

Becoming Students at UAL

‘Signing up to the intellectual project that is the course’?

Year 1 report of a 3-year longitudinal study
for the University of the Arts London

January 2014

Duna Sabri

Centre for Public Policy Research
Department of Education and Professional Studies
King’s College, London
UK

Acknowledgements

I should like to thank the students, tutors, course leaders, programme directors and deans for their time and willingness to take part in this research. Mark Crawley’s support, unrelenting encouragement and questions have been central to the development of this project. Gary Sprules and his team very helpfully provided statistical data which underpinned the design of the project and Anna Mountford-Zimdars’ statistical analysis has been invaluable. I am also grateful to Karonlina Hecker and Suzette La Pierre for their help in organising the logistics of the project.

CONTENTS

Introduction	4
The gap in attainment: framing the problem	4
Explaining the gap in attainment: current thinking	5
Research design and methodology	9
Sampling	9
Analysis	10
Findings	11
Familial contexts and early motivations	11
Conceiving and making work	17
Feedback and reception	21
Networks and working with others	24
Networks and practice prior to the course	24
Observations of segregation	25
Collaboration and competition	27
Student life: precariousness, worry and juggling acts	29
Case studies	31
David	32
Ji Wang	34
Muna	36
Nathan	38
Tamsin	40
Preliminary Conclusions	42
What next?	43
References	44

Summary

This report is based on the first year's data from a three-year longitudinal research study which explores the higher education experiences of first year undergraduate students at UAL from different ethnic backgrounds; and the interplay between these experiences and their intersected identities. The study aims eventually to illuminate statistical patterns in students' attainment, specifically, that Black and minority ethnic students are around 24% less likely than White students to gain first or upper second degrees. This research study is based on the premise that creative arts students' multi-faceted identities are intrinsic to their practice, and so seeks to understand the interplay between students' identities and experience at UAL in the expectation that such an understanding will bring about changes in taken-for-granted practices that underlie the gap in attainment.

Prevalent perceptions about the attainment gap are explored and set against what is currently known about patterns of attainment from national research and analysis within UAL. For example it is often argued that the gap is explained by: socio-economic status, prior qualifications and language. The evidence is that none of these factors explain why there is a gap. There are also ongoing debates and initiatives which relate to characteristics of the institution: staff diversity and curriculum. These are currently seen as fruitful avenues of inquiry and development.

In this study of a sample of 53 students in their first year the following themes emerged as significant to the interplay between identity and experience:

There is uneven participation from different ethnic groups in the creative arts and this pattern provides the context for an analysis of familial support and its implications for material and other resources that students are able to draw upon during their time at UAL. Familial support seems to structure students' frame of mind as they set out on the first year at UAL and can have a cumulative influence and material impact as they progress. Students with unequivocal familial support were of International and home White, and mixed and other ethnicities. Students with limited or ambivalent support were predominantly of international, home, and EU Black and minority ethnic students. These generalisations are obviously not significant on the basis of these 53 students, but they are mostly consistent with the HEFCE statistics on the rates of participation in the creative arts from different ethnic groups. Familial support has to be understood in the context of the history of participation in the creative arts, and the ways in which creative arts curricula situate Black and minority ethnic cultures.

The process of conceiving and making work can be framed in terms of (i) how students find their way around a brief; (ii) the resources they draw upon, including within themselves, to make work and (iii) their interpretation and use of feedback in the course of production. Some students seemed to know instinctively in what ways it was appropriate to question the terms of reference of a brief. Others grappled with a literacy that their peers seemed to take for granted and sometimes orientated themselves piecemeal, sometimes painfully to such challenges as how to identify (and avoid) clichés and literal interpretations, how to reference other's work, navigate a course between artistic and commercial imperatives, and work out how and when their emotional and cultural selves could feed into their work. There are not clear associations to be made between different points on this spectrum and ethnicity or status (Home, EU or International).

Students vary in how they seek and interpret feedback, and in how they relate it to their own view of their work. However, courses can provide very different climates for the reception of work. Broadly speaking these may be characterised as encouraging competitiveness or collaboration: most frequently, a combination of the two in different measures. Students' experiences varied in the extent to which they felt that assessment was fair or arbitrary. The extent to which tutors are perceived to understand students' work and are able to situate their feedback within the students' own terms of reference is central to students' capacity to use feedback to develop their work.

Networks and practice that exist prior to or external to the course usually confer an advantage for students who have them. Doing a Foundation Diploma and having experience of practice on a free-lance or paid basis were the most frequent ways in which networks were established. Students with prior experience and networks tended to have more focused expectations of their courses but were also less reliant on their courses for establishing themselves as practitioners.

It is often observed that students self-segregate along ethnic lines. This phenomenon is explored and found to sit within a wider context of students coalescing into friendship groups that relate to a range of intersected identities. These friendship groups often provide early support and orientation which then enables individuals to interact with peers more widely. Collaboration and competition among students occur in different proportions in different courses. Norms of collaboration and competition tend to be internalised by students and influence informal student-initiated interaction.

As these students are just starting on their second year, it remains to be seen how significant these themes will be in the remainder of their time at UAL. Other themes will also be explored, including students' experiences of internships and industry projects.

A strategy for communicating and using these findings is outlined in the section 'What next?' It will comprise the following elements:

- i. A systematic attempt to involve tutors in debate and discussion on the findings
- ii. A forum for students to discuss research findings, with a focus on issues such as feedback, identity, collaboration and competition;
- iii. A visual output relating to the findings.

Introduction

THE GAP IN ATTAINMENT: FRAMING THE PROBLEM

There is widespread concern across the higher education (HE) sector about unequal attainment between white and black and minority ethnic (BME) students. In addition to a range of initiatives in many universities, several national agencies have commissioned research in this area: National Union of Students (2011), the (then) Department for Education and Skills (Connor et al 2004, Broecke and Nicholls 2007), and the Higher Education Academy (Singh 2011, Stevenson and Wheelan 2013). Statistical analysis at UAL shows similar patterns to the sector as a whole, and in some areas the gap is more pronounced. Although there are fluctuations within courses from year to year, the overall figures for UAL remain persistently high. In 2010/11 24% more of white students were awarded a first or upper-second class degree than were black and minority ethnic students. The figure in 2009/10 was 23%; in 2008/9 it was 29% and in 2007/8 was 18%. The foregoing figures are for home students only. The equivalent figures for international (excluding EU), and home students for the same four years are: 18%, 18%, 20% and 19% respectively.

Causes for this inequality in attainment across the sector are 'yet to be fully understood' (Singh 2011: 6). Because much of the research has been quantitative and has 'controlled' for a range of factors such as social class, familial context and prior attainment, attention has focused on institutions' roles. The concept of 'controlling' for these factors has been incisively critiqued (Gillborn 2010) as a quest to identify a 'unique net contribution of race' which is misguided because it ignores the integrated social processes that constitute education. Furthermore, Gillborn argues that prior attainment in particular is itself constructed in systematically racist contexts. The act of 'controlling' for it implies it is a characteristic intrinsic to the individual. HE is thus positioned to compound past discrimination by statistically 'wiping the slate clean'.

'Institutional racism' as a term has gained currency within HE (Law et al, 2004; Pilkington 2011). This is an illuminating, if emotive and contested, concept because it draws attention to meso-structures that are embedded over time and often become taken-for-granted non-discursive practice. However, little is known about how institutional racism plays out in the day-to-day experience of students. Moreover, the emphasis placed on institutional racism seems to be borne out of an elimination of 'other factors' rather than an empirically evidenced conclusion. This study addresses institutional or meso-structures but does not make the assumptions associated with the term 'institutional racism'.

A growing number of researchers are drawing attention to curricula as an under-researched aspect of HE's relationship with social equality, and it seems to be potentially a site of exclusion in HE (Quinn 2006). As Clegg (2011: 99) argues, curriculum development in recent years has been dominated by the idea of 'relevance' and the employability agenda. At the same time, there has been a proliferation of applied and industry-related courses within institutions that attract students from lower socio-economic classes. This shift in the nature of curricula in some parts of HE exacerbates the considerable inequalities between student experiences at different institutions and in different courses. At UAL, it may be that these inequalities are mirrored within the University between different discipline areas and between colleges. The implication that Clegg draws from her argument is that highly context-dependent curricula can limit students' scope for intellectual development and close down the possibilities for students to fulfil their future potential. Dewey is concerned with precisely this point when he warns of the possibility that experience may well result in the narrowing of

conditions for subsequent learning (1938/1997: 37). Researching the curriculum seems to offer fruitful ways of understanding students' experiences (Sabri 2011 b) and the inequalities that underlie differential attainment patterns. The potential for curricula to exacerbate social equality is already a focus for research at school level (e.g. Sullivan, Zimdars et al., 2010) and is beginning to be addressed within HE (Shay 2013; Mclean et al 2012).

Previous research within art and design HE has drawn attention to the exclusion and misrecognition that are embedded in conceptions of 'worth' and 'potential' that can come into play in admissions processes (Burke and McManus 2009). At the end of their report Burke and McManus urge HE art and design institutions to investigate whether the patterns of interaction that they observed within admissions were present also in curricula and pedagogic practices. Within UAL institutional research analysing student departure and persistence (Sabri 2010a) and students' responses to the National Students Survey (Sabri 2010b) points to the need to explore particular sites of students' experience: curriculum, peer interaction and opportunities to make use of links with industry.

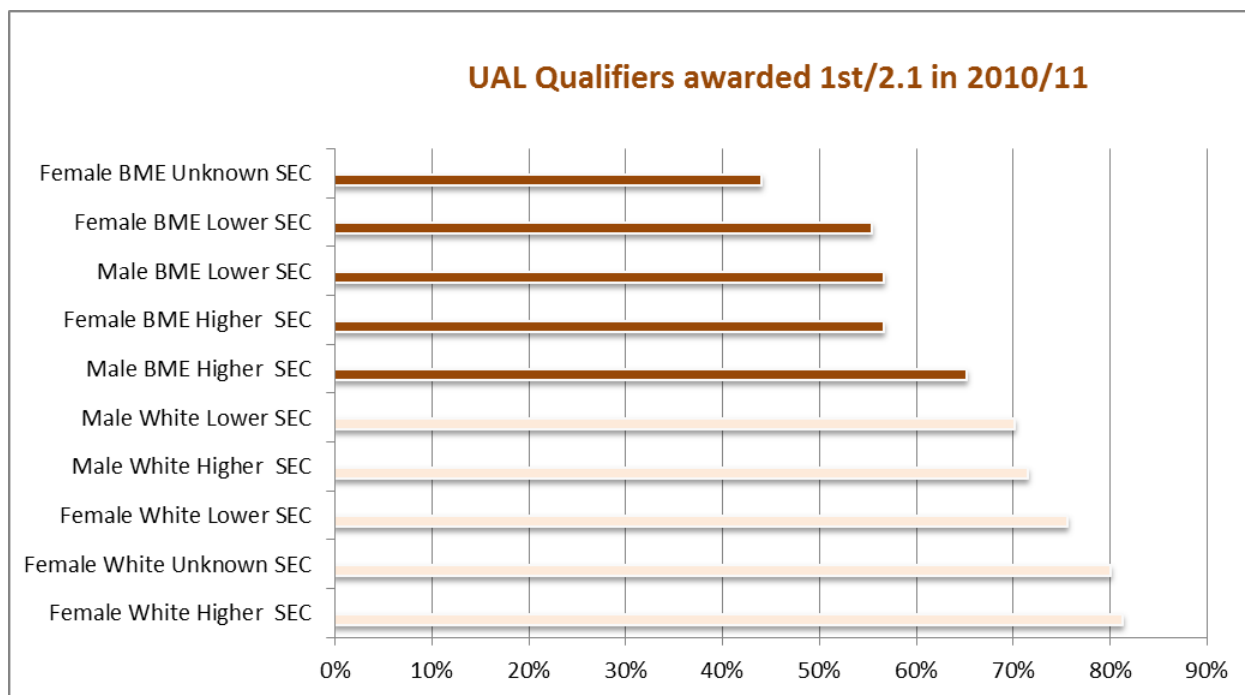
EXPLAINING THE GAP IN ATTAINMENT: CURRENT THINKING

At the inception of this project in the Summer of 2012 consultative discussions were held with deans, programme directors, and course leaders. Later in the year first year tutors were interviewed, as part of the fieldwork. This report does not include a systematic analysis of those interviews. This section briefly explores some of the observations and initial thoughts that have been expressed in these discussions about the gap in attainment between White and Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) students. These prevalent perceptions are then set against what is currently known about patterns of attainment in UAL. I draw on the statistical report by Anna Mountford-Zimdars (December 2013) which accompanies this report, annual reports provided by the University Central Planning Unit (UCPU), the work of the UAL Diversity team, and Shades of Noir and the work of Aisha Richards and Terry Finnigan.

Knowledge of the attainment gap was widespread among deans and to some extent programme directors, less so among course leaders and tutors. Some were surprised, dismayed and sometimes upset at the extent of the attainment gap – especially at its persistence over many years. All were keenly interested in understanding the causes of this unequal pattern of attainment. They were open to exploring possibilities in their own context, and without exception, willing to facilitate the research.

Socio-economic status

It is often believed that socio-economic status (SES) explains the attainment gap between White and BME students. At national level Broeke and Nicholls (2007: 18) establish that the probability of obtaining a First or Upper Second degree increases, the lower a student's index of multiple deprivation (IMD), based on postcodes. They point out that IMD is not the same as SES but there is overlap between them. They used IMD because it had greater explanatory power and there was less data for SES (2007: 14). After controlling for IMD and many other factors such as prior attainment and disability they conclude that there still an unexplained difference between White and BME students. Within UAL, the following graph illustrates the correlation between attainment and the intersected effects of ethnicity, SES and gender.



