

NAMHE Conference 3 May 2011

Education, Employability and Skills post-Browne

Conference Report

Panel 1: The Higher Education Perspective

The morning sessions were given over to employability perspectives of HE and of employers. Dr Steve Halfyard (Head of Undergraduate Studies, Birmingham Conservatoire, Birmingham City University) was the first to speak. She gave an example of an approach towards teaching enterprise and employability, based on the curriculum within her institution. She discussed Birmingham Conservatoire's Major Project module, which is a final year module on the BMus degree programme. This is compulsory for all students and counts for roughly 30% of their degree classification. Dr Halfyard gave some background to the Conservatoire's policy on employability by referring to Palatine's PACE (Performing Arts Creative Enterprise) project which investigated the teaching of entrepreneurial skills in the performing arts in 2004-5. She also referred to the Wedgwood report on 'Developing Entrepreneurship for the Creative Industries'. Birmingham Conservatoire's model of curriculum embedding for entrepreneurial training aligns with the Wedgwood Report. Dr Halfyard discussed entrepreneurial skills with reference to HEA resources, and explained the alignment between these and the assessment criteria for the Major Project.

Dr Halfyard explained that there were no specific rules within the Major Project, although there were minimum requirements. The project needs an additional feature to distinguish this from the student's other activities and can comprise performance projects as well as non-performance projects. Different weightings of assessment are possible according to the characteristics of the project. The project follows on from a professional development project in Year 3, in which students define their own learning outcomes. Should the student continue to postgraduate study, there is an equivalent module available at Level 7. All of these modules enable students to develop their entrepreneurial capacity and at the same time pursue their own creative ideas. Questions were posed to Dr Halfyard on budget, learning outcomes, staff input, risks, and ethics.

The second HE perspective came from Professor Julian Johnson (Professor of Music, Royal Holloway, University of London), who gave an overview of employability based on his own perspective. He noted that the 2009 BIS report *Higher Ambitions* included several conflicts. On one hand the report states that there is intrinsic value in the arts, but it simultaneously states that there is no room for vocational programmes that do not constantly evolve. Prof Johnson noted that there may be a tension between seeking economic success from the arts and the depth of the country's intellectual and cultural life. He pointed out that the government appears not to be interested in university education that does not contribute directly to economic success. Prof Johnson believed that universities should prepare students with awareness of these conflicts.

Prof Johnson commented on the benefits of the diverse range of skills incorporated within a music degree (referring to the UCAS list of skills and associated competencies). He also believed that career destinations outside of music were potentially just as valuable and significant as careers in music.

Prof Johnson called for an attitude of pragmatic idealism, and acknowledged the need for university music courses to explore contradictions and to foster links with outside organizations. He pointed to the challenge of articulating the value of what the HE music community does in terms other than purely economic. In his view, university education should facilitate the development of the individual in ways that exceed the demands of the workplace.

Questions were asked about citizenship being used as a means of valuing music education and about the language of commodities and how we might recover terms that are currently used in a limited way in order to better express what it is that music education offers.

The employer's perspective was given by Richard Hallam (National Music Education Grants Coordinator), Ellie Gussman (LSO Discovery) and Caro Barnfield (also of the LSO). Richard Hallam called for music education to develop independent thinkers and learners. At the same time, he acknowledged that we are currently in a climate of uncertainty. This extended to the National Curriculum: we don't yet know whether music will be statutory or what guidance there will be. He quoted Lord Hill who has called for music to remain 'in a well rounded and rigorous education'. He noted that some local authorities are currently reducing the funding for music education, but praised the Henley Report for achieving transitional funding. He referred to the Qualified Music Educator award, and how that may in some quarters be seen to dumb down Qualified Teacher Status. Mr Hallam also referred to *The Music Blueprint*, devised by the Creative & Cultural Skills Sector Skills Council and the disparity that this had identified between what is available and what the music industry needs. Mr Hallam called for the sector to communicate the work-related skills in music degrees more clearly.

Ellie Gussman of LSO Discovery talked of her own background and of LSO Discovery's services. She also spoke of the requirements expected of orchestral players, who are likely to need to take part in activities as diverse as writing tour blogs, meeting funders and working in educational contexts. She spoke about the attributes that are looked for in interviews and also spoke of the orchestra's characteristics: 70% of the orchestra are long-term members. According to calculations undertaken by LSO staff, a player could take approximately 15 years to pay off his or her tuition fees if they joined the LSO as a full-time member. In Ms Gussman's view, support and training are needed in HE to prepare music graduates for a future in orchestral playing.

