

The Art of Smooth Transition

A qualitative study evaluating non-traditional students' experiences of the transition from Further Education to Higher Education Art & Design degree courses.

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1 Introduction

The transition from a Further Education (FE) to a Higher Education (HE) culture can be stark and intimidating for non-traditional students, particularly within the competitive Art and Design sector, where “the benchmark for first degree participation by lower socio-economic groups...is only 29%”(HEFCE 2004).

University of the Arts London (UoA) comprises of six nationally and internationally renowned colleges: Camberwell College of Arts, Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, Chelsea College of Art and Design, London College of Communication London College of Fashion and Wimbledon College of Art. Benefiting from strong traditions of excellence and graduate success and central London locations, UoL annually attracts high numbers of quality HE applications.

In the Arts, Design and Media sector, there are four recognised entrance pathways from level 3 to degree programmes: A-levels; Diploma in Foundation Studies in Art and Design; National Diploma Art and Design; and Access Courses¹. In addition to formal qualifications (meeting the required UCAS entry points), a portfolio of practical work and performance at interview are crucial factors influencing the success of applicants.

In 2005, Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design (CSM) developed an innovative pilot ‘Preparation for HE’ programme to prepare non-traditional students for entry to HE. The pilot targeted BTEC National Diploma Art and Design students from inner-London Further FE colleges within widening participation postcode areas. It forms part of The National Arts Learning Network (NALN)² project “Curriculum Development for Receiving HE Courses”³, which aims to widen participation in HE by supporting non-traditional learners’ progression to, and achievement on, degree-level Art & Design courses.

This study tracks the *on-course experiences* of the first eight students to enter UoA degree programmes through this new progression route, during their first term of HE study. Student experiences and perceptions of progress and lecturers’ perceptions of their progress and potential, enable the main issues, factors and concerns impacting upon students’ experiences of HE to be identified. Particular challenges and potential barriers to retention and progression for non-traditional, first generation HE students in Art and Design are highlighted to inform subsequent curriculum developments and student support provision.

2 Preparation for Higher Education Pilot Programme

The Preparation for Higher Education (Prep for HE) Pilot Programme was designed with the intention of preparing students by addressing the language and culture of HE Art and Design and assisting in the preparation of student portfolios and preparedness for interview. The following objectives were central to Prep for HE:

1. To introduce student to experiences of working within an HE environment.
2. To use HE staff to accustom the students to different styles of teaching and learning.
3. To encourage self-directed learning.
4. To familiarize students with the language used in art practice at HE level.
5. To develop a Prep for HE curriculum model which can be used in different HE contexts.

2.1 Overview of the Preparation for Higher Education pilot programme

The programme consists of two units:

Unit 1: Summer School

A five day Summer School, run in the last week of the FE term, introduces students to Fine Art practice at HE, at the end of the first year of study on the National Diploma. The unit introduces the language of ideas and how these can be used within contemporary art practice. It involves hands on making, building in 3D, using found objects, drawing, painting and printing and introduces students to processes of collecting information and developing ideas independently in response to set briefs. Students are encouraged to use of visual diaries/sketchbooks, and their importance in strengthening an HE application is discussed. Students participate in several 'crits' and presentations and undertake a tour of the work of final year art and design graduates. Talks on the different courses available at UoA, on dyslexia support and financial support are also provided. Student Ambassadors are present throughout and play an important advice and guidance role.

Unit 2: Preparation for Interview

A series of weekly workshops at UoA run throughout the first two terms of the second year of students' study on their National Diploma courses. These workshops become increasingly focused on the articulation of individual ideas and their development through practice. At this stage, students begin to select their specialist subject areas and specific courses to apply to.

The workshops include tours and presentations by current degree students. Practical activities centre on the development of self directed learning. Students are asked to identify two contemporary art exhibitions to visit and are expected to undertake these visits independently. They are closely supported in the initial research phase, and are introduced to using the library to research artists and exhibitions. Students are supported in developing skills in articulating their ideas, collecting information and presenting their findings and responses to the group. Emphasis is also placed on use of sketchbooks within the portfolio and on preparation for interview. They are invited to attend the UoA visiting lecture programme to expand their knowledge of current contemporary artists.

