develop skills/knowledge is crucial to enhancing employability. However, must ensure students are offered quality placements and that these benefit all the stakeholders. We need to ensure effective collaboration between the institution and the employers.

### **Emerging ideas in our embedding employability project**

1. Employers value a positive attitude, honesty, commitment, reliability, flexibility, professionalism. Students need to be made aware of this within curricular activity.
2. Does a general wider-ranging programme rather than a specialist discipline-focused education in Theatre Arts better encourage a collaborative approach to theatre making?
3. How do we ensure placements as positive learning experience and avoid exploitation in terms of unpaid labour?
4. Encouraging students to have a voice and to stand out from the crowd is seen as important to encourage.
5. Students are on a journey, creating their own history. They need to be aware of this, consciously embedding all their experiences within that narrative. And using such a narrative is important - students need to tell their story and engage their audience of employers.
6. Much has been said about measuring employability skills, but how do we actually do this?
7. Maturity is seen as an attribute impacting employability. At what point is this measured? How is it perceived? How can we develop research in this area?

8. Do we recognise those light bulb moments when students suddenly get it? How can we collate qualitative evidence from students at that point of enlightenment?

### **A tale of two elephants**

In discussing issues of delivering employability and professional preparation, we also identified two quite specific areas that appear to be avoided in the classroom:

1. Having spent three years at University, do students still aspire to the same goals? Is this still what they want to do?
2. It is a tough and competitive world out there and many graduates won't succeed in their particular chosen field, having to adapt to seemingly less appealing pathways.

Whilst we relate to these truths obliquely, should we be more explicit? Are we pre-emptively dashing student hopes if we do so?

To get some sort of perspective on this compound question, we are going to use a number of examples from classes and seminars over the course of the last two years.

The first example references the occasion when the chair of one particular organisation suggested to a large mixed group of Level 6 students that: *"It's a tough world out there and most of you won't work!"*

In one sentence, the student's world is blown apart, their reasons for attending university negated.

Other examples may not be so extreme, but tell similar stories. Sources are respondents to a variety of questions put over the course of this project:

- > *"You should teach them to say 'would you like fries with that!'"*
- > *"You've got to apply what you know to stuff you don't know. Adapt to whatever you are doing at the time."*
- > *"Use your experience and make it relevant to what you're doing."*
- > *"You've got to be willing to learn. Just get out there and see what's available."*
- > *"Using your skills, your knowledge, your qualities to go out there and find your way in life – you've got to take ownership of it."*
- > *"You've got to be patient. You could be doing any number of things before you get your first break."*
- > *"Be open to possibilities – you never know what's round the corner."*
- > *"We don't do it for the money, the glamour or the hours, so we've got to love it right?"*

So returning to the first example, surely, the right advice for graduating students should be: *"It's a tough world out there and we're here to help you navigate your way through it."*

Exploring the question of what employers want from graduates over the past two years, we are continually given answers along the following lines:

*"I can teach anybody anything as long as they come to me with the right attitude."*<sup>3</sup>

And:

*"What do I want from a graduate? Be on time, do a good job and be nice to people."*<sup>4</sup>

So being a graduate, achieving *graduateness*, is more than merely having a particular skillset, it is demonstrating that skillset within a particular environment and to particular people that is important. Equally, many of the skills students will develop at university are *soft skills*, *transferrable skills*, skills that can be applied in fields other than the student's original discipline.

*"[An] interpretation of employability [or "graduateness" might be defined as the] skills, attitudes and abilities that make graduates capable as creative and flexible professionals..."*

Palatine<sup>5</sup>

There is thus much more to the student's journey through higher education than merely developing a set of skills. Who they are and *personal* development play a huge part in that journey.

*"In social identity theory and identity theory, the self is reflexive in that it can take itself as an object and can categorise, classify or name itself in particular ways in relation to other social categories or classifications. This process is called self-categorisation in social-identity theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher and Wetherell 1987); in identity theory it is called identification (McCall and Simmons 1978). Through the process of self-categorisation or identification, an identity is formed."*<sup>6</sup>

In simple terms, upon starting at university, the student wants an education that will give them the skills to do a particular job; in so doing he or she has to jump through a number of hoops in order to achieve a standard considered to be degree-worthy by people like us. In jumping through these hoops, what does a student learn about themselves and the choices they're making? What are the consequences of each step they take? How does this journey impact the way they feel about the world around them? In very real terms, the more a student knows, the more likely they are to make decisions that divert them from their original plan. And these

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<sup>3</sup> Steve O'Brien, Production Manager, New Vic Theatre. 2013 Symposium seminar at Rose Bruford College

<sup>4</sup> Crag Bennett, Development Manager, Whitelight. 2014 Symposium seminar at Rose Bruford College

<sup>5</sup> Palatine, *Employability Issues in HE Performing Arts*, Career No 1, September 2003

<sup>6</sup> Jan E Stets, Peter J Burke, *Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory*, Social Psychology Quarterly 2000, Vol 63, No 3, 224

decisions may be made in light of job market considerations as much as they may be made in light of a recognition that perhaps this wasn't the right discipline after all.

Returning to the questions:

1. Having spent three years at University, do students still aspire to the same goals? Is this still what they want to do?
2. It is a tough and competitive world out there and many graduates won't succeed in their particular chosen field, having to adapt to seemingly less appealing pathways.

