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Executive summary

Introduction
Pre-degree qualifications vary in their appropriateness as a preparation for degree level study in Art, Design and Media subjects. Moreover, the influence that assessment procedures have on determining student outcomes and learning experiences deserves further attention. This report presents findings from research into summative assessment in pre-degree awards for Art, Design and Media. These findings are drawn from data collected in 2014 from on-line questionnaires, interviews and focus groups, all of which sought to investigate specific aspects of assessment policy and practice outlined by UAL Awarding Body’s brief. The findings present evidence that sheds light on the efficacy of different summative assessment procedures for pre-university qualifications in Art, Design and Media. In particular the research reviewed perceptions of the effect of internal assessment and external moderation in relation to possible and actual models of external assessment.

Research objectives
► Define the concepts and processes that practitioners in art and design education use to assess students’ performance in Art, Design and Media;
► Describe and analyse the opinions of experts on the best ways to assess pre-degree qualifications according to their fitness for purpose;
► Accrue a body of evidence including qualitative and quantitative data that can be used to establish the advantages and disadvantages of employing different forms of summative assessment in pre-degree qualifications;
► Make recommendations for summative assessment in Art, Design and Media at pre-degree level in relation to validity, reliability and comparability.

Executive summary
Main Findings of the Report

The research has identified that:

- Internal assessment with external moderation or verification is held up by 79% of Art, Design and Media experts to be the most reliable and authentic method of assessing for pre-degree awards.

- The Foundation Diploma in Art & Design qualification compares more favourably to other Level 3 and 4 pre-degree qualifications in encouraging key student attributes that are sought by Bachelor's Degrees.

- ‘Holistically’ assessed rather than segmented or overly modular programmes are perceived by experts in Art, Design and Media education to improve students' readiness for degree programmes and/or employment.

- Most pre-degree awards share a common language for assessment criteria. Yet there are widely recognised and fundamentally implicit, interpretations of assessment criteria by specific communities of practice. The major drivers for particular ‘community interpretations’ appear to be closely linked to experiences of external assessment/moderation. Where there is a perception of a punitive assessment regime educators respond negatively in terms of programme development.

- Creative identities are largely thought to be enabled by assessment structures that privilege individuality in portfolio development, and through self-initiated projects.

- The careful selection and training of moderators is of paramount importance for achieving authentic and rigorous assessment for Art, Design and Media Qualifications.

- A transparent moderation system which facilitates a supportive critical relationship between external moderators and programme leaders is crucial for improving both national standards and student attainment on pre-degree qualifications. There was a belief that any assessment must enable the development of qualifications if they are to be fit for purpose.
Policy makers should recognise the importance of both assessment of and assessment for learning in determining the quality of pre-degree qualifications for Art, Design and Media. The very real tensions that exist between these two important facets of assessment can be negotiated most effectively by retaining authentic forms of assessment which privilege internal assessment and a regulated moderation system to verify national standards.

Consultation and dialogue between the universities and examination boards for pre-degree level qualifications would benefit from further investment and development to improve continuity and progression routes to higher education in Art, Design and Media subjects. This particularly relates to findings about the current A-level in Art and Design qualification.

Serious consideration must be given to the practical arrangements for any potential changes to the assessment procedures for pre-degree qualifications. Adequate research regarding the efficacy and viability of an assessment workforce including their training must be undertaken. The particularity of Art, Design and Media pedagogy and curricular requires a workforce familiar with a rapidly changing professional field and this would need to be reflected in the knowledge and understanding of potential assessors.
The focal ‘end user’ population within the context of this research is learners, typically aged 16—19 years, studying Art, Design and Media programmes at Levels 3—4 within the post-compulsory education framework. This includes those following vocational pathways through qualifications such as the BTEC National Diplomas and Extended Diplomas, the Foundation Diploma in Art and Design, GNVQs and the relatively new Cambridge Pre-U award (2008). It also includes learners undertaking traditional (AS/A-levels) and those following an International Baccalaureate.

Assessment procedures across these pathways need to be able, not only to adapt to the marked or more nuanced demands of the main qualifications at this level, but, to be equally inclusive of, and relevant to, a potentially very diverse range of learners, including mature students returning to formal education or retraining, and learners following alternative pathways such as apprenticeships.

**Existing research**

The research sought to uncover, from a wide range of sources drawn mainly from the UK context, perspectives and bodies of evidence that can be beneficially drawn on to better understand the current challenges and shortcomings of the heterogeneous landscape of Art, Design and Media assessments at pre-degree level. The sources consulted have been used to situate these understandings within a wider backdrop of qualifications and curricula that have undergone waves of reform over the past two to three decades and, with these changes, yielded small discoveries about the strengths and development needs of different assessment strategies deployed to fulfil broadly comparable measures, from which assessors and awarding bodies can learn.

The literature exposes that assessment is inherently complex, not least in Art, Design and Media. As Smith suggests, ‘because assessment so strongly influences student attention, perceptions and behaviours, it ultimately functions not only as a measure of learning [as perhaps it is typically viewed], but also as a shaper of learning’. (2013: 204).

Research carried out at the IoE EPPI Centre in 2005 by Mason, Steers, Bedford, & McCabe provides an extensive literature review about the effect of formal assessment on secondary school art and design education, which has some relevance for UAL Awarding Body’s research. The review identified a paucity of research that directs attention specifically to the impact of different summative assessment approaches on student learning outcomes in art and design (Mason, Steers et al, 2005). Moreover, as Walker and Barfield (2006) note, art and design students’ views of assessment processes require further research.

Recent research on the creative industries and their relationship with HE design provision, highlighted several points about assessment in which industry practitioners talked about the need to avoid learning strategies that are too focused on outcome [particularly in relation to] digital design where ‘iterative development processes and the rapid prototyping engendered by digital technology require students to understand the benefits of an ever-evolving working process that does not have rigid beginning and end points.’ (Yates and Price, 2014).

Other reports (Walker and Barfield, 2006), that are conscious of the increasing internationalisation of student intake for art and design subjects, stress the need to find appropriate ways to assess for validity, reliability and comparability, which will therefore require more sophisticated ways to measure learning, perhaps allowing students to be more directly engaged in assessing their learning.
Recent literature on the values and expectations underpinning the study of Art, Design and Media advocates the importance of a holistic set of values, perspectives and processes that work together in interaction with the student and the learning community (the class, other stakeholders, such as visiting professionals or specialist contexts such as museums and galleries) (Orr, 2007; de la Harpe and Peterson, 2008; Elton, 2005).

Resulting from an iterative consultation process, with representatives from the creative industries and cultural and education sectors, the Cultural Learning Alliance (CLA) summarised the purpose of such an education thus,

- teach(ing) philosophical, critical and structured thinking and communication skills. It cultivates pupils’ visual, haptic and aesthetic literacy — how we see, hear and listen and respond emotionally. It is about the articulation of ideas, a key skill in life and industry. (GCSE Consultation Report, 2014: 7)

Although this holistic wide-view of the subjects concerned is critical to this report’s overall scope and aims, it is also important to break down and examine the particulars of each of the main disciplines, as follows:

**Art**

In relation to the spectrum of practices traditionally referred to as ‘fine arts’ or more recently ‘visual arts’, there is a significant importance placed on developing students’ autonomy as learners, with the term itself becoming particularly abundant in commentaries and manifestos within the last decade (Orr, 2010; Schneider, 2012). This is underpinned by values prevalent in contemporary contexts in which art is practiced, presented and critiqued, which have a dialogic and overlapping relation to Higher Education ‘art schools’ and, to a more variable degree, Further Education counterparts. Some of these values concern the interpersonal and emotional dimensions of artistic expressions and interventions, as well as some of the ineffable qualities of creative and aesthetic learning, which can be elusive to verbal communication and observation and therefore, at times, resistant to the dominant rationalist and quantitative forms of assessment used in the UK formal education system. (Dahlman, 2007: 320—1).

**Design**

Several key authors and authorities on design education (Smith, 2013; Design Council, 2013; CCSkills, 2013; Charman, 2010) advocate curricula that support students to understand and engage with the relationships and practices involved in professional design contexts through project-working, as well as having opportunities to develop personal responses to the needs of ‘clients’ and ‘users’ through authentic assignment briefs. Corresponding to these ideas, which support a particular connection with employability and industry that tends to be less explicit in Art, Design and Media education at this level, some authors, such as Thorpe (2012) warn against over-emphasising commercial markets and the consumptive role of design at the risk of losing, from education especially, the more generative value of design thinking (Thorpe, 2012: 38—9). This issue is at the heart of debates across the full subject spectrum of Art, Design and Media. These weightings, in turn, shape the affordances of the qualification framework for different conceptions and ways of viewing learning in, or through, design (or art, or media).
Media

There is a substantially smaller body of literature on creative media and moving image pedagogy, which has evolved from a different and more recent lineage to the studio-based approach of traditional art and design instructional paradigms (i.e., C18th and 19th academies). Media education also has roots in English literature education and emergent frameworks on media literacy that have evolved from these (Burn, 2010). Programmes often take a highly vocational approach, with simulated briefs being a common starting point for project-based learning — designed to develop and hone students’ technical skills in a range of media formats, hardware and software, and ultimately prepare students for creative industries employment (CCSkills, 2013). However, the focus on ‘literacies’ (media, and more recently, ‘digital literacies’) has increased emphasis on developing students’ critical and contextual understanding, and vocabulary. While this certainly has a relevant application to a range of working practices and approaches within the creative industries and media sectors, it also serves the more discrete educational purpose of empowering the student to become a critical maker, as well as a critical consumer, of moving image texts and media of all types.

All of these subjects, studied at pre-degree level, are expected to provide students with the skills, knowledge and understanding they need to progress into higher education or employment, apprenticeships and other training opportunities. The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) report (2005) notes an increasing trend towards ‘portfolio working’ for professionals across certain sectors. The vocational dimension, more pronounced in BTEC and Diploma specifications than the ‘traditional academic’ award of the A-level, aim to increase the adaptability of the learner as a reflection of the needs of today’s creative workforce. As Kate Oakley (2009) states, typical working practices are characterised by, ‘(a)...focus(s) on employability rather than employment, following a flexible, non-vertical career path designed to enhance his or her skills or networks’ (Oakley, 2009: 27). Beyond the economic imperative at the root of this goal, which is echoed by many equivalent study programmes at this level, the creative remit of these subjects is also inseparable from the expectations on students to become independent thinkers and innovators, through educational outcomes that are expected to be productive and generative (of emergent, experiential or ‘improvised’ knowledge) as well as summative of their absorption and understanding of the curriculum (in terms of sequential, hierarchical and ultimately ‘canonical knowledge’ (Seally-Brown and Duguid, 2001). The former plays a part in capturing who the student is and where their potentials, interests and motivations currently lie (as well as from where and what they have derived); the latter aims to quantifiably measure ability and achievement, intended primarily as a scientific prediction of future success. (Shepard, 2008: 4) Educational Researcher, Vol. 29, No. 7, pp. 4–14 (https://www.ied.edu.hk/obl/files/The%20role%20of%20assessment%20in%20a%20learning%20culture.pdf)

While these statements encompass some of the central aspirations for what will be learnt and experienced through such an education, scrutiny of the mainstream awarding programmes and surrounding assessment processes at this level yield the questions: what is actually being assessed through the assessment formats and lenses in active use; what is actually sought from students through the demands of the examination? Equally important, what parts of their development, experience, understanding and abilities are under-valued or fundamentally ‘out-of-range’ of the prevailing lenses adopted by assessors and examiners?

There is an inherent struggle, here, that can make it difficult for assessments to serve both the summative and generative purposes noted above.

It is not necessarily the case that these stated aspirations are consistently and explicitly well matched with the assessment mechanisms in place to measure performance and achievement.
Summative assessment frameworks in pre-degree Art, Design and Media qualifications

Prevailing pre-degree Art, Design and Media assessment strategies in the UK focus on the marking of portfolios of work, internally-generated or externally set project work and final outcomes at the end of the award (i.e. summative assessments at the end of the AS and A2 awards, within the full GCE A-Level, or at the end of Foundation Diploma in Art & Design, UAL Diplomas and Extended Diplomas in Art & Design or GNVQ). Exceptions to this include the BTEC National Diplomas and Extended Diplomas, which can be marked unit by unit throughout the programme.

