CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION PERFORMNG ARTS AT HEREFORD COLLEGE OF ARTS

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Abbreviations
PA - Performing Art(s)
ND - National Diploma
FdA - Foundation degree
EM - Event(s) Management
FT- Full time
PT- Part time
AIB - Arts Institute at Bournemouth

INTRODUCTION

Performing Arts in Higher Education is a many-headed hydra. And as soon as Heracles cuts off one of Hydra's heads, another grows in its place. The Herculean labour required for this report is to grow another head out of the existing animal that is Performing Arts at Hereford College of Arts

To close the metaphor, the varied heads are these:

As an academic study in Universities

It may be called Performance Studies or Performance Arts or Performing Arts, Music and Media or Theatre Studies or Theatre and Performance. Even Drama is making a retro comeback with a new B.A Hons at Oxford Brookes. The titles are legion and sometimes lengthy, but they are important because both tutor and student need to be absolutely clear what they are giving and getting.

All of the university deans and tutors interviewed agree that at their institutions theatre practice *informs* the academic study. 'Skills can be embedded within the module rather than separated from it.' (Chris Hall, playwright/academic , University of Plymouth.) With an academic course, skills do not take a primary position. The practical work comes out of the prescribed or chosen module whether it be choral verse speaking out of a Greek classical play, stylised physical movement from a Stephen Berkoff or dialect work from a Cartwright or a Bleasedale.

Drama Schools

There are twenty-one drama schools in the UK with vocational courses in acting, musical theatre and stage management /technical production accredited by the National Council for Drama Training. For performers, entry is by audition sometimes accompanied by interview where subjectively judged 'raw talent' rather than academic ability is the principal requirement for securing a place. It is highly competitive, with some London drama schools offering places on a ratio of 1:50. A report from the Conference of Drama Schools last year highlighted the fact that it is twice as hard to get into a leading drama school as it is to get into Oxbridge. An across-the-board ratio

of applicants to places averages seven to one. A study carried out by the Institute of Manpower Studies on behalf of the Arts Council of England found that 86% of actors *working* in the profession had received formal vocational training from drama schools. Looking at what is considered the top end- RADA - you will find throughout the three-year course, intensive individual work on voice, movement and physical skills varying from Alexander Technique to physical combat. In the second year radio, television and filming techniques are taught. A minimum supervised working day is from 9am to 6.30pm with individual classes in the evening. The majority of tutors are currently involved in the business. (Telephone interview with Gary Rowe, professional dance and theatre director/tutor at RADA)

Lyn Gardner recently interviewed Jonathan Holloway, a theatre director for over 25 years who was briefly head of performing arts at Middlesex University. (Guardian July 15 '08)

"When I've worked with university trained actors they sometimes lack basic skills, but sometimes when you are working with drama school-trained actors you become aware that they've never been in a devised show and don't know how to work in that context. There is now a real tension about the way actors are being trained, because the industry has entered a new era. *Actors can't just act any more. If they want to work they have to be entrepreneurial: they have to make work, build companies and find spaces for that work.* The graduates from universities are good at this. They are able to make context for the work, not just work itself."

This view is amplified by Dr Roberta Mock, Theatre and Performance B.A. Hons University of Plymouth (page)

'There are lots of different performance cultures. We are definitely not training students to be actors. We are training students to be responsive to their communities, to become people who can make theatre happen. Drama schools do that badly or not at all. The students that come out of University PA courses respect politics, audience, spaces.'

From press coverage and general public perception it would appear that for the student who wants a career in the performance industry it's an an either/or. A simple choice of university versus drama school.

But the cultural industry sector has developed enormously in recent years, and with it the career prospects for graduates.

Current initiatives are placing the emphasis more on preparing students for 'graduate jobs', rather than for 'any job'. This involves developing critical, reflective abilities, skills for self-career management and the maintenance of employability and career progression.

Employability Issues in HE Performing Arts : *The Palatine Report Sept 2003:*

The edges of culture, art, craft and entertainment are challengingly blurred - music, theatre, dance, food, film, festivals, site-specific performance, circus skills, clothes, gardening, graffiti, photography... A stimulating mix.

So we come to the Third Way. An HE course (as yet untitled) within an Arts College: one that can identify the challenges facing it and turn those challenges to positive advantages.

To succeed, the course will need to be

1. **Distinctive**
   Have a marketable attraction to a workable number of students.
   Have strong tutors with links to the industry.
   Have a focussed, clearly communicated curriculum.
   Look forward culturally, not backward.

2. **Context-driven**
   The course genuinely should address its geographical and cultural context.
   It should forge strong links with potential employers.

3. **Institutionally Integrated**
   There should be strong, committed cross-fertilisation with other departments in the college.
   It must acknowledge the planning, timetabling implications and regular communication between course leaders to achieve this.

4. **Sustainable**
   For the college. After initial investment, enrolment numbers need to climb steadily.
   For the student: Students need to justify their personal financial investment by being provided with a genuine path to employment.

<u>IDENTIFICATION OF EXISTING PROBLEMS at HCA</u>

Although the Performing Arts ND course continues to function well, the existing Performing Arts HE, validated 2005, is, for a variety of reasons and from several perspectives, problematic.

Student perspective.

Questionnaires May 2008. Collated evidence.

Performing Arts HE students were not satisfied with aspects of the following:
Course organisation
Expectations of the course
Information and timetabling
Communication between course tutors
Range of educational visits.