Portfolio reviews and mock interviews are held by course admissions staff, to give further feedback to students and to advise where they may need to strengthen their portfolio or evidence their knowledge further.

2.2 Student Progression through the Prep for HE programme

Of the students starting the pilot in 2005, ten were offered places on UoA degree courses following successful interview. Of these ten, eight commenced their HE studies in October 2006. Two deferred entry due to financial and domestic constraints, securing their places for 2007 entry. Table 1 provides a summary of the ten students offered HE places.

Preparation for HE Students offered places on UoA degree courses in 2005.						
Gender	Aged 25 +	Previous course	Destination course	Deferred	Retrieval	Withdrawn
F		National Diploma	BA (Hons) Fine Art			
M		National Diploma	BA (Hons) Fine Art		Retrieval	
F		National Diploma	BA (Hons) Fine Art	Deferred		
F		National Diploma	BA (Hons) Fine Art		Retrieval	
F		National Diploma	BA (Hons) Fine Art			
F	Yes	Foundation Diploma	BA (Hons) Fine Art	Deferred		
M		National Diploma	BA (Hons) Graphics			
F		National Diploma	BA (Hons) Graphics	Deferred		
F	Yes	Foundation Diploma	FdA Fine Art Skills and Practices			Withdrawn
M		National Diploma	FdA Fine Art Skills and Practices	Deferred		

Table 1: Summary of student progression onto HE courses at UoA, from the Preparation for Higher Education pilot programme.

Most students were female, aged between 19 and 24 and on National Diploma Art and Design courses. Two mature students (over 25 years) had completed a Diploma in Foundation Studies in Art and Design course.

Of the eight students starting their course in 2006, a further two chose to leave the course, deferring their place to the 2007 entry⁴, and one withdrew completely. Two students were placed on retrieval⁵ following their first summative assessment.

3 Aims of the Study

The Prep for HE pilot was successful in supporting and preparing students for applying to art and design courses at UoA. In particular, students reported that their confidence had been increased, that the information and advice provided was helpful (particularly financial advice), and that the experience had provided a beneficial enhancement to the National Diploma curriculum, as one student commented:

“...the workshop was the completion of my course... I felt very privileged... I felt sorry for the people who didn't have that information...I felt at an advantage”.

This qualitative study monitors the on-course experiences of the eight students who began their Art and Design degree study at UoA in 2005 and identifies key issues and/or barriers to progression impacting upon these non-traditional entrants' experience of HE. Key issues raised are discussed in relation to the particular challenges faced by non-traditional students and suggested areas for further research and development to improve effective progression and achievement for such students.

4 Student Interviews and Tutor Questionnaires

Student interviews and tutor questionnaires were the main methods of inquiry. At the beginning of the study, it was the intention to interview students in pairs at two key stages (early November 2006 and February 2007), to monitor their experiences during the first year experience and to identify any shifts in perspectives. However, due to the lack of availability for interview of some students, it was decided to undertake one set of one-to-one interviews. Whilst this limited the possibility of accurately measuring 'distance travelled' during the first term, it gave students more opportunity to discuss their experiences in greater detail through a longer, one-to-one semi-structured interview.

Nine of the ten students offered HE places agreed to participate in an interview with a Student Ambassador, who was appointed to gather the interview data. The interviews took place between late November 2006 and February 2007. The interviewer previously contributed to the Prep for HE programme as a Student Ambassador and was therefore known to the interviewees. Students felt comfortable talking to him and as a result of this

good relationship he was able to illicit frank responses. The semi-structured interviews allowed students to discuss issues pertinent to their individual experiences of HE. All interviews were voice-recorded.

Tutors' perceptions of the students' progress were obtained from questionnaires. Eight questionnaires were issued and five were returned completed.

