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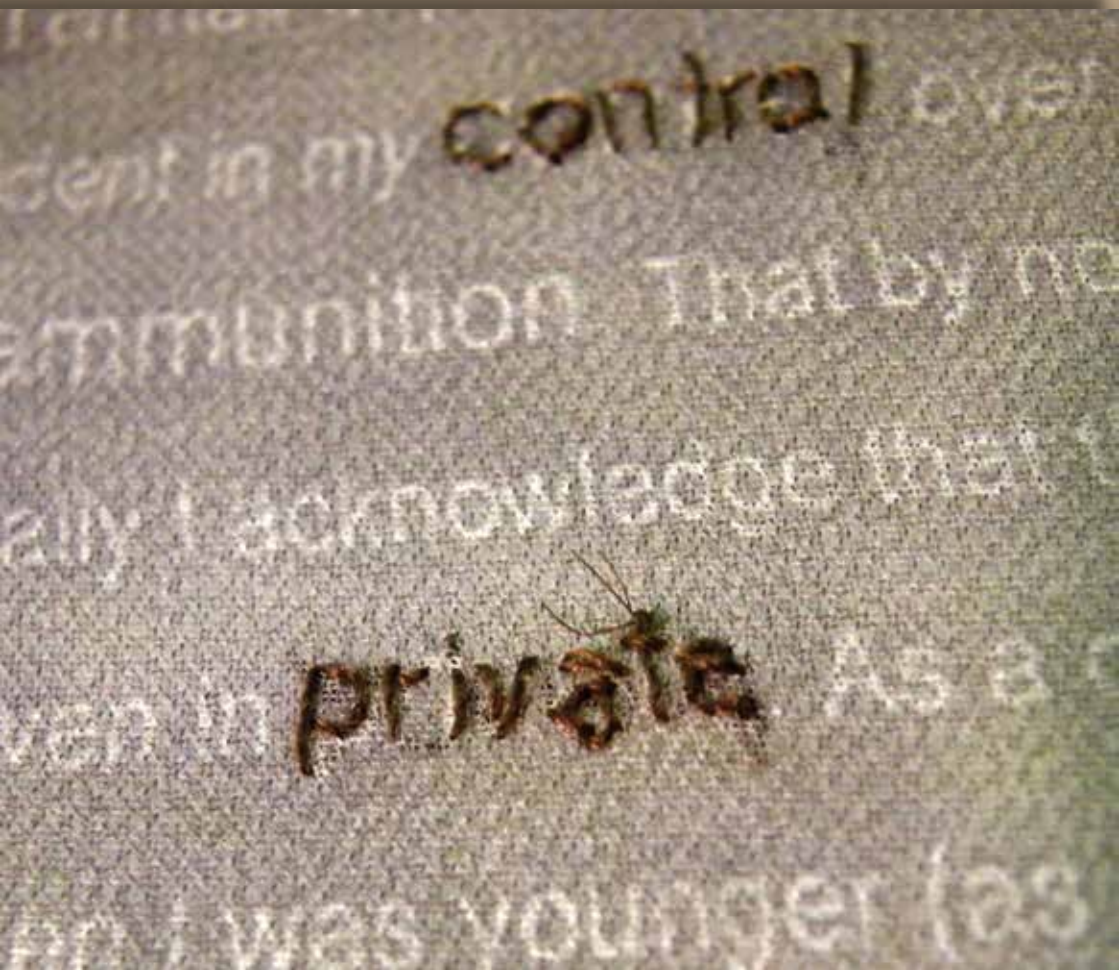
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# RAS Project Evaluative Report 2013



**‘Achievement should mean it was hard work, challenging, out of one’s comfort zone, which leads to reward and satisfaction.’ RAS interviewee**

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## Preface

I very much welcome the publication of the *RAS Project Evaluative Report*. It is a cause of deep concern that at UAL, like many other universities, Black students are less likely to be awarded a 1st or 2:1 than White students. Universities need to change in order to ensure that this inequality of outcome is eradicated. University of the Arts London wishes to be at the forefront of that change. The RAS project makes a significant contribution to understanding how we need to change.

I wish to thank Dr Kate Hatton for her highly effective management of what has been a complex project. I also wish to thank the RAS Researchers for the energy and commitment they have applied to undertaking these challenging academic research projects.

**Mark Crawley**

Dean of Students and Director of Widening Participation and Progression, University of the Arts London

# Summary of key findings

## The 'gaps'

The 'gaps' in achievement between Black home and White home students suggest obstacles are on-going in the system. However, data shows that Black home students had achieved better overall grades on cross-course units such as Cultural and Historical Studies than their White counterparts.

The term 'gap' can be misleading in terms of achievement information. For many students, the institution ignored wider aspects of their achievements.

The institution's conceptualisation and understanding of a 'gap' was detrimental where greater understandings of social contexts of learning were absent. Learning to recognise the problem is within the institution and not with the student body, despite the institution's focus on statistical achievement, would be helpful.

Assessment processes could be improved to provide more equality such as anonymous marking which this study showed helped to create advantages for BAME students around perceived gaps.

