
Engaging BTEC-entry students with sustainability issues in Confetti Film and Television Production courses

The hope is to see a greater number of graduates from varying social, ethnic and cultural backgrounds entering and being recognised by the industry.

Area of Focus

Comparative data across the two programmes showed a trend for students from A-level backgrounds to achieve higher grades in sustainability learning outcomes than their peers from BTEC and other backgrounds. Such a gap has implications not only for students' learning but also for their employment prospects: the module lead for these core modules has therefore implemented a number of changes in order to make learning around sustainability more inclusive and relevant to current industry practice.

Context

The Film and TV Industries are largely unsustainable: a single hour of television production contributes on average 13.5 tonnes Co2e to the environment. In February 2018 Confetti became one of the founding members of the BAFTA albert Education Partnership which promotes "learn[ing] about environmentally responsible working practices and their professional relevance, contributing to the transformation of the film and television industry." Learning outcomes related to sustainability were incorporated into Film and Television Production courses via two pre-existing core modules in which students pitch, prepare and create audio-visual products including a short film.

Interventions

Sustainability was previously introduced in these courses through reading and desk-based research. However, students with BTEC backgrounds tended to find lengthy texts less engaging. Tutors noted that these students were also less likely to have studied geography or science subjects, and therefore did not have at their disposal a background knowledge of global sustainability issues. The module lead made changes so that sustainability is encountered through active learning, and embedded in a meaningful major project. Example interventions include the following:

- Tutors have observed that students who find scientific concepts alienating will often, as budding film-makers, engage more readily through a story-telling approach. To capitalise on this, big-picture issues (for example, "climate change causes refugees") are introduced via a flashcard activity where students create a fictional narrative about the decline of civilization.
- At an early stage in their major project, students use an industry carbon calculator to calculate the carbon footprint of their planned film. They reflect on initial calculations and then adjust their plans to reduce the carbon footprint. This activity forms part of the assessment for the module and for Industry Certification.
- Students make a personal commitment to reduce their carbon footprint as an individual and as a film-maker. For example, when making food arrangements for a recent residential filming activity, students decided to omit beef from the menu.

In addition to interventions around the teaching of sustainability, the course team have made further changes to foster inclusivity. These include the following:

- Assessment options have been broadened so that students can choose to submit a video pitch and a reflective “DVD extras”-style audio commentary for key assessment elements. In this way the focus is shifting from academic writing to more industry-relevant modes, through which students on the course are better able to demonstrate their learning.
- An adaptation to an existing learning outcome provides students with the opportunity to reflect on their sustainable performance as part of a film production unit. Developmental activities are incorporated to help students acquire the skills to prepare a reflective statement. Through these scaffolded activities Film and Television Production students from all backgrounds learn to become reflective practitioners.

Initial Outcomes

- Since sustainability was introduced into the course, overall attainment in the area of sustainability has increased year on year.
- The average grade achieved on level 4 learning outcomes relating to the application of sustainability increased from 4.8 points in 2016-17 to 7.4 in 2018-19.
- There is still somewhat of an attainment gap for BTEC students: the course team will monitor this as more detailed comparative data becomes available.
- Anecdotally, students are engaging more with sustainable subject content in their work, not only when integrated within modules, but in self-directed coursework including undergraduate dissertations and postgraduate projects.
- After completing the film production modules with embedded sustainability, one student—as part of their dissertation work—adapted the BAFTA albert carbon calculator for novice film-makers.

Challenges and next steps

Confetti ICT/NTU is one of 18 educational institutions working with BAFTA albert to embed sustainability. Following the success in the modules described here, sustainability topics and skills are being incorporated more fully across film and television production courses. Students graduating in 2019/20 will gain certification from the BAFTA albert Educational Partnership—a qualification which will give students an advantage over those from non-participating institutions. The course team aim to monitor outcomes for students entering the industry. The hope is to see a greater number of graduates from varying social, ethnic and cultural backgrounds entering and being recognised by the industry.

The module lead for the Film Project Management and Applied Film Technology modules is currently disseminating the work he has done to embed sustainability via conferences and other practice-exchange events, and as an invited guest speaker. The course team are continuing to make adjustments with the aim of closing attainment gaps in outcomes related to sustainability. They hope, further, to expand engagement with sustainability beyond carbon neutrality to social justice, thereby encouraging more diverse narratives around ethnicity, gender, class and culture in student films. Through the BAFTA albert partnership, students have exclusive opportunities to enter their films for the BUFVC Learning on Screen sustainability awards, which may be a further incentive to include sustainability issues as subject matter as well as in production planning.