The graph above suggests that the effect of ethnicity seems to have a more powerful structuring effect on attainment than either SEC or gender.

Prior attainment

Many tutors observed that what frequently distinguished students who were awarded relatively high marks from those awarded relatively low marks is their prior educational attainment and the nature of students' prior education. In particular, whether a student had come with a Foundation Diploma in art and design as opposed to A-level or equivalent qualifications seemed to be significant.

At a national level Broecke and Nichols (2007) and Richardson (2008) have established that the effects of prior qualifications are only partly responsible for explaining the gap in attainment. UAL UCPU's analysis (Achievement Report 2010-11) on highest entry qualifications, in the table below, shows the percentage of students within each prior qualification group who attained a First or Upper second degree:

Foundation Studies in Art and Design (FAD)	72%
other level 3 qualifications and above (includes all Higher Education qualifications)	70%
qualifications below level 3 (including mature students and students with no formal qualifications)	67%

The variation in achievement by prior attainment seems slight in comparison to the explanatory power that is often accorded to it in discussions of the attainment gap between White and BME students. It appears from the sample of this study that students with FAD are more concentrated in some courses and subject areas than others and so it may be fruitful to look at the effect of prior attainment in more detail within subject areas.

Language

Particularly when discussing the persistence of the pattern of inequality not only among home students but also among international students, tutors often speculated on the possibility that language proficiency played a part. Most national research in this area pertains to home UK students only and language is not investigated. Within UAL an analysis was recently undertaken (Mountford-Zimdars 2013: table 2, reproduced below) that compared status within each ethnic group. The limitation of this analysis, of course, is that status is not a perfect proxy for language proficiency. Nevertheless, the results, from data over five years (2007-12) are thought-provoking. While for some ethnic groups the gap in attainment between home and International students is some 10%, for Chinese students the difference is barely 5%, and within some subject groupings Chinese international students outperform Chinese home students. The gap for Home and International Mixed ethnicity students is similarly small. It is not possible to make a similar comparison for Black students because the numbers of International Black students is too small. However, it is notable that the probability of attaining a first or upper second degree for home Black students is below that for all international groups. These observations suggest that language is a poor predictor of attainment.

Status and ethnicity	All subjects
Home White	72.8
EU White	70.8
EU Refused	70
EU Mixed	68.3
International White	62.6
Home Mixed	57
Home Refused	56.8
International Refused	55.9
International Mixed	52.8
Home Other	52.5
Home, Indian, Bangladeshi, Pakistani	51.8
Home Chinese	48.9
International Other	48.4
International Chinese	43.1
International, Indian, Bangladeshi, Pakistani	40
Home Black*	39.6

Staff diversity

A few course leaders were uneasy about the extent to which their course teams reflected the diversity among their students. Many were attentive to the need for gender diversity and had taken steps to ensure a balanced gender representation within course teams, among ALs and guest speakers. Less prevalent, but nevertheless present, was an interest in the ethnic diversity of course and programme teams. The benefits to diversity were seen in terms of ensuring there were 'role models', with whom students could identify; and second in terms of a global knowledge of art and design contexts and practices (more on this in the paragraphs below).

At UAL these concerns with staff diversity are being directly addressed in *'en>route'*, a programme of initiatives, led by Tili Andoh, University Diversity Adviser, that aims to attract, develop and support professionals from under-represented Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds to navigate careers in arts higher education. It comprises three strands: developing an inclusive culture that builds momentum behind the aims of *en>route*; recruitment and career progression; and staff development.

Curriculum

'Some students never really sign up to the intellectual project that is the course': in this pithy observation one tutor encapsulates two fundamental truths. The first is that all course curricula constitute a particular view of what it means to be a practitioner: graphic designer; artist; fashion designer; journalist; curator. They all impart some notion of 'an implied student' (Ulriksen 2007). The second truth is that not all students comply with this intellectual and creative project: of these some accurately comprehend it, explicitly or tacitly, and choose not to participate in it, others do not make sense of it at all.

Some tutors seemed to be taken aback at the suggestion that their curricula were historically and culturally situated; and may be somewhat Euro-centric. Others were highly conscious of the extent to which their views of 'graphic design', 'fashion' or 'art' were contestable and very much constructed by their own class, race, ethnicity and situated experiences or their own practice. Several talked about how often the examples they used with students were not only UK-specific but London-specific. There were also accounts of discussion and debate within course teams that seem to have taken place for some years.

The work undertaken by Aisha Richards and Terry Finnigan as joint lead tutors on the module: Inclusive Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, offered through CLTAD's Academic Practice Provision, reveals a range of contexts in which tutors across UAL have engaged with issues of race and ethnicity within their curricula (e.g. discussing 'Whiteness' among photography students) and started to change the delivery and the resources available within their course. In addition, these discussions link to UAL's support and inclusion of Shades of Noir <http://www.shadesofnoir.org.uk/>, a programme of events and resources that promotes change through raising the profile and level of debate on equality in art and design higher education.

Research design and methodology

This research deploys qualitative methods of interviewing and observation to illuminate historically persistent statistical patterns of inequality in attainment. Alongside longitudinal qualitative fieldwork, statistical analysis of the UAL population of undergraduate students over five years is being explored in the light of emerging insights from the qualitative data. The aim, ultimately, is to establish a relationship between the qualitative and quantitative data sets. This work is in progress but an interim statistical analysis is produced alongside this report.

At the start of the fieldwork discussions were held with Deans and Programme Directors of each of the case study courses. The researcher took along statistics which showed the attainment of students by ethnicity over three years within the sampled courses, comparisons with same discipline courses in other colleges, and with UAL as a whole. These discussions explored staff's interpretations, experiences and observations. First year tutors were also interviewed primarily to brief the researcher about the curricular environment and pedagogic purposes within the case study courses. There was also an attempt to explore with tutors what issues might underlie the gap in attainment, drawing upon their day-to-day experiences and observations.

Students were interviewed twice in the first year. The first interview addressed how they came to be on their course, their motivations, expectations, and initial impressions of life as students. The second interview reflected upon certain points from the first. In addition, the students brought a piece of work upon which they had received tutor feedback. We discussed how the work was conceived and made, its reception by tutors and others, and their reflections upon that reception.

SAMPLING

A total of eleven course groups are taking part in the study from all four UAL colleges. They come from three subject areas: graphic design; fashion and text-based subjects. There are at least two courses from each college, and in each sampled subject area. They were chosen to represent a range within UAL: small and large cohorts, with differing student profiles and college environments.

Approximately 70% of incoming students from these course groups were cluster-sampled and invited to take part in the study. Respondents were sent a further summary of the project and invited for their first interview. Most first interviews took place in September/October 2012, and the remainder during the Autumn term. During this interview there was further discussion of the project and consent forms were signed. Second interviews took place in June/July 2013. The letter of invitation, participant information sheet, consent form and questions for first and second interviews are available on request.

A total of 53 students have participated in the study. The largest group of students, at 25, came from graphic design, 17 from fashion, and 11 from the text-based subjects. There are between 3 and 8 students from each course. The largest ethnic group is of 19 White students; 10 are Asian (Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi); 9 are Chinese (including Singapore, Hong Kong); 8 are Black (African and Caribbean); and a further 7 are from other Asian and mixed ethnicities (a wide-ranging group that includes Middle Eastern, Central and South American, Japanese, Thai, amongst others). There are 32 UK home students, 13 international students and 8 EU students. Their ages ranged from 18 to 30. A total of 10 students were lesbian, gay or bi-sexual. One student declined to give information on ethnicity and sexual orientation.

First generation entrants to higher education numbered 18 and the remaining 35 students had at least one parent with experience of higher education either within the UK or elsewhere. Three students had mobility disabilities, one a sensory disability, and an indeterminate number had dyslexia (many were in the process of being screened).

ANALYSIS

The analysis strategy is informed by an awareness that research in this field has been dominated by: (i) quantitative analyses which show recurring patterns over more than a decade; and (ii) qualitative analyses which interview students and/or staff, typically on a one-off basis. Because these strands of research have been pursued separately it is difficult to piece together an inter-play *between structure and agency*. The ambition of this longitudinal study is to develop an iterative relationship between a range of qualitative and quantitative data sets which include: observation notes, artefacts, interview transcripts, participant validation, and national and institutional statistics. The aim is to describe the mechanisms through which students come to be assessed as having attained better or worse degree results.

The premise of the qualitative analysis is that the researcher does not have direct access to the experiences of research participants:

When talking about their lives, people lie sometimes, forget a lot, exaggerate, become confused, and get things wrong. Yet, they are revealing truths. These truths don't reveal the past "as it actually was" aspiring to a standard of objectivity. They give us instead the truths of our experiences...neither open to proof nor self-evident. We come to understand then only through interpretation, paying careful attention to the contexts that shape their creation and to the world views that inform them. (The Personal Narratives Group 1989: 261, quoted in Riessman 2002)

Student interviews are being subjected to two analytic processes. The first is to summarise each students' transcripts into a narrative case study. Producing this is essentially an interpretive process of delineating what constitutes 'the most salient' aspects of students' first year experience. The researcher draws upon observation notes and tutor interviews as well as the overall purpose of the project. These case studies are being sent to the students as a form of participant validation. The second analytic process is to code the interview transcripts using a combination of low inference codes (e.g. 'application process', 'family'), and higher inference codes such as, 'identity reflections', and 'reputation'.

In this report quotes are attributed to an interview number followed by demographic information. Students' anonymity is regarded as paramount to ensuring that there is no possible effect on their relationships with staff. Where identification is deemed possible, incidental details have been altered or demographic information omitted.

Findings

FAMILIAL CONTEXTS AND EARLY MOTIVATIONS

Understanding the familial support enjoyed by different students entails putting it in a social and historical context. In particular it is worth noting that of all the students who participate in higher education around 11% enter the creative arts (HESA 2011-12). When we break this down by ethnic group we find that there is wide variation:

Students' ethnic group	
Mixed and other	12.3%
White	11.7%
Black	10.4%
Chinese	9.6%
Indian and other Asian	4.8%
Pakistani and Bangladeshi	2.8%
	HEFCE 2010/13: for 2002-3 UK entrants

This uneven participation from different ethnic groups elicits the question: how are the creative arts historically and socially situated in different ethnic groups? And conversely, how do the creative arts situate different ethnic groups? The first of these questions is explored in this section and the second is addressed below in the section on 'conceiving and making work'.

With respect to the first question, and based on these statistics, which relate to Home students only, it is possible to speculate that students from some ethnic groups – notably mixed and other, White and Black - are more likely than Asian students to come from familial contexts where higher education in the creative arts is valued, supported and experienced. We do not at present have the equivalent statistics for international students.

In the sample within this study we can see a pattern of differential familial support among the students. The qualitative data in this instance both explain and nuance the statistical pattern. The questions to be pursued in the qualitative analysis that follows are:

- What kinds of familial support are there?
- What does lack of support look like?
- What characterises the different kinds of familial support or lack of support that students talk about?
- How do students regard this support or lack of support? How do they evaluate it and what is its emotional impact?

Both some home and international students observed that the creative arts were not held in high esteem in their home contexts:

[As] for my family, my father was not very supportive because I think it's a cultural thing, because in Singapore it's very focussed on achievements, property, marriage, money, things like that, which I felt was not very important to me. I think it's the whole Maslow's hierarchy of needs. I've met all my needs, so I just need self-actualisation. So my Dad, maybe he didn't have that when he was younger, so for me, I just felt that life was more than that, so I told him I really want to study and he said no, if you want to study, then you work for it, and that's what I did.

[S05 - Male Chinese international student]

Well, because I come from a family that... they were interested in being a doctor, nurse, or lawyer... I always had an interest in fashion... when I saw my mum going to parties, I always analysed, why is she wearing this or why is she wearing that? Is it to describe her personality, is it to describe what she's feeling at that moment in time, or, is it really to match what she... her body shape? ... My family, still to this day, don't like the fact that I'm doing fashion. ... my Mum's backing me because she's like, 'I'm nearly 50 and I don't know what I want to be'.
[S95 - Female Black Caribbean home student]

Yes, they're not... my dad's an IT technician and my mum's an admin worker in a hospital, so they're not really in any specialist career, or... they're not in a creative career, anyway. Yes, so, in terms of them helping me with the actual creative side of things, they couldn't do much because they don't really know about it, which is fine but they were there to actually say, 'just do what you want'. Because a lot of people don't have that, I guess, especially in my area. It's quite an Asian area and, obviously, in general, they all go into academic subjects, or there's a kind of stigma against the arts.
[S02 – Male Asian Other home student]

As the second and third of the quotes above illustrate it is often the case that when one or more member of a students' family offers support, they often do so against the grain. There is tension and conflict to various extents which of course have emotional and potentially practical consequences for the students, as we will see when these contexts of limited support are compared with unequivocal familial support. Another common feature of this limited form of support is that it often entails a resigned stance in which the student is allowed to 'do whatever makes you happy'. It seems to mark a point of departure from the family's expectations but there is also acceptance. This form of support is occasioned by the process of making a choice and it stops at that point: that is its value is brief, it allows the student to begin a course but it does not sustain the student beyond that point.

The two quotes that follow demonstrate how support can also be limited by a family's lack of understanding, as perceived by the student, of the nature of the subject being studied:

My parents are not in fashion design but my grandparents, they are tailors. So, I guess maybe I have some potential since I'm young. They made a lot of clothes for me and I think that's important, if your family have influence on you. Even though they are not from design but they have some influence on me.

And do they support or encourage you in any way in what you're doing?