The lead researcher analysed the data to identify key issues, concerns and/or barriers experienced by the students; and any similarities or disparities between student experiences and staff perceptions of the students' progress. Student profiles are summarised in the Appendix, p14.

5 The Higher Education Environment

The importance of students' integration within an HE culture and environment is widely recognised as an influencing factor over student retention and progression⁶. Whilst this is a small scale study, student comments raised several issues relating to the social integration of non-traditional students. Perceptions of differences in social background, age and preparedness in comparison to their peers on their degree courses were common. Financial barriers were also a key issue and one which arguably affects all students.

5.1 Mature Students

The mature students did not view engagement in the social aspects of HE as a key priority. For some with family and other commitments outside university, they were conscious of their different priorities to some of the younger students. The two students over 25 years of age were both aware of the university's social life, but did not feel the need to, or want to, become involved in social activities. Both described an interest in their fellow students and the diversity of student groups (including other older students). One student is pregnant and described her peer group as a good energetic cohort, but felt she was "in a different space". Her tutor noted that whilst she is coping with the academic requirements of the course, her attendance is affected by her pregnancy. The other student perceived the age difference to be a barrier, feeling that other students "didn't really give a lot" due to their (younger) age. This student withdrew from the FdA Fine Art Skills and Practices as she saw the course "being wrong for" her and described "not feeling part of it".

Another student, aged 24, is a lone parent. Her tutor felt that she wasn't fully participating in the course because of her situation. The student was conscious that her parental responsibility was impacting on her ability to integrate socially with her peers: "I come in, do

my work and leave... that's life". Her tutor also identified the additional financial pressure of childcare costs which are a concern for this student.

5.2 Language and Cultures

The HE environment at UoA comprises a rich and diverse mix of students from different cultures, including a number of foreign language students, for whom English is a second language. How well students integrate with students from different nationalities may be dependent to the extent of their previous levels of exposure to different cultures, backgrounds and languages. One student noted that "language is a problem" in communicating with some foreign language students who experienced difficulties in communicating and expressing themselves. A student studying at a UoL college with a significant number of international students raised the language barrier issue.

5.3 Social Situation

Where an individual comes from, including their prior experiences, background and social standing can inform their core value system and influence their perspective of, and interaction with, their environment. Many of the students interviewed had not considered applying to UoA prior to undertaking the Prep for HE course because they did not think their work was good enough, or they did not think they were intelligent enough, or in some cases, had been actively discouraged from applying by their FE college tutors. Whilst all the students secured places due the appropriate standard of their work, some were conscious of 'feeling different' to other students. One student felt that compared to her own outlook and background, the culture of her peer group was like "two different worlds" and she "didn't feel part of it".

Another student felt that his peers "didn't have a clue about life" in general as he did not think they had "real problems". He felt that they were narrow-minded, using their "wacky image" as a substitute for genuine open-mindedness. He felt they perceived him as "boring" because he wore "ordinary clothes". His comments raise issues of image and identity in the process of bonding with peers. In his case, the 'unconventional' culture of art students' image was perceived as a barrier.

Two students who suspended their studies (one deferred and withdrew) also described barriers stemming from their class background, which they felt other students did not experience. Both were the first generation in their families to enter HE and felt that their family's pride in seeing them enter HE, made it difficult to discuss their wishes to

defer/withdraw. As one student stated: *“It’s a big thing going to University when you’re from a working-class background.”*

5.4 Educational Background

Students were also conscious of differences in the educational experiences and backgrounds of students on their courses. Five of the interviewees commented that students who had completed a Diploma in Foundation Studies in Art and Design course prior to entry appeared to be more confident in speaking about their work and seemed to find the written work “easier”. One mature student who had completed a Diploma in Foundation Studies in Art and Design course in an FE college felt that the students who had undertaken the same course at UoA performed better in class discussions.

