

# The lay of the land: current approaches to professional practice in visual and applied arts BA courses

## Foreword

This research by a-n The Artists Information Company into the approaches of teaching professional practice within fine and applied arts programmes is apposite. It comes at a time when HE institutions are anticipating how the ongoing changing social and economic climate might impact on their existing and future students as well as on the employability prospects of their graduates.

The research will inform development by a-n of a portfolio of innovative resources to be used by HE with students and recent graduates, enabling them to make their way more surely through the complexity of the creative industries.

Tim Brennan, Dean of Student Experience, Art and Design, University of Sunderland

## Introduction

*The lay of the land: current approaches to professional practice in visual and applied arts BA courses* was commissioned by [a-n The Artists Information Company](#) from Sarah Rowles, artist and Director of [Q-Art](#), author of *11 Course Leaders: 20 Questions* - a collection of interviews with 11 London BA Fine Art Course Leaders.

The study<sup>1</sup> was commissioned for four main reasons:

- To review the 'lay of the land' now with regards to professional practice in comparison with a commissioned report on the topic in 1999<sup>2</sup>
- To assess what effect, if any, the then impending tuition fee rise and focus on enterprise and employability is having on Professional Practice (PP) delivery
- To compare approaches and attitudes towards delivery on fine and applied art courses

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<sup>1</sup> The study was conducted January-April 2012

<sup>2</sup> John Carson's study of professional/critical practice in HEIs informed publication *Out of the Bubble*, John Carson and Susannah Silver 1999, London Institute (out of print)

- To identify the role of a-n The Artists Information Company and its professional development partners in supporting student learning in the future, that can maximise resources to support professional development for students upon graduation.

Examples and approaches to professional practice that were provided for this study hint at significant developments and changes of emphasis within visual arts education that are embracing the characteristics of transparency and collaboration. They also raise the question of whether a more open, value-driven, localised and geographically-spread arts ecology has an opportunity to emerge in place of the dominant London-centred value system.

### **The sample**

Spread across each UK geographical region, the study sampled 13% of the some 149 higher education institutions (HEIs) offering fine art and/or applied art courses<sup>3</sup>. Of those sampled, sixteen received site visits, with the remaining interviews conducted by email and telephone. Twenty-five courses were examined; sixteen in fine art and nine in applied art<sup>4</sup>.

A cross-section of staff including deans, heads of school, course leaders and professional practice module leaders was interviewed to identify how on-the-ground delivery of professional practice sat in relation to an institution's wider strategic aims and partnerships. Some students were also interviewed.

Clearly, this report offers more of a snapshot rather than a comprehensive overview of current provision and attitudes towards professional practice. However, as a result of the spread of the sample obtained and frequency with which many of the key themes and concerns were repeated, the author is confident the report provides a good indication of the current lay of the land and of

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<sup>3</sup> The report's bias is towards fine art provision, this due to the background interests and experiences of the researcher linked to a conviction that as the fine art area is less commonly associated with 'vocational study' and 'career path' than the applied arts, it would need more attention than available within this particular study to gain an understanding of the challenges the discipline faces and the intricacy of solutions being offered. However, were the study to be further developed, the prediction would be that whilst individual examples of provision and staff/student activity would increase and vary, the overarching themes emerging from it and set out within this report would remain similar.

<sup>4</sup> Fifty-two interviews were carried out: four with Deans, two with Heads of Schools, twenty with BA course leaders, nine with professional practice module leaders (some of whom doubled as course leaders), five with careers and enterprise department coordinators and several others (some not cited) with students.

the key issues that institutions and courses seek to address as they prepare students for graduation, including the increased emphasis on employability and enterprise within HE agendas.

With mounting pressure on courses to account for their graduate employability levels, there is an ever-increasing sense of responsibility to raise awareness not only amongst students but also amongst parents and potential employers, of the value of these transferable skills and of art graduates themselves. As a result, there are some sophisticated examples whereby students have opportunity to reflect upon skills gained at each stage in the curriculum, be this through standard course components like crits, presentations and seminars, or within any designated professional practice modules.

This study revealed what seems to be standard provision whilst also highlighting those examples that really stand out. Of the 40 'named'<sup>5</sup> professional practice components offered to undergraduates were topics designed to support student understanding of the arts ecology and of business and employment contexts as well as those that aimed at enhancing the technical and practical skills necessary to support their practice.

### **Example**

<i>Selected fine art 'named' components</i>	<i>Selected applied arts 'named' components</i>
Art world vocabulary	Blogs
Budgeting, accountancy, tax	Buddy schemes (with industry professionals)
Drafting career plans	Client research
IT literacy – Photoshop, Excel	Five-year career plan
Networking skills	Internet marketing
Social media and blog skills	SWOT analysis
Time and project management	Work and workshop placements
Work placements	

Refreshingly, the research revealed some incredible examples of overall course and module designs that in addition to professional practice, are taking head on some of the real challenges ahead. Such examples include use of audience focus groups, audience modules, student residencies within other departments, industry partnerships and placements, and 'in-house' employment opportunities within a department of the university itself. Throughout the report such provision is referred to as 'embedded'.

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<sup>5</sup> 'Named' provision refers to provision that is clearly named under the banner of professional practice.

