

# Measuring Learning Gain from Practice and Work-based Learning Programmes

*A Pilot Project Funded by the HEFCE Learning Gain Programme*

## Project Outline

### 1.1 Summary

Since 2015 Ravensbourne has participated in a programme of work run by HEFCE to pilot and evaluate a range of approaches for measuring learning gain (LG). The programme focuses on developing and testing new ways of capturing educational outcomes and analysing how students benefit from higher education. Over 70 universities and colleges have been involved, and Ravensbourne was the lead on one of 13 pilot projects in this programme.

*“Learning gain can be defined and understood in a number of ways... broadly it is an attempt to measure the improvement in knowledge, skills, work-readiness and personal development made by students during their time spent in higher education.”*

- HEFCE<sup>1</sup>

### 1.2 Our Pilot

Our project was a collaborative project between 7 institutions, the majority of which are small institutions with specialisms in the creative industries. Our partners in the project were: -

- Arts University Bournemouth
- Falmouth University
- Norwich University of the Arts
- Ravensbourne (Lead)
- Rose Bruford College of Theatre and Performance
- Southampton Solent University
- Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance

### 1.2 Aim

The main aim of the project was to understand the potential to measure the LG from work-based learning and work preparation activities learning as part of a course of study and the effects of these activities on employability, primarily using existing data held by partner institutions (such as DLHE, employability and work-based learning data).

## Outcomes

The most significant outcomes arising from this project are: -

- The development, testing and evaluation of three methodologies for assessing LG (DLHE Triangulation, DLHE plus 3 years' and Solent Capital Compass Model).

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/lt/lg/>

- The generation of a range of suggestions for future projects.
- Findings of relevance to future assessments of LG (see conclusions below).
- Development of lessons learned for future partnership working, particularly beneficial to small institutions.

## Conclusions

The most significant conclusions to which the Team would draw HEFCE's attention are that: -

- The work of the project indicates that DLHE outcomes can valuably be cross-referenced to work-preparation activities, and indicates that there may be a causal link between participation in work preparation activities and employability outcomes;
- The methodology developed for the DLHE Triangulation can identify widening participation students, their LG, and the contribution that work preparation makes to that;
- The DLHE plus 3 years' work indicates that career satisfaction and sustainability of career, longevity and professional resilience are more meaningful measures than level of job or financial reward, particularly for those subject disciplines where a career trajectory is not always clearly defined, however complex measures are required for an assessment of this;
- The outcomes from the DLHE plus 3 years' survey and the Solent Capital Compass Model work packages both illustrate that 'longitudinal' should mean multiple survey points and, indeed, suggest that LG is best measured incrementally rather than in big leaps (qualifications on entry matched to salary, for example);
- Surveying our students at multiple points in their career is valuable and beneficial in many ways: it informs an understanding of career trajectory for disciplines, maintains alumni contact, informs Learning and Teaching, as well as work preparation, diversity, lifelong learning and social mobility policies, and gives insight into the most appropriate timing in a student's course of study for participation in work preparation activities;
- Clear and consistent definitions of work-based learning and work preparation activities need to be defined and held at sector level;
- The optimal way of facilitating this analysis would be through the capture of data held on the student record;
- The more qualitative nature of DLHE plus 3 years means that it is intensive in terms of staff time and has particular implications for small institutions with a low staff base, but the Team considers the investment worthwhile due to the richness of the data captured and various uses to which it can be put;
- The methodologies developed from this project are considered very much in their 'pilot' stage but it has been established that there is significant value in capturing information on learning throughout the student's career in HE, and beyond; there is potential to do more work improving on and linking the outcomes from the three methodologies into a 'toolkit' for evaluating student's work-based learning gain over time;
- All three work packages rely to some extent on building effective relationships with alumni, and this is done most effectively by staff working from within the relevant institution: they have an understanding of the environment in which the alumnus was working, can address institution-specific issues in their questioning and develop rapport more quickly when surveying them;
- This project, and the learning derived from it, has been as much about working in partnership as about evaluating methodologies to assess LG.

## Ravensbourne Staff Involved

- Janthia Taylor – Deputy Director
- Nick Johnstone – Head of Planning and Policy
- Lucy McLeod – Head of Student Services
- Jo Barrett – Assistant Academic Registrar
- Allison Cully – Data Analyst