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External Partnerships at University of the Arts London

Overview of findings from focus group and interviews

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Background

Why did we do this?

Relying on a degree is now not enough; preparation for employability is becoming a priority. Changing attitudes over the last decade, where students now have an increased expectation of university teaching delivery means that students now expect that their degree study will enhance their careers:

79 percent of students surveyed for the CBI/NUS Student guide 2011 indicated that they went into HE to improve their job opportunities (Wilson, 2012 p.30).

The cottage industry of arts, design and media is problematic to define; there is no one defined path after graduation. As a result of increasing graduates numbers the nature of the creative industries is further fragmented by an increase in self-employment, micro businesses and SME's, along with graduate mobility. The sheer volume of graduates emerging from arts, design and media colleges each year highlights concerns around the numbers of students studying the same subjects, progressing to careers in similar industries/sectors and vying for the same jobs, clients and opportunities. Further concerns are being raised around the ethics of sustainability whereby large numbers of students are being trained to work, in a limited and fragmented job market, making the need for individual recognition essential in order to give financial success (McRobbie 2007).

The impact on this can be seen as an opportunity, not just a crisis for Higher Education (HE), if we position the university not as a business, but rather as a social enterprise. In doing so, HE can remain a transformative model that increases human potential, knowledge and understanding; and widen the perspective of the world and our place in it. Educational development that increases the potential of students by collaborating with external partners as a social enterprise model of HE can better ensure students are given the very best learning and teaching experience before they graduate and seek employment.

Flexible learning with external partners can offer a crossover to the university experience, whereby the individual is positioned as both student and professional. In this changing climate it has become ever more important for HE to engage with partnerships, and external partners to collaborate with HE; all in order to reach an understanding of enterprise and employability that is then able to align with curriculum to equip students with an understanding of what the world of work is like, how they position themselves within their practice and what is expected of them in their chosen career.

Who did we engage with?

This report investigates a range of external partnerships at University of the Arts London (UAL) that are currently embedded within the curricula, or complementing curricula activity, in order to understand and further develop a process of working with external partners to enhance learning and teaching. The report is primarily based on focus group and interviews with:

Focus Group Participants:

Abercrombie Fitch, H&M,
Giles Deacon Studio,
Guys & St Thomas' Charity,
Ico Design Partner,
London School of Economics,
Marks & Spencer, Onedotzero,
Wellcome Collection

Interviews and Vignettes:

The National Trust
Merlin Entertainment
Tommy Hilfiger Europe
News UK and Central Saint Martins
Business Innovation Centre

Headlines

How could UAL better collaborate with external partners to enhance learning, teaching and practice?

Partnership Working

To enhance learning, teaching and practice for enterprise and employability, external partners identified key areas for successful partnerships with HE. They were:

- That the student, educational institution and external partner understand the purpose and meaning of the collaboration. For instance, why are we doing this? What is the reason and rationale behind these processes or ways of working and what are the benefits to all those involved? A need to articulate this clearly and that this is communicated to, and understood by, the student.
- That working relationships and roles of others are clearly articulated and that the student is able to understand *their own* role in a project or in their working
- Ensuring planning in advance on how external partners and academics bring the students' experience in work-based learning back into the curriculum.
- Dedicated time spent with students in identifying, understanding and developing goals. For instance, setting a goal and knowing how and what is needed to reach goals. This is also linked to students gaining confidence, and identifying skills gaps that need to be developed.
- Dedicated time spent for induction, continuously supported through formative feedback by both the academic and external partner. Benefits to student learning pre-placement and /or project is necessary, along with the involvement of a project manager, course tutor and external partner to support the student.

Broader career knowledge and understanding practice in a wider context

Exposure to collaboration that brokers relationships between external partners, HE and the student can support, demystify and create a wider knowledge of arts, design and media and the transferrable skills to broader career paths.

- Collaboration with external partners to develop a more enquiry-based approach with students; not just work experience. To work with courses to develop more research projects with students, to investigate what's going on in the sector, what's happening in the world, what clients are thinking: then supporting students to apply their skills to the broader picture.
- Shadowing and working with a variety of people to develop students' leadership skills; by observing different styles, and giving opportunities to lead and develop these skills.
- Setting up work-based learning opportunities that allow space for learning and exploring new environments within the creative and cultural sector and beyond.

Preparation and Presentation

Collaboration with external partners as part of a programme of study provides opportunities to develop preparation and presentation skills that can enhance confidence.