So, should we be more explicit? *Yes, we should, because yes, it's ok to change your mind!*

## **Conference output**

The conference formed a major part of the team's work on this project. A video recording of the conference panel and a full transcript of the panel discussions accompany this report and links are noted below. The video will be used as a part of our work in embedding employability on the College VLE.

## **Video recording**

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BxVvw1tBnEEaS094VG92UUdvcWM/view?usp=sharing>

## **Video transcript**

<http://vle.bruford.ac.uk/pluginfile.php/46001/course/section/7384/Employability%20Symposium%20Transcript.docx>

## **Additional material**

The team has also collated a video collection of employers talking to camera about student employability in the performing arts. This will form a very useful resource on the College VLE and will be linked to the curriculum modules on employability within the existing curriculum.

As a part of this project, the Employability in the Performing Arts video was screened at the Graduate Exhibition held in Central London, July 2015. Students involved in the exhibition, potential students who visit and members of the public were asked for comment and suggestions to enhance this resource.

We hope that this resource will form a part of any future OER on Employability in the Performing Arts made for the sector, supplemented by case studies, curriculum examples and personal narratives from former students at different stages of their professional life. This material may be found here:

## **Employability is...**

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BxVvw1tBnEEaRFduSWxpT0pFSEk/view?usp=sharing>

## **In summary**

This first stage of the project was very much a voyage of discovery. What do we do, what do others do, how do our stakeholders engage with this agenda? There is a large quantity of information to assimilate here and it might be summarised thus:

Higher education is not merely about providing an academic qualification, it is about preparing students for careers and for life. In doing so, we need to take a holistic view of what we are offering, one based on the views of industry and alumni, not merely the views of academics, some of whom may not have practiced for some time.

## 4. Project work – second stage

Moving ahead from conference, our aim was to consolidate what we now knew and put forward recommendations for the future. To this end we had the opportunity for further discussion with others in HE at several conferences over May and June 2015. We also wanted to gather the thoughts of students and alumni.

It should be noted that each of the events considered below gave us a particular focus. These are expanded upon under event headings and brought together later in the report.

### Networking event 3

#### York, Wednesday 6th May 2015

These events are always thought-provoking; we are all there for one reason and so our thoughts are always focused towards a specific agenda. Thus at the outset, we started to re-evaluate our definitions of employability, simplify them:

*Employability is what makes a graduate employable. It is what demonstrates that he or she is fit for purpose in an increasingly competitive world.*

But our research has already shown that there is a wide range of understanding associated with this statement, with this diversity of opinion generally split across our stakeholders:

- > Students.
- > Alumni.
- > Staff.
- > Industry.

Some see employability as a set of skills that can be quite specifically taught and some see it as a set of behaviours or attitudes that must be encouraged and mentored.

As our research will show, the truth is that employability is a mix of all these things combined with adaptability, a willingness to learn and a recognition that graduation is merely the start of the journey.

Again I stress that by the very nature of our disciplines, we at Rose Bruford College are somewhat ahead of the curve here, set up to educate for the industries we aspire to populate. However, it is still vital to recognise how our curricular activities actually do impact graduate employability.

## **Technology and employability**

Increasingly, LinkedIn is being seen as the social media tool of choice for new graduates and many institutions are actively encouraging its use as a networking platform.

Software that we already use on campus is Mahara and this has been suggested as a platform for testing students' future engagement with social media alongside its use as an e-portfolio and blogging tool.

Some interesting related initiatives from other institutions are bulleted below:

- Mahara as a personal development timeline.
- Use of LinkedIn as a CV and portfolio tool.
- Open Badges (badging) to promote student engagement <http://openbadges.org/>.
- Use of Mahara "secret URLs" as alternatives to personal websites on LinkedIn.

What more can we do to encourage the use of digital platforms as networking and career development tools?

We continue to explore this exciting field and expect to further engage with digital platforms to deliver and enhance professional preparation over the course of the next academic year.

## **HEA enhancement event**

### **Leeds, Thursday 21st May 2015**

Being invited to give a short presentation of our work to date gave us the opportunity to consider our achievements and to focus on the future.

With colleagues from other institutions, we again discovered shared challenges, not least those connected with:

- Retention and attainment.
- Strategic attendance and engagement.
- Engagement with career development at Level 6.

We discussed how we might better engage students in this area, with some radical suggestions relating to the abolition of the typical lecture or seminar. However, settled on the following more traditional recommendations:

- More interactive learning environments.
- Student-focused tutorial contact.
- Peer learning groups.
- Recognition that HE, much more than we explicitly say, is essentially learning how to learn.
- Encourage ownership of learning.

And we are left with many more questions of which the following are of particular interest:

- How do we ease the transition from school into HE?
- How do we remove boundaries from learning within a modular structure?
- Do we fully understand reflection in order to teach it?

## QAA event

### Bristol, Wednesday 27th May 2015

The focus for this conference was to explore sector engagement with chapter B10 of the quality code. The chapter that deals with work-based learning.

### Situated learning

Currently, we talk about placements and work-based learning. Is it useful to consider the term "situated learning" as an umbrella definition of what we are talking about here?

- > Situation comedy – what is funny about watching those people doing that there?
- > Situational or situated learning – what adds value in offering a particular student a particular experience in a particular environment?

