Name of Provider: Futureworks

UKPRN: 10022087

TEF Year Four provider submission

Provider Context

Futureworks was formed in 2006 with the core purpose of providing high quality media education. 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."*

We aim for the highest possible standards in everything we do, and we have consistently placed quality at the heart of all our activities. Futureworks is distinguished by a high-quality teaching team drawn from a range of professional backgrounds and a highly experienced management team. Our learning resources are exceptional, representing a substantial investment of approximately £8 million in state-of-the-art studios and high specification computing, media and production facilities built to industry standards. By 2017 we were offering nine undergraduate degree courses in Sound, Film & TV, Games, Animation and Visual Effects, with nearly 500 students, and 50 staff (38 FTE).

Over the years we have developed a system of quality structures and systems have been developed which follow the approach of a university. Each year Futureworks' reputation for the quality of our provision and the excellence of our students' experience has continued to grow.

The Futureworks team is proud of our achievements and of our growing reputation. The success of Futureworks graduates, gaining positions with prestigious national and international media companies, is testament to the high standards consistently attained. Our NSS scores for overall student satisfaction went from 82% in 16/17 to 91% in 17/18, putting us seven percentage points above the sector average.

We have received extensive recognition of our achievements. The University of Central Lancashire has demonstrated its confidence in Futureworks by validating an increasingly diverse portfolio of courses. Our QAA reviews have been consistently positive. In 2018 Futureworks became the first independent UK institution to achieve QAA Commended judgements across the board. In a press release the QAA commented: 'Futureworks is a great example of a highly specialist college that understands its industry and what graduates need to succeed in a competitive market. Our reviewers found the college has invested in state-of-the-art studios and production facilities built to industry standards. It has also recruited high quality staff with expertise in both teaching and practice.'

Looking forward, in the short and medium term we are embarking upon an ambitious programme – we are expanding the range of courses, including the launch of our first postgraduate course. During the current year we will be applying for Degree Awarding Powers – a major step forwards in our ongoing progress.

Teaching Quality

Student Engagement (TQ1)

Teaching provides effective stimulation, challenge and contact time that encourages students to actively commit to and engage with their studies.

Futureworks programmes demand student commitment to engaging with the learning process, which is embodied and expressed through course aims, learning outcomes, and learning and teaching strategies. Our courses are designed to develop students' professional capabilities by the facilitation of active learning, typically requiring student engagement in industry-standard projects. Common to all courses is a focus on employability, which provides a challenging learning environment and necessitates committed participation by students in the learning process.

The importance of committed engagement is explained in the information provided to potential applicants and additional information provided to successful applicants**.** Further explanation is given at induction, where the meaning and implications of the course aims, learning outcomes, the Learning and Teaching Strategy, and the nature of Futureworks assessments are explained and discussed with the new students. The centrality of student engagement is also described in Student Handbooks and in Module Handbooks, and all Module Leaders address these issues in their opening sessions, and throughout module delivery.

Many assignments and projects require students to choose, design and produce deliverables such as videos or game art, and tutors provide support at every stage in the process, engaging in a dialogue to help the student through the chain of decision-making to reach the desired end-product. Often students often work in collaboration with their fellow students, learning the skills required to achieve results through team-working.

Tutors arrange for students to experience activites outside the classroom, for example film festivals, trips to art galleries, guest lecturers. Students are also active in developing their own activities, such as film and games societies.

Creative media subjects benefit hugely from a cross-disciplinary approach to learning, which we promote and nurture. Film students will work with audio and visual effects students on projects, and game designers will need artists and audio specialists to create fully functioning games. Our students learn this early in their studies, and they are encouraged to work with students from other areas. As one of our alumni puts it: "Making games involves people with different skill sets coming together, so it's important to not just be able to work with artists, designers and coders but to be able to communicate with them. I made sure I worked with game design students while completing my game audio course and that experience was invaluable." (JK, 2017)

Where students have difficulty in adjusting to the nature of the learning process, additional support is given by Module Leaders, and further help and guidance is available from Personal Tutors and Student Services. This is explained to students at induction, and Module Leaders continually reinforce this message.

Our external examiners consistently confirm that this teaching strategy is effective in producing a stimulating learning environment which actively encourages students to engage. "The course structure and design of the overall delivery, is structured to provide a broad scope for creative, practical and vocational opportunities for the student cohort which is reflective of the commercial/digital industries. In this regard, it's encouraging to see the student-centred approach and strategies employed as a priority and key agenda for the teaching teams." (John Che, Games Design, 2017).