In the case of creative media programmes, or other pathways and endorsements in which time based outcomes are either typical or welcomed (as stated in many ‘Fine Art’ specifications), outcomes usually include documentation of final productions in the context in which they are intended to be, or have been, shown - or digital formats containing the outcomes.

Typically, for the majority of awards summative assessment, which is the focus of this report, takes place in two phases: ‘internal assessors’ (usually programme leaders and/or specialist tutors of the different Art, Design and Media subjects) score and rank all candidates using the qualification assessment matrix, within their institution. After a standardisation procedure has been implemented to determine the measurability of all criteria through the projects and assignments that students have been set. External ‘moderators’ (and/or ‘verifiers’) employed or contracted by the awarding body then request access to a sample of candidates to re-assess independently to determine the accuracy of the centre’s marking, and moderate if concerns or inconsistencies are discovered.

Moderation samples are drawn at random from across the entire examination entry covering the internally assessed rank order (the size of which varies, usually between about one tenth or one third of the cohort).

The assessment criteria vary between each award, but comparison across each of the specifications consulted (Table 1) reveals a broadly comparable use of an analytical mark-scheme split into four overarching assessment objectives. The assessment objectives (hereafter abbreviated to AO) for the award specifications reviewed in this study can be summarised as: (AO1) primary research; knowledge of historical and contemporary sources (AO2) idea generation, media experimentation; (AO3) development, evaluation and refinement of ideas and creative solutions; and (AO4) execution, presentation and reflection of final ideas and outcomes. In the light of this particular research it is important that such similarities in AOs are not understood to be indicative of a common interpretation across awards.

Awarding systems in the GCE A-Level, comparable with other equivalent academic awards at this level, as well as precursor Level 2 awards such as the GCSE, range from ‘A/A*’ (top grade) down to ‘U’ (‘ungraded’, because it failed to meet the assessment criteria sufficiently to receive marks towards a grade). In contrast, the majority of mainstream pre-degree vocational awards (BTEC National Diplomas and Extended Diplomas, UAL Diplomas and Extended Diplomas, Foundation Diploma in Art & Design) utilise a smaller grade delineation system comprising (from highest to lowest attainment), ‘Distinction,’ ‘Merit’, ‘Pass’ and ‘Fail’ (awarded as double or triple grades for larger BTECs). It is noteworthy that historically some awards have had an even more limited range of grades (e.g. Foundation awards up to the 1980s consisted only of ‘Pass’ or ‘Fail’ outcomes).

It has been suggested (Kohn, 2011) that this de-emphasised the grade itself and shifted the value of the qualification, for students especially, to the affordances it set up for creative learning, experimentation and risk-taking (see also: Robins, 2006).

Nonetheless, in considering the efficacy of awards for serving the purpose(s) for which they are intended, there is an undeniable benefit, not least to the Higher Education institutions (HEIs) and employers who make decisions based, at least partially, on grades, of having a more nuanced system to compare candidates. Moreover, it is asserted by Brian Stecher (2010: 34—6) that to be truly fit-for-purpose at post-compulsory level grading systems should also reveal to learners, tutors, HEIs and employers, the candidates’ strengths, abilities, motivations and interests in the subject to support their identification and transition to suitable progression routes.

Another way in which pre-degree awards become instrumental to students’ progression is in their allocation of UCAS points, which are used nationally across the UK higher education system as a cross-subject currency for gaining entry to degrees. Even where their grading system differs entirely, awards may be regarded as having equivalency within the UCAS tariff (points allocation system) based on the depth and breadth of learning outcomes and guided learning hours, etc. For example, the UAL and WJEC Foundation Diplomas in Art and Design were deemed equivalent to the AQA A-Level (UCAS Tariff Expert Group, 2009:4—5). However, the meaningfulness of this measure of equivalency needs to be called into question when the conceptions of learning, ability and achievement across these three qualifications, and others at this level, cannot be said to consistently and reliably compare like with like.

Both these observations present a significant challenge to both the awarding bodies and the educational and creative sectors.
Art, Design and Media as part of a larger qualification system under review

To make fit-for-purpose assessments in any given subject, as explored above, the different purposes and stakeholders, or ‘users,’ of summative assessments need to be considered in relation to the broader picture. This picture is constructed of a range that includes ‘the specific’: the nature of creative learning; through to ‘the general’: the transitional phase of FE as well as the expectations of HE/employers (general and specific). In this section, we will focus on the latter two, to inform a discussion of the subject-specific issues in the final part of this literature review.

DIE (2013) and Wolf (2011), stress that mechanisms of summative assessment need to be comparable and have equivalency with other subjects at the transitional phase of FE. The current vision, significantly influenced by Wolf’s (2011) critical evaluation of current A-Level and vocational pre-degree awards in particular, hails reforms across the qualification curricula and at this level to safeguard the efficacy and reputation of UK examination systems within the ever more competitive international community, especially during this time of economic uncertainty.

Calls for changes to the examination system are by no means unprecedented and they are almost invariably associated with waves of resistance, as well as innovation among those designing, delivering or participating in affected programmes (Perry and Sherlock, 2008).

At the core of this discussion the omnipresent discussion of ‘quality’ and ‘standards’ has been a prominent feature across literature and policy developments in education since at least the 1960s. More widely, assessment of educational centres’ quality and fitness-for-purpose of provision has led to the setting up of inspection bodies and procedures in UK; significant changes throughout 1990s to early 2000s, including Ofsted, the FEFC and QAA being set up (1993), and later the FEFC being disbanded and replaced by the Training Standards Council inspectorate (1997/2001).

Overall, this has created an externalised culture of assessment and scrutiny in the UK, which can have positive and negative affects on the experience of learners and the efficacy of awards being used and interpreted as they are set out. For a portion of the sector’s workforce, it has also fed a feeling of suspicion or even fear of external assessors of all types (inspectors, examiners, moderators, verifiers) and, more commonly still, a concern that the local contexts and specific student populations will not be adequately understood through an external lens. This issue can be particularly prominent in Art, Design and Media, and other creative subjects where the investment of personal perspectives and understanding of local context substantively informs student work.

Arguably, one of the positive counter-effects of this externalisation has been the increased involvement of industry, which is especially important at FE level to ensure the broadest range of progression options are made accessible and viable to learners. A milestone in this development was the merging of the Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) and University of London Examination and Assessment Council in 1996, which combined to become ‘Edexcel’ (who still design and provide BTEC awards bearing this acronym, to capitalise on this industrial heritage).

This was one of the events that signaled the birth of an ‘emergent’ learning and skills sector (16+ post-compulsory), which now sees coalitions of awarding bodies and professional organisations and associates monitoring in relation to contemporary professional contexts and skill expectations or requirements for employment in various disciplinary fields and industries.

However, change takes time and requires testing for efficacy, and an unprecedented number of models and trends for qualification and examination structures have come in and out of use during the past two decades. According to Perry and Sherlock (2008: 50—51) the now almost phased-out NVQ was among the most common qualifications at the inception of the Learning and Skills Council in the 1990s. Its philosophy was linked to a belief that ‘competency in workplace skills could be judged through observed performance of a series of tightly defined tasks’ (ibid). Perry and Sherlock suggest that, in this, it failed to take into account the overall quality and characteristics of performance, and almost entirely disregarded notions of motivation, autonomy, pride in one’s work and excellence or ‘fine workmanship’ which are regarded as vital ingredients in many subject disciplines, both in study and professional service.

One key lesson from the NVQ (revisited later in stage two of the research section of this report), is that a range of approaches and methods for both creating and measuring ‘quality’ in learning are needed; as Perry and Sherlock suggest, ‘any simple notion that one pedagogy might be preferable to all others…is absurd’ (2008: 50—51).
This has relevance to the externalisation of summative assessments in general, but also specifically in Art, Design and Media, where the impossibility of one pedagogy across a learning framework that aspires to become autonomous as part of students’ discovery and development of a creative practice.

There are comparisons to be drawn and unpicked in terms of not only the different pedagogic approaches across the full range of curriculum areas (English, Maths, Science, etc.), but also the different Art, Design and Media pedagogies that reflect the spectrum of such practices in ‘the real world’ of professional practice.

Even discounting the specific cultural, technical and creative aspects of Art, Design and Media study, there are lessons to be learned from other approaches that foreground the learner at the heart of the assessment structure, and take account of the complex factors that impact performance. One of the most influential perspectives on assessment, now well recognised in schools but still relatively recent in HE, has concerned the importance of assessment for learning, as distinct from its traditional counterpart: assessment of learning (Black and Williams, 1999; DSCF, 1998). The use of both formative assessment and summative assessment seems to be especially important for independent learning because it allows pupils to understand the standard of performance expected of them, to monitor their own performance, and to know what they can do to improve.

The assessment for learning approach is often overshadowed by assessment of learning which is more concerned with the importance of reliable and valid measurements than the impact of assessment on learning (Hughes, 2014).
Relationship of Art, Design and Media to other subjects

Which subjects have similar characteristics in relation to their expectations of student achievement? The literature has revealed some unexpected subject alliances when it comes to awards that aim to identify and measure candidates’ abilities for:

- Independent and divergent thinking
- Risk taking
- Subjectivity
- Awareness and contextualisation of material in relation to broader areas.

Divergent thinking — Science

Harlen (1999) examines the role of assessments, both of a formative and summative nature, in supporting learning and increasing students’ confidence, know-how and performance in emulating some of the principles of scientific ‘practice.’ She says: ‘communicating their thinking through drawings, artefacts, actions, role play and concept mapping, as well as writing’ (p. 133) is valuable for nurturing a deeper understanding of the subject. It is worth acknowledging that such materials and artefacts are not consistently accepted within current summative examination procedures in the UK for science, but nonetheless it is important to take heed of her advocacy for the inclusion of processual material in the assessment for any subject in which divergent thinking and creativity is an asset, which unites art, design and science.

Subjectivity — English Lit

The affective element of assessing subjects that involve semantic inferences, personal judgements and interpretations, or creative writing at large, are infrequently acknowledged in literature on assessment in subjects other than art and design in which it is considered explicitly and repeatedly. However, Elliot (2013) conducted a study into the way that emotions and empathetic reactions to candidates’ scripts impact examinations in English as well as History essays. She says: ‘The marking of examination scripts is publicly conceptualised as a rule-based and rational process, governed in the UK by extensive codes of practice (QCA)...’ to promote reliability and comparability as key features of quality assessments. However, she continues, despite the fact that, ‘it is tacitly acknowledged that the qualitative judgement of essays is subjective’ the training for examiners and moderators does not explicitly acknowledge this or put strategies in place to increase reliability and consistency of marking. The training for English and History A-Level assessors are, however, supported by collective marking of sample scripts to foster a culture of assessing and awarding marks in which the implicit subjectivity is able to be understood and moderated or standardised by having several expert examiners discuss their judgements as a group. This process of team marking has beneficially been applied in a range of subjects, and has a clear value in the subject areas under discussion, which can be highly subjective and therefore unreliable, or lacking fairness, in their marking.
Risk-taking – Performing arts

BTEC Diplomas and Extended Diplomas in Performing Arts are offered by Pearson/Edexcel as a programme designed for students interested in a career in the performing arts industry. Like Art, Design and Media programmes, the specification also emphasises its transferable application and functional value in terms of fostering ‘enterprise skills that contribute to improve organisation, risk taking, communication and creativity’. The 2010 specification is 100% internally assessed, externally moderated.

For example, the following guidelines come from the level 3 BTEC unit on ‘improvisation’, which is inextricably associated with agile thinking and risk-taking (creativity skills that are valued by employers outside arts-related employment),

▶ Learners will be assessed in at least two contrasting improvisations, each lasting a minimum of three minutes, at least one as part of a group.