Students had recognised there could be 'gaps' in the way they learnt but by working in smaller group situations, this was less noticeable. The NUS Race for Equality report suggested some issues around preparedness for HE but it was not beneficial to locate the discussion only within the student body.

Black staff and students need to play a much more central role within the institution in order to address 'unseen' issues around achievement and to highlight possible instances of racism which may occur. This presence needs to be located at every level for the benefit of all students and staff and will help in closing the 'gap'.

## Culture and creativity

Culture and identity should be 'debated in project work so they matter rather than just being a by-product'. This idea was reflected in a number of RAS reports and workshop discussions. It sometimes became a serious concern and therefore a recommendation for more and deeper debates within and across the institution around such issues, is notable.

At the core of such issues is the intersection of identity, cultural experience and creative practice, but identity must be also be seen as 'on-going and fluid' (Hall, 2007) within the creative process.

Students can and do bring their culture into their work but if the cultural references are not understood then tutors may not connect with the ideas.

Continuous updating of cultural theory for all teaching staff would allow for new ideas to form naturally and with confidence within all parts of the curriculum.

The students expressed that if Black cultural issues were taught from a positive perspective that they would feel good about themselves.

Taking creative 'risks' works only if the tutor support is there and diverse ideas are valued

UAL must try to break down the perception of White and middle class.

### **The curriculum**

There were uncertainties about the art and design curriculum, it was found that it may contain fixed knowledge but when an interdisciplinary, collaborative creative process was encouraged, this seemed to work much better.

Orthodox pedagogies could be challenged and learning styles reviewed, particularly in the studio space where greater forms of artistic expression could be encouraged. This could work by using more cross-course and cross-disciplinary practices.

Team teaching and team assessments could be valued more, in order to provide better long term and more diverse educational provision at UAL.

The core curriculum has a lack of diversity although some units such as Cultural Studies seemed to have a more diverse curriculum than others. Black students felt they needed to see themselves reflected more positively in all areas of the curriculum.

The curriculum needs to move away from issues of representation to provide a vocabulary for discussing culture in a contemporary context. This can operate by opening up encounters with postcolonial theory, not necessarily on specialist courses, but in a more embedded way as part of the whole curriculum discourse.

Tutors may require support from the institution to help diversify the curriculum in their course areas and to make links to external research and academic centres, in order to expand relevant knowledge. Staff development around cultural theory, postcolonial theory and wider ethnographic practices to understand identities of 'self' would assist in opening up the curriculum and in providing insight to diverse students' identities and histories

The 'workshop' experience adds to confidence building and collective trust and builds a good tutor/group dynamic. The workshop can be cathartic, helping students overcome personal issues and give them a sense of belonging, both on course and University-wide.

Support is needed for the continuing role of RAS researchers as leaders within their course areas. This may involve time for regular RAS network meetings to extend the impact of the RAS programme and ensure its relevance to the developing curriculum. The RAS researchers may also require time to extend links to research and curriculum networks and for any publishing activity derived from this.



# Introduction and context

The University of the Arts London is described as ‘a creative community made up of six world leading colleges’ (Nigel Carrington, Vice Chancellor, 2013). Therefore, the University is in a key position to effect important changes in response to issues affecting art and design students, in particular in working across the arts curriculum to support a diverse staff and student body. The RAS Project Evaluative Report acts as a review of such possible changes, with those shifts not only required at UAL but also other arts institutions in terms of: embracing wider cohorts of students; in furthering debates around culture and creativity and finally in developing a more diverse curriculum for the benefit of all students and staff. This type of progress may not only lead to benefits across subject areas and create more effective study and degree results, but could also promote the arts institution as a leader in the globalised education community, receptive and responsive to the fullest needs and creative potential of its whole body of students and staff.

The impetus for the RAS Programme came from the University’s response to the marked differential in grades between some student groups., University data for 2008/09 showed a difference of 29 points between White and Black students in the proportion of First Degree students being awarded a 1st/2:1 degree classification. Despite UAL having six colleges, there were similar

differentials at each one, although some colleges performed slightly better than others with regard to BAME achievement. Overall, the University’s data suggested White home students were more likely to achieve higher degree classifications than Black home students. The University decided to respond to this situation by means of a number of strategies; the RAS programme being one of these. The 2010–2013 RAS Programme comprised fifteen small-scale educational research studies on questions around educational achievement/attainment, and the art and design curriculum. Twenty researchers worked on the fifteen studies, developing knowledge from the six UAL colleges over a period of two years

The aim of this report is to summarise and evaluate the RAS research findings; to understand why the research needed to take place and to offer suggestions for future institutional activity which would reduce the inequalities in arts education. The concept of a ‘gap’ and what achievement might mean is discussed in sections 4 and 7. The idea of the importance of understanding both culture and creativity in terms of this equalities debate is considered within sections 5 and 7. This summary report extrapolates the key findings from fifteen staff research studies in order to make recommendations for art and design institutions and organisations, policy makers and researchers interested in ‘race’, ethnicity and the higher education curriculum. Knowledge is sparse on diversity and arts education. We felt potential studies within the institution could focus on ways in which the curriculum may afford Black students and staff a continuing voice.