- Setting briefs that immerse students in research of a company and/or sector and provide guidance in terms of preparation and presentation in sharing and talking through ideas developed.
- Inviting students to present at the external organisation's office or client's office can highlight the importance of preparation and presentation to enhance confidence, as well as encouraging a professional approach to client engagement.
- The opportunity for portfolio and presentation coaching with external partners as part of courses could demonstrate the priority of these skills to students.

Experimentation and Risking Taking

External partners recognise the tensions and challenges of reconciling 'creative' and 'commercial' work; they are seeking both and want to work toward this balance in partnership with HE. This tension between creativity and commercialism can perhaps be resolved by focusing on the skill of problem solving.

One of the challenges in this particular area is not offering students too much commercial work, rather getting students to think critically about the client brief, that is, how to generate ideas rather than just solving brand issues or addressing commercial imperatives.

- Collaboration with external partners in writing briefs that give students the room to think freely, to be inventive and creative, whilst also developing a process during formative feedback to translate experimentation into a working environment (with structure and constraints).
- Providing a nurturing environment that allows the learning gained from 'failure' and the ability to make mistakes.

Work-Based Learning

Work-based learning is highly regarded by external partners as an opportunity for students and graduates to help manage future expectations and perceptions, to demystify the workplace and learn more about the hard work, professionalism and career development that is required in a chosen field. Around a third of leading graduate recruiters now recruit graduate employees via work placements and internships (but only those hosted by their own organisations).

- Projects and work-based learning with external partners needs to be longer (more than 3 months) in order to enhance skills through experiential learning and (then) applying this to professional and academic learning.
- Some external partners have realised the limitations of current models of 'one-hit-wonder' work experiences (such as the sandwich placement) and introduced insight programmes, vacation schemes, internships and mentoring programmes, which build a 360-degree understanding and relationship to ensure employers get the graduate employees they need.

Feedback and Assessment

Parity of participation and feedback is important to both external partners and students. Being part of the assessment panel can and will bring unexpected benefits to course and external partner, and can even help future unit development.

- Assessment panels made up of course staff, external partners and students ensures that there is a healthy dynamic that feedback is appropriate and fair and builds confidence in the students. This ensures each student has input from the external partner, as well as from course staff and peer assessment in their feedback.

Tensions

What are the challenges that affect both external partners and HE?

Increased HE tuition fees and the impact on recruitment

As more students attend university it makes public funding unsustainable. The increase in tuition fees has not only impacted HE, the creative and cultural sector is now flooded with increasing numbers of graduates, all having to pay off debts. The impact of increased HE tuition has had an effect on recruitment, and (as a corollary) a substantial demand for paid placements and internships and the expectation of full-time paid employment.

'Students are now coming out with an enormous amount of debt, they want to get full-time paid employment and that's more appealing than an internship where they're perhaps just getting minimal expenses.' (Focus Group)

Around a third of leading graduate recruiters now recruit graduate employees via work placements and internships (but only those hosted by their own organisations). It is clear the proportion of employers who recruit exclusively via work placements will increase, meaning that unless students obtain relevant and appropriate work experience placements with employers, and preferably by the end of their second year, they will face considerable disadvantages in the graduate job market. In the space of five or so years, work experience has gone from being an optional extra to a key employability requirement. (QAA, 2014, p7).

An unexpected behavioural shift identified by the focus group, an overwhelming consensus was that graduate employees have moved from 'what they can offer the company' to asking 'what are you going to do for me?'

'There has been a change of students' attitudes now that they are paying higher fees. There is an expectation that's now translated into the workplace. People don't graduate as art directors...here's my CV, and I'm an art director. There has been this change from what can I do, how can I prove myself to I'm going to do this for you so what are you giving back to me?' (Focus Group)

Creativity and Commercialism

Creativity and learning and teaching practice could be at risk of being overtaken and replaced by a commercial model. While HE has responded to the benefits of working with external partners there is a danger of anticipating and listening too much to employers and their corporate needs (Kenning, 2012). Conversely an area of challenge identified was students' response to briefs, where they were perhaps 'too creative' and needed to consider commercial aspects too. This debate raises interesting, cautionary issues in the balance of an academic + labour market model. The aim therefore is to balance creative and commercial concerns through creative thinking, all explored in the safe environment of study, alongside problem solving on (for example) brand issues and client constraints.

'Commercial is not a bad word, sometimes educators should teach students that too. I love creativity but sometimes you need to channel it to a product that needs to sell. Creativity and sellability are the two things that go hand in hand.' (Querci, Tommy Hilfiger - LCF Vignette)

HE provides learning environments that give students a protective arena in which to experiment, be innovative and learn a plethora of new skills without the pressure of the workplace. It is this innovation and freedom to experiment that external partners crave for their companies.

