LECTURE IN PROGRESS

Insight Report into Creative Higher Education

December 2017
Introduction

Creative Education Research Report
Lecture in Progress inspires and informs emerging talent by providing advice and insight into the creative industry.

We believe that in order to do this we need to ensure a constant awareness of the world around us, and how the next generation bridge the gap between education and employment.

This insight report is our first, and sets out to explore the current creative education landscape in the UK. It looks to summerise recent news topics and themes (pages 6–12), break down the numbers (pages 13–21) and seek opinion and observations from current students, recent graduates, university tutors and creative practitioners (pages 22–39).

About Lecture in Progress
Lecture in Progress aims to empower emerging talent with information and first-hand accounts that demystify the day-to-day workings of the creative world. By focusing on the people, projects and places that make the industry thrive, we want to deliver greater visibility to how work unfolds, where it happens and the breadth of roles that exist.

Alongside original editorial features, we’ll be keeping you in the loop on important conversations and updates surrounding the world of creative work. Explore our Feed, Watch and Directory for a curation of articles, videos and podcasts from around the web and a list of essential resources.

Initially covering design, illustration, photography, film, animation and advertising across the UK, we intend to expand and develop our coverage as we grow.

Lecture in Progress has been created by the founders of It’s Nice That, Will Hudson and Alex Bec, and is made possible with the support of a selection of brand patrons, including The Paul Smith Foundation, Squarespace and GF Smith.
Insight Report
Executive Summary
Things Are Changing
Creative education has changed dramatically in the UK in past five years. In 2012 the tuition fee cap was raised to £9,000 (it’s now at £9,250), this year a new way to rank universities – the Teaching Excellence Framework – was introduced, and there’s been a sharp drop in applications to creative courses. But for those not in direct contact with students or universities, it can be hard to keep abreast of all these changes and assess the impact they are having on UK institutions and the creative industries at large. In this report – our first in a new twice-yearly series – we aim to explore the current landscape of creative education, to bring some of the discussions currently going on at universities up and down the country to a wider audience.

Who’s Talking
To form this report, we spoke to over 80 current students, recent graduates, tutors and industry leaders working in graphic design, illustration, advertising, film and TV, photography and animation from across the UK. We wanted to know where those on the ground felt the education system was thriving and where there was cause for concern. You’ll notice we’ve decided to keep the identities of all interviewees anonymous, to allow them to be as candid as possible. To add some background to these conversations, we’ve also summarised the most important news stories of the past 12 months and brought together the key figures and statistics to put our findings into a broader context.

Creative Industries Are on the Rise
The good news is that creative professions are flourishing. Between 2010 and 2015 the revenue of the creative industries grew by 34%. That’s 12.5% more than the UK economy as a whole. Similarly since 2011 the number of jobs in the creative economy has increased by 19.6%, a huge figure when compared to the growth of the wider UK workforce – 6.3%. But this growth is not being matched by an increase in the number of students taking creative subjects at degree level. In fact in 2016 there was a decrease in the number of university students taking arts and design courses, and although UCAS hasn’t revealed the final figures for 2017, it’s expected (given the drop in overall applications) that the trend will continue.

Students Are Taking the ‘Safe’ Route
You don’t have to look too far to see why this drop is happening. Taking into account the dramatic increase in tuition fees and the subsequent debt, it’s unsurprising that students are opting to study ‘safer’ subjects, like architecture, law and medicine when picking their degrees. This is added to the fact that salaries for graduates in creative subjects are the lowest of all of UCAS’s 23 categories. But there’s a more subtle political agenda at work too. In 2010 the Government introduced a new performance indicator, the English Baccalaureate (EBacc for short), which measures how many pupils get a grade C or above in the core academic subjects at Key Stage 4. It has encouraged schools to focus on subjects like Maths, Science and History, with the result that 19,000 fewer pupils took arts subjects at GCSE last year compared with 2014.

Graduates Want to Be Prepared
Speaking to students and recent graduates, financial concerns featured frequently in their responses and decision-making. Although most are confident in their creative ability, many feel unprepared for the entrepreneurial or commercial aspects of their practice, and wish their courses included more business know-how. Many praised courses with good industry integration, and were keen for live briefs, placements and real-life experience. Having said this, there appears to be a shift away from unpaid internships after graduation, mainly on the grounds that few would be able to afford to work for free. Salary expectations were low, but realistic, and many expected to work in jobs outside of their field initially to support their creative practice. Our research found that grads still see being/living in London as important, but many worry about how to fund accommodation for their first steps into the industry, relying on savings or parents to afford soaring rents.
Bigger Fees Don't Equal Better Education
Monetary concerns also figured repeatedly when interviewing tutors for this report. If you think that increased tuition fees have lead to better-funded courses, think again – the huge hikes have been used to plug gaps caused by cuts to Government funding. Many educators discussed a cultural shift within institutions seeing students as ‘customers’, with universities competing for students (and their fees) and subsequently being less selective. Many felt that students’ expectations had grown alongside fee rises, but resources had not been increased to keep up. Educators also spoke of how league tables and success metrics were stifling creativity in higher education, as universities avoid taking risks for fear of losing funding or student approval. Although tutors loved their work and celebrated the talent of their students, on the whole the mood was glum and there was concern for the future.

An open-armed industry
Those in the industry were a lot more positive about the students they worked with and their involvement with universities. Some echoed students’ concerns that they were underprepared when it came to the commercial side of the design industry, and called for universities to increase business-minded teaching. There was an acknowledgement that students’ portfolios were much broader and interdisciplinary than they perhaps would have been ten years ago – with some praising this and others bemoaning a lack of focus. Most of all industry practitioners wanted prospective employees to be creative thinkers with a good work ethic and communication skills – almost everything else they felt they could learn on the job.

There’s a great deal of insight contained in this report, and we’d like to thank all the people that took time to contribute. But it is just the start. There’s a huge amount of work still to be done to analyse in-depth some of the issues raised in this initial overview. Please get in touch if you’d like to contribute to the next report.
Recent News Themes

In this section we bring you a summary of the most important educational news stories of the past twelve months, to help put our findings into context.

We’ve broken the stories into five main themes: Fees and Money, Alternative Models, The Future of Learning, Diversity, Industry and Pipeline; a reflection of the biggest issues in creative education right now.
Rises in tuition fees and student loan interest rates have increased students’ expectations regarding the value of courses, especially as the outlook post-graduation is increasingly challenging.

**UK universities to offer two-year intensive degrees**
In February the Government allowed universities to offer two-year-long degrees, made possible through an intensive programme and dramatically cutting holiday time. Although institutions can charge upwards of £13,000 per year for the fast-track qualification (making them of similar cost to a conventional degree), the compression saves students substantial living costs.

**London regeneration will cause 30% of artists to lose their studios**
A report published by the London Assembly Regeneration Committee predicted that 3,500 of London’s artists will be forced out of their work places by 2019, making the capital increasingly precarious for creative students and recent graduates. The report makes recommendations to include an affordable cultural workspace policy for every large planning development.

**Student loan interest rate to rise by a third**
Recent graduates will pay a whopping 6.1% interest on their loans from September, up from 4.6%, while high street banks offer personal loans at record lows. Unlike commercial loans the student loan interest rate is tied to the little-used Retail Price Inflation figure, which has soared following the pound’s post-Brexit decline and the subsequent inflation surge.

**University fees to increase**
Legislation hastily pushed through parliament before the general election allowed universities to increase tuition fees regardless of improvements in teaching until 2020, where a link to quality will have to be proven. Until this date universities can increase fees in line with inflation – fees will increase to £9,250 this year.

**Labour pledges to scrap tuition fees**
Outlining plans in its pre-election manifesto, the Labour party promised to abolish fees for those starting in September if it came into power. Jeremy Corbyn subsequently got into hot water by seeming to suggest that he would also write off existing debt of former students (by saying he would “deal with it” in an interview with NME) – the party had to claim this was an “ambition” rather than an election pledge.

**A third of university students say courses are poor value**
According to the findings of the 2017 Student Academic Experience Survey, the number of students that rate their course as poor or very poor value for money has doubled in the past five years, from 18% to 34%. Over 75% said they were against plans to allow universities to raise fees further.

**Arts graduates earn the least of any degree, report finds**
New data released by the Department of Education shows that young people with creative arts and design degrees face the lowest median earnings across all disciplines. The report used tax data five years after graduation to make the assessment, which found that those that had studied creative subjects earned on average £20,000.

**Ten charts that show the effect of tuition fees**
Given the context that tuition fees have become increasingly politicised this year, the BBC crunched the numbers on some of the core claims. Essential reading for those interested in how fee hikes have affected application numbers, whether the cost of fees are returned on earnings and the teaching hours you get for your money.

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1. [http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/2017/02/24/students-offered-university-degrees-two-years/](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/2017/02/24/students-offered-university-degrees-two-years/)
Recent News Themes

Alternative Models

A number of new approaches to education have popped up in the past twelve months, with the aim of making learning – and jobs in the creative industries – more accessible.