## Example

In the second year Fine Art Critical Practice students undertake a Student Placement Scheme inspired by the Artists Placement Group. Students' are offered the opportunity to undertake a placement within another university department or area of activity across the University of Brighton campus. For example students have carried out placements in the School of Medicine, Biology and Biomedical Sciences, and Philosophy. Before starting their placement students are introduced to a range of 'post studio' practices' and activities, students also write a formal proposal articulating 'why they wish to work in a specific area'. Second year tutor Susan Diab oversees the Student Placement Scheme, and negotiates each placement with the relevant department. One of the benefits of the scheme is the experience students' gain in communicating with non-art audiences about their art practice. Whilst continuing to academically support our students we are keen for them to experience working outside the usual art school studio environment.

Matthew Cornford, Professor of Fine Art, University of Brighton

## Key themes

- **Graduate retention**

Many graduates leave the places in which they studied to pursue the chance of 'making it' in London's already established art scene.

"If you wanted to start an artist-run space, you wouldn't do here. Despite all of the creative people, everyone runs to London as soon as they graduate. I'll probably move to London when I graduate – if I can afford it!" Final year student and co-founder of a student-run art magazine

One difficulty all courses outside of London face is how to keep their graduates in the area in order to build and contribute fully to the local arts ecology. This is important for several reasons: prospective student recruitment; local and parental and employer awareness of contemporary art/art graduate skills and to help in the development of a local art market or collector base.

Despite this, most UK courses opt to take part in London's annual Free Range exhibition <http://www.free-range.org.uk/> thus giving graduating students a chance to exhibit their work to London's wider audience.

- **Audiences, partnerships and responsibilities**

Some institutions visited for the study were in areas that lacked an art gallery and where awareness of contemporary art is low. As a result, course leaders, deans, and heads were aware of a responsibility to the area and in light of the 'retention' theme, towards the development of local audiences.

Through course modules as well as college partnerships, courses are encouraging their students to think afresh about how they find and develop audiences. In many cases, students are also asked to think differently about how they display their work and to identify alternatives to the traditional exhibition context:

“We encourage Fine Art students to be thorough and pragmatic in their approach to who their audience is. We hold regular taught and informal discussions around demographics and expectations and levels of how informed any given target audience might be. We support a range of projects that interact with a diversity of audiences from: businesses; passing 'casual' and transitional audiences; regular gallery goers and audiences with little or no experience of engaging with contemporary art. We consider where a students' practice might be best suited to a particular scenario and audience and through site visits, consultations, commissions and interventions, students gain confidence and experience of how their work can be seen or experienced. Students gain the ability to appropriately relate to a range of demographics through public facing projects.”

Desmond Brett, Course Leader BA (Hons) Fine Art, Hull College of Art and Design.

Arts University College Bournemouth, located in a town with no art gallery (other than its own 'on campus' gallery) provides a good example of an institution building strong links with the council, and thus developing platforms for live and public art for students:

Fine Art Year 2: Lower Gardens Project - Students work with Council Department for Leisure & Tourism and Arts Development Officer to put on art and performance festival in town centre. They

submit proposals to the council. Those students whose work doesn't get selected are supported to develop alternative projects. There are many public projects running through Bournemouth fine art department largely down to their being no art gallery at all in Bournemouth except the one on campus.

And Liverpool John Moores University demonstrates strong partnership working, linking with the Biennale as well as with Tate and other galleries in the area, to provide talks, placements and opportunities for students. Director Juan Cruz outlines the complexity of art colleges holding so much responsibility and questions whether too much is being demanded of art:

"Liverpool now is this really fantastic place to be with so many things going on but in the 70s and 80s Liverpool was really challenged economically... Before I started I remember looking at some of the promotional material for the programme and it was people sitting in mountains with anoraks on and contemplating lakes.... and I was concerned that the fine art programme seemed not really to be addressing and dealing with its location and always looking out.... In 2008 when Liverpool was awarded European City of Culture, I think the university started to ask itself questions about what the art school was going to be. What we've tried to do in the last four years is to say 'Look, this is an amazing city with amazing opportunities for artists and a fantastic place for culture, and we've tried to kind of give ourselves back to the city and really make sure we're addressing and engaging with the city; contributing towards turning the city into a place where artists might really think it's viable, interesting and possible to pursue their ambitions and careers. Liverpool is now a city where people are conscious of art but a lot is demanded of art. I think it's one of the cities in the UK where you are palpably most aware of the transformative impact that architecture, design, Tate, the Biennial can have on a city. People are aware and do benefit from that, yet sometimes the difficult thing is that art is expected to always do that. So there is a kind of receptiveness to art - but art does have to work very hard for it."

- **Transferable skills**

Attitudes within studied institutions and courses towards transferable skills are also mixed. Acknowledgment of these sits alongside the previously stated responsibility felt by art colleges - that is to communicate the value and transferable nature of art education to those outside of the discipline:

"Public awareness of the transferable creative skills that art can offer is zero I think. One of the challenges for fine art as a discipline in the next ten years is to sell the idea of divergent creative thinking that flows through Art and Design graduates as a key set of transferable skills that apply generically to private and public sector industries. We need to communicate with the public and the government to enable them to recognise the value of Art and Design courses. UAL is currently lobbying on this."