Year	Metric	I feel part of a community of staff and students.	I have had the right opportunities to work with other students as part of my course.	My course has challenged me to achieve my best work.
17/18	% Agree	86	95	86
17/18	Sector-wide % Agree	70	84	82
17/18	Divergence from Sector	+16	+11	+5

Valuing Teaching (TQ2)

Institutional culture facilitates, recognises and rewards excellent teaching.

The importance attached to excellence in teaching is recognised through the Staff Training and Development Policy, which promotes and supports continuing professional development, and in-house staff development sessions, including the Annual Conference, where current developments and examples of good practice are shared and discussed.

At present, Futureworks recognises and rewards good teaching through the appraisal process, but this has not been codified or formulated as a written policy. We are aware that this is an area which needs to be addressed, and intend to formulate objectives relating to this in the next Learning and Teaching Strategy Action Plan. Furthermore, we have been facilitating excellent teaching in coordination with our partner institution.

When tutors start at Futureworks, they are assigned to a Programme Leader for mentoring in their first year with us. After this, they are included in the teaching buddy system. Each tutor is paired with another tutor and they observe each other's teaching and discuss the session afterwards. The discussion provides an opportunity to identify good practice, which can then be shared with the rest of the teaching staff in the School. Sharing of good practice is a standing item at Management Committee meetings, enabling all teams to benefit.

Staff development needs are identified through a staff appraisal process. This is used to support teaching skills as well as technical skills and qualifications. Our partner institution, UCLan, offers access to an Associates Programme, a 3-day course which covers teaching in Higher Education. Freelance tutors with limited teaching experience have been required to take this programme as part of their contract; many of our full time staff have taken it as well. Tutors can also complete the PG Cert LHE to obtain Fellowship of the HEA. Support for this and other qualifications is given in the form of time in lieu or reduced teaching loads. Our Learning and Teaching Strategy Action Plan states that we aim to have 60% of academic staff to possess or be working towards a postgraduate qualification or FHEA status.

Industry qualifications relating to teaching proficiency are also supported; recently four members of the School of Sound and Music Production undertook the Avid Train the Trainer Programme, using Pro Tools software. The QAA recognised the value of this policy by praising "the comprehensive approach to supporting academic staff in continuing their professional development, thus enabling staff to enhance the learning experience is good practice"[1].

Before the start of each new academic year, we hold a Staff Development Week. This updates staff on relevant changes to policies or regulations for the following year, gives training on student support issues, and any issues identified by senior managers as needing development. This academic year there were sessions on Prevent, committee training, women & girls with autism, mental health, dyslexia, and a personal tutor round-table discussion. The development activities

[1] http://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/reports/futureworks-training-ltd-her-ap-17.pdf

are designed to enhance tutor support for students, and ensure they are up to date with any best practice and changes to legislation.

In addition to the Staff Development Week, Futureworks holds an Annual Conference, which is a full day event attended by all members of staff. Topics vary each year; at the last event we covered mental health, GDPR, and a discussion about our research and teaching strategies. We also saw examples of some of the research being undertaken by our academic staff, and how this was being used to further develop our curriculum.

The centrality of teaching in the student experience is recognised through the importance attached to student feedback in identifying opportunities for enhancement in course delivery. Student feedback is obtained through informal methods such as student-tutor interaction, and through formal methods, including Module Enhancment Questionnaires (MEQs), and through the participation of Student Partners in School Committees and other formal processes.

Rigour and Stretch (TQ3)

Course design, development, standards and assessments are effective in stretching students to develop independence, knowledge, understanding and skills that reflect their full potential.

Enabling students to develop and achieve their academic, personal and professional potential is one of the core tenets of the Futureworks ethos. It is embedded in the Futureworks Strategic Plan and in the Learning and Teaching Strategy.

All Futureworks programmes follow benchmark standards that set out the range of skills required to develop student potential. Each programme embodies a wide range of learning outcomes which ensure the development of academic, professional and personal skills. On all Futureworks programmes the curriculum is designed to progressively build independent student learning, with the aim of equipping students with the range of skills and depth of knowledge required to become professionals in the creative media sector. Notably, this strategy underpins the Project modules at levels 5 and 6, which stretch students by requiring them to identify their study focus and, with tutor guidance and support, develop their own strategies to produce work that meets the learning outcomes at the appropriate level. The nature of tutor support changes as the student progresses, until they become autonomous learners, working like professionals, with minimal supervision.

In their review of Futureworks (HER, 2017), the QAA commended us for the quality of student learning opportunities we provide, including a “student-centred and inclusive learning environment”[1]. We have implemented a quality cycle, coupled with a new governance structure, that ensures our policies and procedures are fit for the development and enhancement of courses designed to build students’ independence, knowledge, understanding and skills.

Continuing Development weeks build on students’ employability skills, and the one-to-one support received from tutors in those weeks helps them develop their understanding and knowledge of their subject (see section LE3).

