Royal Conservatoire of Scotland - Engaging Leaders Project

Background

A successful application was made by the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland to the Leadership Foundation for a Small and Specialist Institution Small Development Grant in May 2013.

The grant proposal was entitled Engaging Leaders and was submitted to develop the skills of part-time hourly paid staff and emerging music leaders who may wish to take up promotional opportunities within the conservatoire sector. It aims to meet an immediate need to engage part-time staff, as acknowledged by the wider sector and Conservatoire UK Principals in recent reports.

For PTHP staff certain training gaps have been identified across the sector:

- Limited development opportunities, especially moving towards a leadership role
- Limited access to professional accreditation for staff development within the sector which is bespoke and recognised by the sector
- Lack of engagement with the developing needs of the sector due to the part-time/transitory nature of the staff contract
- Lack of availability of managerial development tools, such as access to a bespoke appraisal system, to focus on the development of leadership skills.

The aim of this project was to scope and pilot a programme of music leadership and development opportunities to ensure that part-time staff in the Conservatoire (and also to the benefit of the orchestral and arts education sector) are given access to first steps towards a bespoke and recognised system of leadership development training.

Pilot Programme known as “RCS Teaching Talks”

A small development team was been established within RCS to examine the barriers to engagement with ongoing professional development for PTHP staff and in response to these issues the team proposes a 'light-touch' knowledge exchange initiative.
It was agreed in consultation with staff (who are professional artists with a professional career in addition to teaching at the Conservatoire) that the best way to take this forward was to examine the delivery of short bite sized educational films.

These were then developed with in house support and expertise and the delivery mechanism has ensured effective dissemination of best practice within the Conservatoire sector.

The name “Teaching Talks” was chosen to be attractive and meaningful to staff who are engaged as teachers. We decided to use the most relevant and easily understood terminology to launch this project and embed it within teaching practice.

However, the training aspirations of the “Teaching Talks” cover professional development, pedagogical and leadership and managerial techniques, collaborative working practices and professional boundaries.

It was agreed that the project would deliver the following:

The design and delivery of six bite-sized short films (TED Talks-style) to demonstrate and share good practice tips and techniques in and training aspirations for:

- professional development values and attributes
- pedagogical and leadership potentials
- managerial techniques for people, team, time and budgets
- collaborative and dynamic working practices
- professional boundaries and possibilities

**Progress of the Pilot Programme – the “RCS Teaching Talks”**

We initially agreed to use the funding to provide six pilot films, covering the following topics:

- ‘Bringing VLE Alive’ - Acquiring the skills to use video conferencing equipment to support distance learning and teaching
- ‘Top Ten Tips for Structuring and Delivering a Masterclass’ – with our own International Fellow Iain Bousfield
- ‘Mentoring Methods’ – structures and approaches that explore the strengths and weaknesses of coaching versus mentoring with Head of Research, Dr Stephen Broad
‘Respecting and Acknowledging the Space’ – sharing good practice in one to one teaching with children, young people and vulnerable adults with Lecturer Isobel Anderson (Piano and Alexander Technique)

‘Group Dynamics’ – inspiring insights and ideas from Steve West, Classic FM’s Music Teacher of the Year 2012 and Andrew Nunn, Conductor of the BBC Choir of the Year 2012

One final slot was being held for proposals from the PTHP music staff themselves. An open invitation went to staff for this part of the project and much interest was been generated by this invitation. The intention was to create a project profile and content by using ideas that can be commissioned as a result of a small bidding process and realise one, or perhaps two, of the most meaningful and inspiring concepts proposed from within the dynamic cohort of colleagues.

The Final Programme – the “RCS Teaching Talks”

We were successful in developing most of the initial themes, with some slight amendments being required due to the timing of the filming clashing with other commitments for some individuals.

However, we were successful in developing a number of well-received “Teaching Talks” which are now accessible on our website as below:

http://www.rcs.ac.uk/shortcourse_about/research/teaching-talks

We have introduced the RCS Teaching Talks as follows:

RCS is a dynamic learning environment where academics, teaching and guest artists, creative partners and arts administrators strive jointly to support our students and colleagues to perform and achieve. In a learning and teaching capacity, this is developed through 1:1 and small group teaching, peer to peer support, mentoring and coaching, situated and work-based learning as well as more traditionally understood modes.

The RCS Teaching Talks aim to illustrate some of the approaches we take to curriculum development, dynamic learning and teaching styles, the use of learning technologies as well as working in partnership with national performing arts companies. This pilot project is intended to open doors for teachers to further reading, analysis and reflection and support the delivery of the highest quality learning and teaching.
This pilot project was funded by the Leadership Foundation.

Our final films include:

- **Ian Bousfield – “Engaging Teaching and Teachers”**
  RCS Visiting Artist, Ian Bousfield offers his top ten trombone tips, ably demonstrating the range of effective learning and teaching techniques at his internationally-renowned fingertips.

- **Helen McVey – “A Changing Environment”**
  RCS Head of the B Mus Programme and Choice, Helen McVey discusses the RCS Undergraduate curriculum review process and outcomes at a moment of dynamic shifts in the Scottish educational landscape.