They were satisfied with aspects of:
Course organisation and content
Teaching
Assessment and feedback
Academic support
Learning Resources and Facilities
Personal Development

Interviews

All interviewees were asked initially to speak about the strengths of the course before they cited weaknesses. (See transcripts.) This was to encourage creative thinking about change rather than initiate a negative rant.

A common issue raised was that numbers on the course were too low to create a viable performing arts course, and that selection criteria were not apparently applied strictly enough. Course organisation and resources were also criticised.

HCA Staff perspective

Exploration and problem-identification needed to be sensitively handled. Staff shared between ND and HE are doing their best in often difficult circumstances. The PA ND appears healthy with generally good student feedback.

1. A recorded conversation *rather than formal interview* with Pete Thorogood, one of the acting course leaders:

Is vertical integration a strength or a weakness? I mean that some students go on from ND to FdA?
If they stay for the right reasons, that's good.
If it's just to keep up the numbers, it's the wrong reason.

Can you see areas for development and improvement on the HE course?

At the moment it's top-heavy acting. It should be performance more generally - not just acting. We ended up with an acting course trying to be a PA course. In the audition there's no movement. There is nowhere for a dance or music specialist to demonstrate their skills.

How would you attract the right candidates?
I've been doing most of the interviews and auditions. Only 2 were rejected. One for BA and one FdA. I don't know how this fits in with previous years. We need to make sure the calibre of students attracted to the course is high. There are some students who struggle and that doesn't help anyone. There's a tug of war between getting the numbers up and accepting students who can't achieve and one reason that (the course) isn't working is that the numbers are too small - smaller than they were at the beginning. Performing is teamwork. With a small group, one very weak student has a big impact although there is the advantage that you get a tight-knit group who tutors get to know well.
Productions can present problems. The BA show is supplemented by FdA students and sometimes ND.
The original idea was that the final show would attract London agents. That isn't going to happen. We realise now that the final performance could be very different in nature.

2. Interview with ex-course leader, Paul Milton, in post for two months 2008, after he has handed in his resignation quoted in
Discussion paper: HE Performing Arts 20 March 08 (Ellie Parker)

What do you see as existing problems?

- The fundamental problem is that there are too few students to make theatre work viable
- Low morale amongst students and therefore bad word-of-mouth re. recruitment.
- Seriously sporadic attendance that jeopardises achievement of those who do attend. Theatre is team work.
- Low ability of the students accepted, both academic and practical.
- Limitations and lack of stimulation of being taught by the same few tutors for five years.
- Contact time not adequate to provide a skills-base course
- Facilities inadequate to deliver a broad-based performing arts course. It should include film, radio, recording etc.
- Dissertation should be marked by a performing arts specialist.
- Not enough integration with other departments in HCA.

Conclusions
The edited interview above sums up an across-the-board opinion of problems expressed through questionnaires and interview.

Martyn Green, chief executive at the Courtyard who has been a visiting lecturer in arts administration on the course echoes most of the concerns:

- The quality of the students: the standard of written work is low.
- They've not had enough experience to take on significant responsibility
- There is a necessity for college to invest so that not just anyone is accepted onto course
- There is too much competition from drama schools to offer a skills-based course.
- People are staying in Hereford for the wrong reasons.
- Students are not mature or experienced enough coming straight from the ND. (i.e. internal progression not a good idea)
- Lack of student infrastructure at H.E. level – including mature students.
- Not enough divide between F.E. and H.E.

Recruitment

From **UCAS Applications (choices), Acceptances and Ratios by Subject Group 2007**

Drama has the **10th highest** rate of applications out of a total of **199 courses.** (There is no Performing Arts category per se.)
Drama has the second highest number of applications within the eleven categories of Creative Arts and Design (exceeded only by the portmanteau category of 'Design Studies') Its ratio of **applications to acceptances is 7:3**

So the national trend is that performing arts/drama courses attract a particularly high rate of H.E. applications and that institutions can choose an average of three of the strongest candidates out of each seven that apply. Set against this backdrop, applications to HCA have *decreased* since validation with virtually no rejections.

See accompanying **HCA Full Time application and Enrolment Stats as at 25th July 2008**

Interviewed tutors from other institutions were invariably clear that you could not run a worthwhile PA course with a year group of less than 20.

Andy Smith, Performing Arts, Newport:
'Between 20 and 30.'

Doug Cocker, Acting, Bournemouth:

'The course has run for 4yrs. Now we've over 300 applicants for 32 places.'

Roberta Mock, Theatre and Performance, Plymouth University:

We originally had 20 students in a year, which is about ideal. To do varied work you wouldn't want any less.

With the recent small intakes (5 to 8) there are practical and pedagogic difficulties that are unique to Performing Arts and arguably do not apply to other HCA courses.

- Too few to read or cast the plays being studied.
- Practical, workshop and improvisatiory work is limited and students are over-exposed which affects their confidence.
- A full production of a play, including technical aspects, is impossible without amplification from students on other courses.
- The identifiable but unquantifiable *spark* required in performance is difficult to achieve working with the same five students for two/three years.

Marketing of the FdA/B.A. Hons

Helen Vine, progression manager for over two years, responsible for marketing H.E. courses in F.E. colleges:

'Marketing Performing Arts H.E. has been a difficult challenge because the course suffers from a lack of clear focus and it hasn't achieved a distinct identity. Descriptions of the course content therefore sound vague and insubstantial.'

