
Transforming assessment for fairness and sustainability - BA Costume Design and Making

Students seem happy and changes have been well-received: “They were really excited when we introduced the new stuff to them...The first years have come back after Christmas with a vengeance according to the first-year tutor. They’re really excited and happy to be here”.

Area of Focus

Embedding cost-conscious and affordable practice to support and encourage students from lower-income households.

Context

The Course Leader took over the BA Costume Design & Making course in 2017 and had an opportunity to redevelop/redesign aspects of it. Success for All data suggested that outcomes for students from widening participation (WP) backgrounds ought to be a priority for the course team. They were aware of a sector-wide trend for students from widening participation backgrounds being attracted to Costume courses, and of cost being a key industry priority. With these points in mind, they embedded measures to ensure that students could fulfil their potential on the course without feeling the need to spend excessively.

Approach

Drawing on past experience in other institutions and with the support and advice of an educational developer, the course team approached this issue on a number of fronts via an array of embedded strategies. Using data of student demographics, and their progression and attainment rates, the course team was able to embed inclusivity across the course in a way which benefits all students, not just those from lower-income households. To this end, a range of measures have been introduced to the course which were approved during the course validation event in 2018.

Interventions

- Recycling and repurposing – this is already part of the course content but emphasised here for its relevance and value; recycling and repurposing involves asking students to acquire a second hand patterned shirt to deconstruct and repurpose (Year 1)
- Utilising scraps – the course leader explains that “the second years spend the first semester collecting any old fabrics, old clothes, plastic wrapping, cardboard, all kinds of stuff”; “they develop their problem-solving and creativity, it also touches on sustainability practice...it ticks a few learning boxes, as well as being a cheap and sustainable way of making work”.
- Setting and adhering to budgets as part of students’ final year assessment (forthcoming formally in 2019; budgeting already discussed at length with final years).
- CAD and digital portfolios – “they’ll bring their laptops in and do design in the studio, so they’ve still got that atmosphere and the social element of learning, which is a really important pedagogical practice for Art & Design”.
- The course team buys materials in bulk and packages them for sale to students at low prices, to ensure students can acquire required materials as cheaply as possible. This is changing as of this year to provide these materials to students as part of the course, rather than charging students for them.
- Local placements identified and prioritised for students who would otherwise find it difficult to travel/stay away from home (this is dependent, of course, on students being clear about their circumstances and preferences with course staff).
- Reviewing dissertation submission practice to encourage more standardised formatting. In creative courses the presentation of the dissertation can be an example of work in itself; by insisting on a standard format submission, focus remains on the written content and costs are kept low.

Initial Outcomes

Students seem happy and changes have been well-received: “They were really excited when we introduced the new stuff to them...The first years have come back after Christmas with a vengeance according to the first-year tutor. They’re really excited and happy to be here”.

This targeted inclusive intervention, which promotes both social and environmental sustainability, went on to win the NTU 2019 Team Award for Environmental impact

Challenges and next steps

It remains difficult for academic staff to identify WP students and target relevant support accordingly (hence building it into the provision for all students). This is particularly relevant for staff trying to oversee placements and ensure that local placements are made available to those students who would most benefit.

Practical and creative courses are by their nature resource-intensive – costs are unavoidable, and the School cannot cover everything, so being clear and managing expectations is an important part of ensuring students are prepared.

Contact details

Nadia Malik, Course Leader, BA Costume Design & Making

nadia.malik@ntu.ac.uk

Key outputs

“We embedded measures to ensure that students could fulfil their potential on the course without feeling the need to spend excessively”