Apprenticeships are on the rise
A record number of young people – more than 900,000 a year – became apprentices in 2015-2016. It’s a trend that looks set to continue as the Government introduced a new apprenticeship levy for employers with an annual pay bill of more than £3m, with companies that offer apprenticeships able to recoup their payment from a central levy fund.

UK ad agencies rethink the university degree as a job requirement
In January Dentsu Aegis Network, JWT and CHI & Partners all accepted their first non-degree candidates, instead gauging applicants’ industry understanding and potential through group interview days. Ogilvy also launched its Pipe programme, a sixth month paid creative internship, awarded regardless of education, age and previous experience.

Graphic design students contribute to the admissions process at Yale
Among the numerous insights from this AIGA profile of Yale School of Art (USA) graphic design director Sheila Levrant de Bretteville, it reveals that the non-hierarchical structure of her utopian learning hub even extends to admissions. The 18 programme places are whittled down through portfolio reviews where current students score work alongside the faculty.

Google launches new tool for online education
Previously available only to those with a G Suite for Education account, Google Classroom is a tool that allows teachers and students to teach or attend classes online, as well as manage assignments and collaborate instantly. The tech giant also launched a new function that allows users to create their own courses, disrupting the need for learners to be in the same space IRL.

New Photography MA at UWE signals a career-focused approach
Launched in September and designed by photographers Aaron Schuman and Angus Fraser, UWE’s new photography MA is open to all those with solid photographic knowledge regardless of formal education. Its focus is on rigorous image-making, publishing and exhibiting work, and building real world connections – each student receives an industry mentor for example.

London charity launches alternative job centre
A collaboration between charity The Creative Society and Somerset House, the Creative Job Studio will offer young people careers advice and run events to help them find work. It was set up by The Creative Society founder Martin Bright, who is the former political editor of the Jewish Chronicle and of the New Statesman.

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9  https://www.theguardian.com/education/2017/mar/07/why-apprenticeships-are-working
10  https://digiday.com/marketing/uk-ad-agencies-rethink-university-degree-job-requirement/
12  https://www.blog.google/topics/education/google-classroom-outside-classroom
Recent News Themes
The Future of Learning

From applications via Snapchat to new methods to measure performance, this year universities are exploring fresh ways to engage and interact with their students.

Is higher education ready for Generation Z?\(^\text{15}\)
Experts from Lancaster University consider how higher education can be better prepared for the bright, ambitious and digitally native generation born after 1995, dubbed Generation Z. Suggestions include engagement through social media, allowing students to become “change agents” at their institutions and better integration with industry innovators.

Universities use social media to offer places to students\(^\text{16}\)
Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp were used by UK universities to offer places to students in the clearing process following August’s A-Level results. Staffordshire University, De Montfort University, Sheffield Hallam and Southampton Solent University all trialled social media to compete to fill places, following a 4% dip in applications to UK universities caused by a drop in EU students and a decline in the youth population.

Four ways learning is changing\(^\text{17}\)
Autodesk’s Randy Swearer offers insight into the future of higher education in four main areas: ‘flipped classrooms’, which will see lectures replaced by online teaching with IRL time saved for student-led enquiry; micro-crediting to award broader, multidisciplinary study; better off-campus opportunities that involve industry; and a complete overhaul of grading systems.

The Government launches the teach excellence framework\(^\text{18}\)
The Government introduced a new ratings system (the teach excellence framework) that looks at the the quality of teaching as opposed to the current research excellence framework. It is hoped that the gold, silver and bronze ratings will give prospective students a better understanding of teaching quality at universities. The metrics to measure this, however, have been controversial.

More than two-thirds of young people worry about their prospects post-Brexit\(^\text{19}\)
A report by Ipsos Mori for cross-party think tank Demos has found that 68% of 18-30-year-olds believe international experience and a global outlook are essential for their future goals. Top concerns highlighted by the report were worries about working abroad, plus a more general view of the UK as inward-looking.

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\(^\text{15}\) https://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/2017/jul/10/generation-z-starting-university-higher-education-ready
\(^\text{16}\) http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/2017/08/15/universities-turning-snapchat-whatsapp-lure-students-scrabble/
\(^\text{17}\) https://www.autodesk.com/redshift/future-of-learning/
\(^\text{19}\) https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/amp/education-41659127
Recent News Themes

Industry

The relationship between industry and universities is getting ever closer, with big businesses exchanging their money and skills for access to collaborative research and top talent.

James Dyson launches new university 20
Inventor James Dyson has established the Dyson Institute of Technology to combat the shortage of engineers in the UK. The Wiltshire-based institute will accept its first 25 students in 2018, who will not pay fees, will receive a salary and will work alongside Dyson employees. Degrees will initially be awarded by Warwick University, with full accreditation coming later.

The Burberry Foundation funds £3 million RCA research group 21
Burberry and the Royal College of Art have set up the Burberry Material Futures Research Group – the first STEAM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) research centre to exist at a traditional art and design university – to develop innovative materials and manufacturing processes. This year the foundation has also funded two educational grants to introduce young people in Yorkshire and the Humber to opportunities in the creative industries.

Apple’s Jony Ive appointed new chancellor of the RCA 22
The RCA appoints Apple chief design officer Jony Ive as its new chancellor in a bid to better connect art, design and technology at the university. The five-year role will see Ive advise the college on increasing its digital and computer-based courses as it transitions to becoming a “STEAM-focused postgraduate university”.

London businesses pin future growth hopes on the tech and creative sectors 23
According to the CBI/CBRE London Business Survey London-based businesses are gravitating towards technology and the arts to secure growth. The report found that 65% of business leaders were willing to put their money into technology and the arts, versus just 49% into financial services and 47% in Fintech.
The creative industries have a diversity problem, but this year several bodies – both within and outside of universities – have launched schemes to make education more inclusive.

Creative Circle launches free school to improve diversity 25
Advertising membership body Creative Circle has launched a free full-time school that will enrol 20 students from September. The year-long course includes a mixture of live and dummy briefs, plus a 16-week industry-led bootcamp and six-month placement following graduation. Students are not required to have any academic qualifications, just creative minds.

Five universities launch campaign to close attainment gap 26
The University of Portsmouth, UAL, Canterbury Christ Church University, University of Brighton and University of Winchester have launched a project to close the attainment gap for BAME and socio-economically disadvantaged students. The student and staff workshops aim to raise the expectations of students and their lecturers, and to build belief in their abilities.

Universities call for fees rethink for poorer students 27
More than 100 universities called on the Government to reinstate grants for students from lower income backgrounds as well as interest rates on loans. Grants were scrapped in 2016 and replaced by loans, meaning the poorest students end up with the most debt. This protest has been prompted by the increased interest rate on student loans to 6.1%.

Diversity is improving but the design industry is still 90% white, report finds 28
Figures from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport reveals that although the design industry employs 5,000 more people from BAME backgrounds than in 2011 (an increase of 50%), these designers only make up 10% of the total design community. The same study reports that the design industry now employs 60,000 more people than in 2011.

Creative Equals’ Ali Hanan: “The time for talking is over” 29
Ali Hanan from organisation Creative Equals outlines some of the initiatives launched to support women in the advertising industry. Her call for more companies to rethink how they hire new talent – and fund placements – stems from statistics from the IPA that show that just 29.6% of staff in creative departments are women.

25 https://www.creativereview.co.uk/creative-circle-launches-foundation-school-address-diversity-creative-industries/
26 http://newsevents.arts.ac.uk/51976/ual-involved-project-benefit-disadvantaged-students/
27 http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-41166777
28 https://www.designweek.co.uk/issues/31-july-6-august-2017/design-industry-90-white-60-male-government-figures-reveal/
From foundation course closures and a drop-off in creative GCSEs to a sharp fall in mature students, issues lower down the education system are affecting the student demographic at degree level.

Cutting foundation courses will lead to “simplistic education” 30
Plymouth College of Art associate dean Matias Shortcook has condemned the wave of foundation course closures, adding that Government cuts to funding towards the arts have “certainly informed the decision” to close courses. Falmouth this year closed its foundation course, admitting it was “expensive to run”.

How can universities help solve the ‘creative arts crisis’? 31
Central Saint Martins course leader Jennifer Tuckett has outlined how universities can defend creative subjects, which she claims are under attack both at secondary school level and via metrics that measure success by graduate salary. Tuckett calls for greater collaboration with industry, better preparation for work for students and more incubation spaces, campaigning and student-run festivals.

Report signals decline in mature students 32
Figures issued by the Higher Education Statistics Agency show that the number of mature students has fallen by 60% since 2010. The drop-off of applicants aged 21+ has been attributed to increased fees and the closure of part-time courses. Additional concern is due give that mature students are more likely to be from disadvantaged or underrepresented groups.