Actually, because they are really old tailors, when I told them I'm going to study fashion design they just said, 'oh, that's really great, I have a grandchild who can do the same things with us too', but they don't understand the differences between tailoring and design. So, I don't think they encouraged me to do it, they're just really happy I did some job relative to them. And my parents...they don't want to let me go. So, that's why, before I came here, we have a lot of arguing and I had to convince them I really want to study here, it's really expensive here,... To be honest, it's a little guilty to use your parents' money to study. So, I feel a little guilty.
[S76 - Female Chinese international student]

My dad was a bit taken aback, but he was not unwelcoming; and he was like, 'whatever you... I think I see you more in that'. So, yes, it was okay. My Mum was more... she was like, are you sure you want to do this? Because the thing is, in an Indian background or any other background, the most famous degrees are medicine and business or engineering. Those are the most... people say, 'oh, they pay the most', and they didn't know what [this course] was exactly... They were confused, so I had to explain it to them, so that was a bit hard... But they were like, do whatever you want; as long as you're happy, it's fine, so that was nice, yes.
[S91 - Female Asian EU student]

What is evident here is how hard students find it to explain the nature of the courses they are undertaking in the creative arts. This difficulty is inextricable from the financial investment that is being made. In the first of the two quotes above, in particular, we see the emotional burden that the student carries: not only is she hard-pushed to convince her family of the meaning of what she is doing, she is also dealing with the pressure of demonstrating its value in financial terms.

Conversely, even when parents have first-hand experience of the creative arts, they can still be ambivalent in their support:

Well, my mum did graphic design so it's always been around me and I've always had an interest in it. I've always been designing...

And did she advise you?

No, she advised me not to. She wanted me to... I don't know, I think with parents they just expect you to have higher aspirations than them and do better than them so me doing the same path as her she didn't like the sound of it. But it's what I enjoy doing. I told her that that's what I enjoy doing so I'm going to go for it.

And is she supportive now?

Yes. I told her that I can fall back on my ASs and progress in them if I need to; hopefully not because I do want to stay in graphic design.

[S55 -Male Black Caribbean home student]

The quote above is particularly interesting in that it demonstrates how ambivalent support has a long-term function in testing the student's resilience: doubt remains as to whether the choice they have made is the 'right one'.

There were also some examples of students who did not have active parental support but had benefited from support from siblings who had preceded them into the creative arts or into higher education in other subjects. These examples are interesting in that they demonstrate how support can be constructed in the absence of a history of a more long-standing familiarity with the creative arts in UK higher education.

Some of the features of unequivocal support are demonstrated in the following quotation:

My mum came with me to the interviews and stuff. She's, like, 'might as well get a little holiday to London'. So it was just nice. But no, my mum is supportive and everything, but she didn't say, 'you should go there', or 'you shouldn't go there'. ...

Are their backgrounds in different subjects or related?

My mum used to do... She did, when she was younger, she did lots of art and everything... And then she became [a professional in an unrelated field]. ..My Dad paints... Our walls are covered with design work and everything, like our halls and everything. He's good. It was always obvious to everyone that I wanted to do [fashion]. Like on my first day of school, ...first thing I said to my teacher was that I liked her dress. I don't remember that, but my Mum told me, and it was like, 'oh, okay'. And she was like, 'so, from then we knew.'

[S72 -Male White home student]

There is practical support here in the parent's presence when he travelled to interviews and there is experience and appreciation of the creative arts in the family as a whole. Moreover, there is a sense of security in the choice that is being made, the implication in 'So from then we knew' is that this student is destined to design and is recognised as such from an early age. The following quotations demonstrate these components of less ambivalent familial support:

And then I just started making clothes because I saw some... I always had a problem wearing clothes that didn't match my identity, and I couldn't afford the clothes I thought did. So, I first made a ... jacket, and my Mum helped me, and that got me hooked and I just started making my own clothes.

Is she in some way connected to fashion?

Sort of, she teaches textiles at [College]. But she's not connected to my idea of fashion. She's connected to helping me achieve what I want to achieve, so she tries to help me sew a little bit. Mostly, it's just nurturing me.

[S84 - Male home student, ethnicity not given]

[My family members] know that I'm really busy and obviously my mum sees me quite regularly if she's waiting for me at home. She's helped sew some buttons on my shirt project. She thinks it's brilliant that I'm doing it and she knows that it's mentally hard and that I'm busy. I love, even though it's hard and stressful, I think I've been there from 8:30 in the morning till ten o'clock at night, in the studio, for three solid weeks. But you do see no light of day or don't have contact with your friends out of it; I really just love it so it's a bitter-sweet kind of thing.

[S21 -Female White, mixed ethnicity, home student]

I haven't a member of my family who's been to Art College or done a creative subject at university... but my mum is quite creative, and my grandfather was an artist. I guess, with the creativity I was supported. I was told it didn't matter what I would do, I would be supported 100%. I've got a lot of friends that do creative work, and they are doing quite well for themselves, but no one does design, so it's quite nice because we can feed off each other, in different mediums....I was speaking to my Mum, earlier, regarding the whole [college] matter and she was saying, at the end of the day these people are going to be your competition. After the three year degree, you're going to be sitting in an interview room and there's going to be someone you've been at college with for the last three years, and it's you or them gets the job. It almost sounds quite selfish, but at the end of the day, there are some things you've got to keep to yourself and that's the way you do it in independent work, as opposed to the group work briefs, I guess. You kind of hold it to yourself...

[S33 - Male White home student]

Well, I've always loved doing anything creative, anything arty. I come from quite an arty background. My Dad's... he's an art teacher and he does it in his spare time, and my Mum, she's actually a teacher, but she went to art college as well, and she's more into textiles and ceramics. And my Grandma's really into ceramics, so yes, I've always grown up just doing things, but always been encouraged to do anything creative, whether that be reading or painting or anything just really fun; I always loved it.

[S43 - Female White home student]

Practical help in the course of the students' study can take many forms (including childcare, practical assistance for example in providing materials), and the opportunity to talk in some detail about day-to-day happenings. The presence and involvement that this kind of support entails has a long duration, potentially throughout the students' time at UAL.

It is interesting to note that those students who enjoyed this kind of support often tended to down-play its significance – as some of the quotes above demonstrate. Students with more limited familial support tended to emphasise how fortunate they were in comparison to their peers who may not even benefit from the accepting stance of their own parents.

Within the sample in this study, students with unambivalent familial support were of White and mixed and other ethnicities. If the speculation that students from communities with relatively high participation in the creative arts receive a high degree of familial support, one would expect Black students to be among this group. With such a small sample of Black students it is hard to say if this is significant but it is worth noting that those Black students whose parents did have experience of the creative arts, did not seem to regard their experience in a positive light and advised their children accordingly. Students with limited or ambivalent support were predominantly of international students and home and EU Black and minority ethnic students. These generalisations are obviously not significant on the basis of

these 53 students, but they are mostly consistent with the HEFCE statistics quoted at the start of this section.

Students were asked to trace their motivation for the subject they had chosen to study. Students differed in the nature of their motivation and its longevity according to the subject area. Fashion design students, and to a slightly lesser degree graphic design students, almost always recounted childhood interests and predilections:

My Mum always bought these housewife fashion magazines, like Glamour and ... all these, and they had runway specials twice a year... like, little extra booklets. And I always liked them ...Because I grew up in a village and it was this world far away, I liked it. ...then I got ... internet access and became a member of fashion forums and blogs that had scans of magazines. Then started buying magazines and then I was bored by magazines and then I started designing because I didn't like a lot of fashion that was popular at the time. ...It was never really a question if I would do it professionally, or not. I just did it. [S11 Male White EU student]

As the quote above illustrates students often saw their choice as 'the only choice' or so obvious that choice was never really made. There were two students, both international, who recounted how they had never chosen the subject they were studying because others had made the choice for them. One was a fashion design student who had been encouraged to apply on the basis that she was thought to have a particular talent for fashion design but she saw her aim during the year as 'trying to fall in love with fashion' and by the end of the year she had resolved to 'persist'. The other student had been encouraged by a parent who saw graphic design as preferable to the student's other interests in the performing arts. This student seemed content with the choice that had been made for her.

For other students the process of realising a future in the creative arts can be bound up with the development of other aspects of their social and sexual identities:

I was 12 ...but I think I always knew; I just couldn't put the pieces to the puzzle together. I think when I was 12 I finally found that last piece... I think at the time I began to know more about my sexuality. I began to discover more, you know, accepting that I was gay. And I think I was always fascinated by the body. Also my Mum was always into style and I always watched her sew. And so I thought I liked this idea how you can wear art; so this whole idea that you can wear art, I thought it was amazing because not only can you paint it and do it on a canvas or on a board or in mud, I don't know, but you can actually wear it. So I guess that's where I got into the whole fashion. [S23 Male White international student]

There were also students who had a broad interest in art and design – for example often moving between fine art and graphic design – and had only just settled on a particular subject within their creative practice. Completion of a Foundation Diploma of course often played a part in helping students to make these choices. The narratives of art and design practice since early childhood serve a variety of functions: they sometimes give students 'evidence' of innate talent; they justify their choices after the event; they re-enforce familial support (as we saw above); and they serve to strengthen the students' identity as 'practitioner'.

In contrast students of the text-based courses tended to have more generic interests having identified 'writing' as a strength and journalism or other forms of communication as a means of pursuing particular interests: sport, current affairs, music and entertainment, or fashion:

I love music so much and as a journalist, I feel like you get to convey a message that a lot of people don't hear. And I kind of feel that music, especially the kind of music I like ...there's a lot of poetry and there's a lot of social commentary in it. And I think my role as a journalist, I want

to show that. You know what, this is a deep art form and it's a serious art form as well... So I really want to get that across, that's what I'd like to do. [S61 – Female Black Home student]

What excites me? It's current affairs and it is everything, do you know what I mean, it's the truth of the story and the facts behind it and maybe a story's not true but it's something that everyone has to know. Growing up in my family it was something that when you watch the news in the morning it just fascinated me and you watch events. When I go on holiday it's never to Ibiza or Malaga and stuff, it's India and China and to Tiananmen Square, I don't know, it's a weird thing to explain, but it's just something I got nurtured into when I was young and loved it ever since.[S63 Male, mixed ethnicity, home student]

Students from the text-based courses were far more likely to have started a BA in another subject elsewhere before settling on their current courses. Indeed one of the few students for whom this was a first university course ended the year by leaving to go to another institution.

Motivation for a subject is sometimes intertwined with perceptions of a college reputation. There is a belief that a particular college environment will help a student realise who she or he is to become. So there is a close identification with what are perceived to be characteristic ways of thinking and being at particular colleges.

So, I went for the interview in January and I got in and I was really, really happy because I felt that I needed to get to CSM. If I did not, I would lose my soul. So I wanted to put myself in an environment where I'm completely like vulnerable and not knowing what to do, because I know CSM is very focussed on the design part instead of the marketing and commercial part. It's more about inculcating and shaping your inner artistry, and that's why I really wanted to learn more and grow more. [S05 Male Chinese international student]

The making, the craftsmanship, and the finishing... by doing that I can achieve perfection through that, even though the design's not that nice but I can perfect the garment and LCF because it's a course where they balance design and craftsmanship...[S83 Chinese Male international student]

The above quotes demonstrate how students situate themselves in relation to the reputations of different colleges. Some feel that if only they could go to a particular college, they would be able to fulfil their potential. Others are able to disassociate their own agency from college identities:

I'm not scared of my affiliations. I've always had the confidence in what I can do, but then my confidence in other people to think outside of where I studied, yes. So, there's this myth: If you go here, you make it, [of] which naturally I would be wary. [S84 Male, ethnicity not given, home]

Others seemed sceptical about how reputations are produced and observed how their significance can change in relation to students' experience:

For LCC, for producing good design. I know of ... some of the people that went there... I think LCC has hype about it, certainly my foundation course... I think about five of us got into LCC which is a big thing. It was just a hype, I remember, in that classroom we were all, yes, LCC is great, it's just producing some of the best design and we didn't really know what we were talking about we just thought, let's go there because it's cool and seemingly good at doing what it does. It's the designy bit.... It's the designy headquarters of UAL as we saw it and so we followed in that suit. [S42 Male White home student]

As students go through their first year, a few made observations about what they saw as different levels of resource at different colleges. For example,

And I also think my problem with UAL, you could clearly see that they pump all their money into CSM and other more prestigious parts of the... But Central Saint Martins is obviously their most prestigious college, so I think the large bulk of the money UAL have goes towards that, and then the others are just left to deal with it because our facilities are nothing compared to what CSM have. They have books that I need ... but not at LCC, so I've got to go to Kings Cross and get these books which is just dumb. Does that sound fair? [S65 Female Black home student]

Familial support, motivation for the subject, and college reputation seem to structure students' frame of mind as they set out on the first year of study at UAL. At one extreme, there may be a student who has joined late and is still wondering whether she 'made the right choice' and worrying about it. At the other end of the range are students who not only hit the ground running within the course but are already focused on their future selves: for example one student on her way to London to take up her place at UAL had happened to sit near a person who worked for a well-known artist and was in a position to arrange an internship for her. Interaction was possible because the student already thought of herself as a practitioner. It is difficult to imagine a similar conversation taking place with a more ambivalent student.

CONCEIVING AND MAKING WORK

In their second interview students were asked to bring a piece of work to show and discuss with the researcher. The purpose of this discussion was to extend the usual parameters of the interview method as 'story-telling' and give the students a means of particularising their experience of conceiving and making work, and responding to its reception among peers and tutors. It is worth noting that the analysis that follows is not informed by an expertise in the subjects of study that the students are pursuing. It does not attempt assessments of the work, nor does it situate the students' work in knowledge of the range of work that students in these courses produce.

