

NALN Research Report

Penny Jane Burke and  
Jackie McManus

# ART FOR A FEW

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**Exclusion and  
Misrecognition  
in Art and Design  
Higher Education  
Admissions**



COLOUR SWATCH  
AQUAMARINE

COLOUR SWATCH  
CANARY YELLOW

COLOUR SWATCH  
LIME GREEN

COLOUR SWATCH  
HOT PINK

COLOUR SWATCH  
VIOLET

COLOUR SWATCH  
BLACK

COLOUR SWATCH  
COBALT BLUE

COLOUR SWATCH  
DEEP PURPLE



THE FUNCTION WHICH PLATO  
ATTRIBUTES TO THE WATER  
OF FORGETFULNESS FALLS,  
IN OUR SOCIETIES, ON THE  
UNIVERSITY WHICH IN ITS  
IMPARTIALITY, THROUGH  
PRETENDING TO RECOGNISE  
STUDENTS AS EQUAL IN  
RIGHTS AND DUTIES, DIVIDED  
ONLY BY INEQUALITIES OF  
GIFTS AND MERITS, IN FACT  
CONFERS ON INDIVIDUALS  
DEGREES JUDGED ACCORDING  
TO THEIR CULTURAL HERITAGE  
AND THEREFORE ACCORDING  
TO THEIR SOCIAL STATUS.

Bourdieu,  
1993:235

Exclusion and Misrecognition in Art and Design  
Higher Education Admissions

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Published by the National Arts Learning Network. A catalogue  
for this publication is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-0-9559473-3-9

I am very pleased to introduce the report *Art for a Few: Exclusion and Misrecognition in Art and Design Higher Education Admissions*, commissioned by the National Arts Learning Network (NALN).

NALN is a national Lifelong Learning Network comprising specialist arts institutions, working together to widen participation in higher education and to ensure a more diverse workforce for the Creative and Cultural Industries. In commissioning and disseminating this report NALN aims to make a significant contribution to widening participation in higher education in the creative arts.

This report shines a spotlight on admissions policy and practice in arts higher education. Controversially, it questions some of the fundamentals that have been accepted practice. It is my hope that the arts higher education sector will take part in a serious discussion of these findings and respond quickly and effectively to the recommendations that the report makes.

I would like to thank the researchers Penny Jane Burke and Jackie McManus for their insightful and comprehensive analysis, and their courage and commitment, in addressing this key element of Widening Participation in arts higher education.

Mark Crawley  
*Director of the  
National Arts Learning Network*  
September 2009



I DON'T WANT  
ART FOR A FEW  
ANY MORE THAN  
EDUCATION FOR A  
FEW, OR FREEDOM  
FOR A FEW. William Morris

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## Dedication

For Sheila Soul-Gray, late Director, and the architect,  
of the National Arts Learning Network (NALN).

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## Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the art and design colleges that participated in this research, and in particular their NALN progression managers without whom, along with our research administrator Ellen Anderson, the field research would not have happened.

We would also like to thank the following for their advice and support during the research and report writing stages of this report: Mark Crawley, Kirsty Morris, and Maxine Walker (National Arts Learning Network). Professor Gill Crozier (Roehampton University). Rob Imeson, Dr. Olivia Sagan and Gary Sprules (University of the Arts London). Paul Goodwin and Mark Miller (Tate Britain). Derek Bardowell (formerly of the Stephen Lawrence Charitable Trust).

Finally, thank you to Magpie Studio, particularly Jamie Ellul and David Azurdia, for their design of this report.

## Executive Summary

This report presents the key issues emerging from research funded by the National Arts Learning Network. The focus of the research was on art and design admissions practices in the context of widening participation policy, addressing national and institutional concerns to create inclusive, equitable and anti-discriminatory practices in art and design admissions. The research was conducted in five case study art and design higher education institutions and involved analysis of policy texts on admissions and institutional admissions statements, prospectuses, websites and other marketing information; interviews with admissions tutors and seventy observations of actual selection interviews. The analysis drew on the theoretical insights of Bourdieu's (1984) concepts of habitus, cultural capital and field to develop a clearer understanding of how subtle inequalities and exclusions might take place despite a commitment to fair and transparent admissions practices. The analysis closely examines the processes of selection that the admissions tutors engage in, drawing on the concepts of recognition and misrecognition, which are central to judgments about who has, and who does not have, 'potential' and 'ability'.