Proportion of students taking arts subjects falls to lowest level in decade 33
According to a report issued by the Education Policy Institute 19,000 fewer pupils took arts subjects at key stage four last year compared with in 2014. The fall in numbers is attributed to the Government’s push of the Progress 8 and English Baccalaureate performance measures, which favour a narrow suite of traditionally academic subjects.

V&A launches school initiative to stop design becoming endangered 34
The Victoria and Albert Museum launched an initiative to engage more young people outside of London with design. The scheme will allow 11 to 16-year-olds to work on in-depth projects taught by designers from local studios. The programme will also include training in art and design for teachers following funding cuts and a drop in students taking on the subjects at GCSE and A-Level.

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*30 https://www.designweek.co.uk/issues/24-30-april-2017/cutting-art-design-foundation-courses-will-result-simplistic-education-says-plymouth-college-art/*
*31 https://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/2017/sep/14/how-universities-solve-creative-arts-crisis-higher-education-graduates*
*32 https://theconversation.com/there-has-been-a-massive-drop-in-the-number-of-mature-students-studying-at-uk-universities-83180*
*34 https://www.designweek.co.uk/issues/1-7-may-2017/va-launches-school-initiative-stop-art-design-becoming-endangered/*
Facts and Figures

In this section you’ll find some statistics to help you make sense of the health of the creative industries and of creative education.

To compile these results we’ve scoured and cross-referenced a number of sources, including the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, UCAS, The Creative Industries Federation and the Office for National Statistics. All figures are the most up-to-date available at the time of going to press.
Creativity Earns £87.4 Billion

That’s the amount the creative industries generated for the UK in 2015 – the most recent year with available statistics.

https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/grossvalueaddedgva/
34% Growth in Creative Industries

That’s how much the GVA (or gross value added) of the creative industries increased between 2010 and 2015. It’s 12.5% more than the UK economy as a whole during the same period. In case you’re unsure about GVA, it’s a measurement of goods or services produced in a certain sector similar to GDP, but including any subsidies received and with the taxes on goods or services deducted.

https://www.creativeindustriesfederation.com/statistics
2.9 Million Jobs in the Creative Economy

And that’s a conservative figure given the Government last ran the data back in 2015. The ‘creative economy’ includes both those working in the creative industries and those with what are deemed ‘creative occupations’ – people doing creative jobs in non-creative sectors, designers working in the automotive industry for example.

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/creative-industries-2016-focus-on/key-findings
That’s the increase in the total number of UK jobs in the creative economy since 2011. By contrast the wider UK workforce grew by 6.3%.

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/creative-industries-2016-focus-on/key-findings
Nearly a third of all creative-sector employment is based in London.

https://www.creativeindustriesfederation.com/statistics
10.6% of UK Students Study Creative Subjects

That’s the percentage of UK students that took ‘creative arts and design’ degree courses in 2016. There’s been a slow and steady increase over the past decade – 9% of all students took similar courses in 2007. But compare it to the huge increase in jobs in the creative economy (5.1% between 2014 and 2015 alone), and the figures show the rise in jobs is not being echoed by increased student numbers.

In case you’re unsure how ‘creative arts and design’ is defined, the UCAS category includes courses in fine art, design studies, music, drama, dance, cinematics and photography, crafts and creative writing.

www.ucas.com
14,000 Less Applicants

Fewer applications to creative arts and design degree courses in 2017, compared to 2016. But with 260,000 total applications, creative arts and design is still the fourth most popular UCAS category, behind only medicine, biological sciences and business studies.

Bear in mind this figure is for applications, and it’s the norm for students to apply to multiple courses. The figures for the total numbers of students taking creative degrees in 2017 won’t be available until the end of the year, but the numbers of students placed two weeks after A-Level results were down by 2.4%.
£14,000 Median Starting Salary

This is for graduates from creative subjects one year after graduating, according to recent figures from the Department for Education. The average only rose to £20k after five years, with salaries ranging from £10k to £28k. Earnings for graduates in creative subjects are the lowest of all of UCAS’s 23 categories.

First Hand Observations

In this section you’ll find the crux of the report – qualitative interviews about the most important issues in creative education right now.

We spoke to more than 80 current students, recent graduates, tutors and industry leaders working in graphic design, illustration, advertising, film and TV, photography and animation. The questions were purposely open – allowing interviewees to cover the parts of the education system that filled them with enthusiasm and where they had concerns.

Our respondents came from across the UK. The responses are anonymous to allow interviewees to be as candid as possible, but we’ve included details such as discipline or location where context is useful.
First Hand Observations
Current Students: Key Findings

• Almost of all the students we interviewed said they went to university to learn skills, rather than because they thought it essential for a job.

• Although a few respondents looked into apprenticeships or full-time employment, the large majority – 77.5% – didn’t even consider alternatives to university.

• Meeting and collaborating with like-minded individuals were the aspects of university life most praised by students.

• Most in-demand from students were good facilities, studio space, live briefs from industry practitioners, lectures from professionals and interdisciplinary teaching.

• Our interviewees listed industry involvement, teaching time and outside lectures as the strengths of their courses, whereas weaknesses included lack of space, disorganisation and too much focus on just the top students.

• Financial concerns featured often in students’ plans for the future (although not as much as for the recent graduates we interviewed). On the whole, salary expectations were accurate, with many students expressing that they would only be able to afford to look for paid positions.

• Many students said they would look for work local to their course or home, and said that moving to London would be too expensive.
First Hand Observations
Current Students: Detail

**WHAT HAS BEEN THE BEST THING ABOUT YOUR STUDYING EXPERIENCE SO FAR?**

“Meeting professionals.”
BA Graphic Design, Leeds Arts University

“The trips and industry work.”
BA Graphic Design, Ravensbourne

“The facilities.”
BA Graphic Design, Kingston University

“Seeing the variety of work and my own work’s evolution.”
BA Illustration, University of Brighton

“Meeting loads of other people interested in the arts, who come from all different backgrounds.”
BA Visual Communications, Leeds Arts University

“It’s an interdisciplinary course, with architects, fine artists, designers and communication designers.”
BA Graphic Design, Kingston University

“Learning about the real world of work.”
BA Fashion Design, Nottingham Trent

“The freedom to test without consequences.”
BA Graphic Design, Kingston University

“Meeting new people and collaborating.”
BA Graphic Design, Kingston University

“The course’s open ended investigation and ethos of thinking through making.”
BA Graphic Design, Kingston University

“The creative freedom that the course encourages to find out what you are truly interested in.”
BA Graphic Arts and Design, Leeds Beckett University

“A degree is a fundamental qualification for a person.”
BA Media Communication, Sussex University

“To continue learning.”
BA Illustration, University of Brighton

“To further my knowledge and because I didn’t want to go straight into full-time employment from school.”
BA Visual Communications, Leeds Arts University

“To develop practically and personally.”
BA Graphic Design, Kingston University

“The student work was more engaging and innovative than other courses. I felt that the studio culture and inherent group work was incredibly important for me in my practice.”
BA Graphic Design, Kingston University

“I want to work in the design industry.”
BA Graphic Arts and Design, Leeds Beckett University

**DID YOU CONSIDER ANY ALTERNATIVES TO COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY?**

No 77.5%
Yes (Non-specific) 9%
Yes (Apprenticeships) 9%
Yes (Employment) 4.5%

**WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE THE STRENGTHS/WEAKNESSES OF YOUR UNIVERSITY COURSE?**

“It’s sometimes not focused enough.”
BA Communication Design, Gray’s School of Art

“I think a course is what you make of it. One weakness is that I wish we did more industry and competition briefs.”
BA Graphic Design, Ravensbourne

“It’s the top university in media communication but a we’re a bit short of resources.”
BA Media Communication, Sussex University

“The tutors have a really varied knowledge and you can always find one of them who will know about an area you’re looking into. The weaknesses are maybe that we don’t have particularly large studios.”
BA Graphic Design, Kingston University

“Strengths: an emphasis on ideas and thinking creates a space to explore every possible medium in project work – the title of graphic design doesn’t do justice to its scope. Weaknesses – the work risks becoming very clearly that of a Kingston Graphics student, potentially inhibiting graduate roles due to the angle of course and its distinct style.”
BA Graphic Design, Kingston University

“Strengths: weekly lecture by professionals. Weaknesses: no taught classes and the student-teacher ratio.”
BA Graphic Communication, Norwich University of the Arts

“Weaknesses: not enough tutors and lectures to help. Strengths: the ideas and the facilities.”
BA Graphic Design, Kingston University

“I’ve learnt a good skills base but the university needs to push industry life more. It also needs to offer an official placement year.”
BA Fashion Design, Nottingham Trent

“Strengths: inclusivity, connections to professional world. Weaknesses: organisation.”
BA Graphic Design, University of the West of Scotland