Dereck Harris, Course Leader BA Painting Wimbledon College of Art.

For those that support all the talk about transferable skills, they are seen as a necessary way to prepare students for unpredictable careers within the industry. Matthew Cornford, Professor of Fine Art, University of Brighton said: "I'm keen to avoid peddling the myth that most art students go onto make a living through selling their own art. Clearly most of those who study art, don't make a living through selling their own work. However arts graduates are very good at thinking of ways by which they can continue to be involved in art and earn a living. So what students do after art school is important to recognise - otherwise how are [we] going to continue to make our courses relevant to future art students?"

What this categorically doesn't mean is that we turn our challenging, questioning, dynamic art courses into 'industry knows best' vocational training courses. Who knows what type of specific skills will be most useful in three years time, let alone ten years time? Many, many years ago I undertook a vocational course to learn how to use a photomechanical transfer camera – you'd never ever do that now, photomechanical transfer cameras are totally redundant. I also recall being advised to apply for an MA in holography, the art of the future! In this fast changing World, it seems wiser to develop and run courses that encourage students to 'think otherwise', questioning orthodoxy, develop and communicate new ideas, whilst also learning how to acquire new skills without being slaves to technological specialisms."

He continues to talk about how studying an art course has impacted on highly successful careers outside of art, for instance: "Steve Jobs' was profoundly influenced by a calligraphy class he attended at Reed College. – 'If I had never dropped in on that single [calligraphy] course in college, the Mac would never have multiple typefaces or proportionally spaced fonts. And since Windows just copied the Mac, it's likely that no personal computer would have them.' (Reference: Walter Isaacson quoting Steve Jobs, in Steve Jobs by Walter Isaacson). Another high profile example of non art success post art school is Felix Dennis the owner of Dennis Publishing 'one of the world's leading independent polishers' Dennis studied at Harrow School of Art. But most

famously from the Beatles to Roxy Music to The Clash to Scritti Politti almost every British rock band from the 60s, 70s and 80s had members that attended art school.”

Others though are concerned that art will lose the sense of criticality and 'radical uselessness' that has defined the discipline for so many people for so long.

"I'm ambivalent about idea of transferable skills as a way to justify our existence by saying 'Look they may not all be artists but they have a lot of transferable skills' What's the point of investing £9,000 if all you learn is transferable skills to do a job you didn't really want to do?"

Juan Cruz, Director, Liverpool John Moores School of Art and Design

"There's huge pressure on art schools today to account for what they call 'employability' of their students. That's fine if you study something that is designed for employment after graduation but it's more difficult for fine art students because art is not a job and artists don't produce products - even though the market and the government would like us to see it that way. The concept of artists working in 'creative industries' is fundamentally flawed. All that means is that artists should create websites or design advertising. But Goldsmiths' tradition of working critically and being radical does not fit into the frames of commercial industry. Artists tread a fine line bending to the pressures that surround them whilst maintaining integrity and autonomy."

Maxa Zoller, Professional Practice course leader, Goldsmiths College, University of London

An interesting example whereby students are asked to continuously reflect upon graduate and world of work skills as they are gaining them is Liverpool John Moores University that runs the World of Work Programme. This has 3 inter-related elements: Graduate skills, Work related learning and world of work skills. Together with employers they have defined eight graduate skills that employers feel graduates should be able to discuss and provide evidence for. These are: Analysing and solving problems; Team-working and Interpersonal skills; Verbal communication; Written communication; Personal planning and organising; Initiative; Numerical reasoning; Information literacy and IT. Higher-level World of Work skills include: Self-awareness; Organisational awareness; Ability to Make Things Happen and students can achieve a World of Work skills certificate by completing and getting feedback on 3 statements and successfully undergoing an interview conducted by an LJMU employer partner. These result in an employer-endorsed certificate. Employers including Tate Liverpool actively support this Programme by sitting on an employer critical friend group.

- **Expectations of professional practice**

The study has revealed that not all professional practice opportunity within HEIs is assessed nor made compulsory. One reason given during the study for choosing to make it neither of the above, is that it would discourage students who do not see its value. Something that became clear in seminars experienced during the study as well as through the author's own research for the publication *11 Course Leaders: 20 Questions*<sup>6</sup>, is the extent to which students' opinions of art, art education and perceptions of success are hugely influenced by the staff that teach them and the culture of the institution.

A member of staff, who preferred not to be identified, outlines this well: "The university dictates that PPD (personal and professional development) features prominently in the curriculum yet many staff are not interested in its delivery. They see their identity as artists, as practitioners who teach about (critically informed approaches to) making Art. They're interested in talking about making art and they frequently refer only to a very specific contemporary art industry. The idea that we might also be teaching students who may become art therapists, arts administrators or teachers isn't at the forefront of their minds when offering up possibilities/ discussing career choices, and in my view, [staff] will only take these ideas on board if they are really pushed to think beyond the values of their own exhibiting careers. Students are a bit more open but if you're not careful you breed a culture that values only the aspiration to be a practising artist (important as this is). This is where the more ambitious students tend to gravitate as they sense that that is what staff value and also what is rewarded through the assessment process. So for a student to come onto a course and aspire to do something else [other than pursue an art practice], a lot of work is involved".

