Work-based learning, web media production and the social media sector: A case study

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 Offers a range of degree level courses that encourage the innovative use of digital technologies in design and communications.
Ravensbourne today

Current site since 2010: Greenwich Peninsula
Context

Higher education is in a “state of flux”

The regulation of higher education: discussion paper no.77, LSE (Black, J. et al. 2015:1)
The Project

- **Exploring Higher Apprenticeships in HE**
- HEFCE funded Catalyst Fund:
  “to drive innovation in the HE sector” (HEFCE, 2014a).
- Developed by Southampton Solent University in association with Creative Skillset.
- Developing and promoting:
  “seven new Higher Apprenticeship degree programmes during a twelve-month pilot phase” (HEFCE, 2014b).
- To established and explore the role of universities in higher apprenticeship development (Anderson et al., 2012).
1. Student funding and loan repayments

- Coalition 2010 reforms increased tuition fees to a maximum of £9,000.
- Only 5% of students will pay back their debt in full by the age of 40 (Crawford and Jin, 2014:1).
- Almost three-quarters of graduates will not pay back their loans in full (ibid.).
- Average debt of around £30,000 to be written off (ibid.).
- Publicly owned student debt in England will rise to £1 trillion by late 2040s (Bolton, 2015:16).
2. UK Skills gap

- OECD (2015) indicate that the skills gap in the UK is wider than other developed countries.

- The British Chamber of Commerce (2014) found that 54% of businesses consider that graduates are unprepared for the workplace.

- A House of Lords Select Committee on Digital Skills states: “a shortage of medium- and high-level digital skills in the UK” (2015:44).

- Creative industries accounted for 1.7 million jobs in 2013.

- 5.6 per cent of UK jobs and is now worth £76.9 billion per year to the UK economy (Department for Culture Media & Sport, 2015).
Government proposals and initiatives

1. Higher or Degree Apprenticeships

• 2015 Conservative manifesto: create 3m new apprenticeships over the next Parliament.

• Expansion of higher and degree apprenticeships.

• 2015 autumn statement Osborne announced the introduction of an employer levy to help fund apprenticeships and raise £3 billion by 2019-20 (HM Treasury, 2015:15).
2. Trailblazers

• Designed to encourage potential employers to fund and develop apprenticeships programmes in partnership with further and higher education institutions.
2. Trailblazers
The Project

Requirements of the HEFCE funding stipulated that:

- Provide work-based learning provision
- Should be offered as a two-year fast-track.

Intention to:

- Help reduce the increased financial burden placed on students arising from the rise in HE tuition fees.
Course development and structure

- WBL model was adapted from an existing 3 year, BA (Hons.) Web Media Production
- Course title: Web Design and Social Media
- Reflect the exponential growth of social media-orientated jobs and companies within the industry
Course development and structure

Dual trajectory: WBL provision and two-year fast-track.

- Extend course to four terms.
- Students are employed September to September.
- “Bootcamps”: intense period of university learning.
- Academically front loaded.
- Intensive, work-based, blended delivery.
## Programme summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Credit Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WEB15101</td>
<td>Fundamentals of the Web Design</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEB15102</td>
<td>Work-based Learning 1</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEB15103</td>
<td>Web Development Workshop</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEB15104</td>
<td>Social Media Cultures (Participatory)</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C14101</td>
<td>Theory and Context</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C15202</td>
<td>Dissertation Preparation</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEB14102</td>
<td>The Web Industry (company report)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEB15203</td>
<td>Work-based Learning 2</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>WEB15204</td>
<td>Designing the User Experience</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>WEB15205</td>
<td>Interactive Narrative</td>
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<tr>
<td>C15301</td>
<td>Dissertation</td>
<td>30</td>
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<td>WEB15302</td>
<td>Advanced Web Technologies</td>
<td>30</td>
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<td>WEB15303</td>
<td>Work-based learning 3</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>WEB15304</td>
<td>Major Industry Project (4)</td>
<td>30</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>360</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## Timetable

### Year 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Induction &amp; pre-term</th>
<th>Term 1</th>
<th>Christmas</th>
<th>Term 2</th>
<th>Easter</th>
<th>Term 3</th>
<th>Summer boot camp</th>
<th>Term 4 (summer)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15 day boot camp</td>
<td>Work Based Learning 1</td>
<td>10 day boot camp</td>
<td>Work Based Learning 1</td>
<td>10 day boot camp</td>
<td>Work Based Learning 2</td>
<td>10 day boot camp</td>
<td>Work Based Learning 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fundamentals of Web Design</td>
<td>T&amp;C + Web development workshop</td>
<td>Social Media cultures</td>
<td>Designing the User Experience</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Year 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-term</th>
<th>Term 1</th>
<th>Christmas</th>
<th>Term 2</th>
<th>Easter</th>
<th>Term 3</th>
<th>Term 4 (summer)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15 day boot camp</td>
<td>Work Based Learning 3</td>
<td>10 day boot camp</td>
<td>Work Based Learning 3</td>
<td>10 day boot camp</td>
<td>Major Industry Project (WBL 4)</td>
<td>Major Industry Project (WBL 4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissertation prep + Interactive Narrative</td>
<td>Dissertation + Advanced Web Technologies</td>
<td>Dissertation + Advanced Web Technologies</td>
<td>Final major project</td>
<td>Final major project</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Course development and structure

WBL units

• WBL 1 – partnership employer research project (level 4).
• WBL 2 – defined, specific task within a team (level 5).
• WBL 3 – an individual task set by employer (level 6).
• WBL 4 – self-directed project within company (level 6).
Course development and structure

Value of WBL

• Undertaking a personal project in the workplace with technical, practical and intellectual support of the university.
• Build a portfolio of real-world industry produced work.
• Gain valuable experience and knowledge of working in their chosen industry.
• Create a significant self-directed industry project/s that will aid in their quest for employment.
Student recruitment

- Initial recruitment target at 16 students.
- The application process through UCAS ‘subject to validation’.
- By February 2015 applications had risen to 30.
- “No Brainer” response:
  - Two years.
  - Qualification.
  - “Earn while you learn”.


Engaging with partnership employers

Institutionally challenging due to:

- Timescale of project.
- The growth of the web industry, while rapid, is still embryonic.
- Many employers, particularly in social media, remain micro businesses.
Engaging with partnership employers

Small and micro companies were highly responsive to the concept of WBL and degree apprenticeships.

- Limited to one student.
- Many employers involved.
- New employers every year (constant recruitment).
- Demanded a high level of administration and communication between students and employers.
Funding

• Conducted outside the Trailblazer programme.
• Trailblazers: lengthy process of development.
• Micro businesses found the programme resource and time intensive and unaffordable.
• Outlay of the learning provider fee and the apprentice’s salary.
• Trailblazer initiative is more suited to larger employers with greater resources.
Outcome

- The course not followed through to validation.
- Difficulty of combining WBL model within a two-year fast track.
- Developing enough employer partnerships in time.
- Strategy for continued employer recruitment.
- Further development as a three-year WBL course is in progress.
Conclusions

• Concerns over the ‘cannibalisation’ of traditional courses.
• Integration of WBL model within course structure.
• Constant recruitment of employers.
• Address loss of employer provision.
• Diversity of employer discipline's within sector.
• Funding model for small and micro businesses.
Thank you

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References


Black, J. et al. (2015) The regulation of higher education, Discussion paper no.77, Centre for analysis and risk, London School of Economics p.1