It can be argued that demographics do not work in favour of a performance skills course. The amount of locally-produced professional theatre has not increased recently. Arts Council England has stipulated less in-house production at the Courtyard and New Theatre Works has switched its focus pro tem to work in Asia. Fourplay, despite its good voluntary work, is not an employer.

Jane Lewis, cultural services manager Herefordshire Council:

I can't see any relevance of a performing arts degree when both the Courtyard and Malvern are receiving rather than producing houses.

Peter Florence – director of Hay Festival, is a trained actor and both parents were actors. His answer to *Do you see a future for a performing arts H.E. course in Hereford ?* was:

> If we were in Manchester, Stratford, Sheffield of Scarborough, yes, but there is no tradition in Hereford. The fundamental principal is that you need to be embedded in your local community. You have to be seen to be throwing a party locally.

As Pete Thorogood implies above, theatre agents can't be winkled out of London.

So far there have been no formal placements with local industry.

POSITVE MODELS FOR PERFORMING ARTS H.E. IN ARTS COLLEGES

Drama school courses and university courses have their own agenda as discussed in the introduction so I will be examining two relevant models within Arts Institutes; the Acting BA Hons at the Arts Institute at Bournemouth (AIB) and the Performing Arts, BA Hons, Newport School of Art, Media and Design. As the course titles indicate, the AIB course is related closely to a Drama school model whereas Newport leans more towards a University degree with an academic commitment and with skills-training coming out of production rather than independently prioritised.

Both courses are four years old – comparable to the HCA course.

Recruitment

> Andy Smith, (Newport, course leader) discussed how it is possible to ratchet up both numbers and quality of student.

Initially we took everyone... 13 of them...They were guinea pigs and then it changed radically after 2 years... There's been a strong promotional campaign by the University and good word-of-mouth. (We get a lot of) local students - some mature – which is the way things are going (for reason of economics.) After 4 years, for 30 places we have over 100 applicants... For the last three years recruitment has been stable. We've got 27 in year three and 26 in year two.

Doug Cocker, (AIB course leader):

Students tend to come from A levels. They tend not to have taken a gap year. Drama schools choose not to take students

straight from A level.(i.e. there a niche market there). We do encourage more mature applicants. We have 2% returners to learning. It's one of the only acting degrees in SW England. Bristol is the only other one and it's cheaper for students to live at home.
The course has run for 4years. There are now over 300 applicants for 32 places per annum.
PA is part of the strategic plan and mission of the College...so there is a commitment to invest in it financially.

Both courses have increased their intake and have exceeded the 7:3 national average ratio of applicants to offers by

- embracing the economic trend for students to live at home.
- encouraging an element of positive discrimination in the marketing of PA as part of the expansion policy of their colleges.

How have they achieved this?

In the case of Newport, by building a distinctiveness based on the symbiotic relationship of the PA course to film studies BA.

Andy Smith:

The screen-acting specialism gives it a strong attraction re. marketing to students. The collaboration with film is the biggest strength...Our distinct practice is an ambitious project management programme collaborating with film.

At AIB, Doug Cocker:

The college wanted PA because it already had Costume, Film and Art Events Management BAs. PA is felt to be a unifying factor.

<u>Profile of course leaders.</u>

Both course leaders are positive, energetic and passionate about their subject and both display the necessary management qualities. Andy Smith has a sound academic background whereas Doug Cocker combines academic credentials from USA with a professional acting career.

Both courses are seen as healthy and growing but the course leaders are prepared to be open about problems. I asked Andy Smith if he could identify any weaknesses:

Student expectation is a problem

> *Do you mean the Fame school problem?*
> Yes. We have feed back of Why do we have to write? But we wouldn't be comfortable with being a degree-awarding department without a theoretical understanding of performance.
> Within the credit structure we wish we could offer more skills-based training but we don't have the staff hours or facilities. We have to compete to book out the gym for physical theatre stuff. There are plans to move to a new campus with a sprung floor but ...
> We haven't explored collaboration with creative music yet. (Timetabling issue)
> We can't give regular classes in voice or yoga or Alexander technique because we are so driven by production practice.

My question above was informed by the response of Linda Fitzsimmonds, Dean of Arts and Humanities at Oxford Brookes for nearly 4 years.(Previously taught in theatre departments of Bristol Uni and Plymouth Uni.)

> Drama can recruit very well and it can recruit students with high A level scores who can handle written work - which Brookes is keen on. PA, (presently located) in the education faculty doesn't attract high-scoring students, which is reflected nationally.
>
> *The title Drama is quite retro really isn't it?*
> Yes. So there won't be any misunderstanding about it being an acting course. In the last 2 places I worked before Brookes, they thought they were coming to a Fame School.

Doug Cocker acknowledges:

> We, across the college are currently looking at strengthening writing skills. There's no form of playwriting taught…There's no devising either. The course is related to existing staff.

The AIB model is further allied to drama school training in that there are no modules related to forming companies, marketing, funding or artist development.

<u>Investment</u>

At AIB there is obviously a considerable financial investment in the Acting Course which raises the question of sustainability.

