Creative education online: action research report

UAL Online

December 2022

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Foreword

UAL's strategy includes the 'good growth' of our online offer and an ambition to widen access. This requires us to move on from our Covid response, by developing sustainable and inclusive forms of online offer that are more than a retooling of the residential model.

The UAL Online Action Research Project was designed to explore effective, non-crisis, versions of online learning and teaching for our creative subjects. UAL pedagogies such as material practices, dialogue, co-creation, studio and reflective practice were integral, as we built on a significant body of research in online learning and a rich seam of expertise across the university.

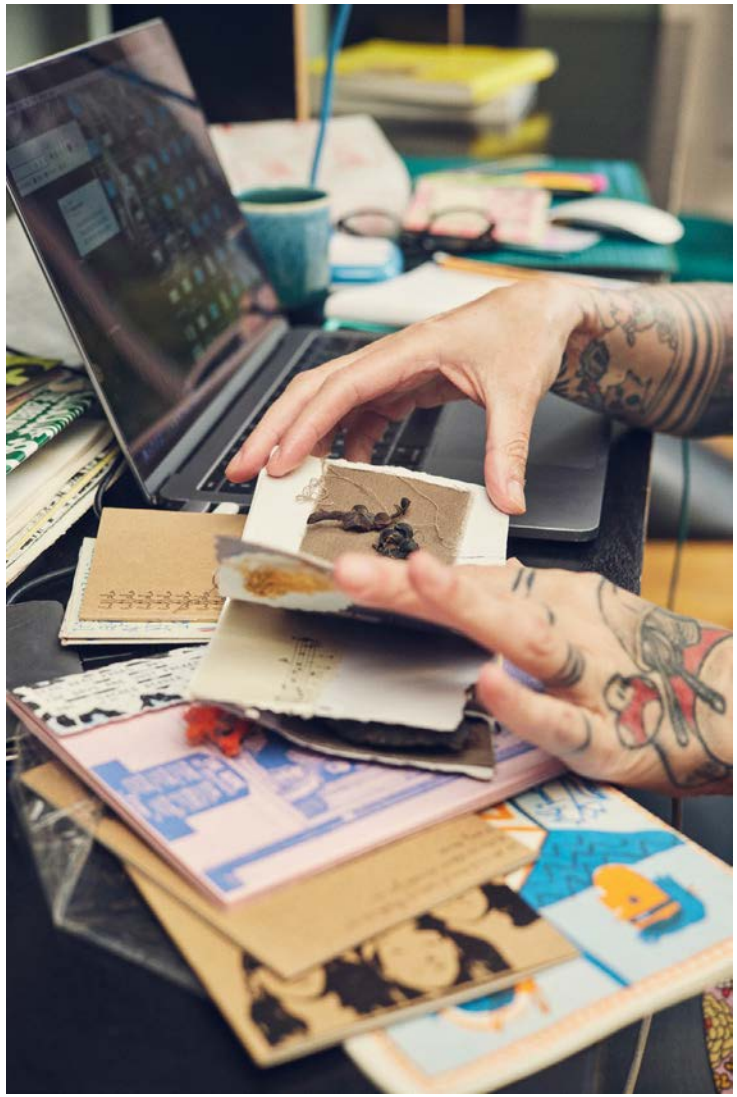
Significantly, the activities we ran with over 300 learners across 15 UAL subjects were about as close to an authentic curriculum experience as possible, while also being genuine experiments. As such, what we have learnt about online learners, our organisational culture and our institutional readiness is of great value.

One finding from the research supersedes all others: We must design our offer on the assumption that our students are busy people. This simple statement represents a fundamental shift from our predominant mode, which is suffused with the 'halcyon residential' – wherein we attempt to support students to make our curriculum their

primary commitment. As discussed in this report, the ‘busy people’ principle informs a range of positive design recommendations which use learning design processes and the affordances of digital technology to support inclusion, access, diversity, and individual circumstances.

In response to the research, we are developing teaching and learning, and student experience models which allow for multiple modes of authentic student engagement across the learning journey. This moves us away from the implicit ‘ideal student’ who engages in a specific pattern and opens the possibility for learners to navigate curriculum in ways which pragmatically map into their lives. Not only is this inclusive, but it is also sustainable for both staff and students - laying the ground for a meaningful student experience and healthy student retention.

The UAL Online Action Research Project has informed how we might best partner across roles and groups to co-design the online offer and has highlighted where our services and processes need to



Photograph: Ben Turner

be more agile to support flexibility for busy students. The detail in this report will be of interest to those developing online curriculum and those looking to enhance the pedagogy of blended courses.

In response to the research, UAL Online will work with colleagues to develop an Online Learning Framework which will embody our findings in a set of values and design principles. This framework will be used as a yardstick for the design of pedagogy and curriculum at UAL and represents a high-level response to UAL's strategic ambitions for inclusive online learning.

I would like to thank everyone who contributed to this project and our ongoing work to explore and develop flexible online learning. It is by drawing together the unique insights and expertise from across UAL through which we can create meaningful work and make a real difference to enhancing the student experience.

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Executive summary

Overview

This project has highlighted the value of flexibility in online learning and the relevance of personal circumstance to student experience. It has given rise to a holistic approach to learning design and student experience. The findings align with much of the literature and sector good practice, connecting retention (which we used as a marker of success) with good learning design and supportive pedagogy. The value to us as an institution is in evidencing these findings here at UAL, in our creative education context and in the experiences of our own colleagues and learners. In designing an online learning experience for students, we have an opportunity to define a learning design process that suits our creative context. We have found that flexible learning design is central to an inclusive learning and teaching model, and student experience must be considered holistically to be effective[1].

1 Blake, Sunday, Capper, Gail and Jackson, Anna. “Building Belonging in Higher Education: Recommendations for developing an integrated institutional approach.” WonkHE (2015). Web.

Image 1: The project at a glance. Diagram of the UAL Online Action Research Project.

Headline findings

Findings from our action research provided us with insight and opportunities to develop online education for creative learners and align to areas of the student experience, including student journey, curriculum design and pedagogy.

Develop flexible curriculum for busy students.

We propose that flexibility is a valuable principle to apply to online learning and that it has extensive benefits for all learners throughout the student experience. Our findings from this research suggest that investing in the design and development of flexible learning experiences would be valuable and could have positive impact to recruiting and supporting more diverse learners with specific benefits to learner engagement, success, feeling connected and student experience online.

Co-design curriculum with teams that include Subject Matter Experts, Learning Designers, and representatives from across service areas.

The challenges of new processes, unfamiliar constraints and inevitable workarounds have revealed the need for clarity and structure, but they have also shown us the value of working together. Co-design and collaborative approaches have been key to the scope and relevance of this project, and we recommend that they be prioritised within future operational plans.

Connect curriculum and the broader student experience.

We have looked at the student experience holistically, focussing on how learning fits into the busy lives of online learners. This approach has helped us unify our responsibility to learners and, if maintained, could help us continue to develop a coherent online experience that meets learners' needs' in and out of their courses. Holistic experience and service priorities, including flexibility, could be applied equally to curriculum, support and other aspects of the online learning experience. It is essential to listen to our learners to understand and improve their actual on-course experience. Appropriate student experience functions need to be defined and designed in partnership.

Create an agile operational approach to support flexible online learning.

Project feedback and reflection highlighted the need for systems that work together. Clear and consistent approaches and processes are needed for us to efficiently develop and sustain new programmes of learning. There is more work to be done around developing technology and software to enhance the student experience. Scalability and automation of processes, such as communications and enquiry management, will be key to facilitating a positive student experience.

Develop into a world-leading online provider by supporting UAL's scholarly community.

From our overarching experience we recommend that an active community of practice would be of benefit to colleagues, and their work in the development of online learning. This could usefully include continuing professional development and support to engage in reflective, innovative and scholarly activities including further research.

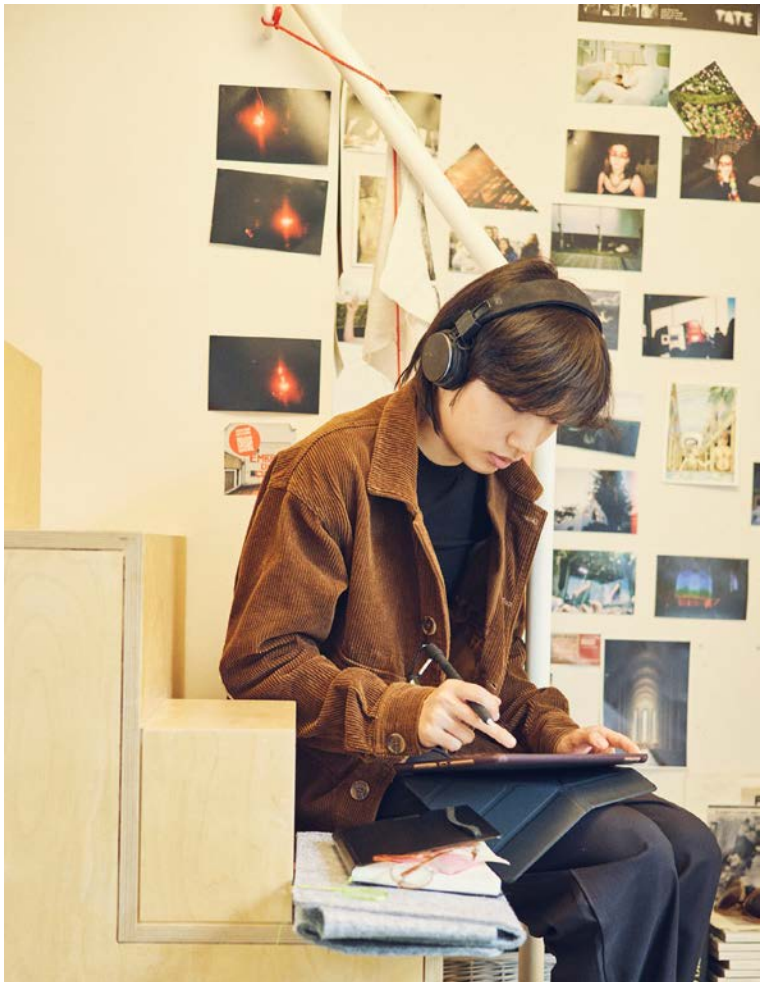
Introduction

Introduction

From January to July 2022, UAL Online developed and delivered an action research project to research and inform approaches to online learning, including pedagogy and student experience design. During the spring term, we worked with over 60 university stakeholders to develop 15 learning activities to explore a series of overarching themes. We enrolled 317 learners across 3 blocks of activities and compiled research findings using detailed analytics, learner and staff surveys, and a series of interviews. This report is a summary, created from the many primary research reports generated during the action research process. While it cannot reflect the full detail of this large project, the following sections explore areas of special interest in more detail. We have organised these sequentially into Design, Build and Delivery stages, so that the reader can navigate to whichever sections are of interest and see these as they might appear during a course development process.

Aims

The aim of this project was to prepare for future growth in online delivery, a direct response to the UAL strategy. It was our intention to build on established strengths and knowledge from across UAL to inform the development of pedagogic and student experience approaches appropriate to UAL's creative context.



Photograph: Ben Turner

Method

We took an action research approach, chosen for its iterative and reflective methodology. Cycles of reflection and planning enabled the project to benefit from established institutional knowledge and respond to new knowledge as it emerged from the actions taken during the research.

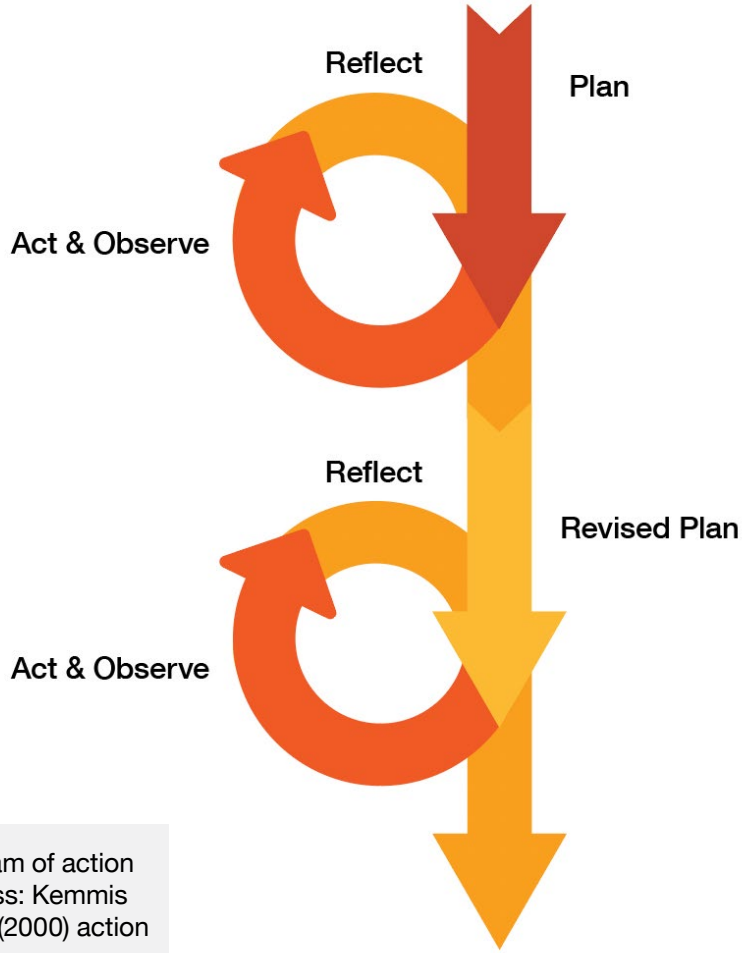
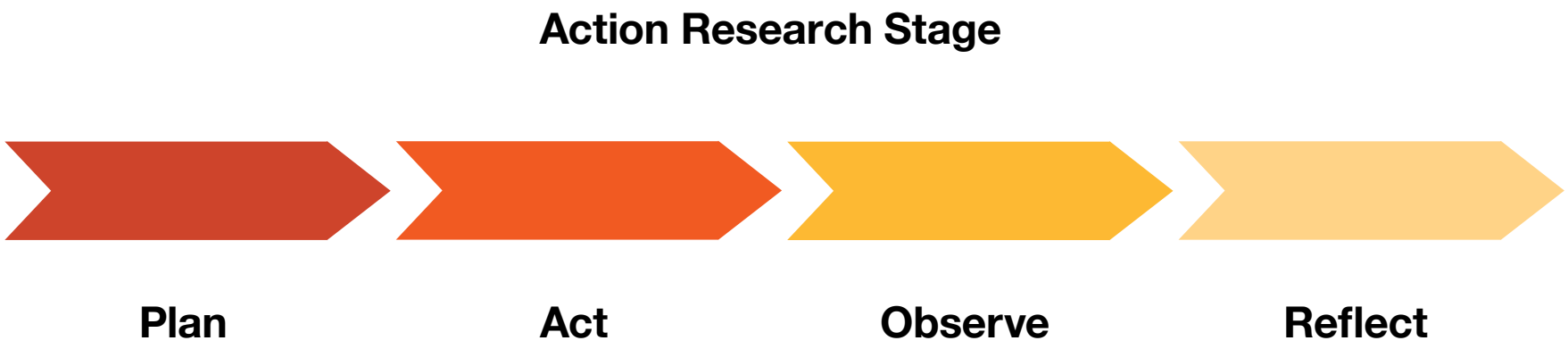


Image 2: Diagram of action research process: Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) action research spiral.

Project overview



- Plan
- Act
- Observe
- Reflect

Co-designing the research project

(December 2021-January 22)
Initial workshops involving the UAL Online team and 36 collaborators from UAL colleges, institutes and services including registry, student recruitment and digital learning, established five priority themes for the project. Each of these related to student journey and experience as well as pedagogy:

- Flexibility
- Induction and shared content
- Embodied practice
- Access and audience
- Belonging and inclusion

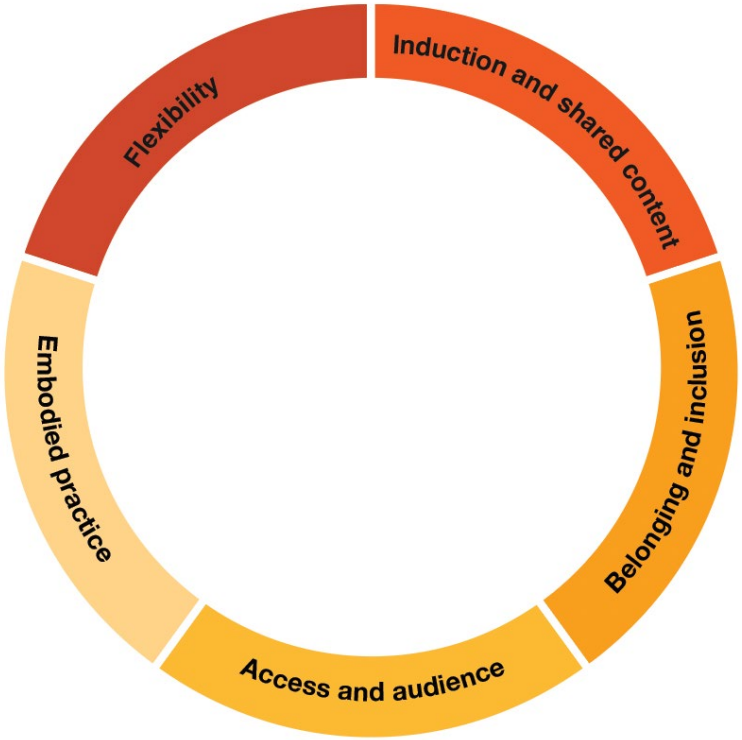


Image 3: Project priority themes.

Thematic groups

(January 2022 – April 2022)
We set up thematic groups to further discuss each theme. Membership represented a breadth of knowledge and experience. Teams included collaborators from a range of university departments, including digital learning, registry, student recruitment and various academic departments. Over 25 meetings (5 for each thematic group), the groups developed research questions, defined priorities and risks, shared and discussed literature and precedent practices, and supported the development of research activities. Their work was recorded in Miro boards.

Research activity design teams

We worked with 15 UAL academics, nominated by their college or institute, to co-design 15 unique research activities. These activities originated from existing validated units, mainly at postgraduate level. These were nominated by the teams that ran or had developed them. All activities were online by design, using UAL approved digital learning platforms and responded to research questions raised by the thematic groups.

Each design team included a UAL academic, learning designer, learning technologist, and, in some cases, other contributors from other areas of the University, including, for example, Library Services, Language Centre and Academic Support Online.

Plan

Act

Observe

Reflect

Recruitment

At the end of spring term, we worked together with UAL's marketing function to promote the research activities on our website, receiving over 1400 expressions of interest. Places were offered on a first come basis, with the exception of incomplete or incompatible applications, based on a short personal statement.

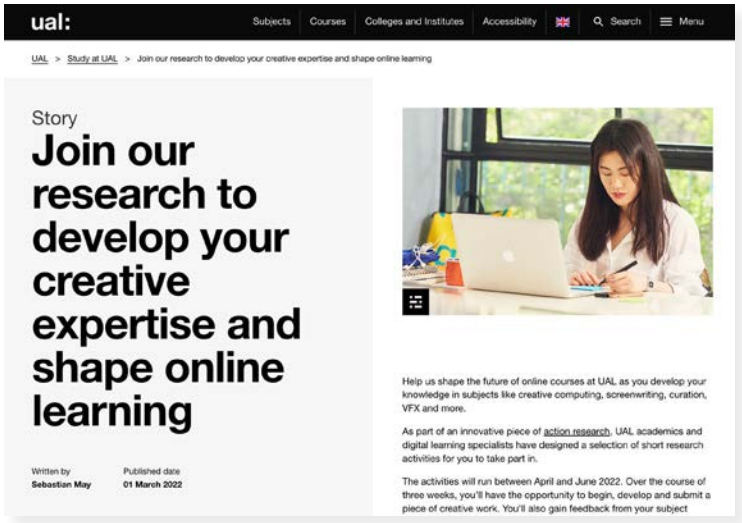


Image 4: Screengrab of UAL webpage announcing the launch of the research activity, March 2022.