Recognising the barriers that generic employability language can have on Fine Art and Design student and staff participation, Mairi MacKenzie lecturer at Glasgow School of Art referred to a project they are working on alongside Buckinghamshire New University in the academic year 2012/13. It is a Higher Education Academy funded project 'An Anatomy of Employability: Articulating Graduate Capabilities for the Creative Arts'. The project invites student and staff participation and using an embedded pedagogy it aims to develop a more sympathetic interpretation of traditional concepts of employability that has relevance to portfolio careers, self employment and employment in the sector. At the outset staff members are asked to identify what their own understanding of employability in their programme is, and where it is currently

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<sup>6</sup> *11 Course Leaders: 20 Questions*, Q-Art London, 2011 [www.q-art.org.uk](http://www.q-art.org.uk)

evident on their course. From the responses, the project will map where professional practice takes place and what language is used to talk about it. Students will then also be organised into focus groups and asked to discuss questions around their expectations and experiences of art school and their aspirations of career after graduation.

A number of course leaders also noted that traditional approaches to professional practice, such as teaching students that CV's are the way to get careers, are being re-thought about and challenged. As student skills in things like video production and social media rise, these may be coming more relevant.

- **Types of provision on offer to students**

As stated, there are numerous approaches to meeting requirements to deliver some form of professional practice<sup>7</sup>. The author was shown examples of named and embedded provision as well as provision supported by wider college enterprise and careers departments.

The relation between 'embedded' vs. 'named' professional practice is not straightforward. It is often the case that even where there is a dedicated week or module clearly identified as 'professional practice' there are also plenty examples of related embedded activity within the course as a whole.

As a result of this, some courses are seen to be 'getting away with' delivering professional practice as an embedded experience within the course. However those that do, argue the pedagogical sophistication of an approach that seamlessly integrates its delivery within studio teaching to provide what they see as a more relevant form of provision.

### **Named**

'Named' provision may be an hour or more a week, for any number of weeks in any given academic year, allocated to and named 'professional practice' either within or outside of the compulsory course curriculum. In this instance, students are made explicitly aware that the aim of the course (and therefore the need for them to attend sessions) is in order for them to acquire skills to help them prepare for life after graduation.

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<sup>7</sup> See as examples the following handbooks which outline art and design BA subject qualification  
<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/ADHA08.pdf>  
<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/FHEQ08.pdf>

Newcastle University:

Yr 1-4 (Fine Art): LifeWorkArt - is named as such within the curriculum so students recognise its existence yet it is integrated into existing modules and studio teaching. In Year 1 students are introduced to galleries, curators, studios etc in Newcastle to orientate them, allow them to make contacts and enable their understanding of how the local arts ecology is structured. IN years 3-4 they all do projects outside the university. In Year 4, students from Newcastle University and other colleges in the region run a conference on 'careers in the cultural sector' working with external partners (e.g. Baltic Arts Centre, Globe Gallery) [http://research.ncl.ac.uk/lifeworkart/activity\\_conference.htm](http://research.ncl.ac.uk/lifeworkart/activity_conference.htm)

Arts University College Bournemouth:

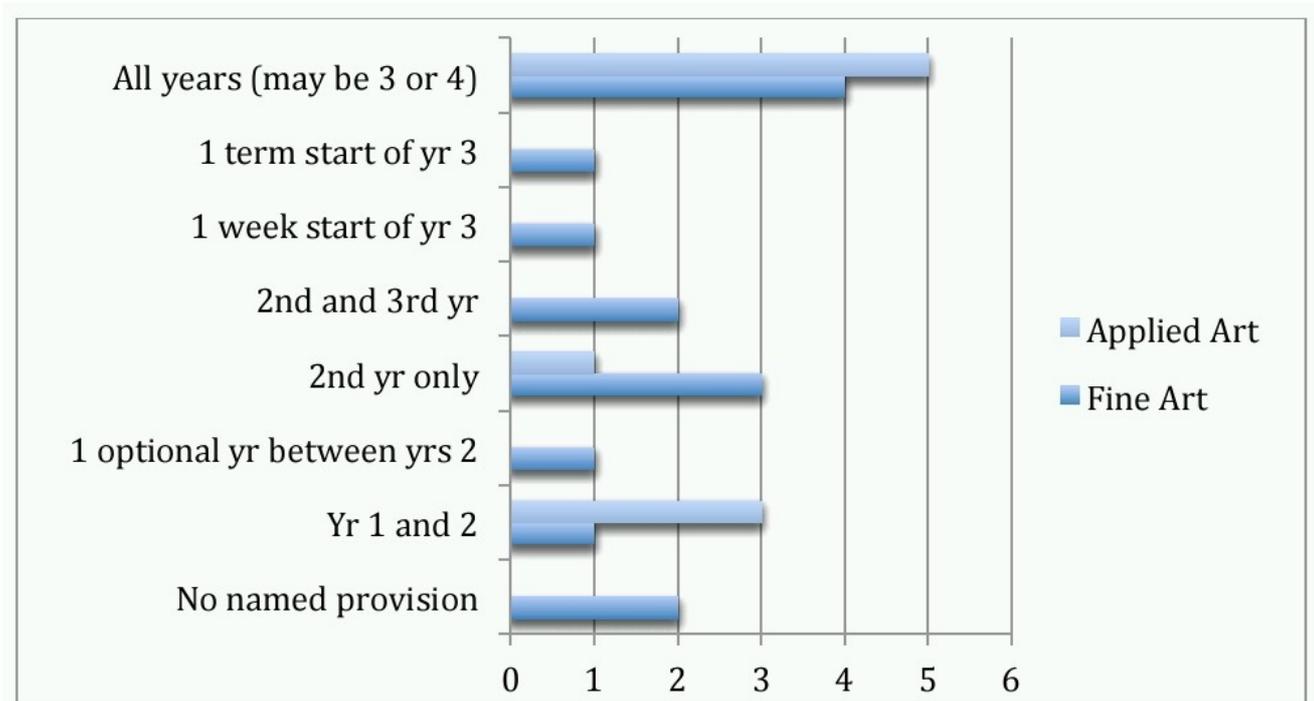
Yr 3 (Fine Art): 'Tate Shots' - as part of PP students produce scripted video shorts outlining the key concerns of their practice. Bournemouth also has an Industry Learning Group (ILG) for each of its subjects whereby respective industry professionals input into curriculum design ensuring that what PP students are being taught is 'relevant'. For fine art this includes Jo Bushnell, (Director, Aspex Gallery) who also teach on courses.