Perhaps what was most noticeable in the second interviews was the enthusiasm and confidence with which many students talked about their work. Many students who had been fairly reticent in the first interview could hardly contain their fervour and were clearly immersed in the work they had made or produced. Even students that were disenchanted with their course or hampered by illness had found ways of sustaining their practice through external collaborations and drawing on their networks outside of the course.

The process of conceiving and making, for the purposes of this analysis, can be framed in terms of (i) how students find their way around a brief; (ii) the resources they draw upon, including within themselves, to make work and (iii) their interpretation and use of feedback in the course of production.

Students' fluency in interpreting a brief seemed to vary widely. Some students seemed to know instinctively in what ways it was appropriate to question the terms of reference of a brief. They would describe the brief in some detail, noting its most salient points, and then question its parameters in order to produce what they saw as something 'distinctive', drawing on their past interests, experiences and even present emotional struggles to do so. Others grappled with a literacy that their peers seemed to take for granted and sometimes orientated themselves piecemeal, sometimes painfully to such challenges as how to identify (and avoid) clichés, how to reference other's work, navigate a course between artistic and commercial imperatives, and work out how and when their emotional and cultural selves could feed into

their work. There are not clear associations to be made between different points on this spectrum and ethnicity or status.

The following quote describes how one student comes to realise what the tutor means when she talks about taking inspiration from a film:

She really liked the fact, yes, I think she liked the idea of taking it philosophically rather than literally, because in previous projects what I used to do before was if it's a film then you look at the film and you find interesting details or finishes, or a dress, and you just copy it and mix it; whereas here, we took the approach and the process and the thoughts [from the film]. [S 74 Female, White other ethnicity, Home student]

As well as demonstrating an aspect of the literacy described above, this quotation exemplifies the extent to which students pay attention to what tutors 'like'. Much depends on their capacity to come to an understanding not only of what one tutor 'likes' but also how they vary; and, as the forthcoming analysis shows, they must also be able to relate these likes to their own sense of 'good' design or communication.

In some courses, some students tended to idealise tutors and their capacities as connoisseurs. In these instances tutors were often described simultaneously as 'amazing' and 'scary'. In this example, the student is referring to a piece of work brought in by a stage 3 student:

...this guy brought in a jacket that looked pretty simple.. but it was so beautifully made. The stitches were all just perfect, and [tutor]'s eyes just opened. They were beaming, and he said, 'look how beautiful this is. You can see that's so perfect. It's almost like a machine made it. Oh, my God!' And he just kept staring at it so passionately. I feel like he really immerses himself into quality, and beautiful quality, so that inspires me, I think even in my life too, just to really understand exquisite taste. [S23 Male White international student]

A few students were interviewed for the first time a few weeks into the term and so it was possible to compare their experiences of interpreting briefs at the start and end of the year. The following student demonstrates the kind of development in fluency that can take place:

...I talked to a British girl in my group and I said 'I need a talk, could you help me?' And she was really patient and told me. I was too sad yesterday night and I can't come out [with an] idea for the ...design. ... because the thoughts of Chinese and the British are very different ...so I try to do it better and again and again ... because I can't understand the requirement, so I did it wrongly. And I cancelled the design and I tried to do the design again. And yesterday when I saw the paper from the school, I found my design isn't suitable for the requirements so I cancelled it again and do it again until four o'clock [in the morning]....I'm afraid my idea is not creative enough and I'm afraid my work didn't reach the requirements because I can't understand all of the requirements. And I don't know where to... how can I get help. I don't know what's the custom of teaching of the teachers and the methods of study. [S75 Female Chinese international student]

By the second interview this student was saying:

... I want to do the designs I want, I really want and I want to take a risk to do something creative so maybe I ignore the grades, but I really care about the grade. It's important anyway... but now I can understand all of the handbook, [it happened] just gradually. Yes, and I can understand better even than some [British] students... because they often ask me 'what's the meaning of this word?'

Relationships with tutors were intrinsic to such developments. The student above talked about a combination of working very hard but also persistently and regularly seeking guidance to sustain her development. In another instance the development in the relationship with the tutor seemed to revolve around the dominance of stereo-types in an initial interaction which the student was able to challenge as time went on.

During a crit of work early on in the first term, the student recounted how the tutor seemed to take the time to have a meaningful exchange with the European students about their work, and in contrast seemed less attentive to the work of the Chinese and Korean students. They felt unable to give an account of their work that fitted with his implicit expectations. The tutor seemed to have a fixed idea of what their work should be and how they should talk about it. It felt to this particular student that the Chinese and Korean students had to do more, and work harder to make their work understood because the tutor was not interested in making sense of their work with them. By the end of the year this student had the following update:

It's not that bad now.. I know his style, he knows my style and he teaches me some things. I ask him questions and we are gradually getting better. [S12 Female Chinese International student]

An important aspect of responding to a brief is of course the nature and extent of the conversations that a student has about it with tutors in the early stages. Many students recounted how such conversations served as a catalyst for their development:

I knew what I wanted to do, but my tutor told me not to do it and start over again and go in a direction that I would not have ... try something new and not play safe and do something I wouldn't have done and not care about it if it would go wrong. So I really felt like I risked a lot just doing something I would never have done. I chose to work with [an industrial material] and I was just not inspired at all in the beginning. But then halfway through I just got really into it, and my tutor started liking it, the garment. And the end results turned out so amazing; I never thought it would go that well.

This student was steered away from focusing on familiar themes that focused on her emotional and personal life. This was a student who seemed to invest a great deal in tutor's initial response to her ideas. Asked whether what makes an idea a good one was a bit of a mystery, she answered:

In the beginning it is a little bit of a mystery because the beginning is always a bit slow because you have to think, do a lot of thinking and then you haven't been talking about your ideas with someone like a tutor. But after it's all confirmed and checked and you've been told it's okay, then it kind of floats more. But yes, maybe it's a mystery when you don't know what you're doing, like I didn't know with this project where the tutor just sends you in a new direction. [S14 Female Asian other EU student]

There were other instances where there seemed to be gradations of tension between what the tutor thought was an appropriate or fruitful idea and the students' instinct. In one instance a student was responding to a brief to produce a visual outcome that represented an aspect of her identity. This was a home minority ethnic student who had lived experience of two very different cultures and wanted to produce work that explored 'that clash':

I was still thinking of doing the dual culture thing and doing something related to British culture and [minority ethnic] culture together, but the feedback was to keep it simple; it's always nice to keep it as one thing, because it is a [short] project and we don't have that much time to develop it.

She was persuaded to produce an outcome that focused purely on an aspect of her minority ethnic culture. Asked to reflect on whether there might have been a way of retaining the duality whilst making the idea feasible within a short project, she responded:

I think it's because it was such a personal thing to me that not a lot of people experience, so people might not understand. And with graphics, it's all about communications, so if it's based on a really personal topic, then other people might not understand it as well and my communication would have been not as strong as [it is in] this one. [S03 – Female Chinese Home student]

She was then, reconciled to the simplified idea that did not represent the complexity of her cultural identity. It is notable that she situates the original idea as both 'such a personal thing to me', that is, she sees it as distinctive to her, and *therefore* difficult for others to understand.

This was a common frame of reference among students of non-dominant and blended cultures. Another student reflected at the end of the year after a difficult experience of trying to produce a piece of work that reflected a personal emotional struggle and hearing the tutor say 'wow, this is really violent, this is too strong for me like I don't understand.':

something that I've also discovered this year is that part of, not getting a good grade but the way a lot of people work, like I've talked with a lot of people as well and they realise that the teacher's taste in things or preferences has a large role to play when it comes to giving out grades or doing, whether they think you do well and that it's just another process of learning to give and take. Of course, there's some sense in what they say, but if you really believe in your work you can just go on with it. So it's always like, it's another balance that you have to strike that they may not always be right because everyone's affected by their own preferences...
[Female Chinese international student]

Conversely, there were students whose work did represent – to their own satisfaction - complex ethnic affiliations which intersected with other aspects of their identity such as sexual orientation and political activism. This was in response to open-ended projects that could be undertaken over longer periods. It is possible that in the environment of the short project, typically two-weeks, there is competitive fast-paced pressure to 'come up with something' and concentrate on its execution which may militate against more complex representations of the self in making work.

There were some students, sometimes with what seemed a high degree of technical skill, who felt their work was at odds with the tutor's aesthetic sense but they were choosing to suspend any resolution of that difference in the interests of seeing what they could learn:

It was... for me, at that time I accepted everything because I'm still new and ... so I just want to listen to their perspective. But I know that this design itself, the [garment part] and, it's what the lecturer likes. So for me that's why I don't see eye-to-eye with the design lecturer because they dictate what they want to see and, yes, that's why most of the time I don't get along with them, but I try to strike a balance between what I like and what they like as well.

What do you think would've happened if you'd gone ahead and done [the garment] as you would like?

I would be wearing it right now instead of having it in my closet! Yes. For me, my approach to stuff is to be simple and wearable and sellable compared to most of the students' work which is more experimental. I don't mind experimental as long as it's acceptable for myself. But if it's not, then sometimes you have to suck it up and do what they want. [S 83 - Male Chinese International student]

...she [the tutor] thinks I didn't understand my research and my application of my research is really literal and my sketchbook should be more beautiful, I need to redo my illustrations. And my design's actually costume-ish, and many of them it's not very contemporary, it's like those what nanny would wear. So basically [she] denied everything I've done for that project I think. But I know why she said that because to some extent, I keep the silhouette of the [particular decade] but however there's one page I design over with bold coat, she is quite satisfied with that and she was thinking I should keep on doing that. But I told her that's not what I want, what I want is to keep the idea of the [decade] still in that, but she's really not satisfied with that.

So is the feedback about 'good' design or is it subjective?

Yes, I was thinking. I think that's subjective. [S13 Asian Male international student]

Some students could not fathom the rationale that lay behind tutors' preferences and felt they were somewhat arbitrary and ill-timed:

then when we had our final critique, you do it a week before you hand in, and then they tell you...you should change all of this, but it's a bit late for that, but if it's something you've been working on for a month, you have a particular idea, and then they go, 'oh no, we don't like that.' And if you had told me three weeks ago, when I started doing it, [say] they don't like red,

if they told us like a month ago, a few days to go, why can't you say that, when we started using red? We didn't use red, but it's to [give an example]. [S72 Male White Home student]

The following student has, ostensibly, a very similar experience but blames himself for the lack of synchronicity between his process of making work and the possibilities for taking advantage of their interactions with tutors:

In my second project I was making something, but because I was never there I wasn't really... I was... well, the times I was there I never really had a lot of work because I was doing other things. An idea I had was a big idea and then my teacher said to me, you're not going to be able to produce it because you're not really here, so that was kind of... I don't really know what the answer to that is....I think of this year I just feel a bit like I haven't been able to produce what I want to produce just because of all the other external factors that are keeping me from doing that. ... I've always had good critique and talks with staff, but it's just really hard for me to say that the feedback has made me do this, this and this, if you know what I mean, because I've always just been doing something else and not really 100% focusing on my work.

So is it...? It's kind of the feedback process is out of sync with the pattern of effort and work that you've been able to put in?

Yes, and it's annoying because I was going to class and I just didn't want to become that character who looks [like] he doesn't care about his work and because, I'll always say the staff have been very helpful, but I feel like I could've gained a lot more from it if I was 100% focused on it and I don't feel that I was because...previously I felt a bit down and [had] my own personal things to sort out. So I had this whirlwind of things going on. [S 82 Male Black home student]

This student seems to be shouldering quite a lot of emotional work in relation to making the best use of his course. As well as drawing attention to the limitations imposed by his personal circumstances, he feels obliged to counter what he sees as a stereo-type of the 'character ...who doesn't care...' It is worth noting that this student did not choose to say in the interview what the personal issues were and it is not possible to say whether he confided these in his tutors. By way of comparison, however, several White students and some minority ethnic students were not only open about personal and emotional problems but could also give accounts of the ways in which they had integrated these struggles into their work. They seemed to have established a rapport with tutors that enabled them to (i) to negotiate adjustments to how they carried out a brief and (ii) to use their experiences in the conceptual development of their work.

There are also students who misunderstand the scale of work that is being asked of them. One international student interpreted 'go on and do it' as an instruction to develop a piece of software that would realise her design idea before realising this was 'impossible' in the timeframe she had. Others (of all ethnic groups) made the mistake of not coming in and working at home for extended periods and were somewhat shocked at the volume or sophistication or the work that their peers had produced in their absence.

FEEDBACK AND RECEPTION

Much of this section is about the way that students seek, or avoid feedback, interpret it, and internalise or ignore it. Sometimes what students understand by 'good feedback' is a reception that rates their work highly, rather than evaluative comment that helps them develop. There is not necessarily a shared understanding of the developmental force and function of formative feedback, when it is precise, understood and interpreted critically by the student. As we will see students vary in how they use it – how critical they are of it and how they relate it to their own view of their work. However, we also explore how courses can provide very different climates for the reception of work. Broadly speaking these may be characterised as encouraging competitiveness or collaboration: most frequently a combination

of the two but in different measures. Such climates – alongside many other factors – influence the students' approaches to feedback.

It was evident from the observations of course sessions that some courses systematically promoted collaboration between students and peer assessment. For example, in an introductory session on a graphic design course students were asked to circulate around the room to look at their peers' work and write comments on a sheet of paper. The tutors did the same, placing their comments alongside those of the students:

I like that. They really are authentic and you can bounce off ideas. The nice thing is if you have an idea that you're very convinced of or that you'd like to explore, it's not like... In [another European country] it's a little bit like they're the teacher and this is how it's done but here it's more like you have options to explore. So that's nice. They write [feedback] on the same sheet as us and not give us a separate feedback sheet, that basically says it. Maybe for me personally their opinion might weigh more than a student's opinion but they don't limit us to their opinion by putting it on an extra sheet and saying, this is how I see this, this is how I would do it. But in terms of putting it in a pool of a lot of feedback so you get to still choose how you want to work on it and it's not indoctrinated...[S45 Female White EU student].