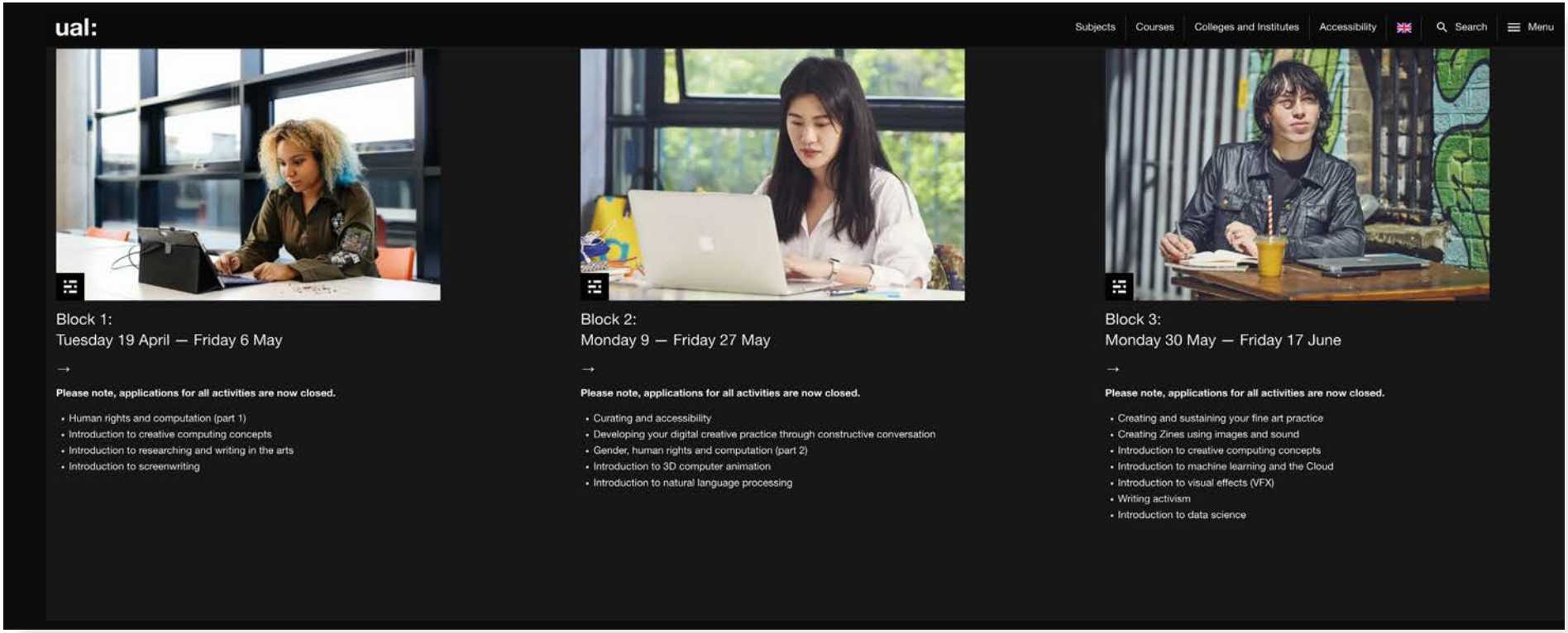


Image 5: Screengrab of UAL webpage listing details of all the individual research activities, March 2022.

Delivery of the research activities

Research activities ran in 3 separate 3-week blocks during summer term:
19 April – 6 May, 9 – 27 May and 30 May – 17 June.
Each activity was designed to be completed online for free. We enrolled 317 learners across all 15 activities. 63 learners completed more than 1 activity.

Final research activities:

- Creating and sustaining your fine art practice
- Creating Zines using images and sound
- Curating and accessibility
- Developing your digital creative practice through constructive conversation
- Gender, human rights and computation (part 2)
- Human rights and computation (part 1)
- Introduction to 3D computer animation
- Introduction to creative computing concepts
- Introduction to data science
- Introduction to machine learning and the Cloud
- Introduction to natural language processing
- Introduction to researching and writing in the arts
- Introduction to screenwriting
- Introduction to visual effects (VFX)
- Writing activism

Plan

Act

Observe

Reflect

Data collection and method

We worked with UAL's legal and information governance functions to create terms and conditions, as well as a privacy statement to underpin data capture. Throughout the project a range of qualitative and quantitative data was gathered to assist our observation and analysis of the research activities. This included:

• 657 applicant personal statements sharing learner motivation and prior experience

• 1400+ applicant and 317 learner profiles including age, country of domicile and identified gender

• learner surveys conducted before, during and after their participation in the research activities to capture their expectations, experiences and reflections

• tutor surveys before and after delivering the research activities to capture their confidence, concerns, and experiences

• engagement data, captured in the virtual learning environment, to monitor how and when learners accessed learning materials and communications

• 25 semi-structured interviews, each 20-30 minutes, exploring aspects of learners' experiences and emerging themes.

Plan
Act
Observe
Reflect

Reporting

Having delivered the research activities, and gathered extensive observation data, our emphasis shifted to analysis and reflection as we developed reports and considered approaches for the future. Data was shared among collaborators as it emerged wherever possible. This included:

• analysis of survey responses and engagement data

• reflective and analytical reports from all members of the research activity design teams

• analysis from 25 semi-structured qualitative interviews with learners

• reports that captured the thematic group discussions, including their recommendations

• reports from research partners including the Library and Academic Support Online.

Dissemination

Initial dissemination took place within UAL on 20 July 2022. We shared reports and findings as part of an open practice sharing event. This event brought together over 50 stakeholders from across the University to explore a range of specialist reports and discuss findings.

Research limitations

The action research project contained several research constraints and limitations which impacted research findings.

Research activities were limited to 3 weeks of teaching and learning, so learners' experiences and opportunities to develop would have been limited. Learners experienced an accelerated creative cycle, with little time to settle in. This would have impacted learners' opportunities to fully experience support services, such as Academic Support, and build meaningful connections among themselves.

The project custom-designed specific processes and virtual environments, which would have limited interaction with many standard UAL systems, processes and people, including staff and students.

Our study was based on research activities that were offered for free, and that were unassessed and unaccredited. Although staff feedback and a statement of completion was offered, these factors would have affected learner motivation to engage with and complete activities. In the absence of assessment data, we placed increased emphasis on retention as a marker for success.

Activities were developed from existing units nominated by the college or institute where they originated. This selection did not evenly represent the full UAL range of material and disciplinary practice and many activities focussed on digital creative and contextual practices.

Design

Introduction

This section focusses on the work of designing the 3-week research activities in preparation for the build and future delivery. This stage of the research project was an opportunity to draft and test new approaches to developing learning that is online by design. Flexibility was a theme throughout the project and from the start we prioritised flexible design by introducing parameters including a one to three ratio of synchronous to asynchronous activity.

We saw how developing learning online by design relied on a combination of specialist subject and pedagogic knowledge. Colleagues worked together in a new team that was unfamiliar to the individuals and within our institution. Colleagues emphasised the need for clear roles and responsibilities to make the most of the co-design process.

The success of collaborative learning design relied on knowledge and application of pedagogic principles and practices, and these weren't familiar to all colleagues. Many reported that they learnt or developed these skills through taking part in the process and that training to introduce unfamiliar concepts and approaches would enable colleagues to more effectively engage with a learning design framework in future.

We found that flexible online learning enabled personalised engagement patterns which supported retention. The benefits and impact of flexible online learning were different for each individual learner, with the potential of allowing learners to fit study into their busy lives and around other responsibilities. Prioritising flexible learning methods increased the potential for self-pacing, making learning more inclusive and retention more achievable. Designing a flexible learning experience meant rethinking familiar ideas of teaching and studentship.

Photograph: Ben Turner

Learning design

Collaborative mixed discipline research activity teams were convened for the research project. Each team included 1 of 15 nominated tutors with subject matter expertise. Each team included an Open Learning Designer from the UAL Online team with online pedagogy and learning design expertise and a digital learning technologist with expertise in the build and use of UAL's online platforms and tools. In some cases, there were additional contributors from other areas of the University, including, for example, Library Services, Language Centre and Academic Support Online.

Each team was asked to respond to a research theme and question, using an existing unit as a starting point to develop their 3-week learning activity. Teams worked to design and build their research activity between January and April or May (with some exceptions). Academic tutors were employed to work on the research project for 2 days per week; Open Learning Designers and digital learning technologists worked across multiple projects.

Several parameters were established by the research team, for parity and to align the research activities with the aims of the overall project:

A 3-week creative academic cycle

All activities were asked to include a brief, time to develop work and ideas, submission and feedback, reflecting a compressed unit process as far as possible in the time, and without assessment. Each activity was equivalent to around 5 credits and was to be delivered at the same level of the validated unit from which it originated.

Open admissions

Intended to reflect the widening access ambitions of the UAL strategy we put emphasis on learner self-selection. Tutors were asked to contribute to recruitment texts to help learners choose activities that were suitable for them. This meant that academic tutors were required to prepare learning for an unknown cohort.

Group size of 20 learners

In some research activities groups were subdivided for synchronous sessions, but all were designed for 20 learners as a scalable group size that we were confident could be recruited.

Using UAL-approved digital learning technology

This was intended to test the capabilities of our currently approved technology. The digital learning technologist role ensured that tools were used effectively. In some research activities this was a notable limitation. Where specialist software (for example animation software) was needed, free trials were identified, and learners were supported to access these.

A ratio of one to three, synchronous to asynchronous learning

This was an important parameter to ensure flexibility. In the research activities it meant offering up to 4 hours per week of live, synchronous, sessions, and around 12 hours of asynchronous work.

Overview of the learning design process

For the research project we developed resources to support a flexible but structured learning design process. This process broadly aligned with existing learning design frameworks including UCL's ABC Learning Design[2],University of Northampton's CAIeRO[3],Gilly Salmon's Carpe Diem[4],Gráinne Conole's 7Cs of Learning Design2 and others.

Through weekly meetings and self-directed work, activity teams were required to think about their research activity in several ways, completing an online storyboard in Miro as the process progressed. This process was led by a designated Open Learning Designer from the UAL Online team.

2 UCL ABC Learning Design
3 Why CAIeRO? Perceptions and impact of ten years of CAIeRO at the University of Northampton
4 Gilly Salmon Carpe Diem

The stages of the process were:

1. identifying the research theme and the research question that the activity would address

2. considering the high-level information, aims and objectives of the activity (e.g., any distinctive features that the activity would have, any reservations or challenges that the research activity team had, the approach that the team would take to decolonisation and internationalism)

3. identifying specific learning outcomes, creative attributes and digital creative attributes, key concepts and how students would submit their work and receive feedback

4. considering the potential student audience, who the activity would appeal to, what students would enjoy or find challenging, any tools that students would need to be able to use, what academic support students might need. Teams were also invited to create a range of student personas to help guide their design

5. creating a description of their research activity that could be used as a quick reference point for the activity team and to recruit students

6. creating a storyboard that mapped out learning outcomes, Creative Attributes (using the UAL Creative Attributes Framework), and individual activities (based on Diana Laurillard's Conversational Framework) for each week of the research activity.

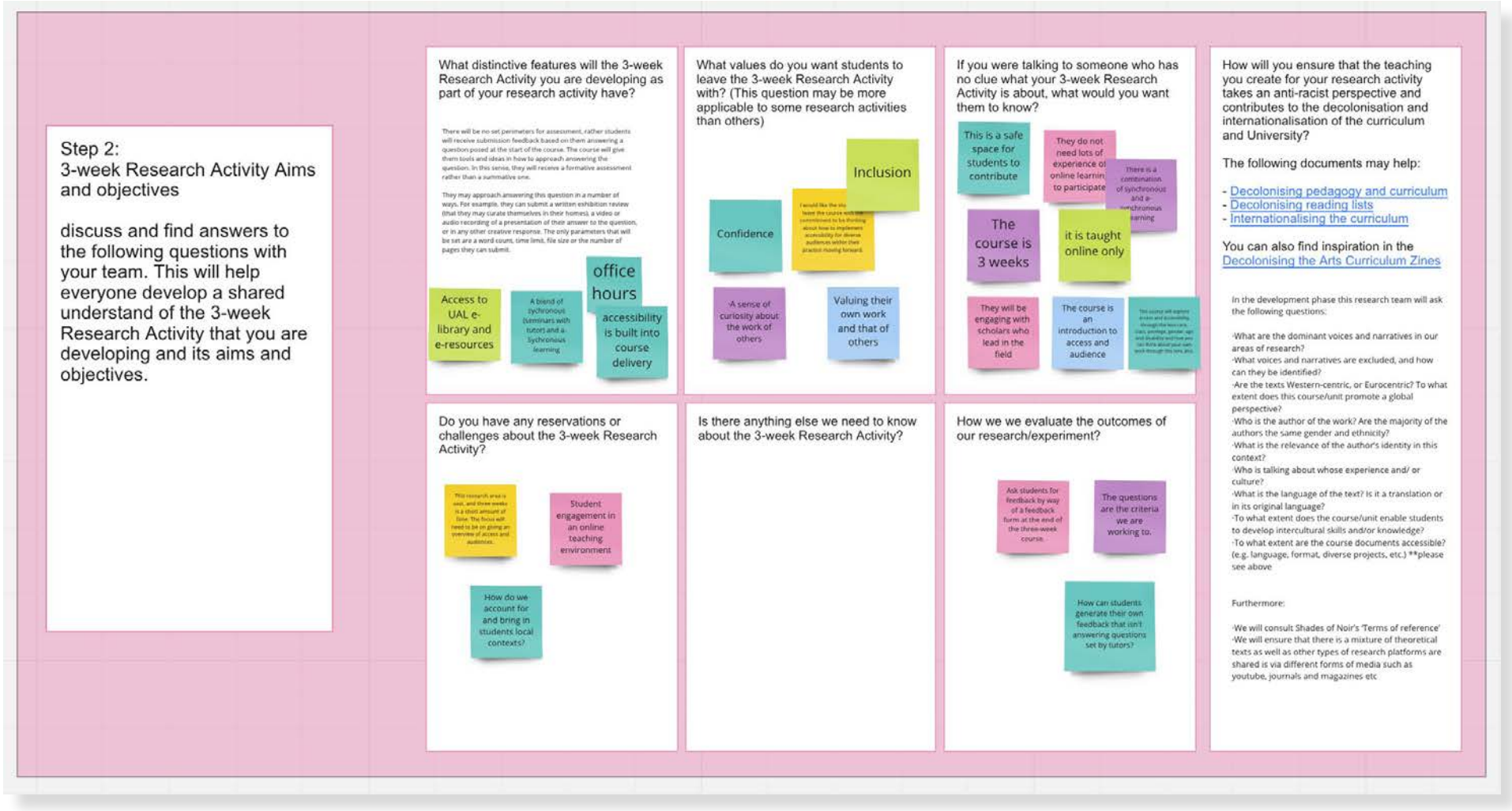


Image 6: Screengrab of Miro board showing 'Step 2' of the storyboarding process.

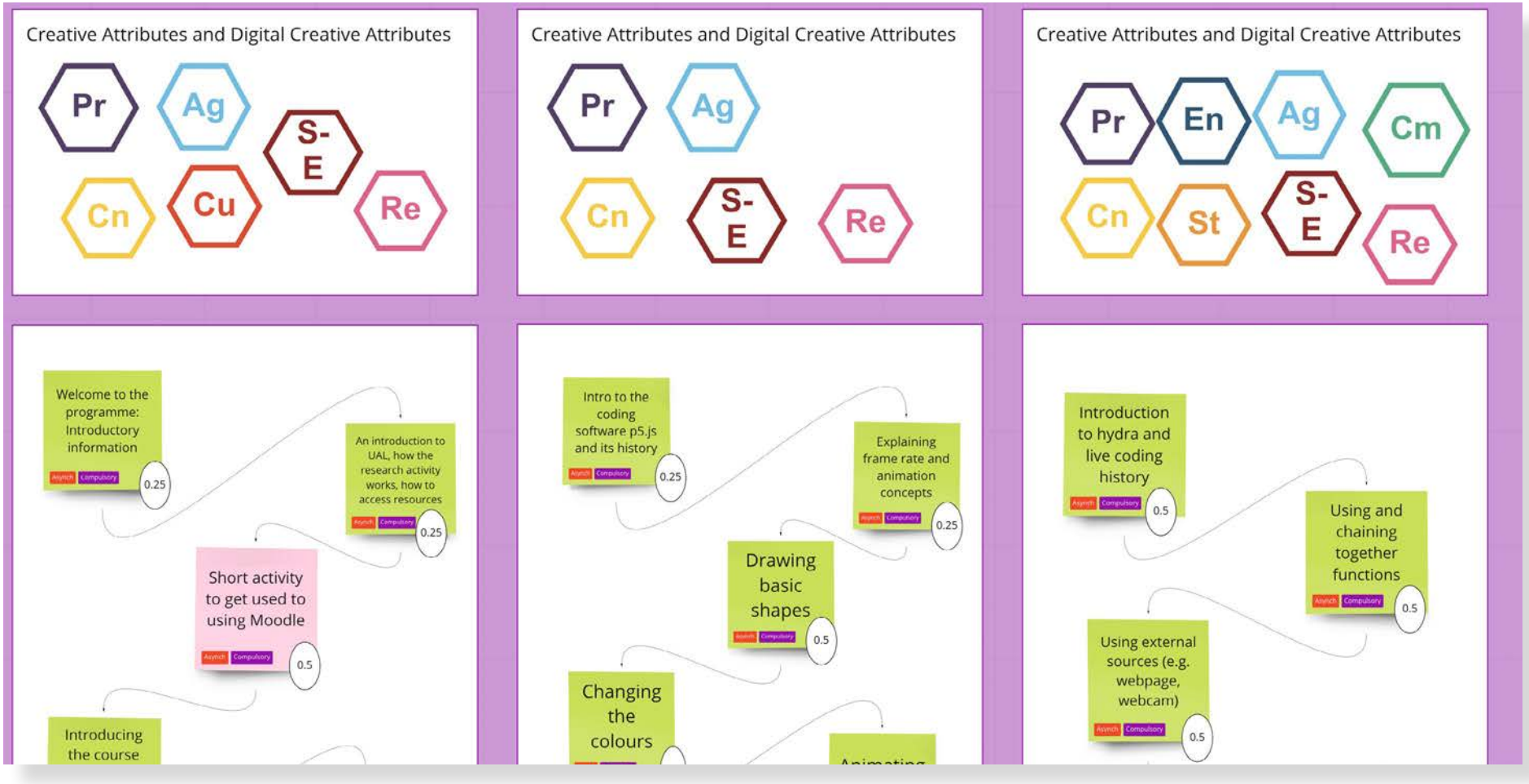
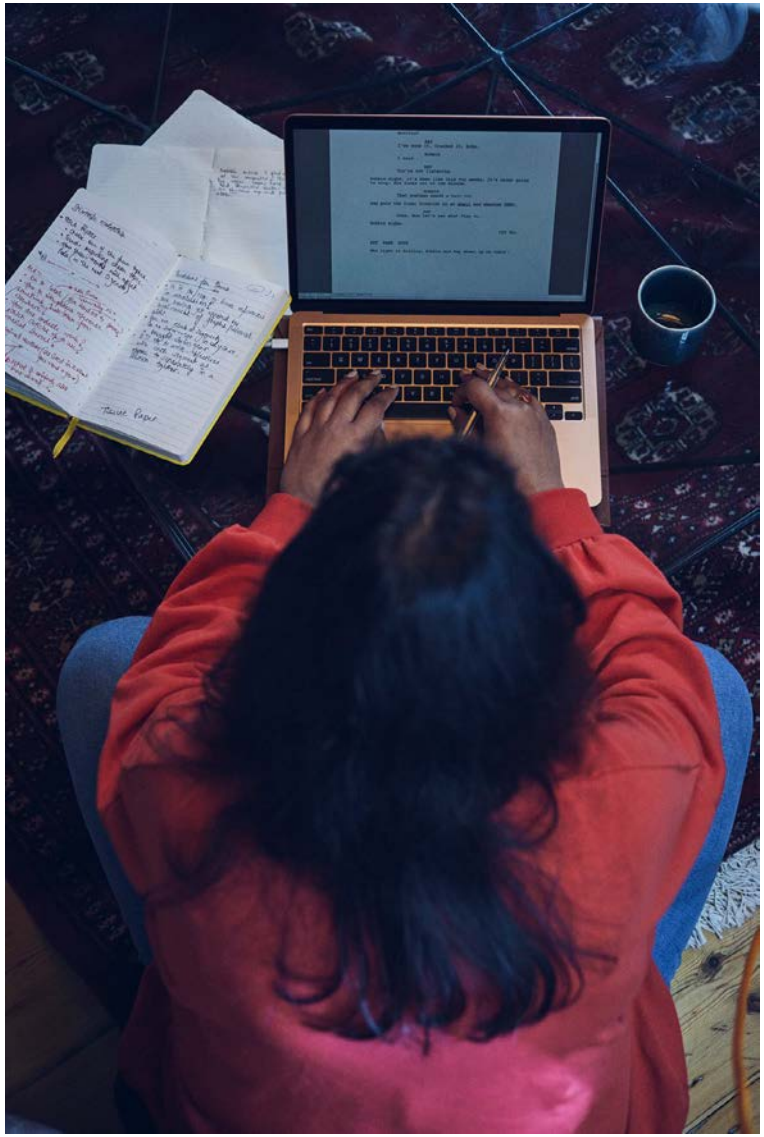


Image 7: Screengrab of part of storyboard from Introduction to creative computing concepts.

Stage 6 of the learning design process involved conducting a storyboarding workshop, led by Open Learning Designers, during which the individual learning activities for each week of study were mapped out by the research activity team. This process established a sequence of individual activities that were appropriate to the content being taught and ensured that these were constructively aligned to both the established learning outcomes and Creative Attributes. It also used the categories from Diana Laurillard's 'Conversational Framework' (acquisition, discussion, practice, production, collaboration, investigation) to check that a variety of teaching approaches were used to cater for the learning preferences of participants and created a more interesting learning experience. The storyboard then served as an agreed 'map' of the research activity's content for each week that could then guide the more detailed content production stage of the learning design process, in which each activity was written in more detail and built within the virtual learning environment.



Photograph: Ben Turner

Learning design and learner success

Using retention here as a marker of learner success we found that there were some positive correlations with several learning design features.