Students are continually challenged and confronted with situations where they are required to address the problems they will encounter in the industry. Tutors are all industry practitioners (see section LE2), and the various opportunities to work on industry projects mean that students can develop their skills in a professional setting. All of our courses aim to stay at the forefront of technology and developments in the industry, essential preparation for a professional career. This requires tutors to work with the students in experimenting with new technologies, something that has been praised by our external examiners: “The experimentation on the course is exemplary, while animation and illustration is at the core of the course it is clear that lots goes on outside of these areas from rotoscoping, planning, video editing, previz, modelling, UVMapping, texturing and so on. This is all great practice for students as it exposes them to areas outside of their comfort

zones and sometimes can become their new comfort zone as they find a key area of digital art that interests them." (Neil Gallagher, Animation 2017)

Year	Measure	The teaching on my course	Staff are good at explaining things.	Staff have made the subject interesting.	The course is intellectually stimulating.
16/17	% Agree	90	94	86	85
16/17	Sector-wide % Agree	87	90	83	86
16/17	Divergence from Sector	+3	+4	+3	-1
17/18	% Agree	90	94	94	88
17/18	Sector-wide % Agree	85	89	83	85
17/18	Divergence from Sector	+6	+5	+11	+2
	Improvement	**0**	**0**	**8**	**3**

We receive consistently positive feedback from our alumni about the challenging ways in which their programmes stretched them: "I would say the most valuable thing I've learned at Futureworks is (through lots of practice) how to successfully organise, structure and manage a project from start to finish. Always making sure to keep an eye on how much time I have to competently satisfy what is asked of me, but also allowing plenty of scope to develop ideas further and go above and beyond the brief where possible." (CJ, Sound Designer, 2017)

Feedback (TQ4)

Assessment and feedback are used effectively in supporting students' development, progression and attainment.

At Futureworks, every student receives personalised formative and summative feedback on every assignment. In class time, verbal formative feedback is given by tutors as they review progress on students' practical work. Written feedback is given for summative assignments, and audio or video feedback is also given for specific types of work, usually created artefacts such as music recordings or art work. Audio feedback is often provided to students and consists of the Module Leader and a second marker discussing the work with each other for 10-15 minutes. Students have reported that they benefit from the back-and-forth nature of this discussion as it gives them a clearer idea of how they can improve. They can also pick up more nuanced feedback through the discussion than through the written notes. Students can then discuss any further questions with the tutors in class, in a separate meeting or via email.

For some assessments, for example visual artefacts such as animation or short films, tutors may provide an audio commentary over the video submission – this enables feedback on specific parts or features of the video, helping student understanding of the points being made. Group critiques provide further opportunities for formative feedback.

At the 2017 Annual Conference, a review took place to investigate how we could improve our feedback to students – this was the chosen topic for that year's conference as, although there was good practice within the Schools, we wanted to bring in greater consistency across the institution. It was agreed that we needed to show a stronger link between grading criteria and learning outcomes, and make it clearer to students why they had obtained the mark given.

As a result of this review, a standardised method of assessing work was rolled out across all three schools from 2017/18. This uses a matrix showing the expectations of the assignment across all the grade boundaries for each learning outcome, with the level achieved highlighted in the relevant box. This is much clearer for the students to understand, and, equally important, helps tutors to be

more rigorous in their feedback. The language used in the matrix can then be used in other additional forms of feedback to maintain consistency.

These changes had an immediate positive effect, as can be seen in the NSS scores across these two years. Previously, our scores were below or not much above the sector average, but in 2017/18 we improved these significantly. In particular, the question on marking criteria improved by 13 percentage points, which we believe is attributable to the impact that the new assessment matrix has had. We will continue to monitor this in the 2018/19 NSS, and seek further enhancements.

Year	**Measure**	Assessment and feedback	The criteria used in marking have been clear in advance	Feedback on my work has been prompt	I have received detailed comments on my work
16/17	% Agree	76	75	70	81
16/17	Sector-wide % Agree	74	78	71	73
16/17	Divergence from Sector	+2	-3	-1	+8
17/18	% Agree	85	88	80	89
17/18	Sector-wide % Agree	73	73	73	74
17/18	Divergence from Sector	+11	+15	+7	+14
	Improvement	**9**	**13**	**10**	**8**

Year	**Measure**	Marking and assessment has been fair (new)
17/18	% Agree	83
17/18	Sector-wide % Agree	73
17/18	Divergence from Sector	+9

The new process received very positive comments from our External Examiners: “The feedback that was returned to students was detailed and covered the grading criteria, the learning outcomes, and some written feedback – this should ensure students are every clear as to how well they have done and what needs to be improved for future assignments.” (Dave Raybould, Audio, 2018)

Learning Environment

Resources (LE1)

Physical and digital resources are used effectively to aid students’ learning and the development of independent study and research skills.