Key issues identified in the analysis include the following points:

- institutional admissions statements often include expressions of commitment to equitable and fair practices, although there is often a conflation of 'fair' and 'transparent' and a lack of clear strategy about how to put 'fairness' into effect;
- there is a general lack of clear information, advice and guidance available to candidates applying to art and design programmes, which would facilitate the discipline's complicated application process, particularly for those groups who do not have access to privileged forms of social and cultural capital;
- connected to this lack of clarity, is art and design tutors' tacit, unspoken understanding of what counts as having potential and/or ability which is seen as innate, fixed, and measurable, through portfolios, tests and interviews;
- the over-emphasis on particular 'attributes' associated with having potential, such as academic writing skills, and 'creativity', serves to exclude those groups traditionally under-represented on art and design higher education programmes;
- potential is a complex concept that is largely taken-for-granted but works to favour those attributes acquired through access to what are seen as valid and legitimate forms of cultural and social capital, for example knowledge of contemporary artists and designers and familiarity with certain galleries and exhibitions, thus exacerbating patterns of under-representation and exclusion;
- the art and design academy has a deeply embedded, institutionalized class and ethnically biased notion of a highly idealized student against whom they measure applicants;
- internal progression schemes, which award degree course places to institutions' internal one year foundation diploma students before external candidates can apply, tend to advantage those candidates from higher socio-economic and certain ethnic backgrounds; particularly in selective institutions, and are one of many hidden and inequitable systemic art and design admissions practices;
- the observation data suggests that the institutional and disciplinary values implicitly shape the selection process in ways that exacerbate inequalities and exclusion in art and design admissions.

RECOGNITION IS AN  
IMPORTANT CONCEPT  
THAT HELPS SHED LIGHT  
ON SELECTION PROCESSES.  
IT IS ABOUT THE POLITICS  
OF IDENTITY AND THE  
WAYS CERTAIN PEOPLE  
HAVE HISTORICALLY BEEN  
MISRECOGNISED.



This report deconstructs the admissions policies and practices of the art and design academy, to examine the practices and perspectives of admissions tutors. It draws on research funded by the National Arts Learning Network, involving qualitative interviews with arts and design admissions tutors. Drawing on Bourdieu's (1984) concepts of habitus, cultural capital and field to illuminate the complex workings of class inequality, the paper will also explore processes of misrecognition (Fraser, 1997; Skeggs, 2004) in operations of selection (Williams, 1997; Burke, 2002). The National Arts Learning Network is a Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) funded Lifelong Learning Network comprised of specialist art and design and performing arts higher education (HE) institutions across England. The aim of the network is to widen participation, within art and design higher education, through the development of progression partnerships between further education (FE) colleges and specialist art and design higher education institutions.

In recent decades with the expansion and 'massification' of higher education, access to and widening participation (WP) in higher education has become a central theme in educational policy nationally and globally (e.g. Boughey 2003; Allen, Jayakumar et al., 2005; Mateur 2006; Jones and Thomas, 2005; Thorat 2007 et.,). In the UK, the government has made a significant commitment to diversification, expansion and widening participation, in the attempt to address the under-representation of certain social groups in universities (DfES, 2003). The landscape of higher education has undergone change and transformation partly as a result of the diversification of higher education, with new student constituencies and professional identities emerging and posing specific challenges for universities, colleges and schools (Burke, 2008). However, persistent patterns of under-representation continue to perplex policy-makers and practitioners, raising questions about current strategies, policies and approaches to widening participation.

In 1997, when New Labour came to power and asserted access and participation as a central theme of national educational policy, 'widening participation', often shorthanded as 'WP', gained discursive momentum and hegemony in UK higher education policy. This developed into an explicit policy agenda, often driven by economic and utilitarian concerns, such as key skills and employability, but also concerned with issues of inclusion. New roles were created in universities with specific responsibility for WP. National targeting guidance was developed by HEFCE, to clarify that WP resources should be aimed at those from 'disadvantaged' backgrounds who have the potential to benefit from higher education.

More recently, research has been funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) under the Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) to explore the complex relationship between student identity, diversity and academic practice (see for example Crozier et al., 2008, Hockings et al., 2008).