A clear structure for learners to be able to see the purpose of their learning and how it aligned to the development of the work that they would submit for feedback at the end of their activity

The reflective activity shown in image 8 encouraged self-reflection at the start of the activity, highlighting the learning to come in relation to its value to the learners' personal development and their work.

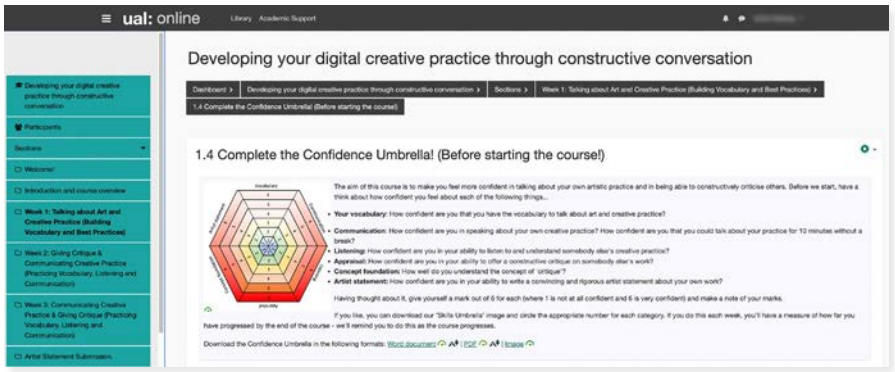


Image 8: Confidence Umbrella resource, from Developing your digital creative practice through constructive conversation.

Briefs that encourage learners to bring their own context, ambitions and creativity into their learning, and to apply their learning to their creative work

The creative brief that initiated the work seen in images 9, 10 and 11 invited learners to create a personal visual essay, “based on a theme or a question that you have posed and that is related to your interests and practice.” This creative project brief was from the activity Introduction to researching and writing in the arts. Learner work was diverse, exploring personalised themes and using a range of technical and visual languages.

Image 9: Diverse learner work, visual essays, created for activity Introduction to researching and writing in the arts.

Image 10 and 11: Diverse learner work, visual essays, created for activity Introduction to researching and writing in the arts.

Regular opportunities for formative submission and feedback from the tutor and peers

From pre-surveys we knew that learners expected feedback from their tutors to be very useful, with peer feedback slightly less highly valued, but in activities where there was regular personalised feedback, we learned that this was an important factor in connectedness, and retention. In interviews learners explained that tutor feedback was the priority.

> **"Personally it's really not so important to me [to be connected to fellow learners]. It's important to have a closer connect with the tutor as they are the one that will give me direction. With the students it's ok, but it's not the priority."** Learner interview

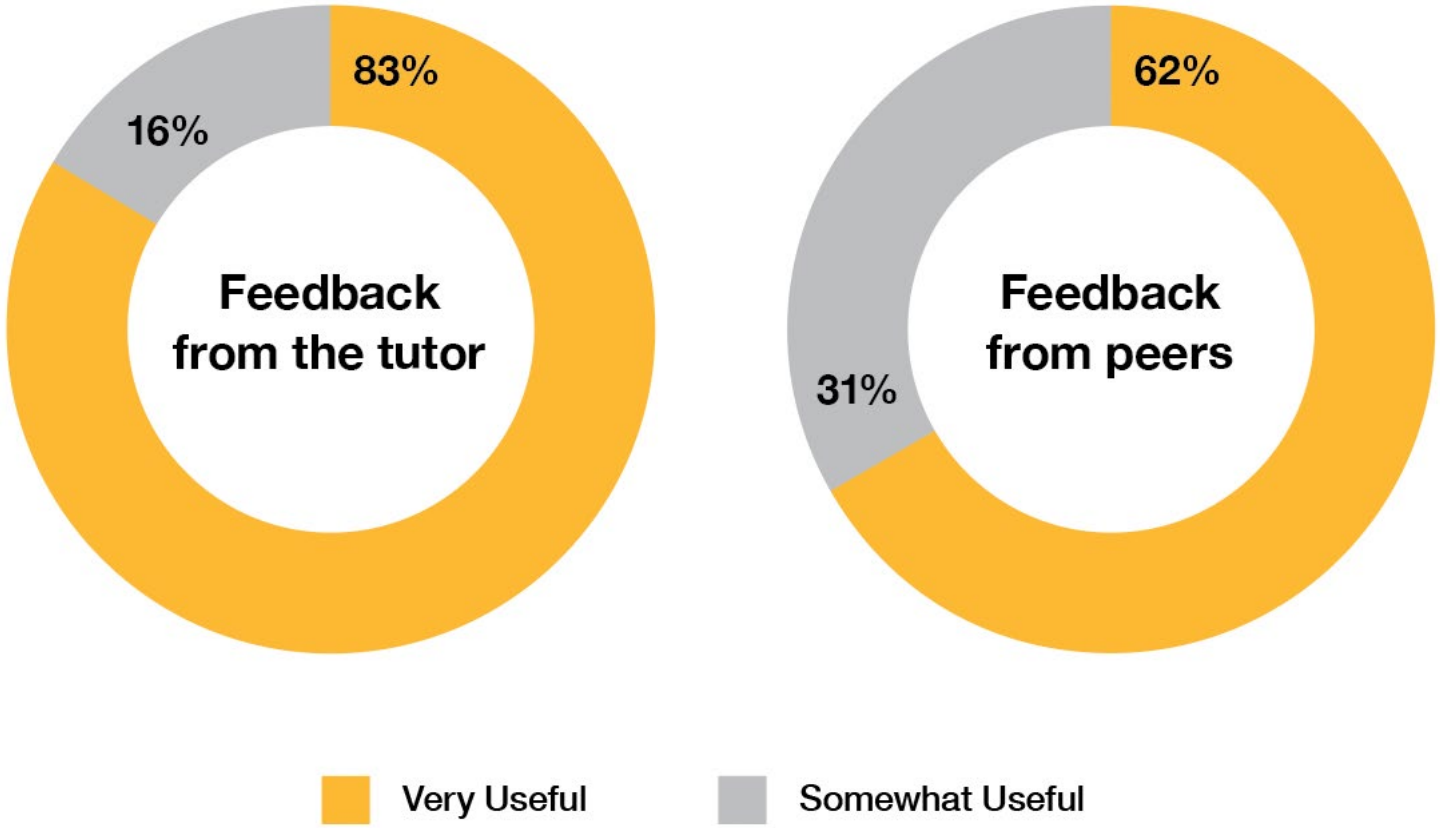
They valued opportunities for fast feedback.

> **"During the one-to-ones, it was important that he checked my work and immediately gave me advice. Timeliness is really important as I need lots of guidance, so that I can progress quickly onto the next thing."** Learner interview

Peer feedback was less of a priority for many, but it was valued. One learner explained.

> **"when I get feedback I feel we are communicating".** Learner interview

Graph 1: We asked learners what they expected to find useful to their learning



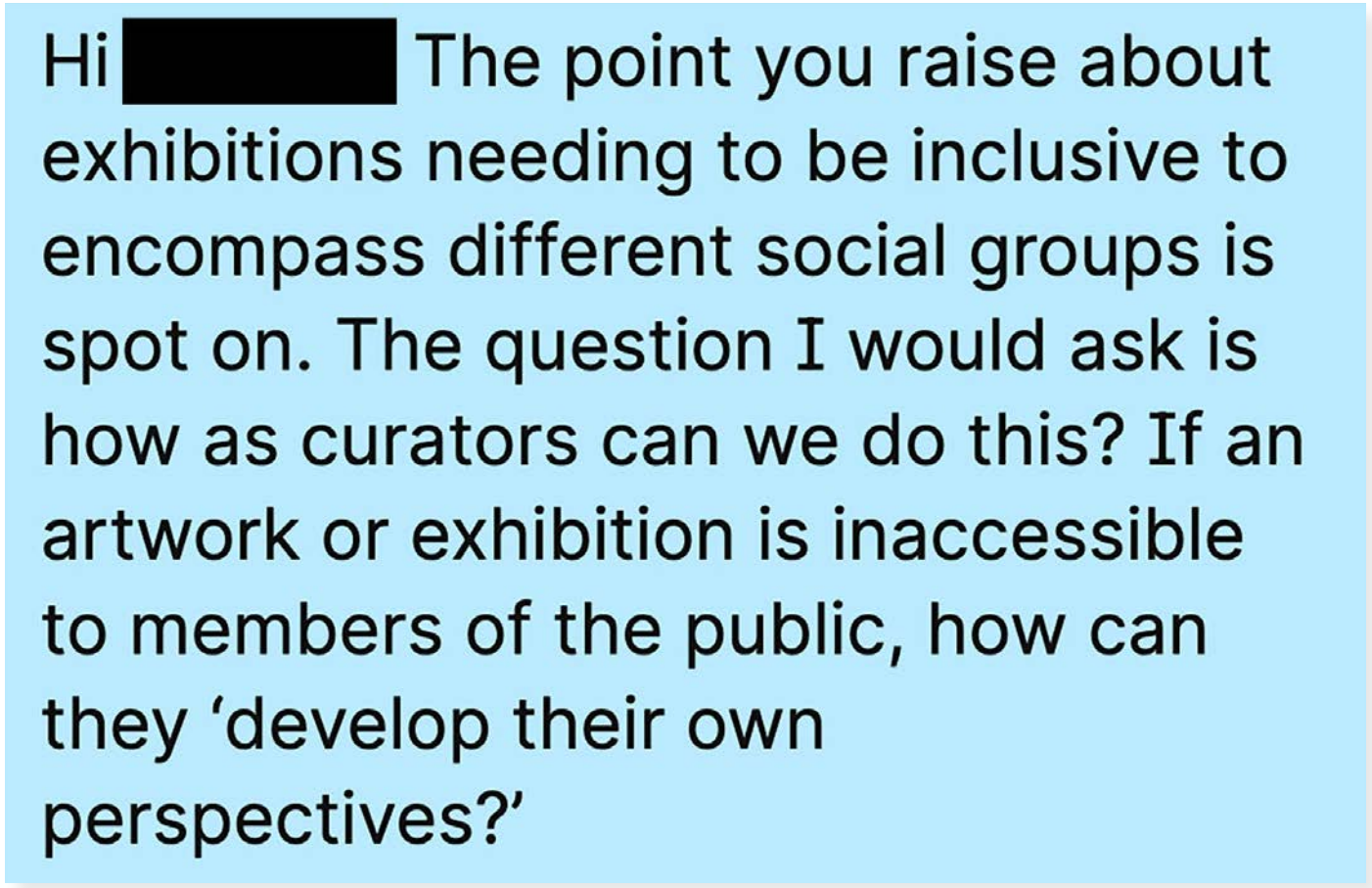


Image 12: Screengrab of tutor feedback on a Padlet page.

All teams successfully developed (and built and delivered) research activities using the process described earlier, but the success of the approach and the experiences of colleagues varied across research teams. The following findings are developed from reflective reports, survey responses from the colleagues involved and engagement data gathered in Moodle.

Designing learning to a framework helped establish parity and embed project values but was unfamiliar

The design process allowed teams to methodically work through a reliable method, using the Creative Attributes Framework, and planning proactively to make best use of the technical resources available. Open Learning Designers were familiar with the practice and benefits of similar methods to design learning but in surveys and reflective reports it was widely evidenced that this structured approach was unfamiliar to academics. In most cases, the development process deviated from the intended methodology and took more time than anticipated, while pedagogic principles were explained and planning processes learned.

> **"I have found the planning process a little daunting, essentially because there is so much to do (both practically and theoretically) in a short space of time."**
> Tutor feedback

> **"I am learning a lot about online teaching and applying this to my other online work."**
> Tutor feedback

Tutors were confident and knowledgeable about their creative subject and brought specialist approaches to delivering curricula, but knowledge of pedagogic and online learning principles varied

Where there was a lack of understanding of pedagogic principles, in particular learning outcomes, we witnessed the use of pedagogies less suited to online learning. Open learning designers were required to offer support, explaining constructive alignment and using 'backwards design' methods.[5] When considering what support tutors would require or prefer in future, most requested training (87%) and support from someone with experience of online pedagogies (90%).

"It was really helpful to work with the learning technologist and learning designers - they supported me to explore different ways of distributing content effectively across async/ sync activities - in line with the pedagogical aims of the course." Tutor feedback

5 Wiggins, G, McTighe J. "Understanding By Design Framework." ASCD (2012). Web.

Co-designing learning was highly valued but effective collaboration requires clarity of process, roles and responsibilities

Feedback from across the design teams highlighted the benefits of working together, but there was sometimes a lack of clarity regarding the design and co-development process, milestones, and deliverables for each stage, meaning the process became confused. Our design teams were new and unfamiliar, and colleagues reflected on the impact of this noting blurred understanding of roles and uncertainty around responsibilities.

> **"I would have liked a little bit more transparency on overall milestones that are taking place."** Tutor feedback

Collaboration with partner services was impactful where it happened, but uptake was inconsistent

Resources and advice from subject librarians, Academic Support Online and the Language Centre were all made available to learning design teams. Although all offers were well received, the uptake varied. The most effective relationships were those that were established by the research team, for example, embedding a librarian in a design team and making an introduction to a colleague for intercultural sensitivity advice. Lack of clarity about what was on offer, why it was needed, and time pressures were barriers to engagement.

Not knowing who the learners were going to be initiated a generally inclusive approach

As short, free, entirely online activities, with a light touch recruitment process it was difficult to predict who the learners would be. Some colleagues would have preferred involvement in a selection process, or more prior information about their cohorts to help them prepare. Some colleagues found teaching learners they hadn't selected challenging, but most actively embraced this uncertainty, proactively making their activities as inclusive as possible by not assuming high levels of prior knowledge and pre-empting diverse abilities and levels of experience.

There was some correlation between higher retention rates and courses designed around more regular feedback, with personalised briefs and a very clear structure

Analysis of the learning design, including learning materials, helped us identify positive correlations between retention and activities that clearly showed the structure and value of activities, that encouraged learners to personalise their work, and that offered more regular feedback.

Flexibility for students

Flexibility was an important aspect of the research project from the start. Online learning is celebrated for the inherent flexibility it offers learners who do not have to travel to a specific location to attend to their learning, but other factors including learning design, the online learning environment and technology ultimately determine the degree of flexibility from a student's perspective. When considering flexibility, the use of synchronous, live, teaching and learning is of particular interest as it is both inflexible and highly valued.

To explore the effects of flexibility, all research activities applied a ratio of one to three (synchronous to asynchronous) in the delivery of their activities. This meant offering up to 4 hours of synchronous delivery, and 12 hours of self-directed (and more flexible) learning per week during the 3 weeks of the activities.

Across the range of activities, we have since been able to analyse the learning designs, learner engagement through data drawn from the virtual learning environment and feedback from surveys and interviews. Several specific examples and findings that relate to flexibility are shared in the following paragraphs and further impact of the one to three ratio may be found in many additional sections including student engagement and feeling connected, learning design, and student experience.

Thematic group perspectives

A dedicated thematic group was formed to focus on flexibility. Their discussions looked at flexibility beyond teaching and learning into areas including course design, student support and resourcing from a range of staff and student perspectives. They drew our attention towards the need for a balance between synchronous and asynchronous teaching, suggesting that to achieve this a framework could guide course design towards flexible approaches. They reframed several barriers to learning as inflexibility and called for considerate kit and software requirements, as well as training to support multilingualism and multiculturalism.

They required a holistic application of flexibility to include assessment and all areas of support as well as teaching and learning. They also raised concerns about the potential negative impact that flexible working could have on togetherness. They emphasised the need to be transparent externally about what learners could expect, and internally about what degree of flexibility we could realistically support.

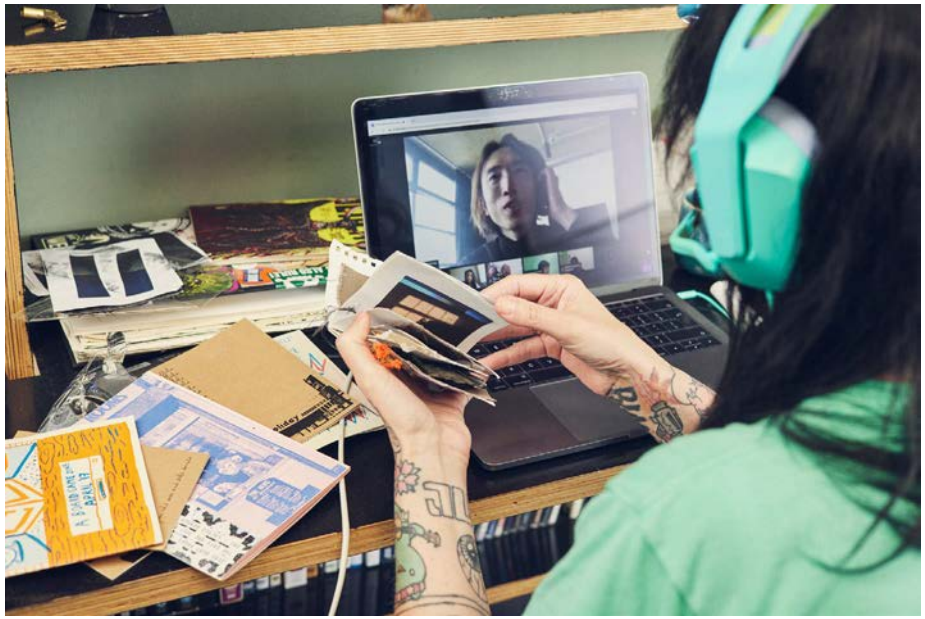
> **“It’s important not to assume that more flexibility is always better in all situations as cohesion and stability can also be important factors in motivating students, cultivating a sense of togetherness, and not overwhelming students with choices. Flexibility for students could also mean a change in staff resourcing and working practices to support it... expectations need to be realistic and sustainable within our capacity as an institution to support it.”** UAL Online Action Research Project findings

All design teams embraced the one to three synchronous to asynchronous teaching ratio and for many tutors this represented a significant shift away from more synchronous delivery and raised challenges around global time differences and what content to allocate to synchronous and asynchronous planning.

> **“The effectiveness of live workshops was limited by language difficulties and time zones: the hour I had set up to be convenient for UK based students was extremely inconvenient for China-based students who (without my knowledge) were the ones actually being recruited. For them, the forum might have been a better feedback tool.”** Tutor feedback

Learner perspectives

Surveys made it apparent how much learners valued flexibility even before their activities began. In the pre-survey, 84% of learners told us that working at their own pace was very or quite important. Other areas that were also very or quite important included (in order) working online, not having to travel, being able to work around other responsibilities and being able to study independently.



Photograph: Ben Turner

Table 1: We asked learners about the value of these flexible features

We asked learners what these flexible features were to them	Very important	Quite important
Working at my own pace	47%	37%
It is online	47%	34%
I don’t have to travel to attend	47%	26%
Being able to work around my other responsibilities	37%	54%
Studying independently	37%	45%

In our interviews learners explained how flexibility worked for them. They implied that they didn't expect their learning to be convenient; they were prepared to prioritise learning over social activities or rest. Where possible, they planned around synchronous sessions, often focussing on these when they spoke about their learning experience.

Live, synchronous, sessions were highly valued as an opportunity to seek clarification, to access the tutor, and to give structure to periods of self-directed study. However, timing of sessions, duration, family and domestic responsibilities including paid work, network issues and many other examples of busyness stopped them from being able to attend live sessions.

> **"It's a chance to be more connected in the live class"** Learner interview

> **"the session starts when I'm still at work, only the schedule makes it difficult, other things are fine"** Learner survey

> **"3/4am US Central start time requires either staying up all night or getting up extremely early, and I can't do that with my daily schedule"** Learner survey

Even when it was possible to attend a live session, that didn't mean it was ideal.

> **"The session is put at evening, even though it is convenient for part-time participants to join in, but it is difficult to concentrate on studying when I've had a tiring long daytime"** Learner interview

68% said that attending live session was easy or very easy for them, but only 63% reported that they were able to attend all live sessions. Over the 3 weeks of the activities, we saw reduction in attendance at live sessions, although as the example to follow shows, this did not necessarily mean that those learners not attending were engaging less.

In interviews, learners explained that they could make the most of self-paced working when things were going well, but when stuck they stopped.

