Futureworks

University Education
for the Creative Industries

TEF PROVIDER SUBMISSION 2023

Futureworks Training Limited
UKPRN: 10022087

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Provider Name: Futureworks Training Limited (t/a Futureworks)
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Provider context – about Futureworks

Founded in 2007, Futureworks is a Manchester and Salford-based higher education provider which specialises in producing the highest-quality graduates for the creative industries. In the sixteen years since our inception, our students have gone on to professional careers in sound, film and games at some of the biggest names in the world. Driven by our Strategic Plan [1] our pedagogical approach is simple: we offer just nine flexible, student-led, assessment-driven degree courses taught in studio facilities which have been specifically designed in consultation with industry to create graduates who are specialists in their field, rather than generalists. Students do this in our world-class recording and studio facilities, which are spread across two sites - one in central Manchester, the other in nearby MediaCityUK, the creative hub of the north of England. Our students have access to 12 state-of-the-art recording and mastering studios, numerous video editing and colour grading suites, games labs, film studios, a world-leading motion capture studio, and the biggest green screen in the northwest - all specifically designed to mirror those found in the professional world. It isn't only students that use our world-class facilities either - our studios are regularly used for commercial projects by big industry names, and our students frequently assist in these productions, gaining valuable real world experience along the way.

Although our degree programmes are delivered in partnership with the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan), in nearby Preston, our 400+ undergraduate degree students study exclusively at Futureworks on a full-time, on-campus basis. Approximately half of our students come from the Greater Manchester area, with a further 25% from the northwest of England [2]. In this way, we have established ourselves as a unique offering – providing a level of service, focus and innovation found nowhere else in the region.

Like our facilities, our portfolio of courses has also been carefully designed to meet the needs of the creative industries. This is achieved by enabling students to specialise from the moment they start their studies at Futureworks, giving them three years to hone their skills and gain practical experience in their field. Collaborative working is key to this approach, and through a range of industry-led briefs (some of which are commercial projects), students are able to apply their specific skillset in a professional environment on a project which often involves many dozens of individuals - something which we believe is unique to Futureworks, and revered and recognised in equal measure by both our academic and professional peers.

The teaching staff at Futureworks are fundamental to the success of this approach, of course, and our team are some of the most qualified and experienced in the industry: BAFTA-award winning editors and producers, game artists and designers, visual effects artists, music producers and mastering engineers for industry giants like the BBC, Realtime UK, ITV, Hit Factory New York, Disney, Rockstar UK, DC Comics and HBO [3].

Supporting our expert teaching team are a world-class line up of guest speakers who bring unparalleled experience and expertise to our curricula. These include industry heavyweights who have worked on some of the biggest productions in the world for household names like Electronic Arts, Disney, Dreamworks, Warner Bros and 20th Century Fox [4].

Ultimately, though, our graduate success stories speak for themselves: multi-award winning games developers, filmmakers, music producers, sound designers and visual effects artists doing work for

leading companies including MPC, Framestore, Rockstar UK, Frontier Games, Netflix, Amazon Prime, Team 17 and the BBC.

It is our firm belief that Futureworks offers a higher education provision like no other - one that is world-leading in its approach to teaching, and in the opportunities and experiences available to our students both before and after graduation. Our student-centric approach to learning, and the cutting-edge technology and contemporary workflows employed in support of this goal, are possible only because of the passion and commitment of the whole Futureworks team, and because of the small and specialist nature of our institution.

Futureworks offers the following undergraduate degree programmes:

BA (Hons) Music Production
BSc (Hons) Game & Interactive Audio
BSc (Hons) Audio Engineering & Production
BA (Hons) Game Art
BA (Hons) Games Design
BA (Hons) Digital Animation with Illustration
BA (Hons) Independent Filmmaking
BA (Hons) Visual Effects
BA (Hons) Post Production for Film & TV

Provider context – about this submission

Futureworks has worked closely with its Student Partners in the development of Futureworks' TEF submission. Initial planning began in April 2022, with a meeting of the senior management team [5]. It was agreed early on that a separate student submission should be encouraged, and that a member of staff should be provided to the students to provide support and assistance throughout the process.

In preparation for the development of the TEF Student Submission, discussions with the 2021/22 Student Partners were held to identify a suitable Lead Student Contact. Staff were invited to join a meeting of the Student Partner Committee to discuss the requirements of the TEF, and students were provided with a dedicated point of contact (our Student Records Officer) who was instructed to facilitate any requests made by the newly-formed TEF Student Submission Group. Over the course of the proceeding months, the Student Records Officer met regularly with the Student Submission Group, reporting back to the senior management team each month on both progress and support requirements. The Student Submission Group successfully engaged the student body through a series of surveys and events, culminating in the production of a TEF Student Submission in January 2023. This submission was presented to the senior management team for fact-checking, as well as for feedback on compliance with the TEF submission guidelines.

In the preparation of *this* submission, the senior management team have worked closely with academic and professional services staff to capture as accurately as possible the ways in which Futureworks supports all of its students to succeed – both during and after their time with us, and we hope to adequately convey our passion and determination to exceed the expectations of our students, staff and the creative community as a whole.

Student Experience

Academic experience and assessment

Outstanding teaching practice is "built-in" to the Futureworks ethos. The exclusive use of industry-active tutors, intentionally small class sizes, and our unapologetically "backwards" method of designing degree programmes (explained in more detail below) is all part of a specific and deliberate strategy to ensure that the teaching and learning experience of our students stands a mile apart from the more "traditional" university experience. Teaching is always face to face, and is always conducted in small, personal groups – Futureworks neither has nor desires huge lecture halls designed to facilitate education on a mass scale. Indeed, the specialist nature of Futureworks' provision *demands* a reflective, tailored, pedagogically-driven approach to teaching in order that our staff can keep up to date with the latest developments in the creative industries.

This focus on industry is evident throughout teaching, learning and assessment processes. Futureworks staff deliver, as standard, curricula which focus on industry-recognised workflows, artefact and portfolio creation, and employability skills. Each assignment undertaken by our students is designed to develop known good practice and, in many cases, has a brief which has either been negotiated by the student with their tutor or set *by* an employer [6]. This approach is augmented by input from regular guest lecturers and the use of critical feedback and self-reflection. Feedback is key to this approach; Futureworks tutors make extensive use of audio and video to provide tailored feedback for students (often with a second marker), which is stored on the VLE for later reference. Group and peer feedback is also a core component of the Futureworks experience – getting students accustomed to critical feedback of their work from others, and reflecting on their own approach to a given task. In many cases, these are enhanced further by the addition of weekly drop-in clinics on "project" modules.

Further to the above, and with a persistent focus on employability skills and portfolio creation, Futureworks students are (by their final year) expected to be producing professional-standard output in their specialist field. Much of the work undertaken in the creative sector is performed in a group setting, and this approach is replicated at Futureworks – both in the approach to learning and to assessment. Students benefit from a cross-disciplinary approach, learning the language and workflows of their peers with different specialisms, and becoming accustomed to jointly overcoming production challenges – often with colleagues in different fields entirely.