It is useful here to note the specific *matching of talent with opportunity* – do we actively identify specific opportunities for specific students or do we just take what is offered?

Identifying three rather different notions of placement used by a variety of institutions:

- > Short term, up to two weeks, observational, taster.
- > Medium term, up to three months, project-driven.
- > Longer term, up to a year, sandwich, internships.

We tend to go for the first and second versions of this. But how do we ensure the student is getting what they need from such experiences? We did talk about ways in which we map intended learning outcomes onto student designed learning outcomes and all felt that this mapping encouraged students to take responsibility for their own learning. We also talked about how we ensure that the host played the game and didn't exploit the student as cheap... well...free labour – how we ensured the student experience.

This all comes down to relationships, trust... and we all identify that our own contacts are so important in this environment, but that without compromising our own relationships, in order to achieve some sort of institutional resilience, we do have to offer up some sort of system to share the good ones, thereby building relationships between college and host rather than between individuals.

*On a side-note, if we were to consider longer term placements, how does this map onto the concept of higher-level apprenticeships? How might we incorporate a recruitment process within modular activity? How do we assess such credit bearing activity? How does this work internationally, with overseas placement opportunities? How do our own current American and European study abroad arrangements map onto these concepts?*

In developing our understanding of the relationship between industry and education, we then better understand the true value of placements. As a Conservatoire College or Drama School, we at Rose Bruford recognise that we are offering industry accredited education and that embedded within that education is the opportunity to explore work-based learning. This offers opportunities to:

- > Answer research questions.
- > Study current industry practice.
- > Gain industry experience.

We cannot ignore the simple fact that many students are actually offered work on the back of these placements. But apart from this (unintended) outcome, we must consider the pedagogic value of such experience, so for those concerned about the (research) value of such placements, one must ask where better to gain an understanding of current developments in any particular field?

The following terms are currently being used across other parts of the sector:

- Legislation and compliance.
- Academic buy-in.
- Scholarly continuity.
- Pastoral vs academic support.

What do we understand by these terms and how do we engage with them?

Equally it is useful to note how others administer their placement provision. For example, Aston has a *placement team* and the Royal Veterinary College has a placement supervisor and an administrator. Whilst we don't necessarily compete in terms of size or length of placement, the same rules apply and we should give further consideration as to how we support this provision at Rose Bruford College.

It is common across HE that placements are seen as bolt-ons and that the administration of such activity is often started only after a student has been engaged in it for some time. Whilst we are better with our administration than many other institutions, this is primarily because academic staff take direct responsibility for it and as identified in a previous paper *Engaging the Industry* (summer 2014), based on college wide research we do need to deal with such administrative tasks appropriately.

Further, we looked at the provision for such activity in comparable institutions to our own. With thanks to Nick Hunt, Head of the School of Design, Management and Technical Arts at Rose Bruford along with members of staff from RADA, Guildhall, RSC, RWCMD and East 15, I summarise findings here, outlining procedures that appear to be the norm across the performing arts sector:

- Students are encouraged to network and to secure their own placement opportunities.
- Tutorial staff may also use their own or shared connections to secure placement opportunities.
- Tutorial staff confirm the suitability of such placement opportunities and start the process with administrative staff.
- Administrative staff look after the paperwork for placements as part of their general duties, this includes confirming agreements, checking risk assessments and chasing feedback.
- Insurance tends to be covered by the placement host. I understand that it is becoming less common for the home institution to provide insurance at all.

In considering how we develop our own thinking here, it is worth considering the ethos of placement provision or work-based learning as a *two-way-street*:

- Investment in the future.
- A real focus on sustainable career development.
- Developing an understanding of the business side of our industries.
- Managing the expectations of graduating students, employers and academics.
- Developing a dialogue with the industries we aspire to populate.

- Developing relationships with manufacturing industries in our sector.
- Understanding the transition from education into the world of work.
- Encouraging industry input to inform curriculum development.

Assessment is also a common topic for discussion. Where placements are part of a student's learning, assessment varies. Whilst here, we only assess reflection from such experience, in other institutions the student is often visited by their supervising tutor in much the same way as we might assess an off-site show role. In other cases, supervisors might put together a competency-based placement questionnaire that alongside applications forms and interviews forms the core of an assessment.

## **The quality code**

When interpreting chapter B10 of the quality code, how does it relate to other sections thereof? We clearly map onto such requirements with our placement handbook and tripartite agreement. However, it is interesting and useful to note that all institutions struggle with adherence to the letter of the law here. No situation is the same, so we need to interpret these guidelines as they apply to us. This is particularly true of host engagement; larger companies can usually be persuaded to play by the rules, smaller companies and individuals less so.

Are our procedures adaptable and streamlined enough to allow even the busiest designer in their home-as-studio to fill in the form and send it back?

## **Risk assessment and administration**

Which brings us on to risk. Sometimes, while simple to set up, the one-on-one placement opportunity can be the most dangerous and the most difficult to monitor. We don't have immediate answers to this, but how do we ensure the safety of both student and host in this environment?

Assessing risk, not just in terms of health, safety and security, but in terms of learning:

- External assessment is seen as high risk.
- Situated learning impacting curricular activity is seen as a medium risk.
- Placement activity in addition to curricular activity is seen as low risk.