'I interview mainly graduates and we don't want to see commercial portfolios, we want them to know how to turn something into a product, but we don't look at that. In a way you do want students to be able to experiment and not just design for the

brand. It is good to see something different, to see experimentation from students.'
(Focus Group)

Working with external partners as part of the curriculum can be empowering when that engagement works for everyone concerned: the student, course staff and the partner themselves. For instance, working to a client (industry) brief *can* produce tensions that force students to be creative, out-of-the-box thinkers and adapt their style; so the final result adheres to the brief yet remains true to them as individual creators. Managing creative development and experimentation, yet remaining within the boundaries of client brief and retaining some aspect of identity can be inspiring and build student confidence (Sabri 2012). External partners recognise the tension of creative and commercial work; they are seeking both and want to work toward this balance in partnership with HE. This tension between creativity and commercialism can perhaps be resolved by focusing on the skill of problem solving.

'It's a real challenge that you say to a student, come up with something that we wouldn't see in the commercial world but do it in the commercial way. Creativity is process as well as outputs. The key is problem solving. Problem solving is actually creative, and by developing this skill with students we might be able to resolve these tensions.' (Focus Group)

Values

What do external partners value in their collaboration with UAL?

Value of a degree

Students and employers have long been convinced on the benefits of work-based learning. For students the opportunity to develop knowledge, skills, contacts, industry insights and their marketability to future employers; for employers the chance to import new ideas and fresh ways of looking at things, to develop good links with education and (more importantly than ever) to generate the talent pipeline that feeds graduate employment (QAA, 2014. P4.)

However, it is not always work-based learning that leads to the development of the most useful employability skills. Rather it is "the meaningful engagement in the discourse and activities associated with specific communities of practice (Browne, 2007 in Hope & Lim, 2012 p.11). Engaging with external partners offers the opportunity of breaking down traditional institutional structures between academia to the professional world, and between schools and subject areas.

Despite a changing HE landscape and student and graduate re-positioning, the focus group championed the 'real value' of having a degree, simply because a degree shows a certain level of educational attainment and so establishes a quality code of practice.

'For us anybody that's going to the States must have a degree. It is an absolute prerequisite for work experience. (A degree) says you've taken yourself to a certain level of education and whatever field you go to work in you have to a certain level. Then we look at them as a person and also their design skills and creative talent.'
(Focus Group)

Grades were seen as less important than the experiential learning that students received during their degree and employment would most likely be based upon portfolio and personality, rather than by actual grade.

Transferrable skills

'The illiterate of the twenty-first century are not those who cannot read and write but those who cannot learn, unlearn and re-learn.' QAA 2014, p4

Collaboration between external partners and HE plays an essential role in preparing students as a well-rounded graduate and offers a range of opportunities that can transform students' interest into a valid and rewarding career choice. This is not necessarily the sole role of the educator. External partners valued the notion of transferrable skills over creative or technical skills and highlighted a greater focus of learning and teaching on transferrable skills. The majority of technical skills being taught in schools and universities were viewed to be potentially redundant by the time students are ten years into their careers (so endorsing the accepted notion of creative graduates as life-long learners and autodidacts).

When course teams and external partners together develop projects and work-based learning this connects academic theory with professional practices and thus enables the student to develop a range of transferrable skills within their discipline and on to broader career paths. Employers are increasingly looking for so-called 'T-shaped' people who have the capability to solve problems, demonstrate expertise, and qualities and attributes to be effective across trans-disciplinary teams and networks (Kettle 2013 p.8).

Transferrable skills were deemed harder to teach by external partners, especially when working on live briefs and short-term placements. Transferrable skills require the most development for the student and graduate, and this was deemed by the focus group as a primary reason for collaborative working between external partners and UAL.

What qualities and behaviours do external partners value in students and graduates?

The 'well rounded' graduate

'We've all come from such different industries and different experiences but we are all looking for the same things to help develop our business despite our different backgrounds. A well rounded individual who not only can meet the high expectations of the creative criteria we all need to fill but is also able to adapt to business and work collaboratively with their peers. This might be persuading the director of finance to back them on a new project, or talking collaboratively and quite creatively with other designers, and everything in between.' (Focus Group)

Transferrable skills were described by the focus group as the subset habits of creativity and technical ability, and were linked to attitude, lifelong learning and development that make up the 'entire person', and their identity.

The focus group articulated what was meant by transferrable skills from academic to professional competencies that best describe what they referred to as the 'well rounded' graduate. They were:

Creativity and Problem Solving: To attain and apply knowledge to problem solve within certain parameters ('inside the box': budget, timelines etc.) and to emerge creatively ('outside the box': challenge themselves creatively) keeping the end customer in mind. A **reflective practitioner** that can engage with opposite or conflicting things and has the tolerance and resilience to resolve and reconcile these conflicts.