### **Embedded**

'Embedded' activity may take place anywhere within the wider BA course whereby students are likely to acquire in a more organic (studio practice integrated) way professional graduate skills - including some of those outlined within any 'named' component of the course.

In 2012 at Hull College of Art & Design, students from across the college worked together on a project at Ferens Art Gallery to make a response to work exhibited with the resulting work also displayed in the gallery. This year the project was Yorkshire-wide, tied with the Cultural Olympiad and entitled Precious Cargo.

**Table 1 – When professional practice takes place**

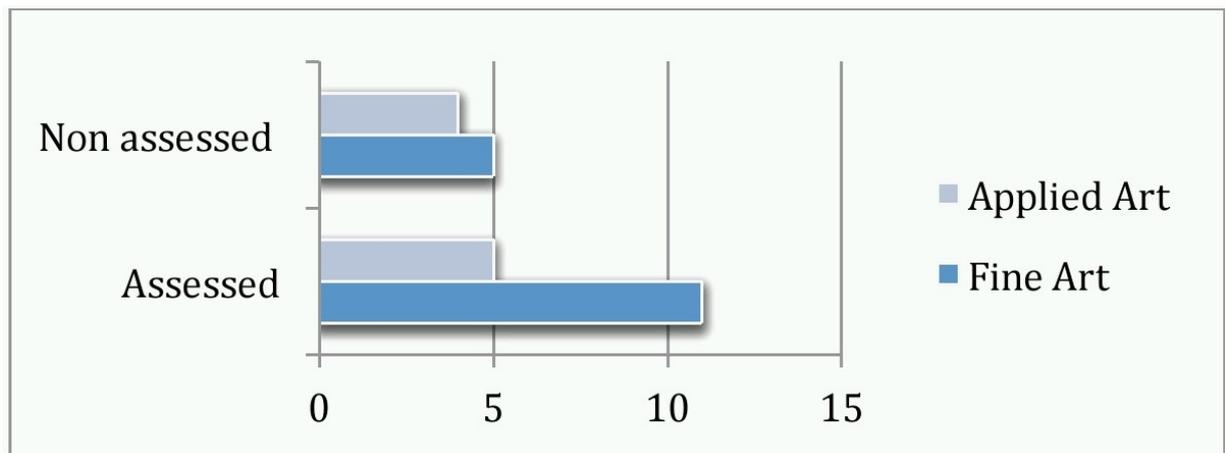


The survey revealed that the majority of named PP delivery occurs in some form across all three years in both fine and particularly applied art courses. The most common year for professional practice to be delivered is within the second year with the least common option being to deliver in the final year of study.

Reasons given were mainly to do with preparing students for graduation whilst endeavouring to not distract them from the final degree shows. Those courses that delivered PP in the final year either had plans to revise their provision and introduce it earlier in the year, or were choosing not to assess this year or make it compulsory, regardless of what provision in previous course years had been.

A third of courses (fine and applied arts) don't assess their named components, with many choosing to work in partnership with wider college and careers centres to deliver skills and advice on all areas of enterprise, self-employment and finding work, be it in many cases not subject specific.

**Table 2 - Assessed or non-assessed professional practice**



Other reasons given for not assessing were:

- The unpopularity of PP with the student body.
- A desire to allow extra-curricular activity to develop organically (not forced/contrived) amongst students and for students to self-select and self-motivate.
- Because careers and enterprise departments deliver a significant proportion of provision externally, and that attendance at such is voluntary.

It could be argued that the significant amount of non-compulsory fine art provision when compared to applied art is reflective of the particular challenges and stigmas associated with such delivery in fine art.

