

The British Broadcasting Corporation is renowned as a training ground for technicians in radio and television. Second only to the BBC is a college set in a leafy suburb between London and Kent.

Lights! looks at the place...

Where Lighting Stars Are Born

It says much about the condition of British education that what has become the UK's premier training school for TV technicians (after the BBC, that is) began life 26 years ago in a wooden shed tucked away out of sight on a college campus.

Conversely, there are some conclusions to be drawn about the current attitude of British industry. For as a result of some very generous donations of studio hardware, the same college is probably now equal to many professional television studios throughout the world.

Obviously, over the past quarter-century the world has become far more TV-minded, all of which is good news to John Lisney. John is Head of the School of Television and Broadcasting, part of Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication in the London Borough of Bromley. To him goes the lion's share of the credit for building up the school to the extent that it is now the largest department within the college.

The school is currently the focus of media attention with the recent official opening of its new purpose-built studio complex, the Howard Steel Memorial Studio (the late Howard Steel, of Sony Broadcasting fame, being one of the industry's pioneers). The total cost of the project is estimated at £8.5 million (\$14.3 million), which includes about £3 million-worth (\$5 million) of the latest equipment from manufacturers, including Strand Lighting.

Strand Lighting's input comprises a complete lighting rig for the principal studio (the

other is primarily a sound-recording studio), consisting of a Gemini 2 control desk and a full range of Quartz-color studio luminaires.

When the school started all those years ago, it was very much a subsidiary of what was then the main thrust of the College – graphic design. Now it is a household name within the industry as being second only to the BBC for the number of technicians it produces.

John Lisney, himself an ex-BBC engineer, who has also worked in industry with both Phillips and Cintel, has seen both his department and his profession grow beyond all reasonable expectations.

He explained, 'The point is that we would not be where we are now and we would not enjoy such a high reputation in the TV and broadcasting world but for the help given to us by industry. The education system just could not afford to provide the level of technical facilities we need.'

'It is to their credit that many sectors of industry now realise that it is to their advantage – and ours – for students to train on the same equipment they will come into contact with when they leave us as qualified technicians.'

'From my own point of view there is another advantage. Many of the students I taught in the early days are now managing directors or in senior management positions with TV companies or associated industries. If they happen to be buying-in a new piece of equipment they will often ask if we would like their redundant hardware. Plus, of course, the fact that I am not too shy to approach them if I think they can help us.'



All the tension and drama of live TV: 'Kent Central' goes on air.

The School has not entirely cut loose from its 'graphic' beginning for it still has 12 of its complement of about 120 students studying TV graphics.

What it can boast, however, is the fact that once a year it operates throughout an eight-hour 'day' as a fully-functional television station, Kent Central. Not only does this enable students to put into practice all they have learned throughout the academic year but also gives them a 'baptism by fire' introduction to real-life working situations. And as anyone

knows, there is no substitute for the rush of adrenalin produced by working under intense pressure.

In the early days, the school took in entrants at 16 years old, for a two-year course leading to a College Diploma. In the more prosperous days of local government, about 12 years ago, the student/staff ratio was about 7:1. Now that ratio is about 12:1. The college is now a Higher Education establishment and students can be anything from 18 to 40 years old, studying for the Higher National Diploma