Like other Art, Design and Media subjects, risk-taking is among several key qualities associated with the assessment requirements that are slippery, if not impossible, to accurately measure (Unit 21 Drama Improvisation, 2010: 3),

▶ The most important improvisation skill that learners must develop is that of offering and accepting; generosity of spirit, acceptance of risk, going where the other actor wants to take the journey with speed and ingenuity will develop thereafter.

However, to navigate this, suggested delivery for tutors is highly student-centred and implicitly accepts the relationality of these skills with other factors, such as interaction with other candidates and individuals’ emotional readiness (Unit 21: 4),

▶ When learners have gained confidence in basic improvisation techniques, they can then spend time on rehearsed or polished improvisation. For the purposes of this unit, there is no need to perfect the improvisation towards a final script. Rather the improvised play should be structured so that learners can place their created characters within it and still remain flexible, within that agreed structure.

This latter point also raises the issue of timing, which can be a sticking point in controlled and, especially, externally assessed or examined tasks.

The guidance above concerning the flexibility of assessment structures (timetabling prohibitors notwithstanding) will be salient to most teachers and lecturers of Art, Design and Media, who will recognise that risk-taking through experimentation — testing, trialing and rethinking, retesting and remaking — is a time and labour intensive process that can lack predictability. However, ironically, such flexibility is perhaps most problematic when the subject aims to award value to learning processes (which are unpredictable, personal and generative; they lead to more and deeper learning), rather than solely to products (predictable, predefinable, rational and concrete).
The subjects mentioned above are just a few of those that, for different reasons and to varying degrees, face similar problems to Art, Design and Media assessments at pre-degree level and that highlight how the tensions inherent to the multiple purposes of assessment can be reconciled:

- documenting and assessing processes as well as outcomes;
- assessment teams or committees;
- moderator training and support (concerning affect and subjectivity);
- flexible assessment periods and mechanisms to support the maturation of creative thinking and accommodate risk taking.

What other factors, and specialist mechanisms, need to be considered in the case of Art, Design and Media to ensure valid, fit for purpose assessments that reflect (and accurately measure) the nature of creative learning? Some of the recognised issues of critical importance to the efficacy of assessments in delivering a robust measure of creative learning are briefly summarised below, followed by a short review of some of the strategies employed to promote the most effective and useful assessments possible.

### Authenticity/real-worldness

In formal learning and assessment, ‘authenticity’ is bound up with the design of educational experiences, such as assessments, that require learners to apply their understanding and skills to problems and scenarios analogous to the real-world they will face in the future, sometimes requiring them to transfer knowledge to different contexts from those in which they learned (Wiggins, 1993: 229—30). In this way, even when conducted for summative purposes, it can often serve a developmental purpose for students’ learning (DCSF, 2008).

Canadian arts education scholar, Fiona Blaikie (2010, 62—3) asserts that there are three main challenges to the overall efficacy of assessment in the arts: the subjectivity of forming judgements, reflected in the bias of the assessor; the ‘qualitative nature’ of arts subjects which are typically incompatible with more positivistic, fact-based, quantifiable measures and frameworks; and, thirdly, the uncertainty and un-generalisability of methods of assessment (i.e. crudely, the approach to appraising a painting will be different from a video work, while there are limitless qualitative differences between works beyond their medium).

### Student autonomy

Assessing autonomy can be highly problematic, particularly where the control over task-setting lies beyond or, even more so, outside of the centre in which they study and have informed student-tutor relationships; ‘autonomous behaviour should be self-initiated’ rather than ‘generated in response to a task in which the observed behaviours are either explicitly or implicitly required’ (Benson, 2001 p. 52, cited by O’Leary, 2007; regarding relationality see also: Orr, 2007). In O’Leary’s study of linguistic students’ independent completion of learner diaries and development of personal portfolios revealed, ‘that the nature of the assessment activity clearly plays a key role in the development of autonomy’.

Nigel Jackson (2003 p.8) purports that, ‘(t)he current assessment model with its atomised approach to assessing learning at module/curriculum unit level is a major inhibitor of designs for creative learning which may need to foster development over a longer period of time and a range of contexts before assessing capability’. This implies that a more holistic and flexible approach is beneficial to creative learning, which is a theme that will be mined further in consultation with research participants from the FE community. ‘Little (1996) and William & Burden (1997) also emphasise the importance of collaboration and social interactions in the development of autonomy.’ — art design students need opportunities to work in collaborative projects and team-based scenarios to not only support the authenticity of learning, but also to foster their independence and confidence through such interactions.
Externalisation, standardisation and moderation practices
Thirdly, the control of tasks by which a candidate is assessed is of course a determining factor in the validity and purposefulness of the assessment and the learning it aims to measure. Traditionally, projects across the majority of arts programmes at Higher Education and Further Education level are either fully generated by the student, or negotiated iteratively with their tutors or departmental staff more widely. Other models are, however, a more prevalent feature of large-scale, high stakes assessments that receive significant political and media attention, such as the A-Level and, increasingly, their vocational counterparts such as the Edexcel/Pearson BTEC. Of the top-down standardisation or control of task-setting, such as by an awarding body, Lewis Elton (2005, p.2) warns that ‘it is in general neither possible nor desirable, to assess a piece of creative work, against predetermined criteria — the criteria have to be interpreted in the light of the work.’

Elton advocates a more interpretivist approach to assessment. According to the literature this can be found at the juncture between compulsory education and higher education in the UK, the Art Foundation, or Foundation Diploma in Art and Design. This has since the mid-twentieth century and especially post the Coldstream Report (1960) been the pre-university ‘rite of passage’ for the majority of artists, designers and makers to begin to identify their own motivations, interests and abilities in across a spectrum of subject disciplines. In this capacity, the Foundation is often seen by professional and academic contexts as ‘the domain in which legitimate cultural production commences’ (Robins, 2003).

However, it is an example of the tensions inherent in this phase of education: the need to strike a delicate balance between nurturing autonomous learners in modes of authentic learning, and the irrefutable requirement for an examination system that is generally regarded seriously, which is to say is valid, reliable and rigorous.
The Research
Stage 1: Questionnaires

Methods and sampling
Questionnaires were sent via email to a national sample of 433 programme leaders of pre-degree qualifications in Art, Design and Media. The contact details were acquired from a UK public sector database agency called Oscar Research Ltd. An original database containing named contacts across FE and HE contexts associated with Art and Design or Media departments were reduced and filtered to identify an appropriate research sample based on:

- the contacts’ department/faculty name (with exclusions made to those in Arts and Humanities departments, rather than Art, Design and Media and associated creative subjects);
- the contacts’ seniority and job title (with exclusions made to those in directorial and professional/administrative roles within the faculty, rather than relevant programme leadership and lecturing positions);
- the contacts’ employment context (Sixth Form centres, FE colleges and HE institutions that incorporate FE provision).

To augment the reduced database, desk research was then used to identify further named contacts in appropriate roles from an online search of college and Sixth Form websites, as well as through college switchboards.

The online survey was launched using a direct email invitation sent to the total sample population of 433 Programme Leaders and Lecturers (see Appendix 1).

The online survey remained open for 5 weeks from May to June 2014, with several reminders issued to contacts during this time. It yielded a total return rate of 42% (182 respondents out of the 433 invited to participate).

A combination of SPSS software and the in-built analytical tools in the Survey Monkey platform was used to perform an initial analysis of the survey data, in order to:

- examine relationships between variables in the respondent population of Programme Leaders from a range of FE contexts;
- compare groups of respondents, to determine whether there were significant differences or influencing factors that corresponded to particular attitudes, perspectives and experiences regarding summative assessment in Art, Design and Media.

Data is represented in this report with the following features:

- Decimals rounded to the nearest whole number in the percentages shown;
- ‘RN’ refers to Respondent Number, the identifier applied to every individual survey respondent (from 1—182).

About the respondents
The sample group of Further Education programme leaders and lecturers working on pre-degree qualifications in Art, Design and Media had the following characteristics:

- **Gender** spread in the group was very even (almost 1:1)
- **Ethnic background** was significantly less even, with 90% from a ‘White British’ or other ‘white’ background. This, however, is broadly representative of the UK, HE sector, in which evidence suggests as few as 8.6% come from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds (Equality in Higher Education Report 2013). This is still much lower than the general population distribution which, in the last census survey of 2011, indicates that 14% come from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds.

Befitting the experience level and career span of the sample group, 80% of those that answered were **aged** 40 years or more, with only 1 respondent less than 30 years old. This is likely to mean that most participants will have experienced changes in assessment cultures, which will have informed and shaped their understandings shared in the survey.

- **English** was the first language of the vast majority of the sample (<99%), minimising the possible effects of linguistic barriers in the survey data. This exceeds the 91% general population statistics for those who spoke English as a first language (census survey of 2011).
Employment in Art, Design and Media education

The spread of the sample group’s current employment, across the main education contexts, was as follows:

- 13% (23 respondents) worked in a Sixth Form centre;
- 64% (117 respondents) worked in a Further Education college;
- 22% (40 respondents) worked in a Higher Education institution/University that incorporates provision of pre-degree awards.

A significant majority of respondents (84%) had been teaching for more than 10 years, positioning them favourably to comment on any changes in the procedures and methods for summative assessment in pre-degree qualifications (of the remaining sample, 11% had taught for 5-10 years; 3% for 2-5 years and <2% for up to 2 years). This ‘career length’ factor also increases the likelihood of respondents having experienced summative assessment at different levels and for different qualifications. This is confirmed by the findings to survey Question 2, in which 73% of respondents indicated that they had experience of teaching right across three sectors (Secondary, Further Education and Higher Education).

This distribution of experience is important for this research, which seeks to better understand the issues and effects of policies and practices for assessing Art, Design and Media qualifications in pre-degree awards. For decades the progression routes for students wishing to study Art, Design and Media subjects at degree level have presented as something of an anomaly in relation to other subject pathways to progression. This is due in part to the relatively small numbers of students who progress straight from A-levels to a BA in Art Design or Media. As one secondary school teacher and focus group attendee explains,

- We had one boy who tried to go, this year, straight to a degree programme, but he failed, he applied to all kinds of places actually and didn’t get in. He had an A* [grade awarded for A-level qualification]. (IN16, FG4)

Achievement of the highest grade of at A-level does not correlate effectively with the requirements for study at degree level. Students typically need to progress to Foundation Diploma in Art & Design programmes in order to develop the skills and knowledge required for undergraduate study. Although this situation represents a cause for concern, perhaps surprisingly, it has not generated more dialogue and there remains a lack of common value between secondary school examination expectations for Art, Design and Media qualifications and the expectations that degree level art education places on learners.

- Foundation programme candidates continue to be selected on ‘portfolio interview’ in which the interviewers are very often looking at the very same artwork that will be graded for ‘A’ level examination. That there may be two groups of art and design educators considering the merits of the same work and often making different pronouncements, says less about the educators themselves and more about their positioning in relation to institutional values and assessment methods. (Robins 2003: 82)

This observation, from a chapter about transition stages in art and design education was made over a decade ago but the situation appears to have changed very little.
Alternative educational contexts
A number of respondents also have experience of teaching outside of formal education, which they disclosed through 'open text’ comments. For example, several (<5%) indicated that they had worked in museum or gallery education departments, while others had taught or delivered arts education projects through prisons, youth centres and other private and ‘recreational’ service providers. Since the question of ‘informal education’ experience was not asked explicitly, it might reasonably be expected that a higher proportion of the sample could have had exposure to alternative arts educational practices which may be, to varying extents, disassociated with measurement and assessment and may have informed their perspectives and attitudes within their formal teaching contexts.