“Strengths include the variety of opportunities available as a creative. Weaknesses would be that there is often limitations with space and funding to create as you may like to.”
MRes Communication Design, Royal College of Art

“Strengths: visiting lecturers, resources on offer at the university, industry links Weaknesses: little contact time and disorganised.”
BA Graphic Design, Kingston University

“Strength: heavily work orientated. Weakness: too focused on the top students.”
BA Television, Falmouth University
“A major strength of Kingston is its lack of convention, but this is also its weakness since I think people often develop quite unfocussed (disciplinarily) portfolios. While these bodies of work challenge what graphic design is, they also cause a bit of friction when grads apply for jobs.”
BA Graphic Design, Kingston University

“The tutors are welcoming and approachable. The course is treated like a professional environment and has an emphasis on collaborative working.”
BA Graphic Arts and Design, Leeds Beckett University

**WHAT ARE YOUR CAREER EXPECTATIONS AFTER GRADUATION?**

“I’d like to keep doing what I love within projects and find where that is most apparent, or to create the role if it doesn’t exist. I’d like to think at this stage salary won’t dictate my entry point into the industry. My experience so far on a Erasmus year of work has already begun to offer a look into alternative roles within the industry that weren’t directly apparent during my first two years at Kingston.”
BA Graphic Design, Kingston University

“Getting a job in graphic design in Glasgow.”
BA Communication Design, Gray’s School of Art

“I’d like to start my own small press print studio in Glasgow, where I’m originally from. Alternatively I would like to pursue a career as a freelance illustrator.”
BA Illustration, Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design

“I expect that I will be a graduate graphic designer in Leeds.”
BA Graphic Design, Leeds Arts University

“I want to earn at least up to £24–25k after graduation and I want to travel, work remotely as well as for companies around the world.”
BA Graphic Design, Ravensbourne

“I would like to continue my studies onto postgraduate level but before that I think I’d like to get a year or two of experience in the industry.”
BA Graphic Communication, Norwich University of the Arts

“I’d like to work for a print-based design agency, earning around 20k in London but to begin I’ll take a paid or unpaid internship.”
BA Graphic Design, Kingston University

“I’d like to work as an in-house graphic designer, but eventually go freelance.”
BA Graphic Design, University of the West of Scotland

“I’d like to do a PhD or go back into industry doing design research at an agency such as IDEO. Not sure of salary expectations but it’ll most likely be in London.”
MRes Communication Design, Royal College of Art

“Getting a junior designer job, anywhere as long as it’s paid.”
BA Graphic Design, University of Lancashire

“I would like to enter into doing art direction work, however I am worried at the prospect of finding somewhere to live – especially the money aspect in London.”
BA Graphic Design, Kingston University

“I’d hope to stay close to London and get a job in a studio. But I want to keep making things, rather than be constantly looking at a screen.”
BA Graphic Design, Kingston University

“I would like to work in an independent studio in Manchester or Leeds. I would love to move to London and get a job there but the living costs are too high.”
BA Graphic Arts and Design, Leeds Beckett University
First Hand Observations
Recent Graduates: Key Findings

- Our graduates sit on a sliding scale between feeling industry-ready and being apprehensive about what was to come, with many stating they felt they couldn’t really be prepared for work until they got there.

- There is a rough correlation between readiness and degree result, with the higher-achieving students proving more confident.

- A significant chunk of respondents feel prepared for the creative side of starting work but feel they lack business know-how – something also echoed by industry figures interviewed for the report.

- As expected financial worries are some of the top concerns for recent grads.

- Unpaid internships are largely out of favour, with many of our responders saying they would not be able to afford to work for free.

- Several of the recent grads interviewed are already living abroad or would consider it, despite Brexit.

- Many grads are planning to take on temporary or part-time roles in other fields in order to support their creative practice.

- Salary expectations are low.

- Moving to London is still an important step for many grads, but most are concerned about how to fund accommodation for their first steps in the industry, relying on savings or parents to afford soaring rents.
**First Hand Observations**

**Recent Graduates: Detail**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>HOW PREPARED DO YOU FEEL FOR THE WORLD OF WORK?</th>
<th>WHAT IS THE BEST THING ABOUT GRADUATING?</th>
<th>WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS FOR THE NEXT 12 MONTHS?</th>
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</table>
| “As prepared as I could have been.”
BA Graphic Design & Illustration, University of Hertfordshire | **TRAJECTORY**
“Feeling accomplished and knowing I can complete three years of studying.”
BA Graphic Design, University of Brighton | “Ideally I would like to do a few internship placements for a year to two years before moving onto a solid job. However if that doesn’t work out I’m also leaning towards applying for a part-time labouring job to earn some money, while giving myself the confidence and drive to start my own projects again.”
BA Graphic Design, University of Brighton |
| “It depends on the day, some days I believe in myself some others I get really frustrated.”
BA Media Communications, LCC | “The achievement of completing my studies.”
BA Graphic Design, Falmouth | “Moving abroad if the right placement comes about.”
BA Graphic Design, University of Brighton |
| “Fairly. My course was very industry and career-focused so there was a lot of insight and support provided throughout the degree.”
BA Fashion Design and Technology, Manchester Metropolitan University | “The feeling of moving forward.”
BA Media Communications, LCC | “I’ve just moved to London and I’m hoping to find work in publication design, visual identity or exhibition design. I have some plans to intern shortly but ideally want to find a junior designer position as soon as possible for financial security.”
BA Graphic Design, University of Brighton |
| “50%. The other 50% you learn when you start working.”
BA Graphic Design, Kingston University | **PROJECTS**
“The excitement of not knowing what projects I’ll be involved in and what opportunities may come my way!”
BA Graphic Design, University of Brighton |
| “Prepared, but feel like I’m already learning more everyday than I was at university.”
BA Graphic Design, Kingston University | “Being able to get into the world of work.”
BA Advertising, University of Gloucestershire | “Since graduating I have completed three paid internships in London, before moving on to Bristol where I have been offered three months’ work as a freelancer within a graphic design studio. As of January I am unsure where I will be based, but hope to gain a full time job within graphic design after my six months of getting experience.”
BA Graphic Design, Falmouth University |
| “I feel fairly prepared to enter work, as I have a solid portfolio. However I don’t feel very prepared for working in their environment as I have no experience of professional work.”
BA Graphic Design, University of Brighton | “Applying the skills learnt at university in new environments.”
BA Graphic Design, Kingston University | “My plan is to work in a digital agency with an expected salary of £22,000 a year. No unpaid internships!”
BA Graphic Design & Illustration, University of Hertfordshire |
| “In terms of my work, I feel ready to approach any project thrown at me. However, in terms of having a business mind, I feel less prepared.”
BA Graphic Design, Kingston University | **COLLABORATION**
“Choice and having a network of friends and designers from university to collaborate and grow with.”
BA Graphic Design, Kingston University | “I’m going to stay in Porto (where I’ve moved) and work for a co-working space while freelancing as a designer and illustrator. My goals for this year are to learn, improve, get as creative as possible.”
BA English Literature, University of Edinburgh |
| “I feel very supported due to securing a place at Makerversity. However, graduating is a huge change and without this I think I would feel very alone.”
BA Graphic Design, Kingston University | “Working on real projects with other people.”
BA Graphic Design & Illustration, University of Hertfordshire | “I’m currently doing some freelance work and looking for a job. I’m planning to work in marketing for now – entry-level or paid internships. I just can’t afford to work for free for more than a month!”
BA Media Communications, LCC |
| “As prepared as I could be. There’s always things to learn so I would never be 100% prepared for any job, but that’s part of the fun.”
BA Graphic Design, Kingston University | **MONEY**
“Getting paid to do what I love!”
BA Graphic Design, Kingston University | |
First Hand Observations
Recent Graduates: Detail (cont.)

“I’m looking for entry-level positions that would allow me to get into design. I expect to be on a near minimum wage salary to begin with and expect I’ll stay in the north of England for the next year while I gain work experience. Roles I’ve looked for have varied from full-time to temp positions. I hope to secure something full-time but value any experience I can get.”
BA Graphic Design, Kingston University

“I plan to work at a design studio while I regain strength after burning out at the end of university. I’ve started researching MA courses.”
BA Graphic Design, Kingston University

“I am working full-time as a junior designer at a publishers and see myself doing this for the foreseeable future.”
BA Graphic Design, Kingston University

“I have been freelancing for a few projects at various companies, both unpaid and paid. I feel like this way of working suits me as I am able to continue my own projects alongside being a part of a working environment.”
BA Graphic Design, Kingston University

“Vital. I love London. More importantly than the work, my friends are here.”
BA Graphic Design, University of Edinburgh

“How important do you feel being in London is to your next steps?”