## RAS methodology

The programme began in September 2010 with six research proposals from one college. In 2011, more studies began, culminating in a full research programme of fifteen small scale pedagogic research studies run by staff across the institution.

The overall context of the RAS programme was that of action research to explore existing knowledge around curriculum structures, develop new forms of cultural knowledge linked to the curriculum drawn from theoretical readings, together with a desire to effect change in terms of 'race' and the institution. The small scale studies emphasised: pedagogy, the institution researching itself, testing interventions and attempting to suggest 'change'.

Cultural theory was extremely important to each study since it enabled thinking around the researcher's self and the importance of understanding identity for the student. Hall's notion of standing back to make 'the detour through thought' (Hall, 2007) in order to acquire deeper understandings, may have represented a part of our RAS approach although this was not always easy to do. Hall suggests this way of thinking and working becomes difficult at times, since:

*So inevitably, thinking is hard work, a kind of labour. It is not something that simply flows naturally from inside oneself. Thus the complexities about doing intellectual*

*work is that, of course, to be any sort of intellectual is to attempt to raise one's self-reflexiveness to the highest point of intensity. (Hall, in Meeks, 2007:270)*

In addition to conceptualising the work of the researcher socially and culturally, a number of methods were also adopted from ethnographic research such as doing field work, making and recording observations of teaching and learning, interviewing, understanding life histories and the ways cultural theory related to this, using focus groups. These approaches also allowed for a deeper social and cultural understanding of the research field (Atkinson et al, eds, 2007). The research was conducted in an organisational setting with the aim that the RAS work would eventually impact on the arts curriculum. RAS researchers took the view that their research would not provide instant solutions due to the complex and sensitive issues involved in addressing achievement as this might take time to see year on year results. As the researchers were on a personal biographical journey, developing identities as researchers of race issues in art education; this meant knowledge had to be built up in ways that formed praxis between the critical thinking around the subject and the practicalities of making changes in the institution, which could take time. The overall conceptualisation of the research as 'action research' followed Somekh's view of understanding notions of power:

*An important issue for action research is the way power is conceptualised, since power is an integral part of the interactions in any group or organisation and an active constituent of any process of change. (Somekh, 2006:17)*

The RAS programme evolved when and where researcher understandings of power became critical, both in terms of the power relationships between students and staff examined at the University, but also around the

positionality of the researcher. These understandings each reflected subtle forms of power, which at the same time required the broader theoretical resources from cultural studies to make sense of such contexts and relationships. Somekh also noted power can occur 'consciously or unconsciously by individuals within organisations' (Somekh, 2006). In undertaking the research, the researchers became very aware of how power performed in the institution with this leading to wider thinking around institutional structures, the curriculum and 'race'.

The RAS researchers worked with first hand exploration of the research settings, whether this was in their own course area, or in other fields which they knew well. This may have involved the courses onto which students progressed (as in the Foundation and BA course areas) which allowed for on-going narratives of experience to develop. A few RAS projects used curriculum interventions to assess the impact of new ideas being built into the teaching and learning process. These interventions are evaluated within the individual reports. (Access via RAS Project Manager: k.hatton@arts.ac.uk)

Researchers used data from institutional statistics, but also were encouraged to work with discourse analysis, examining aspects of theory developed from qualitative research methods, to build on the assumptions they were forming. The use of concepts from educational research together with race theory, art theory, post-structural and postcolonial theory, made sense in order to help develop a wider perspective of the conditions of learning for both Black and White students in the art school, in a contemporary setting. Building in 'theory' was important but this was done in an evolutionary way, and therefore each study reflects a personal journey of 'meaning making' by each researcher.

## Workshops

The RAS programme provided workshop and speaker events, research seminars, discussions and one to one mentoring which took place within the institution, away from curriculum areas. This work supported new theoretical understandings of the curriculum, developed through dialogue, ideas around working sensitively and ethically with students and staff participants. Many social and cultural issues impacting on the work were debated in this relatively 'safe' space. The organisation of the programme of workshops involved setting strategically placed activities to enable progression of work, as in siting the ethics workshop at the beginning of the programme and later on, artist speaker events during the broader research activities to enable the on-going reflection around artistic voices and interdisciplinary artistic practices to emerge.

Researchers were expected to attend a minimum of one meeting per term and were invited to participate in discussions around: research ethics, research progress, researcher positionality, institutional data, qualitative research and researching 'race', whiteness, cross disciplinary arts practices, culture, creativity and the curriculum. The workshops involved published academics on race and higher education, artists, poets and writers. The University supported these workshops which enabled them to be successful as they opened up new possibilities for critical reflection, which was crucial to the researchers work.