Art, Design and Media qualifications offered by respondents’ institutions
In their current place of work, respondents to Question 3 (166 in total) indicated that the following Art, Design and Media qualifications are provided:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Art, Design and Media Qualification type</th>
<th>Total % (and No.) of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GCSE</td>
<td>21% (35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCE A-Levels (incl. AS, A2)</td>
<td>44% (73)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GNVQ</td>
<td>2% (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2 Vocational Diploma</td>
<td>61% (101)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3 Vocational Diploma</td>
<td>73% (121)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 4 Vocational Diploma</td>
<td>23% (38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundation Diploma in Art and Design</td>
<td>75% (124)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA/BFA</td>
<td>33% (54)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The exam boards for A-level to Foundation Diploma are split as follows (excluding GNVQ which was taught by too few respondents to be represented here):

### Foundation Art & Design by Awarding Body

- UAL Awarding Body (78%)
- Pearson/Edexcel (19%)
- AQA (4%)
- Other Awarding Body (2%)

### Level 4 vocational diploma by Awarding Body

- UAL Awarding Body (50%)
- Pearson/Edexcel (43%)
- AQA (1%)
- OCR (2%)
- Other Awarding Body (4%)
The exam boards for A-level to Foundation Diploma are split as follows (excluding GNVQ which was taught by too few respondents to be represented here):

### Level 3 vocational diploma by Awarding Body

- UALab (50%)
- Pearson/Edexcel (43%)
- AQA (1%)
- OCR (2%)
- Other Awarding Body (4%)

### Level 2 vocational diploma by Awarding Body

- UALab (48%)
- Pearson/Edexcel (45%)
- OCR (3%)
- Other Awarding Body (4%)
Responses show a spread of awarding bodies and qualifications, with some bodies strongly associated with Level 4 pre-degree study: UAL Awarding Body consistently amasses approximately half of the vocational diplomas from Level 2 upwards, but this jumps to 78% at Foundation Diploma level. This trend seems to be supported by respondents’ comments about this awarding body. When asked whether their choice of awarding body was influenced by the assessment methods offered, comments referenced a number of qualities that were felt to support UAL Awarding Body offers a range of diplomas at Levels 2, 3 and 4 intended for students wishing to continue their general education at an advanced level through applied learning. Although their Extended Diploma (a two year programme) and Foundation Diploma (a one year programme) adopt an identical approach to assessment it was the Foundation Diploma to which respondents refer in the pie chart above.

Four salient themes were picked up from a qualitative analysis of these comments, including:

1. a perceived professional relevance and rigour of assessment criteria;
2. a perceived coherence of holistic assessment criteria;
3. respondents’ perception of flexibility in assessment criteria and procedures, which empowered programme staff to design student-centred approaches that best fit their teaching and learning context;
4. respondents’ preferences for internal moderation and external verification assessment models, and administrative simplicity for centres.

Example comments included:

- The UAL awards offer assessment criteria that has a more appropriate creative focus which allows for a broader interpretation of process and outcome. This approach to assessment develops learner skills in planning, reflection and contextual understanding. (RN.83, Q5)
The role of assessment in facilitating routes for progression to higher education and employment

Question 9 asked respondents to consider how well they felt current final assessment processes in a selection of mainstream pre-degree awards facilitate direct progression to BA programmes. Responses to this question were particularly revealing. There was a strong sense from the findings (represented in the bar chart below) that qualifications which are currently structured and assessed in a more unitised, segmented way (such as the A-level and GNVQ) are significantly less fit for purpose in preparing students for BA entry in comparison to qualifications which feature assessment by portfolio and exhibition. These function as a holistic summative assessment at the end of a programme, which, based on a number of comments, is seen to increase independent learning and opportunities for students to demonstrate their creative potential for further study or employment in the creative industries.

In respondents’ comments a recent dissatisfaction with particular exam boards is beginning to register. 18 centres commented that they had, or were contemplating, changing pre-degree awarding body in direct response to recent changes to assessment procedures; in particular, one awarding body’s introduction of an externally set final assessment paper. Perceptions ranged from concerns about the prescribed nature of student projects and briefs, which limited centres’ freedom to facilitate students’ creative learning, as captured in the comments below:

- The Edexcel Level 3 Extended Diploma and Foundation Diploma had become too convoluted and prescriptive, UAL offered the autonomy to develop creative students in our ethos. UAL Level 2 offered a better assessment and programme structure as well as no final exam. (RN. 128)

- We have moved from Pearson to UAL because the assessment protocols are suited to Art & Design disciplines, the proposed assessment structures for Pearson are not fit for purpose. (RN. 34)

Some respondents also noted the effect this issue may have on continuity and progression to further study, with the gap between what pre-degree programmes can teach and what undergraduate degrees expect potentially enlarged, thereby undermining the function of the pre-degree award:

- For the Foundation Diploma and Extended Diploma (...) BTEC/ Pearson’s approach is quite convoluted and less suited to the creative freedom of the subject area. It actually makes the process of assessment difficult and cumbersome. UALAB’s assessment has more parity with HEIs. (RN. 171)

In particular, some of the most common criticisms were concerned with the recent turn to external assessments as being, in effect, an inversion of the widely perceived purpose of most Art, Design and Media qualifications as setting the conditions for creative learning, experimentation and development of student autonomy. For example:

- We are currently in the process of moving all provision at Levels 2, 3 & 4 from BTEC to UAL. UAL qualifications are holistic, flexible and with an overall vision, while BTEC Diplomas are bitty and mundane. They are more to do with completing a list of chores rather than asking for real excellence. (RN. 31)

- We think that BTEC/Edexcel Pearson does no longer support a broad approach to Creative Education - We are moving all programmes to UAL (RN 79).

Respondents’ critical view of the externalisation of Art, Design and Media assessments by certain awarding bodies also evoked the worry that external assessment strategies have a tendency to encourage ‘grade chasing’; the pursuit of a quantifiable result or mark, over and above the pursuit of a qualitative experience, for example:

- …UAL qualifications foster ownership of their own creativity whereas BTEC programmes are very prescriptive and restrictive. There are other problems to do with a checklist like assessments and external examinations, but these are secondary to the main dissatisfaction. (RN. 31)

- We moved to UAL for our Level 3 Art and Design programmes as the structure discourages the ‘grade chasing’ that we see with Edexcel. (RN. 175)
The current A2 and previous A-levels have an externally set timed examination. The response from respondents was that this qualification, which is externally examined, does not prepare students adequately for studying at BA level. 52% found it to be poor at this and, while 34% felt it was adequate only 7% endorse A-Level as a favourable option for preparing students for further study. Some of the reasoning behind these opinions is expressed below:

- A Level is a box ticking exercise that does not teach students to be independent and self-motivated, skills required to be successful on BA Degree creative programmes. (RN. 77)

- A levels seem to be moving away from modular, coursework based assessment which is strange considering that University programmes (BA's) are modular and involve significant coursework elements. (RN. 83)

In Art, Design and Media progression from A-level to University is not straightforward and has not followed the expected trajectory of other academic subjects. Students are less likely to proceed from A-level Art and Design to an Art Design or Media undergraduate programme than in other subject areas. For example in focus group 4, conducted with 4 teachers of A-level Art and Design, a ball park figure of less than 15% of students currently progress directly to a degree programme in Art, Design and Media. The remaining students who pursue further study in Art, Design and Media progress instead to a the Foundation Diploma in Art & Design prior to starting a degree. Financial considerations may increasingly prohibit certain students from this progression route. In addition the number of BA providers accepting students from A-level programmes appears to be increasing. This was confirmed in the interviews conducted for this research where it was additionally noted that noted that design subjects, such as Architecture, Graphic Design and Product Design, appear to be encouraging direct application from A-level.

The current summative methods for assessment of Foundation Diplomas in Art and Design and UAL Diplomas and Extended Diplomas in Art, Design and Media, differ quite substantively from A-level qualifications in Art and design. Assessment methods can be seen to influence what is taught and hence the students’ Art, Design and Media outcomes.

Respondents’ views on the suitability of the different pre-degree qualifications for preparing students for progression to further study and for allowing continuity with the values of undergraduate study positioned the Foundation Diploma in Art and Design as the optimal qualification. 89% of the survey respondents perceived the qualification to prepare students ‘very well’ for the next stage of their education. This view was supported by comments such as:

- The Foundation Diploma is the only qualification that really sets students up to succeed at Uni. Rather than jumping through hoops to hit criteria students receive a more holistic learning experience. They make informed decisions about the subject and gain independence. (RN. 35)

- The Foundation Diploma’s emphasis on presentation through exhibiting, problem solving critical reflection and research cohesively prepare students for higher education. A Level doesn’t require the exhibition of work and is fixed at level 3 where as the Foundation Diploma is assessed at Level 4 giving a greater parity with undergraduate study. (RN. 104)

GNVQ was less well-known, given the majority of respondents do not currently teach it, with 38% unsure of how to rate its efficacy in preparing students for HE study. However, the broad picture was not positive; 35% felt it did not prepare students well, or poorly, and 23% only adequately. Almost half of the sample group (48%) believed that current Vocational Diplomas (e.g. BTEC) prepared students adequately but not well; 34% were more optimistic about them (‘very well’) and 14% more critical (‘not well’) indicating a spread of ambivalence and significant scope for improvement.
Attitudes to external versus internal assessment strategies

Questions 10—13 of the survey asked the sample group of experienced art and design programme leaders whether they thought that the principles of external assessment that are present in GCSE and A-level could be usefully introduced into pre-degree assessment (10), as well as if those typified by Bachelors degrees (BFA/BA) could be beneficially cascaded across the previous level.

The findings represented below are an amalgam of Questions 10—13, which explore preferences toward external assessment, or internal assessment and external moderation and invite further explanation from tutors. From an initial analysis, there are three main views, or groupings of views, which characterise the following Programme Leader/Tutor respondent segments:

► Supportive of external assessment;
► Supportive of internal assessment with external moderation and verification;
► Moderate or changeable attitude toward both of these assessment strategies.

These perspectives will be explored further at the interview and focus group phase of this research, to build a more holistic and well-evidenced picture of the understandings and experiences that support them, as well as to develop insights as to how each of the different assessment strategies can be most beneficially and effectively applied within the Art, Design and Media subject areas.

Supportive of external assessment

Overall, approximately 20% of respondents expressed views that were broadly supportive of approaches that include some external assessment strategies to measure Art, Design and Media students’ performance (percentage averaged across Questions 10 and 12, which aim to test for question bias)

27% agreed with the hypothetical application of GCSE/A-level approaches across other pre-degree awards (Q10). Qualitative data was collected around this question, through an open text comments box (Q11). This yielded the following responses, which provide some initial insight into tutors’ reasoning for their views:

► I think at level 3 it can help students to respond to brief set externally as this mirrors work based practice and often the content of year one Uni programme (RN. 151; FE College)
► Supportive of external assessment;
► I like the fact that final major projects on GCSE and A-Level are separately set and received after the course is begun apart from the anticipation and excitement of something new and unplanned, it puts more importance on the FMP to both the students and the staff (RN. 56; FE College)
► Would help remove some of the subjectivity involved in marking creative subjects and offer parity across institutions (RN. 123; FE College)

14% disagreed with the application of strategies typified by Bachelor’s degrees in Art, Design and Media, which commonly assess student-generated final projects and programme-work, as opposed to externally set and examined final assessments, across pre-degree awards. Tutors’ explanations, within a sub group of the 4 respondents who also added a comment, included the following responses:

► The unique way in which degree students make their own show of art or follow art college approach means that each show is so different — an exam might breed uniformity-like in GCSE and AS/A2 in which there are obvious responses everywhere you moderate. But a consistency in awarding grades would be more beneficial. (RN. 63; School with Sixth Form Centre)
► I think the rigour of external assessment moderates the marking outcomes (RN. 95; HE Institution with FE)
► ‘Rigour’ that government want to our vocational qualifications is not best achieved through ‘exams’ in art and design but in final projects that are then externally assessed. It is the lack of rigour in the teacher assessments that is the problem and can lead to centres inflating grades etc. Sampling is not rigorous and still allows centres to claim awards for all their students at the end of the programme (RN. 69; FE College)
Moderate or changeable attitude toward both of these assessment strategies

Across the respondent population, approximately 12% held what might be regarded as a ‘moderate’ or ‘middle-ground’ position. This meant they tended to show an inclination to favour the internally assessed, externally moderated approaches of Bachelor’s degrees, but also saw value in incorporating an element of externally set and examined final assessment, as is more typical of GCSE and A-Level Art and Design. Correspondingly, most of this group answered positively to both Q10—11 and Q12—13, although a few (4) answered ‘no’ to both.