However, a key assumption that continues to underpin much of WP policy and practice is that the main problem lies in the individual attitudes of potential students from traditionally under-represented backgrounds. With the intensity of focus on changing individual attitudes, WP policy places far less attention on the transformation of structures, systems and practices that unwittingly reproduce deeply embedded inequalities within higher education fields. These complex inequalities are intricately intertwined with longstanding cultural and discursive mis/recognitions, which produce what Stephen Ball calls 'discourses of derision' (Ball, 1990) and Beverley Skeggs names 'pathologised subjectivities' (Skeggs, 2004). Although the term 'inclusion' is often used in WP policy, the aim is simply to 'include those who are excluded into the dominant framework/state of being, rather than challenging existing inequalities within the mainstream system, or encouraging alternative ways of being' (Archer, 2003:23). Because of its focus on changing individual attitudes, WP discourse tends to promote a deficit model of those not participating in higher education, routinely constructing certain class and ethnic groups as lacking aspiration for themselves and their children (Burke, 2006), and implying that widening participation to 'non-traditional' students creates the risk of lowering standards, draining resources (Archer 2003) and generally 'polluting' the academy (Morley, 2003).

Indeed, as Louise Morley has argued, those entering higher education from under-represented backgrounds are often seen as potentially contaminating of university standards and as a result a key policy strategy has been to protect the quality of higher education by creating new and different spaces for those new and different students (Morley, 2003). In the White Paper, *The Future of Higher Education*, (DfES, 2003) WP is explicitly linked with concerns about 'safeguarding the standards of traditional honours degrees'. This implies that opening access to students associated with WP might have a negative effect on the quality of higher education, which needs to be protected against the entry of 'other' students. It also assumes that the appropriate level of participation for those new student constituencies is largely work-based degrees rather than traditional honours degrees. This reinforces historical and problematic divisions between the academic and vocational, education and training and knowledge and skill. This also leads policy in the direction of creating new and different kinds of courses for new and different kinds of students without addressing that these differences are shown to be classed, gendered and racialised by research in the field (HEFCE 2005; Reay, David et al., 2005; Crozier et al., 2008). For example, in analysing their interviews with working-class students, Diane Reay, Miriam David and Stephen Ball (2005: 85) explain:

Choice for the majority [of working-class students] involved either a process of finding out what you cannot have, what is not open for negotiation and then looking at the few options left, or a process of self-exclusion.

This raises questions about the extent to which the WP policy agenda has been able to address exclusions and inequalities, despite significant levels of resources being invested. Its current formulation seems unable, to any significant extent, to challenge the status quo or redress the legacy of the under (mis)representation of certain social groups in traditional forms of higher education, which carry with them status and esteem. It is also unable to shift problematic divisions between academic and vocational and knowledge and skills, which are also tied in with classed, gendered and racialised subjectivities, both of individuals and of institutions. As a result enduring hierarchies, privileges and inequalities remain untouched whilst new forms of unequal social relations are being created (Burke 2002). Normalised student identity is subtly held in place whilst the 'WP student' is constituted as 'Other', deserving of higher education access but only to 'other' kinds of courses and institutions.

Fair admissions is a key discourse at play in WP policy and in 2003 the government commissioned a report on admissions practices in higher education, chaired by Steven Schwartz, to examine ‘the options that English higher education institutions should consider when assessing the merit of applicants for their courses, and to report on the principles underlying these options’ (Schwartz, 2004:4).

Schwartz concluded that some groups are under represented in higher education and that admissions are a key factor in who participates. The final report was published in 2004 and highlighted five central principles for a fair admissions system:

- 1 transparency;
- 2 the selection of students able to complete the course as judged by their achievements and potential;
- 3 reliable and valid assessment methods;
- 4 minimizing barriers for applicants;
- 5 creating a professional system underpinned by ‘appropriate institutional structures and processes’ (Schwartz, 2004: 7–8).

Schwartz asserted, in his report, that there was no evidence of poor admissions practice in universities, but that there was a need for greater transparency of entry requirements and selection processes thereby conflating transparency and fairness, a notion that has acquired considerable currency in hegemonic discourses of HE admissions. This report argues that making admissions processes and practices clear and transparent does not render them ‘fair’ if they continue to discriminate against certain class, ethnic and gender groups and, further, that admissions practices within the art and design academy are neither transparent nor fair.

Higher education admissions continue to be high on the government’s widening participation agenda, as indicated by then Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills John Denham’s speech at the 2008 HEFCE conference:

We have to look for...measures that will re-assure the public... based on the fundamental principle that universities decide whom they should admit. The answer lies...in openness, transparency and accountability. It lies in each university having a published admissions policy; being able to show that it has measures in hand to equip all those involved in admissions to implement the policy accurately and fairly; and in each university being able to assure itself that this is being done (SPA, 2008:11).