> The course should be clear about what it wants to achieve. That will dictate what resources are required. Vocational actor training requires extensive studio space and tuition of a more hands-on type. The staffing level is appropriate. We have regular movement, voice and acting classes throughout the course. So we need 5 fulltime members – they bring their subject specialism into the teaching. They all have postgraduate qualifications in vocational subjects.
> We also have 2 FT technicians and technical manager and a production manager. Visiting tutors with professional experience, e.g. a fight director are brought in for discreet length of time - preferably with a Masters.
> We have a showcase in London at the Soho Theatre (for agents.) Also a Bournemouth showcase (for local companies.)

Doug Cocker also pointed out that it is recognised by HEFC that the vocational training of an actor is expensive:

> Drama schools tend to be very vocational and not academic. Arts institutes tend to sit between the two. We model on the drama school but the problem is that drama schools get more from HEFCE than Universities or Arts colleges. For example at Central School of Speech and Drama, every student gets £3,000 fees matched by £6,000 top-up from HEFC. It's up there with medical students.
> Performer training needs specialised space and more tutors. Hands–on tuition is very important to PA.

This is echoed by Ian Reekie, programme director at Rose Bruford. Interviewed by Lyn Barber. Guardian July 2008:

> Training an actor is as intensive as training a doctor. Of course we all value doctors, but perhaps we also have to value what artists bring to society too, and fund their training properly. It's a leap of faith, and we have to take it.

While acknowledging some problems, the conclusions we can draw from outlining the prevailing strengths of these two courses is that their success is derived from

- Clarity of intention and focus clearly communicated to students right from the marketing stage.
- Steadily increased recruitment based largely on reputation.

And either

- Close links and curricular interdependence with another flourishing department (at Newport, the film dept) which provides a distinctiveness

or

- Major financial investment in staffing and physical resources to provide an effective skills-based performer training. (AIB)

At present these pathways are not open to HCA.

VIEWS, REQUIREMENTS AND COMMITMENTS OF REGIONAL EMPLOYERS

Employers can understandably be circumspect about specific commitment to a notional HE arts course. Linda Fitzsimmonds puts the unhelpful cliché - students- can't- write-and- they- don'-t know- anything today – in perspective:

What are these skills that graduates don't have that employers want?

The answer is often based on misplaced nostalgia. Their skills today are different and in different areas but shouldn't be devalued. Their IT grasp can be phenomenal, they learn and respond in different ways from earlier generations. Their knowledge of the contemporary music scene for example, can be extraordinary.

In a letter to the principal 06/05/08, Olly Crick, PT tutor at HCA, suggested (a course based on) forming a company creating 'specifically rural shows ....Village halls want entertainment and rural schools want TIE and other shows...' I put this proposed pathway to Nick Lloyd, chief executive of Malvern Theatres

What do you think of an internally- generated idea of (a course based on) building a company and touring the rural community?

TIE work has dropped off hugely because all the large companies have as part of their funding brief, outreach and education programmes. Most are very good indeed. There would have to be a demonstrable demand for this company. It won't work if you just fancy forming it. I can't see how it could be funded.
There is no such thing as 'community theatre' now because there are so many different communities.

You mean the perceived divide between the privileged theatre-goers and the deprived rural population who needed theatre to be brought to them has disappeared? The 7:85 company work and early Pentabus?
Precisely. We call it community arts now anyway rather than just theatre.

Directors or chief executives of the larger, more established arts organisations within the locality are united in their view that the course should contain an element of business training.

Peter Florence, Hay Literary Festival:

> People in the arts tend to be crap at business and tend to flout tried and tested administrative practises. Brecon Jazz runs on the basis that whatever it spends it will be baled out. The Ross Festival is an example of How to get every single thing wrong…The only thing they got right was local popular support. Location, programming, management, marketing – all wrong.

Martyn Green, the Courtyard:

> Arts Admin should be included. A module covering funding, law, contracts, setting up and marketing a PA company…

Nick Lloyd, Malvern Theatres:

> *Where do you feel are the holes in (PA H.E.) training?*
>
> Students need to be able to read a balance sheet …Arts programming and the demands of the audience are changing all the time. Students need to learn how to manage – develop an understanding of how to manage a team. They need to know company law, health and safety, sponsorship, lottery projects, accessing European money, dealing with politicians locally and nationally, dealing with the Arts Council, being aware of international work… Theatre is a really good role model as it's a tried and tested discipline. Dealing with agents, negotiating fees, getting investors - the whole production regime.

Lee Forde, course leader of Events Management, University of Chester. (Previously manager of the Millennium Celebrations in Liverpool):

> The cultural industries have developed enormously in recent years… Courses these days need to relate to potential employers. To provide a formal training and a proper route into this growth industry. Students need to know about health and safety, risk assessment, crowd management, stewarding, budgets, marketing, ticketing – whatever the event. The point is to create a discipline or a framework for an art form.

Another area stressed is the necessity is to go to see work.

Martyn Green:

> Students don't see enough. They don't know what's going on across the arts.

Nick Lloyd:

> Students must MUST go to see work - across the arts forms. There are so many crossovers now. They need to develop artistic judgement. Arts programming and the demands of the audience are changing all the time.

Generally the interview transcripts have excluded answers to the question - *What do you know of PA degrees?* as the response usually referred back to the interviewee's own educational experience - arguably no longer relevant. But Nick Lloyd has had recent vicarious but apposite experience:

> My daughter has just done one at Manchester Uni. She now manages a little venue in New Zealand. I thought it was a very forward-looking course as they were gearing it to students who might want to run companies or venues. They were actually employable as graduates! They had access to a lot of productions and there was good academic content and high standards.