A peer on the same course agrees and develops the point further:

Because a person might think different, because a person might treat someone's comment biasedly depending on their level of experience, so... basically, if you're doing it like that, it's more fair if you're not being biased, if you're not taking on someone else's comment more than others, so you're not... someone might take in more from a teacher if they knew it was the teacher, or she knew it was from a teacher, rather than from a student.

So it forces you to look at the substance of the feedback, and judge it on its own merits, rather than who it came from?

Yes, definitely. [S44 - Male Asian other home student]

In this course when students spoke positively about tutors it was usually to praise the interest that they took in their work and the attention they gave to understand it.

In some other courses a spirit of competitiveness is foregrounded to a greater extent: this is not to say that collaboration is discouraged but competition between students, sometimes tongue in cheek, can be much more part of the ethos. One student described a session in which:

we had criteria, a bit like prize giving- when you do who's got the best drawing, who's got the best finish, who's got the best presentation and then she talked more about those ones and why they worked in the group. [S02 Male Asian Other home student]

On this occasion, the student talked to the tutor later specifically about his work but the public part of receiving the work was structured around favourable comparisons.

What happens in the formal teaching quite often seems to colour what happens informally among students and this point is explored further in the section below on collaboration and competition among students. Students rely on tutor feedback to differing extents. We saw in the previous section how tutor feedback at a formative stage can be the most pivotal conversation that a student has about his or her work. For other students the act of exploring the reception of their work is much more diffuse:

I showed it regularly to my younger brothers, I Skyped them every now and then and said, 'does this make sense? Do you understand what this picture is about?' ...I'm always getting feedback from my flatmate who's brilliant. She's at [another college] and it's just great to have someone around who is... also a graphic designer, and I could just say to her does this text work and she'll go 'oh you should try this, this and this'. ...you need that point of view, and from friends that I have who are studying this sort of stuff to make sure that I'm not grossly misleading people. And just people who pass through – just going does this look...? A lot of the time I find that more useful than feedback from the tutors because they're the sort of people

that I'm aiming at, not someone who's got a degree in graphic design. So I need a bit of both...
[S01 Female White home student]

And in the case of this student, there is a sense of security about navigating between conflicting feedback from different tutors:

...I think when she marks it from quite a narrow angle where she's just looking at it in terms of how it's related to the brief. And if it's ticked the boxes for the brief then it's a good product, whereas [another tutor with a particular specialism] is looking at it as more of just a piece of work, and critting it as a piece of work rather than specifically to the brief. Which is good, because then you learn a lot about everything not just... [S02 Male Asian Other home student]

Not all students felt confident that the feedback they would get from peers would be useful, and in this case the limitation that peers were perceived to have is a lack of understanding of the cultural context that the student whose work is being critiqued is coming from:

I think because my topic was quite original it's not something that, people who don't know the two cultures like I do, would be able to give feedback on. So I felt that when people come and saw my work they just take it, they couldn't really say anything. They would say it's nice, the logo looks nice or they would comment on the visual of my logo, but they can't really... [engage with the concept behind it] until I explain it properly.... But my tutors had experience with foreign students so I did get some relevant feedback after explaining the cultural background of the project. [S46 Male, Asian International student]

This student did think it was possible for other students to engage with his work but it was important that there was a time and space that would allow him to 'explain it properly'. Sometimes students can feel that they are negotiating a fairly hostile environment or at best indifferent environment in attempting to understand and make use of feedback:

So many times I've asked, where am I going wrong, what do I need to do? All I've been told is, 'just read the feedback'. Is that it? Are you not going to sit me down for three or five minutes? There are tutorials once every term or twice a term, but five minutes at the end of December isn't really what I need, if I'm struggling with something in the middle of October. It is sometimes very hard to get feedback and to talk to other people. Luckily I've got a few friends who are a year or two above, so I've probably got three, four times as much feedback from them and help, than any of my lecturers. I've asked [tutor] a couple of times ... He said, yes, that's fine, try to catch me for five minutes next week. So I came in the week after, asked if we could sit down and he said he was really busy, but he's doing tutorials at the end of month, so I could go to that and discuss it then. So it's four, six weeks I've had to wait to sit down and talk to him about it. Getting feedback hasn't been good and it's been a lot worse for some of the other [students]. I was speaking to one of the girls on the course and she only got her essay back ...and she told me she saw [tutor] in the corridor and asked if they could get the [work] and talk about it and he said, 'no, I've got no time'. Really blunt and rude. He made it very obvious that he didn't want to speak to her. [S63 Male, Mixed ethnicity, home student]

Fellow students had much less of sense of entitlement to talk through feedback. Two students on the same course (Female, Asian home; Female, Black home) could not read the hand-written feedback they had received (and neither was the researcher able to decipher it) but they did not ask the tutor to clarify it. Instead, they internalised a range of shortcomings, attempted to deduce feedback from more general discussion and resolved to 'try harder next time'.

There were a few students who felt they had been unjustly graded. In these cases the injustice stemmed from several sources (i) the amount of effort that they felt they had put in, in comparison to other students (ii) the disparity between tutors' remarks on their work during its development with the final mark. The frustration and sense of injustice is palpable:

He really didn't like it. He just did not like it, and it really upset me because the amount of work I spent on that was ridiculous... But it really, really knocked me, and it's made me think that it's not for me, this course, because of that grade. All...every teacher who saw my work in the crit sessions, my outcomes said, this is fantastic..you can expect a decent grade from this because you've thought about it, the process of it, it's clear what you're doing, everything's clear, you've understood it, you've experimented with it. So I thought, wow, hopefully I'll get something like a B+, even an A, which I've been going for. And when I got a C, I was like, oh, my God. [The tutor] hadn't even seen my work before, at any of the crit sessions, and the feedback I was getting from, not only the teachers, but the students, was unbelievable, and then for [the tutor] to mark my work and give me a C, I just think it's so inconsistent. I don't think he's really looked at my work. I don't think he's understood it. And I look at other people's work, and I'm my biggest critic, I look at other people's work, and they've been marked by other teachers, and they've got Bs and As, and I'm like, oh, my God, if I got mine marked by one of them other teachers. I reckon I would have got a B. Definitely. [S53 Male White other home student]

The effect of getting a lower mark than expected for this student was that he was not only demoralised to the point of contemplating leaving, but he was also unable to focus upon the qualitative feedback which may have helped him to further develop his work. As is well-documented in educational research grades have a symbolic and emotive impact – based on favourable or unfavourable social comparison – which draws attention away from the meaning and substance of qualitative comment. So the impact of getting a low grade (or indeed a high one) that conflicts with the student's own view of their work can have a cumulatively detrimental effect on building their capacity to respond critically to feedback. The more arbitrary the process of assessment seems, the more it comes to be seen as a function of the tutor's formal authority rather than a comprehensible, if complex, evaluation of work.

NETWORKS AND WORKING WITH OTHERS

Where would you think I was from if you didn't know me? [Unknown UAL student]

This was a question that one student asked of another as they walked out of a course session towards the beginning of the year. It expresses how complex ethnic and racial identities are; and how increasingly such identities are hybridised and yet at the same time close to the surface of consciousness. It also illustrates how curious students can be about how they are perceived, particularly by people who do not share their own background. How we think others see us matters always, it seems to matter in particular ways when one is embarking on a university degree course in the creative arts.

This section will first consider the impact of networks and practice that exist prior to or external to the course; then it will describe the dynamics that underpin what is often observed as students self-segregating along ethnic lines. Finally, it will explore collaboration and competition among students.

Networks and practice prior to the course

Networks prior or external to the course and the extent to which students had an established practice varied widely. One of the common factors among those who did have a varied network of contacts across UAL and sometimes beyond was that they had done a Foundation in Art and Design (FAD):

When you start at a new place you're really insecure and it takes time to find your place and your work and the school and the whole thing. And I'd just already been through that and I've become really confident in my design style; and for everyone else... not everyone else, but a lot of people who hadn't done the Foundation were struggling with their style and they're

confused, just like I was in the beginning of the Foundation, really. But I'm not saying that they're not going to make it, because in a month's time they will have that Foundation too, I guess. But yes, in that way, and you just know what is expected of you already because you learned all that from the Foundation. [S14 Female Other Asian EU student]

Among home students who had not done a FAD some had networks of peers that they kept in touch with:

I've got a friend who's a photographer, and he's done work with the Guardian, and done lots of film footage. I've got a friend who was offered a place at [college] this year, but she turned it down because she decided she wanted to do an internship instead. So she's been doing the internship, and she's doing London Fashion Week. So, yes, everyone has a creative ability. I've got another friend who does illustration, and she's incredibly talented. I think it's more that as friends we can pick up work off each other, and drive ourselves, almost competing, but in a different area. [S33 – Male White home student]

Such networks existed for international students too but most usually in cases where they had done FAD or an equivalent. Another possible basis for a prior network for students was work experience. Several students had been free-lancing in the design and text-based disciplines or working for design companies. They often retained networks from that practice and sometimes used it to supplement their income:

I chose this course... I applied for other courses across the country ...one of my interviews they were, 'why don't you just go get a job now doing it?' And I was, 'well, I don't want to get a job now. I want to learn more and go somewhere that's just really going to challenge me,' so that's why I came here. So that's why I've got to be prepared for that but it's just the harder route when I could have just gone and got a job. I'm carrying on with... There'll be bits of work that I'll be given and things like that. Me and my best friend do a lot of freelance work together as well because she's a graduate designer, so. Yes, I'll carry on with bits like that, I think. [S47 - Male White home student]

This student continued to practice beyond his course through the year, collaborating with peers outside the course and very much committed to his practice regardless of whether it was being conducted within the course or outside. Students in text-based courses had often started a blog or contributed to an existing one, and occasionally some were paid for their work. They saw this as very much a part of their existing practice and the course they were undertaking was simply an aid or catalyst in establishing their credentials. Not all students who had prior paid relevant experience continued with it: some found that the course demands took up all of their time.

Students with existing networks and/or prior experience of practice tended to have fairly specific, highly focused expectations of their course but at the same time were not wholly reliant upon it. The course itself was seen as integrated into an existing practice. Where there are no prior networks or practice, expectations are less defined. In the case of one student in this position, hearing from students in other years was helpful to some extent:

Till now, I'm just confused. I'm not sure if I'm going to receive [or] how much I expect to receive, but the good thing that happened the other day, that they called... three students from the second year, and they showed us their presentation of how they were doing it. Looking at that, I really felt that the first year is confusing, but the second year, I definitely will be somewhere... [S52 -Female Asian International student]

Observations of segregation

Asked how important it was to a student to know someone from their own background who had been through the course, one student observed:

I think it helps, because you don't feel like you're going through it alone. You're using his or her experiences to edify you, to equip you, to help you with the experiences that you're going to be going through. Yes, it's very helpful. There's also that sense of familiarity. ...he would be saying it's really hard to get [foodstuff] there in London, so if you can, just bring as much as you can when you come from [home], things like that. So, it's nice. You don't feel so alone in your journey. [S05 Male Chinese International student]

This was a student whose friends seemed to be from a range of backgrounds but it was still significant to him that someone with whom he shared an ethnic identity was connected to his course. The following empathic observation is fairly typical and the gist of it is often heard among both tutors and students:

[The Korean students] all just seem to stick with themselves, and they don't really interact with the rest of the [course], because they'll just talk to each other in Korean – which is understandable, I'd probably do the same if I was in another country and there were loads of people speaking English... So they've taken a while, one of my friends is Korean and she's a bit more social with other people, so that's been quite a difficult group to [break into], because we're very segregated – there are three groups: there are the Koreans in one group, and then you have some guys - I do get on with them but they segregate themselves, the gay guys, in a little clique. Not all the gay guys because there are some in our group, and then there's another group which is just a little more diverse, different nationalities. I'd say there are three sub-groups.

But you were saying it's started to break down a bit, or is it still quite...?

It's started to now, by the end of it the Koreans are starting to interact a bit more, it must be difficult for them... [S21 – Female, White, mixed ethnicity home student]

This observation of students forming into groups is particularly interesting because it both generalises and qualifies its generalisations; and it points to the significance of language, sexual orientation, a cosmopolitan diversity as aspects of identity that can be significant in the way friendship groups coalesce. Another student talked about developing a network around intersected identities relating to political activism for gay rights and being 'artistic':

I [be]came really close with a group of friends about five of us and we have like a Face Book group and then we always share gay rights, and two days ago I was protesting at Westminster parliament because the House of Lords were voting for gay marriage and we shared that stuff on there, and then while I was doing this project I was always posting pictures of the current prototypes and everything and my friends were commenting on it. Yes, I did get feedback from them, but then they were...one of them is third year in [college] she does graphic design as well, and then one other guy is going to [college] to the Foundation. So we were very artistic people quite similar. [Male Asian Other International student]

Such groupings around identity are less visible – particularly because the group members may be of visibly diverse ethnic backgrounds – and so they do not attract an observation of 'self-segregation'. Moreover, all of these groupings, as the following quotation demonstrates often serve a developmental purpose:

Yes. I think maybe it's kind of an ethnic thing as well, because they're Japanese and Chinese so we have more connection through that. Because I find... I do have other friends that are multi-racial, but I think there's still a connection because of the language as well because they can speak my language, Chinese, and they're not that familiar with England anyway so I help them a bit as well.