In summer 2009, HEFCE and the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) required higher education institutes to submit a WP strategic assessment, bringing together WP strategies and admissions policies and procedures. HEFCE’s and OFFA’s guidance on how this document should be produced contains a strong emphasis on admissions:

Although admissions remain an important aspect of institutional autonomy and academic autonomy and academic freedom, institutions should provide a high-level statement focusing on the principles of the institution’s admissions policy, providing assurance of consistency, professionalism and fairness (HEFCE, 2009:8).

The government has also created an ‘independent body’: Supporting Professionalism in Admissions (SPA), in response to the Schwartz report’s recommendation that a ‘central source of expertise and advice’ (SPA, 2008:3) was needed to support higher education institutes’ on the ‘continuing development of fair admissions’ (SPA, 2008:1). SPA’s (2009) draft guidance on admissions policies does not define what constitutes ‘fairness’ and indeed Schwartz’s report (2004) revealed that there are varying understandings and interpretations of ‘fairness’ in the academy. SPA’s draft guidelines seem mainly concerned with promoting transparency in higher education admissions which as we have said is the received translation of ‘fair’.

MAKING ADMISSIONS  
PROCESSES AND PRACTICES  
CLEAR AND TRANSPARENT  
DOES NOT RENDER THEM  
'FAIR' IF THEY CONTINUE  
TO DISCRIMINATE AGAINST  
CERTAIN CLASS, ETHNIC  
AND GENDER GROUPS.



This report draws on interviews with admissions tutors, in order to examine admissions practices in the selection of students for art and design courses in five different case study higher education institutions. The research took a qualitative approach, designed to uncover the complexity of processes of admission and to deconstruct the key assumptions underpinning the selection of students. A qualitative approach enabled the collection of detailed data of everyday practices and the analysis of the assumptions, values and perspectives admissions tutors bring to the selection process. The methods included a review of admissions policies, prospectuses and websites and in-depth interviews with admissions tutors about their perspectives of the admissions system and process, as well as observations of actual selection interviews with candidates. We chose to both interview and observe admissions tutors because as Atkinson and Coffey (2002) argue both are ‘equally valid ways of capturing shared cultural understandings and enactments of the social world’ (Atkinson and Coffey, 2002:811), rather than because we favoured one method over the other.

Out of the nine institutions invited to take part in the study, five colleges of art and design agreed to participate. Two are in large metropolitan areas, one in a cathedral town, one in a rural area and one in a large town. Three out of the five were ‘selecting’ rather than ‘recruiting’ institutions. All of the ‘recruiting’ institutions readily agreed to participate in the research, whilst all but one of the ‘selecting’ institutions initially refused, citing overwork, ethical concern for applicants and a need to *‘get our house in order first’* as reasons for non-participation. One institution declined the invitation to participate because their staff were ‘overloaded’, but later asked for a copy of the research team’s methodology so that an administrative staff member could internally review their admissions processes. We declined on ethical grounds. The one ‘selecting’ institution that readily agreed to participate did so at the insistence of a senior manager who was concerned that their admissions tutors were *‘trying to make everyone middle class.’*

Admissions are clearly a sensitive subject, and confidentiality was crucial to the ethical considerations of this research. We aimed to develop a ‘responsible research relationship’ with participants (Mauthner et al., 2002), which considered ethical issues and the sensitivities and power relations of the research process. This included an explicit verbal and written research contract with participating admissions tutors, guaranteeing confidentiality for them and their institutions, clearly explaining that the research would be published and that involvement was entirely voluntary. Additionally, admissions tutors were asked to explain the presence of the observer to the interviewees, emphasizing that this person would not be involved in

the interview, or decision making process, and that they would be happy to leave if the interviewee objected to their presence. None of the applicants objected to the researcher’s presence, a likely reflection of the (im)balance of power relations.

In total ten members of staff were interviewed and seventy selection interviews were observed. All of the interviews were recorded and professionally transcribed. The analysis involved both the reduction and complication of the data through coding supported by NVivo as a tool of data management. The data were analysed by drawing on the conceptual insights of critical sociological theory, which supports close attention to the complex workings of inequality and misrecognition.

The principle field researcher kept a reflexive research diary detailing her thoughts, feelings and reactions to field work, including the interviews with admissions tutors and the observation of admissions interviews because:

To deny our being “there” misunderstands the inherent qualities of both methods – in terms of documenting and making sense of social worlds of which we are a part...The complex relationships among field settings, significant social actors, the practical accomplishment of the research, and the researcher-self are increasingly recognised as significant to all those who engage in research of a qualitative nature (whether that be participant observation, interviewing, or some combination of the two) (Atkinson and Coffey, 2002:812).

