



STUDENTS AS CO-CREATORS

A Curriculum Design Collaboration

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Lights, Camera, Conversation: Exploring Practice-Based Learning through Student-Led Video Podcasts

Project Overview

This Students as Co-Creators project explored how practical media production could complement the predominantly theoretical curriculum of the MA Business of Film. While the programme provides students with a strong understanding of the commercial and strategic aspects of the screen industries, there are relatively few opportunities to engage directly with the practical processes that underpin filmmaking and media production.

To address this, students worked in partnership with Westminster Waves and Regent Street Cinema to develop a series of visual podcasts featuring professionals from across the film industry. The project combined research, interviewing, production planning and technical filmmaking, allowing students to apply theoretical knowledge within an authentic production environment while creating an audio-visual resource that will benefit future cohorts.

The project began with collaborative discussions in which students explored possible themes, formats and potential contributors before receiving editorial guidance to refine their ideas. Students then undertook a practical workshop covering camera operation, lighting, sound recording and multi-camera podcast production before independently developing their own episodes with light-touch support from staff throughout the process.

Professional recording facilities at Regent Street campus proved to be an important asset, providing students with access to industry-standard equipment and a dedicated production space that enhanced both the quality of the outputs and the learning experience.

Project Outputs

- Student-led visual podcast interviews with film industry professionals (in post-production at time of writing).
- Practical training in camera, lighting and sound production.
- A pilot model for introducing practice-based learning into the MA Business of Film.
- Student reflective evaluations exploring the educational value of the project.
- Recommendations for future curriculum enhancement.
- The foundations of an audio-visual resource library that can support Business of Film and wider Screen students.

Why the Project Was Developed

The project was developed in response to students' interest in gaining greater practical insight into the realities of filmmaking while studying the commercial and strategic aspects of the industry.

Rather than teaching filmmaking itself, the intention was to provide students with sufficient production experience to better understand how creative, technical and commercial decisions intersect throughout the filmmaking process. Podcast production offered a manageable and contemporary format through which students could research specialist topics, engage with industry professionals and gain first-hand experience of planning and delivering media content.

Working in Partnership

Students were involved from the earliest stages of the project, helping to shape both the concept and delivery of the podcast series. Initial discussion focused on developing the format, editorial direction and identifying potential guests before students received practical training in camera operation, and sound recording.

Following this introduction, students assumed a wide range of professional production roles including presenters, producers, production managers, researchers, camera operators, editors and technical assistants. Students were encouraged to take ownership of individual episodes while staff provided light touch editorial guidance and technical support where required. This approach gave participants considerable creative freedom while ensuring appropriate mentoring throughout the project.

Several students highlighted that one of the most valuable aspects of the experience was the trust placed in them to make decisions independently. Rather than working to tightly prescribed briefs, they were encouraged to experiment, solve problems collaboratively and develop confidence through practical experience.

One student reflected:

"We were given genuine creative freedom and, importantly, the permission to fail. That meant we could experiment, make decisions, learn from mistakes and take ownership of the project while knowing support was always available if we needed guidance."

The facilities were also identified as a major strength. Access to a dedicated podcast studio, combined with practical training provided through Westminster Waves, created an authentic production environment that enabled students to apply new skills with confidence.

Outcomes and Reflections

Although fewer podcast episodes were completed than originally anticipated, those students who participated reported significant educational benefits across technical, professional and personal development.

A consistent theme throughout the reflections was a greater appreciation of the planning and organisation required before production begins. Students recognised that successful media production depends not only on filming but also on research, scheduling, communication, preparation and teamwork.

As one participant explained:

"One of the biggest things I learnt is how much work happens before a camera is ever switched on. Finding suitable guests, organising locations, planning interviews, considering technical requirements and coordinating the team gave me a much greater appreciation of producing professional media."

Students also developed valuable professional communication and networking skills through direct engagement with industry guests. Organising interviews, liaising with professionals and coordinating production schedules increased confidence while providing practical insight into professional working relationships. Those undertaking leadership roles described significant improvements in project management, organisation and problem-solving.