## Research development

The art and design curriculum was examined across the University's six colleges, in a number of settings. Each proposal had identified clear issues which were investigated at college level. The research worked on a micro and macro level, using workshops and focus

groups for wider examination and discussion on a one to one basis and through email, with the research project manager and other significant individuals such as interviewees. Research questions developed from the original RAS proposals had been through ethical review prior to the commencement of the work. The definition of key terms and linguistic ambiguities, such as, 'whiteness', BAME, 'culture' and 'creativity', was encouraged, within each study. The researcher's auto-biographical narrative was examined in a number of ways and therefore this informed the overall conceptual framing of the researcher's general approach, and the methods he or she was using.

The term BAME (Black , Asian and Minority Ethnic) refers to the anti-discriminatory aims of social policy legislation and social agency terminologies which have increasingly been used in forming institutional data within the UK. This approach includes data collected in the University setting. In this report, the term BAME is used only as a formal description of 'non-White' representation within University achievement statistics, and does not mean the category is successful in reflecting 'true' identities. The author also deems 'White' as a racial and ethnic category, within which numerous identities may be reflected, as is the case with BAME.

However, the impetus for this research came from statistical data and from this beginning, more nuanced understandings of 'race', ethnicity and cultural identity can and should be made. Further, the terms 'Black' and 'White' may also be used in this report to represent the broader experiences of students and staff. None of these terms are successful in locating true identities and nor should they attempt to do so.

### **The RAS Research Report Model**

The RAS Research Report Model was discussed with researchers and various recommendations were made. This included; how to anonymise participants, how to work ethically in response to the researchers, the researched and the institution and how to request permission for publication. It was felt important, as in line with other action research, that a report was published in order to support the requirements of the commissioning institution and to reach the wider education audience. The individual reports have reached a publishable form and therefore they stand as additional research outcomes that are likely to be published in education journals in the future.

Achieving a balance between publically disseminating information around sensitive subject matter and supporting the promotion of any material which could play a part in making useful change in art education were issues carefully considered throughout. The idea of gaining permission which had become a feature of a number of workshop and tutorial sessions continued to play a part in the reporting process. Work around the sensitive nature of the research needed to be a continuing factor. During the earlier research activity work had been done in the space of the studio or in other quiet spaces. As the research work became a part of everyday activities, both the independence of the researcher and the wholeness of the institution came into play, leading to the development of a sense of the 'situated' nature of the study (Somekh, 2007). This aspect of work influenced how the reporting was considered in order not to affect the community of the researchers and the way in which RAS research had become a part of their everyday lives. The researchers were working and learning as insiders and needed to feel safe when reporting their findings. There came a point however, when their reports required a submission date.

Drafts of individual RAS reports were submitted to the project manager from spring 2013 and were read, amended and re-worked until finally completed in the summer of 2013. This evaluation aims to present a summary of the research activity together with selected recommendations. The studies also stand as independent texts so the individual pieces may stand alone as research objects, worthy of individual publication.

The fifteen studies were based on qualitative approaches to the art education field, comprising small ethnographic work set within the six colleges of the University; four used course and University data as a starting point to model comparative evaluations of achievement within course areas and one provided a detailed study of Options units.

All the researchers had experience of academic research but each worked in different ways to complete their research studies; always focusing around their researcher's strengths and subject fields. A qualitative approach was encouraged in order to discover closer stories from the institution.

# Researchers' backgrounds

The researchers' backgrounds were informed by their arts qualifications and teaching posts in higher arts education. They either had arts or humanities academic backgrounds or had trained as designers, artists, theorists. Some in fact had been students at the institution, but not all. Three researchers were published authors; most were practising artists, designers and curators who routinely held exhibitions of their work. Four had qualifications of doctoral standing and two were working towards completing postgraduate training. A number had Pg Cert qualifications and were therefore qualified teachers in post compulsory education. Each of the researchers had worked in art education for a minimum of five years and therefore had a fairly close understanding of the arts curriculum, both from their careers as students, to those as tutors, researchers and departmental managers.

The RAS researchers could not therefore be classed as 'early career' researchers since they were in long standing professional, research or teaching roles. Researching 'race' and the arts curriculum was however a new departure for many of the researchers, whether they were White or Black. This new territory meant a process of work was necessary for them to understand the research field as requiring a particular approach. The notion of undertaking 'diversity' research was far more complex than many had at first imagined but this was a good thing as they developed

a closer understanding of the complexities of the field and the nuanced aspects of racism in education, by doing specialist research work. Gunaratnam's excellent text; 'Researching 'Race' and Ethnicity' (2003) was one research source which enabled them to think more closely about the production of knowledge about 'difference' and exclusion and perhaps, more importantly, how to work ethically as a researcher researching 'race'. This interdisciplinary approach helped lead a number of projects.

*A particular aim is to develop a critical and theoretical informed approach to qualitative research methods which bring together ideas and thinking from a range of different fields, particularly post-structuralist, feminist, critical 'race', and postcolonial theory. (Gunaratnam, 2003:3)*

RAS also enabled staff researchers to combine their professional and research expertise in the projects, developed alongside normal work routines. They therefore held an 'insider' research position within the research field of the arts university at the time the research took place, which added meaning to their work. This gave rise to many discussions about the power relationships held between researcher and the research subject, but also as to how much their own personal experiences of art education enabled a greater understanding. Therefore, the RAS studies became a form of social discourse around race and art education, predicated from an important insider perspective.