One student said that she didn’t think she’d go to university and that “university is for clever people, brainy people, not me”. This comment reflects a view that university is for an ‘elite’ type of student. At worst this indicates that students from vocational pathways feel that they are actually *less able* and at best, that students from academic pathways have a better understanding of what is required of them. Students may be intimidated by more articulate and confident students, but may not be able to judge the quality of the ideas and arguments being expressed. Some students may have relevant contributions to make but are less confident or find it more difficult to express their ideas. These experiences are common in the majority of interviewees and appropriate support is important to address these problems. Anecdotal feedback from some tutors indicates a lack of co-ordination in monitoring student’s progress and a related sense that the students whose problems are most pressing get most attention due to pressures of time and resources.

6 Cultures of Teaching and Learning

The transition from FE to HE presents a significant shift in approaches to teaching and learning. In particular, an increased emphasis on independent learning and responsibility for managing one’s own learning is arguably felt by most students entering HE from schools, Sixth Forms, or FE colleges, as they become part of a larger student body and may receive less face-to-face staff contact. The students interviewed reflected varying levels of awareness of the shift from student-centred to student-led learning required in the HE environment.

6.1 Independent Learning

Independent learning may be understood in the HE context as a student’s ability to take an active and responsible role in their own learning. This requires skills to undertake self-

directed study, independent research and the ability to manage different aspects of their learning beyond the contact hours described in the course timetable.

For some students, used to more regular teaching contact in FE, a more 'sparse' HE timetable may be perceived as 'leniency' with "only one lecture a week". The cultural shift in expectations of the type of engagement that tutors expected of HE students was perceived by some as lack of teaching. The student who withdrew from her course reported that she had had her first formal tutorial two months into the course and would have preferred more contact and tutor feedback earlier. Another student had not been allocated a personal tutor.

Time-management and self-motivation are also key issues for students who may be used to being more closely monitored by FE staff. One student discussed his work and his course with great enthusiasm, but had struggled with attendance issues and as a result had deferred his place in order to re-start the course again in 2008. This student described a long history of previous attendance problems at school and college. Working evening shifts in a bar whilst studying, he found it difficult to get up in the morning:

"Getting into class was the hardest thing for me...I did mess up and it was too good an opportunity to give up...when I was not coming in for whatever reason it was like a snowball...it just got bigger and bigger and more and more pressure....The thing that I'm struggling with is to get into the routine of it. I want to just try my hardest every day...to get into that routine of trying my hardest all the time...that's what I found the hardest...I was concerned about me getting up out of bed...and being able to do it"

One student acknowledged the need to develop a mutually-respectful, adult relationship with HE staff, by being organised and keeping appointments with tutors. She recognised that "they care about you if you care about them". Maintaining scheduled appointments with tutors is particularly important if staff are part time, as they may not be 'on hand' to see students outside of arranged tutorials.

6.2 Tutor perceptions of students' independence

Tutors noted lack of "organisational skills" in students with very poor attendance, who consistently missed scheduled tutorials that would help them develop.

One tutor raised concerns over a student who he felt may lack the 'independence' required for HE, as he had not attended any of his weekly scheduled tutorials. He also raised concerns about the standard of his written work, which lacked relevant references to contextualise his own ideas. The tutor was concerned that his "living conditions which are not within normal parameters" may have affected his time-management and ability to meet

deadlines. The student transferred to another pathway and his performance and contact with tutors have improved. His tutor feels that he is now “back on track”.

6.3 Academic Requirements

An increasing level of independent thinking is also a key expectation in HE study. One student noticed that the briefs he received in HE were more complex and contained more ambiguity:

“The briefs were less black and white... the brief that we got weren’t straight down the middle and that was dead confusing at first.”

This student also commented that he found the written components of the course difficult. Although he is not dyslexic, his language skills are poor as he had repeated absences during his early schooling.

Another student found the HE requirements for critical thinking challenging. Her lack of critical reference to other sources is notable in written work and this was pointed out to her as a particular area of concern. She passed her first essay and feels that she is improving and getting better at explaining her work than she used to be. She sees her learning as self-directed and feels she received better support from current tutors than those on her previous course.

