

Reinvigorating Curriculum Design

Case Study



Project title: Developing the media curriculum to deliver services to local employers: A pilot study with the National Health Service (NHS)

Exeter College's Media Department and the National Health Service (NHS) South Devon collaborated to develop a curriculum model which would provide industry-relevant learning experiences for students while also meeting the business needs of the NHS.

Worth reading if you are interested in:

- Curriculum design
- Media education
- Employability
- Community broadcasting
- Education business partnerships

Contact information

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Participating organisation(s):
Exeter College, NHS South Devon.

What the project set out to do and why

The project set out to examine the challenges associated with adapting the curriculum to create opportunities for students to learn in an industry context by delivering professional services on a commercial basis to clients.

The project explored these challenges in two ways; firstly, by carrying out research into similar models and experiences in other colleges and, secondly, by carrying out a commercial project and evaluating the experience.

By addressing the challenges and proposing solutions, the project aimed to develop a curriculum which would enable Media students to benefit from the experience of working in a professional environment, thereby enhancing learning and preparation for employment in the industry.

In particular, the project focused on the following challenges:

- understanding the role of the tutor in managing a commercial project;
- placing students in a professional environment and ensuring that they have a successful learning experience and that the client receives a high quality service;
- balancing the expectations of students and the requirements of a client;
- securing alignment between the demands of live industry projects and the assessment requirements of the accredited media qualification.

The partnership with the NHS enabled the project to consider the opportunities for learning presented by the development of community-based local broadcasting and by the training needs of a large local employer.

What the project has achieved so far

The project engaged a group of students in a commercial assignment to produce a short promotional film for the NHS to promote a new model of training to stakeholders across NHS South Devon. Students worked as part of a production team, developing and pitching ideas for the film and managing all aspects of production and post-production.

Staff from Exeter College's Media Department undertook research into other models where community broadcasting was being used as a vehicle for student learning. This included a visit to West Anglia College to visit their in-house Springboard TV, and research into Germantown TV in the USA.

Feedback from students, tutors and the client was collected and evaluated and, from this, a set of recommendations and learning points developed.

The impact of the project can be seen in:

- the positive feedback received from students about the benefits of learning through real work;
- the recommendations and key learning points which are informing a number of new developments arising from the project (described in the following section).

What the project still needs to do

The project has led to a number of significant further developments:

- A proposal, under consideration by the College, for a Media Academy within which students would have the opportunity to work on production teams for a range of external clients.
- A commitment from NHS South Devon to fund further development of this work through a grant of £75,000 to explore other applications within their organisation such as training films for staff, and films to provide instructions to patients when they are discharged from hospital (for example, a demonstration of an exercise to

promote post-operative recovery).

- A successful application for a £10,000 grant to develop a similar model for level 4 and level 5 learners in partnership with Plymouth University;
- A new level 3 short course for post-19 learners (designed by Exeter College and subject to validation in the summer term 2012) linked explicitly to opportunities for live project work with the NHS.
- Plans to engage other FE colleges in the South West in extending this model to provide community-led services and to promote the development of community-based broadcasting.

What the project wants to share with other schools, colleges and training providers

The following resources can be found at the end of this case study:

- Summary of student feedback (annex 1);
- Short course outline for post-19 media production (annex 2).

A promotional film is in the final stages of post-production and will be available from the project lead after Easter 2012.

Key learning points

- Students want to work on real projects. They learn more quickly during these than in classrooms, retain the learning better and feel that their learning is more valuable to them. They feel valued as part of a production team. Students expressed high levels of enthusiasm for the work-based experiences and these have a positive impact on engagement and motivation.
- Students gain an appreciation of the specific skills needed to successfully bring a project to fruition, and of the levels of responsibility and professionalism expected of them in the work environment. Interviewing students for roles within the production team helps to place the right person in the right role and emphasises the need for professionalism.
- Some aspects of production are challenging. Clients have high expectations and tutors have to intervene if these are not being met. This can mean sharp words on location shoots. Students do not resent these interventions, seeing them as part of the professional process, but it is an aspect that needs to be anticipated.
- Clients often have a clear idea of the outcome that they want, but not how to achieve it. Students may assume that clients will be interested in their ideas but student ideas are often not taken forward. Students need to be prepared for this to avoid being demotivated by feedback from clients. The focus of the students' creative input may often be more valued developing the idea suggested by the client.