“I would rather not live in London to work – the cons outweigh the pros. I am swimming in student debt and I currently live in South West England. Living and commuting to London is a big drain on money in comparison to a number of cities in the UK. However, I understand that you have to take chances and am willing to relocate given the right opportunity and accommodation comes around.”
BA Graphic Design, University of Brighton

“It is not that important to be in London, however there is a lot of pressure to move there and “make it” when it’s not that simple to just up and go.”
BA Graphic Design, University of Brighton

“I felt it really necessary to move to London and have just moved. There are no design opportunities where I grew up. I was initially contemplating other cities in the UK, but despite the prices, it felt like the safest bet – with a constant scene of design work available. I’ve been lucky that through some freelance work I’ve managed to save some money to get me by initially and my parents are willing to support me, but I don’t think it would be a possibility for me to live here if I wasn’t sharing a room with my boyfriend, meaning our rent is halved.”
BA Graphic Design, University of Brighton

“I have been freelancing for a few projects at various companies, both unpaid and paid. I feel like this way of working suits me as I am able to continue my own projects alongside being a part of a working environment.”
BA Graphic Design, Kingston University

“I want to carry on interning in the field of graphic design. I’m open to try lots of things, just take every opportunity that comes my way so far. All my internships have been in London and I live at home at the moment, but want to move out when I’ve found the right thing.”
BA Graphic Design, Kingston University

“I have been freelancing for a few projects at various companies, both unpaid and paid. I feel like this way of working suits me as I am able to continue my own projects alongside being a part of a working environment.”
BA Graphic Design, Kingston University

“I have moved to Amsterdam and I plan to work here for up to two years if I can. I can probably expect a very low paid internship, hopefully I’ll be supported by Erasmus funding.”
BA Graphic Design, Kingston University

“I want to work at a small studio, possibly apply for a program at Google and try to start my own business.”
BA Graphic Design, Kingston University

“I have moved to Amsterdam and I plan to work here for up to two years if I can. I can probably expect a very low paid internship, hopefully I’ll be supported by Erasmus funding.”
BA Graphic Design, Kingston University

“I plan to intern at various agencies and studios (paid) to figure out which area of design I want to work in and save money so I can stop living with my parents.”
BA Graphic Design, Kingston University

“I am working full-time as a junior designer at a publishers and see myself doing this for the foreseeable future.”
BA Graphic Design, Kingston University

“I want to intern or find a junior designer position for a year. I’ll probably earn under 20,000 a year.”
BA Graphic Design, Kingston University

“I feel like I would have made my life a lot easier by staying in London, more jobs, more friends, secure salary etc... but there are other ways to find opportunities in other places.”
Illustrator but studied BA English Literature, University of Edinburgh

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BA Graphic Design, University of Brighton

“I have found London to provide the most opportunities, however the cost of accommodation, especially while interning, is an issue. I feel I will return to London when I have saved enough to afford to do so, and hopefully this will bring with it new opportunities of paid work that will then fund my future in London.”
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BA Media Communications, LCC

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Illustrator but studied BA English Literature, University of Edinburgh

“I didn’t move to London to work – the pros outweigh the cons. I’ve been lucky that through some freelance work I’ve managed to save some money to get me by initially and my parents are willing to support me, but I don’t think it would be a possibility for me to live here if I wasn’t sharing a room with my boyfriend, meaning our rent is halved.”
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BA Media Communications, LCC
First Hand Observations
Recent Graduates: Detail (cont.)

“As much as London has loads going on for it I felt I needed to go out of my comfort zone and leave the country.”
BA Graphic Design, Kingston University

“It’s important because most well-paid design jobs are within London.”
BA Graphic Design, Kingston University

“Kind of. But I feel like London isn’t a very fun place to be. It’s quite tough.”
BA Graphic Design, Kingston University

“Very. London studios saw our show so it’s important to make the most of the wave after graduating.”
BA Graphic Design, Kingston University

“Crucial.”
BA Graphic Design, Kingston University

“Staying in London was very, very important to me. If I’d moved back to my parents I don’t think I’d have been able to make the move back very easily.”
BA Graphic Design, Kingston University
First Hand Observations
University Tutors: Key Findings

• Student expectations have increased alongside fee rises, and are now seen as ‘customers’.

• Employability and industry involvement is more important than ever – and there is a drive for more integration from students, studios and educators.

• Many educators feel that the importance of league tables and success metrics is stifling creativity in HE, as universities avoid taking risks for fear of losing funding.

• However the introduction of the Teaching Excellence Framework (a way of ranking schools based on the strength of their teaching) may be good for creative courses as many educators feel the current Research Excellence Framework is an awkward fit.

• Financial pressures weigh heavily on many tutors and some are concerned that the goodwill that keeps standards high will run out soon.

• Fewer students are coming to creative courses with a traditional creative background (due to a focus on academic subjects at A-Level) but this may not be a wholly bad thing.
First Hand Observations
University Tutors: Detail

WHAT ASPECT OF CREATIVE EDUCATION ARE YOU CURRENTLY MOST EXCITED ABOUT?

“I’m still excited that a lot of students want to come and study creative subjects. Despite all the warnings and the negative press that you hear about the diminishing number of students being introduced to creative subjects within mainstream secondary education, there doesn’t seem to be a diminishing number of applicants for us nor diminishing quality.”

Foundation Diploma Art and Design Programme Leader (London)

“Given the current political state of not just this country the outlook is still international. I haven’t experienced that mass negativity that is bandied around yet, that young people feel like they have no future. There’s still a sense of optimism and a sense of entitlement – I meant that in a positive way. There’s the feeling that there are still opportunities out there.”

Foundation Diploma Art and Design Tutor (London)

“I work predominantly now with online and distance learning, which enables those who would not (or could not) attend a campus-based programme to learn about subjects they are passionate about. So for me, I am particularly excited by the possibilities that new technologies and apps provide and how these can be used to enrich online learning environments and erode traditional pitfalls in distance learning, such as learner isolation.”

MA Photography Course Co-Ordinator (England/West)

“I find the growing focus on employability exciting. Throughout my career, I have fought to engage students in employability activities and now it is on the agenda of all universities – the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education survey (DLHE) and Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) have ensured this. Good graphic design courses have always liaised with industry, but now it really matters.”

BA Graphic Design Programme Leader (England/West)

“Cross-disciplinary work is absolutely at the heart of the skills of the future for graduates whatever level. Being able to work with teams with all sorts of skills in order to be really creative and productive is very exciting. I now work across arts, the creative industries and education, but also with colleagues from the environment, technology, business and law faculties. You might have thought they had nothing to do with the creative industries but of course there is such value in finance, accounting, project management and marketing skills – all those things that you need now because there are no longer PAYE, pensionable jobs for 20 years in one organisation.”

Assistant Vice-Chancellor (England, West)

“Collaboration, and the potential for it. I’m interested in integrating cross-disciplinary practice into teaching and learning in a hands-on, project-led way. The opportunity for collaboration with local industry has never been greater, as HE seeks to enhance and embed employability within courses, implicitly and explicitly. Art schools should be actively central to a locality’s cultural community and politically the need has never been greater for the joining together of pockets of cultural activity.”

Principal Lecturer, Design (England, North)

“What is really exciting for me is creating collaborations that reach outside of our institution and allow for a disruption of the ways that we’ve always done things. Also, the whole notion of a proactive, questioning graduate, who is not just going to stand for what they’re being offered, is really exciting. Institutions are just starting to switch on to that.”

BA Graphic Design Tutor (London)

“Industry is far more willing to come into the classroom and collaborate with us on projects – there seems to be a complete sea change in a very positive way. Rather than sitting outside waiting for graduates to arrive on the doorstep, whether ready or not, they’re putting the effort into working with us and the students. The industry gets insight into the capabilities of students at an early stage and students don’t feel the bridge to employment is quite so hard to cross.”

Graphic Design and Motion Graphics Head of School (England/North)

“I am finding that students are increasingly political in their work, approach and ambitions. A lot want to create work about social issues and use their skills for good. There is also a rejection of the London-centric design world, and many graduates are looking for regional employment, going freelance, or starting their own business.”

BA Graphic Design Programme Leader (England/West)

“What are your main observations about how creative education has changed over the last couple of years?

AN EMPHASIS ON EMPLOYABILITY

“Over the last decade there has been a much greater emphasis on employability and professional practice within academic programmes. Statistics gathered for league tables by institutions about what sort of jobs and how much graduates earn at certain intervals following graduation are a driver for this, but the cost of tuition fees and the debt accumulated in living costs while studying full-time means that students are hungry to know how to make a living from their craft. While I am at heart a believer in education for the sake of learning and personal development, I welcome a greater emphasis on professional practice. A degree in the creative arts should prepare students for a range of possible roles in the creative industries, as well as ‘graduate level’ positions more broadly.”

MA Photography Tutor (England/West)

“Expectations regarding employment have been raised since I started teaching. Emphasis on getting ‘value for money’ since the introduction and increase in student fees has placed additional and often unwelcome pressure on staff (and students). Previously
the value of an art education was focussed on broadening the mind, learning skills that would enhance creative output, and preparing students for the independence of a creative life rather than focussing solely on employment. This has inevitably narrowed the scope and experience of an art education.