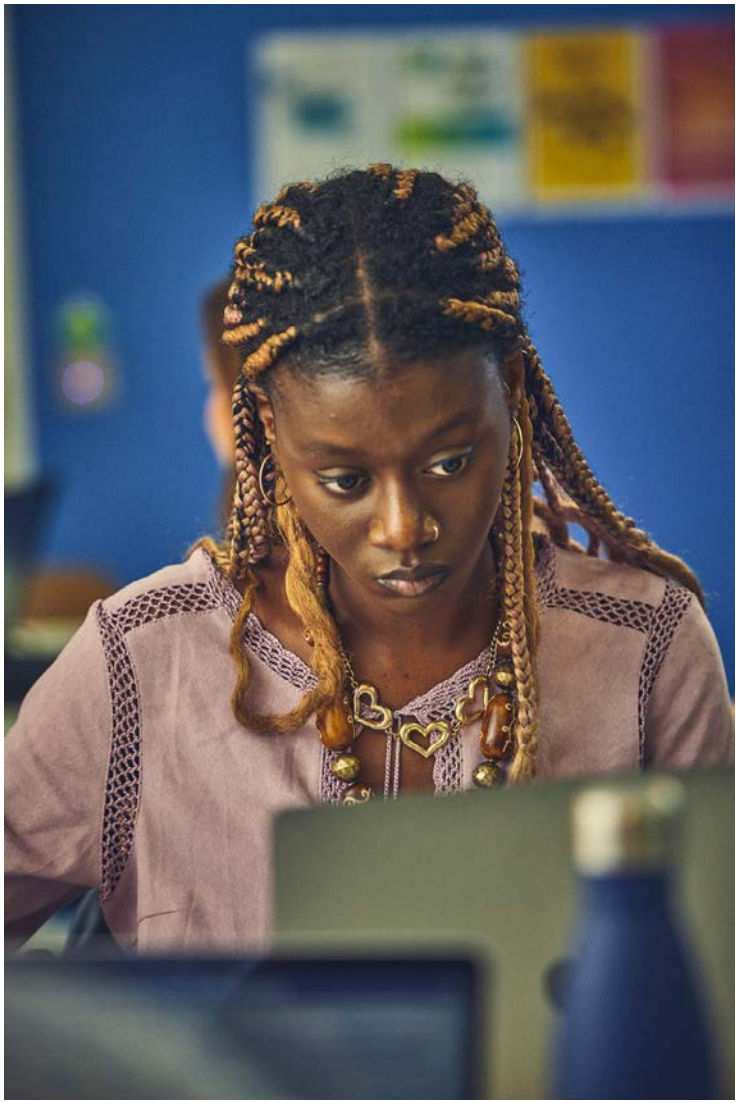
In one interview a learner explained that creative work was different to other tasks that could be fitted in around a busy day,

> **“It’s different when you have to create something. Whether that’s making physical piece of art or a piece of writing, I don’t feel like it’s very easy to go: ‘OK, I’m just gonna set aside 2 hours.’ Like, it’s not as scientific as that. You need time for your brain to kind of be in a creative place. I suppose that’s what I’m finding. And so yeah, it was more of a challenge to switch that on and off, really, I think.”** Learner interview

In the survey data, we saw that learners who reported problems balancing study around other commitments were more likely to be already educated to a postgraduate level, in work, and more confident. Learners who reported having less available time for study were likely to be older.

Flexible learning in the Introduction to creative computing concepts research activity

This research activity has been chosen as it was an average group of learners with above average retention and satisfaction, compared to other activities, and a flexible learning design.



Photograph: Ben Turner

Table 2: Information on Introduction to creative computing concepts

Introduction to creative computing concepts		Activity data	Average data
Retention	Self-identified that they had successfully completed the activity	80%	74.4%
	Retention, evaluated by research team, at the end of week 3	71%	51%
	Retention, evaluated by Moodle engagement data	30%	26%
Satisfaction with research activities	Very/fairly satisfied	94%	90%
Connectedness to tutor	I feel as connected as I want to be	83.3%	94.1%
Connectedness to other participants	I feel as connected as I want to be	83.3%	75.5%
Level of confidence	Very/quite confident	79.2%	76.5%
	Somewhat/not very confident	16.7%	15.4%
Prior education	Up to and including Level 6	50%	58%
	Post-level 6	45.8%	31.3%

It is possible to observe how learners participated in the activity by reviewing the engagement data gathered in Moodle. This has been used to create a visualisation seen in Image 13. Each row of dots represents a learner, progressing through the activity. The difference in each learner's time zone as compared to British Summer Time (BST) is listed as a positive or negative number by each learner ID. Red dots show the synchronous sessions where a learner joins a live teaching session in Collaborate Ultra. These are aligned vertically as all learners engaged at the same time. The blue dots represent each learner engaging with asynchronous learning materials in Moodle, for example a video, text, activity or recording. There is variety here as this was self-paced work, but clusters of activity can be seen as learners prepare for live sessions, and later for submission. Some learners can be observed working more steadily, using preferred days or times. Although the specific example here includes a digitally produced practice, the applied learning design model can be applied to material 'at home' practice in similar ways.

Image 13: Screengrab of Moodle data showing learner engagement with activity material over the activity 3-week period.

The learning resources in this activity included many videos. These were used to share information and to demonstrate complex processes, allowing learners to work at their own pace and saving time in live sessions for peer-to-peer interaction and collaboration.

> **“Whenever I have some spare time. I like it how the preparation videos are in short pieces instead of a long piece, so we can finish it one by one easily”** Learner survey

> **“This course is designed properly for me to keep a learning pace”** Learner survey

Live sessions were recorded, and some learners who attended chose to re-watch, others used the recordings to catch up if they missed the session.

> **“After I finish all pre-recording lectures and several days before due date, I watched all resources and some of peers’ work and get some inspiration for my own work”**
> Learner survey

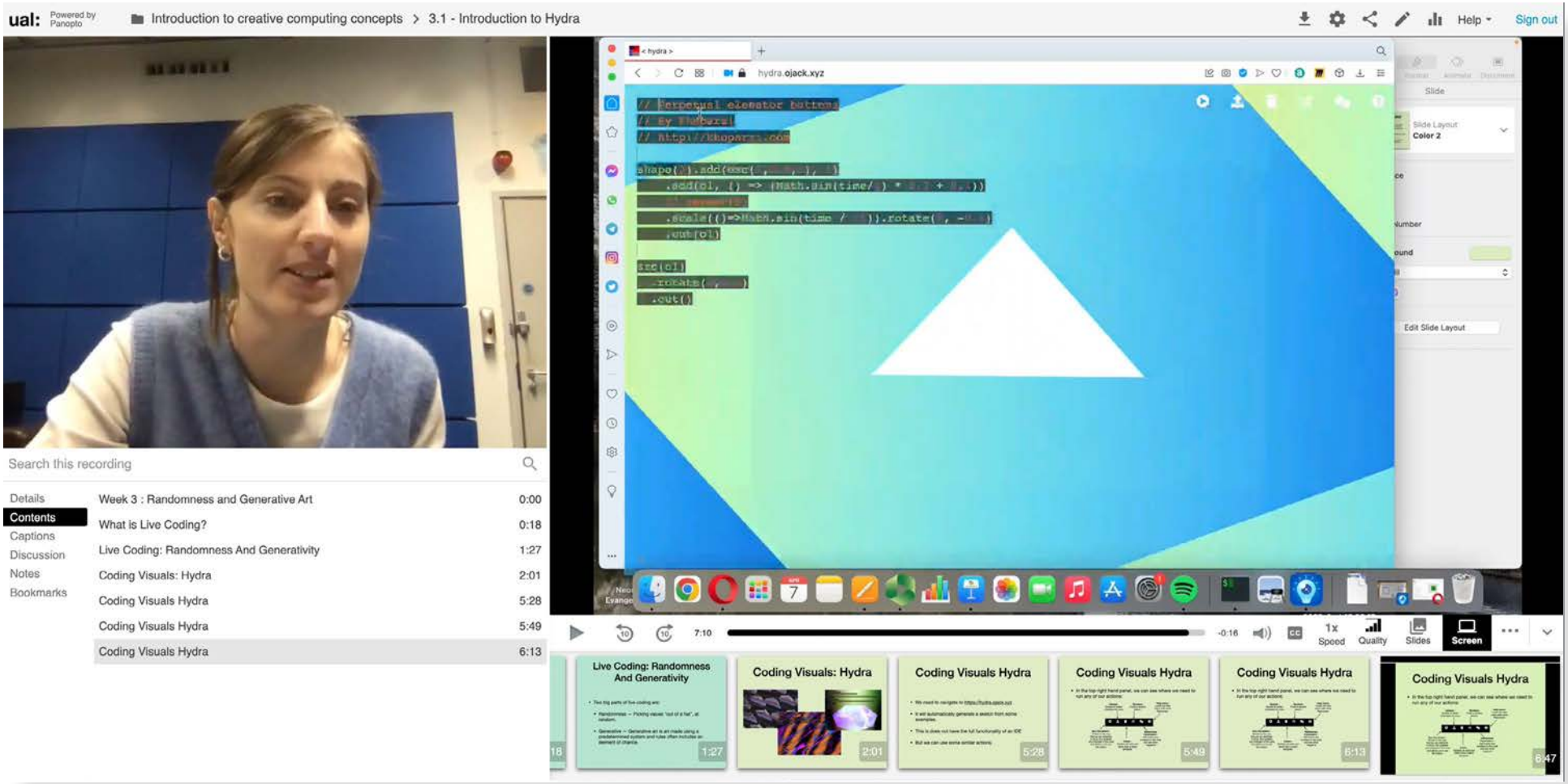


Image 14: Screengrab of Panopto view of video, 'Introduction to Hydra' from activity, Introduction to creative computing concepts.

Image 15: Collaborative work from a live session (from Introduction to creative computing concepts).

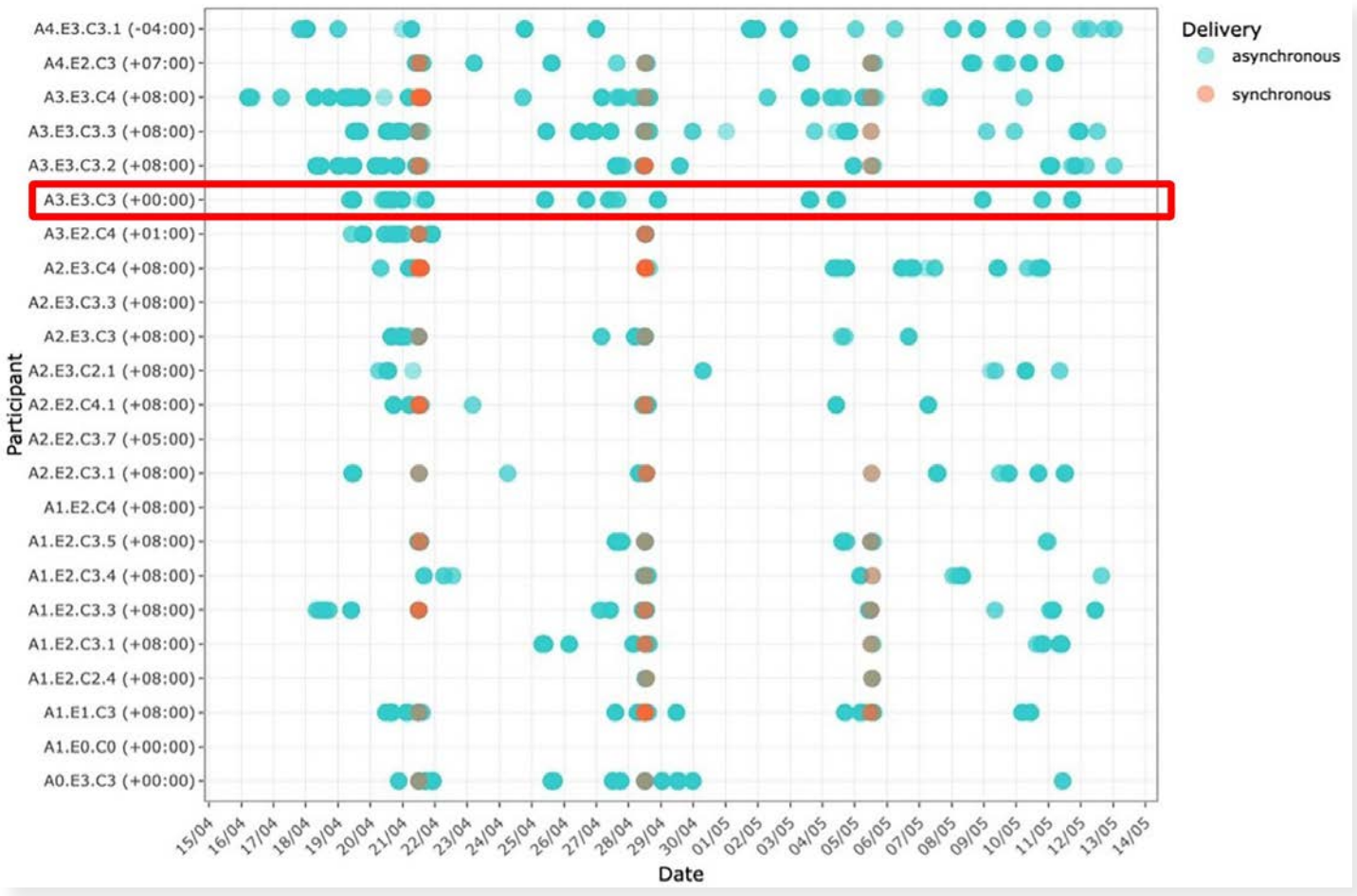


Image 16: Screengrab of Moodle data showing learner engagement with activity material over the activity 3-week period, a single participant is highlighted.

We can see that the learner highlighted in image 16 missed all synchronous sessions as there are no red dots; however, the blue dots show their sustained asynchronous engagement, and they completed the activity successfully. In the interview they explained how recordings of live sessions, video resources, and the ability to contact the tutor with questions meant that they were able to complete the activity.

> **"I watched all the videos. Sometimes I cannot remember all of the coding things so I go back and forth. Sometimes I used captions. And also I think it is important for non-native speakers. I watched the introductory video and I think it is quite good and easy for the learners to know how the class goes and what we will learn at the end. Based on the recorded lesson I can go back and forth and do some research by myself and I can make creative things. The tutor can also give feedback to us, this is quite helpful for the learners"** Learner interview

Photograph: Ben Turner

Findings

The benefits and impact of flexible online learning are different for each individual learner

Flexible learning provides choice to students over how, when, and where they learn. Engagement isn't focussed only on live events. This allows learners to fit study into their busy lives and around other responsibilities, widening access to students with limited or low-quality internet connections or who are located across multiple time zones.

Prioritising flexible learning methods increases the potential for self-pacing, making learning more inclusive. Despite the inflexibility of synchronous sessions most learners and tutors place a high value on them as part of the learning experience. In the research activities we saw that flexibly designed activities had higher retention rates, even allowing learners to complete activities after totally asynchronous study.

Delivering a flexible, dominantly asynchronous, online course means rethinking familiar ideas of teaching and studentship

Design team reflection frequently referred to the challenges of shifting emphasis away from the synchronous (a legacy of historically dominant residential model) towards more flexible and 'designed for online' learning. The learning design report identified that there was a

> **"tendency to prioritise synchronous sessions over asynchronous activities, meaning that asynchronous content was sometimes under-developed"** UAL Online Action Research Project findings

For example, some live sessions included teaching content that could have been provided asynchronously, and the potential for asynchronous activities to provide feedback, interaction and nurture feelings of connectedness was not fully explored.

Guidance and training would help us to develop more asynchronous and flexible learning

Many of the tutors reported that they had learnt from this project, and they identified the need for additional support in future.

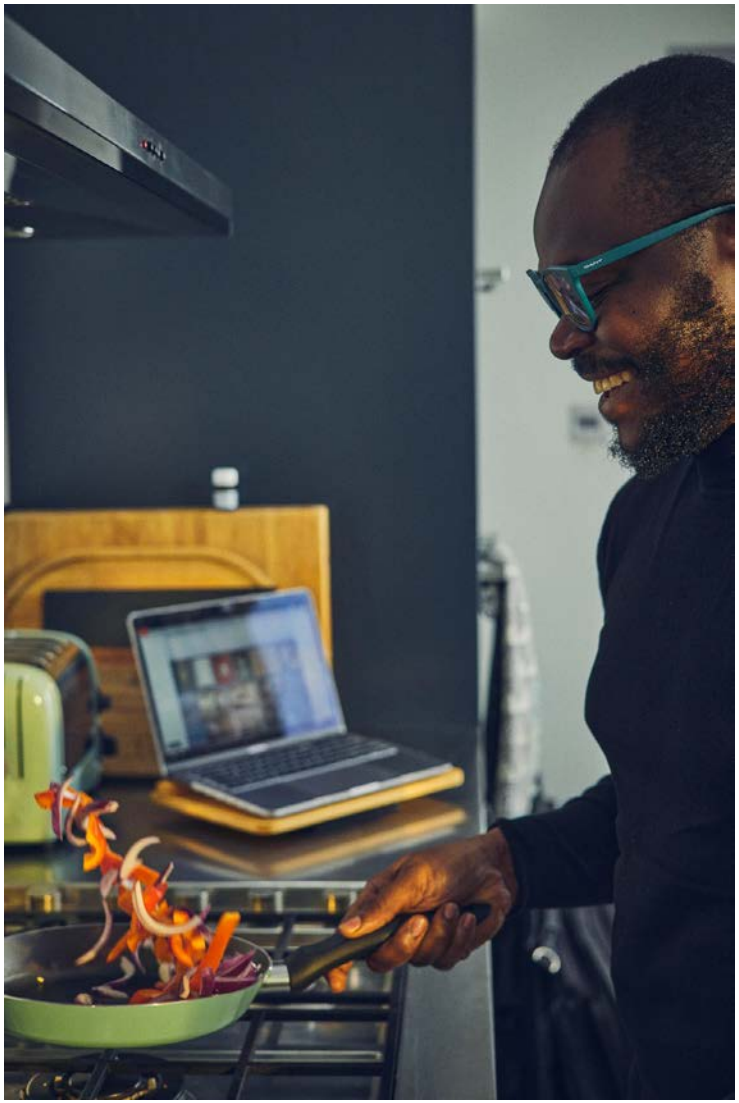
> **"I learnt a great deal about how to design learning activities, what was better suited to async vs sync and how to make the most of Moodle."** Tutor feedback

In the tutor survey, 87% of tutors requested training about online pedagogy and technology. The Flexibility thematic group recommended the development of a framework, and a menu of flexible design features for use in the development of new courses. Not to limit experimentation, but

> **“to ensure quality provision and student experience (not a free for all that is administratively difficulty to manage and confusing for students or provide very different student experiences)”** UAL Online Action Research Project findings

Collaboration with partner services was impactful where it happened, but uptake was inconsistent

Resources and advice from subject librarians, Academic Support Online and the Language Centre were all made available to learning design teams. Although all offers were well received, the uptake varied. The most effective relationships were those that were established by the research team, for example, embedding a librarian in a design team and making an introduction to a colleague for intercultural sensitivity advice. Lack of clarity about what was on offer, why it was needed, and time pressures were barriers to engagement.



Photograph: Ben Turner

Build

Introduction

Having defined the curriculum, and planned the learning experience, our build process used UAL approved tools including Moodle and offered support to teams creating media content. We used surveys, interviews and data gathered in Moodle to find out about learners' and tutors' expectations and experiences and gathered reflective reports from all staff involved in the build process, including digital learning technologists.

The build process revealed how prioritising flexible activity design increased the need for and value of media content. Producing video content required investment of time and resources. Training, equipment, and technical support helped teams achieve high quality results.

Video and audio materials allowed tutors to introduce complex technical and theoretical content outside live sessions so that it could be accessed flexibly. Learner feedback revealed that it effectively supported their learning and contributed to their feelings of connectedness. Ease of access to high bandwidth materials was affected by unreliable internet connections, sensitivity to this could inform where video, for example, is prioritised over lower bandwidth materials. Media content was an investment, and we were able to sustainably and efficiently re-use equipment and training resources. Some content produced could have been reused by learners taking part in different activities.

UAL platforms and tools performed well in our activities, but we found that colleagues did not always have faith in them. Specialist digital learning technologists played a key role in overcoming concerns, illustrating how best to use the Moodle theme created for the activities, and supporting colleagues to use additional platforms where more appropriate.

Photograph: Ben Turner

Equipment and internet

Before the start of our research activities, we asked learners and tutors about the devices they would use, what locations they would be studying in, and what type of internet connection they would have access to. Analysis showed that most participants intended to use a home broadband internet and laptop but expected to also use mobile devices.
A few would use public wi-fi, for example at cafes, mobile internet, and university or work wi-fi.
Many planned to use a combination of internet connections.

Interviews revealed participants' reality of working from home. Alongside the convenience of joining activities online, learners described the challenges of using shared spaces and shared or unreliable internet connections. Some described working outdoors, for example one of the activities included a podcast activity that took place outdoors. This resonates with the Shift Learning report from 2021 where "many [students] had home working spaces that were less than ideal, with frequent disturbances by family members or flatmates." [6]

6 Powell, Jane, Wood, Matt, and Karlin, Lena. "Lessons Learned: teaching and learning during COVID 19." Shift Learning (2021). 7. Web.

Table 3: What type of technology will you be using to take part in the activity?

Device type	Use: Often	Use: Sometimes	Use: Not at all
Basic laptop	180 (64.7%)	50 (18%)	48 (17.3%)
Powerful laptop	124 (44.3%)	67 (23.9%)	89 (31.8%)
Tablet	120 (43.3%)	88 (31.8%)	69 (24.9%)
Phone	113 (40.4%)	121 (43.2%)	46 (16.4%)
Basic desktop	45 (16.6%)	37 (13.7%)	189 (69.7%)
Powerful desktop	33 (12.3%)	44 (16.4%)	191 (71.3%)

Graph 2: What type of internet connection will you use to access the research activity?