So you get cast in the role of interpreter and cultural interpreter. What's that like?

It's good, I think. It's nice because I was raised mainly here, so it's nice to see that bit of the Chinese culture come back again into my life. And a new culture like my Japanese friends, so a new culture comes. It's nice to see the diversity of it. It's been fun. We're always translating, they're teaching me new words and we teach them. It's quite nice.

[S03 Female Chinese home student]

By the end of the year, this student had widened her friendship group largely through collaborations that had been made possible through the course. Asked about the barriers in getting to know students from other backgrounds, another student explained:

Well, I found, yes, there are some barriers because we actually have a totally different background. What we see and learn is totally different because when we were young, we've... Because some times when we talk about something I actually don't particularly know who it is because at the beginning I didn't even know who David Bowie is when I came to the UK and everyone was talking about him and I was, like, oh, sorry, I don't know what you're talking about. That's a bit embarrassing but I don't think it's my fault because I never know such a person while I'm in China. [S13 Male Chinese International student]

Another student observed that fellow Chinese students tended to feel that if they talk to each other they should do so in their own language and used English herself so as not to exclude students from other backgrounds. She also observed the incremental steps that her fellow students made to interact with students from a range of backgrounds in the context of small group work. She felt the barrier was not that they did not wish to interact across cultural difference but that they did not know how to do so. While some experienced rejection on making such steps, others slowly discovering that 'it could be fun'.

There seemed a less complicated, less risky and less effortful task of negotiation for White and minority ethnic home students than for many international students who wanted to make the most of the diversity of backgrounds in the student body:

At one point we sat in the cafeteria and we were I think nine people all together and I just looked around and realised we are all literally from a different country there're Irish, Australian, Italian, everything and it was just really nice thing just to be there. [S11 Male White EU student]

Collaboration and competition

This section builds on the analysis within the Feedback and Reception section that related to collaborative and competitive course environments. It is notable that there was not a correlation between the degree of collaboration among students and the size of the course. Quite contrasting cultures of collaboration and competition could be observed in courses of similar sizes.

Reflecting on the year as a whole, one student recounted her own conceptual shift in how she situated herself among her peers:

I probably would have like to have spent more time on my drawing design, I feel more confident now because I think when I first started I was thrown back a bit by all the other students with their different styles of work, so I felt maybe I need to be a bit more like them but now I've come to the conclusion that I just need to improve my style, because it's me and that's why I was picked – because of my style. [S21 Female White, mixed ethnicity, home student]

Asked whether she discussed her work with fellow students, one student replied:

Not so much, especially not from my own class. I think in [my course] not so much – I think the [another course] people..., I've heard from my friend who's in there that they are really good with showing each other's work and getting feedback, helping with [work] ... But in my class, I don't feel that much of it – it's more like keeping your own work for yourself and... yes.
What do you think about that?

I was hoping at the beginning that it would be like the [other course], that we could show each other each other's work... because that's how it's going to be someday in the real world. So yes, I think that's a shame that it's not like that. [S14 Female Asian Other EU student]

Some students felt that competition had an important role to play in their education:

Is there competition? Yes, and I think there should be. I think it's healthy. The way you take it is what can make it severe or can make it healthy for somebody because we can't really copy each other's aesthetic. Yes, I can't copy the aesthetic because it's very obvious if one is copying it. And I think [course leader] does an amazing job and he's been doing an incredible job in choosing the students that get in because I think what he's really good with is being able to grab individuals and putting them all in one box. Because as a result we can compete but we can't copy each other's ideas, if that makes sense. [S23 Male White International student]

I want to get to grips with London, UAL, and the creative side of both. I hope that my work can evolve, and I can get some constructive criticism about my current style and how it can develop to actually be produced in a competitive way, so it could actually come up against other people's and it would work, and I'd have a chance. So that's what I'm up for this year, really, and I guess for the three years. [S33 Male White home student]

The wish to be distinctive seems at the heart of these students' aspirations and arguments for competition. Relatively competitive contexts for some students seemed to militate against discussing and sharing work. Other students tended to gravitate towards peers that they felt shared their commitment and ambitions and actively sought to create relationships of reciprocal support, if not always collaboration. Distinctiveness was not seen as inimical to collaboration. Often the sustenance of such groups depended upon their presence in a studio:

a lot of people go in, get the work and then go home, sort of thing. There is a few of us, maybe less than ten, who are in fairly often and we're a bit closer, but we don't really talk that much outside of college. ...working in the studio quite often and we'd like to put stuff up on the wall halfway through work so, yes, I think you can say, 'what do you think about this?' or, 'do you think you would change this in any way?' I think I have done that a few times. That's good really, that's probably the most healthy way to work and probably the most professional as well. But, I think generally art and design people are quite shy, me included, so I think some people get a bit nervous when they're...[exposed] [S31 Male White home student]

One hindrance to collaboration was the perceived lack of commitment from peers which several students lamented.

It's very scattered, I wish sometimes, it sounds horrible but I wish I could get a filter and take away the people that don't really care. I mean I see [number in student cohort] but I don't see [same number of] passionate people, I feel this time [college] took in a lot of students that were probably good but lost their way so they just became, because they're talented, they became really lazy and they just don't have a lot of passion.... I would say almost half of them are not very passionate about what they do. [S05 Male Chinese International student]

The following student extends the argument somewhat and juxtaposes the wide variation in commitment from students with the college's claim that students learn from each other:

I was just unfortunate enough to end up in classes where people don't really care about their work and I think that's what I have a problem with most this year, because I find that you can tell when someone cares about their work because they're willingly to give it time and effort. It's not even about the quality of the outcome in the end, but it's about whether you've tried hard enough to do something and I find that lacking so much here.

How does that make you feel?

I just don't understand why they're here because I think part of [college ethos] is the way you learn is from each other because ...the teachers don't exactly tell you how things are supposed to be or how to do things. It's through learning, your peers and how maybe through crits when you look at other people's work that you learn new things and you improve yourself, but when it comes to classes with like students who don't, who've obviously done something the night before just so that they could come to class and have something on the wall it's really discouraging. [S07 Female Chinese International student]

The argument that several students made was that colleges were undermining the possibilities for productive student collaboration through what they perceived as insufficiently selective recruitment. Related to this point was a fairly frequently expressed irritation that some students had with peers who would come in and regale them with stories of the night before:

people talking about how much they drank last night, or they're so hung-over and they still came to college. I was like, okay... That's not my way of living. It's fine for you, if you enjoy it, but, for me, it's not... I don't find that appealing.

And you don't have an equivalent story about feeling rested?

Yes! It's like: I feel fine today! Yes, I'm ready for the project, and they're just sitting there hung-over. [S03 Female Chinese Home student]

I think it also doesn't help that I don't really do parties and that sort of scene, I'd rather stay in and have a conversation somewhere I can actually hear what I'm talking, which doesn't really help you socialise with the student body in general. But I'm kind of okay with that, I have other friends who are on the same page as me. [S01 Female White home student]

As these quotes demonstrate this stance was shared among students from a variety of backgrounds, and among students of different ages.

STUDENT LIFE: PRECARIOUSNESS, WORRY AND JUGGLING ACTS

'The student experience' is often discussed as though it exists independently of students' complex lives. It is hard to generalise about the hinterland experiences of the fifty-three students who took part in this study. Their problems ranged from the mundane to the life-threatening. Within their first year at UAL this cohort included experiences of: estrangement from the family home; mental illness; violence from a housemate; persistent problems within accommodation; physical illness that went undiagnosed for a period; illness that entailed hospitalisation; unwanted sexual attention on public transport; racist remarks on public transport; illness of a family member; bereavement; relationship break-ups; financial problems, and chronic pain.

There were sometimes long term ongoing struggles of having to make judgements about how much and when to do paid work such that it did not prevent them from doing coursework. Students' capacities and scope for achieving a balance varied widely. Giving up work was not an option for some, and for others there was no need to consider working at all.

Another ongoing struggle that some international students worried about was their language proficiency. Two international students saw part-time work as a means of improving their English language skills. One worked as an unpaid volunteer in a charity shop in order to improve her English. In all cases their English had improved dramatically from the first to the second interview.

Financial problems varied widely. Some were dealing with disputes with the Students' Loan Company, others with high accommodation costs. Many complained of the cost of materials. Some resorted to 'keeping asking parents for money'. This option was not equally open to all for reasons that were explored in this report in the section on Familial contexts.

When students faced such difficult problems they did not always feel able to ask for their circumstances to be considered by their tutors in assessment. Making an application for 'Extenuating circumstances' was seen by some as a form of defeat:

I don't know but I think this EC form is some kind of surrender. I think, I can do it, one more week, I can. Maybe I can't do all the samples but I can do half of it, although the quality is not that good. At the end of the day I still didn't apply for it and I go and the teachers understand. The portfolio side, is really good but just the technical sample side is not really good so it pulled my mark down a bit. ...for the technical side my tutor gives me a bare pass because I don't have enough samples. I think it's fine because I don't have enough so at the end I just got a C minus. [S73 Male Chinese International student]

Students were also sometimes demoralised by the knowledge that other students had left the course. In fashion in particular some students saw themselves as struggling against a gradual process of attrition which was 'depressing'. Close friends leaving seemed to add to the feeling of precariousness that many students seemed to have, especially as they awaited their marks at the end of the first year.

Case studies

The following case studies are based on first and second interviews in the first year. In discussing these questions you may wish to supplement the information in the case study with your own experience of course environments at UAL.

Discussion questions:

1. What does the student believe and do that stands them in good stead?
2. How would you wish this student to develop his/her practice?
3. What aspects of the course environment serve this student?
4. What aspects of the course environment hinder or under-serve this student?

DAVID: BA Fashion Design, Year 1, 2012-2013

EU White student

Having done his FAD, David went on to apply for the BA at the same UAL college. He was keenly conscious of the competitiveness of the admissions process and found the period of uncertainty (as to whether he would get a place, and if so on to which course) stressful. While he was excited to get a place on the course that was his first choice, he was sad to see that some of his friends did not.

He traces his interest in fashion to early memories of flicking through his mother's fashion magazines and becoming immediately interested. He had always liked drawing and started designing clothes when he became conscious of disliking a lot of the fashion that was popular at the time. The attraction to fashion was very intuitive: 'it was never really question [of whether] I would do it professionally or not, I just did it.'

Before starting the BA course, David managed to get an internship which was unpaid. He accepted it on the basis that his travel would be paid. After three days his employer refused to pay travel and claimed they no longer had work for him. He had already spent £90 on a travel card and so was out of pocket as well as not having the work experience that he was expecting to have. He still felt that getting experience through internships was really important and was hoping that there would be more opportunities and support with obtaining these through the college's contacts.

Having left it too late to apply for accommodation in university halls, David had a lot of trouble finding affordable accommodation – especially as private landlords were demanding six months' rent in advance because David did not have a British guarantor. Eventually, he did find accommodation at the last minute via Gumtree.

David seemed to have a strongly emotional yet ambivalent stance towards starting the course. He was wondering whether he was going to 'hate it as much as I hated the foundation'. He was anticipating the pressure of 'so much to do in so little time' and what had added to this pressure in his prior experience of the foundation diploma was the uncertainty about how his work would be received and whether it would be perceived as good enough to get into the BA. Similarly he was both excited about and dreading meeting new people. Some people were 'pretentious and annoying', others 'knew what they were doing', 'knew everyone else' and were exciting to be with.

Before he had even started the course David seemed to have a range of contacts with peers in different parts of the college. Some were friends from the foundation diploma course and in addition, he was writing for a college blog to which students and alumni contributed. He carried on contributing to this blog throughout the first year.

In terms of the course curriculum he was expecting a shift from the foundation diploma to the BA that would entail a greater emphasis on the garments that are made rather than just the design thinking, as expressed in sketch drawings. He was also looking forward to more opportunities on the BA to work in groups as he saw it as a way of allowing the group on the course to cohere and start socialising.

By the end of the year, David felt that the value of being at UAL was less to do with its reputation and more to do with the opportunity to work in close proximity to like-minded creative students who shared high standards of work. He felt inspired by his peers, their

motivation and accomplishments. He was, however, also looking forward to meeting his second year tutors.

From the start of the academic year David had managed to get a part-time job at a London department store where he worked 2-5 hours in the evenings. He adjusted his working hours as deadlines for work approached and by the Spring was working at the week-ends and one evening week-day instead. That pattern was better for fitting in his university work. He didn't tend to work in the morning, and preferred to come into college from late afternoon and work into the evening.

In the course of the year David was diagnosed as having dyslexia, ADHD and dyspraxia. It was a bit of shock as his school marks had always been pretty good. He'd noticed that he found it hard to concentrate on a single person talking, as in a lecture or extended period of instruction. He was dismayed to find that despite the diagnosis, as a non-UK EU student he is not eligible for any funded support from the University.

He did have longer to complete essays though his performance in essays was already good. He had a strong intrinsic interest in the topics for which he wrote essays and talked about the interplay between the ideas he developed in writing and his design inspirations. This interplay was supported by discussions with a particular course tutor who is 'awesome'. He identified with the way she thought, her openness and lack of pretentiousness. David absented himself from his own seminar group in order to attend that of this tutor. He valued her feedback on the essay he wrote as well as discussions in advance of submitting it.

By the end of the year David had an appreciation of several of the tutors and described what they each were particularly good at, and what they looked for in students' work. He saw consistencies between the feedback he got from different tutors: for example more than one has said that it was hard to interpret his drawings. More often, as he makes garments, feedback has focused on technical aspects of his work. This is feedback he takes on board and acts upon in subsequent work but it is not demoralising or derailing. He has a strong sense of how he works, always knowing how he wants things to look at the end, using a concept as far as it will take him but not necessarily making all decisions in line with it. It's not so much about the concept as about the need to ensure that he is satisfied with it as a design.