The approach set out above is fundamental to Futureworks' modus operandi and, as such, it is embedded in both our institutional culture *and* governance structure [7]. At the highest level, our Executive Team (with the support of the Board of Directors) has articulated this in our most recent Strategic Plan – and in the mission, vision and values contained therein. Futureworks' Academic Board approves and oversees the successful delivery of our Learning & Teaching Strategy [8] which clearly articulates the Futureworks "way": our expectations, methods and goals. The Learning & Teaching Strategy is executed, in turn, by our academic teams through the Learning, Teaching & Research Committee, and also via our three School Committees, whose role it is to engage staff and students throughout the year, and to reflect on teaching and assessment practice "on the ground". School Committees comprise a range of academic and support staff as well as Student Partners, and in this way we are able to ensure the successful embedding of our institutional approach to learning and teaching throughout the entire organisation, and that this experience is tailored to the needs of every student.

This approach has proven successful year-on-year, and this is reflected both qualitatively and quantitatively. In the first instance, the data speaks for itself: year-on-year, c. 40% of our students achieve a 1st class degree [9], 95% of our graduates enter the workplace (or further study/other positive outcome) within 15 months of course completion, satisfaction with teaching is consistently strong, and student satisfaction overall puts Futureworks ahead of the sector by a considerable margin [10].

Analysis of the 2017-21 student satisfaction data (from the TEF dashboard) puts Futureworks ahead of providers of a similar size and with similar specialisms, as illustrated by the chart below.

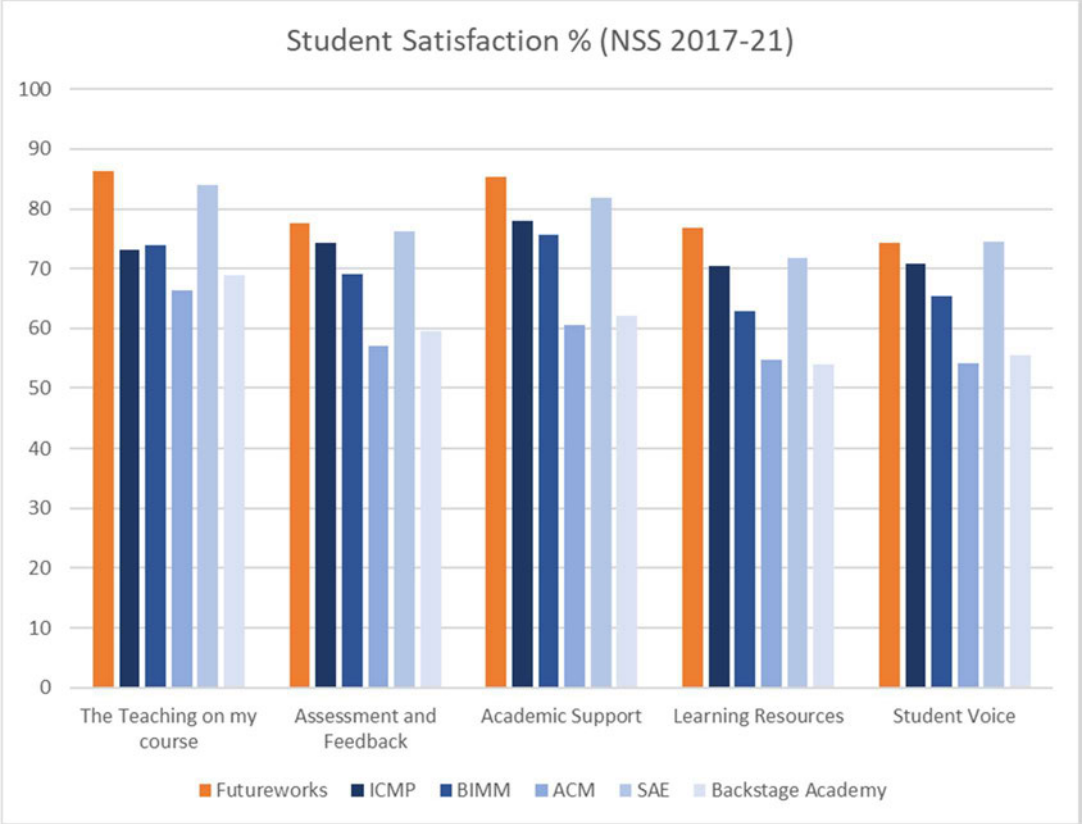

Figure 1: Student Experience Measures (Source: TEF data dashboard)

Careful analysis of the 2022 NSS data reveals that Futureworks is the number one specialist provider of higher education for the creative arts in the UK for “overall satisfaction (Q27)”, "teaching on my course (scale 1)”, "learning opportunities (scale 2)”, "academic support (scale 4)” *and* "student voice (scale 8)”. Furthermore, Futureworks students rated Futureworks above all UK *universities* for “teaching on my course (scale 1)”, "learning opportunities (scale 2)” and "assessment and feedback (scale 3)”.

The effectiveness of our approach is backed up qualitatively through consistently strong feedback year-on-year from our students [11], partner university [12], and External Examiners [13] – as well as through feedback from our academic staff who themselves act as External Examiners and Advisors for a wide range of other higher education providers around the UK.

As discussed above, Futureworks courses are designed to develop students’ professional capabilities. This is achieved primarily through the use of active learning, and a requirement for every

student to engage fully in each module they undertake. Many assignments and projects require that students choose, design and produce deliverables such as videos or game art; tutors provide support at every stage in this process, engaging in dialogue to help the student through the chain of decision-making to reach the desired end product. Students will often work in collaboration with their fellow students, although this cannot be facilitated for summative assessments in every instance.

Creative media subjects benefit enormously from a cross-disciplinary approach to learning, which is why our degree courses are designed and written “backwards” – starting with industry expectations, and working “back” to the start of the programme to determine the attributes required of Futureworks’ applicants (centred around the constructive alignment programme design paradigm). Once enrolled on their chosen course, our students are supported to work collaboratively at every opportunity: film students will work with audio and visual effects students to produce a short film, games designers work with artists and composers to produce immersive games – the list goes on. Thus, collaboration and ongoing engagement is a central pillar of teaching and assessment at Futureworks.

Tutors use a variety of pedagogical approaches to enhance the learning experience, including open-ended instruction (where students are taught through structured lectures in such a way that complex and multiple answers are possible), experiential learning (such as production of a feature film), and case study (to facilitate discussion of real-world scenarios). In all cases, Futureworks curricula are designed to utilise Locus of Control as a pedagogical approach, providing every student with meaningful opportunities to select elements of programme content of interest to them, the medium in which they wish to work, and the level and depth of their chosen specialism.

Students are enabled to personalise their learning through negotiated assessments, which is often the gateway to a student developing their own specialisation, and this has proven time and again to have a positive impact on student engagement. This approach is further aided by the wealth of industry-standard equipment available to Futureworks students throughout (and after) their time here. Students are continually challenged and confronted with real-world problems to solve as part of their learning and, as a result, Futureworks produces independently-minded creative problem solvers, utilising traditional academic elements as a focus to develop sought-after communication and soft skills.

