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AYRSHIRE COLLEGE PUTS SSL AT THE CENTRE OF AUDIO EDUCATION

Ayrshire College has invested in a new Solid State Logic AWS 924 ?elta SuperAnalogueM hybrid console for sound production facilities at its Ayr campus.

The College is a multi-campus institution formed from several smaller regional colleges and boosted by ongoing, targeted support from the Scottish Government. It has been running sound production courses since 2000, but stepped up several gears in 2002 thanks to investment in the new Music, Sound Production and Performing Arts department. With that investment came a new, large studio facility with three studios: Two DAW-based rooms, and what has very recently become the SSL room.

The SSL is an AWS 924 ?elta SuperAnalogue hybrid console featuring 24 SuperAnalogue channels, a classic stereo bus compressor, two additional dynamics sections, comprehensive DAW controls, and DAW level assignment to faders and channel encoders. SSL ?elta technology allows automation of AWS channel and mix bus volumes as if it were a DAW plug-in, using DAW-based plug-in automation.

Patrick Devlin, Curriculum Manager for the department, sees the console as an essential part of the programme at Ayrshire, giving production students a learning opportunity that cannot be delivered any other way. "It's filled one of the biggest holes that we wanted to address," he explains. "We wanted to instil the ability to make decisions. A tool of this quality means students feel comfortable about using inline compression straight-to-tape, for example; or inline EQ -

making decisions instead of messing about with a mouse on a DAW for ages. It's about having a physical connection with the equipment.

"We've never had such an ability to trust in what we're seeing and feeling with the console. It's so rewarding to commit to a one-off experience."

Ayrshire College now runs an extensive choice of courses for all levels from short courses for senior school age students to full time qualifications from NC (National Certificate) to HND (Higher National Diploma) levels. Those courses take in a variety of skills, including live sound engineering, studio production, editing, sound design, and music business. Students are prepared for an wide range of roles in the professional market place - not just the traditional 'rock and roll' routes. "Scotland doesn't have a big traditional music industry anymore," says Devlin. "So we have to open the minds of the students to a whole range of options. We equip them for the challenge of a modern creative industries career."

One project that is proving successful is the creation of a record label (Sun Turtle Records) and promotions company (High Tide Promotions) within the College, enabled by innovation funding. Devlin is determined that this project is a long term, sustainable, student-led endeavour with real-world benefits: "We have appointed students to internships with the two companies, giving them experience in A&R, promotions, multi-format publishing, and so on. The new SSL console is a big part of that. We need to make sure we have fantastic, commercial production facilities that can deliver the best quality, while giving the students the most relevant experience we can."

The music studios, and the new SSL, are also core to the wider multi-disciplinary department - not just the audio production specialisms: "There's a high level of cooperation across the performing arts and technical courses. All students get involved by bringing their specialism to other projects and productions going on around the department - drama, music performance, lighting, live sound events, recording, production, publishing, and promotion. It's all going on, and the SSL sits right in the middle of it."

Sound production education at Ayrshire College has grown massively over the 18 years it has been developing and delivering courses. Intake has seen a five-fold increase, the College now has 'articulation agreements' that give students degree course opportunities on sought-after courses around Scotland, and the curriculum has wide-ranging justification under the government's STEM (Science, technology, engineering, and maths) skills targets.

"We bought the SSL for lots of reasons", concludes Devlin. "Sonically, it's night and day compared to any previous tools we've had; it won't break down, and SSL support is excellent; and we're also very aware of how much the SSL brand can bring to our facilities and our standing in this area. Now we want to let Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom know that we have these amazing facilities, the opportunity to work on a variety of commercial products. And of course the expertise to back it up."

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