Caro Barnfield spoke about projects that the LSO runs to support professional development, to challenge perceptions about what an orchestra is, to prepare students for auditions, as well as talking about the series of masterclasses run by the orchestra and the orchestra's String Experience Scheme.

Questions ranged from why the LSO had chosen to ally itself with GSMD, to the identity of the music industry and whether we are expected to be providing a uniform educational experience in preparation for an industry which is diverse. Professor Stephen Cottrell pointed to the paradox between the focus needed for top orchestral jobs (of which there are relatively few) and the alternative destinations of many graduates.

Panel III: The Students' Perspective.

The afternoon panel focused attention on the students' perspective. The panel members consisted of five former or current students of Music; three with experience of studying at a University: Alex Jeffery (Goldsmiths), Jasmin Rodgman (Manchester), Trish Brown (Bath Spa); two with experience of studying at a Conservatoire: Stephen Willey (Birmingham), Helen McKey (RSAMD). Celia Duffy chaired the session and began by inviting each student to give a short presentation about their experience in Higher Education. She informed delegates that the students had been asked to consider the following questions within their presentations:

- 1) Were your expectations of Higher Education met?
- 2) What skills did you acquire?
- 3) Did your course offer 'added value'?
- 4) Would you recommend your course to others at a cost of £9k?
- 5) Should a Music degree in Higher Education provide students with 'skills' or an 'education'?

Presentation 1: Alex Jeffery (Goldsmiths)

Alex began his studies as a mature students aged 34 with 'no fixed plan'. He went to University to 'explore and develop his potential' and was attracted to his chosen course because of the 'variety of activities on offer' – these included participation in a variety of different ensembles, participation at the Samba School, exposure to Electroacoustic Music, and lessons at the Guildhall. Early in his academic career he felt pressure from within to develop a 'specialist' area of study but quickly realised 'he wasn't that sort of person' and by the third year had continued to be engaged in a wide range of activities (world music, songwriting, performing). This gave him the confidence to be pro-active in setting up projects within and beyond the structure of his course and as a consequence of these experiences developed excellent organisational skills.

He was introduced to collaborative work early in his studies, working with theatre practitioners, scriptwriters, musicians, performance makers and dancers and this allowed him to experience work and engage in creative approaches from the 'perspective of other kinds of creative people'. This was a skill he did not expect to develop at the beginning of the course but noted that this skill 'will be useful to have in his professional life whatever that may be'.

Alex is considering a career in academia. He is aware that, in the current economic climate, many musicians develop 'patchwork' careers and this may include teaching, performing, receiving commissions etc. From this perspective he found it useful to use his tutors as 'case studies', specifically looking at how he perceived his tutors to balance their work/life relationships – he asked the question: 'is this something I could or would want to develop for my own career'?

During the course there were opportunities to engage in Professional Development activities – Music Therapy and Music Business were two examples given. He reported that, 'the opportunities were there but it was not compulsory'.

During his time as an undergraduate he was not looking for a distinct career path but was more interested in opening up himself to potential opportunities with the intention of this informing his future career direction. As a songwriter he is aware that the many varied experiences he has been exposed to have informed his songwriting practice. As a postgraduate student he is aware that his ideas are now starting to crystallize and is developing an awareness of where he needs to be. He sees himself going on to do PhD work.

Presentation 2: Stephen Willey (Birmingham)

Stephen reported that his time at the Conservatoire as an undergraduate was 'fantastic'. He felt fully supported in his work both from the academic staff as well as the Composition Department and that it was 'difficult to break it down to things I wasn't happy with'. Opportunities were plenty and 'you just can't grab enough of them'. Whilst he reported that the course offered a variety of Professional Development opportunities through core modules there was also an expectation that students would engage in all aspects of the course. Within each module it was 'made clear why different modes of assessment would benefit the student' and the roles of the tutor and the student throughout the course were made explicit. He reported that 'there was a strong balance between tutor guidance and student responsibility' – this came with an expectation that students would, 'make the most of the opportunities presented to them...the course is what you make of it'.

For Stephen, it was important to explore opportunities. He attended activities not directly linked to current tasks as he saw these as potential networking opportunities – one meeting with this tutor resulted in him being invited to present at this Conference!