- Students may need help with ideas generation. Often they will see commercial briefs as mundane and they need help to think about them in innovative ways – if not in how the idea is conceived, then in how it is developed.
- This process of engaging in commercial production assignments will not be suitable for all Media students. Only those who want to follow a career in commercial media production will wish to undertake this form of learning as a significant part of their programme. In general, level 4 and 5 students may be more interested in media production than those on level 2 and 3 courses.
- Some students are only motivated if their work is linked directly to assessment outcomes. While others are happy to undertake work that is not linked to assessment outcomes, all students value having work-based tasks accredited.
- Some students have an expectation that the media production assignment is an opportunity to have fun and to develop their own creativity. Confronting the realities of commercial production (for example, budgets, long days and uncomfortable environments) could have a negative effect on such students.
- There are huge opportunities to develop local TV and media for clients. Besides involving students in production, these can also draw in others who have other interests in this area (actors / producers etc.). While the learning of the students was a focus of the pilot project with the NHS, it was clear that the NHS staff who volunteered as actors and production assistants also learnt a great deal – with on-going benefits to the organisation in terms of staff morale.
- To be brought to a successful conclusion, projects require tutor supervision. Some employers assume students will produce commercial work without supervision, and expect them to do this for nothing. They are disappointed when projects are not completed, or are unsatisfactory, and then blame the College for not training the students correctly. It is best to avoid situations where employers don't wish to contribute anything to the production yet still expect a useable outcome. It is advisable to draw up a contract, with a clear list of expectations, outcomes and contributions, before embarking on any project with an employer or organisation.
- This form of learning, structured around media production projects, changes the role of the tutor and support staff who now have a dual role of monitoring the learning needs of the students and meeting the commercial expectation of the client. This is an exciting space to occupy, requiring close communication and negotiation. At times, it is also extremely demanding and challenging, especially when the role of tutor conflicts with the needs of the client.
- There remain some significant barriers to increasing the amount of live industry assignments within the formal requirements of an accredited course. The solution adopted by Exeter College (and modelled by West Anglia College) is to establish a vehicle for students to work on productions that is separate to the accredited programme of study and through which students apply to take part in assignments.

Annex 1

Summary of Student Feedback

Students identified a range of skills that they had developed in the course of the project; these included:

- Communication;
- Team-working and collaboration;
- Time management;
- Processes for planning the production;
- Project management;
- Story-boarding.

Through the project, students reported that they learnt about their own abilities by being given the opportunity to apply their skills in a particular role within the production team. They also gained an understanding of the realities of completing a production, for example the amount of detail required in the pre-production planning and the amount of time it takes to complete the shoot.

Students gained insights into the levels of professional required of them in an industry setting and in a professional role and recognised, sometimes in retrospect, the importance of taking responsibility for the progress and management of the project.

Students learnt about the requirements of particular roles, e.g. the student taking the role of the producer recognised the need for the producer to step back and rely on the skills of others and the preparation of the team to lead to a successful outcome. They also recognised more fully the contributions made by each role within a team to the overall success.

The practical experience improved their understanding of the requirements of each role and the 'fit' with their own skills, abilities and career aspirations. One student, for example, reflected that she quite enjoyed 'stressing out a bit and being in control' so the role of producer / director might suit her well. For another the experience consolidated their desire to be a camera operator.

Students took away from the project an understanding of what they might need to do in order to better develop their skills and an interest in gaining further work experience, sometimes taking on different and more challenging roles.

Annex 2

Short Course Outline

DRAFT

Level 3 TV Production

Part-time (19+)

College certification

3 hours per week. 12 weeks.

Aims:

To give learners the basic skills to produce video based media.

To learn legal and ethical contexts

To work to client specified briefs

Week	Description	Additional Tasks
1	Legal issues: Health and safety / intro to technology / studio operation roles	Research legal / roles etc. Research camera operation
2	Review legal / roles. News gathering with portable cameras 1. Client specified brief 1.	Research codes and conventions / techniques
3	Review codes etc. / editing.	Research Editing techniques. Complete edit
4	Review edits Putting it together: intro to studio / news desk / weather 1 etc.	Research news programme sequences
5	Assessment programme 1. Legal issues 2: copyrights / news gathering 2 / client-specified brief 2.	Legal issues research
6	Editing 2	Editing
7	Studio programme 2	
8	Assessment programme 2. Client specified brief 3. Legal issues 3: Defamation etc. / uploading to YouTube etc. / news gathering 3	Gather news
9	Editing 3	Edit
10	Studio 3 and course review	Plan next projects
11	Assessment TV studio 3. Using previous footage. Open exam. Legal and ethical frameworks.	
12	Course review. Links with clients for future projects (MHTV)	