The following selection of comments provides an insight into some of the reasons given for this. Firstly, in response to the proposition of expanding GCSE and A-Level Art and Design, respondents in this sub-group said (Q11):

- Depends on the level of qual [ification] Very important to have that objectivity and level playing field that is only really achievable using an external moderating process. On Foundation students write their own proposals and the work is internally and externally moderated. (RN. 163; FE College)
- Part of the course could do this [incorporate externally set and examined assessments] but some aspects of the conceptually based practical are developmental and need assessment first by internal moderation. (RN. 81; FE College)

Correspondingly, in response to the suggestion of cascading BA-type approaches downward to pre-degree qualifications (Q13), comments included:

- Our learners and the skills, knowledge and understanding they need to succeed in our industry cannot and should not be judged by an exam scenario. If the externally set assessment was vocational ie: A topic or theme they need to use to produce a short film then yes it could work but why would we restrict their creative potential by doing this? (RN. 14, FE College)
- Yes on Art Foundation Programmes, however A level is a platform to embed skills and necessitates flexibility to include starting points generated on a more national level to ensure a democratic choice of subjects for learners within the final unit(s). (RN. 74; Sixth Form Centre)
- It would allow for more innovation and challenge. However it may well lead to a greater disparity in results which may make it harder for management culture to accept. (RN. 15; FE College)

Indicative of the nuanced issues in this complex territory of Art, Design and Media assessment, these comments were given by the same respondent (RN. 56, FE/HE Institute) across both questions:

- Q10-11: I like the fact that final major projects on GCSE and A-Level are separately set and received after the programme is begun apart from the anticipation and excitement of something new and unplanned, it puts more importance on the FMP [final major project] to both the students and the staff.
- Q12-13: Currently this is what we do the students will provide a project proposal however whereas in Foundation where students are at a level where they can plan and perceive the remits of their own project, at level two the students haven’t got the skills or experience yet to do this effectively.

Those who were more familiar with external assessment from teaching in a school context did not offer a positive endorsement of such strategies. An analysis of co-variance of Q10-13 answers with respondents’ employment history reveals that those who thought there was a case for external assessment came from across the teaching spectrum (Schools, FE/HE), with no more than a 10% variance between each phase.

Although the distribution of these attitudes was not markedly different across the current teaching contexts of those who responded, closer examination and a more nuanced understanding of what is meant will be sought in the interview stage.
Skills-based assessments
The survey also asked the group about their opinions of assessment strategies that separate skills-based measures from assessments of other forms of knowledge and understanding. This was a purely qualitative question designed to elicit a broad indication of attitudes and other reactions to this scenario.

In response to this free-text question, a review and top-level coding of the qualitative data revealed three broad attitudes, which can be broken down as follows:

Out of 123 responses to this question, the overwhelming majority (97 responses) were strongly against separation, while 18 respondents had some reservations and 10 respondents were in favour of assessing discrete elements and competences.

These findings correspond to the body of literature on assessment in Art, Design and Media which is widely in favour of holistic approaches to assessment of student work.
The Research
Stage 2: Interviews and Focus Groups

Methods and sampling
The second phase of the research was used to gather more nuanced qualitative evidence concerning assessment in Art, Design and Media. This included face-to-face interviews and focus groups for the richer communicative context that they provide.

All programme leaders who completed the online questionnaire were asked to indicate whether they were willing to participate in a face-to-face interview. Over 60% of the first 100 questionnaire respondents expressed their willingness to be invited for a follow-up interview or focus group.

The initial research plan included a series of 6 interviews with FE programme leaders and tutors conducted in their place of work. In the light of recent DfE recommendations and in consultation with the funder for this research it also became important for us to use the second phase of the research to capture more expert views and opinions on external assessment. We therefore took the decision to put in place more focus groups and less one-to-one interviews than had originally been planned.

The research schedule interview times also coincided with the examination period and or arrangements for the end of term and many programme leaders who had expressed willingness were subsequently constrained by work commitments and periods of annual leave. Interviews were instead conducted during August 2014 with 2 experienced Level 3—4 course leaders:

- One interview was held in a specialist arts school in the North of England, with FE and HE provision that offered Level 3 courses through to postgraduate degrees.

- The second was held in a Sixth Form Centre in the north of England as part of a large multi-campus FE college which offered Level 1 courses through to Foundation degrees.

Semi-structured interviews focused around similar research questions and address similar aspects to the questionnaire, they also provided scope to follow up participants’ original questionnaire responses, seeking further detail and explanation in the participants’ own terms.

The interviews enlarged upon the salient issues and perspectives raised through the survey responses, specifically in relation to the following topics:

- Individual experiences of different summative forms of assessment;
- The benefits and problems of external assessment;
- The benefits and problems of internal assessment and external moderation;
- The impact that these forms of summative assessment have on students’ work and progression.

Focus groups
Focus groups were selected for their capacity to draw out more detailed information about the ways in which different assessment practices and procedures are understood to impact of student learning and the efficacy of examinations to capture this in a way that is both authentic and reliable. This method of interview also enabled us to extended the range of interviewees and incorporate those with an overview of progression routes through to university and those representing distinctive pathways through to higher education.

The literature on focus groups generally recommends including between four and ten participants (MacIntosh, 1993). There is also a recommendation that interviewees interact and contribute more authentically if they are in a group with some commonality (Bloor, 2001). We therefore planned the groupings to maximize ease of discussion through an understanding of common ground, specialist terminology and comparable educational experiences.

Focus groups explicitly use group interaction as part of the method. This means that instead of the researcher asking each person to respond to a question in turn, people are encouraged to talk to one another: asking questions, exchanging anecdotes and commenting on each other’s experiences and points of view. This method is particularly useful for exploring people’s knowledge and experiences and can be used to examine not only what people think but how they think and why they think that way.

One-to-one interviews give more control to researchers than a focus group in which participants often take the initiative. A focus group can therefore enable researchers to gain more information in a shorter period of time.
Focus groups are particularly useful for exploring the degree of consensus on a given topic (Morgan, 2002). However, their limitations should also be acknowledged, in common with one-to-one interviews an emphasis cannot be placed on generalizable findings due to the small numbers of people participating and the likelihood that the participants will not be a representative sample. Qualitative data derived from focus group participants in this report is presented in addition to quantitative findings to create a more detailed analysis.

The focus groups were all conducted at the IoE with two members of the research team present. Interviews and focus groups were digitally recorded and professionally transcribed. The coding frame was based on the semi-structured questions used by focus group moderators and interviewers, but also developed in response to emergent themes in order to reflect the capacity of focus groups to generate new ideas and directions.

Focus Group 1 was comprised of a sample of questionnaire respondents working in a range of contexts from FE colleges, art colleges and universities. They were selected for their willingness to offer views and opinions in the questionnaire and as individuals who would be likely to have salient views and opinions on assessment. Of the 15 programme leaders contacted, 7 were able to take up the invitation to attend.

Focus group 2 invited additional participants not consulted in the questionnaire. These were selected for their expertise in the field Art, Design and Media assessment, programme design and for knowledge of progression routes. Of 12 participants invited only three were able to attend this group.

Focus group 3. It was important for the research to have the views of BA programme leaders from Art, Design and Media. We also wanted representatives from the National Society for Art and Design Education and other professional bodies and those with close links to the creative industries. 15 participants were invited and 5 attended.

Focus group 4 was convened to elicit views from A-level teachers and moderators in response to the frequent discussion of this pre-degree qualification in focus groups 1–3. The partiality of FG4 participants needs to be acknowledged, as all can be seen as having an academic bias, in that they are either current or former Masters and Doctoral students from the IoE. However, these teachers’ academic interest in the assessment of art and design qualifications potentially positions them usefully as having more expert knowledge than a random selection might have provided. 5 participants were invited and 4 attended.

Data from focus groups and interviews is presented together and represented in this report with the following features:

- ‘IN, Interviewee Number, the identifier applied to each individual interview or focus group participant (from 1—18)
- ‘FG’ refers to the focus groups (from 1—4).

At all stages the research design conformed to the ethical guidelines for educational research set out by the British Educational Research Association, which are available at: www.bera.ac.uk/files/2008/09/ethica1.pdf

Exploring views and attitudes about the range of approaches to summative assessment in pre-degree awards

Focus group participants (FGPs) were asked to comment on their perceptions of the efficacy of current assessment regimes in place for pre-degree Art, Design and Media qualifications with which they were familiar.

In two of the four focus groups discussion initially circled around the question of how important summative assessment was, and indeed to what degree an emphasis on summative assessment was needed at all. These discussions can be related in part to the history of the Foundation Diploma in Art and Design, which, as FGPs commented, was once passed or failed. Levels of achievement were instead measured by a student’s success in acquiring a place on their chosen BA programme. To some extent there is a legacy of this perception of achievement in current qualifications where students are selected for their chosen degree programmes in unit 6 (Level 3), before they are awarded a final grade for their qualification at Level 4. Traditionally, progression to BA study has rarely been contingent on final grades, therefore summative assessment may be regarded as a relatively inconsequential aspect of the programme.

It was acknowledged however, that expectations have changed and assessment now forms an important part of the student learning experience. Interviewees and FGPs stressed the importance of a range of assessment methods including formative and ipsative alongside other success indicators such as the development of confidence and independent study skills, that are more difficult to capture in an external assessment.
The Research

Stage 2: Interviews and Focus Groups

Reviewing the current assessment system for Foundation Diplomas, extended Diplomas

Those working on pre-degree programmes in HE institutions and FE colleges felt that the current system of internal assessment and external moderation works effectively to create a rigorous system which is authentic to the subject area and prepares students for further study. An experienced FE programme manager highlighted perceptions, regarding creative arts pedagogy and the current assessment system for Art, Design and Media, from outside the UK.

Internationally they are looking at this as a good model, so rather than us looking at how they are getting ranked in league tables, eighty-seventh or something, instead of worrying about that, we should be watching them watching us, because they are saying that they like this model and it’s got some value, which it has. (1,FG1)

Those leading BA programmes in focus group 3, also stressed the importance of the current assessment regime for Extended Diploma and Foundation Diploma programmes as enabling students to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and potential for further study. Significantly, they advocate assessment that enables a holistic approach to the subject, where knowledge and understanding and practical skills can be assessed together.

Assessment across different awards and levels of pre degree qualifications

Acknowledging that current pre-degree qualifications in Art, Design and Media employ a range of approaches to summative assessment one FGP remarked, ‘it’s quite a fractious sort of mix’ (IN2,FG1) and this sentiment was iterated through other focus groups.

From discussions it became apparent that the differences in assessment procedures heavily influence what is valued, learnt and taught across the spectrum of pre-degree awards to a greater extent than any variances in assessment criteria. Therefore, individual programmes of study, operating at the same level often embody distinctive subject pedagogies and principles. This also manifests in the formation of ‘communities of practice’ (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) where shared values are demonstrated and reinforced, leading to cohesion between professionals who identify with particular qualifications.

Programmes, such as the Foundation Diploma in Art and Design and the A-level often manifest clear subject pedagogies, which closely relate the histories to institutional values and qualifications (the ‘art school’ or the secondary school, traditional & academic or progressive, liberal & Bauhaus derived). Moreover, these values are also informed by the function and significance of summative assessment within the community of practice (school league tables, Russell Group University status etc.).

Interviewees and FGPs, who had experience of teaching a range of programmes and levels were also concerned about the misunderstanding that can occur, and the contrasting values that may be held, in different communities of practice. As an assistant dean notes,

▶ I had the biggest shock, when I went to work in a university, which was seven years ago (I’d been teaching A-level previously) and I did my first portfolio review for Foundation. So the students brought their portfolios, and of course it was the A-level portfolio, and it had that summer’s exam piece ...halfway through the day I heard a colleague say if I see another bloody thing about X, Y and Z I’m going to scream. And I said, you do realise that was the exam question last summer? (IN4,FG1).