All our programmes are heavily dependent on physical and digital resources. Futureworks have made a substantial investment in state-of-the-art studios and high specification computing, media and production facilities built to industry standards, ensuring that both learning resources and the approach to education remain relevant in a rapidly changing creative market. By 2017, the total amount invested in capital equipment was approximately £8 million. Our recording studios are among the best professional studios in the country. We have 12 music, mastering and post production studios, featuring top of the range consoles such as Neve, Avid S6, SSL and Icon. We have an impressive film studio space located at MediaCityUK that can be adapted for any need – whether creating a studio, building sets or using the green screen. We also have the software and hardware required for 3D digital art, character animation, digital painting, 3D modelling and game engines. One external examiner commented: “Resources and equipment available to students on

the programme are to a very high standard. All resources available to students mimic the professional working environment of the TV and film industry." (Paul Smith, Post Production 2018)

Futureworks facilities are open to students seven days a week, typically until 10pm - extending to 2am during periods of peak-demand. Students are introduced to the learning resources available and how to use them effectively during induction. Students receive tuition, guidance and support in the use of specific specialist equipment and software applications within the delivery of individual modules. For students with special needs, learning resources may be tailored to their specific requirements.

We collect feedback on our resources through the Student Partner meetings, School Committees, Module Evaluation Questionnaires and the NSS. This had led to improvements, for example after receiving feedback in a Student Partner meeting in 2017 we began a project to install dual monitors in more classrooms.

Our NSS scores relating to learning resources have improved over the last two years, and we are actively developing our resources with the aim of reaching, and subsequently surpassing the sector average. Our IT resources have improved in the last year as we have run a number of back-office projects to improve services, such as moving the Moodle server in-house; adopting Office 365 for staff and students; improvements to the Wi-Fi infrastructure; as well as continuing our annual update and upgrade of the equipment available for student loan (e.g. cameras, microphones, studio lights and musical instruments). We also regularly update the studio hardware in line with current technologies, and staff have access to these so they can prepare their teaching materials.

Year	**Measure**	Learning resources	The library resources have supported my learning well	The IT resources and facilities provided have supported my learning well.	I have been able to access course-specific resources when I needed to
16/17	% Agree	72	65	74	77
16/17	Sector-wide % Agree	86	87	89	82
16/17	Divergence from Sector	-14	-22	-15	-5
17/18	% Agree	81	71	84	89
17/18	Sector-wide % Agree	85	86	83	86
17/18	Divergence from Sector	-4	-15	+1	+3
	Improvement	**9**	**6**	**10**	**12**

Historically, our lowest score in the NSS has been in response to the question about our library resources. We have been, and are continuing to, address this issue through an ongoing programme of enhancements to update and enhance our library provision. At the same time our resource allocation process ensures that all learning resources keep up with changing industry standards and remain matched to academic needs.

We have a Learning Resource Centre on site that has books, journals and a range of online academic resources. Students also have access to the library resources of our partner institution which include excellent online resources, and access to sites such as Lynda.com. Additionally, many students make regular use of the inter-library loan schemes such as SCONUL and VALNOW.

Continuing evaluation of our Virtual Learning Environment (Moodle) takes place every year, with resulting enhancements. Our External Examiners have commented: "The use of the VLE is excellent, with students reporting particular appreciation of the traffic light system to sort essential, recommended and extra learning and support materials for the modules" (Kaye Elling, Visual

Effects, 2018). Over time there has been continuing investment in the updating and expansion of learning resources to ensure that Futureworks continues to meet professional expectations and that the scale of the provision meets the expanding needs of a growing student body.

Scholarship, Research and Professional Practice (LE2)

The learning environment is enriched by student exposure to and involvement in provision at the forefront of scholarship, research and/or professional practice.

Practice as research is an essential element of the Futureworks teaching strategy. All of our tutors have industry experience, with many of them still actively working in creative media. Some are freelancers, some take on regular part-time work, and others run their own businesses in the sector. This knowledge and expertise feeds directly into the curriculum. Each summer, the teaching teams hold a review of industry technology updates and best practice identified during the course of the year. This informs the upcoming year's scheme of work, including changes to the software taught, changes to assessments, or upgrades to hardware. This ensures that we are at the forefront of industry practice, and can react quickly to changes, and enhances the employability of our graduates in their chosen creative media sector. As one of our graduates stated in an interview: "Futureworks is a fantastic hub for working in many areas of creative media. The music and sound departments are uncompromising in their approach to using cutting edge equipment, professional studios and are led by experienced, industry-savvy tutors." (JS, April 2017)

Students are exposed to professional practice, not only through the curriculum, but also their interactions with tutors, and engagement with industry. For example, Futureworks often offers studio space and equipment to companies wanting to use our facilities for their creative projects. We offer a low-cost option for them, but with the stipulation that they must bring in our students to help on the project. The students gain valuable experience, and they have first-hand encounters with current techniques and technologies in a live situation. Students are also often able to work with our alumni when they return to develop their own projects, or on live briefs with external companies; they may also work on projects being developed by their tutors.

