How one creative arts university went online in a week

Who would have believed that we would be delivering our creative university education entirely online and for the transition to have taken just one week to complete?

Suddenly at University for the Creative Arts we are all experts at Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Blackboard Collaborate – pick a platform, any will do – and liaising with staff and students as if we've always been working this way.

Of course, we could not have achieved this without our amazing staff pulling out all the stops to make this happen. But, for creative education there is still a whole host of challenges to work through during lockdown.

Our Games, Animation and Media courses rely on our purpose-built facilities, our dedicated studios and industry standard equipment. But, how do you continue to teach while these are not accessible? And, are there copyright or intellectual property rights issues sharing material on digital platforms?

Also, how do you teach students who don't have access to professional resources and software, or have the broadband speeds to handle large files?

Still from film by Ross Stringer

We've had to adapt our teaching to react to these challenges. Our lesson plans now include web-based radio tasks, blogs, and vlogs and has now been made available to students to download and use at home.

We have also invited industry experts to give virtual 'Masterclasses', hosted crit reviews online in open forums, and designed live briefs in collaboration with external partners who can then provide our students with the professional tools to edit and curate their content. While this is different to the norm, it still ensures we are adding value to our students' education.

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There is no doubt that we have learnt a lot in the last few days and weeks and the creative education pedagogy that will be shared as a result of this will be rich. We have been speaking to colleagues from all over the globe faced with the same situation to find creative solutions. UCA is part of the World Association of Film and Media Schools, called CILECT, that has 180 member schools from 65 countries. The network is sharing best practice for online provision, including lesson plans and lesson content. This has had the effect of making us all feel connected as we are all tackling the same conundrum together.

And, as with any creative arts school, the highlight of our graduates' creative endeavours are the degree shows, which

won’t be taking place as planned this June. As we face this latest challenge, UCA is in the process of creating a digital online portal for students to exhibit their work. This will allow family, friends, and industry the opportunity to experience the work of our grads in a unique virtual showcase.

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Looking ahead, I think the future challenge will be completely moving back to where we were before the pandemic, but the question is, should we? For some, the online ‘flipped classroom’ approach works really well, so perhaps we should not be too hasty to revert back to the way things were just because we can, and we should instead learn from the experience.

But, my goodness, it will be nice to be back on campus again.

Professor Lyndsay Duthie is Head of School for Film, Media & Performing ArtsAll art featured is by current students from the uni.

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