In this account of student entry interviews, the university colleague involved in selecting students, and therefore assessing students’ portfolios, seems unfamiliar with assessment procedures for A-level Art and Design, which involve a timed, externally set examination. S/he also registers the issue as a frustration, because the portfolios fail to demonstrate much about students’ personal interests and capacity for further study in a subject that requires high levels of independence.

▶ If all the [A-level students’] portfolios look the same, it’s because of the exam question, all the teachers will do more or less what I used to do, prepare a couple of nice slide shows, a really good list of artists, tick, yeah, we’ve done it. And it becomes a very structured, very funneled experience, well lo and behold they all produce something similar. Particularly if you then have to send it away, which at one time we did, and that limited it’s size, and it’s form too! (IN4,FG1)

A number of noteworthy points are articulated in this commentary, first, the lack of common understanding about current requirements for assessment in different pre-degree qualifications and second, the impact on continuity and progression of the different values held in academic and other pre-degree routes.
The focus groups discussions provided some additional reasons why this persistent model of different values might be hard to unpick. These discussions addressed the extent to which assessment criteria might prevent more diverse student outcomes. Rather, it is the ways in which values are implicitly embedded in the interpretation of examination criteria used in the training of moderators — a point that will be expanded on at a later point.

Of the range of educators consulted it was those involved with Foundation Diploma in Art and Design, and UAL’s Diploma and Extended Diploma, who were the most positive about the efficacy and reliability of their qualifications’ summative assessment procedures. Reasons for high levels of confidence in these particular awards came from perceptions of an assessment system, which was flexible, holistic and suited to the specificity of learning in Art, Design and Media subjects. These were perceived as,

- very different from some other subjects which have a linear progression and a linear way of measuring things, ours is much more organic and holistic and that notion of bringing together the synthesis of kind of skills and understanding. (IN1,FG1)

Furthermore it made sense to FGPs and interviewees that the qualities and values that were sought in the summative assessment of pre-degree awards corresponded to those sought in assessments of in students’ work being made by interview panels for BA programmes.

Programme leaders for BA courses in Art, Design and Media similarly valued the ways in which the UAL awarding body was emphasizing on portfolio development and developing qualifications which enable students to engage critically and contextually with their subject specialism. The complexity of these demands for assessing independent learners was acknowledged,

- We talk to the students a lot about there not being a right answer, you know, we spend a lot of our days talking about there is more than one right answer to your creative problem, whatever it is, and so inevitably when it comes to assessment we can’t be looking for the right answer. (IN4,FG1)

In an informative paper on students’ expectations and the difficulties that they may experience on Art, Design and Media BA programmes, Austerlitz et al write,

- Art and design pedagogy is concerned with the importance of students interacting with open-ness and uncertainty to enable them on graduation to negotiate the complex and unpredictable demands of the creative industries. The kind of knowledge that art and design deals with is procedural, provisional, socially constructed and ever changing. (2008)

The literature reviewed for this report reveals that many of the points made by Austerlitz et al (2008) could similarly be claimed in other subject areas, however there are fundamental expectations made of art, design and media students, which seek a manifestation of such openness and provisionality in forms and media that combine evidence of research, subject knowledge and contextual understanding with risk taking and experimentation. Moreover, evidence is sought in a very wide range of generative art, design and media forms. Reflecting on the expectation that BA providers will have of students one FE lecturer remarked.

- [We want] students who can demonstrate research, ideas development, practical skills, evaluation, contextual understanding and ability for independent study. (IN6,FG2)

When evaluating a system that is best placed to facilitate students achieving these areas of skill and knowledge FGPs referred to the unit of work often referred to as a Final Major Project.
Assessing synoptic knowledge and enabling student autonomy

The Foundation Diploma in Art and Design and UAL’s Extended Diploma’s Final Major Project (FMP) was held up as an effective summatively assessed unit, for which students are expected to demonstrate synoptic knowledge and skills by relating experiences of learning throughout the programme in a personally generated body of work relating to their chosen progression pathway for higher education or employment.

One FE lecturer valued UAL’s FMP for its emphasis on developing a mature, critical language for students to discuss their work, which prepared them very well for a BA programme.

I think they are very well geared for higher education because it’s sort of encouraging independence really, the whole remit seems to be that independence, and that’s obviously what they are going to need when they go into higher education, because it can be a huge, big shock, that transition from FE to HE, and I think it works particularly well, because I think in maybe previous awarding bodies specifications and assessment methodologies we’ve worked to, it’s been very much a tick box approach. This isn’t, and therefore the students are used to it, and of course obviously it’s not what they’ll get when they are up there, so up there being higher education. (IN1,17)

Understanding the differences in specialist BA programmes across the Art, Design and Media spectrum is a strategic and fundamental purpose of student learning at pre-degree level and one that was also signaled as being facilitated by the Final Major Project.

The assessment also needs to fit not just the kind of level or purpose of the course, but the discipline practice actually, and how we to some extent recognise what the practice is in our particular subject. (IN5,FG1)

As an FE programme leader states,

- The advantage is they [students] are getting used to self-initiating their area of interest and focus, and they are having to pick their way through what that really means. (IN17, I)

The emphasis is afforded in part due to the time, structure and place of the summative assessment in the last stage, unit 7, of these qualifications. The same programme leader adds.

- it really is a summative learning experience, shall we say, as opposed to assessment, because it’s like we’ve done all this, we’ve presented you with, we’ve shown you how you can explore, how you can research, how you can develop an idea, now you have a go, initiating it yourself. So I think it’s a good one. (IN17,I)

Generally it was felt that if students are not rushed to produce work (as they might be in a timed examination) they can work in a more authentic manner corresponding to expectations for their subject specialism within real world practices in Art, Design and Media. An associate dean re-enforced these points commenting,

- basically the skills that we are requiring students to develop are around four kinds of areas, research skills, ideas development skills, evaluation and reflective skills, and methodological to do with materials (IN8,FG2)

Qualifying, he stresses the time it takes to develop these in a ‘meaningful way’ worrying that any timed examination would produce a ‘superficial result’.

The work produced in UAL’s FMP is assessed by members of a specialist subject teaching team who therefore have professional understanding of both the students’ chosen field of specialisation and related BA programmes to which students progress.

Perhaps suggesting that the emphasis in foundation is split between Levels 3 and 4 where progression really happens, an FE lecturer with responsibility for progression to HE comments,

- I think we get it right, but of course this thing about diagnosis, I mean foundation and extended diploma, it’s becoming more and more about diagnosis of your specialism, that’s something that this level of education does so well, and it’s the thing that’s more important. (IN6,FG2)

In focus group 3, a BA programme leader for design was less positive than others about the Foundation Diploma in Art and Design and its assessment. He criticised what he perceived as a bias forwards a ‘fine art approach’ in both A level assessment and some Foundation Diploma programmes. The FMP, in this instance, was questioned for its emphasis on student-generated project setting rather than providing students with a design brief or responding to user group needs.

This corresponds to some of the feedback from questionnaire respondents who expressed opinions that assessment procedures might benefit from the setting of a task rather than expecting student generated work.
I think it can help students to respond to a brief set externally as this mirrors work based practice and often the content of year one Uni course. (RN150)

Suggestions were made for ‘a proposal against a set task or a problem’, to avoid ‘the criteria being set personally by the student’ This would differentiate for the routes to which students were progressing ‘whether they be graphic design students, whether they be 3D design students or fine art students’. (IN11,FG3)

A head of pre-degree added that he had been discussing this with someone at an exam board and saying,

- shouldn’t we be contextualising this within the discipline that they are choosing? If they say they are a designer then they need to measure it possibly against kind of client set kind of terms, as opposed to their own terms, and there was a lot of debate around that. And there were other people arguing that you shouldn’t measure it according to the industry that they are selecting or the discipline that they are selecting. (IN12,FG3)

These may be pointers for further discussion about the way in which subjects at BA level are changing in relation to real world contexts. Perhaps there is a need to recognise that not all Art, Design and Media BA programmes are expecting identical attributes in prospective students, for some specialisms the ability to work collaboratively and to recognise and respond to user needs may be more relevant than the ability to show independence and original ideas.

**Continuity and Progression**

The difference in what was valued in assessments across the spectrum of pre-degree awards was perceived by a number of FGPs as ‘troublesome’ and identified as leading to ‘unnecessary misunderstanding’ between programmes of study.

This was felt to be exacerbated by a lack of opportunity for professional contact and discussion between those working at differing levels and across programmes of study, particularly between schools and universities. Specialist art college and arts university staff do not generally view the A-level work in a favourable light. Although it was acknowledged that there are pockets of excellent practice and that, A-level has much more potential to be like what foundation used to be. (IN9,FG3)

A-level teachers were also thought to be, ‘teaching to a model of art that doesn’t exist anywhere else in the world.’ (IN8, FG2). This is something of which many A-Level teachers of Art and Design are only too aware.

A university head of school compared the stringencies of the Foundation Diploma and A-level qualifications thus,

- Something fairly intensive and specific, like Foundation, or something, you know, relatively less intensive, like A level or AS level, where it’s part of a whole basket of subjects (IN2,FG1).

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Whereas a teacher and NSEAD consultant suggested that,

- A-level students have rigour and actually some of the Foundation students have lost that because they’ve gone on a Foundation programme that’s put other things in place. (IN10,FG3)

Discussing the reasons why another awarding body A-level is not needed an associate dean from a university remarked,

- actually much of the desired content is in the qualification that is written for A-level, but it’s the confidence of the teachers teaching A-level to deliver the content, that’s actually why students still need to do the Foundation actually. (IN8,FG2)

Whereas a secondary school teacher from focus group 4 indicates the reasons have less to do with teachers’ given levels of confidence and more to do with external moderation and its impact on confidence,

- A-level becomes a full stop, it’s a thing at the end, you know, your A*, it’s fabulous, and then there’s this — and now what — thing, where do we go next? I think that’s what it is. And schools have to do it, and you can see why it happens. If they think a moderator’s going to not understand a video piece that’s fantastic, [because they will say] ‘where’s the skill in that’ you know, you are going to be afraid to encourage children to make perhaps more interesting pieces. (IN16,4G4)

Our findings demonstrate that FGPs were more critical of the summative assessment for procedures for the A-level award than other awards. The current domain based assessment and the externally set, timed, final examination were all cited by a teacher and NSEAD consultant as creating atomised requirements and forcing teachers into adopting an orthodox approach. He caricatures the process and the products it may encourage,
There are four marking domains, and so you do that, then you do that, then you do that, and then there’s a time test at the end so you can’t do anything fine art or 3-D because that won’t fit into eight hours, so let’s all develop a deft expressive painting style because then you can be ambitious in scale and do something in eight hours. That’s where the orthodoxy is built in. (IN10,FG3)

There was also a perception that in its current form (it is noted that changes to A-level are current) the examination for A-level limits the possibility of direct student progression to further study at BA level. This echoes questionnaire findings in which only 7% of respondents considered A-levels to be a viable direct route to a BA programme.

It seems to me like the A-level that the exam boards have created serves such a different purpose from what happens next, you know, it’s not preparing them [students] for the future. (IN16,FG4)

I mean if it’s supposed to be a pathway to university the people who run this assessment [for university entry] need to have a conversation with A-level moderators, it’s as simple as that. (IN13,FG4)

Another secondary school head of Art and Design remarked,

I don’t think there’s enough joined up thinking between us and higher education, ‘they’, ‘I mean higher education’ well it doesn’t feel like we are providing them with the students who can cope or who have had the right experiences. (IN15,G4)

These comments reflect a long-standing lack of opportunity for collaboration between universities and secondary schools but perhaps more importantly a need for communication between schools, awarding bodies and universities.

Participants in focus group 4 (which comprised solely of secondary school teachers, including one experienced and one new moderator) concurred with the majority of questionnaire respondents’ views that A-level assessment was least well suited for progression to higher education in Art, Design and Media subjects. These teachers were also openly critical about the A-level assessment procedure and the affect they perceived this to have on subject pedagogy and students’ work.