Dialogue and Communication: To be able to engage with and discuss ideas with a variety of people, and the ability to use various communication techniques. An **adaptable practitioner** that is committed to a dialogue with the object, others and with oneself in order to collaborate.

Cross Platform Working: To be able to transition between different activities and tasks and engage with different practices. A **versatile practitioner** that can work across teams and on several projects at the same time.

Networking: To be able to network, develop meaningful working relationships and bring established networks to the company. An **engaged practitioner** that can demonstrate their passion, whether online or take initiative in developing relationships.

Vulnerability: Ability for openness, being exposed as an important aspect to developing both creative and transferable skills. An **open practitioner** that is genuine to themselves, can develop trust through collaboration and is dedicated their own learning.

Development and Opportunities

What are areas of development for students and graduates?

Broader career knowledge and understanding practice in a wider context

'Students often don't know about roles, they often walk in wanting to be the Art Director. There is a strong notion of auteur and fetish with position and title. Its not the 'star jobs' driving industry, it's the bigger picture and understanding the nature of the business, the customer and all that goes into it.' (Focus Group)

Exposure to partnerships that broker relationships between external partners, HE, students and/or discipline can support, demystify and create a wider knowledge of arts, design and media. For the focus group, working in collaboration with HE is not just about students gaining experience of working within a particular industry or sector, it's about the broader context - exposure to culture of society, different people and different types of practice that make students the most employable.

Preparation and Presentation

'I interviewed (a graduate designer) whom I found from Graduate Fashion Week. I contacted her for an interview and she (turned) up without a CV and a portfolio. For a designer I would think that has to be glued to your arms, it's just an extension of who you are. No matter what, always bring your sketchbooks and always bring your portfolio. Obviously this message isn't always being translated to students and graduates, these basics are important because it is so incredibly competitive out there.' (Focus Group)

Students and graduates need more preparation and support in this area to prepare for the realities of 21st century employment. The focus group emphasised that students and graduates must develop an identity (including an online identity) as a person, not just a maker. When contacting employers, every student needs to develop a range of professional skills, such as an ability to present, articulate and situate their work within a wider practice. Proper research about the company being applied to must be carried out, along with a properly considered CV, contextual and personal statements.

The basic professional housekeeping that often needs to be taught was viewed by the focus group as a problem for HE, as many courses do not have time or finances to do this. However, many external partners are keen to be involved, to come into colleges and deliver vital information via (for example) a portfolio day, basic CVs, interview skills and portfolio presentation skills. How students and graduates are presenting themselves (interviews, portfolios and online) and being perceptive enough to adapt to different people, and situations, is of prime importance for future employability.

Experimenting and Risk Taking

'There are concerns that many students' portfolio work can be seen as too commercial, what students are doing is really bland. Just fulfilling basic requirements of a live project rather than taking risks, students are submitting what they think industry wants, rather than tapping into original ways of thinking.' (Focus Group)

The opportunity here is for students to take risks and make mistakes within the safety of the course curriculum and should be viewed positively, even necessary, as this 'failure' informs creativity and experimentation. It also builds confidence and resilience, all of which are an important part of the learning process. External partners are not looking for portfolios that are overly commercial in content; they want experimental work combined with new ideas. They are looking for students and graduates that are engaged passionately with creativity. However, students also need to communicate their thought-process and identity within that creativity. The briefs should be written together by course staff and the external partner; and must be clear to avoid misunderstanding and incorrect assumptions of what academia and the external partner wants, yet also have a degree of flexibility to inspire creativity in students to ensure this balance.

What are potential areas of development for UAL?

Work-Based Learning

'Certainly from an internship standpoint we would never invest in students for anything less than three months because by the time you train them and (they) know their way around the offices it's time for them to go. We would want to invest in an individual for certainly three months or longer.' (Focus Group)

The main issue identified by external partners are time conflicts and constraints within the HE academic year. Projects and work placements in an external and HE partnership are often perceived as too short to develop the attributes and developments required for students and to maximise the impact of learning. Some external partners have realised the limitations of current models of 'one-hit-wonder' work experiences (such as the sandwich placement) and introduced insight programmes, vacation schemes, internships and mentoring programmes, which build a 360-degree understanding and relationship to ensure employers get the graduate employees they need.