When the notion of a development into some kind of Live Arts Events Management Course was mooted, all potential local employers approached responded positively, even with its implied commitment to placements within the industry. Both Martin Orbach , a director of Abergavenny Food Festival – which has a significant live performance content – and Pete Mustell who is one of the Sheep Music Festival organisers, in principle are in favour and suggest that a proposal should be sent to the festival management teams. Richard Heatly, in his capacity as chair of the Photography Festival, is positive about the possibility of placements as well.

Nick Millington, director Rural Media (telephone interview):

> We've been looking at some kind of hook-up with the college for some time but placements of the length you are suggesting (6 weeks) have been difficult to arrange with performing arts students as our projects tend to run much longer (than a theatre production.) Sometimes a film can be over three years. But for a student to be involved with some kind of launch or event – that would be easier to arrange. We have 5 or 6 events a year so that could work out really well.

Peter Florence:

> There is a very interesting course to be run about Making the Arts Work... All creative students should do placements with people who mediate creative art to the public. They are not just free to express themselves - it has to be commercially underpinned.

So what could you offer by way of placements?
I could offer 5 or 6 placements at a month a time. Shadowing and researching is very useful. They would spend time watching how people here spend their days. There needs to be the proviso that I could sack them if they were rubbish!

Martyn Green:

I would accept secondments in all areas - technical, box office, marketing , general admin., front of house. I would be prepared to teach one morning per week on all aspects of admin - either at the CY or the college. we would need to liase with the course leader.

Nick Lloyd:

How may placements do you think you could take per year?
Say one marketing, one front of house, one production. Difficult to say at this point. You haven't suggested anyone working with me!

Would you mind being shadowed?
Not at all. Some days are pretty boring.
There could be another component - Reviewing of work. The local papers don't always understand the work.. They aren't arts specialists.

Would you endorse a learning agreement for placements?
Yes. Because each case is different. It's probably better coming from the students initially. What they want out of the placement. And then we can see if we can accommodate that...I can't see that there would be cost implications for us to take on placements.

We have a specific training programme here. We do two studentships - a marketing and a technical on a 12 month studentship with some money we have in a Trust. They come from all over the country. They get really good jobs afterwards after an excellent training, but we don't do management training at present on this scheme.

We already work closely with Worcester Uni. I interview (a potential placement) to make sure they will fit into the team. They need to be flexible. Can't be 9-5, particularly if they are involved in get-ins, (so this) has travel implications.

Both tutors and employers agree that theatre is an excellent art events management model.

Lee Forde, Chester:

Theatre is a pure model for event management. Everyone has a particular role. Almost too disciplined and specific. You wouldn't get an ASM at a rock concert - but when it works, there can be excellent teamwork.

Peter Florence is particularly in favour of a course moving from actor training towards an understanding of how art happens:

> Anything that has developed is worth studying. Even the Three Choirs or the Eisteddfod.... If you're a writer you should go and work in a bookshop. A painter should try to sell things in a gallery.
>
> Run the course purely as an M.A. to start with. Tap into the craft/festival /commerce/tourism thing...All the festivals round here are bloody brilliant. Hereford has some of the most interesting festivals in the country. People will be practitioners or empowerers. One or the other.
>
> We have trained half the people running festivals around Britain.

[In a sample of one month, July 08, according to figures from Cultural Services, there were 50 events in Herefordshire - including nine festivals.]

Jane Lewis, Hereford Cultural Services manager:

> An HE course involving events management would retain young people, which is one of our aims. (The skills involved would be) clearly transferable into the corporate and the private sector.
> Cultural services' role is as a moderator between the creators and the consumers . We act as facilitators so we could be very proactive in finding placements for 6 weeks.

Ellie Parker, (as) visiting lecturer at HCA and director New Theatre Works, the only professional theatre-making company resident at the Courtyard:

> Over the last eight years we have taken on four ND students through recommendation from the (then) tutor in technical theatre. They were stage management placements for summer shows and all did well. I wouldn't consider taking on a student as an actor - partly rehearsal logistics but mainly because they haven't been trained properly. Although they have seem to have spent a lot of time improvising,- - which is great - they generally can't project their voices or speak lines particularly convincingly. We audition through casting agencies locally and in London as well as using a pool of regulars.
> It's also worth mentioning that Arts Council funding has been reduced by one third and this has hit small companies such as ours hard, so sadly we are producing less work and employing fewer people.

I was a keen advocate for the proposed HE course five years ago and an enthusiastic visiting lecturer. Despite the aura of confusion, the staff were always helpful but the students were struggling.

The stark conclusion is that employers generally do not envisage any co-operation with students and staff involved in a PA HE course – unless it radically changes focus.

MODELS FOR ARTS EVENTS MANGEMENT COURSES

> The Events Management HE course at University of Chester was chosen as a model because as a combined course it offers more than any other HE institution. There are 49 courses which combine with EM
>
> The cultural industries have developed enormously in recent years, and with them the career prospects for our students. On graduation, you might work in a building-based arts organisation, such as a theatre, arts centre, symphony hall or gallery. You may be more interested in working in a freelance capacity, perhaps staging one-off events or festivals.
> Perhaps you'd prefer more direct engagement with artists, promoting a small performance company or managing a band. You might also be interested in bringing cultural activity into communities, or in helping to interpret our heritage in a museum or historic property. You might even want to be involved with developing and implementing policy on a strategic level, having direct influence on how arts and culture in Britain are perceived and delivered. Our graduates have gone on to all these careers, and many more.
>
> University of Chester Undergraduate Prospectus, 2009

It was a short interview as Lee Forde, course leader, is a very busy man, but it is very much to the point and worth analysing in its entirety.