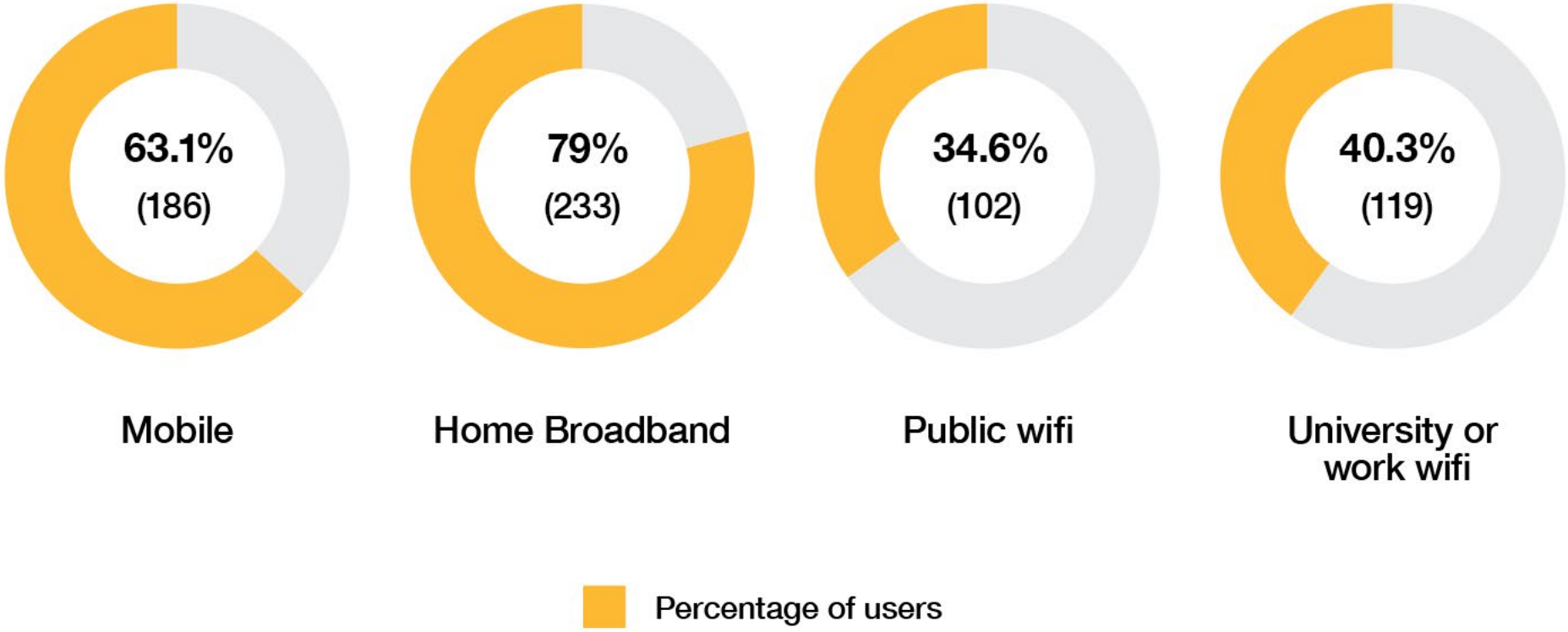


Table 4: Where will you be working from?

Location	All of the time	Some of the time	Occasionally
At my own desk at home	158 (54.9%)	116 (40.3%)	14 (4.9%)
At my own desk at work	29 (14.4%)	69 (34.2%)	105 (51.5%)
In a shared place at home	33 (15.7%)	78 (37.1%)	99 (47.1%)
In a shared place at work	16 (8.4%)	54 (28.3%)	121 (63.4%)
In a comfy chair or sofa at home	64 (27.4%)	103 (44%)	67 (28.6%)
In a public place	25 (11.2%)	97 (43.5%)	101 (45.3%)

Platforms, tools and Moodle

Our research activity focused on UAL approved platforms, and research teams were asked to use UAL platforms and approved software. Some activities used, or strongly wanted to use, platforms that were not approved for use by UAL. This presented potential data risks and GDPR issues. In addition, some platforms were inaccessible in certain countries and had no central support available. Some colleagues were not aware of (or disregarded) the risks in using unsupported learning technologies. Free trial software was used in some specific cases, on the understanding that licences would be provided if a full version of the course were ever launched. The limited use of platforms and restricted cloud access created several restrictions for tutors and research teams; however, this helped the project to contain its findings.

All activities were delivered using Moodle and UAL-approved learning platforms. Tutors, and other project stakeholders, raised assumptions about Moodle's limited capabilities and capacities; however, our research also found limited understanding across the institution about how Moodle can best be designed, implemented and used. Teams relied on digital learning technologists who brought specialist knowledge and course build experience to ensure that activities made the most of the approved platforms.

> **“The support of the learning technologists was invaluable and made me feel confident in the activity, and it’s success.”**
> Tutor feedback

Because the research activities were taking place on the core Moodle platform, a custom sub-theme called ‘Pilot’ was developed for Moodle to differentiate the research space from the existing UAL course provision.

The Pilot theme streamlined the user experience by stripping away extraneous information and navigation not pertinent to the research activities. It replaced legacy menu links with dedicated Library and Academic Support Online resources.

Pilot was only made available to research participants - existing staff and students continued to experience the site via the core ‘Arts’ theme.

Moodle provides several insights into usage from which we were able to gather engagement data. These default views address specific use-cases and are therefore limited in scope but by downloading the course logs from Moodle, we were able to analyse the log data externally and ask sophisticated questions about participant engagement in the research activities.

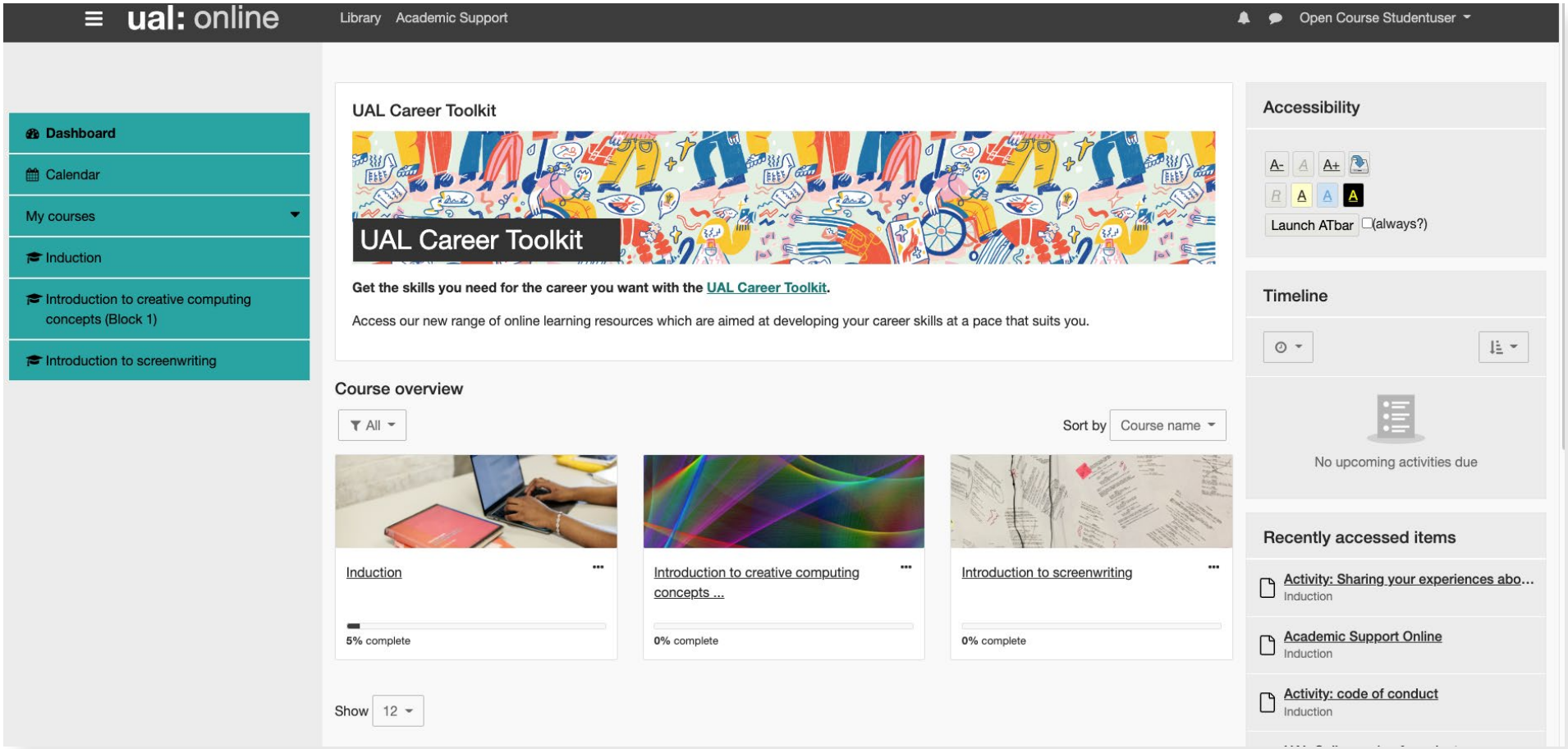


Image 17: Screengrab of a participant's Moodle dashboard with the Pilot theme applied at user level.

It could be argued that the Moodle course index page had the greatest influence on the student experience of the digital learning environment. The course page contained all information about the activity, with content and navigation laid out in sections and subsections. Moodle's content management system (CMS) facilitated the layout and presentation, but it was the staff members who were responsible for how the page design and in-course navigation was implemented.

Ease of use in the digital learning environment is crucial to inclusion, and must be a priority if we are to meet the needs of a busy diverse cohort. Navigational preferences may be personal or culturally situated.

> **"Web site localization on the cultural level (i.e., adjusting cultural markers, such as aesthetic appeal, colors, logic, and communication patterns, etc.) is critical for user acceptance and satisfaction of Web site."**[7]

7 Cui, Tingru, Xinwei Wang, and Hock-Hai Teo. "Building a Culturally-Competent Web Site: A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Web Site Structure." Journal of global information management 23.4 (2015): 1–25. Web.

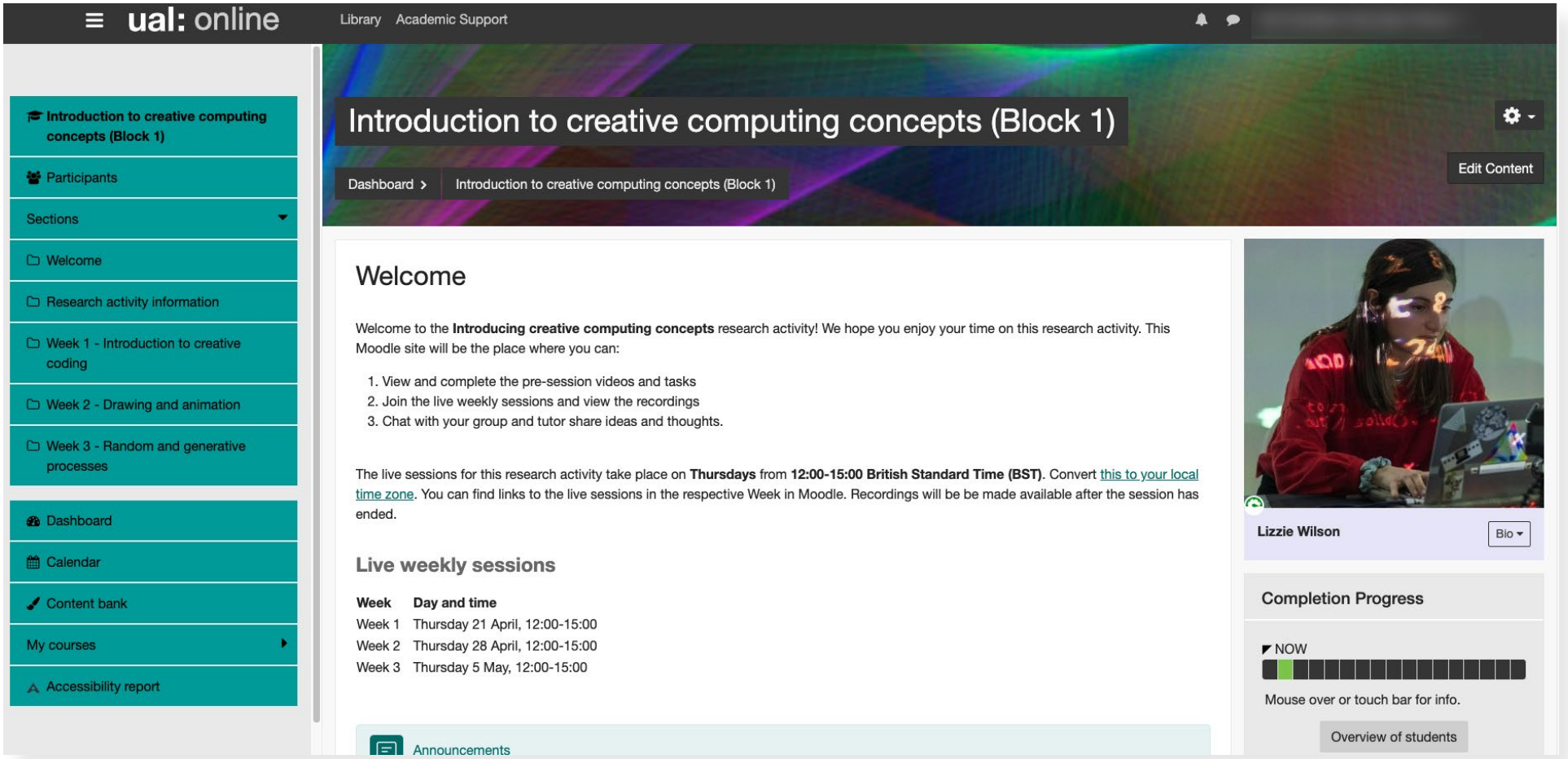
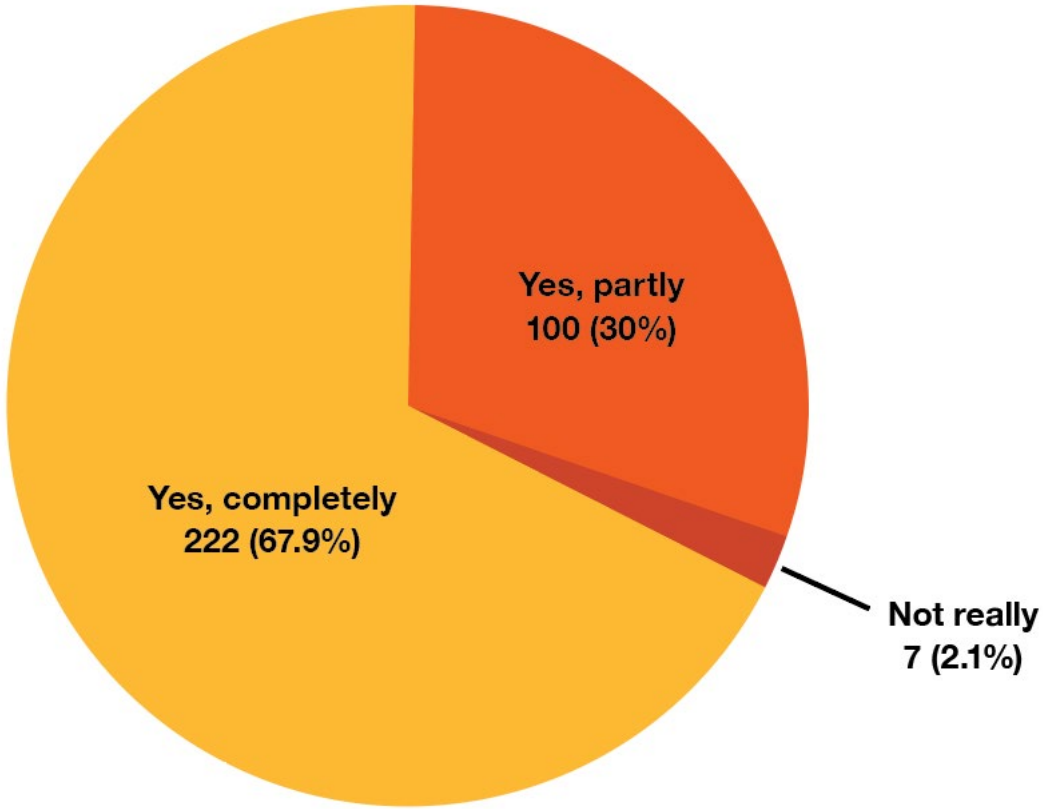


Image 18: Screengrab of a participant's Moodle course page with the Pilot theme applied at course level.

Graph 3: Was Moodle organised well enough that you could follow the activity and find what you needed this week?

333 responses
across all weeks and blocks



Interview feedback expressed more frustration with Moodle, especially in relation to slow upload / download for sharing work in progress. In interviews learners described using popular social media platforms as a workaround to communicate, and share their work, outside of Moodle.[8]

Learner pulse survey: Q9. Is there any other feedback you would like to give us about Moodle this week?

> **"I think the Moodle theme has been well designed especially the breadcrumbs navigation which is very clear. I think the addition of a 'notices' widget on the dashboard would be useful for a central point of important info, at the moment am getting info from UAL email, personal email and a Moodle widget. Would be nice to have all notices also in one place on the dashboard."** Learner feedback

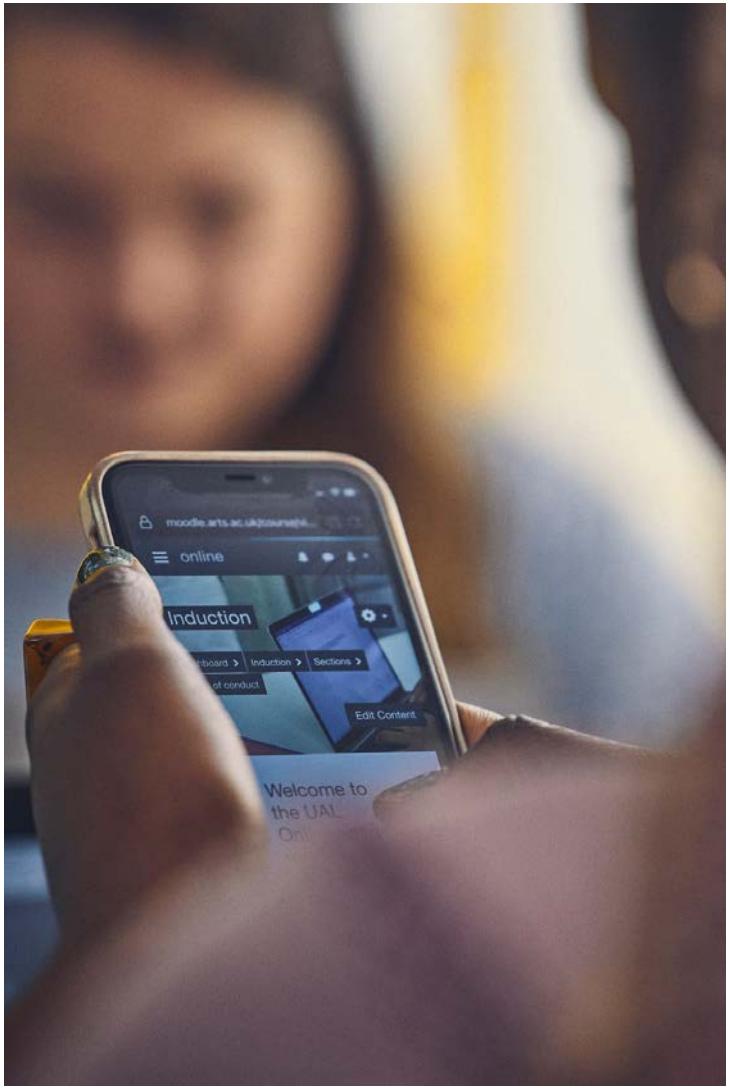
> **"I think Moodle has too many layers, it's like a matryoshka doll. Just my personal feeling. I understand there are a lot of materials and what we need to know during the sessions, however, I just think there are too many links on Moodle. Every time I clicked to unfold a section, it links to some pages or files, and there might be more links (or videos, articles) under that link. When I finished checking the links and came back, I almost forgot where I was just now. Maybe it's just me. However, I believe there should be a way to rearrange the presentation of these resources and materials, and optimize the users' experience."** Learner feedback

> **"If there is some button or short msg direct to tutor or other IT support, that will be great. Because sometimes I have some questions that I want to ask the tutor directly but don't know where to leave a message."** Learner feedback

8 Blake, Sunday, Capper, Gail and Jackson, Anna. "Building Belonging in Higher Education: Recommendations for developing an integrated institutional approach." WonkHE (2015). Web.

During the build process the Open Learning Designers noted that there was a degree of frustration about using Moodle among tutors, many of whom felt it was not a particularly useful or intuitive platform. Some colleagues requested to use alternative platforms. However, further conversations revealed that often tutors were unaware of the full capabilities of the platform, or how the different layouts could change how materials were presented. Resistance to the use of Moodle reduced when colleagues became aware of these factors, with one tutor commenting in the final survey:

> **“the Moodle space for my activity is beautifully clear and has become the model after which I want to design my courses.”**
> Tutor feedback



Photograph: Ben Turner

Learning materials

Making the commitment to flexible learning design and delivery put pressure on teams to provide more asynchronous content. This was unfamiliar and time consuming, and despite the support available, producing this content wasn't always prioritised. Interviews and survey responses revealed the value learners placed on content by their tutors. Quality checks raised questions about external media content in relation to accessibility and quality. For example, PDF documents were inconsistent and not always formatted correctly. Also, some external media content was, unbeknownst to tutors, behind paywalls or firewalls depending on location of the learner.