Feedback and Assessment

'When you have clear ideas and you share those clear ideas with students, you get great results. It's up to us, (with) our seniority, to find out what are their best skills, and use them for the best skills they have. The best thing about this collaboration is working all together and giving them parts of the project so they feel nurtured.' (Querci, Tommy Hilfiger LCF Case Study)

Collaborating with external partners on projects based within the curriculum should ensure all students have the same quality of experience. Students whose work has not been chosen can often have a limited interaction with the external partner: they have received and interpreted the project brief but the interaction has ended without resolution as far as the students are concerned (Sabri 2012 p.4). If a course involves the external partner in all aspects of a unit project, from concept to summative assessment, this will give students a positive learning experience.

A pedagogic approach that places a central focus on learning outcomes with individual activities matched to work-related objectives, and personalised learning matched to external partner needs, is most likely to be successful. (HEA, 2009 Flexible Learning Pathfinders in Kettle, 2013 p.14) Best practice occurs via formative process when external partners and course staff interact from the outset to discuss what students need to learn from the unit experience, and how this will impact on subsequent units and progressive learning. Critiques,

with feedback from external partners and course staff throughout the unit process involving all students, give students a valuable experience; bring rigour and critical debate, so avoiding parity issues.

Vignettes

Central Saint Martins

MA Industrial Design & MA Communication Design and News UK

This case study is an example of a graduate consultancy project. News UK worked with two courses at Central Saint Martins (CSM) to develop concepts for the future of news.

'To be able to say straight after graduation that you've worked with a client like News UK, that's a real benefit. And if you look at the graduates' websites, you know, it's front and centre, they are still talking about the work.'

Dr. Matt Malpass, Creative project manager CSM

'This has been really valuable experience in terms of talking to a client and engaging with them about a subject, their own subject and selling something to them. It's also been really interesting because its News UK and because of how interested they were in the topic and how engaged they were.'

Josef Clinch, Graduate MA Communication Design CSM

'Working with Central Saint Martins and working with younger minds, and younger individuals, who work in the creative industries per se has meant that for us as a company its actually opened our minds, to fresh thinking and ideas. When you work in a news organization you can't always think and look outside the box. And for us as a company it has actually enabled us to do that.'

Michael Byrne, News UK

Background

Innovation Business and External Relations (IBER) at Central Saint Martins (CSM) carry out between 10 and 20 Graduate Consultancy Projects each year, in which a client pays to run a project with up to ten graduates over two to four months.

Graduate Consultancy Projects are managed through IBER, and an academic member of staff provides support for the project. Client fees cover the cost of managing projects, payment for academic staff, payment for the graduates and a contribution towards the course from which they graduated, as well as material expenses. Intellectual Property outcomes are contracted and are generally owned by the client.

News UK <http://www.news.co.uk> approached Nick Rhodes, Course Director of the MA Industrial Design and CSM IBER because they wanted to work with students initially to develop concepts for the "future of news". They chose the graduate consultancy option because it fit with their timeline and they needed flexibility outside of the academic year. The graduate consultancy format, unlike Sponsored Student Projects, which are run within the curriculum and planned up to a year in advance, can work at any time of year and this fit well with their need to position the project over the summer holidays. News UK particularly wanted to showcase the project ideas and outcomes in September during London Design Week.

It also worked very well for the graduates to be put straight into a consultancy project in the summer following their graduation and then deliver outcomes by August, ready for the September launch. The project took place in various stages over a total of 12 weeks starting in July.

Eight graduates were selected by Nick Rhodes and the Creative Project Manager, Dr. Matt Malpass (MA Industrial Design and MA Communication Design) to take part in the project. Each graduate was paid a fixed fee under contract acting as a supplier of services, essentially working as a freelancer. The graduates were provided with access to a dedicated workshops space at CSM so they could make mock-ups and prototypes for the final stages of the project and promotion during the London Design Festival <http://www.londondesignfestival.com>.

Design and Approach

The format for this project was fairly standard in terms of structure. The client and academics from CSM refined the brief collaboratively. Academic staff selected graduates from MA Industrial Design and MA Communication Design with the aim of bringing together a mix of recent graduates from across the two different disciplines who would be able to work together and had strong conceptual skills for generating ideas.

News UK was involved throughout the project to ensure they were able to provide ongoing feedback during progress and steer the work towards their desired outcomes. This close engagement started with the client briefing the graduates and inviting them for an immersive tour of News UK working environment and staff. The outcomes of the project were agreed in a brief and contract before work started and defined by the number of concepts to be developed by each graduate. The graduates were initially required to create 24 concepts between them. At this stage, the creative project manager took a much more active role working with the graduates to develop their ideas at a peer-to-peer level rather than as a tutor. They all then met halfway through the project with News UK, academic staff and graduates to review and critique the best parts of each of the concepts, and then select 12 to be taken forward for completion.