He discussed the opportunities the Major Project offered – this is a fully negotiated module and allows students to focus on the future direction of their work (both academic and/or professional). Students have the opportunity to develop their professional practice and entrepreneurial skills, can develop academic research skills with the completion of a dissertation or can negotiate between the two. He suggested that the application of skills developed through the Professional Development strand would be very useful for the future, for example – the job interview. These transferable skills include, self promotion, business awareness, assessing risk and communication.

Whilst this was not an issue for Stephen, he did want to explore the issue of 'what happens when communication breaks down'. Stephen suggested that University procedures may need to be more transparent, particularly with the introduction of the new fee structure, so that students are aware of how to deal with tensions and disputes between academic tutors and students should they arise.

Presentation 3: Jasmin Rodgman (Manchester)

Jasmin began by confirming that she 'expected to gain the "usual" skills you would get from participating at University in a humanities subject'. Here, she was referring to a list of generic entrepreneurial skills Julian Johnson had included in his presentation earlier this morning. She began her studies by taking advantage of, and engaging in the 'variety of opportunities' available through the course and only later became interested in Composition as a specialist activity – she is now studying for an MA in Composition at the same institution.

One aspect she didn't expect when she arrived at University was the amount of contact teaching time her course offered (6 hours per week). This she considered low in comparison with students on other courses at her institution. However, she considered the course to be well managed and with the additional support of her tutors found that having to manage her own study time encouraged her to be self-disciplined, gave her greater independence, and challenged and engaged her in her studies – this approach fitted well with her particular learning style.

When considering the relationship within a University education between 'education' and 'skills' she was very clear: 'it should provide both'. She stated that 'these are not disparate entities so there should be some fluidity between both concerns'. For a University, she suggests that the development of industry-led modules are useful and complement academic studies and both are relevant in preparing students to enter the job market. However, she reported that some students on her course would have liked to have had more opportunities to develop specific music technology skills as part of their course. Jasmin suggested that what is important here is the issue of recruitment. The subtlety between the variety of Music courses could be made more transparent so that candidates are better informed to make decisions. She reported that some of her peers on reflection would have chosen a more popular/technology based course.

In addition, Jasmin would have liked to have had the opportunity to attend a Music specific Graduate Fair. Her peers, taking non-arts courses have had the opportunity to explore potential career paths by attending a variety of Graduate Fairs and this had exposed them to the variety of professions within their subject discipline.

Would she do it again? Having now gone through the experience and knowing the benefits of receiving a University education she confirmed that she would do it again. However, she also suggested that as a 'young adult considering a University education, it would make her doubt her commitment to her studies unnecessarily because of the price attached to a degree'. For a fee of £9k per year she would expect the University to 'provide more career and networking opportunities'.

'From our discussions and presentations today', she continued, 'it would appear that at Conservatoires there are more career opportunities and direct networking experiences on offer than at some Universities'. She offered examples of Conservatoires offering Masterclasses with professional composers to undergraduates and exposure to professionals working in the industry.

Jasmin's presentation generated further comment from the floor:

- 1) Celia commented on Jasmin's use of the term 'fluidity' between academia and practice and suggested that this is one of our advocacy points that should be highlighted when talking to Government.
- 2) Stephen responded to Jasmin's concerns regarding the £9K tuition fees and suggested that potential students will need to be better informed about the tuition fee structure and how monies are used. Jasmin agreed.

Trish Brown (Bath Spa)

Graduated from Bath Spa in 2009 and has formed her own group the Trish Brown Band. She is a Freelance musician and Arts Management professional with a portfolio that includes work with Serious Management and the London Jazz Festival as well as providing production support for the International Guitar Federation.

Trish also began University with 'no idea' of what to expect and found the course by chance. She was visiting the area and discovered the course and 'thought this to be the kind of thing she would want to do – there was much variety on the programme'. She wasn't sure what she wanted to pursue but was excited by the opportunities the programme offered. She could play a little bit of sackbut and she could sing so to be given the opportunity to explore this through the programme in a 'safe' environment without having to deal with the commercial world was very exciting – her expectations were met.

She very much enjoyed becoming an independent learner through the experience of her degree but raised the issue that for those students who come direct from the school system and have not taken, for example, a gap year may find the transition to independent learning difficult. She suggested that this is something that should be made very clear early in the course so students were made aware of their learning responsibilities. 'You need to take responsibility for what you are going to get out of your degree. Lecturers are there to offer guidance and support you and offer their experience and their advice, but at the same time you need to grasp every opportunity you can find.'