The field work raised strong emotions and reactions for the principle field researcher, one of the co-authors, leading her to question her professionalism as an ‘impartial’ researcher, and her position as a higher education professional. The researcher’s positioning as ‘one-of us’ by the admissions tutors, who generally treated her with warmth and friendliness, coupled with their seemingly unquestioned belief in the received wisdom of deeply-embedded and taken-for-granted admissions practices, appeared to render her invisible in the interview room. This became particularly problematic for the researcher who struggled with reconciling the admissions tutors’ recognition of her as a fellow professional, and colleague, with the reflexivity of her own identity (i.e. who she thought she was, and where she positioned herself) and the tutors’ (mis)recognition of applicants as worthy or unworthy of a place on a course.

Admissions statements

Four of the five colleges involved in this study had written admissions policies. All five had access agreements, which are a prerequisite for charging top-up fees. The language used in all the available admissions policies is very similar, with some differences in the use of language that could be said to indicate underlying assumptions about students, widening participation and the nature of higher education. Greenbank argues (2004:209) that because institutions meet and work together, language used for particular purposes such as equal opportunities quickly becomes codified and homogenised and that institutions have ‘learnt to develop the “right” form of words.’

In all four available admissions policies discourses of equal opportunities were drawn upon, including use of the term ‘freedom from discrimination’, yet it was unclear what measures were being taken to ensure and support equitable and anti-discriminatory practices. Further, there was general usage of the terms ‘race’ and ‘colour’, despite the latter having been deemed as inappropriate in anti-discrimination guidelines in the UK (it is still used relatively widely in America) in favour of the terms majority and minority ethnicity. At the very least, this use of outdated terms in admissions policies indicates a loss of touch with current trends in the equalities discourse but more seriously indicates a lack of attention to the development of equitable and anti-discriminatory practices.

Morley (2003) argues that such gestures, without serious and methodical attention to the ways inequalities might be reproduced, are acts of performativity and are damaging because:

Producing the right kind of optimistic and promotional self-description in mission statements, vision statements and self-assessment documents incorporates self-subversion and ritualistic recitation and reproduction. It implies a lack of ideological control over the task (Morley, 2003:70).

Drawing on Morley’s point, we argue that the development of equitable, inclusive and anti-discriminatory admissions policies and practices must move beyond simply using certain terms in documentation to a serious engagement with the complex ways that inequalities, exclusions and misrecognitions play out in subtle, insidious and often unwitting ways within taken-for-granted practices and judgments.

Course Information

Our research shows that there are very few resources and materials provided to help candidates understand the expectations and criteria that underpin selection in the art and design admissions process. The necessary application steps for admission are only alluded to briefly, and in none of the examples was it readily clear what standards are required of prospective students, or in fact exactly what they need to do to apply. Only one of the college websites attempts to explain the application process, with all the requisite UCAS codes and a clear list of all entry requirements. This lack of information in prospectuses and on websites implies that institutions expect applicants to instinctively know what will happen in the admissions process, or that they should be able to find out this information for themselves, when actually there is nowhere for them to look, further exacerbating their confusion and lack of clarity. In art and design, there is an added layer of complexity to the admissions process (McManus, 2006) in the form of a portfolio of work which is the main determinant of who is admitted to art and design degrees. The ‘traditional’ art and design HE applicant has spent a further (unfunded) post-A level year on a further education foundation diploma in art and design (not to be confused with the two year foundation degree), developing a portfolio. This lack of published information and guidance extends to the production of a portfolio, a standard requirement for entry onto art and design higher education courses. Information on how to develop a portfolio was completely absent or covered only in a few bullet points which failed to clarify what the admissions tutors interviewed for this study said that they were looking for in a portfolio.

Ball and Vincent, (1998) in their work on parental school choice make a distinction between ‘hot’ information or knowledge which is heard ‘on the ‘grapevine’ (Ball and Vincent, 1998:337) as part of family and social networks and is unevenly distributed across social groups, and ‘cold’ formal or official knowledge which is provided by institutions and professionals, for example through prospectuses and websites, and by teachers and careers advisers. Although middle class HE applicants’ access to ‘hot’ information means that they are unlikely to need ‘cold’ information, they are actually more likely to receive it than their working class peers who have little or no access to ‘hot’ informal networks of information (Reay et al., 2005). Archer, Hutchings and Ross (2003) suggest that the main reasons working class young people are not as well-informed about higher education as their middle class counterparts are that:

...working class people know fewer people who have experienced higher education; that schools and colleges supply less information to those from working class backgrounds; and that the information needed by working class potential applicants is itself more complex than that needed by their middle class counterparts (Archer, Hutchings and Ross, 2003:101).