Some RAS researchers have tackled matters of race and identity head on; others worked with the idea of understanding emotional contexts of learning which affect all students in the arts institution, often those reflecting barriers to learning. RAS reports either examined individual curriculum units or particular course levels working both with interventions and theories of identity to see what the curriculum might be saying to its students.

## Achievement or attainment 'gaps'

Initially, the RAS study began as an institutional response to a disparity found between Black and White students achievement in degree classifications statistics (UAL 2008–09). This disparity in degree classification figures was by no means apparent in one institution; the statistics appeared to be similar within other HE institutional data reporting around the same time. In this sense, UAL could not be 'singled out' as having wider sector disparities, rather its statistics revealed an on-going position within UK academe for Black students.

The disparity between grades at UAL created an image of achievement that the institution rightly wished to confront. This part of the institutional narrative of achievement, confirmed the received messages about who the institution was and what its representations to diverse student groups and their families might be. Many HE institutions have similar achievement statistics for White and Black students at degree classification and student focused surveys (NUS, 2011) reflect a wide concern across many universities. However, the situation is more complex than simply looking at statistical 'gaps', which is what the RAS researchers discovered as they worked through this problem; developing their own data and triangulating relevant theory in order to make meaning from their findings. The qualitative research methods they were using allowed for more nuanced readings of the data

and their findings worked with student experiences of the curriculum rather than simply degree results.

Furthermore, the use of terms such as 'achievement' or 'attainment' together with the word 'gap' becomes problematic in this context as statistical data may not give the University an accurate reading of the student experiences or abilities. Critical race theorists writing about education have examined such questions as; is the use of the term 'gap' a good way of looking at inequality in education? Gillborn (2008) rightly focused on such terms as being divisive, as they ignore the intersectional nature of issues impacting on the social practices of education such as class, race and gender. If such matters may be affecting education statistics, this may mean the interpretation of statistical data requires deeper analysis than simply considering the idea of a statistical 'gap':

*...as with almost everything to do with race inequality, nothing is straightforward: depending on their approach, two different commentators may describe identical statistics as showing exactly opposite trends.*  
(Gillborn, 2008:44)

The 'Gap Talk' Gillborn has examined, which is prevalent in many organisations charting educational achievement sometimes means, he suggests, there are particular reasons for the emphasis on using 'gap' methods and terms. The 'gap' approach tends to ignore, for example, any proportionate increases made in achievement by Black or White students, or in fact what the term achievement can actually mean. This approach can also misread what achievement and disadvantage is, in addition to the fact the approach often ensures any perceived inequalities are 'locked in' (Gillborn, 2008: 64–65). The RAS interview data reflected a similar finding, when the 'real' stories of students were examined. Achievement was actually seen by students as having

differing qualities and values. It was not just to do with scoring high marks:

*Achievement should mean it was hard work, challenging, out of one's comfort zone, which leads to reward and satisfaction.* (RAS interviewee)

Another student in the RAS study noted how family support and recognition of a family's social identity was important as a marker of success and achievement, suggesting that to the student, life experiences matter as much as academic successes:

*My dad has achieved but not in an academic way; he has done well in business and has been a great dad.*