Much discussion was had regarding how we then monitor placement activity, noting that research by ASET suggests that it takes 20 hours to look after each student. Thus, for 4,000 students, an institution would need 48 full-time members of staff to look after placement provision alone.

Our placement situation is rather different in that we don't specifically assess such activity. However both risk and administrative burden are things we should perhaps look at again, particularly in light of the fact that we have made certain assurances through annual monitoring and in the college's strategic plan to appoint an Industry Liaison Officer.

## Professional practice and professional preparation

When considering professional practice and professional preparation, we note the subtle distinction between the two. So, what of professional practice within this context? Our research suggests that we should be working more closely with industry bodies to ensure our adherence to current and best practice in terms of rules, regulations and health & safety.

In conversation with Robin Townley, the CEO of the Association of British Theatre Technicians (ABTT), we identified that whilst many institutions pay lip service to notions of technical standards, few actually use these rules as specifically taught elements of the curriculum and that they were thus diluted within more abstract concepts of working practice.

Professional competencies and skillsets are specifically recognised and assessed in both the nursing and social work sectors.

I note that at Rose Bruford, we too have such pass/fail assessments at Levels 4 & 5 across DMTA and would recommend that we look further at the ABTT's Technical Access Passport (TAP) to validate this activity in much the same way as nursing undergraduates are assessed on their skills in hospital.

We are currently mapping our professional competencies before further consulting with the ABTT, but competency tests that can immediately be related to the TAP might include:

- > Rigging equipment skills.
- > Health and safety practices.
- > Risk assessment.
- > Electrical safety.
- > Electrical and data protocols.
- > Workshop practices.

What the TAP offers in real terms:

- > Within the broader education we offer, our training is industry approved.
- > We can include logos from ENO, ROH, NT, RSC, ATG amongst others on our website, demonstrating this approval.
- > We are recognised as a provider of such training by others in the industry and in our sector.
- > Students get a "passport" with qualifications attached that "grows" with them as they gain experience and skills, they thus have a demonstrable portfolio of industry-recognised skills upon graduation.
- > We further build industry contacts through the ABTT and others.

At *Royal Holloway*, they also run a Passport Skills Award scheme with the added benefit of improved student engagement as a result of a real professional qualification.

Further details of this initiative may be found here: <https://www.tapthis.co.uk/>

## **Alumni focus group**

**London, Friday 12th June 2015**

Throughout the course of our deliberations, we have become increasingly aware of the importance of including alumni in our discussions. To the following ends:

- > Informing curricula development.
- > Acting as mentors to new graduates.
- > Introducing students and graduates to industry contacts.
- > Liaising between the world of HE and the world of work.
- > Developing an increasing network of similarly minded practitioners.

Our questions were focused on what more could we do at Rose Bruford to support graduate transition from the world of education into the world of work:

1. Having been out in the industry, what do you understand about 'employability'? What makes a new RBC graduate 'employable'? Is 'employability' different for performance vs. technical graduates?
2. Is employability different from 'professionalism'? Do you think it's true that becoming a professional means proving yourself in the workplace? Is there more to it than that?
3. In terms of 'professionalism', what are the best and worst things you have seen? Do you recognise any of this in yourselves as you were graduating?
4. How can Rose Bruford College encourage employability and professionalism? Is this something that can be taught?
5. How 'work-ready' should a new graduate be? How 'work-ready' were you when you left College and what did you do to fill the gaps?
6. Does the industry have a responsibility to continue to train / develop new graduates?
7. What do you think were the key skills, attitudes and knowledge you found useful when you graduated?
8. Is mentoring of actual value? If so, what form should a formal mentorship scheme take?
9. How should we engage with alumni? How can alumni help us improve what we offer? How might alumni help us develop our curricula moving forward?
10. How can alumni help us with training opportunities? With placements? With jobs?

And our delegates:

- > Liam Hawes (DMTA – Lighting Design 2012) – project manager at National Stage Technology.
- > Miles Mitchell (ETA 2010) – acting and artistic director Page One Theatre.
- > Tony McHale (old diploma course) – writer / TV producer. Created Holby City.

- Darren Joyce (DMTA – Scenic Arts 1997) – Head of Construction at National Theatre.
- Evelien Coleman (DMTA – Costume 2014) – Freelance. Was on the course board for two years.
- Michael Shaeffer (Acting 1995) – career on West End stage and on film.
- James Hyland (Acting 1996) – Artistic Director Brother Wolf Theatre Company.
- Dan Murfin (DMTA Lighting Design 2004) – Lighting Control Supervisor at the National Theatre.
- Paulette Randall (Community Theatre Arts 1981) – director / writer.
- Piers Ross (DMTA – Scenic Arts 1999) – Founder and managing partner All Scene All Props.

Lively discussion ensued revealing the following key points:

- That actors need to adapt their style to the role they're auditioning for. In the same way, production staff need to adapt their skillset to the venue, gig or company they are interviewing for.
- Rose Bruford College clearly does a lot more now in this area than it did even three years ago.
- Education is as much about developing confidence as it is about developing skills.
- Chemistry and likeability are as important as how good you are. Are you a good company member?
- Teamwork is a vitally important factor in employability.
- Can you verbalise your skills – communicate them? If you can't you are unlikely to get that job.
- The basics are important – how to write a letter, an invoice. What do people get paid for a particular job?
- Don't underestimate luck. Encourage students to consider what it is to be in the right place at the right time.
- Students need to grasp the fact that as freelancers they are likely to be out of work. Are they prepared for this?
- Mentorships from Alumni are seen as a real opportunity to engage in a two-way dialogue.
- We all need to better understand what each other does. This is the nature of collaborative work, particularly in film and television.
- Particularly for production disciplines, the value of situated learning cannot be underestimated. However, students really have to go to the theatre, observe practice and immerse themselves in their chosen fields if they are to succeed.