Much of the information available in the prospectuses and on websites that we reviewed seemed to be a 'blizzard of hype (pseudo) information and impression management' (Ball cited in Reay et al., 2005:87) skewed towards a marketing approach to recruitment, focusing on promoting the college in a competitive market, rather than helping prospective students to apply for a course (see also Slaughter and Leslie, 1997). This approach particularly disadvantages certain class and ethnic groups because:

...information in prospectuses is far from transparent, requiring the complex decoding skills that come with the particular kinds of cultural capital that characterised middle class rather than working class families (Reay, David and Ball (2005:145)).

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## Theorising the Data: key concepts

In analysing the data, we draw on Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field and cultural capital, as well as feminist concepts of power and subjectivity to shed light on the complex operations of inclusion and exclusion at play in admissions practices.

Habitus is a set of socialised dispositions, which unconsciously incline people (agents) to 'act or react' (Bourdieu, 1993:5) in certain ways in particular social spaces (fields). Habitus is 'the result of a long process of inculcation which becomes a "second sense" or "second nature" (Bourdieu, 1993:5). People do not operate in vacuums but in the context of social spaces which Bourdieu calls 'fields' all with their 'own laws of functioning and its own relations of force' (Bourdieu, 1993:5). A field can be understood as a particular social setting, both actual and abstract (Silva, 2004, cited in Reay et al., 2005), and as what gives habitus its dynamic quality. It is within field that habitus becomes practice (Reay et al., 2005). Habitus generates behaviour, feelings and practices depending on the field. Each field is comparable to a game with its own set of rules; those with a 'feel for the game' (Bourdieu, 1993:5) and the 'right' habitus are free to play the game:

To enter a field – one must possess the habitus which predisposes you to enter that field and not another, that game, not another. One must possess at least the minimum amount of knowledge, or skill or 'talent' to be accepted as a legitimate player (Bourdieu, 1993:8).

If habitus confronts an unfamiliar field, although the experience can be transformative, it more often produces feelings of 'discomfort, ambivalence and uncertainty' (Reay et al., 2005:28). In addition to generating certain feelings, emotions and practices, habitus produces various forms of resources, which Bourdieu calls 'capital'. Different forms of capital are 'capable of conferring strength, power and consequently profit on their holder' (Skeggs, 1997:8). The concept

of cultural capital and its possible conversion into symbolic capital, is generative for understanding admissions practices. Bourdieu defines cultural capital as 'a form of knowledge, an internalised code or a cognitive acquisition which equips the social agent with empathy towards, appreciation for or competence in deciphering cultural relations and cultural artefacts' (Bourdieu, 1993: 7). Such concepts are illuminative in uncovering the subtle ways that certain socio-cultural groups might have a social advantage in decoding the expectations and criteria of art and design admissions.

In 'The Love of Art' (1991), Bourdieu details the findings of his survey of European art galleries which suggested that because of issues of habitus and cultural capital – rather than cost or location – the middle classes were more likely to visit art galleries and museums than the working classes. Admiration for art is not an innate predisposition; it is an arbitrary, that is, a cultural product of a specific process of inculcation. Bourdieu's work is chiefly concerned with the ways in which power and inequalities are reproduced. For Bourdieu, it is an 'obvious truth' (Bourdieu, 1991) that art is implicated in the reproduction of inequalities, and that the relationship between culture and power is such that taste creates social differences. Certain kinds of art can only be decoded, and appreciated by those who have been taught *how* to decode them (Bourdieu, 1984). The cultural capital of the working classes, and certain ethnic groups, is devalued and delegitimised (Bourdieu, 1984). Furthermore, Bourdieu argues that dominant groups make inequalities seem just, fair and natural, particularly through notions of meritocracy (the idea that economic and educational 'rewards' are the natural result of ability and hard work) resulting in the misrecognition of the effects of class inequalities. (Bourdieu, 1984).