Learning materials included video, podcasts and interactive tools such as Padlet. We looked at these materials and tools from the perspective of participants who encounter them within their learning experience and the tutors who may have pedagogic and technical involvement in creating them.

Participants regarded pre-recorded video and audio material highly. From the participant survey an average of 84.4% of respondents rated pre-recorded video lectures as 'very useful' or 'somewhat useful'. An average of 71.8% of respondents rated pre-recorded audio lectures as 'very useful' or 'somewhat useful'. Survey and interview commentary revealed that video and audio materials also built feelings of connectedness, a benefit of seeing and hearing the tutor.

Tutors producing asynchronous media content had a range of prior experience and confidence. Some opted for simple screen recordings, others took up support on offer to create materials with higher production values, but this took time.

> **“Creating all of the content for online asynchronous activities took a little more time than I had anticipated, so ensuring that all the content for the different delivery modes joined up and lead to a coherent learner journey took a little time to master.”**
> Tutor feedback

Across the activities, several different video and audio formats were presented: software screencasts, screenshares and slideshows with narration, tutors speaking directly to camera and audio podcast interviews. This content was largely produced by the tutors and their research activity teams. The content also varied from activity introductions to ‘how-to’ and conceptual knowledge content. With few exceptions, media content was generally produced to recommended guidelines with good quality audio and visual material where presenters spoke clearly and at a good pace.

Engagement with audio-visual material universally declined across the duration of the activity in all cases. While participant login also declined over the duration of the activities, video and audio engagement was always lower. In most cases, a majority of those who started watching the videos engaged for the duration of the individual video or podcast. In nearly all cases, a small number of viewers would review some, or all, of the content. It is difficult to say what caused this decline in engagement, but it could be one, or more, of the below reasons:

• The activities were low stakes for students - they had absolutely nothing to lose by not engaging with all the materials.

• The purpose of engaging with the recorded content was not clear in the instructional text so the participants skipped them.

• The media materials weren't interesting to the students.

• The students felt they could successfully complete their tasks without watching/listening to media.

• The participants' commitment to the activity became less as the activity went on.

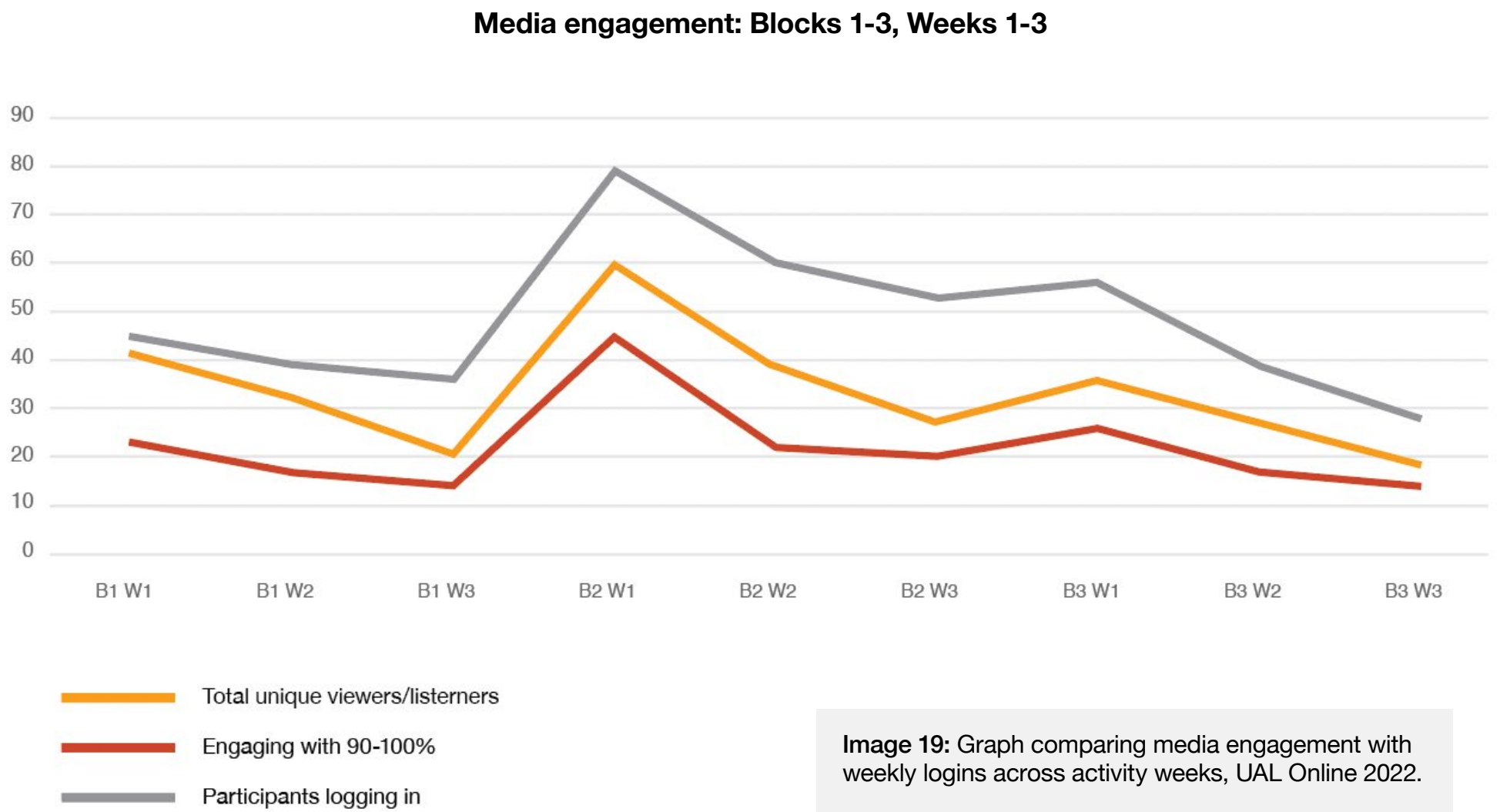


Image 19: Graph comparing media engagement with weekly logins across activity weeks, UAL Online 2022.

Welcome videos

While most of the media content was produced by tutors, UAL Online helped produce 5 ‘Welcome’ videos to introduce learners to their activities, provide them with an overview of activity content and connect them to their tutor.

Image 20: Still from ‘Welcome’ video for Introduction to data science, UAL Online 2022.

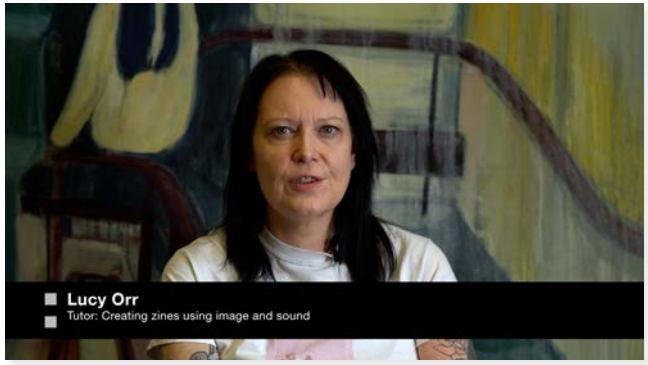


Image 21: Still from ‘Welcome’ video for Creating Zines using image and sound, UAL Online 2022.

Learners explained that welcome videos helped them to understand their activities and what to expect.

> **“I feel connected when I watch the welcome video.”** Learner feedback
>
> **“It was reassuring to have watched it beforehand, feels less like jumping into the unknown.”** Learner feedback
>
> **“The video clarifies the structure of this unit and the relevant concepts of writing activism, it was useful.”** Learner feedback

> **“Before the introduction of the project, I’m confused about the form of sharing and doubted if I can share my personal artwork with the group or not. Fortunately, [the tutor] explained the workflow and purpose of different weeks. It became more vivid and structured on what can I prepare for the group and live sessions. It helps me to get the importance of the [tasks]”** Learner feedback

Live session recordings

Although flexibility guidance meant that live sessions could only represent one quarter of the teaching and learning time all activities relied on teaching during live sessions to support learners to complete the activity. Most activities made recordings available. Most learners attended most of their live sessions and a small number of participants also watched recordings. From Moodle engagement data it is unclear if they watched part, or all, of each recording. In interviews learners told us about their experience of using recordings, reviewing these at their own pace and convenience and some watching these even when they had attended. Recordings were valued by learners but considered to be far less valuable than the experience of attending live.

> **"I don't think I would have gotten nearly as much out of recorded sessions. It would have been worse from any kind of engagement level. It's about the opportunity to listen to other people and converse with other people. It's really the only benefit of engaging in a class at all. Otherwise I could just watch YouTube videos all day."** Learner interview

Podcasts

The research activity ‘Developing your digital creative practice through constructive conversation’ focused on the use of podcasts to deliver asynchronous content.

The podcasts included a series of interviews with creative practitioners that students could listen to, some were mandatory, others were optional. Students were encouraged to listen to these while on the move rather than remaining ‘tethered to their desk’ when undertaking the activity; however, most students did not listen to the podcasts outside of their home (although some were in lockdown).

Learners were initially of mixed opinion about the duration of the podcasts with most students in Week 1 finding them too long, but by Week 3, most respondents described the duration of the podcasts as ‘just right’.

Most of the learners listened to the mandatory podcast material, although completion of podcasts activities that were marked as optional was much lower.

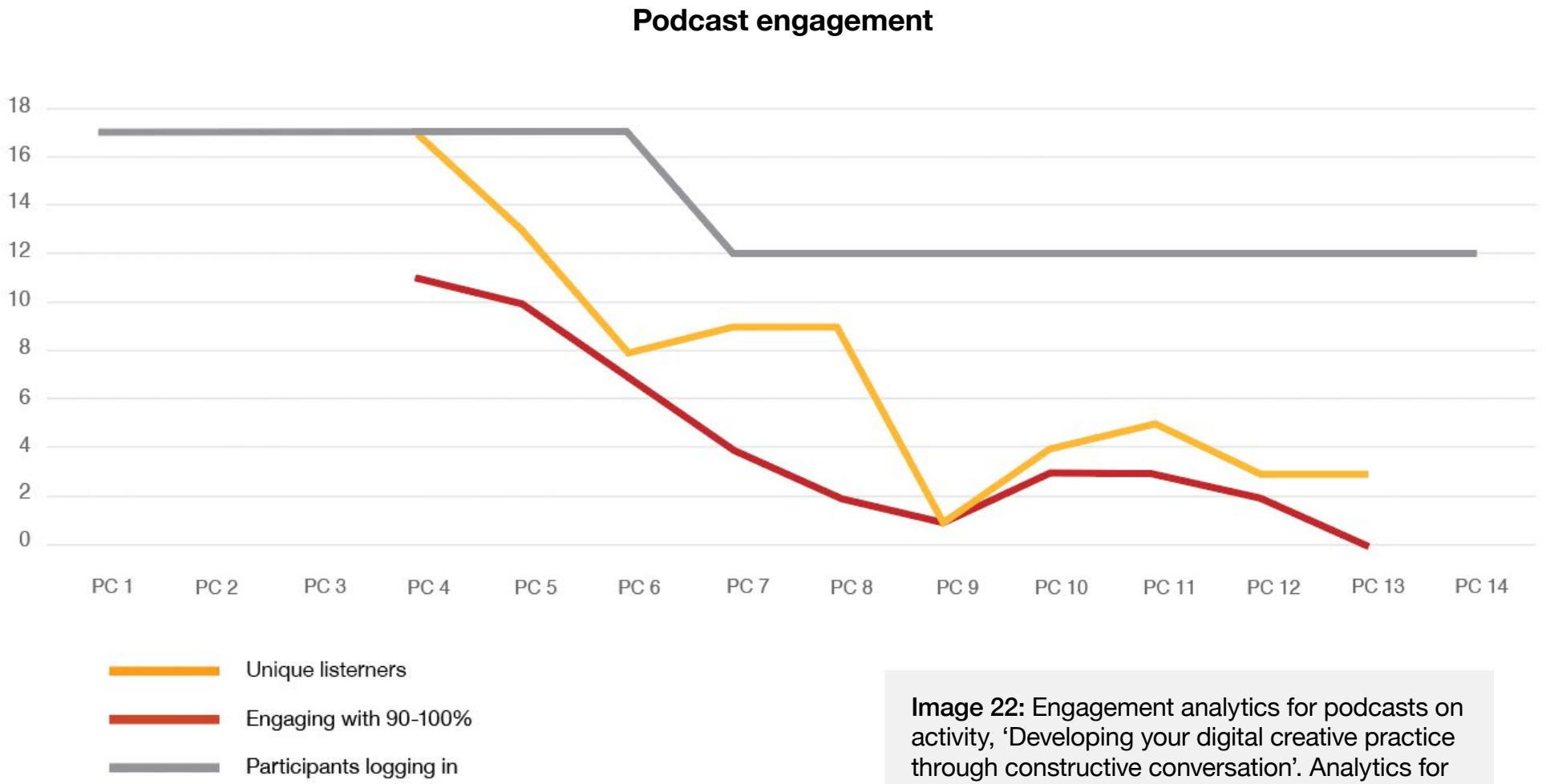


Image 22: Engagement analytics for podcasts on activity, 'Developing your digital creative practice through constructive conversation'. Analytics for some podcasts were unavailable.

X axis= Podcast (PC) listed in numerical order
Y axis= Number of listeners

Media support for tutors

Several support options were offered to tutors to help produce audio-visual content including technical advice, the option to have recording equipment sent to them or have a video recorded with a small production crew. The take-up of these offers was quite limited and further exploration of media support should be undertaken. Of the support offered, the one with the most take-up was having a video recorded by a small production crew.

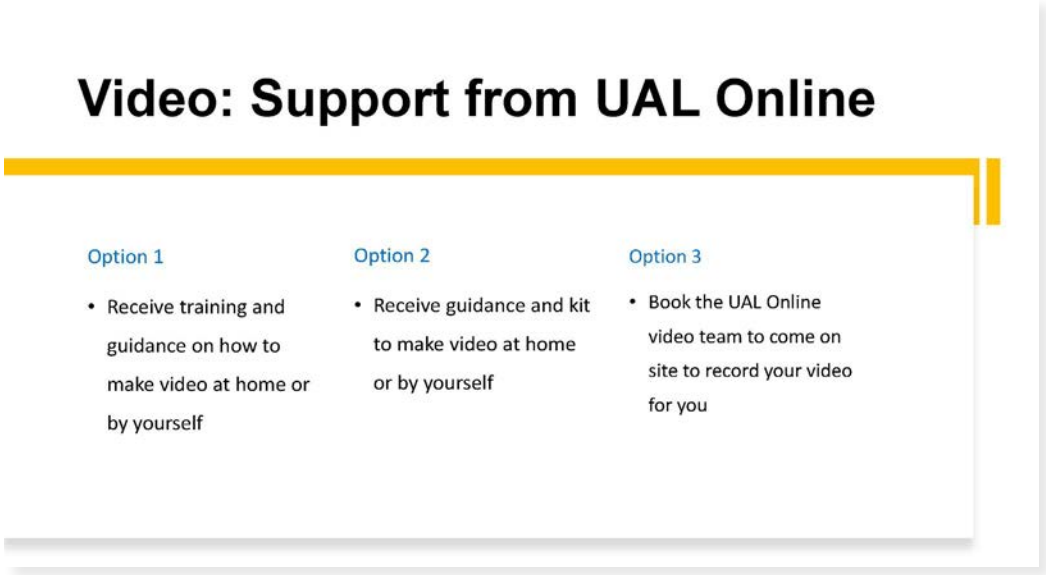
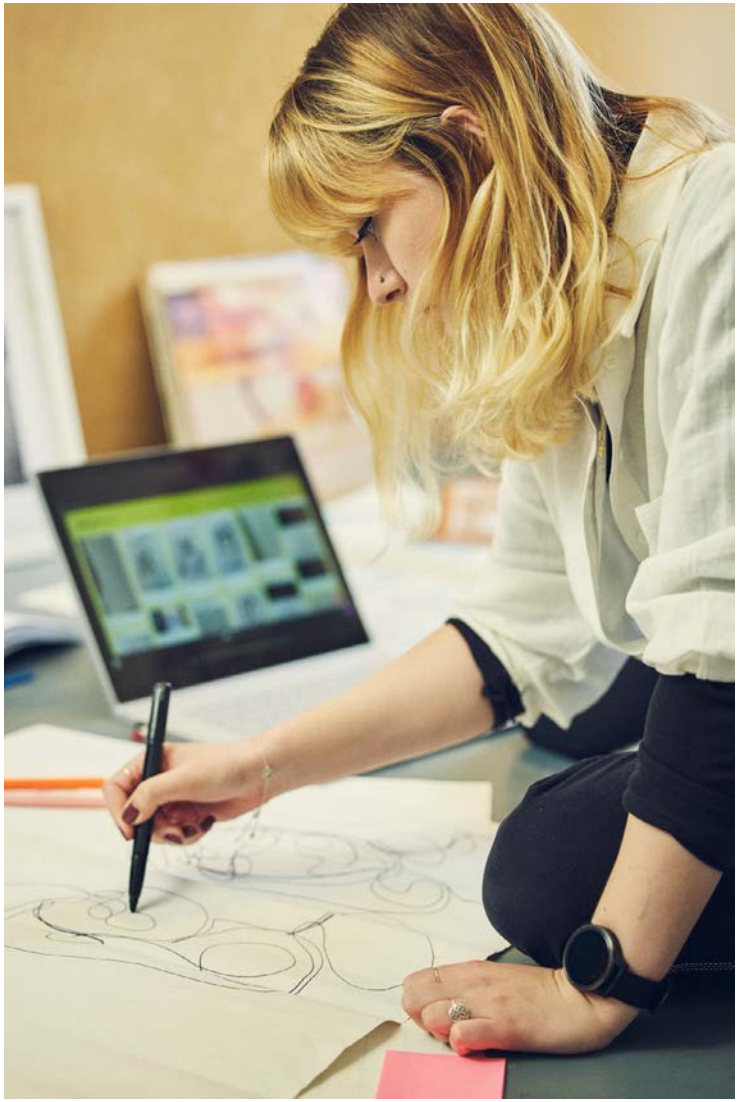


Image 23: Slide from workshop, 'Introduction to video' given to research activity teams in March 2022. The slide illustrates the levels of support offered by UAL Online for the action research project.

In the tutor after survey the following feedback regarding media production was received:

> **“Perfectly handled as far as I am concerned. I felt supported and I feel we had a good result based on their professionalism in recording”** Tutor feedback

> **“I didn’t use video for this course. Had I known about the students being almost entirely in Chinese time zones, I might have done.”** Tutor feedback



Photograph: Ben Turner

Findings

Internet connections affect engagement and experience, especially in synchronous and media rich learning environments

Learners wanted, and needed, to access their learning using a combination of devices, including mobile devices. Interviews and surveys revealed that learners didn't always have access to a stable internet connection, and this affected their ability to access high bandwidth content and join live sessions.

The Moodle environment met most of our needs but did not fully support dynamic peer-to-peer interactions

Learners used social media platforms to support spontaneous practice sharing and peer-to-peer interactions alongside Moodle. Tutors were impressed by the Moodle theme provided and valued support from learning designers and digital learning technologists to make the most of Moodle for their activities.

Students valued recordings of synchronous sessions far less than the experience of actively participating

Not all activities provided recordings but where these were available, they were valued, especially by learners who couldn't attend live. Learners explained that the passive nature of watching couldn't match the learning or experience of being part of a live, dynamic session. The motivations to attend live sessions included access to the tutor, contact with peers, immediate feedback from the tutor, and to punctuate periods of self-paced study.

There are risks to using external media content to supplement self-authored course materials

Leaning towards flexible design put pressure on teams to provide more asynchronous content. Where this was produced for the activities, interviews and survey responses highlighted the value of bespoke content, drawing directly on the expertise from UAL tutors. Using existing media content highlighted issues around copyright, quality, and availability.

There are practical and ethical decisions to be made about gathering and using analytics

In this project we used Moodle data in combination with learner profiles and survey responses to analyse our research activities. This data has been valuable to us, revealing otherwise unknown patterns of engagement, making flexible learning visible. If future learning environments are to gather data in similar ways this will require careful ethical and technical consideration.

High quality media content is an investment as skills, equipment, training materials and content can all be reused

Tutors had varying experience of creating media content, and the need for time and skills were a barrier to this, despite the support that was available within the project. Further guidance, equipment, and consideration about the best use of media to support flexible online learning is needed in this area so that materials can consistently be produced to a desirable standard, and potentially reused to assist the scalability.

Delivery

Introduction

This section focusses on the delivery of our 3-week research activities and how learners experienced them. The project team also had the opportunity at this stage to gather different perspectives, thoughts and ideas from learners and tutors through surveys, analysis of Moodle engagement and qualitative interviews.

As part of this, we were able to discover how learners' experiences in an online setting is vital to understanding and improving what we do. Throughout delivery it became clear that the more we understood learners, the better we were able to curate learning around their lives and support them.