Bearing in mind how many art school graduates have been influential in so many sectors including music, literature, design, fashion and film, it is extraordinary that a broader approach to art education is not recognised or valued more highly."

BA Illustration Lecturer (England/North)

“Students quite rightly demand that they are fit for the world of work. We do that by ensuring that there are plenty of live briefs and that students study how to be entrepreneurs, study innovation and also work hand in glove with the wider sector to make sure that they’re bringing their knowledge into the university. That expansion of a narrow basis of study in a practice-based subject into thinking about the subject in an interdisciplinary way and working in teams is crucial for the future.”

Film and TV Tutor (England/West)

“As students are now paying so much for their education, the pressure to get a job directly after graduating has intensified. This has meant that students are less prone to risk-taking and favour commercial projects and approaches.”

BA Graphic Design Programme Leader (England/West)

“Those working at the cutting edge of digital design have realised that there are far more job opportunities than skilled and insightful graduates in this particular area. It means people in the industry are more willing to do the legwork to make sure they get the students early to talk about the opportunities and also the potential requirements of the industry. While students use digital technology every day, many students still seem to come out with a very traditional graphic design portfolio when perhaps they ought to focus on the opportunities of digital. Students see it as difficult and so sometimes they’ll shy away from the challenge when they shouldn’t.”

Motion Graphics Tutor (England/North)

“There’s a massive move for institutions to set up placement schemes without really thinking about what that does to the industry and what it does for the students, the atmosphere that it creates in terms of free work and how that might undermine the professional standing of our industries. What’s exciting is that people are waking up to ask some very serious questions about the economics of our industry.”

BA Graphic Design Tutor (London)

THE DOMINANCE OF LEAGUE TABLES

“Students have come from a schooling system which is obsessed with results and league tables. They have been constantly monitored and coached. It is therefore not surprising that they often find it difficult to work in an environment which demands independent thinking and has open-ended outcomes. Incidentally, universities are also increasingly obsessed by league tables and National Student Survey results which judge the ‘quality’ of a course on a spread sheet. What differentiates creative courses from others is the simple fact that the work is visible and concrete. Visual intelligence is not trusted.”

BA Illustration and Animation Tutor (England/North)

“Since the inception of new universities (from the erstwhile Polytechnics) there has always been a tension between the vocational and the academic. Teaching and Learning Studies have always praised the methods employed in teaching art and design, however, universities are increasingly introducing centralised systems which fail to recognise these qualities and in some cases are positively detrimental to good creative education practice.”

BA Illustration Tutor (England/North)

“There’s an audit culture that’s crept into education where every decision is referenced back to the NSS, the DHLE, achievement data or league tables. This reliance on really simplistic data to make really massive decisions about the future of the institutions where people like me work is worrying. It’s increasingly difficult to have a conversation that comes out of things you know to be true – evidence that is qualitative rather than quantitative. The other worrying thing is that institutions attempt to cheat the data – they try to get the answers they want by making safe choices. It’s stopping us from engaging with real innovation. For example if you try something in your third year class where in two or three years time a student will turn around and realise that it was a really valuable experience, but in the short term it was quite challenging, there’s a risk that that will reflect badly on you in the NSS.”

BA Graphic Design Tutor (London)

“If I was to have a conversation about education as a commodity with my academic colleagues, they would be horrified by it. Personally I’m ambivalent about it. I don’t think education is a commodity but it is an enormous investment that families are making now, so they quite rightly need to be able to see what a university is doing well and what it is not doing well before you make that investment. It’s a challenge but you need to have those metrics that are translatable to your potential customers, you can’t do it any other way.”

Assistant Vice-Chancellor (England/West)

“There’s a problem in judging students and courses using employment data from six months out of university, as the DHLE does. For most of the really interesting practitioners I know, it’s a slow burn. There’s an A+B=C scenario that would definitely get my students jobs but there’s always a group of students that want a bit more than that. To get a job in the cutting edge of their field takes graduates a little longer but when they get there it’s really interesting. Where does that fit within this data-driven landscape that we work in?”

BA Graphic Design Programme Leader (London)

“I know the Teaching Excellence Framework is unpopular but I think it’s a good thing. It needs to be more sophisticated obviously – but it’s important that there’s another way you can validate your courses outside of REF [Research Excellence Framework]. I welcome that people are looking at teaching in higher education as a thing that’s important as you
First Hand Observations
University Tutors: Detail (cont.)

Principal Lecturer, Design (England/North)

“The main change is in perception of HE for the student: there’s a shift in expectation and we’re now seen as providers to consumers. The direct impact of governmental policy regarding removal of number caps has had a huge impact on the way institutions operate, and the long-term impact has yet to be fully played out. But there is a game shift that is around brand perception versus education delivery, and brand perception is currently taking the lead.”

FINANCIAL PRESSURE

“The student body has changed through their experience of secondary education. They are generally more concerned with grades and not failing, plus nationally there has been a rise in mental health issues at universities. More of my time now is devoted to dealing with student anxiety and making sure that students are supported in a safe environment to experiment and play creatively.”

BA Illustration Course Leader (England/South)

“One change that is kicking in now is the Brexit effect. We’ve already noticed a decrease in student applications from Europe and further afield. This dip in international recruitment is being felt across the board and means that we are all recruiting from a smaller pool and this is making it much harder for smaller institutions.”

BA Graphic Design Programme Leader (England/West)

“We haven’t yet seen the impact of changes lower down in schools – such as Ebacc – but be sure that we will. I’m speaking from a position where we have healthy rates of applications to our courses but you’ll get a very different response from different places. Foundation courses across the country are still thriving but a lot of the time that’s down to creative thinking, finding funding from other means or a sympathetic principal in a college. Foundation courses are massively important within the HE sector because they potentially lead to graduate enrolments. But there are courses all across the country struggling to keep those foundation courses running. One of the most high profile closures was Falmouth. Students of the foundation degree at Falmouth probably didn’t stay on to the undergraduate courses and the powers that be probably thought, ‘Maybe we don’t need to fund this anymore’. I’ve been working in and around foundations for close to 20 years now, and it’s a perennial conversation: is this the death knell for foundation?”

Foundation Diploma Art and Design Programme Leader (London)

“One positive change is the number of female students studying graphic design has gone up. A lot of courses in the UK tend to be 60/40 (or greater) split in favour of women. It would be good to see a greater range of ethnicity in our students also.”

BA Graphic Design Programme Leader (England/West)

“There has been a surge in those wanting to study illustration as a subject, alongside the expansion of undergraduate programmes across the UK. There are 126 courses in the UK with Illustration in their title, which is remarkable from my own experience of graduating back in 2001. Undoubtedly a driver has been economics as universities rely on tuition fees as a source of income. The preservation of course standards and philosophy has been my main concern alongside how to manage this growth of numbers.”

BA Illustration Course Leader (England/South)

WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES YOU FACE IN YOUR ROLE AS AN EDUCATOR?

BUDGET CUTS AND FINANCIAL PRESSURES

“The high cost of studying at HE level now has had a profound impact on the nature of the relationship between institutions and their students, and the families who support them. Being ‘an educator’ involves challenging students and meting-out feedback that can be hard to swallow, and this is difficult when institutions are increasingly treating students as customers. It feels often like academic staff are perceived by students as the ‘bad guys’, while other departments and ‘services’ are seen as kinder and more attentive. Despite paying a lot more in tuition fees than those before 2012, students today get very little...
First Hand Observations
University Tutors: Detail (cont.)

more for their money, those fees are spent on maintaining their courses and the institution in lieu of government funding, so keeping up with many students’ (totally understandable) demands for more of their tutor’s time is difficult to sustain. All of my colleagues put in many more hours than they get paid for. In my opinion the ‘student as customer’ attitude does a disservice to students by over-protecting them from the realities of (creative) professional life, which include getting on with others, taking criticism onboard, and dealing with rejection.”

MA Photography course Co-ordinator (England, West)

“The challenges are to continue to sustain something at a very high level with a constant squeeze on people’s time; to go that extra mile to do those live projects and to make those external contacts, given that we are asked to do more and more administrative duties; and to deal with directives that come downwards, not always from senior management within your own institution but often from government. To maintain the highest level of student experience is harder and harder. I have to deal with issues I shouldn’t have to – admin issues and photocopier issues. I’m the caretaker of a building and that impacts on my ability to really fulfil my other role. The challenges are rarely to do with dealing with students or the curriculum.”

Foundation Diploma Art and Design Programme Leader (London)

“Frankly, pay is an issue. While it’s not a job you do for big bucks, the yearly 1% increase is the equivalent of a drop in salary, and this makes paying the mortgage more difficult. Coupled with this is the expectation that all lecturers will do more with less, and work overtime for free. As institutions are demanding more in terms of research, it is not yet factored into contracts properly – many lecturers are taking a holiday to do research; otherwise, they could miss out on promotions and career advancement. This pay cut comes at a point students have much higher expectations and are demanding more when the actual amount the university receives per student has not gone up at all, it just comes from a different source. As reported widely in the news, any extra money seems to go to VCs, not the staff on the ground.”