Recent extensive research, 'designed partly to replicate Bourdieu's work' (Bennett et al., 2009:1), into the role of cultural capital in the reproduction of privilege in the UK found that:

Visual art remains a strong field of classification of social position. Engagement with visual art, as part of a broad visual culture, is widespread, the availability of art substantial and access increasingly available. Yet core participation by better off groups remains resilient, even though fissures and cleavages occur across group boundaries. The grip of legitimate culture remains firm. This is partly a matter of being able to afford to own works of art, the more prestigious of which are comparatively expensive. Acquiring objective cultural capital in this field, through possession, is for a minority. It is also evident in the tendency for the more highly educated middle classes, and especially the elite, to be far more likely to visit art galleries and have views about the quality of art. They, and their children, are disproportionately likely to develop a knowledge and appreciation that serves to increase institutional [legitimate] capital... Art remains a relatively exclusive field (Bennett et al., 2009:131).

Feminist concepts of power and subjectivity also help to expose relations of inequality and misrecognition that are often so subtle and insidious that they are largely overlooked in everyday practices, such as admissions. Power operates on multiple levels, is relational, contested and negotiated and is continually shifting across contradictory discourses and relations. All individuals are implicated in complex sets of power relations as situated subjects, including admissions tutors attempting to operate in fair and transparent ways. Admissions tutors are also implicated, like everyone else, in the hegemonic discourses that create possibilities for practice and for a sense of institutional position and legitimacy. Power is enacted in discursive fields that position different individuals, or subjects, in different ways across differences of age, class, disability, ethnicity, gender, race and sexuality as well as institutional status and authority. Identity formation is inextricably tied in with processes of subjective construction, which is continually being made and remade through everyday practices and in relation to difference and recognition:

Precisely because identities are constructed within, not outside, discourse, we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies. Moreover, they emerge within the play of specific modulations of power, and thus are more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion .... Above all ... identities are constructed through, not outside, difference (Hall, 2000:17).

Student identities are thus constructed through difference and 'polarizing discourses' and are tied to the notion of an ideal student subject; the traditional, standard, 18 year old student (Williams, 1997, 26). Those students associated with WP struggle to avoid the denigrating subject position of the 'Other', the identifiable 'non-standard' subject of the often derogatory discourses of WP, which are embedded in classed and racialised assumptions about lack and deficit. The discursive constitution of subjectivities is located within debates and policies that generate particular understandings of potential, talent and ability. Notions of self are always tied to notions of the 'Other' and disidentifications are key processes of subjective construction. Hegemonic discourses of WP inform understandings of what it means to be a university and art and design student as well as determine educational policies and practices (Burke and Jackson, 2007).

THE CANDIDATE IDENTIFIED  
AS HAVING POTENTIAL IS  
EXPECTED TO ALREADY  
DISPLAY CERTAIN ATTRIBUTES,  
SKILLS AND UNDERSTANDING.



## Expectations in the Admissions Process

One of the most striking themes to emerge from the data was the wide range of expectations of the candidates that admissions tutors bring to their decision-making and the selection process. The sheer breadth of the different kinds of characteristics and attributes the admissions tutors cited in terms of what they were looking for in potential students for their courses is noteworthy. For example, the expectations included the following points, expressed during the interviews with admissions tutors:

- wide knowledge of contemporary art
- some knowledge of fashion
- design ability
- ability to visually interpret
- ability to develop ideas, visually and conceptually
- breadth of understanding of various media
- critical understanding
- particular interest
- demonstrate potential
- expected to visit the college/course/site
- willingness to budget for and cover the cost of resources
- has an easy journey into college
- ‘unusual’
- ‘on the edge of society’
- looking for evidence of inspiration
- critical analysis and thought-process
- use of colour
- communication of ideas
- enthusiasm
- motivation
- good at self-promotion
- vibrant
- strong visual portfolio
- ‘talk really well’
- great team player
- ‘incredibly interesting’
- ‘incredibly entertaining’
- creative mind
- invention
- wit
- reflective
- organised
- ability to meet deadlines
- putting it on paper – in words
- not averse to writing
- ability to express themselves

- ‘have they got something to say’
- onus on student to know about the course
- attended an open day
- ‘You know it when you see it’
- knowledge of technology and computers

The range of different characteristics is particularly striking, considering that for the most part, the tutors were describing their expectations of 17 and 18 year olds before they had even started their courses. This highlights the complexity of notions of potential; for example to what extent is the candidate identified as having potential expected to *already* display certain attributes, skills and understanding? How are characteristics such as ‘wit’ and ‘being unusual’ or ‘inventive’ measured and judged and how can this be made ‘transparent’ and ‘fair’? Certain characteristics identified as important by the admissions tutors, such as ‘having something to say’ and being ‘incredibly interesting’ are steeped in value judgments that are arguably connected to historically privileged ways of being. These are tied in with ontological perspectives that value certain dispositions and attitudes more highly than others, and this is inextricably connected to classed and racialised inequalities and subjectivities. This raises significant questions and poses challenges about the processes of selection in terms of issues of equity, recognition and justice (Fraser, 1997).