One other approach that stands out and is not reflected in the tables above, is a 1 year diploma offered by Central Saint Martins. Jane Lee, BA Course Leader there outlines this below:

"The Diploma in Professional Studies is a year taken between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year, effectively adding an extra year to a student's studies. UK students are eligible for an extra year of student loan for this course. For this year they pay half of the normal fee for an undergraduate year not a whole year's fee. Within the year they do twenty weeks of placement in any professional art environment which includes something other than simply their own practice. They have tutorial help in selecting and establishing their placement and tutorial contact (either vis-vis or skype) during the placement period. They have access to college facilities other than studio space. They gain an extra 120 credits (60 ects) for successful completion of their year. They are assessed on the written report they submit at the beginning of their third year when they return to their BA course. The course can only be done as a sandwich course in our BA Fine Art and is not

open to any other students.”

A number of staff on courses where placements are offered did however hint at the difficulty in achieving parity of experience for the QAA when it comes to placements. In one case a member of staff quoted an example of a parent asking how much discount they are getting because their daughter was on placement for a month.

### **Student and graduate careers and enterprise support**

The study addressed the role of careers and enterprise centres in supporting or contributing to professional practice for students. These units are generally responsible for purchasing the JISC licences with a-n, thus enabling the staff to research and identify key resources on [www.a-n.co.uk](http://www.a-n.co.uk) for inclusion on course reading lists and to support student assignments and course learning.

University of the Arts London's Student Enterprise & Employability Service (SEE) is an exemplary service that helps students and graduates across all courses develop enterprise and employability skills through a vast portfolio of workshops, talks and online material. The free and well-publicised service is available to students and graduates of three years on a voluntary non-assessed basis and includes under its umbrella: Own-it - Intellectual property advice for the creative sector, Arts Temps - UAL's in-house temping agency, and Creative Opportunities - job vacancy and work placement website for UAL students and graduates. Artquest, funded by Arts Council England as a National Portfolio Organisation, sits administratively within SEE and provides projects and opportunities for visual artists and craftspeople in London at any stage in their careers, whether UAL graduates or not.

#### **Camberwell College of Arts (UAL): Peckham Space**

Peckham Space is a gallery that commissions location-specific, socially-engaged art practice by established artists in collaboration with community partners. As well aiming to encourage progression of local young people into further and higher education at the College, its internship programme offers two paid gallery assistant positions every six months to graduates of Camberwell, Chelsea and Wimbledon Colleges. Working within a small team, the internships provide ample opportunity for professional development and interns can also take advantage of the University's staff development and learning programmes.

Arts University College Bournemouth's Enterprise Pavilion on campus supports, hosts and retains new graduates who have set up businesses in the South West, providing talks in the curriculum and placements for students, particularly those from the applied arts and design courses.

Rise Up<sup>8</sup> at Newcastle University is part of the university's wider careers service to support enterprise and self-employment. Working closely with LifeWorkArt (developed by David Butler within the fine art course, it provides talks, internships, desk space, grants, advice and expertise.

NET315 at Hull College of Art and Design provides support to students across departments as well as graduates and uniquely, to members of the public who are able to benefit from its support after the closing down of Business Link services. It also negotiates continued access for Hull College graduates to the college's facilities as and when they need them. See: <http://www.net315.co.uk/partner/hull-college/>

### **Extra curricular activity**

It is perhaps notable that several courses are considering how they might find ways to accredit any 'relevant' extra-curricula work being done by students as part of a degree - this both to put the focus on what students find interesting and to help them as best as they can when entering the job market.

Choice here of the term 'job market' as opposed to 'creative industries' or 'artist' is made because it seems more relevant. The sense of 'guilt' that as recently as five years ago plagued those who left art school to do something other than be an artist seems to be lifting, at least at the less-elite institutions. This has much to do with the attitudes of staff and in the author's opinion, the rise of teaching qualifications, alongside a genuine awareness of the wide-reaching value and potential of an art education and a gradual sense of responsibility to communicate this.

- **The vocational in art practice**

It is important when looking at all of these arguments that we take into account the recent and longer histories of fine and applied art disciplines. Jim Hunter, Deputy Principal at The Arts

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/careers/riseup/startup/>

University College at Bournemouth, outlines art's long-standing relationship to industry as one of which we should be proud and not ashamed. He was not alone in the study in feeling comfortable with the use of the term 'vocational':

"We're all - I am anyway - quite relaxed with the term vocational. If the term vocational means you develop knowledge and skills, which help your practice once you've graduated, then there's nothing wrong with that. It's also part of our history... If you go back 125 years we had art schools in every provincial town in England to promote good design in support of local industry - following the example of Prince Albert in the Great Exhibition.

There wasn't a college of art in Bournemouth because people thought it was a nice idea to sit painting and drawing; it was because it helped build pottery and so on and so forth. That's the background heritage of English art and design education and I think that should be remembered. The relationship between art and design education and industry has always been there only now the industry has changed. The industry we work to now here at Bournemouth isn't local anymore; the main industries now are Creative UK."

There are also several examples of colleges such as Bournemouth, Bedford and Hull that encourage cross-departmental working amongst students to realise projects – something noted as reflecting the collaboration found in industry.