And again, we are left with several unanswered questions:

- What qualifies as a graduate level job in this sector?
- Actors seem to very reliant on agents, should they be? Shouldn't they take more responsibility for their own careers? Become more entrepreneurial?
- In their final year, the last thing students are thinking about is career. How do we reconnect them with their purpose?
- Understanding that vocation is a very real phenomenon – do students actually understand what it means? Do we?
- In HE, how much should we actually teach and how much should students actually learn?
- How do we better engage with film and broadcast media?

## > Where does student ambition lie?

In many ways, alongside the conference, this event really did give us very real insight into what we need to achieve for our students. The responses and debate inform the recommendations we put forward later in this paper.

The transcript of this event may be found here:

<http://vle.bruford.ac.uk/pluginfile.php/46001/course/section/7384/Alumni%20Focus%20Group%20Transcript.docx>

## **Inside Government event**

### **London, Wednesday 24th June 2015**

A wide-ranging conference looking at graduate employability in very broad terms brought a lot of our thinking to date into sharp focus, showing us where our work maps onto the work of others in the wider HE sector.

Bob Gilworth, from Kingston University, started off by talking about “serving” the student by providing careers education and guidance, the explicitness of what we offer to prepare students for the world of work. Of particular note here was the suggestion of using professional development planning as an educational tool – something that directly maps onto our delivery in the SoDMTA at Rose Bruford.

He went on to talk about institutional employment data – how current is it? How do we use it? How should we use it?

But most importantly, he argues that at the start of Level 6, students are generally at one of five points:

- > Have no idea of a pathway.
- > Deciding on a pathway.
- > Planning a pathway.
- > Ready to start on a pathway.
- > On a pathway.

So we need to ask ourselves:

- > Where do we want them to be?
- > What is right for the individual student?

And in turn, I would argue that this is the purpose of formative assessment in any module delivering professional preparation. That such a module needs to be embedded throughout a student’s journey through HE. And this is reinforced by Ben Smith, from the University of Bath, who talked about a long, thin professional preparation module to maintain student engagement and momentum.

Further, across vocational HE, situated learning is seen as vital to future career development, in terms of both experience and suitability for a particular career path.

As an institution do we consider ourselves to be “employability intrinsic” with clear vocational pathways or “employability added”? Do we perceive our delivery of Professional Preparation to be embedded within or bolted on to the curriculum?

Here we are at the crux of our deliberations for this project.

Stuart Johnson, from the University of Bristol, argued that “we are all different, but whilst we need to be careful of generalisations, we can find commonalities and general principals as long as we have a strategic commitment to do so”.

He went on to ask how might we instil a very real sense of workplace competition within the student mindset?

### **Students:**

- Explore (what you want to do).
- Develop (skills, attributes and experience).
- Compete (for opportunities).

### **Employers:**

- Raise awareness.
- Identify talent.
- Recruit.

So measuring employability might be articulated thus:

- Do students know what they want to do?
- Do students have (or are they getting) the skills and experience?
- Are they able to compete?

With both institutional and student buy-in, we can indulge in joined up thinking in order to identify curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular activity and identify it as being relevant to student progression or transition into the world of work.

And how might we engage alumni in this process:

- Alumni mentoring scheme – keep it simple.
- LinkedIn as a platform.
- Informal rather than heavy and prescriptive.

This further reinforces our key purpose and aim.

Chris Millard, from HEFCE, talked about a University education as an investment in the future, leading to consideration of a return on that investment. Whilst Laura Bellingham, from the QAA, talked about the recognition of extra-curricular activity.

There followed some discussion on Higher Apprenticeships instigated by Alison Harris, from UKCES, who identifies that (work) experience is becoming an increasingly important factor in graduate employability, arguing that this is what is seen as so appealing about apprenticeships.

Harris then went on to assert that it is generally accepted that higher apprenticeships are equivalent to a Level 4 qualification. If we take this at face value, what does this say about a degree-level qualification?

Penny Renwick, from Manchester Metropolitan, closed the conference talking about the future being focused on employability, employment and enterprise; this notion is sequenced through faculty, alumni and the careers service.

Further, I might recommend that destinations of leavers to be more firmly embedded within college statistics and fed into development of professional preparation strategies.

## **Student input**

### **Gathered over the course of the year...**

Evidence from both the classroom and student discussion indicates that professional preparation tends to be the last thing final year students focus on, set against the pressures of final projects and dissertations.

However, discussions with individual students do tell an encouraging story of readiness for the world of work and a positive attitude towards the future. Whilst much of this evidence is anecdotal, some is rather more concrete. Students do identify excitement, fear yes, but more than this, a very real opportunity to make a difference in their chosen fields.

