INSIGHTS PRACTITIONER INTERVIEW.

24th October 2025

Question 1

**In your experience, what do you find are the most significant barriers that students on the Insights programme face when participating in the Insights**

**course ?**

One huge barrier that we're very aware of is the cost of travel.

So I guess you could term it a financial barrier.  
As an outreach team, we cover this for the spring and summer school, so we pay for their travel, so we remove that barrier. So we try to take away that financial barrier. So we acknowledge that it can be difficult and we try and support them by paying for their travel.

Another thing that I think can be particularly difficult were perceived as a barrier for students is sometimes leaving their own borough travelling beyond what they're used to. This is particularly the case for students in Tower Hamlets where students rarely leave this area and don’t for instance visit galleries and museums.

This can be caused by their family perhaps being a little afraid of their child going outside of a familiar area and that impacting their own sense of security. So I think maybe they've got such a community in that area and maybe they don't want to go further outside of this sense of security.

And that familial impact I think is also another barrier, whether their parents or guardians are accepting the fact that their child is wanting to pursue a creative degree or a creative path, whether that leads to a degree or not is what we think is up to them. But obviously a lot of parents love the idea of their child becoming an architect or something. But as soon as you say fine art, or fashion design they are less accepting.

If they are first generation going to university, so if neither of their parents or guardians have completed a university degree there is that lack of knowledge of what it's like going to university and knowing what it means to go to study on this level, so this can create a barrier in terms of family support going into taking a university degree in a creative subject.

Obviously we try to kind of demystify the whole process, in Insights, and I think it's really important that people remember that we're not recruitment, we're there to give the students the agency to decide what they want to do with their future.

We want to equip them with the skills and knowledge so that they can then decide what they want and they are not being told what to do.

Another barrier, is the school systems and school, curriculum. It's so rigid.

And they're taught to do things in such a regimented way and prescriptive way.

We Softly, gently encourage them out of that more limited mentality and way of thinking in preparation for higher education, because it's a very different style of teaching and learning that they will be going in to.

I think also we like to celebrate mistakes as part of the learning process we are encouraging, rather than following more restricted and prescriptive expectations and outcomes that students might experience at their schools and colleges.

Question 2

**What areas do you think could be added to the course structure to enhance the learning experience, on the Insights course, such as access to equipment, studio space, additional specialist tuition?**

Specialist tuition definitely with current tutors on the BA course who have a very in depth knowledge of how their course operates, and to be able to communicate what creative processes they are expecting. I think that's really gold standard.

Another gold standard would be having access to the technical areas. We received a lot of requests regarding this this in our post evaluation feedback from the students frequently where they say that they wish they had had an opportunity to have an induction and explore the sewing machines and the knitting machines, just so that they get to experience something that they have got no access to at school or their FE college. An induction, learning how to thread and use a machine and some guidance in developing technical skills, not a whole project but with the aim of being able to achieve something by the end of it would be a great development.

I would want them very much integrated in that experience.

Or doing a project with them in a short course week, whether it be spring or summer school. And of course, when it comes to Autumn/ Winter school, it's a lot more directive and supportive, you know, because this is like the final stage of applying to university and you give them as much as possible before they send in their applications.

Something that's actionable rather than more blue sky thinking, could be online sessions where inductions and skill sessions can be recorded and then we have a bank of resources of recorded talks. Obviously if an activity session is live, students can ask questions at the end, but then if we build that resource then it's really close to giving a really detailed understanding of what fashion design is at CSM for example.

That’s also the reason why we feel we need tutors that are currently teaching on the BA courses. Not only do they have the knowledge, and information about the course structures, we would also be creating connections with tutors on the courses they move on to so there would already be those familiar faces that they recognise and they've interacted with already. So that actually takes away that the impostor syndrome barrier that you get once they're on boarded. So that's beyond what Insights provides and prepares them for. By implementing this, we are trying to pave the way for the most the smooth on boarding experience when transitioning on to the BA courses.

Question 3

**Do you find that students on the Insights programme are reluctant to admit they are finding the course difficult and seek support ?**

Students will tell me that they're struggling financially or, they don't know how they're going to study full time because they thought they were going to get a bigger student loan, and they can't do more paid work to financially support themselves because it means they can’t focus on their studies .

And then I can, advise them on who to speak to, student advice, accommodation services, counselling and advice on hardship funding.

It causes anxiety and the kind of emails that we've received from students have been like, oh, my God, my life is crumbling.

Question 4

**In what form do you think any additional support could be given?**

So my aim, is that we support Insights students in advance with more tuition from BA tutors and access to sewing or knitting technical areas, learning how to thread a sewing machine and how to do some initial skills, so that they can prepare ahead and be aware of what the expectations might be, whatever university they go to, ideally we would prepare students for UAL courses, but whatever institution they become part of, there's always going to be a disciplined disability support team to help them with various processes, for instance if they're applying for student loans, they could always apply for disabled students allowance, and it's likely that any university is going to have something similar to the Individual Support Agreement at UAL, where there are allowances and policies in place to help with inclusive learning, depending on what kind of support that individual student requires.

It is overwhelming for a student because when someone first starts university, there's all this information being bombarded at you. There's never a good time to tell you everything because not everything's going to stick. So I think for us in the Insights programme, it's that continuous reminder and signposting about what it’s like to study at a university so if we can prepare students well ahead with the skills they might need and equip them with more knowledge about the expectations and workload when joining a BA course it should create less anxiety and lessen feelings of a student not belonging.