Not only is the term 'vocational' being used with relative ease in relation to fine art courses feeding the creative Industries - it is notable perhaps that one art school has as its website strapline 'Creativity to Careers' - greater emphasis than ever before is being placed on the importance of 'transferable skills'.

- **Bottom-up networks**

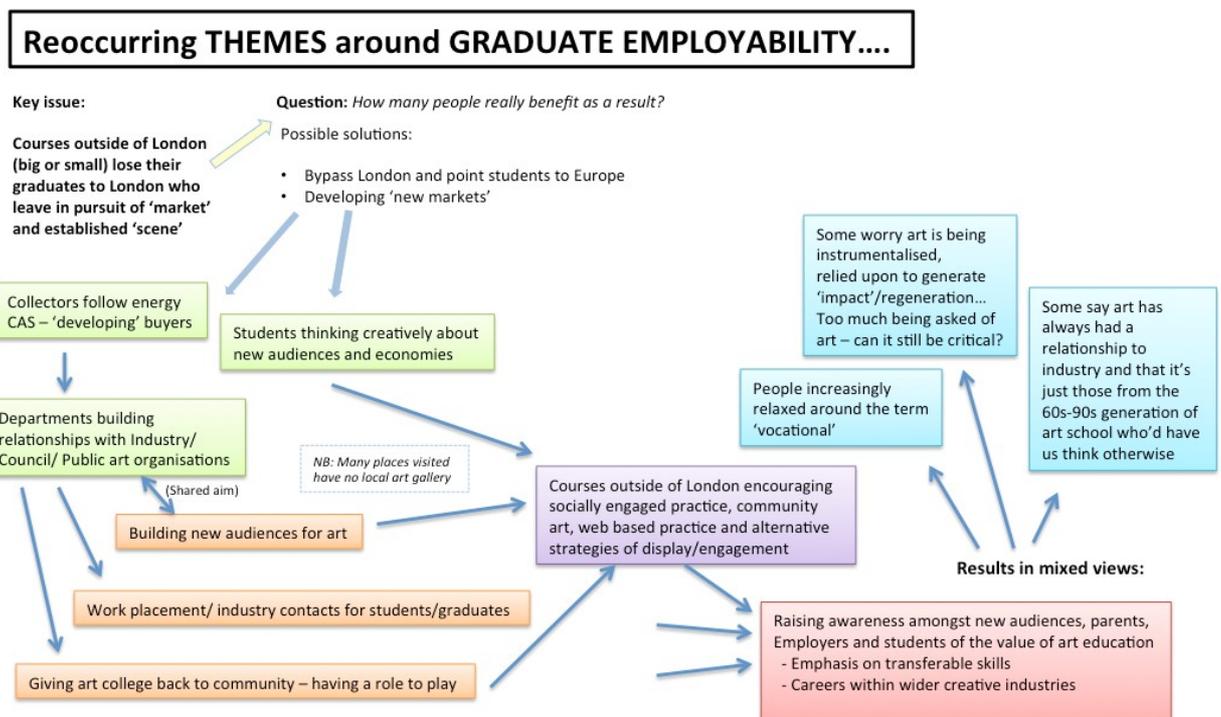
Up and down the country, increasing numbers of self-organised networks are emerging and staying put - and course leaders were all too ready to give examples. This is helped by enterprise departments who greatly encourage this, as well as by staff who bring in recent graduates who have set up such projects as examples. The route from 'A' to 'B' is more palpable when bringing in recent graduates; the idea of going out there and doing something similar seems achievable to

the student. There is less and less tendency to bring in 'established' artists whose career paths seem to far removed and whose definition of success is usually tied with market values.

The question and aspiration here is whether art will follow the patterns occurring elsewhere in the economy where we are seeing global power shifts, with top-down, opaque and hierarchical institutions crumbling in the face of bottom-up, transparent, peer-led and value-driven collaborations.

"Today there is resistance and disbelief amongst my students in relation to the art world and the idea of a 'career path' - something that was desirable in the 90s and even still five years ago. But the financial melt down and the global protest movement changed that. It created energy and there are more artist-run and self-organised networks emerging now. There is 'strategic optimism'- being made to feel disempowered creates movement. The course I am leading here at Goldsmiths has changed in that I now have a huge number of artist-run and alternative models that I can show rather than the two or three I had previously".

Maxa Zoller, professional practice course leader, Goldsmiths College, University of London



## Findings from the study

The research has identified the main concerns raised by tutors about professional practice as:

- How do courses retain graduates in the area and where absent, begin to build (or build upon) local art ecologies, economies and audiences?
- How can a course both support and advocate student employability whilst at the same time maintain in its students a sense of criticality and what many see as art's 'radical uselessness'?
- How can courses best prepare students for entry into an unpredictable economy, jobs market and evolving arts ecology?

The three notable splits identified by the research where attitudes and approaches to professional practice differ are: between those courses inside and outside of London; between courses that 'embed' provision within the wider course curriculum and those that label it as a separate module or component; and between approaches taken in fine and applied art.

The differing approaches inside and outside of London are tied up with an area's graduate career prospects; the number of art colleges and art organisations feeding the area; and the level of responsibility felt towards their graduates, prospective students, parents and towards the physical location as a whole.