This approach, combined with regular guest lectures and field trips, ensures that the vast majority of students remain active and engaged participants in their education. Nonetheless, some students experience difficulties during their time in higher education and we have systems and processes in place to identify and support any individual at risk of disengaging from their studies, for whatever reason. Academic staff work closely with our student support team to generate engagement data, and to proactively assist students who require additional support (whether that is financial, academic, personal or otherwise). This data is reviewed fortnightly by the Executive Team to identify any patterns which might emerge, such as a dip in engagement on a particular course, module or year group.

Futureworks is an organisation founded on enterprise and industry practice, recruiting academic, professional and managerial staff from industry to build a centre of excellence, and provide the highest quality education and success in graduate employment for the creative industries.

We first set out our strategic goals for research, scholarship and professional practice in 2021 [14], with the aim of helping us begin our journey towards establishing the institution as a beacon of research, knowledge exchange, technological and scholarly development for the creative sector.

Key to the success of our students is our portfolio of industry active lecturers who continue to work professionally with some of the biggest names in the industry (the BBC, Disney, Avid, Hasbro, CITV, HBO, Google, DC Comics and so on - the list is too long to enumerate) alongside their teaching, however, in transitioning from a teaching-intensive specialist higher education provider to a more rounded academic institution, we have sought to build upon and promote the synergies between research, enterprise, teaching and learning. We have also explored ways to encourage and enable a culture of research and enterprise around areas of specialism. Finally, we have been keen to formally recognise, support and promote existing research profiles of academic staff.

Practice as research is an essential element of Futureworks' strategy and the industry background of our tutors and their contemporary knowledge and expertise feeds directly into the curriculum. Each summer, our teaching teams undertake a review of changes to the technology used in industry and any good practice that can be identified. This review is used to inform the upcoming year's scheme of work and may result in changes being made to the software and tools used, assessment methods employed, workflows (and so on). This research-informed approach ensures that Futureworks remains at the forefront of industry practice and, in turn, enhances the employability of our students and graduates.

Futureworks also has a growing traditional research profile which is starting to gain international recognition. The Futureworks Research Group, comprised of a passionate group of research-interested staff, have organised two academic conferences: Work and Play (2016) [15] and Technology and Tradition (2021) [16]. Both were interdisciplinary conferences with an emphasis on creative digital media. The proceedings of the Work and Play conference were published as a special edition of the journal Information, Communication & Society (Vol 21, Issue 9, 2018). IC&S is ranked in the top quartile for journal quality (Q1), scoring an 80 on the H-index on the Scimago journal rank, meaning that its papers are highly cited. The collected papers have so far amassed over 6000 views in total. We have also recently launched a summer research conference, which in 2021 featured a broad range of international researchers presenting papers, and we host a fortnightly "Research Breakfast" which is focused on opening opportunities for dialogue and pedagogical enhancement amongst Futureworks staff.

Futureworks courses are specifically designed to provide our graduates with the skills and experience needed to succeed in the industry, not only as employees but also as artists and entrepreneurs. All of our courses feature modules which invite students to develop skills in networking, interview technique, self-promotion and showreel/portfolio development, and every course is informed by our prestigious Industry Advisory Group - formed of a diverse range of talented and influential individuals from across the creative industries [17].

Curriculum content and design is also informed by industry best practice through our close working relationships with studios of all kinds, regionally, nationally and internationally - ensuring our students are kept on the cutting-edge both in terms of software and workflow. For some of our programmes, this is achieved through built-in certification options - which enable our students to graduate not only with their degree, but also with an industry-recognised technical qualification (for example, via the Avid certification route).

In addition to the outstanding (and active) experience of our teaching team, we regularly provide our students with opportunities to hear from, and network with, guest speakers from the creative industries - some of whom are Futureworks' alumni who can speak authentically to the challenges faced by

graduate students looking to enter the industry for the first time. Our guest speakers often provide students with detailed masterclasses of new or emerging techniques or approaches used in industry, which further prepares our students for professional life, and inevitably helps shape future curriculum reviews.

Industry engagement in our students' preparation for professional work is not limited only to seminars and workshops, however - with some commercial studios providing a simulated project brief, complete with critical review and feedback at key milestones over several months. For example, content creators Fuzzy Duck , whose client list is extensive, and includes the BBC, United Utilities, National Trust, Talk Talk and many more, are actively involved in the delivery of the second year of our animation degree, starting with a tour of their commercial animation studios in week 2, and culminating in a series of pitch presentations from our students in week 12, helping our students to better understand how client work is commissioned and delivered [18]. Similarly, attendance at, and contributions to, regional film festivals form a part of the curriculum for our filmmaking students.

Finally, our students are actively encouraged and supported to enter competitions regionally, nationally, and internationally, to raise their profiles and meet potential employers. There are many examples of this taking place in practice, through events such as Dare to Be Digital, Tranzfuser and Grads in Games, events which have directly led to the employment of several of our games and animation students immediately after graduation.

Resources, support and student engagement

The professional development of Futureworks' academic staff is inexorably linked to our Learning, Teaching & Research strategy, and to the raison d'etre of Futureworks overall - the very nature of teaching on the "cutting edge" of technology and professional practice requires nothing less than an uncompromising approach to staff development in order to remain not only valid, but also as leaders in our field.

Core to this approach is Futureworks' staff recruitment and retention strategy. Academic staff, for example, are *required* to maintain the currency of their industry credentials and skillset – and are afforded the time and resources to do so as a standard part of staff workload planning. Thus, it is not simply the case that "some of" Futureworks academic staff "used to be" animators, visual effects artists, film-makers and sound engineers, as is commonly seen in larger higher education institutions; rather, it is the case that *all of* Futureworks academic staff are *currently* active in their respective professional and creative fields – even if this takes them away from Futureworks for significant periods, such as is required when accompanying a production crew overseas, or when touring with a band. Indeed, the post-pandemic approach to flexible working has long been a core tenet of Futureworks' approach to staff time and management, with staff actively encouraged to seek commercial opportunities to further their skill sets, industry connections and aptitudes.

Futureworks also provides considerable support for maintaining academic currency through activities such as post-graduate study at Level 7 & 8, teaching qualifications, professional certifications, and academic research. Over the past four years, we have supported over 90% of our academic staff to gain a post-graduate qualification, and a number of staff have had research projects and professional memberships approved under the resources provided through our Research & Professional Practice Strategy. Additionally, staff are supported and encouraged to seek opportunities to serve as External

Examiners, External Advisors, course validation panel members, conference speakers, external working group chairs/members and so on.

Bringing all of this together into the curriculum is the responsibility of the Learning, Teaching & Research Working Group who meet weekly to discuss good practice as it relates both to academic and professional practice, and how best to integrate contemporary trends and research into Futureworks' curricula. By discussing and evaluating a range of academic and professional issues, and drawing upon research from academics and practitioners in their respective fields of study, our academic staff (and, by proxy, our students) are enabled to push the boundaries of the knowledge within the sector, to develop their own arguments, and to contribute meaningfully to the corpus of extant literature and professional practice.