We saw that personalised approaches, where learners could identify the materials, modes of learning, and support they wanted, and inclusive approaches made things better for more learners, with learners showing they appreciated personalisation and active support that fit around their lives, making their student experience more inclusive.

Lastly, we found that embedding services, and support offers and materials within learning design increased impact and effectiveness. Where we embedded these, learners engaged and responded more positively.

Admissions and enrolment

For the action research project, UAL Online took an open admissions approach with an emphasis on self-selection. Tutors were invited to draft the recruitment texts for their activities, which were refined by marketing colleagues. Applications were processed on a first come, first served basis, where the only applicants excluded were those who didn't meet suitability criteria set by tutors. At 19%, we saw a low rejection rate across all the activities.

Most applicants (and later participants) were between the ages of 18 – 24. This ranged between 56% of the total sign ups to 63% of selected participants. Of the remaining applicants and participants a large group were older, many in their 60s.

Table 5: Age ranges of applicants and participants

Age range	Total number of sign ups	Total number of applicants (complete applications)	Total number of participants
18-24	834	392	175
25-30	3	211	111
31-39	133	58	22
40-49	35	12	6
50+	11	4	3

Most applicants and participants identified as female – from 85% of the total sign ups to 92% of selected participants. This is a higher percentage than UAL's current student population.

Most of the applicants and participants, 71% of total sign ups and 86% of selected participants, identified as Chinese nationals. However only 43% of total sign-ups and 61% of selected participants lived in China. The most popular domiciles after China were the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

Through analysis of personal statements, it became clear that many of these Chinese nationals not living in China were university students studying in the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, and Europe. These students were either interested in studying at UAL in the future or were looking to gain a particular skill set and knew of UAL's reputation, hearing of and sharing information about the project on social media.

47% of reviewed applications were from current university students, which included those at BA, MA, and PhD level. These students studied a variety of subjects, not always related to the activity applied for. Often, they were motivated to join the activity to learn a specific skill that they thought would help their future career, to find out more about a subject they were interested in, to meet new people or to learn more about UAL. Many mentioned taking online classes before, some mentioned taking these through Coursera.

26% of reviewed applications were from working professionals. These participants were usually working in a field related to or sometimes adjacent to the activity. They were motivated by wanting to upskill or needing to receive formal training after being self-taught. Flexibility of online study was mentioned by several of these applicants who wanted to fit study around work. Recent graduates (7%) also tended to have similar motivations.

In smaller numbers we received applications from prospective UAL students, who although were coming to study at UAL in the Autumn, were looking to learn more about UAL. This was also true of the small number of applications we received from A-level, foundation, and high school students. (Note: all learners were over the age of 18 by start of the activity).

Despite having a very open selection criteria and relatively short application process, we received high quality applications reflected by the activities' low rejection rate. Applicants were aware of their skill level and able to choose an appropriate activity for their learning goals - based on course descriptions and requirements. Very few learners withdrew from their activity and reasons given for non-completion were related to other commitments and responsibilities – time – rather than academic issues. In some cases, cohorts weren't as tutors had expected and this was challenging. Some learners had less, or more, subject knowledge than the students that might have been selected for residential courses. The selection criteria for the research activities was much broader and more open than a residential course. Tutors were concerned about the inconvenience for learners in significantly different time zones and were also concerned about language levels. In addition to open admissions processes these concerns may also relate to the nature of a dispersed online cohort and preparing tutors for more diverse groups may become a future priority.

> **"The different levels of the participants [was particularly challenging] and being able to differentiate successfully in an online environment."** Tutor feedback

> **“They were 100% Chinese nationals. They were from a broad set of interests/disciplines. 1/3 of them were studying abroad in Australia, US, Europe etc. Most didn’t really grasp what activism is as opposed to general social issues of concern. Most were of lower BA level - only a few were MA level. They were very engaged.”** Tutor feedback

> **“I found it difficult to teach students who were not at foundation level, and instead be presented with a room full of MSc/MA and PhD or even post-PhD stage students. Having the ability to curate my students would have been useful.”** Tutor feedback

We used retention as a marker for success. Having reviewed the profiles of learners who completed their activities, we found there was no major correlation between specific profiles and retention on an activity. Age and confidence had a small positive correlation with retention, but level of prior education, satisfaction and attendance at live sessions did not. In interviews we found that learners of different ages, with different work, study and other responsibilities were having similar experiences balancing activity workload with other life commitments. In summary, they were all busy.

> **“They were lovely - active and engaged for the most part and very glad to be involved. The majority of the group were from China, which raises challenges as it does for the regular UAL student recruitment process.”** Tutor feedback

Induction

For learners taking part in the research activities, we developed a universal induction. This was provided in Moodle. It was made available a week before the learning activity began, providing induction materials designed to give participants information, confidence and familiarity with the learning environment and values needed to help them prepare for their research activity. The induction was developed in collaboration with Library and Learning Services, alerting learners to the resources available to them outside their teaching and curriculum, for example the library, language tutorials and Academic Support Online.

The Induction Moodle area contained 6 sections for learners to explore:

- Welcome
- Code of conduct
- How-to guides
- Academic Support Online
- Library
- Support

Overall, participants reported that they found the induction helpful. Survey feedback was positive, describing it as ‘helpful’, ‘clear’ and ‘comprehensive’ preparation. Queries raised by learners seldom related to areas that were covered in the induction.

> **“The induction section is helpful and lay a clear path for me on how to navigate the whole course and support recourses (sic)”**
> Learner feedback

Co-created induction activity

The code of conduct used a co-creation approach. Participants were asked to uphold and then to reflect on 6 values vital to learning online, namely: trust, engagement, care, sensitivity, communication and inclusivity. Reflections, and interpretations were posted on a Padlet, allowing learners to see how their contributions contributed to shaping and defining the code of conduct. There was a high level of engagement in this activity, which simultaneously developed the code of conduct and initiated a trusting, discursive approach that was appropriate to future learning activities.

Image 24: Screengrab of a Padlet showing the 'UAL Online code of conduct'.

How-to guides

The How-to guides were the most accessed pages in the induction according to the Moodle engagement data. This may be unsurprising, given that many learners were new to Moodle, but being able to monitor return visits allowed us to see that these practical resources were being heavily used.

Through survey responses, Moodle engagement data and later qualitative interviews a more nuanced picture emerged. Despite emphasis on induction as a preparatory activity, it emerged that participants continued to access (and re-access) the induction materials throughout their time on their research activities (as seen in Image 25).

This shows that the materials were accessed at the start and frequently later accessed again at the point of need. This highlights the importance of keeping induction available for participants throughout their time on their other courses and treating it as an integrated element of the online learning experience rather than a standalone entity.

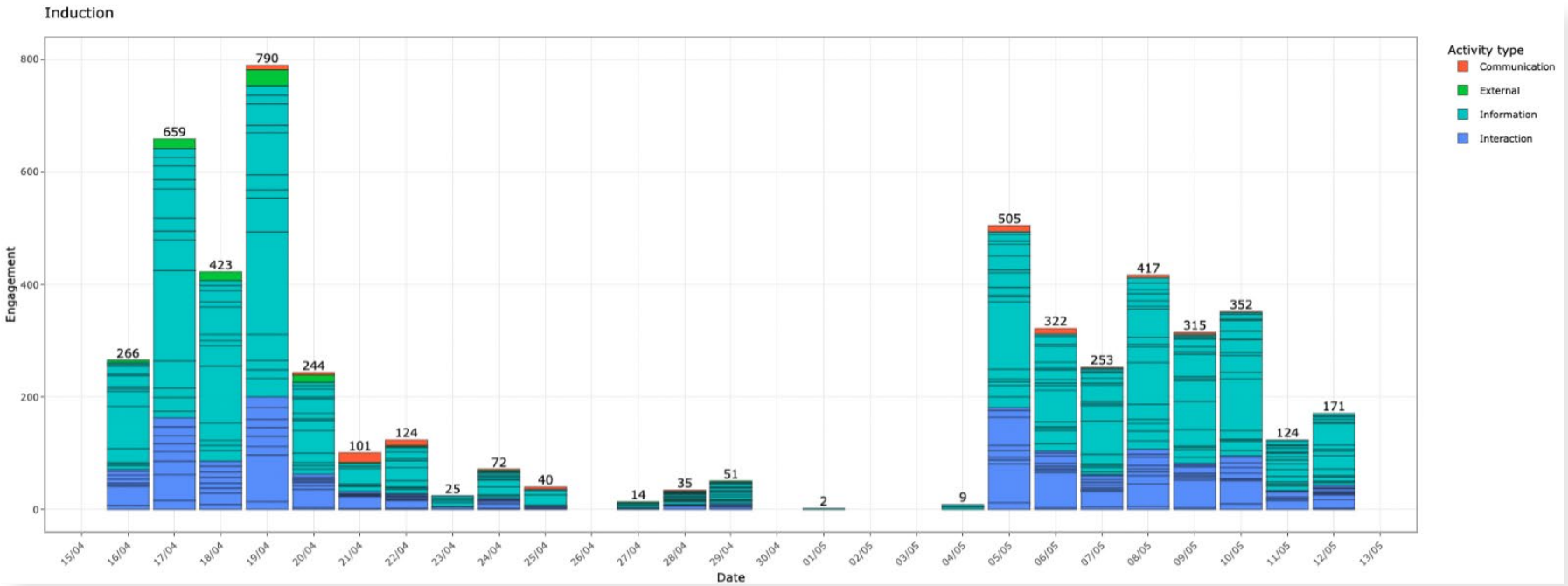


Image 25: Bar chart showing data of page views of the Induction course for Block 1.

Connectedness

With our learning activities lasting only 3 weeks we felt that the opportunity to build a meaningful sense of community among our learners was limited. We opted to monitor feelings of connection between learners and their peers, and learners and their tutors.

Before the activities began many learners were given access to welcome videos or messages from their tutors. In interviews learners told us that they had also researched their tutors online.

> **"I watched his video before attending the session and researched online to find out more about him. I was interested to find out about his past experience, CV, and to see his work. This helped me know that he was very experienced as an artist and teacher."**
> Learner interview

In interviews some learners told us that they had used social media platforms to connect outside the teaching and learning environment during the activities. They had shared their work and enjoyed the support and social connection that this offered. Other interviewees had not been included, and some would have liked more peer-to-peer contact.

> **"Offline we had a WeChat group, so we discussed what we needed to do for the next class and asked how each other are going."** Learner interview

As social media channels were self-organised not all learners were included. Communicating in languages other than English, and using preferred local platforms necessarily excluded some learners, a loss for those who would have preferred more peer-to-peer connection.

> **"When people are not speaking their mother language they are a little bit nervous and more careful. When they are talking their mother language they are more open and quite cute"** Learner interview

Not all learners wanted to build connections, especially with their peers. Tutor relationships were generally prioritised.

> **"Personally it's really not so important to me [to be connected to fellow learners]. It's important to have a closer connect with the tutor as they are the one that will give me direction. With the students it's ok, but it's not the priority."** Learner interview

> **"For this course, I preferred to listen and learn more. The other participants were younger than me. They weren't my people."** Learner interview

The value in making connections extended beyond the learning experience, learners valued the opportunity to connect over shared interests and meet new people.

> **"It is good to have a chance to communicate with things that we are interested in. It is very hard to communicate with people with the same interests, so the online course provided us with a way to find more people who want to talk about the same thing."** Learner interview

They went on to explain that they wanted to be in an international cohort. Their group had been mainly Chinese.

> **“I want to know people from other countries, that’s more appealing to me”** Learner interview

In interviews several learners also talked about their experience and the connection they experienced with the university.

> **“I feel like I’m in the University”** Learner interview
>
> **“this online course make me feel I really travelled abroad to study.”** Learner interview

Despite the emphasis on asynchronous teaching and the short duration of these activities the vast majority of learners reported feeling as connected as they wanted to be with their tutors. After only 3 weeks of study all survey respondents from 10 out of 14 activities were as connected as they wanted to be with their tutors.

Table 6: Self-reported participant confidence and activity completion

Confidence	Did you feel that you successfully completed in the activity?	
	Yes	No
Very / quite	80.3%	19.7%
Somewhat / not very confident	68.4%	31.2%
Unknown	60%	40%

Learner support, services and offers

As part of the project, we developed learner support in collaboration with a range of existing UAL support services, creating a customised learner experience. We were able to test co-design approaches, tailored content, and embedding services and support within the learning programme. This, with support offered by tutors, contributed to the overall positive student experience of our learners.

Library Services

Data gathered from our student survey clearly showed that most learners valued access to the online library and library services. 83.9% of learners said they found access to the online library and library services useful.

In interviews, learners expressed how they enjoyed using the library more extensively, exploring resources that related to other study subjects.

> **“You can go to the library and you can go to some introduction workshops and I think it’s really helpful to see all these learning resources before I started the course. I think it’s very generous for UAL to provide this.”**
> Learner interview

The Library Services team closely worked with tutors to make available specialist materials and provided general as well as subject specialist expertise and guidance, which also meant we were able to create a more personalised experience for learners.

The UAL Scans for Teaching service was used as a solution to supply chapters or articles where books were not electronically available. This service was under-utilised by search activities, with only 5 orders in total.

Copyright violations happened on a few activities where tutors did not engage with Librarians or with the Scans for Teaching service. One revelation was how little academic colleagues – and some library colleagues – understood the Scans for Teaching offer.

3 activities engaged in kick-off meetings with librarians, tutors and learning designers. No further meetings took place after course “go-live”. Librarians reported that on 7 of 14 activities some form of email correspondence with tutors took place.

Library Services offered a specific landing page, ensuring that learners could only access relevant online and globally accessible resources.

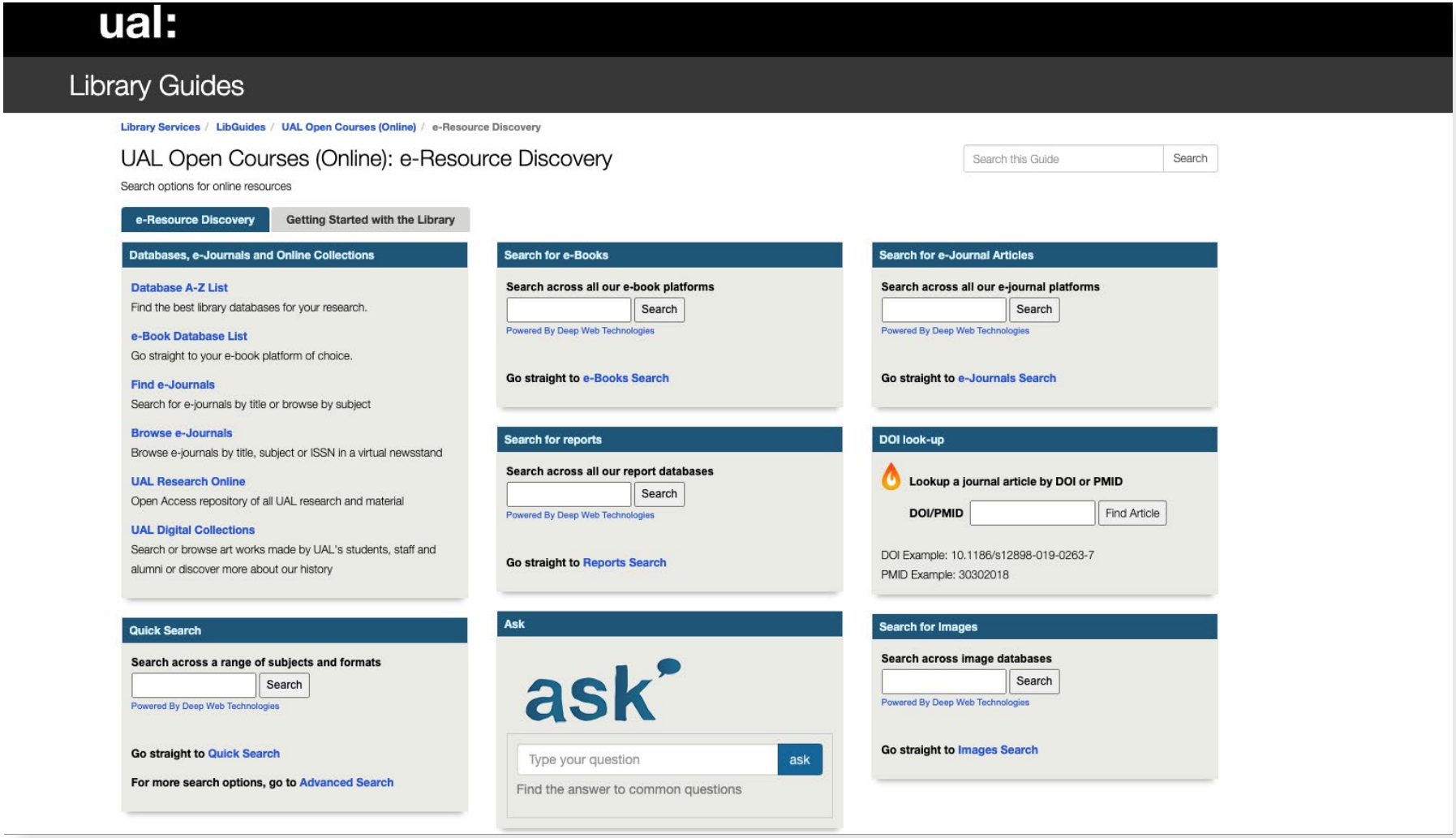


Image 26: Screengrab of customised library portal.

Academic Support

With Academic Support learners expressed how useful they found the support they received. However, we were surprised at the high expectations learners had about Academic Support even before they began the activity. 94.9% of learners expected access to Academic Support to be useful before they began their research activity.

> **"I joined 4 different ASO workshops. I think the workshop is really interesting. I learned a lot from the workshop because every workshop we have the different topic, like how to make a Zine and how to be more creative from moving image. And we have some discussion about art and creative thinking."** Learner interview

> **"These kinds of workshops are really useful to help me learn more about creative thinking. Maybe it is not related strongly to 3D animation, but it opened my mind and give me some new experience about art and creativity."** Learner interview

We collaborated with Academic Support, who worked closely with tutors to create bespoke content. We also tested and changed approaches throughout the different learning blocks to provide different support.

One of the main take-aways for us was that Academic Support seemed to work best when embedded within the activity and connected to specific learning activities – which is something we hope to explore further in the future.

Tutor Support

In interviews learners also told us about their experience of being supported by their tutors. They valued feedback in all forms, synchronous and asynchronous, and told us that the value of synchronous sessions was in part that they were an opportunity for feedback and advice direct from the tutor. One learner explained how a live conversation was helpful as an opportunity to articulate the question as well as get the response.

> **"I'm the kind of person who prefers to write and read messages. However, the research subjects were quite complicated and I think the majority of students could find it difficult to formulate a question in writing in one sentence. When it's a 'real' conversation, the tutor or the person you're talking to can help you formulate your question."** Learner interview

Learner expectations about their tutors were generally met or exceeded. In interviews many expressed pleasure that their tutors were so welcoming and approachable, one expressed how much they experienced and valued personalised attention.

> **"The ideal relationship (online or not) is that the tutor knows each students, and my direction of art making, my intention, why I'm in this course. Everyone may have similar or dissimilar reasons and from that the tutor would give different attention - to personalise the class is very good, no matter if 6 or 26 people. Sometimes I experience some personal attention - the tutor knows that I'm not interested in that or that I'm weak in this or strong in that."** Learner interview

Supporting communications and language needs

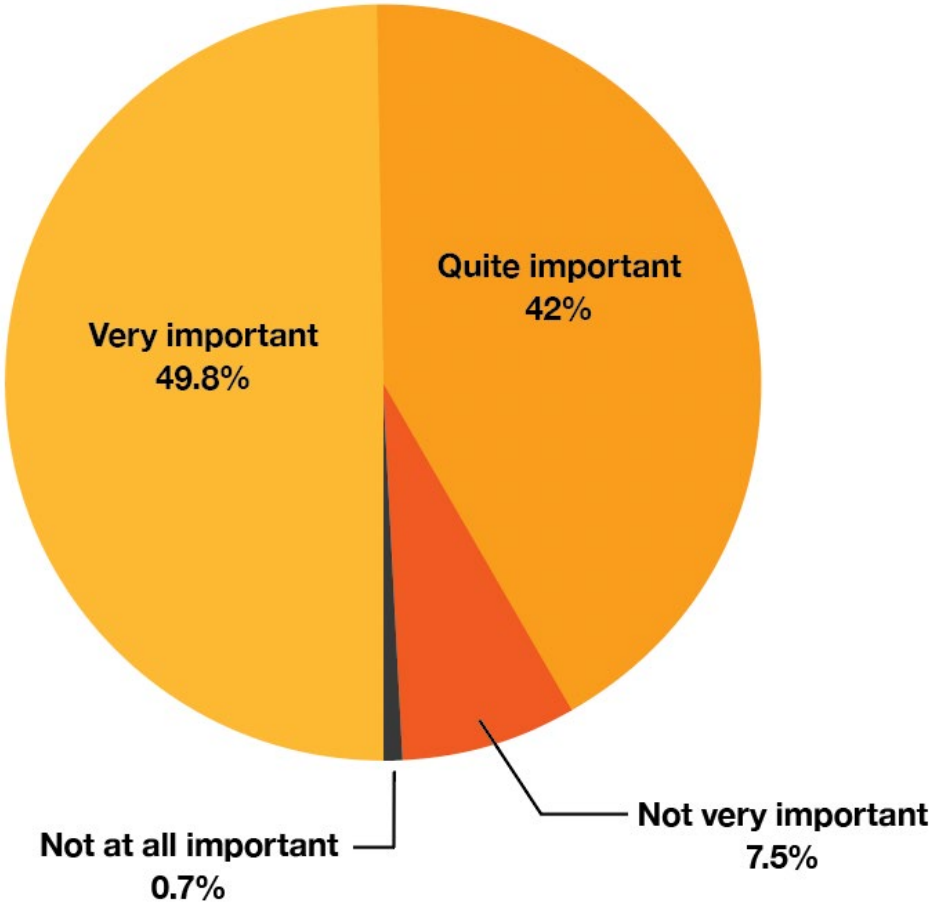
Learners rated highly being able to communicate in a way that worked for them. This included speaking directly to a tutor in a synchronous session or using a specific forum or chat function. Learners also asked for live captions and even told us they were using their own software to caption sessions and content. Many learners used social media platforms to communicate outside the learning environment,

> **“Somehow it’s easier to communicate in wechat because we usually use wechat”** Learner interview

A frequent barrier to communication was confidence, many learners lacked confidence in their English language ability, some were shy.