Attitudes towards professional practice and choices about whether to 'embed', name or assess any provision are multiple and seem to be bound up with the staff's own received experience of art education; the perceived 'successes' and 'failings' of their own careers; and their opinions about how art should be 'taught', at times shaped by either undergoing or not undergoing a PGCE (now required by those employed in further and higher education teaching). Differing approaches to professional practice on fine and applied art courses seem very much associated with expectations of, and associations with, each respective discipline.

## Role of a-n in course provision

Many university courses lack the formal means to systematically track what their graduates do – or tend only promote the few that are successful as artists using the traditional routes at the expense of those with more varied applications of an art degree. Careers surveys such as *Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education*<sup>9</sup> (DLHE) don't take into account how developing an art practice for emerging artists - such as through artists' initiatives - sits alongside often non art-related employment.

The study shows that most courses point students to a-n as they arrive on the course and it is almost always listed as a resource within course handbooks and literature. The most popular things for course leaders to use with students are *Jobs and opportunities* to research contexts for practice after graduation, the *Code of Practice for the Visual Arts* and the features and contextualising articles in the *Knowledge bank*. The latter is especially recommended as a resource for student assignments that address topics such as pricing and selling work. Students are also made aware of how to advertise their final-year shows and some have built use of the *Degrees unedited* blogs into second year assignments. The *a-n Artist +AIR membership* that includes Public Liability insurance is also popular amongst artist staff themselves and one reason some recommend students to join as new graduates.

a-n was cited for its ability to reflect changing practices and approaches amongst artists, that “makes the contemporary art world more visible for students”. Although tutors' use of a-n's published tools for teaching<sup>10</sup> was low, this may be because almost every tutor interviewed had a membership of a-n themselves, and such access may well have had an underlying influence on the materials tutors produced themselves for use on courses.

The research threw up a range suggestions from tutors that a-n should scope, that could better support student learning and course development, and would serve to extend a-n's research and rich evidence-base on contemporary practice by drawing more fully on its active constituency of professional visual and applied artists, curators and arts organisers.

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<sup>9</sup> [http://www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=1899&Itemid=20d=239%29](http://www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1899&Itemid=20d=239%29)

a-n's *Tools for teaching* resources include Not so much as job as an opportunity, Artist-led activity: a learning resource guide for tutors, Critical Mass and Degrees of success.

<sup>10</sup>

## People consulted

Lynne Windsor, MA Printmaking student, Anglia Ruskin University Cambridge

Mary Humphry, BA student, Anglia Ruskin University Cambridge

Chris Webster, Lecturer Fine Art, Aberystwyth University

Jim Hunter, Deputy Principal, Arts University College Bournemouth

Stephanie James, Associate Dean, School of Visual Arts, Arts University College Bournemouth

Mike Griffiths, BA Fine Art Course Leader, Arts University College Bournemouth

Emily Druiff, Director, Peckham Space, Camberwell College of Arts, University of the Arts London

Sarah Mclean, Assistant, Peckham Space, Camberwell College of Arts, University of the Arts

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James Frost, Senior Lecturer Media, Art and Design, Canterbury Christchurch University

Stephen Carter, XD FA Pathway Leader, Central St Martins College Of Art & Design, University of the Arts London

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Elle Reynolds, Academic Placement Coordinator, Central St Martins College Of Art & Design, University of the Arts London

Jeff Ko, Y1 student, Central St Martins College Of Art & Design, University of the Arts London

Martin Newth, BA Fine Art course leader, PP, Chelsea College of Art & Design, University of the Arts London

Mairi MacKenzie, Lecturer, Glasgow School of Art

Maxa Zoller, Professional Practice Course leader, Goldsmiths College, University London

Chris Lillywhite, MA Fine Art course leader/PP module leader FA, Grimsby Institute of Further & Higher Education

Matthew Lilley, Hull College

Rob Moore, Head of Art & Design, Hull College

Jill Howitt, PPD leader, Hull College

Desmond Brett, BA Fine Art, Hull College

Harry Hodgson, 3D design/art in public realm, Hull College

Chris Whilds, Net 315 Coordinator, Hull College Enterprise Dept Net 315

Sheila Gafney, Course Leader BA Fine Art, Leeds College of Art

Juan Cruz, Director – Arts, Liverpool John Moores University

Chris Alton, student, Middlesex University, School of Arts and Education

John Timberlake, BA Fine Art Course leader, PP coordinator, Middlesex University, School of

## Arts and Education

David Butler, School of Art and Cultures, Newcastle University

Matthew Cornford, Fine Art and Fine Art Critical Practice Leader, University of Brighton

Mary-Anne Francis, Professional Practice, University of Brighton

Arabella Plouviez, Course leader Photography, video, digital imaging, University of Sunderland

Tim Brennan, Dean Student Experience Art and Design, University of Sunderland

Colin Rennie, Course Leader Glass and Ceramics, University of Sunderland

Peter Wolland, Admissions Tutor and Senior Lecturer, University of Sunderland

Stephen Beddoe, Director, SEE, University of the Arts London

Russell Martin, Programme Manager, Artquest, University of the Arts London

Rachel Bradley, PP Leader, University of Worcester

Dereck Harris, Painting Course leader and PP leader, Wimbledon College of Art, University of the Arts