She reported that: 'a lot of her networking and work experience through University has resulted in her getting paid work. On the programme there is an enforced Professional Development module in the second year and this is so valuable'. During the Professional Development module she was able to use the time to listen to jazz, be inspired by meeting a variety of practitioners and work on her degree at the same time. She reported that, 'this was a fantastic opportunity. This helped provide a realistic experience of what I may want to go into'.

One issue she raised was that the University has many different types of Music degrees: Music Technology, Popular Music, Commercial Music, BA Music, Music Theatre; however, there were no formal platforms for collaborations to take place. In addition, she reported that, 'it would have been useful for all musicians to develop skills in the studio as this could be one strand for a professional career'.

Would she do it again? Yes. 'All my work has come from my degree'. However, she suggested that careers advisors in schools and UCAS should take some responsibility in explaining to students how the fee structure works and how tuition fees are used.

Finally, she reported that, 'the ability to work independently is invaluable and one of the things I learnt from doing a music degree. Working in the creative arts sector also requires resilience and this come from being passionate about the subject – something a Music degree helps to foster'.

Helen McKey (Glasgow)

Helen graduated in 2001 from the RSAMD and has developed a 'portfolio' career. She is a cellist, an educator, a student doing an MBA. She is executive manager of Enterprise Music Scotland which is the national body promoting chamber music in Scotland. She lectures in Arts Administration at the RSAMD and was a consultant on the Curriculum Reform Project at RSAMD.

As a graduate of 2001 at the RSAMD her education was 'free' at the point of delivery when the education landscape was very different. Subsequently, Helen responded to the task from two positions: first as a graduating student of 2001 and second as a current postgraduate on the MBA at Glasgow University.

In 2001, 'she knew exactly what she was going into' – she had a defined career path and was training to be a cellist. She had been preparing for this since the age of 12, had been to the RSAMD Junior Department for two years so her career path had already been prepared. However, on reflection, Helen reported that, 'it took her sometime to understand the system she was part of'. In contrast to the other speakers, she considered her undergraduate environment to be 'subject specific and enclosed' and also in relation to the other speaker, she reported to have experienced 'a less defined engagement with the learning process'. Subsequently, she was not pro-active in exploring opportunities and had not considered a career path beyond the perceived image of what success looked like – this for Helen, was working as an orchestral cellist.

As a, current, fee-paying student, her expectations have changed. She reported to now have 'ownership' of her learning and has become pro-active in directing her learning towards her career ambitions. She suggested that for her, the learning environment has significantly shifted and suggests that Universities and Conservatoires will need to be more aware of the 'buyer/seller relationship...if you are paying more money you are going to expect more.' In addition she reported that the sector should be aware of the 'sub economies of the commercialised music sector, the subsidised sector and the education sector and how they relate to each other.' Given the current economic climate, she

suggested that institutions of Higher Education consider the opportunities this may bring, for example, 'the importance of working with students to empower students and the ability to share with them an ability to create and shape change'.

Celia thanked the panel for their contributions and invited comments from the delegates.

The issue of 'ownership' was discussed in relation to the future development of Higher Education courses. It was suggested that 'ownership' could be discussed from three different perspectives: student (the student in charge of their own learning), lecturer (in terms of their expertise and how they develop their courses as well as the type of experiences they offer the student), and the institution.

It was suggested that a key challenge for the future could be negotiating the balance between what the students 'thinking they know what they need to learn and the lecturers knowing what they need to learn' and this will need to be developed through a process of 'trust' between the student, the lecturer and the institution.

In response to the idea of a Graduate Fair for Music, it was noted that whilst this may not be practical at a local level it could work as a national event and this is something that could be discussed further to see how this could be possible. It was also suggested that non-conventional markets such as Contemporary Music festival events might also be explored as business networking opportunities.

Final thoughts

Celia proposed that there were 'practical things we could do both in our dialogue with industry and the professions and in our advocacy with Government'. In relation to what NAMHE could be doing she suggested: a) much better advocacy with Government – 'we need to be the go-to organisation about music because we represent the broad spectrum of Higher Education', b) 'we need to get in front of the right people, in terms of dialogue with the industry and the professions', c) she endorsed the idea of the Creative Network events and suggested NAMHE could lead on this, d) she suggested that there is the possibility of working with the AHRC KE Hub scheme.

Thomas Schmidt-Beste thanked both the students and delegates for their contribution to the session.