The course is only one year old:

> I arrived 2 weeks before the students with the modules already written. There are core elements combined with options as to where the students want to specialise.
>
> *What is your background?*
>
> Electronic engineer. Theatre electrician at Liverpool Everyman. I formed my own electronics business the did sound and lighting for local bands in the early 80s. Went into tour management touring internationally. In 1994 I was NEC production manager then manager of the Millennium celebrations in Liverpool. I did an MBA at here Chester Uni.
>
> I think it's important for the course that I remain a practitioner in the industry of events.

Lee Forde is a hands-on, experienced event practitioner.

I asked him how he could possibly run so many combined courses:

> The building blocks are the same and can be applied to any event or

course combination... There must be training in how to handle budgets... Students need to know about health and safety, risk assessment, crowd management, stewarding, marketing, ticketing – whatever the event. Events can be anything - festivals, weddings, sports tournaments. It's better to narrow it down as in Arts Management. Students are less confused then.

So the course is an all-purpose add-on to 49 subjects? It initially appears impossibly all-embracing but it is plausible when you consider that in every area of the workplace there are likely to be events - from the Fireman's Ball to a launch party to celebrate the completion of the letter M in the Oxford Latin dictionary. (This happened.) Forde is impressively employer –focussed:

Courses these days need to relate to potential employers. To provide a formal training and a proper route in to this growth industry. At the same time, we are trying to promote and provide the necessary entrepreneurial skills that young people need today.

How well does EM combine with live arts subjects?

The drama and arts combination can find students struggling because the way the subjects are taught are so different. EM is more formal. It needs to be. The point is to create a discipline or a framework for an art form. Students combining marketing with the course will find it easier. They are used to the language and the style of teaching. And they are in the same building.
But it does tie in with the concept of an art form. Combination with dance is particularly popular.

We return to the old notion that arts students can be resistant to discipline but consider the practice hours needed for a professional musician or the tight discipline required to mount a good theatre production.

Forde:

Theatre is a pure model for event management.

How do your placements work?

They all have placements of 6 weeks. Yes it's difficult with so many! Nearly 100 on the first year. The industry has to be getting something out of it as well as the student. The learning agreement needs to be clear.

Do you know of any other good EM courses?

EM at Leeds Met is the most established but there's a good one at Manchester Met.

Do the students put on their own events?
Of course and the event they are assessed on must wash its face financially.

That's a lot of events.
Yes. Right across the business spectrum. And they might well be organising in-house university events.
Text books on the subject are really poor and virtually non-existent. To manage an event properly you need to understand the subject/art form.

What is your staffing?
Only me full time plus staff from the departments we combine with. Mainly it's based on bringing in people from the various industries.

Have you had any problems?
Of course! It's the first year – but that's the challenge – getting it right. People from the industry are better at that than people who have been teaching for twenty years or whatever. They move faster.
One of the main problems for me is the amount of dissertation marking. (*he indicates a large pile in the corner of his office.)*

From body language, the fact that our interview started with many apologies an hour and a half late although it was out of term time, was interrupted by mobile phone calls and was politely terminated after half an hour, I would suggest that the course leader is over-stretched. The combinations are too many and too varied and it is too much for one FT member of staff who is new to HE. These are important considerations – particularly bearing in mind the concerns expressed about the number of staff changes by students on the existing HCA PA course

Despite the requirements to make some significant alterations, it does appear to have been a dynamic pilot, well grounded in the climate of employer-led courses answering to aspirations of graduate entrepreneurship.

The following model is the one to which this report leads. The Arts Event Management Course at AIB

Richard Wright is course leader of the Arts and Event Management B.A. Hons.

The course has been through changes. It started as HND 2year course in '93. Originally its title was BA Art and Events Production.
At the recent periodic review it received its new name.

Profile of course leader
RW has been in FE and HE for 30 years. Prior to that he was a stage designer. He has a 1st degree in drama. He was head of design at Plymouth theatre, then taught museum exhibition design. His initial post at AIB was on the 3D course. He considers that his varied arts background has been very helpful in leading this course. Also, it takes several years to build up trust and meaningful contacts with local industry.
He spoke quietly , almost in a monotone - i.e He was in no way 'selling ' the course to me. It sells itself.

Wright spent a term **researching the course**, analysing surveys and postal questionnaires and looking at other institutions. This led to the formulation of what was an entirely new course structure. It took 2years to develop. While the new course was gestating, RW continued to research it while he worked in the film department.

The course has the necessary **distinctiveness**. Event management is a buzz course at the moment but this course is different from other events management in that this BA is arts *event* management. This is unusual if not unique. It is not too narrow in that it covers the whole spread of the arts - visual arts, PA, music, dance, film and literature. Festivals are a very attractive aspect. The course excludes the corporate and social (e.g.weddings) . **Experience is developed in the workplace**, students are encouraged to be **creative** as the list of their third year assessed events displays and **entrepreneurial.** The events have to cover their costs.