The importance of the evaluation of professional practice, and the contribution of scholarship, is recognised through the Staff Training and Development Policy. Teaching staff continually update their professional practice, through researching changing principles and methodologies, industry contacts and attendance at conferences. Futureworks is very responsive to industry changes - many tutors and students are engaged in professional practice outside of the classroom. In future, we intend to expand this to become an influencer in the creative media sector through research and scholarship.

Personalised Learning (LE3)

Students' academic experiences are tailored to the individual, maximising rates of retention, attainment and progression.

Tailoring students' academic experiences to their needs is an integral element of our Learning and Teaching Strategy. This begins before the point of entry, when the Student Affairs Team uses a questionnaire to identify students with specific learning needs (see SO3 for details of how we respond to these needs).

The priority in the first year of their studies is to ensure students have a smooth transition into Higher Education, and are given the tools they need to progress on their course. Assessments are designed to introduce them to key topics, staff are on hand in class to provide feedback, and our studio support staff are available to help with any hardware or equipment support (see section SO3).

Class sizes are small (typically 15-20) ensuring that tutors understand the individual learning requirements of their students. Tutors tailor their classes based on strengths of the cohort they are working with, and the Student Affairs Team ensures all tutors are made aware of any specific learning requirements of their students through a dedicated area on Moodle.

At Level 5, students are able to personalise their learning through negotiated assessments; a project module in every course; and the ability to start specialising in an area of interest and exploring it further. For example, on the Independent Filmmaking course, students at Level 5 take a module that has teaching in semester one, and then in semester two they alternate between film production meetings and lectures on topics of their choosing. Students can submit ideas to their Programme leader, who will then structure the lectures, often finding external speakers to come in and talk. In 2017/18 this resulted in student-requested lectures on working with child actors, and a stunt man demonstrating falls and fight sequences.

In their final year, students can continue with their chosen specialism, or choose another for their Level 6 project. At this level, students are expected to be fully independent learners; tutors are available in the scheduled classes to provide support if needed and to give ongoing feedback on their work in development. We believe that our excellent NSS scores for learning opportunities is at least partly a reflection of our students' ability to tailor their course to their needs and aspirations.

Year	**Metric**	Learning opportunities	My course has provided me with opportunities to explore ideas or concepts in depth.	My course has provided me with opportunities to bring information and ideas together from different topics.	My course has provided me with opportunities to apply what I have learnt.
17/18	% Agree	92	94	93	90
17/18	Sector-wide % Agree	84	84	85	81
17/18	Divergence from Sector	+9	+9	+8	+8

Continuing Development Week, which runs twice a year, gives students an opportunity to try out new areas of interest that may not be part of their curriculum and are typically focused on enhancing graduate employability; for example mixing techniques, colour grading, life drawing and motion capture. For some students, this is a chance to try out something completely unrelated to their degree, for others it is an opportunity to test-run a subject and decide if they want to explore it further in their studies.

Futureworks celebrates diversity, formalised in the Futureworks Equality and Diversity Policy, and actively works to ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to meet the learning outcomes and experience the rich diversity of learning experiences available.

Student Outcomes and Learning Gain

Employment and Further Study (SO1)

Students achieve their educational and professional goals, in particular progression to further study or highly skilled employment.

The Futureworks student experience is focused on developing high levels of professional and employability skills, enabling our graduates to enter and sustain a professional career in the creative industries – this is one of our core values. Programmes and assessments are carefully balanced to maintain rigorous academic standards, whilst ensuring relevance to industry practices; by the completion of their courses students will have engaged in industry-standard projects and attained the level required of industry professionals. Over the years our success in this respect has been acclaimed by students, by employers and by the QAA.