6.4 Student Support

The Prep for HE students’ take-up of student support in their first year of HE was erratic. Some students had dyslexia tests scheduled but did not attend, while one student organised a dyslexia test independently. Although all students were aware of the student services available to them, some commented that they were reluctant to access these services.

The issues affecting student progress are complex. One student fell behind with coursework and eventually withdrew, deferring his place in order to re-start the course in 2008. His progress was affected by late enrolment due to delays with his student loan, as well as his perception of his lack of study skills, external pressures and feeling an outsider to the culture of student life.

One student found the increased emphasis on self-directed work in the second term of her course was unnerving. She found that advice and guidance offered by a Student Ambassador was helpful. Many of the students interviewed also maintained informal links with the Prep for HE Course Leader; receiving phone and face to face support as required.

Many found this very important as it influenced them to think about their options, rather than 'giving-up' if they were experiencing difficulties.

There tend to be high numbers of dyslexic students studying visual arts and design subjects and dyslexia testing and support is offered through services. Some of the students interviewed reported making appointments for dyslexia testing, but then did not attend. One student arranged her own dyslexia assessment outside the university. One student reported that although she received a talk about dyslexia support, there was "nowhere to go" at her college to find out more. One student said that although she knew support was available, she would prefer to get help from her friends rather from the dyslexia support tutors.

One student with severe dyslexia was offered a viva voce presentation for her Art History and Theoretical Studies assessment submission, which she passed without additional learning support. Staff are currently reviewing the success of the viva voce as an alternative assessment method in this case and exploring its potential for further development.

Many of the students interviewed had specific concerns regarding financial issues. Four of the students commented that the advice about HE funding received on the Prep for HE course had been invaluable. Whilst most of the students lived at home (and may arguably have less financial problems than traditional students who move away from home to enter HE), they still experienced financial issues affecting their progress. For example, the lone parent with the costs of childcare and the student with attendance problems because he was tired from working evening shifts at a supermarket.

7 Key Issues Affecting the 1st Year HE Experience

Overall, the Prep for HE course was successful in supporting non-traditional students into HE, by providing information and support in:

- Financial advice
- Portfolio and interview preparation
- Student ambassador advice and support
- Idea generation, development and critical thinking
- Confidence-building and presentation skills

However, the transition into the culture of HE was challenging for many, in the crucial first stages of study. The challenges experienced by students could be identified as those related to adjusting to the HE culture and environment, and those related to the academic

expectations and the culture of HE teaching and learning. Within the former, the following key issues were raised:

- integration issues for mature students
- introduction to diverse languages and cultures
- awareness of different social and educational backgrounds

Some students clearly felt less advantaged than some of the other students on their course. As well as the challenge of social integration, was that of meeting the expectations of HE teaching and learning, in particular:

- independent learning
- time-management and organisation
- critical thinking and essay-writing skills
- accessing student support

Staff felt that the students' performance was more erratic than that of traditional students. The students were perceived by tutors to be less organised (and therefore less teachable) due to poor attendance and take up of scheduled tutorials. Some of the students were coping with external problems, which led to absences and deferrals.

8 Conclusions and Recommendations

The Higher Education culture of learning and teaching is based on independent learning and self-directed study. Students are encouraged (and expected) to demonstrate individual initiative in making use of the full range of learning, and support, available to them. This cultural shift in emphasis from tutor-led to student-led study and the responsibility of managing one's own learning, often within a more complex and diverse learning environment, is particularly challenging for non-traditional students. Whilst the Prep for HE programme was successful in providing the information, guidance and support required to enable students to enter HE, the experience of HE was still challenging. The challenge of *experiencing* HE was articulated by the student who withdrew from her course after realising in "was not right for her":

"Its not really like what I thought it was like... Living it was entirely different to what I expected... It was absolutely different to what I expected because when you see it, it is different to being in it. I just personally expected something totally different."

Another student who was confident that the course was right for him struggled with his attendance, fell behind and eventually deferred his place until 2008.