There has been a steadily rising application rate. There are over 40 in year 1. This is in line with the intake on other courses at AIB.

130 students were interviewed this year to find 40 students.

We were advised to make 105 offers. Out of that we now have 48 firm acceptances. The target was 42.

Please could you outline the course content?

It is a management course. That has to be clear. Students are not trained to become practitioners. There is a spread across the arts. Students come with wide arts interests. Some are clear about their specialist interest - particular dance. It is seen as a preparation for careers in promotion and management They can be equipped for careers in a gallery, an arts centres, the music business, theatres, local authority cultural services departments or arts agencies. The list could go on. We aim to equip them with the skills-knowledge and - especially - experience to do this in a changing working environment.

All the units specific to the course .i.e we don't dip into any other courses. It isn't a combined B.A.

We encourage an understanding of the arts generally. Making the links. What is happening now with some historical perspective. Most students are from an arts background – either ND or Foundation. We aim to increase their critical and responsive faculties. The extended investigative study gives an opportunity for individual interests.
They leave with an understanding of arts management, marketing, business, finance, insurance, human resource management, contracts, IT spreadsheets, funding and budgeting. We try to tie all these aspects into specific projects and give practical focus.

Funding is included as a unit. **.** Sponsorship, public funding, n ot ACE as they are procuring funding for their particular projects as students and ACE doesn't fund education. But other – Big Lotterey etc.
Their practical project sets this course apart. Small teams organise events from start to finish. Their ideas, their written proposals, funding applications. The staff interrogate their plans and guide them.

Do you ever advise against (a particular event)?
We might advise against something too ambitious – particularly financially..
They always actually produce something. It has to happen to be assessed. Financing often ambitious.

What happens if there is an unforeseen disaster – rain for an outdoor project or something?
I do have some course contingency funding. But basically the projects are supposed to break even – or make a profit. Box office / ticket sales or course fees for workshops. When it needs to be a free event, we use the course budget. Sometimes they are able within budget to bring in specialists.(e.g. break dance teachers) or other students on an agreed minimal rate

Yr 1 They are divided into groups of 5 or 6 for practice-based management projects. There a several visits.

Yr 2 and 3. form their own groups according to individual interests. There's always a good mix. They undertake a detailed investigative study which is fed back to the group using various presentation techniques..

Placements are key to the course. The 6 week work placements are well researched in summer term of yr 2. There is no geographical limit and several students go abroad.

We make sure we prepare for placements as well as possible. We interview both student and industry to draft **a learning agreement**.This is 3way. Student/AIB/ host. We have discussions as to .work-based learning objectives and identifying a discrete work project.
Assessment is through presentation at college via PowerPoint, video etc plus staff interrogation.

Year 3 **The practical project.(** See list .)
There is a learning agreement for this as well re. aims, outcomes and budget. They are encouraged to be ambitious e.g the eco project working with 200 children (the student charged £15 for 5 days workshops plus performance.)

They write a 4,000-word project report on their event and the team gives a 20 minute presentation.

Can Individuals be creatively involved within event?
Yes. They quite often are – for example, the Burlesque at the restaurant venue. Most of them performed and all dressed up.

What is your staffing?
One FT (the course leader) and two point five/ PT plus several visiting tutors who are practising arts managers.

What we had to stress at the beginning was the necessity for **complimentarity.** Now it's taken for granted that we work with the acting course, photography, graphic design, etc. Timetabling can still be a bit of a battle.

This AIB course appears to fulfil all of the four established criteria. (page 5) although I was not in a position to examine in depth whether ' the course genuinely (addressed) its geographical and cultural context.'

Two further related experiences reinforced the high scoring of this course.
I interviewed a second year student, Florence Foster. It was brief as she was part of the organising team. (see below)

Why did you choose this course?
I'd done the French Baccalaureate – actually in Turkey – and I really didn't want to have to sit any more exams.

Do you have any career plans?
Definitely. I'd like to work for a large NGO as a funding event manager.

Do you have any criticisms of the course?
It's been great. I've really enjoyed it. The only problem I can think of so far is that the unit about funding came a bit late – we needed to get applications and stuff in earlier to fund our year three event.
(She then gave me her business card.)

The second experience was an impromptu invitation to an AIB staff party. Staff parties can be turgid affairs but this was early evening in a pavilion with a large terrace overlooking the sea. Tutors' young families had been encouraged to attend. I chatted informally to tutors in the acting, costume and film departments while an Arts Event management team organised face-painting, fun games on the beach for children and adults, an excellent disco, Pimms and individually packaged fish and chips from the local chippie.

PROPOSED PATHWAY

What could be successfully developed at HCA is an HE Arts Event Management course.

To return to our categories:

1i.**Distinctiveness**

Although it is a popular growth area, there are no *arts* event management or even event management HE courses in the vicinity of Hereford. Not at Newport School of Art, nor the universities of the West Midlands, Worcester, Cardiff, Birmingham or Bristol. Competition will not be a problem for the time being.

1.ii) Have a marketable attraction to a workable number of students.

The plethora and variety of arts events in the county that prospective students could become involved with either to study in depth or as work placements are unique.

There are many extra curricular opportunities for arts practice. If students are interested in theatre training and performance, they can join the senior Youth Theatre at the Courtyard (16 to 25 age group). Under Estelle van Warmelo this has an excellent record. And 2FacedDance is a nationally recognised breakdance group.