Futureworks provides a system of multi-layered support for its students which can be tailored to the needs of an individual student as required. At its core is the close working relationship between our Student Services department, personal tutors, and our academic staff, underpinned and bolstered by a combination of small class sizes and a strong staff-student ratio. All our staff, whether academic/teaching or those in professional and supporting services, go the extra mile to support our students to achieve their maximum potential.

In practice, this takes many forms: for some students, this may be the provision of additional support for academic skills such as academic writing or referencing; for others, there may be technical barriers which are standing in the way of a student's artistic or academic progression. In all cases, there may also be additional factors – financial, personal and so on. Whatever the circumstances, we work proactively with our students to identify and resolve issues at as early a stage as possible, and we routinely set and monitor our performance in this regard against a small number of relevant service KPIs.

Futureworks also operates a number of initiatives specifically designed to address the most common barriers to learning experienced by our students; for example, a recording studio environment can, for some students, be an intimidating experience, particularly in their first year of study. In these circumstances it may be necessary to review and repeat lesson content in the studio setting, and to spend additional time explaining and discussing the subject material on a one-to-one basis. For this reason, Futureworks employs dedicated cross-over staff who can support both the teaching and technical teams by providing one on one support to students on the full range of technical learning resources available. Such support is available seven days a week, including late in the evening and outside of term time, to accommodate students' individual needs and circumstances.

A wide range of support is also provided directly by the student services team, who are able to identify any further support requirements necessary to help a student overcome the barriers they are facing [19]. Futureworks offers tailored support for any student struggling academically, financially, emotionally and/or psychologically, and support staff work closely with the relevant teaching team to deliver a personalised programme of interventions. Since 2020 we have also operated an Office for Students funded student-led peer mentoring programme [20] in collaboration with ten other higher education providers in the UK which is already having a positive impact on student retention and engagement.

Futureworks was founded on the principle that graduate students should be industry-ready after completing their degree programme, and this has been the driving force behind every investment

decision made since our inception. Because of this ethos, the facilities available to Futureworks students are widely acknowledged to be exceptional and on the cutting edge of the creative industries – from world-class recording studios designed by Harris Grant Associates (Battery Studios, New York and BBC Maida Vale Studios, London) to our state-of-the-art motion capture facilities, film studio, incubation labs, and mastering facilities.

The extent of our facilities is too varied and numerous to list extensively here – but all have one thing in common: to ensure that Futureworks graduates are equipped to seamlessly embark on real world projects with the sector's leading employers. Crucially, Futureworks' learning spaces have been designed from the ground up to serve a specific purpose for the course(s) which use them – and this approach applies not only to the more obvious spaces such as recording or motion capture studios, but also to computer labs, classrooms and edit suits. Each learning space features tailored hardware and software designed to fulfil a particular role, whether that be for recording audio, mastering, compositing, 3d modelling, animation, video editing or colour correction – the list is huge. In some cases, such as our recording and mastering studios, the hardware available to students is quite literally bespoke – built by hand to fulfil a niche role, something found nowhere else in higher education in the UK [21].

The calibre and status of our learning resources is perhaps best illustrated by the industry employers who come to Futureworks seeking not only the use of our cutting edge facilities, but also the talents of our staff and students. Our MediaCityUK studio houses the Northwest's largest green screen facility – frequently used by BBC CBeebies, Trinity Digital and other production companies when their own facilities are not able to accommodate their film, animation and music video projects. Our Mastering Studio has been used by a range of artists and performers, including Deaf Havana's "Rituals" Album (Top Ten UK Official Charts), and Yours Truly's debut album "Self Care" (nominated for a coveted ARIA Music Award for Best Hard Rock/Heavy Metal Album). Three of Kerrang Magazine's "10 Best EPs of 2021" were mastered using our studio (Hot Milk, Boston Manor and Static Dress), and All Time Low's performance of "Monsters" for Jimmy Kimmel, The Ellen DeGeneres Show and The Late Late Show with James Corden was also mastered in our studio, by our team.

It isn't just our hardware that keeps Futureworks on the forefront of industry practice, it's also about using the same software as industry and, crucially, the right workflows - utilising authentic recordings and film footage provided to Futureworks by production companies. Futureworks goes beyond other providers in how we tailor our academic programmes to incorporate industry workflows from day one; and rather than leave the more "difficult" tools and techniques until year three, our students graduate with not only their degree, but also three years of industry experience and several commercial projects under their belt. This is perhaps best exemplified by our recent engagement with the Ivy League University of Columbia in New York, whose Master's Degree visual effects students reached out to Futureworks seeking 3D artists and compositors to assist them in the production of three film projects.

There are too many software packages to list extensively; however, a sample of the core tools utilised by our students is as follows: Pro Tools, Media Composer, Unreal Engine, Unity, FMOD, Wwise, Maya, Nuke, Houdini, Z Brush, Substance Painter, Deadline, Thinkbox, Da Vinci and Black Magic.

In addition to the above, our games incubation hub has seen four indie games studios flourish, with some going on to become national and international competition winners and, following this success, Futureworks now holds status as an academic partner of both Epic Games and Sony Playstation.

Our substantial physical learning resources are backed up by a virtual learning environment (VLE) and growing Discord community, both of which are used in the provision of learning materials, assignment feedback and ongoing support. Use of Discord has improved considerably in the past two years, and we have found that this has opened doors to a whole new way of supporting students both on and off campus. Furthermore, it is already becoming evident that the innovations developed and deployed throughout the pandemic have been well received by both staff and students, and this is having a positive impact on the quality and timeliness of academic support offered to students as well as on retention and overall student engagement.

Student engagement is at the heart of everything we do and we recognise that an effective student voice is central to continuous enhancement of the student experience. Futureworks prides itself on being transparent and open with students in all matters, and has put a series of structures and measures in place to ensure that the thoughts, ideas and opinions of students have an opportunity to be heard at all levels of the organisation [22] – so much so that in 2022 we commissioned an independent Uniac audit of "the effectiveness of the student voice in institutional governance" [23] at Futureworks to benchmark ourselves against our own objectives and expectations, and the sector. The report concluded with the provision of a *"'Substantial' Risk Assurance rating for the institution's current Student Voice Channels due to positive student feedback during fieldwork and identified good practice"*. This rating is the lowest risk category, and is accompanied by a benchmark rating of *"Sector Leading: The provider's systems, processes and practices are ahead of other institutions and operate within best practice, based upon Uniac judgement at the time of the review"*.

Student Partners at Futureworks are, of course, critical to the successes elucidated above – and it is their willingness to participate in our decision-making processes which is ultimately responsible for this. We also recognise, and take seriously, our obligation to hear the wider student voice, and we have structures in place to facilitate this also.

At an individual level, students are routinely invited to provide feedback to their module tutors for consideration and resolution in team meetings. Such matters are usually attended to by the relevant Programme Leader, and fed back to students in the classroom. Students are also asked to provide module feedback at the end of each course module for consideration by the programme team and in annual monitoring.