At Futureworks we are proud of the achievements of our students and alumni. The long list of Futureworks graduates who have gained employment in the creative industries is testament to the high quality of the student experience - some have gone to work at large organisations such as the BBC, ITV, Sony, Realtime UK, and Rockstar Games. Some join small game design companies or start-ups; many do freelance work; and others find work outside creative media but work on projects in their spare time. Some do a combination – one of our alumni we interviewed in 2017 was employed by the Universal Music Group (which owns brands such as EMI, Decca, Abbey Road), whilst at the same time managing a music producer on a freeelance basis, in addition to acting as a freelance music producer – at that time he was working with Nike on a social media video (GM, 2017). Another has set up a company – Accredited Skills - with three other Directors, "my role being to manage all of the in-house creative media such as video production, animation, audio editing, app production, website design and graphic design" (AK, 2017). One of our Games alumni received nominations for Audio Accomplishment at the Develop awards 2016 and Audio Design at the TIGA awards 2016 for an indie game he worked on with a team of developers (JK, 2017).

A large proportion of Futureworks graduates follow a freelance career path. Many set up their own businesses in the creative sector, and take advantage of start-up/incubation support from Futureworks, e.g. access to expensive audio-visual equipment and studio space, which we make available to students beyond their graduation. There are many success stories: for example, one group of Futureworks students formed their own company and, using our premises and resources, developed a game which won a national competition and went on to be BAFTA nominated.

An important contribution to the development of professional skills is that our teaching staff maintain extensive links with the creative industries and work on industry projects, eg working with film studios, producing music albums, designing games. The experience they bring to the classroom greatly enriches the student experience, and enhances the development of students' professional and employability skills.

At Futureworks we maintain our relationship with our graduates beyond the degree ceremony. All alumni are invited to join our LinkedIn group, through which we advertise vacancies, project opportunities, and provide updates on what is happening in the industry. We also have a monthly email newsletter that students and alumni can sign up to which offers similar content. This is all managed by our Industry Coordinator, who offers career support to both students and alumni. This year we have introduced the Industry Advisory Group, which has a brief of critically examining our curriculum, ensuring it continues to meet industry requirements. The Industry Advisory Group will also explore how we can increase the range of live briefs available to students (where students are engaged in real-world projects).

All alumni have access to our technical facilities for up to two years after graduation – a service which has been vital for many alumni who wish to pursue a freelance career or build up their portfolio of work. For example, we have had students who undertook freelance location sound jobs using our equipment for high-end sound design/mixing, and which provided a gateway into the industry. A recent film project undertaken by an Erasmus trainee provided paid employment for a graduate to mix a critically acclaimed film that featured at the British Film Festival in London.

Our investment in cutting-edge technologies means that many of our alumni come back to work on projects, often involving our current students. Alumni can book space and equipment for up to two years. For example, UK Games Talent sponsors Transfuzer – an annual games design competition, where teams build games, taking them from concept and prototyping through to publishing. Our students and graduates have used our facilities to develop work for this competition, and have won, in different years, prizes of £5,000, £15,000, and £25,000.

At the end of the academic year final year students stage a degree show to exhibit their work to friends, family and industry representatives. Each year we have students who receive job offers as a result of this show. This also gives them the opportunity to practise showing their work and building up the confidence to pitch themselves to potential employers.

Further study at postgraduate level is something that many creative media professionals undertake. We have found that postgraduate study in our sector tends to have more appeal to those that already have some experience in the industry. In preparing to introduce our first Masters level programme (starting September 2019) we conducted information-gathering sessions with our students about its attractiveness and relevance. Most said they would be interested once they had spent some time in industry, as they would then have a better base of knowledge and experience to draw on.

A high proportion of our graduates follow a freelance career, and this is a known characteristic of the creative media sector. The Creative Industries Federation comments "Of the creative workers in the (creative industries) sector, 47% are self-employed, compared with 15% across the workforce as whole"[2]. We prepare our students for this with workshops in Continuing Development Week, and as many of our tutors also work as freelancers, they are able to help students understand the particular challenges of freelance work.

As can be seen in our metrics for highly skilled employment or further study, Futureworks is below the benchmark at the point of the DLHE survey, 6 months after graduation. We have found that our graduates' performance is, in the longer term, much better than the DLHE statistics suggest. This is partly due to the dominance of freelance work in this sector, and the slower start to the launch of a career which often results. Our analysis indicates that at the point of the DLHE survey many of our alumni are engaged in preparing portfolios, working on projects, or in the early stages of a freelance career. Where our graduates obtain employment in the creative media industry, the roles are often entry level and starting salaries low. For example, a junior game artist/designer typically earns around £19,000 per annum, but with the expectation of progressing to a considerably higher salary within two years.

Employability and Transferable Skills (SO2)

Students acquire knowledge, skills and attributes that are valued by employers and that enhance their personal and/or professional lives.

All our courses embody aims, learning objectives and curricula which recognise the central importance of the acquisition of knowledge, skills and attributes that are valued by employers.