1.iii) Have strong tutors with links to the industry.

Martyn Green, the Courtyard, Nick Lloyd, Malvern theatres and Ellie Parker, NTW have stated willingness to be visiting tutors. There is a wealth of potential visiting lecturers from the industry in the area

1iv) Have a focussed, clearly communicated curriculum.

Further research will be required to build this into a high quality course following the guidelines suggested. (see below.)

Useful models include AIB, LIPA, Leeds Metropolitan, University and Manchester Metropolitan University.

1v) Look forward culturally, not backward.
This course is in line with changing cultural values of the 18 to 30s age group. They are more IT-driven than ever before and with the necessity for artists to be entrepreneurial and proactive, often developing what is now described as portfolio careers, an ability to manage their chosen art form is essential.

2. Context-driven

i)The course genuinely should address its geographical and cultural context.

Some of the most prestigious national festivals take place in and around Herefordshire. It can boast the Hay Literature Festival, the Hereford Photography Festival, Borderlines Film Festival, Ledbury Poetry Festival, The Big Chill, Abergavenny Food Festival and more.

The population of Herefordshire is only approximately 177,000 but within that there is wide cultural diversity. Up until recently there was little ethnic variety but that has changed with the influx of Eastern European seasonal workers - many staying here more permanently. There are the different urban communities - from 'green belt' to South Wye, In the countryside indigenous agricultural l, ex-hippy rural and retired couples with money and time for leisure live side by side. The annual craft fair at the Courtyard brings together craftspeople of all description.

You only have to look at the profiles of the people heading up arts organisations and the writers living in Hereford to be aware of a significant hegemony of highly educated urban immigrants who have raised families in Herefordshire over the last 30 years.

Between January and June 2008 there were 224 events in Herefordshire listed by cultural services . There are 61 listed so far for July to Sept 08.

2.ii) It should forge strong links with potential employers.

See pages 17 to 23.

3. **Institutionally Integrated**

3 i) There should be strong, committed cross-fertilisation with other departments in the college.

3 ii) It must acknowledge the planning, timetabling implications and regular communication between course leaders to achieve this.

These two items would have to be discussed in detail at senior management level. The course would only be viable if students could access and increase their understanding of a range of art forms.

4. Sustainability

For the college: After initial investment, enrolment numbers need to climb steadily.

For the student: they need to justify their personal financial investment by being provided with a genuine path to employment.

A strong marketing drive could be instigated. There could be stalls advertising the course at local festivals and events as well as at more traditional venues as the most attractive elements of the course will probably be the placements and the opportunity to create your own event. E marketing and any other new marketing devices such as YouTube could be investigated.

An arts college by definition has creativity as a priority. An arts EM course can be:

- Enabling creativity
- Creative in its own right.

Problems that will need to be overcome

There is a risk that within the next two years there will be an explosion of EM courses as, given the competition for students, institutions second-guess the most marketable new courses.

Staffing will need to be reorganised to suit the needs of the ND and the remaining few on the FdA or top-up PA.

For the Arts EM course, a course developer/mentor could be on a fractional basis while a new course leader was being appointed. This mentor should have enough knowledge and experience of the local cultural demography to write the course and contact employers for placements. The new course leader will, for a short period, work alongside the mentor.

I asked Linda Fitzsimmonds, dean at Oxford Brookes:

How do you staff the setting up of a new course? Do you fund someone to write the course and set up placements, fulfil the employer –engagement criterion etc?

No longer can an institution afford to employ someone for a year to set up a new course. I would employ someone suitable on a fractional basis and then increase the fraction. Maybe that person stays on as mentor to a new course leader for a period doing some visiting lecturing as well. It depends on your budget of course.

What about existing H.E.students ?
You can look and see if other institutions will accept them. I would phase it out as soon as possible so that you can focus on a particular area... I would take it away from performance skills altogether. Then you wouldn't be recruiting students who have failed to get in else where who expect a drama school. You could provide proper progression to employment.

Draft Outline of Course Content. Three year B.A.Hons.
FdA two year would exclude the creating and making event happen but would include the placement in yr 2.

Year one
Cross curricular introduction to contemporary arts.(inter-college)
Programme of visits negotiated and then compulsory.
Performance/event analysis.
Development of specialist interest.

The following modules divided between yr 1 and 2, (covered by visiting lecturers from local industry.)
Budgeting, marketing, company law, health and safety, sponsorship, lottery projects, crowd management, stewarding, ticketing.
All come out of practical models.

Year 2 summer term. Placement following detailed learning agreement between student, industry and tutor.
Report of placement via a range of techniques e.g. PowerPoint , debate, edited DVD etc.
Begin enquiries re. funding of year 3 event. Formation of small teams.
Understanding of mangement strucutures e.g. Belbin.

Year three. Budgeting, funding and planning of event.
Putting event into practice.
Analysing/ reporting on event.
Evaluating other year 3 event.

This plan would be subject to the further research. Initial investment in writing a well-researched and planned curriculum will be well spent.

Staffing
FT course leader
one .5 PT
contracted visiting tutors

Conclusion

There has to be a commitment to the existing HE students to make their remaining educational experience as positive and stimulating and possible.

So long as the move forward is seen as constructive and exciting; that it is a development rather than a replacement and it is led by an enthusiastic course leader with some knowledge of the events industry and of education, it should be a vibrant course in its own right and a great asset to the college.