At course intake level (or sub-group, if the course intake was split into two), students elect representatives (known as Student Partners) to act and speak collectively on their behalf. As a consequence of our small class sizes Futureworks has, by design, a much higher proportion of student representatives than is ordinarily found in higher education with a partner-to-student ratio of 13:1 and a partner-to-academic staff ratio of approximately 1:1. Student Partners attend School Committee meetings each semester, as well as Student Partner Meetings each month.

For representation at institutional level, students also elect Senior Student Partners, including one Principal Student Partner (or Lead Partner). Senior Student Partners are responsible for ensuring that all partners are adequately supported in their work, and assist the Lead Partner in assuring Student Partner attendance at relevant meetings. Senior Student Partners, including the Lead Partner, attend semesterly meetings of the Academic Board (chaired by the Principal/Head of Provider).

In this way, Futureworks provides multiple opportunities for students to have their voice heard, and Student Partners are present in all formal decision-making bodies within the governance structure

with the exception of the Board of Directors. We are not complacent in this regard, however, and following the feedback we received from the Uniac student voice audit, from January 2023 the shareholders of the business plan to attend meetings of the Student Partner Committee on an annual basis.

The above, in combination with routine continuous and annual monitoring processes, has led to many positive changes at Futureworks over recent years. For example, improvements were recently made to our procurement procedures following feedback from students about the effects of delayed installation of new iMac computers in specific computer labs. Student Partners representing the BA (Hons) Post Production programme raised concerns about the disruption being caused to lessons as new iMacs were installed mid-Semester, and as a result changes to the procurement schedule and sign off process have been implemented – ensuring that any such delays in future will not impact upon teaching and learning.

Student Outcomes

Positive outcomes

We have adopted a range of approaches to ensuring students succeed in their studies and progress into skilled employment. During selection, in most instances, students are required to provide a relevant portfolio of work – demonstrating their interest, aptitude and potential for succeeding on their chosen course. This step is crucial in ensuring students receive value for money from their higher education experience; as previously discussed, our approach of developing courses “backwards” means that the technical/artistic starting point for applicants has already been identified – it is not enough that an applicant meets only the traditional application criteria.

Prior to entry, all new students are required to complete a questionnaire in which any specific learning needs or requirements which might pose a barrier to study. This information is used as the basis for discussion with both academic staff and the students themselves, with the goal of tailoring the students’ learning experience whilst at Futureworks, and ensuring that students have the necessary tools and support to succeed on their course.

Our approach to class sizes is another element which has proven highly effective in supporting students to succeed. This is “enforced” by the size of our classrooms, labs and studio spaces – specifically designed to house only small groups of students. At present, our largest single class is a group of eighteen students – classes in excess of twenty are automatically split into two groups to maintain this approach. It is because of this approach that our students not only receive a huge amount of time with their tutors face to face (lessons are typically scheduled to run for around three hours), but that they also have the opportunity to ask questions and, crucially, receive detailed answers.

Curriculum and assessment design also plays an important role in student success and progression, with every module designed to develop relevant and sought-after industry skills, alongside soft skills such as confidence, resilience and self-criticality. Every course includes modules which are specifically aimed at preparing students for life in the creative industries [24], and self-initiated/negotiated project briefs feature prominently at Levels 5 & 6, allowing students to determine their own assessment outcomes based on their specific area of interest - this is especially useful for

students looking to develop a portfolio of work which will be attractive to employers in their particular field.

In addition to in-class support for success and progression, Futureworks hosts two Continuing Development Weeks each year, designed to give all students an opportunity to explore areas of interest which may not be included in their curriculum [25]. These events focus primarily on graduate employability, and typically feature guest speakers from industry, alumni panels, cross-discipline projects (such as game jams) and other sessions designed to encourage students on all courses to come together and explore opportunities for collaboration.

Notwithstanding the above, the primary factor in ensuring student success and progression, which has seen considerable success since its deployment in 2019/20, has been a drive to bring student services and academic staff closer together. This effort has resulted in a system known at Futureworks as “SARD” (“Students At Risk of Disengaging”) [26]. The SARD system enables module tutors and other academic staff to raise concerns about individual students via an app. The data from this app is automatically collated, and flags are raised with student services and the relevant programme leader whenever a specified threshold is reached. Individualised support can then be proactively provided based on the particular needs of the student (be they personal, financial, academic, vocational etc) even where a student has not directly asked for help. We have found that this approach picks up issues far earlier, and has helped to focus individual students on their personal goals - as demonstrated by Year 1 and 2 continuation, completion and progression data. The performance of this system is monitored fortnightly by the Executive Team, which ensures that academic and support staff remain engaged with the process.

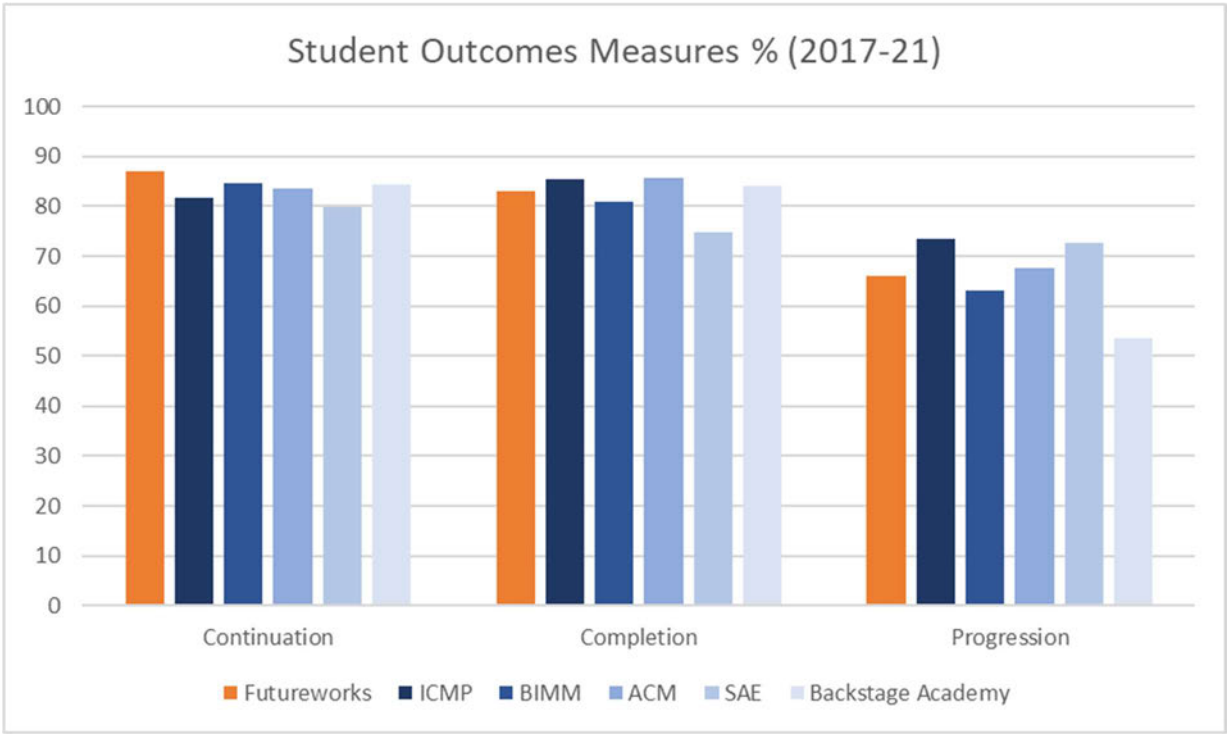

Figure 2: Student Outcomes Measures (Source: TEF dashboard)

Continuation, completion and progression compare favourably against our peers (i.e. those with similar specialisms, and who are similar in size and scope), as illustrated above.

