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Student Number: 1700964
Module Number and title: UX210002 Personal Employability Strategy
Assessment number: Outcome 2 Assessment

University of the Highlands and Islands/ Perth College

Module: UX210002 Personal Employability Strategy
Assignment: Critical Evaluation

Assignment Front Cover

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Title of assignment	Critical Evaluation
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Introduction

Throughout the course of my placement with Liz Hobbs Group in September 2021, I learned a lot of new skills and tried to utilise my time on placement to expand my knowledge and skillset. This evaluation will summarise what I learned, and will evaluate areas in which I performed well and areas to improve.

Outline

I had great fun on my placement, which also happened to be a paid position as I was operating as a freelancer. It was reassuring to be working with a very experienced system technician in Steven Selby, who I have a great working and personal relationship with. This helped ease me in to the first task – flying PA. Before going on placement, I ensured to read up on J and V Series rigging as I had never rigged J series before, and had rigged V twice previously. Selby helped fly the first hang of the main J Series PA, and left me to fly the second hang. It was all going very well, until Selby came round the corner and stopped me, and asked me to look up - I had forgotten to put the cabling in. A rookie error, and with hindsight it is not a rookie error I should have made – I know better, and Selby said as much as well. This really reinforced to me the first major lesson of the weekend – it is important to take ones time throughout a process such as flying PA. Forgetting to plug the boxes in, while it is a bit of a pain, is not the end of the world. If I'd got the rigging wrong, it could have quite easily resulted in death.

Luckily the rest of the PA went up far easier, and I had another first coming my way – deadhanging PA on the outer end of the video goalposts. This involved rigging a 1 ton rated polyester strop in such a way that it would not fall off the end of the truss. We got this sorted, then started flying. I then realised what would have been far more effective than shouting at each other telling each other when to stop, bump up on one side of the goal post or the other – use our radios. This reinforced another key part of the process of being on a large site such as that to me – communication is equally as, or arguably more, important as technical knowhow. This communication covers everyone, including local crew, fellow production crew, touring crew and artists alike.

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Skills

Once I had conducted my skills assessment prior to going on placement, I actively thought about where my skills gaps lay on placement, and ensured plenty of hands on time was gained in those areas.

A key area that I was keen to expand my hands-on time with was rigging, including cabling the PA and amps up. On reflection, I could have taken more time to take photos of the entire process in order to remind myself what order things went in, however I definitely left placement with a far greater understanding of the process, from FOH to amps, and amps to PA. This will be enhanced with training from Scotland's largest d&b stockist, FE Live, prior to my work with them at TRSNMT in 2022.

As I alluded to in the previous section, I very rapidly discovered that communication was key, and while this applied to communicating with crew, it was equally important to be able to communicate in an appropriate manner with talent, whether that is the support acts, main support acts, headliners or their guests. I first learned this skill while working with Fatherson, after a very quick briefing in passing with their Tour Manager. All he said was "Know two things; A – They are human and B – They like being treated as such." I had this echoing around my head with all of the acts, however I also took my cues from how the other crew, especially the touring crew of the main support and headliners, were treating the talent. This was definitely easier with the supports than the headliners, as the supports were surrounded by far less people and as such it was easier to form a rapport with them. During Tom Jones' set, we also had 2 VIPs SL, in the form of Johnny Depp and Mick Jagger. This was a true test of my communication with talent, dealing with one of the most famous people in the world. I found the trick to be acting professional – continue doing ones job unless asked a question. This was a tad hard initially as I did not actually have anything to do, then a radio call came through telling of a sub issue. I quickly hopped into action, unfortunately knocking Mr Depps drink as I went, for which I apologised however had to go and solve said issue. Once I got back, his humanity obviously prevailed, and he offered me a drink and chatted with me, complimenting me by saying that "I was clearly working hard and deserved a drink". This reinforced to me that my professionalism coupled with skills obtained over the course of the weekend had

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stood me in good stead, and allowed me to interact with arguably one of the most famous actors in the world.

Perhaps the skill I was most comfortable with pre-placement was my use of digital mixing desks and my ability to form a good mix. Having used a variety of desks pre-placement, from X/M32 to Midas Pro and DiGiCo S/SD series, I felt confident operating the Allen and Heath SQ5 provided for mons. Having used the SQ once or twice, and the similar QU as well, I knew I was in for a nice weekend as while the desk has a small footprint, it packs a punch. I initially got tripped up by every send being set to post fader, however once I overcame that issue, I soon got into the swing of mixing monitors on the desk. I had 4 Stereo mixes; 1 2 and 3 going to the artists and the 4th for myself, which I had routed the output of the "Solo" function to, to allow me to listen to each monitor mix. I had also built myself a monitor mix on 2 free auxes so that when I had free time I could build myself a monitor mix. I also got my first go on a DiGiCo SD8 while mixing FOH for a DJ, which as a similar layout to other SD consoles I have used, however with an older chassis. My monitor mixes got complimented by all of the supports we had through, especially from HRVY who said the stereo image was perfect. I suspect this was aided by me using the same in-ears as him. With hindsight, I likely should not have been caught out by the post-fade sends of all channels as that is standard, and I definitely should have been able to route the reverb to the monitors far more quickly than I did, however these are two relatively minor points.

Action points

There are a few areas identified in this evaluation that I would like to improve moving forward, to increase my chance of securing and retaining work. The one that stands out most to me is the knowledge of rigging that is required at this level of production – I ideally need to be versed in flying all sorts of PA from d&b and L'Acoustics as well as other brands such as RCF, of which there is a large number of boxes in Scotland. This experience will come with time, and as long as I am up-front with employers that I am not at a level to be flying these systems solo, this should not be an issue. My work ethic and ability behind a mixing desk, as well as patching systems and dealing with RF will give employers, especially venues where I house tech, cause to employ me and allow me to develop further. As I write this in early March 2022, this plan has come to fruition, as I am now the preferred Audio Freelancer in The Classic Grand in

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Glasgow, which has led to me being approached by SWG3 to become a house technician there, as well as by Pro Sound Services and FE Live, both of whom have booked me as a freelancer throughout the year. My focus on actively gaining work in the industry will hopefully aid me hugely after graduation.

Conclusion

While there were most certainly elements of my placement where I did not perform at the level required, I still did not feel out of my depth – I had made it clear to Selby that I was there to learn and I was not hugely experienced in some of the areas I was working in. The whole placement experience was hugely positive for me as it allowed me to gain a working understanding of not only what I needed to improve – but also what I was already good at, which boosted my confidence and spurred me on to accept and put myself forwards for more jobs, as well as eventually getting noticed by companies I've always had ambitions to work for such as FE.

This strategy has definitely opened doors for a sustainable career in the Live Audio Industry, allowing me to not only build experience with equipment I may not have managed to get hands on with, such as the d&b J-Series (experience and knowledge of which has helped me gain employment at the time of writing), but also to build contacts. The first part of this strategy was to find companies who could offer me employment, and in that aspect the strategy has succeeded, affording me so much work that I am at a point where I have to turn down a number of gigs per month.

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