A compilation video of interviews conducted at the 2014-15 Graduate exhibition may be found here:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BxVvw1tBnEEaNnVJd1BSVWNUTzg/view?usp=sharing>

## **Other relevant material**

### **Gathered over the course of the year...**

At various meetings in Rose Bruford College over the course of the last year, having had the employability agenda in mind, we have picked up on so many related points in seemingly unrelated areas.

It is worth noting two particular examples here as starting points for further discussion:

- In staff development sessions looking at our preparation for TDAP, we are recognised as a small specialist institution, providing a *professional education*.
- In staff development sessions looking at the College's strategic plan, the Principal referred to the *training* we provide in terms of specialist funding.

There seems to be a confusion of identity here. Are we providing training? Are we awarding professional qualifications?

In theory the answer to these questions is that we are not; but in very real terms are we? Should we?

And lastly, we engaged in some informal straw-polling of alumni using Facebook, with the question:

*From your own experience, what do you wish you knew about entering the world of employment when you graduated?*

The responses were interesting in that whilst some referenced entrepreneurship and making your own work, almost all of them talked about tax and self-employment as being things

graduates wished they'd known more about; things we quite explicitly talk about in class. This merely serves to reinforce the simple truth that, currently, professional preparation is the last thing students think about in their final year.

The summary of this poll may be found here:

<http://vle.bruford.ac.uk/pluginfile.php/46001/course/section/7384/Facebook%20shoutout.docx>

In contrast a very interesting blog post from an ETA graduate may be found here:

<https://jwshoeproject.wordpress.com/2015/07/09/16-things-drama-school-taught-me-for-real-life-and-beyond/>

In it she discusses the true value of the time she spent at Rose Bruford, resilience, positivity and a desire to keep learning.

## **Deliverables**

At Rose Bruford, we continue to recognise that as a college of vocational HE, we are already educating students for a chosen field. We explicitly identify areas of the curriculum that directly impact employability – rubber-stamping them if you will.

Equally, with thanks to David Matthews and Jayne Richards and their research as Rose Bruford Teaching Fellows, we already recognise and encourage these key employability skills within the curriculum:

- Written communication and numeracy.
- Oral communication.
- Teamwork.
- Leadership.
- Interpersonal skills.
- Digital literacy.
- Planning and organisation.
- Initiative.
- Problem-solving.
- Adaptability/flexibility.
- Industry awareness and entrepreneurship.

But what more could we do in the immediate term to enhance our delivery?

I already have agreement to develop DMT612 Professional Preparation as a three-year module at Rose Bruford College:

- Level 4 to include a formative assessment task of producing a CV and a covering letter, this supported by additional classes.
- Level 5 to include a formative assessment task relating to social media and personal identity, promoting a presence on LinkedIn or equivalent as well as a profile for the college website, this supported by additional classes.
- Level 6 retains a summative assessment task developed from the current *per programme* iteration, including a professional development or promotion plan, portfolio or e-portfolio and mock interviews. But as a result of engagement at Levels 4 & 5, we should expect much improved results.

The VLE page for this module may be found here:

<http://vle.bruford.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=240>

And this forms the basis for an internal educational resource that might in turn be opened up to alumni and others as an OER in the future.

I am in discussion with colleagues to ascertain how such a model might be applied across School of Performance Programmes.

Andrew Scanlan and I have already discussed an alumni mentorship scheme and I can report that there is a growing trend across the HE sector to engage with LinkedIn to provide such a service. It might seem rather less onerous for (hopefully) busy alumni than face-to-face meetings. This scheme is under development and further details should be available in the next academic year.

Succeeding here and progressing other recommendations, we hope to further explore the delivery of Entrepreneurship and Enterprise Education within the next academic year.

Finally, to paraphrase correspondence with Paule Constable, an internationally recognised Lighting Designer and Fellow of Rose Bruford College:

*"Of course there are skills required to do certain jobs. But how you behave, how you understand a situation, read the room, your aptitude, your ability to absorb and learn. These are all vital.*

*"You can develop skills and will learn things quickly with a good attitude.*

*"I think a proper approach, a person who it is good to have in a situation, I'd rather have that - particularly in a young person - and make up the short fall in skills or help them develop their skills while they work alongside you.*

*"A willingness to learn and to grow is vital. Not imagining that once you graduate you are fully formed, but recognising that you are now ready to start your journey..."*

## **In summary**

At the end of our first stage, I summarised our findings thus:

*Higher education is not merely about providing an academic qualification, it is about preparing students for careers and for life. In doing so, we need to take a holistic view of what we are offering, one based on the views of industry and alumni, not merely the views of academics, some of whom may not have practiced for some time.*

Does this still hold true? What more have we learned?

Quite simply, the same truth still holds, but it now has focus in terms of our strengths, our weaknesses, our opportunities and the challenges we face.

If we are to offer a holistic education, we must embed rather more nebulous qualities within it; soft skills, attitudes and behaviours as well as the more traditional skillsets. Alongside this we must embrace the opportunities offered by situated learning, recognising that is in the workplace that learning becomes reality.

## 5. Future developments

### Entrepreneurship and enterprise education

The work started with this project is long term, not merely a quick fix or box-ticking exercise. We firmly believe that further steps into a better understanding of the ways in which we deliver concepts of entrepreneurship in the medium term and then an overall ethos of enterprise education – education for business – in the longer term are vital if we are to remain competitive in this area.