We note from the TEF data dashboard that our Year 4 (most recent) continuation data show Futureworks as being materially below benchmark (84.1% actual vs 89% benchmark). Detailed examination of internal data show that lower than normal continuation on the BA (Hons) Music Production course is largely responsible for this performance, and that this is due to the disproportionate effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on this programme, as it is predominantly delivered and assessed within a recording studio environment (which was completely unavailable for long periods of time due to the national lockdown). It is noteworthy that our own "Year 5" data indicates that this trend has since reversed, as BA (Hons) Music Production continuation has returned to pre-pandemic levels.

We also recognise that the split-indicators for Continuation "Disability Reported" (35 students over 4 years) and "Mixed Ethnicity" (13 students over 4 years) suggest that these particular groups present an emerging risk to continuation – something we are actively seeking to mitigate through our Access & Participation Working Group. Note that the same pattern does not exist for Completion, and that the number of students affected in each group is very low.

We have identified a small disparity in outcomes between students enrolled on courses coded as "Computing" versus those enrolled on courses coded as "Performing Arts", "Engineering" or "Creative Arts & Design". Futureworks' BA (Hons) Games Design degree is, for example, assigned only the HECoS code for "Computing", whereas the remainder of our programmes are assigned a mix of codes. This has had the effect of forcing a comparison between graduates from the Games Design programme (who are predominantly designers and artists) with graduates from all other "Computing" programmes nationally (who are predominantly computer scientists, software developers and IT technicians) who enjoy a very different marketplace for their respective talents.

In addition to the above, there are some well-noted issues regarding the use of SIC Codes (Standard Industrial Classification of economic activities) for the Graduate Outcomes Survey, which we believe have negatively impacted upon the progression outcomes of our BA (Hons) Games Design and BA (Hons) Game Art courses. This is because a substantial proportion of Futureworks graduates enter the games industry within a year of graduation, and this industry is not well served by current SIC Codes, which have not been updated since 2007. This is a significant issue for providers seeking to identify graduate students entering into professional game development for data and tracking purposes [27] [28].

Educational gains

Both curricula and assessments at Futureworks are designed in such a way as to facilitate continual monitoring and measurement of the educational gain of our students. This is because the course content, and formative & summative assessments, routinely "test" students against a range of vital aptitudes and skills. These skills include critical thinking, problem solving, academic writing, presentation skills, time management, team working and entrepreneurialism – all attributes which are highly sought after by employers in the creative sector. In this way, we are enabled to closely monitor the progress of individual students throughout their degree without additional burden, and to tailor support mechanisms to individual needs. In support of this approach, Futureworks courses feature dedicated modules at Levels 4 & 5 which focus specifically on the above skills, in a similar manner to those modules (discussed earlier) which target life in the creative industries, careers and entrepreneurship.

The following chart demonstrates that all students, regardless of their entry profile, are enabled to succeed at Futureworks; that is, on average, a students' grades will improve year-on-year relative to their starting point academically; i.e. those students who enter with the most UCAS points continue to improve (educational gains are not limited or restricted in any way), whereas those students who enter with the least UCAS points also continue to improve at the same rate (lower performing students are not left behind). Thus, we can demonstrate that value is added for all students, regardless of their entry profile.

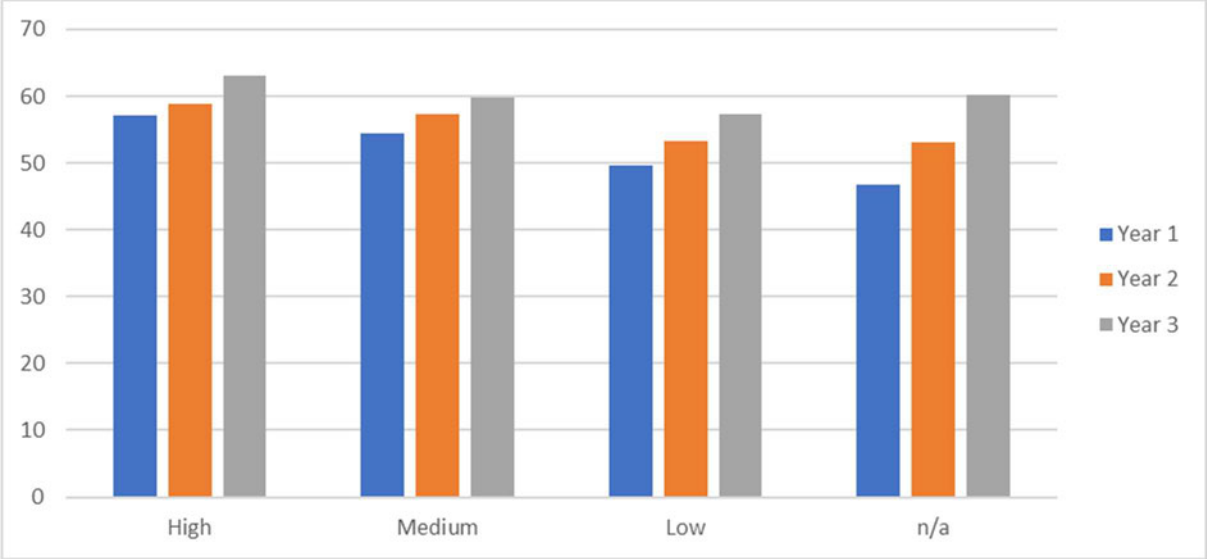

Figure 3: Entry profile vs average grades

Additionally, each year our academic teams come together within their respective Schools to evaluate the "distance travelled" by each student since enrolment, based on the above skills and assessment performance. Those students whose educational gain is the greatest are recognised at our annual graduation ceremony by an award which celebrates their outstanding progress relative to their start point.

From September 2023 onwards, we plan to systematically capture a range of information from new students relating to their perceived academic, personal and employability skills. This data will be captured each year thereafter, enabling Futureworks to systematically measure the educational gains of every student. The ultimate goal is to build a comprehensive longitudinal dataset which can be used to provide more detailed insights into individual student learning and education gains.

There are several ways in which Futureworks students are supported to achieve their maximum potential. Firstly, through the provision of regular high quality academic advice students can receive guidance to help them plan their assessments, manage deadlines and avoid falling behind. Secondly, Futureworks holds (and encourages students to hold) tutoring and study groups, to help them better understand their course materials, and prepare for assessments. Thirdly, Futureworks provides financial assistance to students who are struggling with the cost of living, including transport to and from Futureworks' campus(es). Provision of careers advice is another important service which Futureworks has integrated into its curricula, and which also features in Continuing Development Weeks. In addition, Futureworks provides a wide range of mental health support services, including on campus mental health advice and a bookable counselling service, and care is taken to try to

schedule all activities in such a way that students with family and work commitments are enabled to attend to this without causing disruption to their course. Finally, students are provided technical support to help them navigate online learning platforms and other educational technology – these services are accessible to students seven days a week, and in the evenings.