Employer input is a vital element in course design and development. For example, a national games studio was invited to contribute to the ongoing enhancement of the BA (Hons) Games Design course, specifically learning outcomes, progression through the degree and the range of skills acquired by graduates. This fed into enhancements to the programme delivery for 2018/19.

Programmes and assessments are carefully balanced to maintain rigorous academic standards, whilst ensuring relevance to industry practices; by the completion of their courses students will have engaged in industry-standard projects and attained the level required of industry professionals.

All courses at Futureworks include modules with an employability focus and students gain professional skills by working to industry standards on assignments. This is supported by tutors

[2] **https://www.creativeindustriesfederation.com/sites/default/files/2017-07/Creative%20Freelancers%201.0.pdf**

with a strong creative media background, many still working in the industry. All three Schools have received comments from External Examiners praising their industry focus:

> "Many of the industry standard art skills for the film and games industries are being covered that would allow the students to become employed in the future." (Neil Gallagher, Animation, 2018).
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> "The [music] industry focus of the course is very strong and students demonstrate commercial quality in their production and understanding of techniques." (Tim Land, Music Production, 2017).
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> "The integration of industry led post-production workflows, mechanical and creative processes provide students with an in-depth knowledge of the requirements of this highly significant production role. The students are also actively encouraged to work with industry and some of the programme modules stipulate this as an essential practice. This is excellent industry focused practice and has the added benefit of allowing students to create portfolio-ready footage of their work within the assessments themselves." (Paul Smith, Post Production, 2017).

Modules on employability cover vital career skills such as CV writing, cover letters, and portfolio development. Assessments are based on their chosen career sector, and a portion of class time is dedicated to one-to-one discussions on students' work, projects and career aspirations.

Each semester we run a Continuing Professional Development week, with many of the events specifically geared to employability skills. Sessions have included: "How to build contacts as a freelancer"; "The process of making & distributing your independent film"; "Meet Sofia Rahman (TV Producer)"; and demonstrations of industry-level mastering techniques. The QAA HER report (2017) identified our employability skills integration as being good practice and noted that it "effectively prepares students for a career in the creative industries".

Employer involvement is a key feature of the learning experience, helping to ensure that the latest professional techniques are employed. For example, as part of an animation module students presented their work to the team at the Neighbourhood, Manchester's largest animation and graphic design studio, and were given invaluable formative feedback from professional practitioners, prior to submission.

In the School of Art & Design, games studios are involved in providing live briefs as a basis for assessments, and studio representatives are engaged in the feedback process. Games Design students also have the chance to apply to be part of a usability testing team at Team 17, a major UK games studio – this is paid work that is invaluable for their CVs.

In the School of Film, Television & Media there are frequent opportunities for students to work with alumni and companies on projects – calls go out on our social media channels 2-3 times a month with projects available. External companies that use our facilities are expected to involve our students in the process, which gives them experience of the technical aspects but, equally important, exposure to the challenges of working with professional actors, helping to develop interpersonal skills in a p[rofessinal context.

The School of Sound & Music Production offers certification courses in Avid Pro Tools, from beginners level through to Pro Tools Expert (Level 7 equivalent). Some of these courses are embedded into our degree programmes, and others are available to students at a discount.

Futureworks also has its own record label[3] that students and alumni can submit their music to for promotion and distribution.

Our Industry Coordinator builds relationships with and enhances industry engagement, strengthening the Futureworks brand in the creative sector. He supports our Programme Leaders and tutors in the integration of industry practice into the curriculum, helping to facilitate employment opportunities for our students and alumni.

The success of Futureworks graduates in gaining employment within the industries related to their degree courses provides evidence that Futureworks is succeeding in the aim of developing professional and personal skills, and that working with industry, employers can provide a pathway for graduates to move quickly into their careers. Recent Futureworks graduates have gained employment with, for example: Hello Games, Cold Sun Studios, Ringtale Studios, Airship Images, Urban Green Space, Red Frog Digital, BBC iPlayer, ITV, Sony, Ericsson Broadcast, Framestore, Virtual Viewing, Realtime UK.

Positive Outcomes for All (SO3)

Positive outcomes are achieved by its students from all backgrounds, in particular those from disadvantaged backgrounds or those who are at greater risk of not achieving positive outcomes.

As noted above (section LE3), Futureworks celebrates diversity, formalised in the Futureworks Equality and Diversity Policy, and actively works to ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to meet the learning outcomes and experience the rich diversity of learning experiences available.

Futureworks offers support to all our students over the course of their studies, from application through to after graduation. At Futureworks we try and create as inclusive an environment as we can, and set up additional support when we identify a need.

We also support staff in understanding our students better by giving them access to information on their students support requirements on the VLE, and they can find out more about disabilities or conditions using the provided links. In Staff Development Week we have run mental health awareness sessions; presented videos on issues such as autism and mental health. We have also made available a wealth of information on health issues on the VLE. Staff report that these initiatives help them improve their support for students.