This belief is central to our proposals regarding a possible MBA in Entertainment Industry Administration or similar postgraduate qualification or set of qualifications, although we identify an alternative way of thinking about this here:

- Rather than focus on an academic model, should we consider a corporate model with corporate pricing?
- Focus on SE London and Kent.
- A lucrative income stream.
- Use of existing on-site resources, staff and facilities.
- Restructure deployments with appropriate (corporate) remuneration to allow this.
- How does a corporate model sit with an academic model, how do the regulatory frameworks align?

Following conversations with staff from Whitelight and the ABTT support discussion with Pat O'Toole here at Rose Bruford College, we intend to further explore the concept.

This initiative sits alongside our response to the Government's Apprenticeship initiative. We expand on this below, but suggest that the postgraduate Level 7 degree apprenticeship model might be of more interest to us at this stage.

### The challenge of apprenticeships

The Government defines apprenticeships as follows:

Apprenticeships combine practical training in a job with study.<sup>7</sup> As an apprentice you'll:

- Work alongside experienced staff.
- Gain job-specific skills.
- Earn a wage and get holiday pay.
- Study towards a related qualification (usually one day a week).

Apprenticeships take one to four years to complete depending on their level. An apprenticeship has an equivalent education level and can be:

- Intermediate - equivalent to 5 GCSE passes.
- Advanced - equivalent to 2 A-level passes.
- Higher - can lead to NVQ Level 4 and above, or a foundation degree.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/apprenticeships-guide>

The Skills Funding Academy also identify a Degree Level Apprenticeship that can take students through Levels 5, 6 and 7.

It is worth noting that the Government advice on *traineeships* now also points to information on apprenticeships.<sup>8</sup> However, we need to be aware that any apprenticeship scheme is by definition led by employers and by job specification. How do we actually relate to this notion as a provider of higher education?

## **The competition**

I summarise here some of the marketing material available from those who might be seen as competitors in this field:

### **PRG**

The world's leading supplier of entertainment and event technology, PRG provides integrated services and equipment, including audio, video, lighting, rigging, staging, and scenery and automation systems, for these markets from more than 40 offices in North America, South America, Europe, Africa, Asia and Australia.

PRG currently runs a Work Experience Placement scheme, but are developing an apprenticeship programme.<sup>9</sup> More details to follow.

### **ROH**

The Royal Opera House has been offering apprenticeships in backstage production and technical departments since 2007, providing high-quality vocational training by learning on the job from some of the best skilled in the industry.<sup>10</sup>

### **RAH**

The Royal Albert Hall is also developing an Apprenticeship Scheme.<sup>11</sup> More details to follow.

### **SKY**

'Imagine having the chance to gain experience and qualifications with a company that's revolutionised how people watch TV – giving them dedicated channels for sport, arts and films; launching technology that allowed them to pause, stop and rewind live TV; and delivering it all to them wherever they are. Not to mention being a company that's taken telecoms to a whole new level. We're making the future happen, right now. And you can be a part of it.'

'That's what's on offer when you join Sky as an Apprentice. Even better, you'll gain a nationally recognised qualification and a permanent position while you're learning about what we do.'

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/traineeships-programme>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www2.prg.com/our-company/work-experience-placements/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.roh.org.uk/learning/schools-and-colleges/apprenticeships>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.royalalberthall.com/about-the-hall/education/>

'Sky Academy is a set of initiatives that use the power of TV, creativity and sport to help young people unlock their potential. Launched in 2013, Sky Academy is supporting one million young people to build practical skills and experience by 2020. We believe everyone has potential in them; it's just a case of finding the right thing to help unlock it. Sky Academy is for young people, from primary school right through to those starting out in their careers. Find out more about Sky Academy at [sky.com/academy](https://www.skyacademy.com/).<sup>1213</sup>

## ITV

'At ITV, we're always on the look-out for new talent. And we're 100 per cent behind providing opportunities to earn-while-you-learn. So apprenticeships are right up our street. We've already had a number of people successfully complete our award-winning scheme, and many have gone on to secure great roles within our business.<sup>14</sup>

'Our programme is 12 months long and has lots to offer, including:

- > A competitive apprenticeship salary.
- > A nationally-recognised qualification in Business & Administration, Creative & Digital Media or Customer Services.
- > A year of valuable hands-on experience working alongside industry experts.
- > Guidance and career support every step of the way.'

And again we note that these schemes are employer-led. Further, what are the qualifications they are actually talking about here? Although somewhat unclear, the apprenticeships identified above appear to sit at Level 4; perhaps a precursor to studying for a degree?

## Apprenticeships at Rose Bruford College

Perhaps we might consider such a qualification in technical theatre, optimised for individual students and focusing on generalist vocational skills, but on a model of our own making:

- > Level 4 might include shared modules and cross-school classes.
- > Level 5 might allow the student to specialise within a particular programme during the first stage before going out for the second semester to start a year-long placement.
- > Level 6 would then allow the student to spend the first semester finishing that placement, leaving the second semester to write a 60-credit (critically-reflective) dissertation either at college or whilst at work.

For particular consideration with this model:

- > How do we monitor workplace assessment?
- > How might we guarantee completion of Level 6?
- > Who might provide such a long *sandwich* placement?