Each student journey starts with an analysis of their entry data, and the support questionnaire completed prior to enrolment (discussed earlier). Personalised plans are generated for every student detailing support requirements, and academic staff are briefed accordingly. Student Services and academic staff check-in regularly to discuss any changing requirements, and individual progress is monitored through information gained from formative assignment submissions, tutor-student interactions, any one-to-one support sessions, and through personal tutoring. This model works well for Futureworks, as it enables us to take advantage of our small size and strong staff-student ratio. In this way we can monitor and evaluate individual student progress in a way that a larger institution could not.

As mentioned previously, from September 2023 we intend to gather data from all new students (and from all returning students in each subsequent year) to enable us to more carefully measure each individual's educational gain (i.e., with hard/quantitative data). The data will be gathered as part of a mandatory self-assessment survey, undertaken at enrolment, and will complement the qualitative data already generated by the systems described above. Following a review of the relevant literature, we have chosen a survey-based approach because the evidence indicates that this method is likely to be the most effective for Futureworks' context [29] [30] [31] [32] [33] [34]. Other approaches considered include semi-structured qualitative methods and standardised testing (in addition to the use of academic grades).

We recognise that student self-assessment of educational gain has both benefits and downsides. Benefits include students being encouraged to take increased ownership of their learning, becoming more invested in the process and taking more personal responsibility for their progress; students may also be prompted to reflect upon their own strengths and weaknesses (and to consider ways to address these over time). Finally, student self-assessments will also provide academic and support staff with valuable information about the areas in which they require additional help. Conversely, we are mindful of the propensity for response-bias shift (for example, where students over-estimate their level of ability at the outset of the survey, and later underestimate their level of ability as they develop their understanding of the subject matter) and for the need to ask sufficiently detailed questions so as to adequately augment measurements taken from assessment alone.

Presently, the educational gains made by Futureworks students are measured primarily through the assessment process – with learning outcomes designed to address core competencies identified by employers in the creative industries. Our Academic Board examines student performance data each semester [35], and School Reports [36] add valuable contextual information to support the hard data provided. We also generate twice-yearly Programme Performance Reports, which are discussed and considered at programme, school and institutional level. These reports include analyses of assessment data, attendance data, student survey data (e.g. satisfaction data), continuation, attainment and progression data.

From September onwards, an analysis of the data captured by the student self-assessment survey discussed above will be included in continuous and annual monitoring processes as standard, and in this way will become embedded into Futureworks' governance structure. To enable the Academic

Board to evaluate the success of this initiative, and to monitor the effectiveness of its operation, we have developed a simple theory of change, which posits that improved awareness of students' abilities (through self-assessment) should, over time, increase education gains and, ultimately, progression outcomes. A full report on the educational gains made, and of the effectiveness of this new initiative will be included annually in the Futureworks Annual Report, prepared for the Board of Directors.

Student success

Futureworks routinely produces graduates of the highest quality. Students, such as and now hold senior artist positions at world-renowned game studio and publisher Ubisoft, whereas others - for example, , secured work at the hugely successful Realtime UK as visual effects artists. Others, like , at Hello Games, and at Sumo Digital, have risen to prominent positions within the games industry, making important creative decisions on high profile projects. Students like and have made considerable impacts while working at Cloud Imperium Games, producing sophisticated professional-standard work for upcoming triple-A title "Star Citizen", and worked on ground-breaking games Grand Theft Auto V and Red Dead Redemption 2 as Senior Audio Designer for Rockstar Games.

It is no exaggeration to say that Futureworks' alumni network now contains graduates working at every level of the digital creative industries, both domestically and internationally, shaping the future of entertainment and culture. For example, , sound recordist, has worked on blockbuster film projects such as Jurassic World and the Oscar award-winning Bohemian Rhapsody. Others, such as have gone on to work in content delivery and production roles at the BBC - located nearby Futureworks in MediaCityUK. Graduates and have joined the ranks of world-leading visual effects artists at international studio MPC, meanwhile and have put time in at London-based DNEG, who are one of the world's most accomplished visual effects and animation studios. has also performed work alongside Futureworks graduates while working for BAFTA and Oscar winning creative studio Framestore on projects including Downton Abbey, Avengers: Infinity War and Guardians of the Galaxy. We also have graduates working in the creative industries overseas for household names including IMAX, Amazon Studios, Universal Studios, Warner Bros., Netflix, and Freevie.

Our students are actively encouraged and supported to enter competitions regionally, nationally, and internationally, to raise their profiles and meet potential employers. There are many examples of this taking place in practice, through events such as Dare to Be Digital, Tranzfuser and Grads in Games, events which have directly led to the employment of several of our games and animation students immediately after graduation.

A small sample of quotes from our graduate students, their employers, and our External Examiners follows, as well as an overview of some of our graduates' recent competition/award successes.

We feel that these testimonials not only convey the objective experiences of our stakeholders from their own perspectives, but also that they further demonstrate the ways in which our students have enhanced their knowledge, skills and careers as a result of their time at Futureworks.

Graduate students

*"Futureworks has provided me with a solid foundation and the confidence to secure work on sets like No Offence, Victoria, Peaky Blinders and Journey End's just to name a few. But more importantly, it gave me a chance to observe talented DOPs and Directors at work. People like Laurie Rose (High-Rise, Free Fire, Journey's End), Stephan Pehrsson (Black Mirror, Inside No. 9, Doctor Who), Tom Shankland (House of Cards, The Punisher) and Lucy Tcherniak (The End of the F***ing World, Wanderlust)." [Cinematographer and camera assistant]"*

"My time at Futureworks was invaluable as not only did it allow me use of a large range of recording facilities that would have been otherwise inaccessible, the wide range of modules on the course also exposed me to various aspects of artistic creativity, project management, interaction with other creative people and the myriad ways in which the music industry operates. These experiences allowed me to evaluate my aptitude and affinity for many different areas, and ultimately helped me to decide that for my next steps I wanted to find out more about the science behind the acoustics and signal processing that underpin music technology. All this led to my doctorate in music technology and my current position as a scientist working in underwater acoustic modelling." [PhD, Project Scientist, JASCO Applied Sciences]

"Teaching is excellent. Frequent feedback and a more personalized experience with tutors helps to deliver a much higher standard of learning and development." (BA (Hons) Games Design student, 2022)

"All tutors are friendly, knowledgeable, and competent, and I always feel that I can ask for help. They always do their best to answer any questions or find out if they don't know. I like the variety of teaching styles, from academic to hands on as it keeps thing fresh…really astonished at the amount of equipment and space available that is packed into the 2 sites. Everything you need for any project which can be booked out at any point." (BA (Hons) Visual Effects student, 2022)

The teaching is great, the tutors are encouraging and helpful which really helps the class environment. I personally like all the feedback I can get outside the classroom from the discord chats. (BA (Hons) Game Art student, 2022)