The students interviewed were quite insightful in their evaluation of their progress. They recognised their strengths and weakness and were aware of areas where they needed to improve. In some cases (as in the case of the student who withdrew), they tended to be more critical of their academic progress and social integration than their tutors. However, in spite of recognising areas for improvement, they were very reluctant to access student support services.

While it is apparent that effective student support is crucial to ensure successful progression by students from FE and non-traditional students pathways it may be that the support offered by the academic curriculum could be strengthened. For instance it may be that time for essay writing workshops, seminar discussions and individual essay tutorials could be timetabled into the Art History and Theoretical Studies curriculum during Stage One *across* UoA to ensure parity. This could slot into the existing programme, delivered by the academic tutors who are setting and marking coursework ensuring that contact time could be tailored to, and focused on, each student's needs in relation to the curriculum. This valuable individual contact time might allow for staff to become familiar with the diverse needs of FE students and to address the particular problems facing them with appropriately nuanced pedagogic techniques.

A direct outcome resulting from the findings of this study led to a student support meeting being set up at UoA to address the particular support needs of non-traditional students entering HE through the Prep for HE progression route. The following areas were identified in which to pilot and develop new student support initiatives:

- A student mentoring proposal
- More active student support for dyslexia
- Closer tracking of student progress within courses
- Student union buddying programmes

Whilst it must be acknowledged that this was a small-scale study with a limited number of students, it has highlighted the importance of available and accessible student support for non-traditional students, particularly during the crucial first stages of their HE experience.

For students with external problems, it is important that any issues are picked up early enough in order to provide support and guidance to minimise their impact upon progress.

Students may not be proactive in seeking support for a wide range of reasons, including perception, confidence, limited information about what support is available, lack of awareness of the extent of their issues and to what extent they are affecting their progress, etc.

Our main recommendation from this study is to investigate ways in which student support can be strengthened by:

- Monitoring non-traditional students' on-course experience more closely.
- Address the disparities between students' experiences of FE teaching and learning and the expectations placed on them in Higher Education.
- Support the on-course development of independent learning skills, including time-management, organisation, etc.
- Exploring alternative modes of assessment.

Notes

¹ Whilst A-Level students with the required UCAS points can apply directly to Art and Design degree courses, the Diploma in Foundation Studies in Art & Design has been the dominant pathway as the curriculum is specifically designed to promote independent learning and to prepare students for the HE applications process. Although this is also a Level 3 qualification on the National Qualifications Framework, it is viewed by many as a Level 3.5, as students enter once they have completed A-Levels. The two year BTEC National Diploma route is a vocational Level 3 pathway and is mainly offered in Further Education colleges as a vocational equivalent to the A-level route.

² The National Arts Learning Network formed in September 2005 to widen participation in Art, Design and the Performing Arts, by "increasing the number of learners progressing from vocational programmes, or the workplace, into Higher Education, and to equip them for lifelong employment in the creative industries" (NALN 2005), and aims to develop a Credit and Accumulation Transfer Scheme by the end of 2009. The NALN is funded by HEFCE, with contributions from member HEIs.

³ The project (2006-2009) is led by the University College for the Creative Arts at Canterbury, Epsom, Farnham, Maidstone and Rochester (UCCA). Other NALN partners include Camberwell, Chelsea, Wimbledon, Norwich, Leeds, and Herefordshire Colleges of Art and Design.

⁴ One student deferred at the end of the autumn semester 2005 due to academic problems, and one deferred at the end of the spring semester 2006 due to personal issues.

⁵ Students are 'on retrieval' if work presented for summative assessment does not reach the required standard to pass the module. Students on retrieval receive assessment feedback and can re-submit work for assessment within a specified deadline. The work is re-assessed with a maximum 40% mark achievable. If successfully passed, students can progress to the next stage of the course.

⁶ Ref 1st year experience study.