The graduates were treated very much like consultants and freelance professionals; they worked closely with the academics and News UK as a complete team. Using a dedicated workshops space provided by CSM, the graduates developed the final concepts into prototypes in a variety of formats including, 2D, 3D and video.

The client, News UK, owns the intellectual property of the final concepts and prototypes but has permitted the graduates to use the work in their portfolio. This is typical of graduate consultancy-type projects, where graduates are paid for their time at near industry standard day rates.

Challenges

This project did not take place within a course but with a combination of expert academic staff and a select group of graduates from the MA Industrial Design and MA Communication Design. Course leaders and academic staff are often referred to for selecting suitable graduates to participate in graduate consultancy projects and to help ensure the best possible outcomes for the client. This arrangement generally works well, as the tutors will have become familiar with the graduates' work during the time when they were students.

Graduate Consultancies are different from Student Sponsored Projects mainly because there is no formal assessment and so the graduates can focus their work on the requirements of the one client, rather than balancing the requirements of assessment and the client at the same time, something which many students often find challenging with Student Sponsored Projects.

In terms of outcomes, the trade-off between a Student Sponsored Project and Graduate Consultancy Project is the large number of concepts generated by a whole class of 60+ students and the quality, maturity and level of engagement afforded through a Graduate Consultancy Project with outcomes comprising fewer and more refined ideas and superior levels of work.

Outcomes

The main outcomes in terms of delivering on the brief were very well met and, in addition, News UK benefitted from working with graduates and interacting with the creative team as a whole. News UK was particularly pleased with the range of work; spanning conceptual and thought-provoking ideas and proposals to market-ready prototypes of which many observers have said; "why has this not already been produced?"

The main benefits to CSM are twofold; the income the client paid for commissioning the project and the publicity the college (and courses) received via the outcomes, which News UK

was keen to promote during the London Design Festival. CSM benefits considerably from the publicity which clients like to generate in relation to their engagement with CSM students and graduates.

In terms of the physical outcomes, News UK was exposed to fresh ideas and ways of thinking. They reported they were pleased with the quality and variety of concepts they received.

The main benefit for the graduates is they received a very real experience of paid work for a client, as well as developing high-quality portfolio work. They also benefited from free access to workshops for developing prototypes, and having expert support and advice from academic staff. Further benefits included having their work featured in an exhibition during London Design Festival.

Wimbledon College of Arts

BA (Hons) Technical Arts & Special Effects and Merlin Entertainment

This case study is an exploration of the long standing relationship between Merlin Entertainment and Wimbledon College of Arts (WCA) BA Technical Arts and Special Effects (TASE), and the benefits of this close reciprocal relationship with the external partner as part of the curriculum.

'It happened naturally. We have a lot of sculptors who studied at Wimbledon and a real connection there. So it really was a natural thing just through visiting regularly and really out of just wanting to be a bit inspired and get involved at that level with students that we then developed the relationship and decided to try and make something of it... to find a way we could support directly in the course. The best results we've had in our talent development in sculpting have been Wimbledon graduates...And they are success stories, the strongest success stories we have.'

Liz Malinowski, Figure Production Director, Merlin Entertainment

Background

The relationship between WCA TASE course and Merlin Entertainment has developed over many years, creating a strong link between the studios and the college.

The current work was initiated during an informal meeting and the format chosen was based on what was available for Merlin Entertainment to offer and how it would best support the course.

Merlin Entertainment provides funding support to the TASE course (ongoing for about four years) and offers a prize - The Madame Tussaud's Sculptor Prize - each year to an emerging graduate. Merlin Entertainment Figure Production Director, Liz Malinowski is actively searching for sculptors every year and has developed a close working relationship with TASE course director, Allan Sly. The two worked together on this project through a shared passion for keeping certain elements of the course, in particular life modeling, which they consider to be critical to the training of sculptors. The funding enables this to continue.

'It's lovely to give back anyway in the industry. I think it's important. All of us would say that here, that we feel we have a role. But it's also really good business sense. You know, it was not hard to work out that all our great talent was coming from that one place, that if we fostered the development of talent in that place it's going to mean really good stuff for us in the future.' Liz Malinowski, Production Director Merlin Entertainment Figure

Design and Approach

The main element of the project is yearly funding that enables the course to hire life models, which keeps this element of the course going. This format was chosen as there were concerns that important elements of the course were in potential danger of discontinuing, which would result in a drop in the standard of sculpting.

Additional to the funding, Merlin Entertainment offers a yearly prize. Additionally, one of Merlin Entertainment's experienced sculptors is teaching on the course. The money is invested in the course for the benefit of all students, and the prizewinner decided by a committee that attends the end of year show.