The range of marks on David's course seemed often to be within the range of C- to C+, with a very few Bs. David says that he does not care about the grades: 'I just want to make nice stuff that people care about.' The part of the course that David was least engaged with was when he was asked to do 2-week projects that did not require making a garment – this seemed to him to stop short of what he found most meaningful: the making of 'a garment...an interesting and desirable thing that people like to look at and people like to wear eventually.'

David has many friends on the course that he sees socially. They range widely in background and are mostly doing the same course as him. He has also kept in touch with friends from the foundation diploma who are on other courses. A trip back home reminds him of what he really enjoys about London – its diversity and the possibility that you can have people from 20 different countries in the same room 'and it's just normal'.

He has also refined his ideas and aspirations for internship. He would not want to give up his job, which pays very well, but is keen to get specific internships that would give him contrasting experiences of high-end and high street fashion.

Ji WANG: BA Fashion, Year 1, 2012-2013
Chinese international student

Ji Wang had been interested in art and design since the age of 11, and people around her thought of her as being talented in this area. It wasn't until she was 17 that she decided she wanted to design fashion: she recalls the moment of realising this was what she wanted to do after seeing a particular fashion show on a website, 'I just got some kind of feeling that I would do that'.

Although no-one from her family had experience in fashion design, Ji Wang had a couple of friends who came to her college in UAL and to other UK colleges. At the art college she attended in Beijing Ji Wang was encouraged to apply to UAL by two teachers who had themselves studied there. She sees studying abroad as an opportunity to succeed in a new context, to experiment and develop as a designer who produces original work.

Having gained a place on a highly selective course, her first days at college were marred by what she experienced as preferential treatment of European students over Chinese and other international students. During a crit of Summer holiday work, the tutor seemed to take the time to have a meaningful exchange with the European students about their work, and in contrast seemed less attentive to the work of the Chinese students. They felt unable to give an account of their work that fitted with his implicit expectations. To Ji Wang, he seemed to have a fixed idea of what their work should be and how they should talk about it. It felt to her that the Chinese students had to do more, to work harder, and to make their work understood because the tutor was not interested in making sense of their work with them.

Ji Wang was conscious that there was a significant rate of attrition on her course and felt keenly the pressure to survive. She understood from tutors on the course, in their introductions to the students to be saying 'you need to work hard or you just need to go'. She foresaw that the experience on the course would be emotionally challenging for some who might feel upset, and think, 'I'm not great, I have to leave, I can't stand anymore of this.' Alongside this pressure she felt that this atmosphere created a sense of competitiveness and reluctance on the part of students to engage across different ethnic groups. People don't necessarily say 'hello' to each other. She has also heard that some students take care not to cut their patterns at college but to take their work home so that there is no risk of anyone damaging it – though she did not think that would be a common occurrence.

Nevertheless, Ji Wang was still excited about working hard and producing garments that she never thought she was capable of producing. She felt that her hard work would overcome any difficulties and would eventually be recognised. And even it wasn't, her ultimate aim was to take back style and technology to China which would sell well there. She welcomed the prospect of making mistakes and using those to learn more. She believed her hard work would get her through essays in Cultural Studies as well as design work.

Ji Wang was keen to continue to explore Chinese history and the role of fashion in social and political structures. She was also looking forward to developing as a person – to having new views about family, love and life - through her experiences in a new country, and a new continent. Her exploration of London had just included a visit to the Gherkin had been preceded by a long wait queuing in the pouring rain. When she finally got in, she was disappointed to find she was not allowed to take pictures.

During the year Ji Wang produces some highly original work. The tutor recognises this but seems to hold back from openly or definitively praising this work. Ji Wang believes the tutor likes certain pieces of work she has produced and feels that she has gradually succeeded in building a relationship of mutual understanding with the tutor that first appeared to be prejudiced:

It's not that bad now, I'm quite getting used to him and the tutor is getting better at getting along because we know about each other. It's good...I know his style and he knows my style and he teaches me some things and I ask him questions and we are gradually getting better.

Ji Wang also comes to realise that the presentation of her work is an important, if not more important, than the work itself. She sees the presentation as

just a little trick, a skill, if I can do it really good it will be easy...[it's a matter of] tak[ing] a few important pages and mak[ing] them big and strong – like a photograph of everything and edit it and pay attention to the paper and the quality, just everything - artwork, it's not just presenting your fashion.

However, the process of acquiring these insights has not been easy. During the first year Ji Wang falls foul of assessment regulations on two occasions: once because she was 10 minutes late for a hand-in; and a second time because she did not produce the right number of sketches in the format expected. As a result her grades are capped at 40% within these projects. While these grades do not reflect the quality and originality of her work, she does not feel unjustly treated. On the contrary, she feels that she has accomplished a great deal by getting to know her way around the system, including developing an understanding of what tutors like.

Two further significant developments take place in Ji Wang's first year. Firstly her English language capacity expands: her vocabulary, comprehension and capacity to express complex ideas are dramatically improved. She has done this through trial and error, through day-to-day practice. She regrets that the Language Centre has not helped – in particular they seemed unable to support her in a discipline-specific way. She felt the time investment needed for their courses did not merit the benefit that she would get.

The second development related to a redefinition of her trajectory as a designer. Rather than aspiring to create commercial designs, she was at the end of the year excited about exploring design for its own sake. Commercial design seemed to her somewhat pedestrian. She was now seeking to change herself as a designer, and was waiting to create something that 'really belongs to me'. She saw this development as not simply occurring in the course but part of a much longer-term development that she would drive herself.

While she saw the course as a catalyst in this process, she did not see it as a supportive or hospitable environment. She described it as having an unpleasant and unfriendly atmosphere where it was still difficult to communicate with European students. She was also feeling a little saddened by the departure of several of her friends who had gone back to China without completing their courses.

Over the Summer she was planning to take some time out from thinking about fashion – which had been a constant and intensive preoccupation all year - and planned to immerse herself in another artistic practice – ceramics and sculpture.

MUNA: BA text-based course, Year 1, 2012-2013

Home Asian other student

Muna's family came to the UK when she was four years old. She had always enjoyed writing and after some work experience with a tv news channel that a family friend helped to organise, she decided that her goal was to work in journalism. Her family members are all scientists but they were supportive and encouraging of her choice. She continues to live at home and commutes into college.

She went along to some Freshers' events and found them pleasant enough. She is conscious of being in an art college and of a distinctive atmosphere that is associated with that but she's not sure at this stage what implications that might have for her own interests. She's very much looking forward to the hands-on aspects of the course, writing features and meeting new people. Her excitement is tinged with nervousness about meeting new people and also the workload which she expects to be a step-up from A-level. She's also expecting to have to drive her own progress: 'if you want to succeed you have to have your own willpower and you have to want to succeed.'

By the end of the first year Muna had worked steadily and was really engaged in the course. She had been a little taken aback by the Contextual Studies element of the course: whilst she expected to cover the history of journalism she found it hard to see the relevance of some of the topics covered such as the Russian Revolution. She was buoyed by the positive feedback she received on her essays but also felt it had been a little 'lenient'. She had been most engaged by an assignment that required her to analyse the discourse of two women's magazines over a period of time. She went to talk to her tutor about the brief and this helped in her choice of magazines and in working out how to approach the task. What was engaging about this assignment was that it was comparatively long, she had time over a vacation to work on it, and it was asking her to look systematically at material that she had taken for granted. She found that she revised the opinions she first held as a result and would now look with more critical eyes both at what kind of material magazines choose to cover and why.

She got an excellent grade on the essay and some really positive comments. However some of the comments were illegible and she never followed up with the tutor who had written them. Indeed she had never had a discussion about her essay with any tutor – be it during the writing of it or at the end. The written feedback was handed back the day before an exam. Muna got her own feedback on her essay from family and friends, however, whom she asked to comment on earlier drafts.

Muna had anticipated that she would enjoy practical journalism more than the contextual studies part of her course. As the year progressed she found that she got, what she perceived as, better feedback about her academic writing than on her more journalistic pieces and this influenced how she thought about what she was good at. She concluded that she needed to work on her journalistic style and be 'simple and to the point.' This came down to reading and practising her craft. As the year went on she felt that her views of what makes a good article were changing – she had more understanding of structure, and the different functions of, for example, titles and introductions. Muna enjoys being part of an international course cohort. Her groupwork project went well and she keeps in touch with a few course mates outside of the course despite living at home.

Reflecting on the year as whole she feels that her fears about the workload were not warranted as there were times when she felt she did not have a lot to do. Some tutors pushed

students to improve and others seemed not to expect students to improve. However, Muna was active in asking tutors how she could improve and took on board their suggestions. She found that she had to be persistent to get such advice. Her marks steadily improved as a result.

Muna's country of origin had recently been in the news as a result of political and social conflict that had an impact on regional and world politics. She was surprised, mildly, that this was never discussed in the course. Her own parents had been political activists and suffered some persecution and so the issues were close to her heart. While some friends talked to her about her background, there was never a context throughout the first year where it seemed appropriate or relevant to discuss current events in her country or origin. She sees this as part of a larger context in which some events or places are seen as 'newsworthy' and others are not. She observes an emphasis in the course and also in wider society on local news. When she did talk about events in her country of origin with friends she was taken aback by their lack of awareness, for example of the prevalence of censorship and absence of freedom of expression in some societies. The impact of this ignorance around her was to make her feel that these issues were personal to her, that in some sense she had a personal responsibility to 'give a voice to people that aren't being heard in other countries'. She observes that reporting of events in the Global South tends to emphasise political developments rather than 'real civilian costs' of which she is aware through personal experience.

She does not feel there is space or appetite in her course environment for discussion of these issues: 'I do want to bring it up but I feel I'd just open a whole new discussion because the course is really diverse...' The sense she gives is of a course context that holds diversity at a superficial level, not exploring it in depth despite its obvious relevance to the course subject matter and its reflection in the student body.

NATHAN: BA Fashion Design, Year 1, 2012-2013

Home Black student

A feeling of not having found his strengths and interests pervaded Nathan's experience of sixth form. He was not intrinsically interested in the social science and humanities subjects he was studying. While working in a clothes retail store for a year, where the working conditions were not at all motivating, he found himself looking at the clothes and visualising that he could design and make better ones. He had always had an interest in fashion and enrolled to do a BTEC in Fashion and Clothing at a College in the North East of England. There he met a tutor who became a huge inspiration and was influential in Nathan's search for a university level course. This tutor had himself studied at UAL.

Nathan did exceptionally well in the BTEC course, gaining a distinction. This was a turning point in his educational achievements: prior to this he had never felt motivated or interested enough to work so hard in an education context. Nathan was offered interviews at two UAL colleges but at this point he panicked and ended up not going to the interviews. However, he did prepare a portfolio and gain entry to another college outside London. During his first year there he became aware of how little funding there was for the course, and how little staff seemed to be interested in the students' work. Talking to friends (also training in fashion design) he came to realise that to succeed, not only did your work have to reach a high standard, but you need to have 'good press', other people who are aware of your work and can help promote it. He was determined to gain a place at UAL.

Later that year, he repeated the process of preparing a portfolio, and through friends found out the names and contact details of the course tutors at a UAL college. He sent them an online portfolio, and was offered an interview. This time he was still panicking because it was a high risk situation for him. Not getting in would have been worse than not trying at all. Two things helped to mitigate that overwhelming panic – the first was that he had sent an online portfolio and was reassured that the tutors already knew the quality of his work. The second was that as soon as he walked in he felt welcomed, and the tutors were engaging with him, for example showing him the work of the current final year. He was offered a place.

In his first weeks Nathan was impressed by the quality of teaching and the commitment of the tutors who stay late and make time to see students. He felt the course would help to develop him into 'the person I want to be.' He did not have a closed view of that person but located it in a London Arts scene. He was hampered by the distance he was traveling from his accommodation into London (a journey of an hour and 10 minutes) and by financial problems, including the need to pay for materials. In addition, Nathan had been diagnosed with dyslexia and dyspraxia. He found it hard to manage his time but had every intention of 'cracking on'.

He was very much looking forward to a process of developing, and heartened to see what his fellow students were of a high standard. He was also conscious of standing out, 'of not looking or sounding like anyone else on the course'. Talking to a friend who also deemed 'he didn't look like he should be in fashion', the two came to the conclusion that this might be to their advantage in that they might have something distinctive to offer. Early on Nathan's outlook included a long-term vision of where he wants to be and he imagined keeping in touch with current friends but interacting with them in very different circumstances. Ideally after finishing the BA course he would like to go on and do an MA in Fashion at another UAL college.

At the start of the year he quickly got stuck into his first project and got some constructive and helpful feedback from his tutor. But travelling to and from college was tiring and he found he

needed long periods of rest in between working. Whilst he has a long-term purpose in mind, Nathan found it increasingly hard to fit in with the pattern of work in college. He tended to keep ideas in his head and produce work at the last minute. His experience of feedback was often that he did not have time to get develop his work to stage that tutors expected and so was unable to test out his ideas. He blames himself – ‘I haven’t presented it properly’. As the year progressed he became increasingly interested in creating his own fabrics and in textile manipulation. He therefore often experimented with fabrics and was buying them on a scale that might have been perceived as disproportionate to the time he had to complete. This was expensive but he was reluctant to limit his creativity because of financial constraints.