A combination of factors informed their negative appraisal of the current system which included:

- a lack of trust in the moderation process;
- a dissatisfaction with the constraints of domain based marking and an externally set examination question;
- the limitations of a timed examination inhibiting the production of meaningful work;
- a general perception that league tables and auditing culture has created a situation where teaching is entirely focused on examination results.

As stated before this part of the research involved too few participants to draw general conclusions but it does perhaps point to the need for further research about the efficacy of moderation processes employed across different pre-degree awards.

The external moderation process

Foundation Diploma in Art and Design and UAL Extended Diploma FGPs and interviewees, (many of whom have experience as external moderators, examiners and verifiers) were generally positive about their experiences of the moderation process. A further education programme leader, with responsibility for student progression, also felt that the internal marking and external moderation of student work was taken very seriously.

External moderation is carried out on Foundation and Extended Diploma by experienced practitioners and teachers, who apply through the awarding body for those positions, and are given the position to do that, so there is obviously a process of selection, selecting the right people, who the awarding bodies confirm can do that role, and the moderators will come in, yeah, and check the grades, do a sample, check it and see if they conform to the national standard, so to make sure there’s a standard that works across all the programmes. My feeling on this is — is there any evidence at all that this doesn’t work? (IN6,FG2)

This view relates closely to the questionnaire data in which 79% of respondents hold up the current system for Foundation Diploma in Art and Design and UAL Extended Diploma as fit for purpose.

The importance of moderators possessing up-to-date knowledge and experience was stressed as a prerequisite for the role. This too was seen as extending to vocational qualifications.

There’s an onus on you to keep up to date with things, and onus on you to research, develop your own skills, you can’t just come in year after year and be the same person, I think you are always developing. (IN1,FG1)
The essential but often time-consuming process of reaching a consensus was also remarked upon by an associate dean.

- Over the last two years we’ve had only retired people. Not that there’s anything wrong with retired people, but the point is they are at a distance from being in the classroom. (IN15,FG5)

- It has become increasingly difficult to get ‘good moderators’ (IN14,FG5)

FGPs commented that the moderator training for A-level encourages a limited understanding of how criteria might be interpreted differently (for example using different media, aligned to Art, Design and Media specialisms) but still attain a comparable grade.

- The standard that they set is the work they show you, and you have to apply that to the centres that you go into. The work that you look at as standardisation is, like you [IN13,FG4] were saying, ‘really traditional’. The top marks have observational drawing leading up in a very linear way to a final piece that has like critical and contextual studies linked with it, and the whole thing is a really nice unit of work that nicely meets all the objectives. Uncomplicated. (IN14,FG5)

- I’ve just done the training this year, it’s a really weird process actually, you are shown the examples and you are given a little booklet of what an ‘A’ [Grade] looks like, you know, an example of what it is, you go to each centre and you cross check your book [laughs]. But in every single one of those examples, there was no video work, sound work, there was no new media whatsoever. (IN13,FG4)

- Yeah, the [A level] exam boards need to really think about just changing their practice, because for twelve years that hasn’t changed. Art’s changed, education’s changed. Kids have definitely changed. (IN14,FG4)

- They are either inexperienced teachers, needing pin money or people who have retired and don’t understand the episteme. (IN10,FG3)

These secondary school teachers characterise a system that appears to have moved increasingly towards standardization and norm referencing. Although the external marking is referred to as ‘moderation’ it differs substantively from the moderation process for Foundation Diploma in Art and Design, UAL Extended Diploma and the Edexcel/ Pearson BTEC and it is experienced more as if it is an external ‘examination’ of a selection of work rather than a moderation of internal grading. The implications of this process appear to disempower teachers from their ability to make expert judgments.

- I think in the current system there needs to be more transparency, because it is a ridiculous situation... The way [A-level] moderators are trained, I’ve been trained in exactly the same way for twelve years, so maybe the conversation isn’t between the universities and the schools, it’s between the universities and the A-level exam boards, maybe the universities need to come in and train the principle examiners, chief examiners, and have those conversations with them. (IN15,FG4)

In focus group one, an FE programme manager expressed his concerns that any implementation of more externality in the assessment process for vocational qualifications at level 3, would have the same effect.

- And an external test, as you say, you don’t have that conversation. We’d try to be objective, we won’t be, we’ll fall short. (IN1,FG1)

The withdrawal of support and verbal feedback was also leveled at the Pearson Edexcel BTEC,

- it’s not just right we are coming in, we don’t want to speak to you, which was how BTEC’s had gone just before they went to digital moderation, and sampled digital moderation, I think [that’s when I actually left Pearson’s as a moderator because I didn’t believe in it. I thought ‘how is this standards checking’? It’s not, it was well you might be left for years and you could be doing anything. (IN18)

The notion that moderators for A-level might be ‘out of touch’ was voiced on a number of occasions,

- They are either inexperienced teachers, needing pin money or people who have retired and don’t understand the episteme. (IN10,FG3)

These views contrasted with those held by A-level teachers, who did not feel confident in their moderators and who found the increasingly non-discursive approach to the moderation visit ‘frustrating’ and ‘not really good enough’.

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The withdrawal of support and verbal feedback was also leveled at the Pearson Edexcel BTEC,
He also remarked on the importance of working with moderator’s who had relevant knowledge,

- I don’t know if anyone’s worked with OCR, really, really difficult conversations sometimes, so with UAL it’s a lot more progressive, a lot more...you are talking to people who have some industry understanding. (IN1,FG1)

Exchanges between programme leaders and moderators were also valued for their positive criticality.

- It’s a very critical conversation isn’t it? It’s a very focused conversation. It’s not soft.

However, one Foundation Diploma programme leader thought that there was still room for improvement to moderator training,

- some moderators don’t have the training, I have come across some who I don’t feel confident, and maybe that could definitely be tightened up. So that it could be much more rigorous in getting the right moderators in place, more training for them, but it’s only a few. (IN6,FG2)

- This thing about bringing in an external judgement, for me whether that is a good idea or not really depends on who they are, you know, and how that, you know, how that committee is put together, or, if that was made up of a group of people who are working at that level and maybe somebody working at degree level, somebody working at postgraduate, a bit like this committee [the focus group 3 members], if this was the committee I think I’d feel really happy about it. (IN10,FG3)

These comments reinforce the significance of the selection process and training of moderators for all awards. The current system of moderation for Diploma awards appears to be working well but vigilance is needed to ensure standards are maintained and further developed. Any proposal to increase the incidence of external assessment across pre-degree awards needs first to recognise the current uneven ground of moderators’ expertise, knowledge and professional abilities across different pre-degree awards.

In the questionnaire responses, focus groups and interviews, there is also evidence that where choice is available, heads of art departments in schools and programme leaders in FE elect to change examination boards and even qualifications to better suit their students’ progression needs and likelihood of success.

Discussing a departmental decision to move away from A-level to BTEC Level 3, a secondary school art and design teacher comments,

- In our Level 3 BTEC the work they [students] are producing is amazing compared to what it used to be at A-level, it’s so much more exciting, it’s brilliant, because there is no fear. (IN13,FG4)

When asked to clarify how this perception of success could be quantified he answered,

- Well none of them got into college before, and now they do, I mean none of them did and now they are, and they are getting into good colleges. (IN13,FG4)

Grade Chasing

In common with some questionnaire respondents’ views about the externalisation of Art, Design and Media assessment that are currently under discussion, interviewees also commented that such externalised strategies have a tendency to encourage ‘grade chasing’; the pursuit of a quantifiable result or mark, over and above the pursuit of a qualitative experience.

Those interviewees responsible for the Edexcel/Pearson BTEC Extended Diploma and the UAL Extended Diploma stressed a variety of indicative markers of student achievement, amongst which summative assessment and the grading of students’ work was considered to be a part, but not the most important part.

- It’s not just about getting assessments and qualification, it’s about the relevance of what they [students] are doing in real life situations, I think, that is valid. (IN17)

This view was also echoed by a BA programme leader, who expressed concern that students seem increasingly fixated on their grades as the only marker of the value of their education,

- Talking to students about the relationship between their grade and some notion of employability, is really difficult because they are going yeah, but I got an A, and it doesn’t matter, it’s what in your portfolio that matters, it’s the connections you make, it’s the work placements you do, and they are saying yeah, but surely if I get a First I’ll get a job. They are still into that thing, it’s the culture of A level a bit, but I also think it’s something about the zeitgeist of education in this country at the moment, you know, if I get these qualifications Z, Y and Z will happen. (IN11,FG3)
These comments reflect the challenges for creating a balance between students' immediate concerns with their progress, indicated by a range of assessment strategies including formative, ipsative and peer with the processes of summative assessment. The fast changing and relatively unpredictable world of the creative industries necessitates that students are able to accommodate working provisionally towards less finite achievements. Therefore, the need to accept grades as one part of a learning trajectory towards a variety of goals may increasingly need to be reinforced.

‘Tick-box’ assessment culture

Interviewees and FGPs connected external examinations in Art, Design and Media with a number of negative attributes. They were unanimous in their adverse appraisal of approaches to assessment which they characterised as ‘tick box’ exercises serving an ‘audit culture’.

Concerns were voiced about the lack of authenticity in such approaches which act to compromise the complexity involved in making professional evaluations about student learning and achievement in Art, Design and Media.

Educators, from BA programmes to A-level discussed the importance of internal assessment and verification, noting that this was time consuming but also in keeping with the complex nature of making expert judgments in a creative subject.

It was acknowledged, by some educators, that certain things would be ‘easier to mark’ than others and this led to concerns that any turn towards increasing external assessment would privilege readily visible and discernable aspects of student work to the detriment of more complex, conceptual, critical and original outcomes.

This was also reinforced by a comment made by an A-level moderator who stressed the ways in which limited time and standardisation impact on the process of grading to privilege the marking of an easily recognisable acquisition of skills,

▶ because it’s skills based, again, it’s incredibly easy to mark, because rightly or wrongly you can see someone that can draw well, or that can shade well, or that can use paint well, or that can apply colour effectively. So if they are marking top end and it’s very skills based and quite traditional, it’s easy to mark, it’s easy to give it a mark.  (IN14,FG4)

In common with a number of questionnaire respondents, an FE college lecturer stated that his centre has moved away from Pearson/Edexcel examination board for their BTEC qualifications because, ‘over the years its become too easy, ticking off set criteria’ (IN,17). The same lecturer preferred the UAL Extended Diploma because it ‘makes a more rigorous student’, due to the synoptic nature of the assessment process in which, ‘students are involved in the continual cycle of reflection and self-assessment’ (IN,17).
External assessment

FGPs in groups 1-3 were asked if they could think of benefits and positive attributes that could be achieved by increasing an emphasis on externally assessed components. FGPs were not all adverse to external assessment per se but they were unanimous in their rejection of a system that fails to put in place external assessors with sufficient up-to-date knowledge and understanding of current developments in different specialist field of Art, Design and Media. In only one of the focus groups were suggestions made about the possibilities for how external assessment might be managed. These discussions were quite challenging with more emphasis placed on processes of ‘damage limitation’ than the possible benefits proposed for discussion by the moderator.

In one group a suggestion was made for assessment that could be managed, …through some sort of blog or some sort of digital form, which can be assessed, you know, sent quite quickly, looked at quite quickly, and assessed quite quickly, makes a lot of sense really. It’s not too fundamental a change, I would welcome it. I would just be very concerned about if I’ve got a course of three hundred and fifty students at that process, are the people who are looking at it being well trained and very familiar with the programme that they are assessing? That’s all. (IN6, FG2)

Discussion in this focus group turned to a consideration of the progression stage, at Unit 6 of the Foundation Diploma in Art and Design and UAL Extended Diploma, as a possible time that might lend itself to this form of assessment.