Appendix

Student profiles

(All names have been changed to protect anonymity)

Adam completed a National Diploma and is currently on the BA (Hons) Graphics at CSM. He has not been assigned a personal tutor so no tutor questionnaire was completed for him. He feels his practical work is stronger than his written work. He works in Sainsburys part time and has a loan. He felt the general advice and information on loans on the Prep for HE course was invaluable. He has passed all his practical and written assessments.

Christina completed a National Diploma and is currently on the BA (Hons) Fine Art at Byam Shaw. She lives with supportive family and feels she integrates well into student life. She feels better at speaking about her work but is aware that her written work needs to demonstrate more academic skills. Her tutors feel she is progressing well.

Francis is a mature student (over 25). She completed a Diploma in Foundation Studies and is currently on the BA (Hons) Fine Art at C.S.M. Her progress is good according to her and her tutors. Her Tutor says he has a supportive and friendly relationship that grows in trust. She understands the requirements of the course but her pregnancy is making it hard for her to attend everything. Another student is supportive and calls her to let her she has missed. She since deferred; her reasons for this remain private.

Isabel is a mature student (over 25). She completed a Diploma in Foundation Studies and started on the FdA in Fine Art Skills and Practices at Byam Shaw. She felt the course “was not right for her” and withdrew. She felt the course wasn’t what she thought it would be like: “Living it was entirely different to what I expected”. She also felt her outlook and background were different than her peers, and she “didn’t feel part of it”. She hopes to find a job and intends to apply to courses at Chelsea School of Art and Westminster School of Art.

James completed a National Diploma and is currently on the FdA in Fine Art Skills and Practices at Byam Shaw. He found the Prep for HE course very helped him to secure a place on his current course. At the start of the course he felt his tutor was initially reserved but his perception of her gradually changed. He found applying for a loan was particularly confusing. He lives at home and does not have particular financial worries. He has experienced some difficulties with attendance and feel behind in his coursework. He deferred at the end of the autumn semester 2005 and will re-attend the Prep for HE course this year before returning to his FdA course in autumn 2007. He remains positive and is determined to return to the course.

Kate completed a National Diploma and is currently on the BA (Hons) Fine Art at Byam Shaw. She is a lone parent with two young children to care for without any family support. Her situation presents her with particular challenges. The cost of living in London along with childcare costs present significant barriers for her. She does not want to be seen as needing ‘special treatment’ by the tutors, due to her circumstances. She has severe dyslexia and is receiving support. Her tutor feels she is coping well on the course, although her practical skills need to improve to more successfully convey her ideas. Her tutor is concerned that Kate doesn’t have enough money for materials and feels that purchasing materials would help. She is perceived by staff as particularly determined to overcome her problems and is an asset in seminar discussions. She wants to be a teacher.

Richard completed a National Diploma and is currently on the BA (Hons) Fine Art at the School of Art. He did not give an interview. He is insecurely housed and has had very bad time keeping that has impacted negatively on his progress. He failed retrieval. This has

been addressed by his tutors and he has demonstrated better organizational skills and has transferred to another pathway, his tutors offer the opinion that he is on track to progress.

Rebecca completed a National Diploma and was offered a place on the BA (Hons) Fine Art at Byam Shaw. She decided to defer due to external reasons that she does not want to go into. She reports that the Preparation for Higher Education course gave her more useful information and built her confidence more, than her BTEC. Finance will be an issue but she will get a student loan.

Sarah did not want to be interviewed. She completed a National Diploma and was offered a place on the BA (Hons) Fine Art at the School of Art. She had problems (which she did not wish to disclose) that contributed to her failing the first stage and going to retrieval. In her own opinion she is now on track to pass. Her tutor was unaware of her problems.

Vicky completed a National Diploma and was offered a place on the BA (Hons) Graphic Design at the School of Art. She deferred her place due to external reasons. She had no family support and the Prep for HE course prompted her to apply to University in the face of opposition. She is going in spite of them "once I'm in, I'm in". Her experience of the route to this point has been very different to what she expected, "everything has been different".