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.skyacademy.com/>

<sup>13</sup> <http://jobs.sky.com/sites/default/files/pdfs/sky-starting-out-apprentice-transcript.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.itvjobs.com/working-here/apprenticeships/>

All the while aiming for a practice-based degree rather than an apprenticeship.

### **Facing the challenge of apprenticeships**

Interestingly, Chris Millard (HEFCE), talking at the Inside Government event in June, identified that we don't yet know how the Government's apprenticeship initiative will pan out. Funding is certainly an issue, but one that is beyond the scope of this report.

Alison Harris (UKCES) identifies experience as becoming an increasingly important factor in graduate employability, arguing that this is what is seen as so appealing about apprenticeships.

Whilst Harris asserts that *higher apprenticeships* are equivalent to a Level 4 qualification, the SFA suggests that they might be equivalent to Levels 4 & 5, with *degree apprenticeships* equivalent to Levels 6 then 7. But at what level might *we* want to offer such a qualification?

- > What might be the result of Higher Education embracing apprenticeships and training rather than taking an either/or approach?
- > An academic award and professional qualification rolled into one. Is this such a hard concept to understand and progress?
- > Our world might appear rarefied. Is this appropriate? Desirable? Fit for purpose in a modern world?
- > How might we broaden our appeal?
- > Is there any reason why can't we diversify and give a variety of students what they actually want and need?

I might argue that we have an opportunity to redefine such higher and degree apprenticeship qualifications, asking what our industries need them to be and creating our offering accordingly.

## 6. Conclusion

Bringing our previous summaries together we have:

*Higher education is not merely about providing an academic qualification, it is about preparing students for careers and for life. In doing so, we need to take a holistic view of what we are offering, one based on the views of industry and alumni, not merely the views of academics, some of whom may not have practiced for some time.*

*If we are to offer a holistic education, we must embed rather more nebulous qualities within it; soft skills, attitudes and behaviours as well as the more traditional skillsets. Alongside this we must embrace the opportunities offered by situated learning, recognising that is in the workplace that learning becomes reality.*

Employability and professional preparation should be at the heart of what we do as a college of vocational HE, we compete with providers of apprenticeships and vocational training, needing to both tap into their markets and appeal more broadly to those seeking both personal and professional development in order to advance their career opportunities.

Education for career development and sustainability is key here, we want our graduates to find and keep work in their chosen industries and this should be our ultimate goal.

In order to strategise and implement such a goal, we propose the development of specific roles to enhance Employability at Rose Bruford College, with future responsibility for developing our delivery of Entrepreneurship and Enterprise education. We are not necessarily proposing new appointments, but rather specific deployment to cover our recommendations.

Professional Development Lead:

1. Developing industry relationships and partnerships to build placement opportunities and graduate career opportunities.
2. Encouraging industry to feed back into curriculum development.
3. Liaise with Head of Development and Alumni Relations.
4. Consult on current and best practice.
5. Lead Professional Preparation across all three levels.
6. Involvement with industry events (PLASA, ABTT) and graduate exhibition.
7. Develop our thinking towards entrepreneurship and enterprise education.

Could this role also include college wide responsibilities? In terms of an overarching college ethos, this might seem to make some sense.

Industry Liaison Officer:

1. Database of and liaison with placement providers.
2. Database of and liaison with industry contacts.
3. Placement administration.
4. Supporting tutorial staff with placement provision.
5. Monitoring ongoing placements.
6. Administrative support and liaison for graduate exhibition.
7. Collate student content for website and graduate exhibition.

It should be noted that we are *not* recommending the appointment or development of a careers advice position, role or service at this stage. This sort of provision may be appropriate for larger institutions or for institutions with less focused career goals, but we feel that whilst it could be seen an opportunity to start up a Bruford Agency for performers and production staff, such an initiative might promote a *Bruford* brand rather than an *individual* brand leading to a homogenous graduate output. We also feel that with the wide range of contacts members of staff already utilise to promote graduate networking, we might be exploiting their goodwill if we tried to formalise such arrangements.

## **Recommendations**

We are looking here at encouraging a holistic notion of praxis; what I know, what I do and who I am are entirely interconnected.

Encouraging an ongoing dialogue between all stakeholders: staff, students, alumni and industry; we identify the following ten recommendations in order to progress this agenda:

1. Recognise the professional qualification embodied by the academic award we are offering with our degrees, taking this recognition forward to lead our sector in delivering relevant, appropriate state of the art higher education for the performing arts industries.
2. Identify, map and brand what we offer within the curriculum.
3. Embed technical competencies within the curricula and assessment of our DMTA programmes.
4. Embed professional standards within the curricula and assessment of all our programmes.
5. Run three-year professional preparation modules embedded throughout a student's journey through HE.
6. Improve alumni engagement with both curriculum development and student mentorship.

7. Improve industry engagement with both curriculum development and situated learning.
8. Further develop the methods by which we measure graduate employment and employability.
9. Create a role (allocate deployment) to head up or lead on Professional Development.
10. Create a role (allocate deployment) to administrate placements and industry data.

We make these recommendations in the belief that they are manageable without requiring unachievable levels of resource.

In conclusion, what we are promoting here is a philosophy of inclusion; we have the opportunity to offer degrees that are not simply academic awards, but that are equally professional qualifications. Not merely the best of both worlds, but a synergy of achievement.

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