### **Looking at the wider perspective on 'achievement'**

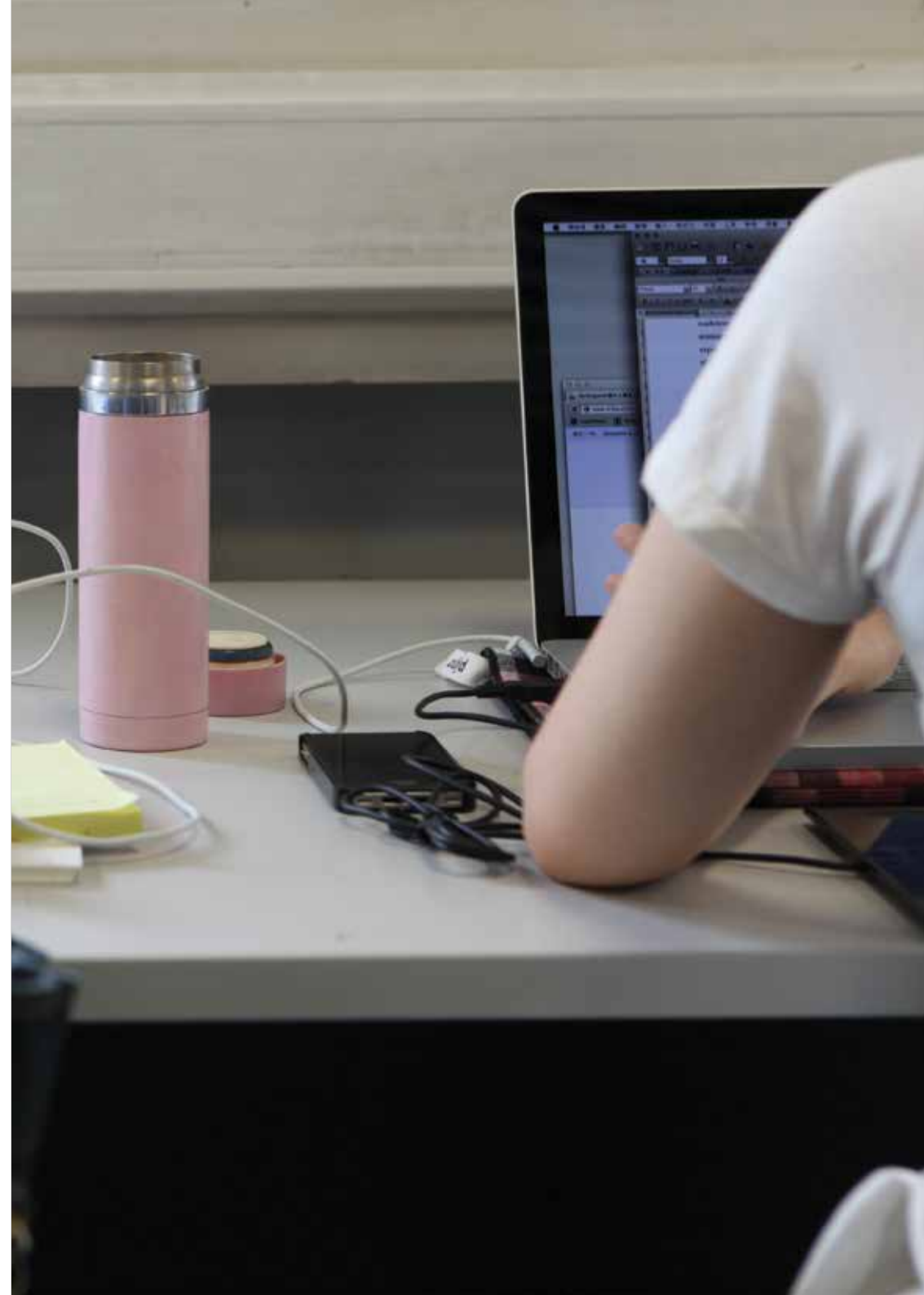
One RAS researcher found that by looking at statistics about achievement in cross college modules it was useful to see the wider picture of achievement on specific courses, but that there were possible reasons for certain disparities in achievement and startling results could be found when the statistics were read more closely. For example, the achievement data for particular modules which may have been considered academically challenging (Cultural and Historical Studies, for example), did in fact suggest BAME students were outperforming White students. This led to an assumption that these units of study had benefitted BAME students more than White students, or were in fact, more appropriate to their needs. The question of whether the practice based units were being delivered more successfully to White students, or that Black students may not have felt they could engage with practice as easily, for whatever reason (and this could have been to do with the subject or teaching practices), remains a valuable discourse, particularly when the units of study involving: identity theory, theories of representation and cultural understanding, seemed

to provide Black students with greater opportunities for engagement, as their unit results showed.

This is a complex situation in art education requiring a fine reading of critical race theory and educational theory in order to develop a better understanding of the sensitive issues involved, especially as far as 'race' and cultural diversity are concerned. Sharma, when discussing the transformation of the curriculum, interestingly noted:

*The challenge of a radical multicultural curriculum is immense. It fundamentally questions the praxis of education. The conventional focus on content has eclipsed questions on how it may be taught.*  
(Sharma, in Law et al, eds, 2004:114)

However, having a greater awareness of the affecting factors of culture, gender, class and other social and economic issues on statistics, and by asking deeper questions around the 'successes' of students, might assist University staff in making more accurate readings and interpretations of achievement data before any new curricula is planned. This wider approach is extremely important, before any new recommendations may be made within the teaching and learning context, in order not to ignore areas of the curriculum which seem to support achievement, and which in certain ways, can suggest room for improvement across courses, especially in practice based units within arts education.





# Culture, creativity and the arts and design curriculum

Culture and creativity were concepts built in to the RAS programme in the autumn of 2010 but these terms are variously defined within each study. It was felt these ideas were crucial to an understanding of Black and White identities within the art school and its curriculum and that in many senses no clear definitions could be made. The concepts, culture and creativity, also provided space for the RAS researchers to examine their own positions, their identities and institutional expectations of the students and the curriculum, in addition to their insider research positionality and approaches towards art and design, teaching and learning, within the art and design school. A White researcher, for example, might begin for the first time to look at what 'whiteness' may mean in terms of culture, power and the creative curriculum and could therefore examine relationships they had hitherto not recognised. A Black researcher might challenge assumptions around the 'whiteness' of the curriculum and how non-White forms of expression were being ignored. RAS workshops and focus groups provided a safe space for discussion on issues of identity and many issues were raised here.

