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# Guildhall seeks to nurture entrepreneurialism and creativity

By Jonathan Moules, Enterprise Correspondent

The Guildhall School of Music & Drama is little more than a *pas de deux* from the Old Street roundabout that has become the focus of London's growing business start-up scene.

Now it hopes that it too can nurture some of the entrepreneurial mindset of its neighbours among its arts students.

This term the school launched a scheme called Creative Entrepreneurs, aimed at supporting its graduates to set up their own businesses and develop entrepreneurship skills.

Ten teams led by former students have been chosen for 12 months of intensive support, including mentoring, a dedicated office space and access to networks of advisers for issues such as funding and sales.

The scheme is co-ordinated by Cause4, a body that helps charities and social enterprises to develop their business plans, and the aim is to enable these fledgling enterprises to become much more substantial arts bodies.

The decision reflects the realisation that it is not enough to teach people to be great actors and musicians, but that it is important to give them also the skills to manage their careers as a business, says Helena Gaunt, assistant principal at the Guildhall, who is overseeing the scheme.

"The arts world has changed dramatically," she says. "We are not looking for businesses with huge returns because the arts aren't so much about that but we do want to foster viable organisations that are making a difference."

Among the successful applicants to the scheme's first year is Ed Hughes, who graduated as an actor in 1999. After a series of jobs with the Royal Shakespeare Company and in television and film, he set up Salida Productions with set designer Michael Vale.

Both of the theatre productions the company has created since its formation in 2010 have been profitable. The founders have also benefited from the guidance of their patron, the actor Sir Kenneth Branagh. However, Mr Hughes has ambitions to expand operations with the help of outside funding.

"I received no entrepreneurial teaching when I was at the Guildhall as a student, which is partly why it took me eight years to get my first production staged," Mr Hughes says. "It took my own efforts to get started, getting out and educating myself through business seminars, talking to people there and doing whatever it took to learn about business."

The hope for the Guildhall is that the companies being helped by Cause4 and the Creative Entrepreneurs scheme can provide inspiration as well as job opportunities for the next generation of students, Ms Gaunt adds.

"We have to be realistic about this, but if we could grow a network of viable businesses that would be an amazing resource for Guildhall students."

The Guildhall is not the only one of London's world renowned arts colleges to wake to the potential of fostering entrepreneurship among its students.

The Royal College of Arts has formed an incubator programme, called InnovationRCA, to nurture what programme director Nadia Danhash calls the "market disrupting products and services" that former RCA students create.

Among the 10 start-ups on the programme is Loowatt, whose waterless sanitation system has already received the backing of a \$1m grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

"Our role is to get our graduates to a point where they are able to attract follow-on funds from investors or begin trading or both," Ms Danhash explains.

Áine Duffy, RCA spokesperson, notes that more than 70 per cent of the RCA's work is involved in design. Much of this has the potential to be commercialised.

“Not everyone knows this,” Ms Duffy claims. The hope is that InnovationRCA will help change perceptions and make more people realise the potential entrepreneurial talent the college is producing.

Roger Ashby, managing director of Nolah Innovations, which has invested in several start-ups launched by RCA graduates, claims that the college has made great strides in nurturing the entrepreneurial talents of its students in recent years.

However, he notes that more must be done if institutions such as the RCA and the Guildhall are to be as renowned for their business acumen as they are for the quality of their artistic output.

“The record of universities to develop IP is quite poor,” Mr Ashby says. “Until they can get funds, like Imperial and Cambridge, to enable them to pay commercial salaries and rewards to attract top commercial brains they will tend to rub along on the bottom.”

The Guildhall may be better suited than the other colleges at gaining such funding given the location of its campus, in the City of London. Indeed its board of governors contains elected members from the City of London Corporation, the local authority for the Square Mile.

“Being in the City, we are more aware than most of the imperative of creating entrepreneurs,” Ms Gaunt notes. “It is not just about what the arts can contribute to the City. There is a shared ownership in us.”

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