- **Grant Golding – “Blending In”**
  After an introduction from John Logan, RCS Head of Brass, respected artist Grant Golding offers tips and techniques for delivering music lessons via video conferencing technology.

- **Isobel Anderson – “Respect the Space”**
  RCS Lecturer in Alexander Technique and Lecturer in Piano, Isobel Anderson shows us how to ensure we protect and respect the space between teacher and learner in a one-to-one teaching environment.

- **Andrew Nunn – “Aiming for a Rich Dynamic”**
  RCS graduate and award-winning conductor, Andrew Nunn talks about his experience of working with groups and the challenges and benefits this presents no matter what the art-form.

- **Lawrence Gill and Alex Reedijk – “Playing Together Nicely”**
  Lecturer in Woodwind, Lawrence Gill talks with Scottish Opera’s General Director, Alex Reedijk about what makes a successful industry partnership.

**Signposts for future continuous professional development**
All of the above films are supported by quality theoretical underpinning and with signposts for future continuous professional development routes for those who are motivated to progress beyond these first, hopefully inspiring steps.

The signposts include “Ted Talks” from inspiring teachers in other subjects and relevant or further reading about the Scottish context, such as the Enhancement Themes paper on developing and supporting the curriculum.

We also signpost staff to the Conservatoires UK Best Practice Guidelines which set out the standards required in one to one teaching for the sector.(NB this is backed up by each CUK members own training and development.)

We also highlighted various links for the industry, to ensure that our staff working as part time staff in a variety of contexts are given the most up to date and wide-ranging information on teaching, collaboration and partnership, such as:

Creative Collaboration: a 21st Century Perspective: A TED Talk

Cooperative and Collaborative Learning: Education Scotland

Student, Lecturer and Industry: Working Together in Partnership to improve employability:

https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/events/annualconference/2013/Presentations/Students_lecturer_and_industry_Tracey

The Collaboration of Teacher/Artist Teams: A Qualitative Analysis of Selected Interpersonal Components Influencing a Partnership-model Artist Residency by Paula Purnell, 2008.


Though the pilot project was not designed to develop a framework for CPD it is anticipated that, if successful, it could evidence and lead to demand for accredited CPD and credit-rated modules which could be offered by the Conservatoire sector across the UK.

We are just beginning this work and are highlighting this work to all CUK members with a view to assessing demand for such accreditation.

In addition we have already received further proposed developmental ideas form part-time staff which they feel would enhance this pilot suite.
Knowledge Exchange and Curriculum Support

Each of the RCS “Teaching Talks” are now hosted on two platforms:

1) Outward-facing and public via YouTube and so be readily accessible to a worldwide audience when embedded in our RCS Broadcast platform at rcs.ac.uk/broadcast which already has a dedicated audience
2) Inward-facing on Moodle, the Conservatoire’s dedicated VLE and community and for consumption by all teaching and support staff at RCS.

The Conservatoire has a long established series of Knowledge Exchange and Curriculum Support sessions for staff and these will be supported by our Knowledge Exchange staff.

The project was soft launched at the start of our academic year and will feature in these sessions.

Each film will conclude with a hosted chat-room opportunity, a feedback form and signposts to next stage learning or contacts for further information.

In addition, we featured one of the most popular pilots, that of Grant Golding at our Learning and Teaching Conference in September 2021. Grant was able to speak to full houses on his techniques for delivering music lessons via video conferencing technology. This session has led to other developments on the expansion of online teaching delivery which we hope will come to fruition in the near future. Perhaps more importantly it got people excited about the possibilities.

We are also using our RCS Broadcast platform at rcs.ac.uk/broadcast which already has a dedicated audience to publicise the “Teaching Talks”.

We will continue to signpost part time staff to further development opportunities and this has been greatly welcomed by our teachers. They are keen to explore these further.

We anticipate that it will help our Part Time Hourly Paid staff (and those in other Conservatoires) to find a platform for ‘checking-in’ on training possibilities and an evolving route map for development where they are inspired to further their own learning.
Summary

The support of the Leadership Foundation was crucial to the success of this project and we now have an output which can be shared with the Conservatoire sector and beyond.

The decision to deliver the “bite sized” films is seen as forward thinking and proved to be the most successful method of working, using the flexibility it allowed to capture staff and influencers at a time which was suitable to their busy schedules.

The surrounding interest caused by the open competition for staff to participate with their projects generated much interest and led to the featured film by Lawrence Gill and Alex Reedijk – “Playing Together Nicely” – a joint production by a staff member and an industry leader.

The support of the Leadership Foundation has been crucial to this development and has provided the catalyst needed for these exciting developments.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge the support of the following staff in this project:

Eona Craig, Lawrence Gill, John Logan, Stephen Broad, Adam McIlwaine, Gavin Rizza, Abigail Howkins, Linda Innes, Marius Jugariu and Abbie Wallace

Jackie Russell

Director of Human Resources

Addendum:

Budget
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<td>Project Co-ordinator – 15 days at £103 per day</td>
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<td>VLE pilot – Brass Department</td>
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<td>Teaching Talks content and scripts development</td>
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