▶ unit six, which is about progression, you could have that externally assessed, so we’d change the fundamental nature of the course and have that externally assessed, so that would be externally assessed at an earlier point and then that would contribute to their final award, so you actually change the structure of the qualifications. There are lots of things you can do with that I think. But I think that diagnosis about progression needs to be captured somewhere in there (IN6, FG2)

▶ evaluation and reflection is what art and design do very well, which doesn’t reflect in the qualifications very much at the moment, at A-levels, at foundation, at degree, is actually the student story, their work, through portfolios. I could imagine a scenario whereby students were asked to present every kind of story of the project they’ve produced, that was actually an externally assessed element. And that would then show depth, I think one of the things about time limits is the depth, it’s almost time versus depth. (IN8FG2)

In other focus groups the idea of assessing students’ evaluations and reflections were more rapidly discounted, due to a perception that this would place undue emphasis on students abilities express themselves and their research in written form,

▶ [Art, Design and Media students] are visual people, they maybe don’t particularly want to write a great deal, they are often not well equipped to write it. There’s a very high incidence of dyslexia and other barriers to writing in art and design, and that’s well documented. (IN4, FG1)

Most FGPs had quite vivid recollections of external assessment that could be best characterised as unsatisfactory. These included the recollection of timed tests of observational drawing skills that were posted to examination centres, and even timed tests for BA qualifications. The problems with such approaches to assessment were identified as lacking in connection to real world professional practice and unfit for measuring much more than a particular set of skills.

The premise that external assessment can increases reliability in Art, Design and Media was also viewed with some skepticism. A professor of fine art recounts,

▶ The other thing about parity, because I remember when I was teaching A-level, and my mum was teaching A-level art at the same time, and my mum was teaching at [a well known girls’ school], which had a very good reputation, and I was teaching it at a [FE] College, which had a very bad reputation, and we went to see each other’s final A-level shows, and you know, my mum taught me art, so we had a pretty similar benchmark, and all her students got As and Bs and all my students got Ds and Es, and I can tell you it wasn’t to do with the work, it was the fact that they were used to getting those marks at the centres, and that really opened my eyes to the differences that were implicit, even when you sent your work off, which we did. (IN9,FG3)

An international expert on assessment in the arts was also concerned about the backward looking resultant effects of increasing emphasis on external testing,
The difficulties that I have with the whole area of emphasising the externality of moderation is that this is a very dangerous and slippery slope, and the reason being that it’s taking us into a way of thinking which is to do with NVQ type verifications … and eventually somebody will come up with a tick list which actually inhibits what’s going on all over again. I wouldn’t personally go down that road, I think there are other ways to do it. (IN7,FG2)

A Foundation Diploma tutor, with responsibility for progression to HE also commented on aspects of student learning that such an approach might fail to capture,

I think the idea of any kind of set examination, or any kind of tick box assessment, is incredibly difficult for these kind of qualifications, which are providing these much broader skills, which are quite difficult to kind of capture. So I think in terms of examination with some sort of tick box you are losing all the kind of flavours of what makes these courses so strong really, and so useful for HE courses. (IN6,FG2)

Views on this discussion of external assessment might best be summed up by this closing remark by an assistant dean,

I think it’s very complicated and difficult to come up with positive solutions that don’t act as a step backwards. (IN8FG2)
Our findings indicate that the majority of research participants view the external assessment of pre-degree Art, Design and Media qualifications negatively. Through discussions participants expressed concerns that such a turn to increased externality could take qualifications backwards to what are perceived as outmoded models. In particular the replacement of emphasis on internal assessment with external moderation by a process of external examination was perceived as unlikely to improve reliability or validity. Concerns were raised that enabling students to meet the new challenges of BA programmes and the creative industries would not be facilitated through this process due to the limitations of the quality, that would necessarily be placed on the form that such externally assessed work takes.

Where ideas were mooted about how additional externality could be implemented, this was tempered by discussions about compromise and speculations about the lack of adequate infrastructure, particularly an expert assessor workforce, to manage such change.

With the current mix of pre-degree qualifications there is already disparity in assessment procedures and fitness-for-purpose of different qualifications. Those qualifications held up by participants to be the most effective, Foundation Diploma in Art and Design and UAL Extended Diploma, employ synoptic, holistic assessment and are internally assessed with external moderation. This was an almost unqualified position.

Due to the location of many of these programs as pre-degree provision within universities and art colleges, these more successful qualifications also employ a workforce that converses with colleagues in HE, enabling a better fit with the expectation for progression. Those programmes held up to be the least effective: A-level and GNVQ, have the highest levels of external intervention and assessment and the lowest levels of expectation for student autonomy. The workforce of educators on these programmes often has little communication with colleagues in HE.

There are widely recognised, yet fundamentally implicit, interpretations of assessment criteria by specific communities of practice. The major drivers for particular ‘community interpretations’ appear to be closely linked to experiences of external assessment/moderation.

Participants endorsed the support given through the assessment of student portfolios and exhibitions by the current externally moderated programmes however they lamented the loss of discursive opportunities that have taken place in A-level and Pearson/Edexcel BTEC qualifications.

Assessment structures that privilege portfolio development, self-initiated projects and those that promote independent learning are regarded as the most appropriate for enabling students’ creative identities as specialist practitioners to emerge.

For any external process of verification and/or moderation the careful selection and training of moderators is of paramount importance for achieving authentic, relevant and rigorous assessment for Art, Design and Media.

Crucial to the above is the implementation of a radically transparent moderation system which facilitates a supportive critical relationship between external moderators and programme leaders.
Appendix 1: Questionnaire

Course Leaders' Survey: Pre-Degree Assessment in Art, Design and Media

This questionnaire aims to explore your views and experiences of final assessment procedures used in the different pre-degree art, design and media awards with which you are involved professionally.

NB. Questions and comment boxes that are compulsory are marked with an * asterisk *

Your Professional Experience of Final Assessments in Art, Design & Media...

*1. How long have you been teaching?
   - [ ] Less than a year
   - [ ] Between 1-2 years
   - [ ] Between 2-5 years
   - [ ] Between 5 and 10 years
   - [ ] Over 10 years

*2. Have you ever taught in a different educational context to the one in which you are currently employed?

(If yes, please tick all that apply)
   - [ ] Not applicable
   - [ ] Secondary School
   - [ ] Sixth Form Centre
   - [ ] Further Education College
   - [ ] Higher Education Institution
   - [ ] Other (please specify)

Your Institution’s Art, Design & Media Programme Menu
Appendix 1: Questionnaire

Course Leaders' Survey: Pre-Degree Assessment in Art, Design and Media

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*1. How long have you been teaching?*

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- [ ] Between 1-2 years
- [ ] Between 2-5 years
- [ ] Between 5 and 10 years
- [ ] Over 10 years

*2. Have you ever taught in a different educational context to the one in which you are currently employed?*

(If yes, please tick all that apply)

- [ ] Not applicable
- [ ] Secondary School
- [ ] Sixth Form Centre
- [ ] Further Education College
- [ ] Higher Education Institution

Other (please specify)

Your Institution’s Art, Design & Media Programme Menu
Appendix 1: Questionnaire

Course Leaders' Survey: Pre-Degree Assessment in Art, Design and...

**7. Have these changes: (Please tick all that apply)**

- [ ] Improved the range and variety of assessment methods available?
- [ ] Improved the reliability and comparability of assessment outcomes?
- [ ] Improved the external moderation processes?
- [ ] Improved the ‘authenticity’ and real world relevance of assessment?
- [ ] Increased the use of assessment outcomes to measure the success of a department or institution?
- [ ] Improved students’ understanding of the assessment (i.e. by involving them in the development of this process)?
- [ ] Improved the consistency of assessment processes and criteria across educational phases and levels (e.g. A-Level to BA)?
- [ ] None of the above (please comment below)

8. Please tell us more:

**Your Personal Views and Opinions on Final Assessments in Art, Design & ...**

**9. How well do you think current final assessment processes in the following pre-degree awards facilitate direct progression to BA courses?**

**Please rate**

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<th></th>
<th>Very well</th>
<th>Adequately</th>
<th>Not well</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
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<td>A-level</td>
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<td>GNVQ</td>
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<td>Level 3-4 Vocational Awards (e.g. BTEC)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Foundation Diploma in Art and Design</td>
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</table>

Please comment

**Your Personal Views and Opinions on Final Assessments in Art, Design & ...**

**10. Currently a number of academic awards in art, design and media (e.g. GCSEs, A-levels) include an externally set and examined final assessment.**

**Do you think that this approach could be usefully extended to pre-degree awards?**

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No
Appendix 1: Questionnaire

Course Leaders' Survey: Pre-Degree Assessment in Art, Design and

11. Please tell us more:

12. BA awards typically assess student-generated final projects and coursework as opposed to externally set and examined final assessments.

Do you think that this approach could be usefully extended to more pre-degree awards?

☐ Yes
☐ No

13. Please tell us more:

Your Personal Views and Opinions on Final Assessments in Art, Design & ...

14. What do you think about assessing skills-based course content separately from knowledge and understanding? Please share your views here:

15. If you could make one change to the final assessment processes in the pre-degree awards your institution offers, what would it be?

16. Do you have any other comments or opinions regarding summative assessment in art, design and media? Please tell us here:

About You

Please tell us about yourself and your background. This information will be treated confidentially and anonymously.
Appendix 1: Questionnaire

Course Leaders’ Survey: Pre-Degree Assessment in Art, Design and

**17. What is your gender?**

- Female
- Male
- Prefer not to say

**18. Which category below includes your age?**

- 21-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60 or older
- Prefer not to say

**19. How would you describe your ethnicity**

Any other ethnic group (please specify)

**20. What is your first language?**

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**SURVEY COMPLETED**

Thank you very much for your time and your contribution to this part of our research.

The findings from this stage will form an important part of the final report and feed into the recommendations provided by this research.

We value your experience and opinions and would like to know more.

In the next stage of this research, we will be visiting institutions across the country to conduct follow up interviews with a number of respondents.

These interviews will last no more than 30 minutes and can take place in your place of work, via telephone or Skype, to fit conveniently around your commitments.

**21. Please let us know if you would consider participating in an interview or focus group about assessment in arts design and media subjects at pre degree level?**

- Yes
- No
## Appendix 2: Focus Group

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Expertise</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Questionnaire respondent</th>
<th>Code in report</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Further Education College:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Programme Manager for Art, Design and Digital Media.</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>(1, FG1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>University:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Head of School with responsibility for pre-degree education.</td>
<td>South East</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>(2, FG1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art College:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Senior Lecturer responsible for Pre-Foundation also teaching Foundation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>(3, FG1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diploma programme.</td>
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<tr>
<td>University:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Associate Dean with previous experience as a programme director for</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>(4, FG1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Foundation Diploma programme.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Programme Leader for Foundation Diploma programme.</td>
<td>South West</td>
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<td>(5, FG1)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Lecturer with responsibility for pre-degree and progression.</td>
<td>West</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>(6, FG2)</td>
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<td>Academic and Director: Research &amp; Development at International Graded</td>
<td>International</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>(7, FG2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Qualifications Ltd</td>
<td>(Asia)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Associate Dean with previous experience of FE and International recruitment</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>University:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professor of Fine Art</td>
<td>London North</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>(9, FG3)</td>
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<td>Head of Art and design, NSEAD consultant for London</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>(10, FG3)</td>
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<td>University:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Programme leader for BA Graphic Design</td>
<td>South West</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>University:</td>
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<td>Programme Leader for Foundation Diploma Moderator for UALab</td>
<td>West</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>Teacher of Art and design, Moderator for Edexcel and PhD student at IoE</td>
<td>Inner London</td>
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<td>Head of Art and Design, Moderator for AQA and MA student at IoE</td>
<td>North London</td>
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<td>Head of Art and design, NSEAD council member, director of the Gerald</td>
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<td>Moore Gallery and EdD student at IoE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher of Art and design, former MA student at IoE</td>
<td>North West</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>(IN16, FG4)</td>
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<td>Further Education College:</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Divisional lead manager art and design, fashion and floristry.</td>
<td>North West</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>(IN18)</td>
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<td>Specialist Art College:</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Foundation Programme Leader</td>
<td>North West</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>(IN18)</td>
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</table>

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