TEF Year Three provider submission

The core purpose of Futureworks is to provide the highest standard of media education, with quality at the heart of all our activities. Working in partnership with the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) since 2008, we offer undergraduate degree programmes in Sound, Film & TV, Games, Animation and Visual Effects. Our Mission Statement sets out our principal goals:

> *"Our mission is to be recognised as the leading alternative Higher Education Institution in the UK for media education. We aspire to be recognised as the first choice for students who want top quality, vocational and relevant education which will lead to sustainable employment in the global media industry."*

Futureworks was formed in 2006 by a team of managers with established experience of providing high quality vocational undergraduate programmes.

Futureworks currently has just over 500 full-time students enrolled on nine undergraduate degree programmes. Students enjoy a superb learning environment, designed to mirror real-world media production facilities. Our main campus is a state-of the-art 24,000 sq ft facility situated in the heart of Manchester. In addition, we have recently established an 8,000 sq ft film studio, located nearby in MediaCityUK (home to the BBC, ITV etc), which provides practical set-building, motion capture and filming space. To date, we have invested £8m in the provision of industry-standard recording studios, film production facilities, post-production suites, computer labs, and a range of other creative spaces.

From the outset, the aim was to create quality structures and systems that followed the approach of a university, while also providing the sort of state-of-the-art vocational education that was, at the time, typically only found outside HE. We are immensely proud that Futureworks graduates have gone on to work at many high profile media companies across the world, have worked with some huge names in the worlds of film and music, and have been involved in countless start-ups, producing everything from video games to visual effects; alongside this, Futureworks' reputation for quality and excellence has continued to grow, and its graduates have generated a continuous stream of success stories for the next generation of media professionals to aspire to.

The Futureworks teaching philosophy/mission is characterised by a learning environment which enables students to develop and achieve their academic, personal and professional potential, employing cutting-edge methodologies in the production of challenging, real-world assignments, preparing them to be future leaders in the creative industries.

We celebrate diversity by actively working to enable all students to reach their potential through providing and promoting an inclusive culture and environment for recruitment and admissions, teaching, learning and assessment activities. We ensure that comprehensive support is provided for students with special needs to enable them to achieve their potential, based upon the premise that learning should be accessible to all.

Futureworks believes strongly in student as partners in institutional decision-making. We encourage students to be active participants in the leadership, management, development

and delivery of their own educational experiences. This is achieved through student membership of committees and other formal and informal feedback processes and through active student engagement in the learning process – the student voice is central to our ongoing academic quality monitoring, review and enhancement processes. We promote a self-critical academic culture that places the utmost importance on reflection, evaluation and enhancement.

The long-term success of Futureworks graduates results from the professional nature of the programmes, and the extensive support provided to help students develop business and employability skills. Amongst the factors contributing to graduate career success are:

- Futureworks' mission, policies and strategies, which are designed to develop the acquisition of professional and employability skills, and to support students in entering and sustaining a professional career in the creative industries; over the years this approach has been acclaimed by students, employers and the QAA.
- Our academic staff, who have substantial commercial experience, extensive links with the creative industries and who continue to work on projects within the industries, e.g. producing feature films, designing games, illustrating comics, producing music for adverts or bands. This greatly enriches the student experience, enhancing the development of their professional and employability skills.
- Our Industry Coordinator, whose core responsibility is to support students and graduates in finding employment, work experience and/or small business startup. The Industry Coordinator develops long-term relationships with employers and assists in the integration of industry practice into the curriculum.
- The support provided to students in the development of enterprise and entrepreneurship skills - essential requirements for industries that are heavily reliant on freelancing and fragmented sub-contracting.
- Futureworks Music, our in-house record label, which has enabled dozens of students to launch their music careers.
- Guest lectures from industry professionals, which provide valuable insight and guidance on career pathways and overcoming entry barriers.
- Continuing Development Weeks, which include sessions on portfolio and showreel development, CV surgeries and seminars by visiting alumni, who share their experiences of the creative sector.
- The Industry Advisory Group, which promotes innovation in Futureworks' relationship with the creative sector, and develops initiatives aimed at enhancing employability opportunities.

Many Futureworks graduates have set up their own freelance businesses in the creative sector, and take advantage of start-up/incubation support from Futureworks. They often require access to expensive audio-visual equipment and studio space, which Futureworks makes available for up to two years after graduation. This opportunity is widely taken up, and has led to many success stories.

The creative industries have a heavy preponderance of freelance, self-employed staff, and many Futureworks graduates follow a freelance career path: almost invariably this results in lower financial rewards in the early years, with higher financial rewards postponed for considerably longer than in other employment sectors. Because of the competitive nature of

the creative industries employment market, many new graduates work on a voluntary or expenses-only basis in the early stages of their career.

Futureworks metrics relating to employment/further study indicate results which fall below benchmark levels. However, this metric understates the long-term success of our graduates in gaining employment. This is because of the unusual characteristics of the career and employment structures in the creative and media industries.

For example, a significant proportion of music production graduates pursue non-traditional career trajectories, especially in the early stages of establishing their careers, developing, publishing and distributing their work through social media and other non-corporate channels. Young film-makers typically take work on an unpaid basis, which helps establish their reputation within the industry, and develops their portfolio. Graduates of Futureworks' games-related programmes invariably enter the industry at a junior level at first (often at minimum wage), since games studios are typically reluctant to expose recent graduates to the more complex aspects of multi-million pound projects. Futureworks' own research suggests that many graduates only secure highly-paid employment some time beyond the six months after graduation.

Finally, the high quality of the student learning experience at Futureworks was acknowledged by the QAA in October 2017 when, following our Higher Education Review (AP), we received commendations in three of the four judgement areas, and eight instances of good practice were highlighted. Furthermore, we were recently recognised for outstanding support for student learning and excellence in the student community at the Independent HE Annual Conference. We are immensely proud of these achievements, and look to build on these success in the coming years.