BA Graphic Design Programme Leader (England/West)

MEASURING SUCCESS

“Practice as research is a real challenge. If you’re a medic and you research a cure for something there’s a very straight line and you can see how it is useful. But if you’re a painter or a graphic designer or a photographer or a film-maker, how do you make your practice into a research practice that sits within the framework not really designed for you?”

Assistant Vice-Chancellor (England/West)

“New knowledge – which is what research should be covering – is not supported by how you might apply the Research Excellence Framework to art and design. What you get is researchers that work in a particular way being prioritised because their work looks good on the REF. The real challenge is how we support research that enriches our student experience, but that doesn’t directly relate to the framework imposed the government and so doesn’t connect to funding. Because our field is changing so quickly there is real need for rigorous research, but it needs to be done on our terms.”

BA Graphic Design Tutor (London)

“As the pace and scale of design changes, keeping on top of our subject is more tricky. Our work can range from traditional branding projects to complex service design, to sophisticated digital outputs and looking at strategic design. Having both a macro and a micro experience of that full range of design is a lovely but complex challenge for us as educators.”

Motion Graphics Tutor (England/North)

“One of my biggest observations when I first went to work for a university was how few academics were really interested in the external landscape. So when the NSS (National Student Survey) came in it was a real challenge, because they hadn’t actually had any external exposure before. It’s taken quite a long time for academics to understand the importance of that. I think they’ve got that now – for example if students don’t like something, you need to work out how you can change it so they think they’re getting a good education and value for money. Most academics get it – they might not like it but they get it.”

Film Tutor (England/West)

“Since fees have been introduced to undergraduate education, institutions talk about how employability is important to them, and say x percentage of their students will be in jobs in a certain sector in x amount of time post-graduation. Whereas it’s more important to make yourself employable – there’s a crucial different that’s being lost. It’s about putting yourself out there, doing projects, making stuff happen, making work not waiting for a job to come along and picking up lots of skills that allow you to carve a niche for yourself. That’s very different to the idea of employability that is currently being promoted by most universities.”

Foundation Diploma Art and Design Programme Leader (London)

THE NATURE OF STUDENTS

“The lack of creative GCSE subjects will have an impact that we are not quite prepared for yet. The tick box method of learning is already prevailing, and it gets harder to get students to take ownership over their education. This lack of ownership has led to a rise in complaints and appeals – if a student does not pass, they blame the course or tutor rather than looking inwards.”

BA Graphic Design Programme Leader (England/West)

“The biggest challenge has been to reconcile the benefits of an art education with the financial investment students are now required to make. Perhaps art education no longer belongs in universities and it is time to reconsider different ways to acquire and share knowledge in this field.”

BA Illustration Lecturer (England/North)

“Students come to us having always been judged by how many hoops they can jump through and then all of a sudden they’re at art school and are in charge of their own time. To get students to engage with an
experience that is going to stimulate lots of different types of learning, we can't just present them with that experience. They've had twelve years of conditioning to not understand that experience. We can't moan that students aren't what they used to be. It's not the students that aren't what they used to be – education is not what it used to be.”

BA Graphic Design Tutor (London)

“I'm noticing students that aren't as creative in the old-fashioned sense of the word. There's a lowering of standards as well in terms of applications. Across the board now courses don't select – I don't think it's necessarily a bad thing but it does change the dynamic of education. It's very easy for me to say "Students aren't getting what they need at A-level" – that really arrogant. But I think there's a problem that tertiary education won't sit down around the table with secondary education. A lot of people in higher education weren't even aware of the changes with EBacc (English Baccalaureate). And now we're going to see the results of us not more actively opposing what has happened. You can see it starting to happen but it's only the tip of the iceberg.”

BA Graphic Design Tutor (London)

“There are fewer students with traditional creative backgrounds, meaning we're dealing with students with broader approaches. So that's a challenge in the beginning. It's a positive and a negative though – a negative in the sense that you can't assume what your students know prior to coming, and a positive in that you've got a much broader set of experiences coming into a design degree, which we should try to capitalise on.”

Motion Graphics Tutor (England/North)

“I really question the fact that there are lots of different types of students that come into higher education. If we're really interested in diversity then we can't just play lip service to it or embrace the bits of diversity that we find interesting and appeal to our sensibilities. We have to embrace that there are going to be students in our group that are coming at our subject from a perspective that we find slightly distasteful. But we have to look at it from a certain perspective – perhaps they're tapping into an audience we don’t
First Hand Observations
Creative Practitioners: Key Findings

• Many creative practitioners felt recent graduates would benefit from a better knowledge of how commercial projects work in the real world, and suggested either an increase in sandwich courses or more relevant briefs.

• Interviewees noted that portfolios were becoming broader in terms of skill set and discipline – some see this as positive others bemoan a lack of focus.

• Several creative practitioners commented that student work often referenced current design trends too much, and felt that students could do more to look beyond their immediate field’s blogs and their peers for inspiration.

• Industry figures working in largely freelance disciplines (such as illustration and photography) felt that students would benefit from more business-focused teaching, something echoed by the students we interviewed.

• Enthusiasm, strong conceptual thinking, the ability to take criticism and good time-management all featured highly on employers’ wish lists.

• A couple of respondees mentioned that they now look for an ability to develop editorial or video content in potential employees, as brands are increasingly asking design studios to populate web and print products as well as to design them.

• There were mixed feelings towards alternative routes to university, such as apprenticeships. Some were open to taking on young designers without degrees, but only if their ability level was high.
First Hand Observations
Creative Practitioners: Detail

WHAT ARE YOUR MAIN OBSERVATIONS OF THE GRADUATES THAT HAVE ENTERED THE INDUSTRY IN THE LAST FEW YEARS?

“The discipline of graphic design has changed dramatically in what is expected of graduates. Also from an educational point of view there seems to be a blurring of boundaries between disciplines, especially with illustration. A lot of graduates that send us their work aren’t what we’d consider as traditional graphic designers. This is dangerous because if you’re getting into illustration, it’s less about coming up with ideas for a brand or an execution of an identity – the sort of thing we have to provide a client with. I think the boundaries need to be redefined so graduates understand what the requirements will be once they start work and potential employers know what they’re going to get.”

Founder, design studio (Scotland)

“I think one of the big things we’re seeing from the recent generation of illustration graduates is that they have a better understanding of how to animate. We’re seeing a lot more movement in work and more thought is being given to how illustration can be interactive. This is a real positive as we’re increasingly asked for animated elements in our projects. Even if an illustrator never uses these skills commercially, just having an understanding of the processes and how they want their work to move will be really helpful to them.”

Illustration agent (London)

“In some cases we’ve found over-confidence and a sense of entitlement long before they’ve knuckled down and started proving themselves really valuable to the studio. At the other extreme we’ve seen people with humility who are doing the intern circuit – so I think that’s still down to personality rather than the way graduates are being turned out. One thing I would say is there seems to be an ever-growing trend for the design student as author, working on self-initiated briefs. This is something we also did way back when I was studying, and it demonstrates an ability to think. But it needs to be balanced with commercial-style briefs, to show you can understand and solve practical challenges.”

Founder, graphic design studio (London)

“There are so many talented students out there but unfortunately most that we meet are in general ill-prepared for a life as a freelance illustrator. They seem to be surprised when the world doesn’t fall at their feet after graduation. Those that are after a full-time job are often quick to abandon illustration for a career as a designer of some sort, which is really sad.”

Director, illustration agency (Northern Ireland)

“They are hard-working, creative people, but there’s still a lot of work to do to bring them up to speed with the way we work. We work at a fast pace, so one of the things that they need to get used to is creating things quickly, and then not being precious about their creation as quite often we’ll discard it if it doesn’t work out. We’ll use whatever method we can to validate an idea, be that a sketch/code/etc, and turn it around in a matter of hours. This is sometimes a bit of a shock if you’re used to having a week or two to work on something.”

Director, digital product studio (London)

“I’ve worked with some really amazing interns and juniors who think totally differently from designers who have been in the industry a long time. But on the flip side, I’ve also noticed that graduates have spent too long copying and referencing famous designers on the internet rather than thinking for themselves and using broader references.”

Creative Director, graphic design studio (London)

“The upside is that many of the grads we work with are bright, clever, confident but not cocky. They have excellent skills and a willingness to learn. But the downside is there’s always too much reference to existing design fashions and sometimes a conceptual leaning that isn’t balanced with application of ideas to design issues.”

Co-founder, graphic design studio (North)

WHAT IS THE MAIN THING YOU LOOK FOR WHEN WORKING WITH GRADUATES?

