

# Spotlight on the U.K. Section— Young Innovators Marks a Dynamic Fifth Year

BY SALLY-ANN D'AMATO



**T**his February, I revised my travel schedule so that I would be in London for the fifth anniversary of the Young Innovators event, which I'm told was arguably the busiest and most energized (or, more appropriately, "energised") yet! I had heard so much about this program over the years, and it sounded amazing. In fact, without ever having attended, our staff spoke with the Section about sharing the program with other Sections so that it could be reproduced in other parts of the world. And it did not disappoint.

First of all, I am so grateful to Sky U.K. for their partnership with the SMPTE U.K. Section to enable such an important and high-caliber event. Sky hosted and sponsored this event with contributions from Group Product (Content Tech & Innovation, Global Device Org.) and Sky Sports. These teams also helped organize and staff various workshops during the program. They also hosted the evening networking event, providing facilities and catering for more than 200 students, early-career professionals, and industry participants.

During the day, 50 students and their professors from several universities (and from different disciplines) converged on Sky. They spent the afternoon rotating through hands-on workshops designed to give them an overview of a variety of end-to-end media technology career paths. While the program only scratched the sur-

face of the many engineering disciplines within an organization like Sky, it provided students with a valuable glimpse of the wide range of roles and solutions beyond those they are most familiar with. I saw this firsthand during a demonstration on closed captioning for sports, when one student had an "ah-ha" moment after realizing that a live human is actually responsible for converting the spoken commentary into captions—something he had not considered before.

Carys Hughes, one of SMPTE's Education Directors and a Manager on the U.K. Section Board (and also a member of the 2025 class of SMPTE Fellows!) shared that "the hands-on rotations through technical roles within Sky Sports' flagship studio and gallery environment are always a massive highlight. This year, groups were given a glimpse into the worlds of software production, production support, post-production workflows, solutions design for playout and accessibility, all the way through to picture quality and display engineering on Sky's TVs." I attended almost all of the workshops, and I was blown away! The students were so engaged in the chance to work in different environments and ask questions—and, from conversations with some of the professionals who gave their time to host the workshops, it was a real highlight for them as well.

Following the day's workshops, the students joined more than 150 additional guests for an evening networking program, which led into the main

event. Highlights included project presentations by several PhD students and a fireside chat with early-career professionals who shared their experiences and insights. The program ended with remarks from SMPTE President Richard Welsh, Education Vice President and U.K. Section Secretary-Treasurer, Polly Hickling, and me.

This evening program is where the Young Innovators event truly comes alive. Students step out of their comfort zones to present their work on-stage to industry professionals, getting the opportunity to showcase both themselves and their work. Early-career professionals who once attended the event as students return to share what they've learned since their roles were reversed and how those early connections helped launch their careers. Industry professionals are always looking for new talent, offering advice and experience with genuine enthusiasm. This is the SMPTE Membership coming full circle—supporting the next generation while sustaining both the community and industry we serve.

Polly shared that the event “continues to demonstrate what the next generation of engineers and technologists are bringing into the media industry—curiosity, adaptability, and new perspectives. One of the most striking aspects of this year was the number of new faces and educational pathways represented. Media technology talent is clearly emerging beyond the traditional institutions. It's a reminder to us, as a technical community, that future talent may not always emerge from the familiar places we've historically relied upon. And that our outreach and engagement must evolve accordingly.” She also observed a strong sense that “the students are actively stepping forward to engage with industry—asking questions, seeking guidance, and making

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real connections. Equally encouraging was seeing industry professionals opening doors, offering time, advice, and opportunities to those willing to reach out for support.”

As a first-time attendee of the event, I noticed this as well. The event planners helped foster connection by assigning students to networking groups, encouraging them to step outside their usual circles, and giving them a gentle push to introduce themselves and engage with the professionals available. When I was asked by students, “What can I do to get into the industry?” My answer was simple: “You're doing it. You're here. You're meeting people. You're asking questions. Keep doing this. Keep showing up. Keep getting involved.” The professionals at Young Innovators were truly there for the students—open, accessible, and generous with their time and advice. They are deeply invested in building this community and sustaining the industry.

Later, when I had the opportunity to address the audience, I shared how impressed I was to experience Young Innovators for the first time. I told the students how lucky they were to be at the Sky Osterley campus, with professionals who had dedicated their day to leading workshops and, in the evening, to continuing the conversation—helping to build this community and

support the newest members as they start building their networks and careers. The goal is that the connections here don't end when the evening does.

The spirit of sustained connections is what makes the program so impactful. As Polly Hickling aptly said, “Young Innovators is increasingly becoming a space where connection, visibility, and opportunity meet—helping bridge the gap between education and industry.” The U.K. Section has truly created a community of growth and belonging. What began in London has now expanded to include groups and programming in the North of England and, more recently, in Scotland, expanding the reach of SMPTE and creating new opportunities for its members across the region.

A huge thanks to Carys Hughes and Polly Hickling, who I believe are the heart and soul of Young Innovators (and who helped make sure I had my facts straight while writing this message), as well as all the many Section leaders, volunteers, and Sky employees who contributed to programming and running this event. You were all fabulous, and I can't wait to return next year!

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