"Everyone has been wonderful and well prepared with our lessons. They are approachable and are always happy to help with anything we need." (BA (Hons) Digital Animation with Illustration student, 2022)

"Small classes are great because we can get a lot more focused teaching." (BSc (Hons) Audio Engineering & Production student, 2022)

"The studios are top notch and there is a variety of equipment to book out to use. It's good from an Audio Student's perspective." (BA (Hons) Music Production student, 2022)

Industry employers

" sent us a speculative application looking to join our Art Team. She had just graduated from Futureworks Game Art degree and had been shortlisted as 'One to Watch' by Grads in Games "Search for a Star" competition. We were not actively looking for a new Associate Artist, but the artwork in her portfolio really shone out as exceptional - far better than the vast majority of other

graduates. We got her in for an interview the following week and offered her the job a week later. She has now been working with us for almost two years and has already been promoted to a full time artist position. We have also now recruited a second artist from Futureworks, who is working out really well too!" [Head of Art, d3t]

"As Lead Audio Designer at Sumo Digital Sheffield, my role involves facilitating a full audio team, being the voice for audio in the wider development team, defining audio direction and designing sounds to AAA standard. I've worked on games which have been nominated for multiple audio awards, and my last project "Sackboy: A Big Adventure" was a PS5 launch title in collaboration with Sony - it won 2 BAFTAs for "Best Family Game" and "Best British Game". I couldn't recommend Futureworks graduates highly enough to anyone in the games industry" [Sumo Digital]

"I am a Studio Director at Supermassive Games, a BAFTA-winning independent game developer. We have released numerous successful titles and are best known for the critically acclaimed PS4 hit "Until Dawn" and "The Dark Pictures Anthology". In my experience of hiring talent into the studio, I have found Futureworks has equipped their students well to enter the workplace - their quality of teaching shows in their graduates, who are easily on par with any institution that we have seen nationally or internationally. Their combination of small class sizes, tutors with industry experience, and the teaching approach puts them, in my view, in the forefront of games education both in the UK and overseas" [Supermassive Games]

"I am the Executive Producer at CGHero and have extensive experience working with and around students from Futureworks. Our platform has over 5000 freelance artists who work primarily in the fields of Games & CGI. We work with a steady of stream Futureworks students, both current and past students, and always find them talented and eager. Futureworks gives its students a solid foundation to leap into their chosen career, both technically and professionally. As well as hiring many of Futureworks' graduates on a freelance basis, we have also recruited several of their graduates into full time positions" [CGHero]

External examiners

Subject	*Author*	*Comment*
Music Production	University of Gloucestershire	The industry focus of the course is very strong and students demonstrate commercial quality in their production and understanding of techniques. The relationship with games design subjects has also demonstrated particularly strong work that allows students to explore new media formats for music and audio.
Audio Engineering	Leeds Beckett University	The facilities that I saw were of a very good standard, and enables students to produce professional quality material.

		The small cohorts on both courses enable tutors to form close relationships with their students which in turn fosters engagement and achievement from the students.
Game Audio	Bournemouth University	Given the small cohort sizes, the tutors have an in-depth knowledge of all the students and clearly provide very personal and tailored support. It is particularly good to see the very practical nature of the course which stands to make Futureworks graduates very employable.
Filmmaking	University of Greenwich	This is a unique offering, the only degree of its kind in the UK and the course is living up to that expectation. The focus on screenwriting throughout the degree is not seen on many comparable courses. The student work often exceeds that on similar degree courses, and the staff ability to support students in their ambitions is no doubt partly a result of the small student numbers - this is clear and visible in the quality of the work.
Visual Effects	Solent University	This is an intensive and wide-ranging course that prepares students for life in the competitive VFX industry. Students benefit from small class sizes and personal support thanks to a highly dedicated and committed staff. The quality of the student work is approaching professional artistic standards.
Animation	Sheffield Hallam University	The curriculum design presents a complex and highly sophisticated programme that combines an introduction to traditional techniques and the latest technological advances in the field. The course is achieving outstanding results with great technical and aesthetic quality that will feed the national animation and illustration industry with fresh talent.
Game Art	Canterbury Christ Church University	It is evident what Futureworks game art course is designed to do - the team supports students in attaining industry-level skills and aptitudes while benefiting from

		a rigorous and challenging programme of study, transferrable skills and qualification.
Games Design	Abertay University Dundee	The games design degree reflects professional practices well. The course team engage with industry speakers and bodies to promote best practice and forward thinking in design and diversity matters which is excellent. The course is designed to allow students to develop a good understanding of industry practices across a range of game design related roles without spreading their development too thin standing them in good stead for moving into professional game development.

Competitions and awards

Person/Team	*Award/Outcome*
Torque Studios, game design and audio students	Dare to be Digital competition (finalist). Channel 4 prize of £25,000. BAFTA nomination. Released their game in 2016, now a commercial studio.
game art graduate	Search for a Star competition (winner, environmental art category). Now working for Sumo Digital as an environment artist.
game art graduate	Search for a Star competition (finalist, character art category).
game art graduate	Voted as One to Watch by BAFTA Grads in Games for her game "Don't walk: run!" Now working for d3t as a full-time artist.
Cold Sun Studios, game design students	Tranzfuser competition (winner) with their game "Tome Travellers" with a prize of £21,000. Two of the team now working at Supermassive Games (Guildford) as game designers and one working at Rebellion (Oxford) as an environment artist.
Milksop Games, game design students	Tranzfuser competition (finalist) with their game "Heads 'n' Tails". Jamfuser Game Jam competition (winner).

	Tranzfuser competition (employment pathway winner, best game design) for his game "Banana: Citchen Khaos". Now working at Supermassive Games (Guildford) as a game designer.
Astro Manatee, game design and game audio students	Tranzfuser competition (winner) with their game "Voltaic" with a prize of £22,000. Team leader now working at Supermassive Games (Guildford) as game designer.
animation graduate	Bolton Film Festival (nomination, Audience Choice Award) for his animation "Mass Production". Tiger Con, Georgia, USA (winner, Judge's Choice Award) for his music video "Mr Black Lake".
animation student	Guardian Graphic Short Prize (runner up).
animation and game audio students	Exhibited their short film "Train" at Manchester Animation Festival as part of "Anijam".
music production graduate	Queen Palm Film Festival (winner, Gold Award) for Best Sound Design in a Short Film. Short Sounds Film Festival (winner) for Best Combined use of Sound and Music.
audio engineering graduate	Music & Sound Awards (winner, International Best Sound Design for Short Film). Roma Creative Contest (winner, Music & Sound Award). Jussi Film Academy Awards (nominated, Best Sound Award).
filmmaking students	Selected for High Peak Independent Film Festival. Selected for Lift-off Global Network. Selected for INDIs. Selected for Kinofilm International Short Film & Animation Festival. Nominated for High Peak Independent Film Festival "Outstanding Student Debut" category.
visual effects graduates	Action on Film International Film Festival (Winner, Jury Award) for their short film "Kiss the Devil in the Dark" and nominated for Best Visual Effects.

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