Starting a job in the Spring term where he worked 20 hours a week meant that Nathan had less time and energy for college work. The job was a necessity to pay rent but it meant that in that term he managed to do very little college work. A lot of catching up had to be done the following term which he managed to do with the support of his tutors. Nevertheless, he felt frustration at not being able to realise in practice the ideas that he has – he attributes this to not having enough time. He also found it disheartening to see that he produced work at a slower pace than his peers.

Feedback from tutors varied a lot. On one occasion he was put off pursuing idea when he heard the tutor say ‘you’re not going to be able to produce it because you’re not really here’. He found this discouraging. He did not necessarily disagree – because knew his attention was focused on problems extraneous to the work - but he found it hard to know how to respond. He did not want to be perceived as ‘that character that looks like he doesn’t care about his work’. On another occasion, it was clear that a tutor seemed unequivocally reassuring in his expectations of Nathan.

Nathan appreciated talking to a student support tutor who gave him space to reflect on his progress. This was much easier than talking to peers. In contextual studies Nathan found it easier to get on with the work but hard to make use of study support. He would book support sessions and then not attend, or forget to take along his essay. He put this down to his own lack of organisation. On the one occasion that he did go he found it helpful when the tutor ‘deconstructed’ the ideas he went with and was able to recommend some books that would help develop it.

He has plans for the Summer – independently initiated work – to define himself as a designer and prepare for internships in year 2. Nathan gained an offer for a paid internship during the year but did not get back to his contact after being offered certain dates for the work. So he feels embarrassed to follow up with this contact for any future work. Nathan seems to often downplay his achievements. Reflecting on the year, he describes it as a ‘crap year’ because his realised work does not match his visualised ideas. He feels that he produced work ‘only because he had to’, under pressure. Constantly struggling between what he visualises as an ideal and what he is able to produce is linked to constraints of time and motivation. He spends time at other UAL colleges where he feels inspired and at times wishes that he could be studying there, yet at the same time he appreciates many of the tutors and facilities in his own college.

Thinking about the second year, he is also anticipating collaborative projects with his peers and is feeling somewhat daunted at the prospect of being able to express his ideas to them. He feels it may be a challenge to work with people who are ‘not on the same wavelength’, though he also sees this as part and parcel of professional life. He does have a respect and admiration for the work of his peers and sees the group as ‘a talented bunch’ but he does not socialise with anyone on a regular basis. He does keep in touch with friends from his hometown.

TAMSIN: BA Fashion Design, Year 1, 2012-2013

Home White student

Tamsin did her foundation degree at further education college in Manchester. It wasn't until the second year of A-level study that she realised that fashion design was what she wanted to do. Up until then she had been focused on social sciences and humanities subjects. She found that she was most absorbed in the Textiles course she was undertaking and found that it was only in that that she was able to express something of herself.

Tamsin's mother and father had gone to art college but it was mostly her teachers who helped her in the application process. She did much of her own research – looking at the final year shows of the colleges she was considering, reading as much as possible about the course content, and finally deciding on a UAL college because of its reputation, course content and location in London. She particularly liked the BA shows there that she felt were very professional, technically accomplished and experimental.

She managed to get a room in Halls and straight away got on very well with her housemates and found a group of people to join at Freshers' events. Having never lived away from home, she really enjoyed her new-found independence in London.

On the course she was very much looking forward to being taught by tutors who had experience in the Fashion industry. She was slightly apprehensive about the workload but only insofar as she wasn't sure how it would fit alongside her intention to gain an internship as soon as possible. Indeed she got talking to someone on the train coming down to London who may have been able to put her in touch with someone who could help with that. In the event that contact did not come to anything but she managed through other means to gain several highly stimulating industry experiences throughout the year: she was one of three students chosen by her tutor for one internship; she collaborated with a flatmate from another discipline within fashion which resulted in her designs being published by a fashion magazine; her designs were sold at London department stores; and she immersed herself in a 5-week internship over Easter during which she expanded her technical skills in several areas and gained an invaluable first-hand orientation to the fashion industry.

Experience on the course itself somewhat paled in comparison to these experiences. There was one tutor that she felt understood her work, that she identified with and that she felt gave her feedback which helped her work harder. She describes the process of working with this tutor:

When you produce work, ... all the little bits in the back of your head that you think, maybe I should do it that way; ... but you just leave it and hand it in, she picks up on all of those, so it makes you switch on and think, actually, no, I need to...

However, this was not the case with all tutors, one of whom she felt seemed to have penalised her for producing too much work. To some extent, for Tamsin, the significance of the course receded in comparison to her own practice but she couldn't help but feel a sense of injustice at being awarded the same grade as fellow students who she felt had produced less work to a lower standard.

Group projects were fraught with difficulty. She felt that she shouldered most of the responsibility for organising and doing a group project which was run jointly with students from another course. While she had some contributions from two students, she was disappointed with the level of participation. One student dropped out without telling the

other members of the group, another was repeating work from a previous term and finding it hard to contribute to the group project. At one point she felt she 'had to fire' other students who were not turning up and not pulling their weight. She had the tutor's sympathy but the lack of commitment from her peers was a source of frustration.

By the end of the year Tamsin was immersed in her practice; experimenting with texture and print and building on her industry experience. She came across as determined and single-minded, working '24/7' to realise her ambitions. She was surprised at how much she had had to spend on materials but fortunately was able to ask her parents to help financially. This was an important source of support because her level of commitment to the work was such that she did not feel she could fit in a paying job alongside and most of her interning work had been unpaid.

Tamsin felt that that most of her progress had come as a result of this experience and the informal learning during her internships rather than through the course which she felt did not offer enough 'up front teaching'. She recognised that she was being taught through crits about 'how to make something better' but there was not enough guidance processes or methods. She wanted to be taught, and then have the opportunity to experiment with variations. As things stood she felt that she was discovering things incidentally rather than being taught in a designed curriculum. She has enjoyed the cultural studies part of the course and can really see how it related to her practice.

The frustrations of groupwork did not carry through into interactions with peers in that she enjoyed their company and often saw a group of course-mates outside the course. However, she was conscious of a range of commitment among students, some of whom did not attend. She found it hard to relate to that lack of commitment.

At the end of the year, she had firm plans for new accommodation with a friend and had organised a work placement through a contact of her mother's, who now worked for a high-end designer in a (mainland) European capital.

Preliminary Conclusions

In research that is highly emotionally and politically charged, such as this, there is particular sensitivity about the terminology that is used. For example, it is possible to say that the inequality under discussion pertains to ‘the award of degree classifications’ or alternatively to ‘the under-achievement of Black and minority ethnic students’. In the former case agency is attributed to tutors who assess students’ work and Academic Boards who confirm those assessments, with the implication that one or both are complicit in unfair discrimination. In the latter case agency is attributed to the student, with the implication that the student is ‘in deficit’.

There is indisputably a gap in attainment and this attainment comes about through an inter-play of structure and agency. The attainment of all students comes about because they are able, to greater and lesser extents, to turn the environment around them to their advantage; and, the environment appears to be more often suited to the agency of White students than that of Black and Minority Ethnic students.

The play on ‘becoming’ (as verb and adjective) in the title of this report is an attempt to draw attention to the existence of an ‘implied student’ (Ulriksen 2007: 522):

the implied student could be understood as the study practice, the attitudes, interpretations and behaviour of the student, that is presupposed by the way the study is organised, the mode of teaching and assessment, by the teachers and in the relations between the students, enabling the students to actualise the study in a meaningful way.

The concept of ‘the implied student’, building on more well-known predecessors such as ‘the hidden curriculum’, refers to the idea that assumptions are embedded in all that educators do: from course design to day-to-day teaching and assessment. Students deliberately or intuitively come to grips with these assumptions to differing extents. The findings presented here relate to the first third (or less) of this process. And so this attempt to map it out is very much in its early stages.

Nevertheless it seems there are clear – if often complex – differences in students’ capacities to make use of their course and college environments; and in the potential of those environments to serve, or under-serve, students. These differences begin before students arrive at UAL in familial contexts and their early motivations. The implication of these differences is that some students have a greater material and emotional resource to call upon than others. Furthermore, the advantage or disadvantage conferred by familial context seem to have cumulative and developing impacts on students rather than simply being a factor in students’ initial subject choice.

As students start to make sense of briefs and make work or write, they are starting from very different points. Opaqueness, it has long been recognised, favours those already ‘in the know’ and transparency can be a leveller. However, it does not consist in merely explicit inductions or well-written briefs (though these are important) but in the day-to-day conversations, in the examples chosen, and in the time taken to understand where students ‘are coming from’ in their work even when, at first glance, it may seem trivial, over-complicated or irrelevant. It is the attention in and of itself that gives students the feeling that they and their work matters.

How students see themselves may not always be mirrored in how they are perceived by others. As Tariq Modood has observed:

in locating oneself in a hostile society one must begin with one's mode of being not one's mode of oppression for one's strength flows from one's mode of being. (Modood 1990: 130)

That students should be able to bring themselves – in their mode of being – into their work hardly seems contestable in an art and design higher education institution. Yet it seems to be harder for some students than others. It is not possible to say it is harder in specific ways for all Black and minority ethnic students as compared to their White counterparts: after all a good proportion of the former do attain very well. But it is possible to say in the current configuration of curricula and day-to-day teaching and learning; it is more often harder for BME students (home and international) than it is for White students. Just as students need to develop a literacy around what it means to be a student and practitioner in a particular discipline, so too do tutors develop a capacity to recognise the particular misunderstandings or states of 'not knowing that they need to know' that students often come with. The **Case Studies** at the end of this report document how these general patterns may play out at a micro day-to-day-level, while the main findings section offers a thematic analysis.

What next?

A strategy for communicating and using these findings will comprise the following elements:

1. A systematic attempt to involve tutors in debate and discussion on the findings

In addition to taking the report to the relevant committees such as the Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Committee, programme directors will be offered the opportunity to discuss the findings within their teams. Relevant case studies can be selected to provide the basis for a stimulating discussion. In addition, drawing on the expertise and forthcoming events of Shades of Noir debates will be opportunities to take part in public debates on particular themes such as representation of diverse cultures in curricula.

2. A forum for students to discuss research findings

Students participating in the research will be invited to an event at the start of the Summer term of 2014. Its aim will be to give them an opportunity to learn more about the project and discuss its findings with each other. These students and SU Arts will be consulted about further ways to engage other students in the project.

3. Visual output relating to the findings

A range of creative outputs are possible based on the findings of this research. Among the ideas under discussion is the making a film based on the case studies generated by the project. This would have the benefit of creating a focus for stimulating and re-framing discussion about the gap in attainment.

References

- Bernstein, B. (2000). *Pedagogy, symbolic control and identity: Theory, research and critique*. New York and Oxford, Rowman & Littlefield.
- Broeke, S. and T. Nicholls (2007). *Ethnicity and Degree Attainment*, Department for Education and Skills.
- Burke, P.J. and McManus, J. (2009) *Art for a Few: Exclusion and Misrecognition in in Art and Design Higher Education Admissions*, National Arts Learning Network.
- Clegg, S. (2011). Cultural capital and agency: Connecting critique and curriculum in higher education. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 32(1), 93-108.
- Connor H, Tyers C, Modood T, Hillage J (2004) *Why the Difference? A closer look at higher education minority ethnic students and graduates* Research Report RR552, Department for Education and Skills, 2004.
- Crozier, G. and D. Reay (2011). Capital accumulation: working class students learning how to learn in HE. *Teaching in Higher Education* 16(2): 145-155.
- Equality Change Unit (2008). *Ethnicity, Gender and Degree Attainment Project: Final Report*. HEA, York.
- HEFCE 2010/13, *Student Ethnicity: Profile and progression of entrants to full-time, first degree study*
- Law, I, D Phillips, L Turney (eds) (2004) *Institutional Racism in Higher Education* Stoke on Trent, Trentham Books
- McLean, M., A. Abbas and P. Ashwin (2012): The use and value of Bernstein's work in studying (in)equalities in undergraduate social science education, *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 34 (2), 262-280
- Modood, T. (1990): Muslims, race and equality in Britain: Some post-Rushdie affair reflections, *Third Text*, 4:11, 127-134
- National Union of Students (2011) *Race for Equality: A report on the experiences of Black students in further and higher education*
- Pilkington, A. (2011) *Institutional Racism in the Academy: A Case Study*. Stoke on Trent, Trentham Books
- Quinn, J. (2006). Mass participation but no curriculum transformation: The hidden issue in the access to higher education debate. *Perspectives and Practice in Widening Participation in the Social Sciences*. D. Jary and R. Jones. Birmingham, C-SAP, University of Birmingham.
- Reay, D., M. David, et al. (2001). Making a difference?: Institutional habituses and higher education choice. *Sociological Research Online* 5(4).
- Reay, D., Crozier, G., & Clayton, J. (2010). 'Fitting in' or 'standing out': Working-class students in UK higher education. *British Educational Research Journal*, 36(1), 107-124.

Richardson, J. T. E. (2008). The attainment of ethnic minority students in UK higher education. *Studies in Higher Education* 33(1): 33-48.

Sabri, D (2010). *Student Departure and Persistence at UAL*, UAL.

Sabri, D.(2011b) What's wrong with 'the student experience'? *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 32(5)

Suellen Shay (2013): Conceptualizing curriculum differentiation in higher education: a sociology of knowledge point of view, *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 34(4), 563-582

Singh, G. (2011) *A synthesis of research evidence. Black and minority ethnic (BME) students' participation in higher education: improving retention and success.*
www.heacademy.ac.uk/evidencenet

Stevenson, J. and Whelan, P. (2013) *Synthesis of US literature relating to the retention, progression, completion and attainment of black and minority ethnic (BME) students in HE.* Higher Education Academy: York.

Ulriksen, L. (2009) The implied student, *Studies in Higher Education*, 34:5, 517-532