> **“I never communicate with tutors before. I was very nervous. I think it was myself that was nervous. She [the tutor] was nice. It is difficult for me to have confidence. Maybe if there was 1-to-1 communication but that would be difficult for her because she has many students.”** Learner interview

Graph 4: Being able to communicate in a way that works for me



Language Support

Opening recruitment, applications and selection so widely, meant we enrolled a global audience with a range of language skills and needs.

Confidence in language ability was a concern that learners voiced throughout surveys and interviews. For example, learners expressed mixed levels of confidence in being able to communicate verbally, as per our pre-activity survey.

> **"There are two parts I'm most concerned about. One part is the language because you know I'm Chinese, so I'm a little bit concerned about the class we using the English. Maybe I'm not very good."** Learner feedback

> **"I feel like I would've learnt more if we spent more time having conversations in a group with the tutor. There were people who didn't have experience in screenwriting so some of them didn't know how to feedback. I would also say that the language barrier had a big impact in this part. Some students had to translate what they wanted to say from their mother tongue to English. It seemed that there was more engagement in the main room, but not in breakout rooms."** Learner feedback

Different types of learning spaces and different abilities in subject specialisms also impacted how learners communicated, and learners reported that some of creative language used was new to them.

Language Services offered support directly to learners through Academic Support Online. Uptake was low, and interview analysis suggested this was mainly to do with lack of time, and clarity about the purpose of seeking this support outside

the learning activity. Where activities focussed on written and spoken word, tutors actively supported language skills and confidence through materials and activities, but tutors raised concerns that they couldn't support learners whose ability wasn't as expected. This is an area where collaborative development with Language Services would be fruitful to develop in future.

While we did not use IELTS requirements during the admissions process, there may be additional work for UAL to set expectations of learner language skills with staff and within the recruitment process in future.

> **"The recruitment process did not check that the students had high enough levels of writing or speak English for the course - this was a problem. There was a mis-match of levels of what was designed and who was taking it."** Tutor feedback

Glossaries to support the use of unfamiliar terms

3 research activities offered glossaries to introduce and clarify technical and unfamiliar terms as part of their course content though engagement was mixed.

The Creating Zines using images and sound research activity had the highest uptake, with 21 out of 27 learners in the group using it. This high level of engagement can be attributed to the frequent use of technical terms that were unfamiliar to both an English and non-English speaking audience, and the prominence of the glossary in the course materials. The tutor actively directed learners to use it during synchronous sessions, and it was interactive. Learners could add their own contributions when they came across a word that was unfamiliar and access further resources as links were embedded to additional materials.

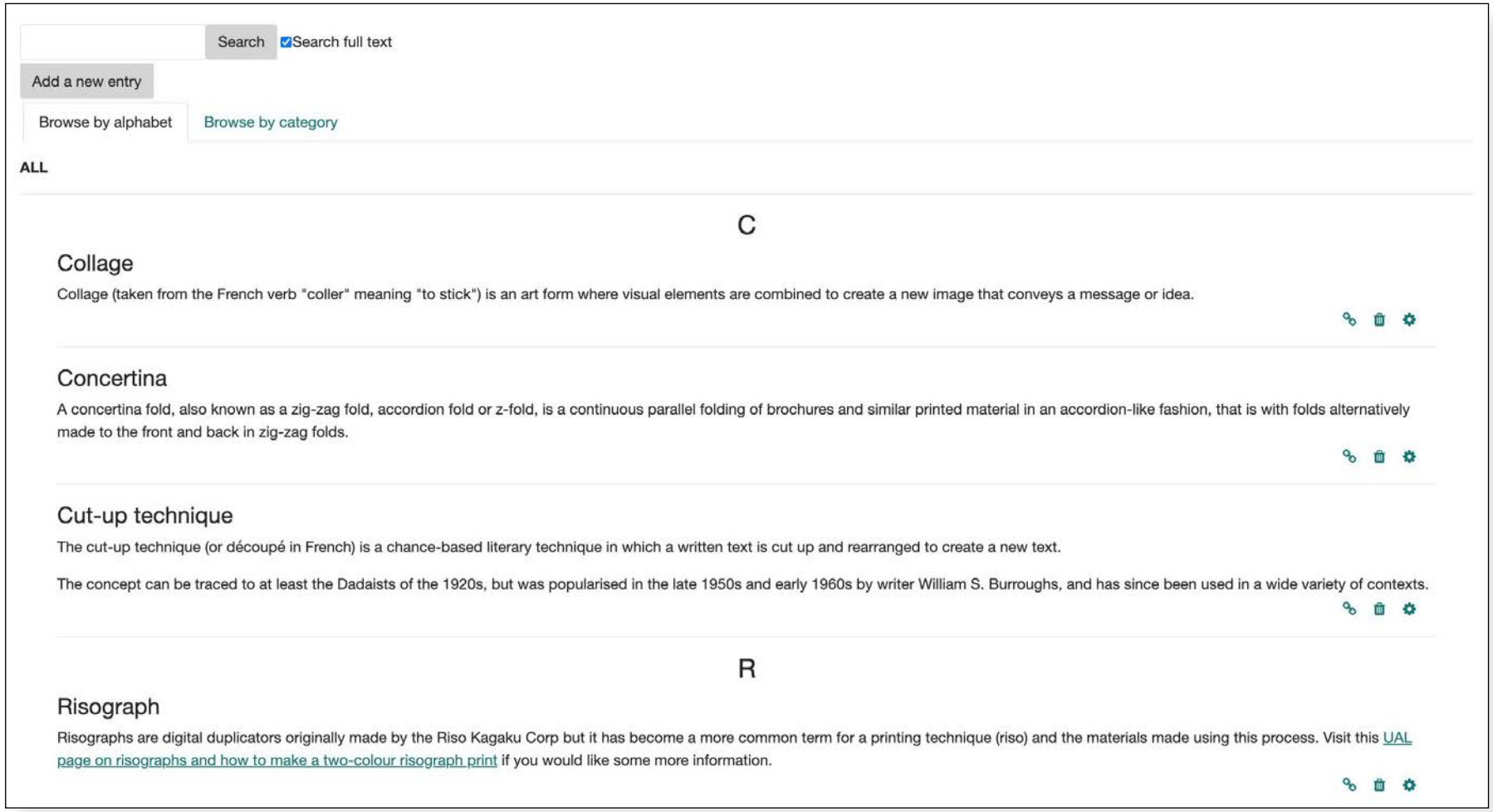


Image 27: Glossary provided to learners in the Creating Zines using images and sound research activity.

Cultural nuances and sensitivities

Cultural nuances and sensitivities were considered throughout the project in curriculum content, the design and scaffolding of learning activities as well as how students were supported. As is common at UAL, culturally sensitive topics, such as surveillance, censorship, human rights, and many more were handled in the activities. Tutors were sensitive to this aspect of their curricula and one group sought intercultural communication advice from the Language Centre. Survey and interview feedback indicated that learners welcomed these subjects and felt supported to engage within the online learning environment. Working with and supporting learners in dispersed local contexts requires sensitivity that is specific to online learning and this is an area that needs further consideration.

“Recently, the human rights of a large group of people around me have been violated. At the same time, I happen to be conducting such a research, which makes me feel that this serious topic is actually around me.” Learner feedback

“The students said they wanted more anecdotal professional tips from me. I took this on board but was also conscious that advice that is relevant in my country might well not be in theirs.” Tutor feedback

Communications and enquiries

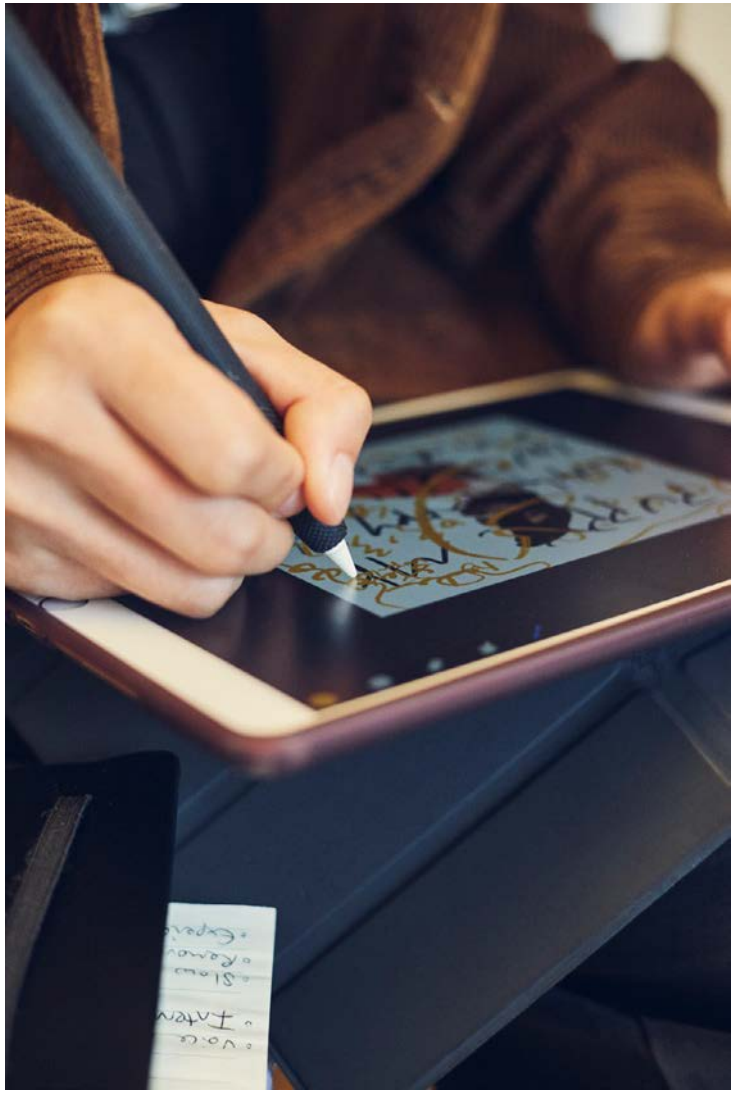
During the research project we were able to manage all enquiries in the UAL Online team which meant we were able to respond quickly and effectively, contributing to a positive overall student experience.

We used a single point of contact, so students knew where to go for support and communicated pro-actively, anticipating questions and queries before they were made. The majority of questions received were not about the learners' on course experience, but related to issues they had using their account and logging in. We received a very small number of digital learning enquiries, which were all handled by the research team.

Emails sent to learners, using the same single email address, had incredibly high open rates. In particular, the welcome and induction emails, on average, had a higher than 90% open rate. This fell once learning was underway. Similarly survey completion rates reduced.

> **"I received an e-mail maybe a week or two before the course started, so I had enough time to look at all this stuff and be familiar with the tools we may need to use on the course. Everything is just really thoughtful and very efficient."** Learner feedback

As seen in the table on the next page, most of our student enquiries were related to IT issues and usually they were asked in the first week of the activity. In future, this suggests that it would be especially useful to work closely with IT services focusing on ways to support our students. In addition, working with registry to make sure that our students have a smoother enrolment process would also help to resolve these issues as most were related to password resets.



Photograph: Ben Turner

Table 7: Types of participant submitted enquiry

Type of enquiry	Number of enquiries Block 1-3
IT issues: password, email, and logging in, ...	180
General comments: Feedback (mostly positive, related to events and classes) and dropout	25
General questions: Class timings, missing class, requests, etc	16

Open content

As part of the research project lecturer Hana Noorali curated and organised a series of engaging artist talks. These were delivered as part of the curriculum of the research activity, Curating and accessibility, which she was teaching. The events were also made available to all other learners taking part in the research activities, and to students on a relevant postgraduate programme at Chelsea College of Art. The events were well received and attended by 103 learners, working as a useful pilot for live, open access and shared events.

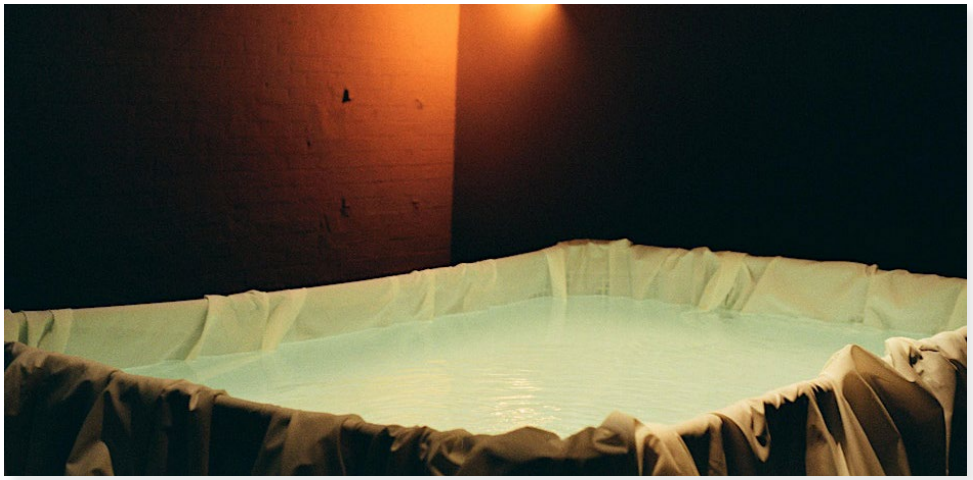


Image 28: Invitation image to a talk hosted by the Curating and accessibility activity with Leah Clements.

Findings

Learners returned to induction materials after the start of their activity.

We offered a shared induction before learners began their activities. This offered technical and general welcome information including a co-created code of conduct. Engagement data, and interviews, showed that these resources had value at the start when they helped learners prepare, but they were also used again later for reference and as a route to support resources.

Despite the short duration of activities and an emphasis on asynchronous delivery, learners felt connected to their tutors, peers and the University.

We saw that connectedness can be achieved in many ways, through a range of flexible learning designs and delivery approaches. These include regular feedback and media content and are not dependent on extensive synchronous engagement.

Learner support services may be more effective when offered at the point of need.

While introductions to Academic Support Online (ASO), Library and Language support were included in the induction and learners engaged with introductory resources, uptake was low overall in comparison to resources built into the activities. This suggests it would be better to integrate these services at the point of need on courses rather than introduce them as standalone services.

Communication confidence was more of an issue for learners than technical language skills, but widening recruitment adds to our responsibility to provide support for staff and students.

In these short and unassessed activities learners with varying language needs felt supported and were able to succeed. However, varied levels of confidence and skill created concerns for tutors and learners, especially where written work was the focus of the learning. In future, more comprehensive support throughout the design, build and delivery of new courses would benefit staff and students.

A single point of contact and fast response and resolution time for all enquiries contributed to a positive learner experience.

We were able to handle all enquiries ‘in house’, and learners told us that they valued this fast and responsive service. Although this method would be a challenge to deliver at scale it was an opportunity to learn and make major fixes as we went.

Report conclusion and recommendations

Throughout this report we have shared findings that relate to the design, build and delivery stages of developing new online learning. The aim of this project was to prepare for future growth in online delivery, in response to the UAL strategy. Through using a structured learning design process and exploring flexible approaches, we have started to develop a scalable development process that benefits learners through flexible, ‘online by design’ approaches, ready to support all creative and material practices. It was our intention to build on established strengths and knowledge from across UAL and this project represents a collaboration with over 60 UAL colleagues. Working with over 300 learners, recruited to take part in 15 teaching activities, has given us an invaluable insight into the online learning experience.

Photograph: Ben Turner

Our wider findings provide us with insight and opportunities to develop online education for creative learners and align to areas of the student experience, including student journey, curriculum design and pedagogy. We have used extensive data from learners and colleagues, gathered in surveys, interviews, reflective reports and through the delivery of learning activities. The following recommendations are drawn from the project in its entirety, highlighting the priority areas and opportunities that the research project has revealed and aspects of the research design that we, the project team, believe should be sustained. They relate to the operational approaches and support that is needed to continue developing online learning, the training needs and formalised processes that would help us to sustainably develop new online learning and deliver a high-quality student experience, at scale. They are also relevant to the delivery of existing online and low residency provision.

Recommendation 1: Embed co-design and collaborative approaches within delivery of online learning.
Throughout the project we have been able to draw on extensive knowledge from within our own community, including disciplinary expertise and specialist creative pedagogies, making our findings relevant to our context as an arts institution. The challenges of new processes, unfamiliar constraints and inevitable workarounds have revealed the need for clarity and structures, but they have also shown us the value of working together. Co-design and collaborative approaches, working in new teams that mix creative expertise and online pedagogic and technical know-how, has been key to the scope and relevance of this project and we recommend that they be prioritised within future operational plans.

Recommendation 2: Apply holistic design principles to pedagogy and student experience to create a coherent experience.
We started this project with broad research themes

(Flexibility, Induction and shared content, Embodied practice, Access and audience, Belonging and inclusion) and this has allowed us to explore student experience and pedagogy together. We have looked at the student experience holistically, focussing on how it fits into the lives of our busy learners. This approach has helped us unify our responsibility to learners and if maintained could help us continue to develop a coherent online experience that meets learners needs in and out of their courses. Holistic experience and service priorities, including flexibility, could be applied equally to curriculum, support or other aspect of the online learning experience.

Recommendation 3: Supporting growth, scale, and opportunities for future development.
During the design and delivery of our research project, we encountered predictable and unexpected friction where existing systems did not have the capability or capacity we required. Project feedback and reflection highlighted the need for systems to work together, clear and consistent approaches to system processes, and the ability to develop programmes of work to benefit new groups of students. We need to plan to gather and ethically utilise student data, to respond to learners in ways that show they matter in their own learning journeys. In addition, there is more work to be done around developing technology and software to enhance the student experience. Elements such as scalability and automation of processes, such as communications and enquiry management, will be key to facilitating a positive student experience.

Recommendation 4: Develop a comprehensive online student experience, working with students as partners.
Through extensive survey data, engagement analysis, and in-depth interviews of this project, we have significantly deepened our understanding of the online learner experience in a creative arts context. What we have found can inform future actions, but we have an opportunity to involve learners earlier in future. By listening to our learners we will be

able to welcome new and diverse groups of learners. We recommend further development to define standards and develop guidance to ensure students' experience is inclusive, accessible and valid for a wide range of different types of students and identities. This would affect all stages and areas of development including, and not limited to, learning materials and media, the digital learning environment, support and recruitment. We recommend exploring personalised learning journeys, personal tutoring and support diagnostics as a way to embed inclusive approaches.

Recommendation 5: Prioritise flexibility so busy learners can engage when, where and how they prefer.

We set out to explore flexibility, and this research has deepened our understanding of its value to learners and implications for teams developing and delivering flexible online learning. We applied a ratio of one to three, synchronous to asynchronous delivery for this project and saw the impact on staff and learners, especially the mature and working learners that were attracted to these online activities. We propose that flexibility is a valuable principle to apply to online learning and that it has extensive benefits for all learners throughout the student experience. Implementing flexibility would require effort and support throughout design, build and delivery, with for example learning design, production of asynchronous and media content and rethinking teaching roles and additional support. Our findings from this research suggest that this investment would be valuable and could have a positive impact on recruiting and supporting more diverse learners with specific benefits to learner engagement, success, feeling connected and student experience.

Recommendation 6: Establish a community of practice to support online learning professionals.

Throughout the project we and our collaborators have enjoyed the opportunity to innovate, collaborate and reflect. The action research cycle has guided us to reflect before and after taking action, and

our work has benefitted from the vast professional experience of our colleagues. From this experience we recommend that an active community of practice would be of benefit to colleagues, and their work in the development of online learning. This could usefully include continuing professional development and support to engage in reflective, innovative and scholarly activities including further research.

Recommendation 7: Develop a framework to establish clear values and measurement.
In response to the research, and for the ongoing development of online and low-residency teaching and learning across UAL, we recommend working with colleagues to develop an Online Learning Framework which embodies a set of values and design principles. This framework could be used as a yardstick for the design of pedagogy and curriculum at UAL and represent a high-level response to UAL's strategic ambitions for inclusive online learning.

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