



## **Evidence for Enhancement:** Improving the Student Experience

# **Considering the Learner Journey from the Student's Perspective**

**June 2019**

**As part of the collaborative project, two student interns explored their learner journey and its unfolding to support them in post-graduation professional contexts.**

Their narratives and reflections are included below as primers for further discussion.

## **Learner Journey Presentation 1**

### **A graduating acting student.**

**Describe your journey to higher education, outlining the impact it has had on your local community.**

In terms of my journey to higher education, for the most part, my experience hasn't been too dissimilar to those undertaken by many from the acting cohort at my institution. I got involved with lots of school plays and local youth theatre programmes, all the while making useful connections with my community and learning important lessons that continue to impact my creativity and my attitude today.

Nevertheless, prior to commencing my studies, I knew that I had to obtain professional experience on camera - either on TV or film - because the majority of drama schools provide substandard training in this area. In contrast, the vast majority of job offers that correspond to our training post-graduation, as a result of the ever-growing demand for great TV and films, are onscreen roles.

I specifically took acting for screen classes for six months in preparation for my gap year, which was eventually extended to three years as I continued to work in my field.

This gap in training and knowledge results in students being ill-equipped and ineffective when it comes to onscreen confidence and performance. Moreover, students often miss out on opportunities for employment and financial gain because they don't have the necessary level of proficiency and skill for such acting roles.

Today I understand that as a graduating student with listed experience on my CV, I have a significant advantage in comparison to my peers because, effectively, I have the experience and training that the community demands.

**What have you done as part of your degree that has allowed you to have an impact or influence on your local community?**

There has been a range of opportunities provided by my institution that have enabled me to have an impact/influence on my local community. However, in general, these opportunities are available to students in the second or third year, with the preference being third-year students, because the first year of training consists of only classes and then in-house productions towards the latter part of the academic year. In this way, the first years can learn and absorb as much as they can regarding the craft of acting and polish up existing skills. By the second year of study, as a result of this intensive training, students inevitably are better performers and more qualified for professional work and like opportunities.

In my second year, I undertook an ERASMUS exchange placement at CNSAD in Paris. This was an excellent exposure to the community in France; it deepened my knowledge and understanding of the French approach to acting, and additionally expanded my awareness of how art is received, interpreted and appreciated in a different culture.

Another important part of my training was the study of Shakespeare which, again, occurred during my second year, and this culminated in productions for the public. We did a special, abridged version of a Shakespeare play for local schools in Glasgow, and also led interactive workshops alongside this for the young students to solidify their understanding of Shakespeare's work.

The chief objective of the third year as an acting student is to prepare you for the world of work. Consequently, I have been exposed to many more opportunities by my institution so that I'm able to make as much contact with my community as possible. For example: practical workshops and auditions with directors and casting directors from the National Theatre Scotland, Royal Shakespeare Company and The Citizens Theatre; Q&As with industry professionals; the opportunity to perform devised pieces at national and international festivals; and classes in professional practice - essentially, the business of being an actor.

In addition, final-year acting students perform in a showcase for industry professionals, one show in London (the UK industry hub) and two in Glasgow. Each student performs in two to three short scenes with a partner in order to exhibit their strengths as a performer. The advantage of having a showcase is that students gain access to professionals who can bridge the gap between studies and the world of work. These people - agents, directors and casting directors - are direct pathways into the industry.

### **What you would like to have done to engage with your community?**

As for areas of improvement, I believe it is important to encourage students to be as proactive and professional-minded as possible, from the beginning of the curriculum. Students could be given coaching and/or mentoring to ensure that they are empowered to determine the direction of their own path and journey within the community. This option would also help to nurture one's own voice and creative instincts.

Second, I think some form of shadowing would be extremely valuable. This doesn't necessarily have to be just shadowing actors in the rehearsal room or on set: students should have the chance to shadow and work with other key players within the industry, such as agents, directors, producers and castings directors; or even editors, writers and movement practitioners, so that they - the students - understand that there are numerous choices and forms for expressing and living one's creative capabilities within the community.

Lastly, it is vital that students are given opportunities to continue to develop and study during the holiday period. More precisely, students should be encouraged, from the beginning of their studies, to cultivate a thirst for self-study and learning. Summer schools, workshops and internships can help to strengthen existing skills and knowledge and contextualise them, too. Moreover, students will undoubtedly pick up other necessary skills that relate to the world of work such as networking, time-management, discipline, self-awareness and so on - which can only enrich and improve their experience as an actor, both in training and beyond.

## Learner Journey Presentation 2

### **A third-year music degree student in higher education following a period in a further education college.**

#### **Experience gained at university**

In my experience as a music student at university level, any sort of community engagement or practical experience proposed by the University with the objective of enlightening us to the world of work, would revolve around visiting speakers from a narrow branch selection of the creative industry (usually performers of specific instruments). These visits (roughly happening twice per year) were not focused on the performer's career itself, but on the performer's playing technique - something that was indeed useful for the one or two saxophone players in my class.

Still, during my first year, we had the opportunity to participate in an external event (albeit organised by the university) to hear many freelancers in the music industry - this event was not fully publicised and so not all of my classmates were present. This event was the only instance where I had direct contact with the community from many industry branches such as composers, entrepreneurs and performers.

#### **Own experience (gained solo or through word-of-mouth)**

All the experience I've got of interacting with the wider community - be it teaching music to young children or singing in a church choir - are interactions I got through word-of-mouth. My years spent in college offered me a good preparation for what was ahead, as well as making me aware of the risk I was taking in pursuing a career in music. I discovered through my tutors that I needed to become versatile, meaning that becoming self-employed and giving singing lessons to beginners would be an easier way to sustain myself financially while using the skills I had acquired in college and never with the guidance of the university.

#### **Attainable expectations**

Regarding my university, many times I even wondered if I am qualified for the job, because if there was a mentor or even a personal tutor that would dedicated time for CV building, career choice meetings and the like, would have been a step towards me being more confident in the job I chose. Entering my final year, I don't feel I've done enough to become ready for the world of work.

Our music programme is highly versatile, meaning that both sides of performers and academics, or even a mix of both, are present in this course. The academic side of creativity is something that course organisers should pay extra attention to - perhaps in having more visiting speakers from different areas of the academic side of the music industry, such as researchers, publishers, analysts and theorists, to name a few.

Creative arts programmes are not only comprised of its performing aspect - students that are not trying to pursue the '1% chance' of becoming future renowned artists, will want to explore all other areas of the creative arts industry. As so, I would have liked to see an actual course dedicated to career guidance to the ones that want to pursue an academic career, while maintaining an interest in the performing side of music.

Lastly, internships at any undergraduate level are necessary - there are still numerous summer schools and other seminars for both academics and performers, but are most often closed to low-level undergraduate students.

## **The best-case scenario**

In the best-case scenario, with no constraints, the undergraduate would start their academic journey with the guidance of a mentor, exploring their strengths and weaknesses and making plans for a future creative career outcome. In the best-case scenario, the undergraduate fresher would already have the opportunity to become an intern in the industry, embedded within the community, making the most out of their skills and further shaping their future career. In the current system, a fresher and a fourth-year will most certainly have different knowledge amounts academically, however it does not mean that they are different in terms of professional skill or impact on the community.

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