Creativity itself could also be questioned through the RAS research method. The creative identities students are encouraged to adopt and develop through their art and design courses are often seen as an exploratory

process; an open and free situation emerging out of students needing to develop the appropriate visual and written languages in order to express themselves. Yet this process itself, particularly if following the 'atelier' tradition of following the 'master' and speaking in 'crits', can be intimidating for students who bring 'difference' to the art school. Sometimes different approaches are not understood by tutors who have their own particular visual language and understanding of representation, upon which their courses have been built. This means some students may not fully develop their own creative identities on well-established courses. It is only recently that female art students have been able to challenge art education's so called pedagogic 'rules' and expectations. This particular discourse is still continuing. Furthermore, the notion of a University promoting what is deemed acceptable in terms of the forms of 'creativity' it promotes, might affect the visions students have of the art and design institution, and how well they are able to perform within it.

On one traditional design course, a RAS researcher found there was a dominance of a certain kind of knowledge and social practice, which was value driven by the industry practice the course represented. This made it very difficult for students, especially those from diverse backgrounds, to challenge such dominance and they also had a fear of getting things 'wrong'. Safe spaces are sought, such as in contextual studies, in which to explore personal identities and make meaning on courses. However, there is no reason why a wider contextual discourse could not operate across the curriculum to enable a co-constructed course approach between students and staff to operate at all levels. This could mean a course becomes very distinctive and speaks back to the norms of the industry practice, which in some senses may be behind the times and need to catch up.

The art school has more influence on this process of creative identity formation than at first imagined. A survey of art students in the 1990s covering a wide range of subject fields (Hockey in Hickman, 2008) noted the strong relationship between creative identity formation and creative practice and this relationship relied on the student performing a fully reflexive self, within the context of the art school. Yet creative identities are inevitably conditioned by the settings in which they had been formed and the expectations of tutors and examiners, whose ideas of art and design practices and criticisms may have been shaped by western traditions. This could mean there is a depth of knowledge of culture and creativity outside the western tradition which is unknown to them. With an increasingly diverse and international cohort of students registering on arts higher education courses, the more traditional approach might be seen as out-dated.

### **Interventions**

The RAS researchers who worked with interventions that encouraged wider cultural discourse, discovered positive responses from students which enabled them to reflect on possible future curriculum activity which might benefit all students. The researchers also became more aware of how RAS allowed for students to provide an insight into what was needed:

*Whilst I am not in a position to influence the diversity of the student cohort intake, the (RAS) interviews established very convincingly the central importance and necessity to provide more readily available precedents for students to be able to identify their concerns with.*  
(RAS researcher)

One RAS project was closely linked to the existing curriculum, but worked as an intervention; it was seen by its researcher as a 'social' intervention in which identity

issues were explored in addition to looking at the gaps in the curriculum. By using the Tate as a focus, paintings worked as vehicles of exploration of identity, and the tutor led the students into a study of how views changed over time. It was noted that, 'students seemed to have appreciated the opportunity to explain and affirm those notions of identity that were important to their practice' (RAS researcher). Such work was enhanced by the introduction of readings on gender and identity in relation to art.



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# Racism: How might it be understood within the Art School?

## Institutional obligations

All public institutions have a duty to adhere to the Equality Act (2010). Most institutions develop their own equality and diversity policies. There is no full data as to how these institutions address and monitor local and institutional issues and resolve problems occurring due to racism. Bhopal and Jackson (2013) noted that a policy commitment to equality is not necessarily the same as strong leadership and implementation of the policy:

*Higher education institutions state a commitment to equality and diversity through their adherence to equality policies. However, there is limited evidence to assess the real impact of such policies.* (Bhopal & Jackson, 2013:18–19)

The RAS project aimed to address at a local level how aspects of 'race' and diversity worked within the curriculum and what tendencies there may be to restricting development of a wider curriculum across a range of art and design courses. On some courses such as the Foundation degrees at one UAL college, a researcher found 42 % of students were of BAME origin; however, the staff BAME ratio was 10% and in management 1.6%. The dominance of a Eurocentric curriculum despite a student cohort of nearly half the population having non-White origins, might suggest that what is happening

now in terms of the curriculum and general management of courses is somewhat disjointed.

## Could institutional racism occur?

According to Macpherson, institutional racism can be defined as:

*The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin.* (Macpherson, 1999: para 6.34)

This is an ethical issue reflecting matters of institutional responsibility. Institutional racism can occur within the arts institution, both through its curriculum practices and by means of routine activities which exclude Black students or staff from institutional narratives. These narratives may privilege certain groups, contexts or simply support particular staff 'hierarchies' that are predominantly White. In terms of courses, this might include the following approaches: setting and repeating a core curriculum which ignores non-Western traditions and histories; privileging curriculum staff in senior positions whose backgrounds may be White and middle/upper middle class; ignoring student concerns over the need to integrate diversity into course structures.