Another important finding was that the project enabled students to transfer existing filmmaking skills into a different production context. Students with previous experience in cinematography and editing described adapting these skills to multi-camera podcast production, broadening their understanding of professional media workflows and demonstrating the transferability of their technical expertise.

The practical training day was consistently highlighted as one of the project's greatest strengths. Students reported that learning how to operate cameras, lighting and sound equipment before filming gave them confidence to work independently during production. Several students also commented on the benefits of working within clearly defined production roles, noting that this reflected professional practice and helped them understand how individual responsibilities contribute to successful collaborative production.

Interviewing industry professionals also strengthened students' understanding of career pathways within the screen industries. Even students working primarily behind the camera described gaining valuable insight simply by listening to discussions with guests, while others reported that hearing different career journeys made the industry appear more accessible and provided practical guidance for their own future careers.

One student reflected:

"It was interesting to see the different routes people have taken into the careers they have now. The similarities gave me guidance about the steps I need to take in my own career."

Across the cohort, students consistently reported increased confidence in producing media content, communicating with professionals and understanding how creative, technical and commercial aspects of filmmaking work together in practice.

Impact on Learning and Teaching

The project demonstrates that relatively modest practice-based activities can significantly enrich a postgraduate programme that is predominantly theoretical.

Students consistently reported that practical production strengthened their understanding of filmmaking as an interconnected creative, technical and commercial process. Rather than learning

solely through lectures and case studies, they experienced first-hand the planning, communication, logistics and collaboration required to deliver professional media productions.

The project also highlighted the educational value of authentic engagement with industry professionals. Direct conversations enabled students to explore career pathways, develop professional networks and gain insights that would have been difficult to obtain through traditional classroom teaching alone. An additional benefit was the development of transferable employability skills. Students identified improvements in leadership, teamwork, communication, preparation, networking, organisation, technical confidence and problem-solving alongside a greater appreciation of professional production workflows.

The emerging podcast library also has considerable long-term value. Students viewed the collection not simply as a record of the project but as an ongoing learning resource that could support independent study by providing accessible discussions with industry professionals and examples of professional practice.

As one participant explained:

"A shared audio-visual resource gives students ongoing access to industry knowledge and examples of professional practice. It supports learning outside the classroom, reinforces key concepts and provides inspiration for future projects."

Another added:

"There are not enough resources discussing the business of film. Having industry professionals explain these areas will be valuable for students who want to build a career but don't know where to begin."

Together, these reflections suggest that practical production activities not only reinforce theoretical learning but also provide students with greater confidence in applying their knowledge within authentic professional contexts.

Lessons Learned

The project generated several valuable insights that will inform future curriculum development.

The principal challenge concerned participation rather than educational value. Although initial enthusiasm was high, maintaining engagement became increasingly difficult as MA students balanced dissertation deadlines, final projects and employment commitments. Because participation was largely extracurricular, availability inevitably reduced during the busiest period of the academic year.

In hindsight, the overall ambition of the project was greater than was realistic within the scale of a Students as Co-Creators initiative. A smaller number of podcast episodes, supported more intensively from conception through to publication, would likely have resulted in higher completion rates while preserving the quality of the student experience.

Students also identified timing as an important consideration. Delivering the project earlier in the academic year would have made it easier to secure industry guests before the summer holiday period and increased opportunities for recording interviews in person rather than online. Another lesson concerns project leadership. While Westminster Waves contributed enormously through professional expertise, facilities and technical support, future iterations would benefit from being more closely embedded within the MA Business of Film curriculum and led day-to-day by members of the course teaching team. Stronger integration within existing modules would reinforce the relationship between practical production and academic learning while making participation feel central to the student experience rather than an additional extracurricular commitment.

Perhaps the clearest finding from the project is that practice-based learning has significant value within a predominantly theory-led postgraduate programme. Students consistently described increased confidence, stronger professional networks, improved communication and leadership skills, and a much richer understanding of how creative, technical and commercial decisions intersect within contemporary media production.

The pilot therefore provides a strong foundation for future curriculum development. While future iterations should be more focused in scope, delivered earlier in the academic year and more closely embedded within the curriculum, the evidence strongly suggests that carefully designed practical experiences make a meaningful contribution to student confidence, employability and understanding of the contemporary film industry.