Since 2016 we have asked confirmed applicants to complete a support questionnaire so that we can assess and address their needs before they commence their studies.

Initially questions focused on disabilities and access requirements; we have since extended the scope of the questionnaire to ask about their expected living arrangements, e.g. if they are expecting to live away from home, and what support they will need and expect to have while staying in Manchester. By asking for the information at this early stage we are able to reach out to them before enrolment and offer extra support.

Support from tutors and other staff is provided with the aim of making learning accessible to all, rather than make changes for individual students. This philosophy is in line with DSA guidance, which states: “The learning environment should be as inclusive as possible, so that the need for individual interventions is the exception, not the rule.” Support systems should be accessible to all within an inclusive learning environment.

[3] https://www.futureworksmusic.co.uk/

With this in mind, all learning materials are uploaded to MyFutureworks VLE, to which all students have access, and printed notes provided where appropriate. Tutors also create video tutorials, which are accessible to all via MyFutureworks VLE or School drives (e.g. Google Drive). Nevertheless, where students do require individual provision this is arranged, e.g. recording of lessons - audio recorders are provided if students don't have the necessary equipment to make the recordings themselves.

At the start of the 16/17 academic year, we launched an initiative called Running Start[4]. This is an orientation event the week before enrolment, created to help students who would benefit from the opportunity to enrol in a quieter and more relaxed environment. It is designed to ensure that everyone is given the time and information needed to enrol and to help build the confidence to start their studies. Students complete all their paperwork, have a tour of the facilities, meet teaching staff, and get to know staff and their fellow students.

Over the three years we have run this initiative we have expanded the pool of students we invite. Initially it was limited to those that had declared a disability, but in 18/19 we also invited mature students and those from outside the UK. The initiative has been very successful, with 100% of participating students in 17/18 reporting that they felt more confident about starting their studies. The QAA stated in their HER report that the "support for disabled students, and in particular the Running Start initiative, which enables students to fulfil their academic and professional potential, is good practice"[5]. We are currently looking at expanding this initiative further for the 19/20 intake.

Support for all students is embedded into the structure of the academic year, with Welcome Week and Continuing Development Weeks being key parts of the calendar. During Welcome Week, at the start of the academic year, sessions are run for each level, providing tips for having a successful year, as well as a number of technical support and informal sessions to help students get to know each other.

The Continuing Development Weeks are run in the middle of each semester. Starting in 2014, they initially offered technical and academic support to students, but over time this has expanded to include more employment and study skills sessions. In 17/18 we added sessions on mental wellbeing and stress management. Feedback in Student Partner meetings have been positive with a request for more sessions (January 2018 Meeting) and similar sessions are planned for the 18/19 academic year.

When a member of staff has concerns about a student, they refer them to the Student Affairs Team, following an established referrals process. We have a full time Student Welfare Officer who conducts initial consultations with the student and may liaise with other staff (such as their Personal Tutor or Programme Leader), or refer the student to our Student Counsellor, who may refer the student to NHS services if appropriate.

Students working with technical equipment and studio facilities receive support in using the equipment and software. Students requiring additional help may arrange one-to-one support sessions.

We are continually identifying opportunities for enhancing our support for students from diverse backgrounds. We produce an Annual Diversity Report and a Diversity Strategic Action Plan, which sets out immediate, and longer-term actions to address the identified issues. A Transgender

[4] https://futureworks.ac.uk/about/student-services/running-start/

[5] http://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/reports/futureworks-training-ltd-her-ap-17.pdf

Support Group was started in 2017 after a request from a student. This group meets every semester, and this year ran an open session during Welcome Week that interested students could attend.

Conclusion

We are confident that we have demonstrated how our students are at the heart of all that we do, and that in delivering the learning experience we strive to meet the highest standards.

Students participated in the preparation of this submission, and we would like to close by quoting some of the comments we were given by a focus group convened to discuss its contents:

> *"Futureworks has easily accessible and helpful staff, as well as a great range of equipment."*
>
> *"My experience has been that the learning is very focused. Tutor-student rapport is very strong compared to other Universities."*
>
> *"I came here for the small classes and readily available tutors."*
>
> *"The facilities use up to date technologies, and we get the latest programs for things like compositing."*
>
> *"Always striving for improvement, and we get lots of updates."*
>
> *"Tutors have a lot of time for you, in one-to-ones and discussions outside of class"*
> *"Disabled support is great."*

When the focus group students were asked which level of award Futureworks should receive, they all agreed that Silver was the correct assessment. We have to say that we emphatically agree with the students' judgement!