The resources offered by Merlin Entertainment are money to the course, time invested in visiting the students, regular communication with the course, enabling students to tour facilities. Additionally, in 2014, the cost of time for one of their principle sculptors to input onto the course.

The link with the Course Director is clearly a key element of the success of the support offered by Merlin. As a result of this strong link between the two organisations, students are

able to visit and tour Merlin's facilities and the Merlin team visits Wimbledon to see current students and discuss their progress. This enables the team at Merlin to see talent is being nurtured fully through this training.

The best outcomes are the success stories of individuals who progress from junior sculptor level to principal sculptor within ten years. This is a very niche area of work, so Merlin Entertainment have found many specialised people through this course.

Merlin Entertainment felt the cultures of the two organisations are similar, which enables people to adapt and understand the values between them. This informal arrangement is, in the words of the industry partner "part of the fabric of what we're doing".

There is no link with course assessment. Merlin Entertainment put in the level of support into the course,

'We don't want to put any unnecessary constraints or restrictions or involvement into something that would turn it into something it shouldn't be. That's not our role. Our role is to foster talent through places like Wimbledon, but not to try and overly control the decisions that are being made.' Liz Malinowski, Production Director Merlin Entertainment Figure

Challenges

The link between the two organisations is currently working very well. There are number possible issues that need to be addressed for the long term, mostly concerned with personnel, and the reliance of this initiative on the working relationships of two key people involved, one in each of the organisations, which is to a great extent the driving force for the relationship between the two organisations.

Students benefit from Merlin Entertainment's involvement at different points throughout the year, and at the end of year show when they can talk about career plans or ideas for the future regarding what they want to do.

Through tours of the Merlin studios, students benefit from seeing what the work environment is really like and what working in a structured, scheduled situation is like. A few students are offered trials at the end of the year and often about three or four graduates are hired each year, a good start for them on a career pathway in this competitive sector.

The course benefits as the training can continue to be offered at a high level with many of the students going into employment very soon after graduating, even if that is not with Merlin. Similarly, Merlin Entertainment benefits from this relationship as they have a large number of staff who originate from the Wimbledon course, along with an insight into what is happening in education. They gain insight into what is happening on the course and what skills are being developed through the course.

London College of Fashion

BA (Hons) Footwear and BA (Hons) Accessories and Tommy Hilfiger

This case study explores the collaboration between London College of Fashion (LCF) and fashion designers Tommy Hilfiger, in which the fashion designers task students with developing products for a new collection, in a competitive process that leads to two students being offered internships at the company.

'This is the third year that we are working with LCF and I think we are really growing our relationship in a very successful way. We are super happy to discover this talent that we have right now in our headquarters in Amsterdam. They have really grown into really super professional students, and they are really big assets for the company. So I think more and more we will need to link with LCF and find more of these talents, because they are really important for our growth as an industry, as well.'

Marco Querci, Creative Director, Tommy Hilfiger Europe

Background

Annual live project briefs have been provided by Tommy Hilfiger Europe, for all second year Footwear and Accessories students at London College of Fashion (LCF) since 2010.

The relationship between the college and Tommy Hilfiger developed from recommendations within the company, potentially from LCF alumni who now work there. This meant, prior to any formal arrangements, there was an existing and strong awareness internally of the benefits to both parties to work together on live briefs, including the excellent reputation of the college and the creativity and ideas of the students, which then result in successful internships and recruitment for Tommy Hilfiger.

Kristina Bolling, the Internship Programme Coordinator, said the process had been a learning curve for Tommy Hilfiger, as the structure for live projects at LCF is strong and this has helped them 'pin down' their approach and management of live projects and partnership working. Marco Querci, the Creative Director for Tommy Hilfiger Europe, is an ambassador for using this type of live project as a way of recruiting talent, and there is also interest in this from other parts of the company.

Design and Approach

The project has followed the same model over the three years of working collaboratively. A creative brief to design footwear and/or accessories for a new Tommy Hilfiger collection or season is set for students at the end of the autumn term. Students then develop their ideas and present these at a mid-point in the spring term, with guidance given by members of staff at Tommy Hilfiger.

Following this, students continue to develop their designs, which are then submitted as a competition for judging by Tommy Hilfiger early in the summer term. Two students are selected as winners, and are offered six-month internships over summer at Tommy Hilfiger Europe's headquarters in Amsterdam.

For this year's project, the briefing was delivered at LCF by Kristina, Marco and two other colleagues, which was the first time the Creative Director had attended the briefing. It was felt by all parties this was a useful and exciting start to the project, even though it required more resource in terms of staff time.

