**Students As Co-Creators**

**BA Radio & Digital Production**

**Curriculum Review**

**Project Aims:**

We were approached via email by Matthew Linfoot, the Course Leader, asking for volunteers to take part in a project to help identify possible areas for modifying the current course curriculum, as part of the revalidation process.

The main focus for our input was to work in collaboration with a group of alumni from the course, taking on the roles of interviewers during a seminar-style question and answer session. We would then use these responses to draw up an outline of suggested core modules in a revised course structure.

As current students on the course (three at level 6, one at level 5), we have a good knowledge of how it is structured and ideas about which areas or aspects could be revisited. This helped us in formulating our questions and lines of enquiry.

Matthew put out a call to the alumni, and brought together seven participants. Their jobs/roles include: music scheduler; studio manager; producer/presenter; digital content producer; music producer. They work largely for the commercial sector, and although that might exclude BBC representation, it is an accurate reflection of where most students find work at the moment.

We agreed to structure the session into four areas and then we devised questions that we would ask in each area, as follows:

Alumni as Students:

Questions:

* When they studied on the course
* What are their strongest memories
* What did they achieve
* What was challenging
* What were their ambitions then

On graduating:

Questions:

* How did they get work initially
* How easy / hard / competitive was it
* What would have prepared them better from the course
* What were their contemporaries doing?

Current Employment:

Questions:

* What is their current career trajectory?
* Is there a plan or is it unplanned?
* How do they feel about contracted work (ie working for an institution) compared to freelance work
* Is job security important
* Which skills from the course have helped them most
* Which NEW skills do they need to develop?
* Do they come across recent graduates from this or other courses? How well prepared are they?
* How does their current work compare to what their ambitions were when they were students?
* Where do they see themselves in 10 years time?

Audio / Radio Industry Now:

Questions:

* What do they think of the industry now?
* Is it an optimistic future?
* Is it very fragmented?
* What are pay and conditions like?

The final section involved brainstorming new ideas for a new curriculum, and which new topics or skills could be introduced.

**The Seminar**

The session took place in Regent’s St, on May 21. We organised the room with a round table, so we could sit next to the alumni, and move around easily. Each of us worked in pairs or small groups with the alumni. For each of the discussion topics, we took notes on post it notes, and these were put up on large sheets around the room. We also gave a verbal feedback on each section. Matthew was there as the facilitator, making sure we kept to time and helping with the organisation.

These are some of our reflections on the seminar:

When talking about the course, the alumni seemed to all have fond memories of the practical, hands-on work that they did. They said that beyond the radio and production skills they learned from these course, they also took away valuable management, team-work and organizational skills that they use to this day.

One BIG thing that was clear that the course was great for NETWORKING and opportunities: we all agreed that being in London was a strong point and the amount of cool opportunities to meet and network and fundamentally make those connections was/still is invaluable and that’s something that being on the course does extremely well for students.

Some of the other things that were bought to our attention were things like HOW to network, HOW to approach people and conduct interviews which the alumni realised had already been enforced because in year 3 we have a module now where there is a mock interview so it was really great for them to see that the course had been improved.

A big advantage of this course for them was the required work-experience module. With the support from the university, that module allowed 80% of the alumni that we spoke to land work experience that aided them getting a job after graduation. Lastly, we talked about their current roles. All the alumni agreed that they continue to use skills they were taught in the course. The things that came up the most that were still used were; scheduling software, Adobe Audition, clock and running order making, team management, organizational skills and talent management.

We also looked at what the alumni had learnt and what the proudest moments were from studying on the course. The majority of students said that they were proud of the student radio links that the University had and how important Smoke Radio is for the university. We all agreed that it’s really important that the University move forward with investment into radio and gather students from other areas, to really engage with the student radio station.

All the alumni seem to enjoy the work that they are currently doing. Not all are working in radio broadcasting but are working with radio brands. When talking about their careers, all are happy with where they are. Some got to where they were by sticking to a plan. Others did take the long way round to get there but enjoyed the experience in doing so. When asking where they see themselves in 10 years it was pleasing to see they were still passionate about the industry and that they think there is still a future in the industry and want to progress.

There was an overall feeling that the theory side of the course wasn’t engaging and had no specific links to the industry. We discussed what the alumni wanted to achieve whilst doing the course; the majority of them said the ambition was to work at Radio One , probably because the course is very BBC orientated. Everyone wants to work for the BBC , but actually there’s a much wider scope of radio jobs out there.

It was also emphasised that the university is using outdated software such as the Sadie editing system. It would be really beneficial to new students to have new and current equipment that is being used on the radio industry and this includes the playout software and radio desks. The radio industry is changing to become a more digital platform and it was mentioned that the course should realise this and become more digital to have such lessons as social media training and more video because the industry is becoming more multi-platform.

We then had a group discussion about what the course should look like in the future. We talked about the current strengths and weaknesses, the new industry standards that should be incorporated, the possible future developments to consider and the structure of certain modules. The alumni all agreed that radio and audio production has increasingly become more visualized, digitized and reliant on social media and web presence. They also mentioned that although radio has changed a lot, the focus on music being the most important aspect has not changed. They suggested that the course adapt by adding more digital aspects including training in visualization, social media management and web development.

To incorporate music more, they suggested teaching skills like music reporting and talent management and how to work with labels and promoters effectively. Together we brainstormed the weak links that were not benefiting the course. We all agreed that there could be an update in the editing softwares taught, with an emphasis on the importance of Pro-Tools, and suggested that the theory modules try to be as radio focused as possible. We also all agreed that the biggest development in the audio industry that needed to be better reflected in the course was podcasting.

In terms of the aspects we thought were strong and should remain; all the hands-on practical courses like music and talk radio and pop-up station. We said that the current modules all had potential to be very strong by adding some modernized elements like visualization and social media involvement. We also had a discussion about a name for the course, which might incorporate the words ‘audio’, or ‘podcasting’, but it was difficult to come to any consensus.

**Post-Seminar**

Matthew typed up and circulated the notes from the session. We also had a template for the course structure, and we were asked to think about the discussions, and come up with ideas for three core modules at each level, for a Radio degree. We did this individually, although we did collaborate our ideas via a Google doc.

Our suggestions for module areas, along with the substance of the discussions, will be used as part of the revalidation process for the degree, to help inform structure and content.