If this is an unseen issue for White staff, further reading of Critical Race Theory would provide a good background to some of the major concerns. There is a tendency for staff working at higher positions in arts academies to have White and often upper middle class backgrounds themselves but this is not routinely monitored or understood. Many Black staff work on temporary contracts, despite having good qualifications, deep artistic knowledge and a strong commitment to students. Often, when cuts are made to courses these staff will lose

their jobs before the White staff. In the words of a writer on multicultural education,

*White people need to learn about racism.* (Sleeter, in Ladson-Billings & Gillborn, 2004:176)

Again, this situation of privileging White staff should be monitored by the institution. There are also possibilities for improvement in terms of promoting what the art school already has as a resource. One such option is to acknowledge that there are many BAME staff with strong backgrounds in art and design education, already working within art and design institutions, and that their status should be seen as equal to that of the White middle class tutor or manager, but this fact often seems to be ignored. A commitment to acknowledging and promoting BAME staff would help the whole institution to diversify and would support staff, students and the developing curriculum.

To develop this point further, as it is a significant one, the 'professional classes' (Rollock, et al, 2012) noted in a study of Black middle classes and education, are an unseen group in the domain of education despite having an excellent knowledge of the education system and good social and cultural capital. Although primarily a study on schools based education systems, the evidence Rollock (et al, 2012) presented, suggests education institutions easily stereotype ethnic identities in relation to class, thereby creating uncertainties which in turn may have a negative impact on staff and students, as well as on the institution's image. This is worthy of consideration in terms of art education.

*For many there does not seem to be an easy, straightforward way in which to be Black and middle class: histories and cultural identity, the classed British context and racism all intervene to complicate, disrupt and render identities and allegiances uncertain.* (Rollock et al, 2012: 271)

Through this misrecognition of the equality of Black students and staff in having a middle class identity, equal to White middle class students and staff, there could be a pernicious and excluding effect within many educational settings particularly if the figures of Black staff are disproportionate to the diversity of the student body. The possibility of institutional racism occurring from such imbalances within an arts institution cannot be ignored.

The RAS researchers identified many instances of the marginalisation of Black students and staff across the institution; and although these instances were routine, White staff seemed to be unaware of the problems. In the RAS workshops, researchers wanted to know why such instances occurred and this generated useful discussion. This type of discussion could be more widely examined in course team meetings for example, if the person questioning situations had a neutral voice and was given a safe space to speak.

Despite the overwhelming power of art colleges and universities to develop a curriculum which would serve the communities and student body they are there for, little is often done in developing staff to work with an advanced and 'critical' (thinking) approach to cultural theory in order to build informed issues of culture into courses. This deficit impacts on the whole process of delivery, and the identity of an institution, since the academy tends to retain 'Whiteness' as a dominant discourse.



## RAS: Further findings and recommendations

The following recommendations by no means reflect the full findings of the RAS programme of research since each individual RAS report will stand alone as a definitive study of a particular area and set of research questions. Individual RAS reports will be available from Dr Kate Hatton in line with UAL approval. However, this overview together with the points raised at the beginning of this report, reflects the more general recommendations derived from data analysis of the fifteen studies, selecting three key themes derived from the fifteen reports to establish summary recommendations. The following may be read as additions to those outlined at the beginning of this report, but they are by no means less significant.

### **The gap**

More action research is needed to deepen researchers' engagement with the subject of diversity as well as with the subject of ethnographic research and reflexivity (from one RAS study).

There may be a gap in terms of cultural theory resources within colleges. One solution would be to develop a 'RAS' resource, as in an archive or lending source located at college libraries or a central UAL point which could be used by staff in preparation for the curriculum and for on-going reading for staff and course development. Other RAS suggestions included developing 'in-house' and permanent teaching resources at course level.

Further development of the RAS programme would support UAL's on-going commitment to responding to the achievement gap and broadening the curriculum. RAS researchers could become 'experts' or 'advisers' with curriculum discourses, course planning and student concerns being routinely discussed with them. The RAS research network could continue to support such figures within the institution in order to help make links to external bodies, to gain funding for further research and to mentor future researchers interested in the field.

### **Culture/Creativity**

A number of RAS researchers mentioned at some point in their report findings the White, Eurocentric nature of the art and design curriculum, but that this needed to change to involve a wider interpretation of history and identity, in particular to reflect more discussion on Black histories and Black arts practice. A number of suggestions as to how this might be done included: learning more from the student body, staff development, greater representation of BAME staff in senior positions, using cultural theory across courses that would present wider interpretation and discourse.

UAL to undertake an audit of Cultural and Historical/ Contextual Studies provision with the aim of developing greater parity across the institution. This could include an audit of dissertation supervision, staff knowledge and qualifications.

Existing UAL research networks such as TrAIN (University of the Arts London Research Centre for Transnational Art, Identity and Nation) could be used more by both students and staff. More could be made from this link by people attending TrAIN talks and liaising with TrAIN researchers to develop curriculum possibilities.

### **The curriculum**

Students need to share more in the knowledge formation on courses (a repeated RAS idea) and to co-construct the curriculum. Promoting BAME student engagement is significant at all levels.

More dialogue is needed between practice and contextual studies staff.

The status of Cultural Studies against main study needs to be evaluated.

The multicultural/diversity lens could be used to examine the curriculum.

Workshop group activities seemed to have encouraged individual progress, but this was not evident as a practice across all curriculum areas. This work could be encouraged since group knowledge and peer led learning was advantageous to both students and staff. 'Corridors of knowledge' might also be developed between courses in this way.

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