The creative outcomes were clearly set by the Tommy Hilfiger staff, in terms of what was to be designed, and this was followed by a further brief from the course leader which pinned down the learning outcomes. In this way the Tommy Hilfiger staff and course tutors collaborated to make sure the briefs, timescales and learning outcomes were in line and suitable for both parties.

The Tommy Hilfiger staff do not currently get involved in formal assessment, though they do provide the mid-point review and guidance for students' work. This year they will all come back to LCF to do this in person, running a workshop to give more time for looking at work and giving feedback. Once the two students are in place in the internships, regular performance reviews and feedback is provided throughout.

Outcomes

The main outcome from this project for Tommy Hilfiger were the relationship with the LCF, working with talented students to develop new designs and the two interns they recruited.

The Creative Director works closely with the two current interns from LCF, and was very impressed and proud of their work. He had this to say about students and the current interns:

'First of all, I think they're really open-minded, they're from a lot of different nationalities and I love that. I mean we love to kind of push that kind of culture in Tommy Hilfiger, Europe. And I feel that the students here are really prepared. Sometimes interns want to do like super high-end design things but we are a commercial brand. And I think the students here understand the meaning of a commercial brand and commercial products. So that's a plus.'

Marco Querci, Creative Director, Tommy Hilfiger Europe

The benefits for students included the experience of working with a fashion brand, following a brief and meeting deadlines, as well as receiving support for their designs and the opportunity for their work to potentially be included in a real collection. A further benefit was the chance to secure one of the two internships in Amsterdam. The students get a useful insight into the industry and particularly so with the commercial side, which is good preparation for their future work and careers.

Future Developments

The project has followed the same model for the past three years, and as it works well there have not seen to be any improvements needed. However, one possible development, which came from the staff at Tommy Hilfiger, would be a longer internship, of perhaps up to a year, which could be developed as one of the sandwich years for a course.

London College of Communication BA Surface Design and The National Trust

'The freedom we were allowed to develop this particular brief was really exciting and worked really well for us as a test product. The results (of the project) have been put towards stimulating ideas, sharing with different stakeholders and much more around concepts than an actual project to deliver. Overall it was the course that led the pace rather than the (National Trust). It can be very easy for us to have the same thoughts and the same ideas, but having a new set of minds looking at some of our problems was inspirational and really gives us a chance to challenge our own thinking.'

Douglas Stewart, Consultancy Manager for Outdoors Specialty, National Trust

London College of Communication (LCC) had been approached by Douglas Stewart, Consultancy Manager for Outdoors Specialty for the National Trust, about a different project, and after discussion with Ellen Hanceri, Senior Lecturer on BA Surface Design at LCC, they agreed to work on another live project suggested by Ellen. The project was viewed as a pilot project for this type of collaboration.

After initial phone conversations and face-to-face meetings, Ellen and Doug co-wrote a brief, which was then presented to LCC colleagues, after which there were a series of onsite visits and project meetings.

Design and Approach

Doug's role in the project was that of sponsor and facilitator, maintaining relationships and helping the course team to make the right contacts within the National Trust, enabling them to speak to people on the ground.

The tutor's role was to ensure the project remained relevant to students, and that it was as real-life as possible, as well as helping them understand the frameworks on which the National Trust operates, while ensuring they were creative and pushed the brief as far as possible.

The project end was characterised by reports on the students' work from the National Trust, giving valuable feedback on their involvement.

Challenges

Students produced high-quality pieces of work and stimulated conversation within the Trust. However, priorities changed during the projects, so although they was a very close match of intended and actual outcomes, there are things the National Trust will need to work on a bit more for future projects (for example, involvement from Property around deadlines, and giving the students more feedback about real circumstances surrounding the project).

One of the challenges of the project was in creating an inspiring brief for the students that could be feasible in real life. The National Trust partners found a lot of the project expectations were very speculative, with unviable budgets. It would be highly unlikely that such projects would ever be realised.

From the course team perspective it is very difficult to do real-time, real-life briefs when the students are still learning their skills. They need to be given the chance to experiment. At the same time, creating the brief as realistically as possible it would have cut down many of the avenues for creativity that made it enjoyable.

Outcomes

The National Trust benefited from hearing opinions, and a fresh perspective, from outside of the organisation.

For the students, gaining an insight into an industry that recruits designers, and understanding how who the National Trust are (especially with regards to textiles and interior design), gave them renewed inspiration. Dealing with people outside of the college has also been interesting and beneficial.

The quality of the work varied, but there were lots of exceptionally high-quality pieces of work that emerged. The National Trust partners were impressed by the level of work, and the variety and creativity that had gone into some of the projects.

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