“Obviously talent and a body of existing work is key to capturing our attention, but I can’t stress enough how important it is for a graduate to have a good attitude and professionalism. The ability to take art direction and feedback without losing confidence is very important. Having the mentality to work under time pressures, while still maintaining the quality of work is also key. We need to work with people who can mentally juggle numerous projects at the same time, so a certain amount of pragmatism and a can-do attitude it key to getting on.”

Illustration agency (London)

“We’re looking for graduates that are bright, clever, confident but not cocky. They need to have an ability to be part of the team quickly. They need good ideas backed up with a good skill set, but must be open to learning and to critical feedback.”

Co-founder, graphic design studio (England/North)

“Our industry is changing quite a bit – it’s not so much about creating an identity, print product or a website, it’s more about content. We find ourself spending more time with clients designing content for them, so that can be photographic art direction, or it could be working with a copywriter, or coming up with interesting ways to use an UI to sell a product or service. What we’re doing as a studio has dramatically changed – it’s a big shift in where our revenue comes from. What we’re looking for now is grads that can facilitate that. For example we’ve just taken on a recent graduate to do motion graphics. He understands design thinking and typography but he can apply it in a way that we can’t. For us that’s quite a specialism – it’s quite unusual to get a graphic designer with a skillset at a graduate level.”

Founder, graphic design studio (Scotland)

“The ability to think conceptually is vital, as that’s something you really can’t teach too late into someone’s career. Having said that, it’s not much use to us unless it’s matched by a level of visual competence. It’s no good having great ideas if you can’t execute them in a way that looks commercial. We need to see that they ‘get it’ both conceptually and visually. Of course we’re not expecting the
“It’s a combination of attitude and skills. There needs to be an enthusiasm to learn and adapt, but also some core skill in the area they’re interested in. This doesn’t necessarily mean they know how to use the latest software (which most of us struggle to keep up with now in digital!), but instead it should be the foundations of design; for example, if someone is interested in visual design then a knowledge of grids, typography and colour is essential, but the inner workings of Sketch not so much. That can be learnt on the job. One thing I’ll always look out for is if they’ve got self-initiated projects, as it shows a love of what they do. It can be an itch they just needed to scratch (maybe an app idea), or it could be something like photography which shows that they love the act of creating something beautiful which tells a story.”

Designer, digital product studio (London)

“I think the most important thing to look for when working with graduates is enthusiasm, a willingness to learn and commitment. I personally spent four years assisting and learnt a huge amount in this time, all of which has been invaluable to my career ever since. I think anyone who is looking to move on too quickly is potentially putting themselves at a big disadvantage not giving themselves the time to experience all aspects of being a professional photographer.”

Photographer (London)

IF YOU COULD CHANGE/INTRODUCE ONE THING TO A UNIVERSITY EDUCATION WHAT WOULD IT BE?

“From what I’ve seen there isn’t enough coverage of what it’s actually like to actually be a commercial illustrator. The realities of the industry, a basic understanding of contracts and license agreements. Essential skills like how to present a quote and how to calculate and structure fees for a project. There seems to me to be a big gap in knowledge when it comes to these aspects and in some ways these areas can appear to be shrouded in mystery for graduates.

Whenever I talk at universities I try to be as honest and open as I can about how it all works and to share real cases studies about what can happen on a live project. I think it’s important for students to know these things before they’re on a live job.”

Illustration agent (London)

“There needs to be much more focus on professional practice, self promotion, marketing and general business know-how.”

Director, illustration agency (Northern Ireland)

“I’d make it mandatory to have some sort of design history module, as I’m not sure they all do this well enough. The biggest problem at the moment is the ease with which everyone can ‘be inspired’ by the same projects, studios and blogs. That means the pool of reference is getting increasingly shallow – not just within education but within agencies too. With a combination of conceptual thinking and a good understanding of design history, at least graduates would be versed in the birth of trends, rather than just copying the stylistic surface of their repeated iteration. Getting that sort of rounded knowledge from the source means you can learn from similar principles but take them in your own direction.”

Founder, graphic design studio (London)

“Placements and sandwich years to prepare students for studio culture and to translate real, live brief thinking into uni briefs.”

Director, animation studio (England/South)

“I would like tutors to embrace failure as part of the creative process and make it something that can still get you a good mark. If a project doesn’t turn out right, then allow a student to acknowledge that – they should then be able to explain why it didn’t work out, how they’d do things differently next time (or with another iteration), and what they learnt from the experience.”

Designer, digital product studio (London)

“I’d like to see a better understanding of the role design plays in business. The understanding of branding within established design courses can be narrow. Designers come out thinking that branding is logo, type and super graphics... but most of the work we do is around creating alignment internally around objectives, vision, values, tone, and so on.”

Creative director, graphic design studio (London)

“More preparation for the real world. Lots of graduates talk about being totally unprepared for what’s coming. It’s tough too, with a lot of competition for experience and jobs. I’d like to see more focus and steering. There’s lots of lost souls at the point of graduation and seemingly little help to support graduates as they make their way into the world.”

Co-founder, graphic design studio (England/North)

“A clearer distinction between the different disciplines of design – so in our instance between illustration and graphic design. The market is flooded with people of a certain ilk in terms of style, but with a lack of ideas or thinking in place. It’s largely aesthetic. That’s come from the revolution in illustration because that doesn’t have to have an idea at play because the idea is there already and you have to illustrate by that. It’s a really important issue with education that I would like to see addressed before it comes to our end, which is too late by then.”

Founder, design studio (Scotland)

ARE YOU SEEING MORE CREATIVES ENTER THE INDUSTRY VIA ALTERNATIVES TO UNIVERSITY AND IF NOT, WOULD YOU BE OPEN TO IT?

“I’ll be totally honest and say that we never really pay much attention to where someone was educated and what level of education they achieved. We have artists on our books who went to Central Saint Martins and the Royal College of Art, but equally we have illustrators who have never officially studied illustration. Some of our most successful artists never went to art school. They’re completely self-taught and in some ways their styles and techniques are all the more unique and individual as a result of it. As an agency we don’t mind where someone has come from, all that matters is where they’ve got to.”

Illustration agency (London)
First Hand Observations
Creative Practitioners: Detail (cont.)

“We’ve been asked many times to consider apprentices. But the difference in standards of ability, attitude and quality of work between second and third year students doing BA courses is huge – so much so that we stopped taking anyone who isn’t in their final year or graduated, so we would have quite serious reservations about taking someone with little to no experience in an environment which is at least already steering them towards the professional world (in software skills, social skills, creative thinking and so on). Self-driven projects are interesting but again they would need to be exceptional for this to be their only route to the industry.”
Co-founder, graphic design studio (England/North)

“This is certainly something we’re open to. When you factor in a foundation and then a degree, you’re looking at a minimum of four years of study, with a sizeable debt at the end of it. It’s difficult then for graduates to consider taking internships or junior salaries at a level that would make agencies want to take a risk on them. Anything that helps them to get an understanding of the commercial world earlier has to be useful. That said, the right degree should push you into asking questions and critical thinking – and then give you the time to explore subjects. Sometimes I think the ideal thing would be to get everyone working as quickly as possible, and then go off and study in your forties, by which point you find yourself becoming endlessly fascinated in lots of different subjects, with no time to explore them!”
Founder, graphic design studio (London)

“I don’t think we’re at the stage where there’s a steady supply of students coming in through non-university pathways, but we’re very proactive in helping support other forms of design education. Everyone in our industry realises that we’re excluding a huge pool of talent that can’t afford to go to university, so we need to create alternative routes for this talent to learn about and find a career in design. A good example of this is the Flipside project, which is aiming to give young people in east London a stepping stone into a creative career.”
Designer, digital product studio (London)

“Generally people approaching us come from a university background but that’s not to say that we wouldn’t accept someone from a different path. The benefits of university is that it provides a solid design history and works through the basics about what a designer needs to know. It also gives them a safe place to present and receive criticism.”
Creative director, graphic design studio (London)

“I think university is a great experience, for learning and living, and the vast majority of photographers and assistants I know went down this route. However I don’t think it’s necessarily the best way to eventually break into the industry. Assisting and interning is a much more direct way of learning the specific skills it takes to make it in the industry. I have noticed a rise in people who have made it without doing either of these things and risen with the social media channels. As good as this is for them, I do feel like by taking that route they’re missing out on a wealth of education when it comes to practical and technical knowledge, basics on running a business and promotional tools, and generally learning in a fun and creative environment.”
Photographer (London)

“We assume most people have come from university but we jump straight through to the portfolio so we don’t necessarily know. I guess that that means we don’t really care if the ability is there.”
Founder, design studio (Scotland)

“One of the most successful illustrators on our books is completely self-taught. An illustrator’s portfolio is the only thing that really matters to us.”
Director, illustration agency (Northern Ireland)
Appendix
Appendix

Image Credits

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