Jenny Williams has argued that processes of selection are connected to ‘polarising discourses’, ‘in which students are constructed as normal or abnormal, worthy or unworthy, acceptable or unacceptable’ (Burke, 2002: 85). Williams explains:

Meanings are constructed through explicit or more often implicit contrast; a positive rests upon the negative of something antithetical. The normal, the worthy student and the acceptable processes of admission are legitimised by references to the abnormal, the unworthy, the unacceptable (Williams, 1997: 26).

In the context of Art and Design, the ‘worthy’ student seems to be associated with the ‘unusual’, the processes of creativity that involve risk-taking and invention (characteristics historically associated with white, euro-centric forms of masculinity). However, this is not a discourse about difference in relation to redressing social inequality and celebrating (ethnic and class) diversity. This is a discourse that is embedded in entitlement discourses and in middle-class judgments about what counts as valuable and tasteful (Skeggs, 2004).

Recognition is an important concept that helps shed light on selection processes. Recognition is about the politics of identity and the ways certain people have historically been misrecognised (Fraser, 1997). In the context of access to higher education, this is about the struggle to be recognized as a potential student of higher education (Burke, 2002, 2006). This concept helps to shed light on the struggles of candidates from working-class and minority ethnic backgrounds to be recognized as ‘worthy’ of selection within a framework that validates and legitimizes the dispositions and subjectivities of the ‘standard’ or ‘traditional’ student of higher education. In the moment of the selection interview, judgments are being enacted, which are claimed to be ‘fair’ and ‘transparent’ and even ‘value-free’ but clearly (from the long list of quite specific and value-loaded sets of expectations) are embedded in histories of classed and racialised inequalities, mis/recognitions and complex power relations. It is important to note that individual admissions tutors are as implicated in such complex social relations and discourses as the candidates themselves. Thus, this is not about individual decisions but about racialised and classed policies, structures and discourses that constrain the possibilities for individuals to operate in inclusive ways.

One of the recurring themes in relation to expectations of candidates was good communication skills. This seemed to relate to all forms of communication, for example, written, spoken and the expression of creativity and ideas. Literature in the field focusing on academic literacies and widening participation has argued that linguistic capital operates as a form of exclusion because ‘good communication’ is judged from a white, middle-class perspective (Lillis, 1997, 2002; Burke and Hermersmidt, 2005; Burke and Jackson, 2007). Lea and Street (1997) propose a theoretical framework to help develop practices that might work towards inclusion. This involves understanding writing and other forms of communication as sets of social practices rather than simply as skills or techniques that are straightforwardly taught to students. This recognizes that communication is not only about developing certain skills (such as writing an introduction, proofreading or compiling a bibliography); it is about the complex decoding of tacit understandings and conventions and as such remain mysterious to those on the outside of academia (Francis et al., 2003; Burke and Jackson, 2007; Leathwood and Read, 2009).

Such theoretical insights about the nature of writing and communication raise challenges for admissions policies and practices in relation to the commitment to widening educational participation, and more specifically to developing inclusive, equitable and anti-discriminatory practices. How might admissions tutors best assess potential in relation to communication skills with regard to those candidates from traditionally under (mis)represented backgrounds, whose linguistic and literacy practices are often drawing on epistemological frameworks outside of those privileged in academia? Such candidates might not yet have access to the tools to decode the tacit academic conventions but this does not mean that they do not have the potential to participate in higher education. The ways that the candidate articulates and expresses her or his ideas in the interview situation, and the way this is judged and assessed, relates directly to the issues of habitus and subjectivity outlined earlier in this report.

The assumptions behind the claim that communication skills are central criterion in the selection process deserves close attention. The admission tutor in the following quotation emphasizes communication skills as essential, suggesting that communication skills are something an individual has *naturally* (rather than as something that is learned, developed and acquired through particular forms of capital):

*Well, I am looking for people who are **natural communicators** really. Because, essentially, what they are doing is communicating in the same way as painters communicate and poets communicate and authors communicate. My students communicate various things, making films about particular emotions, stories, whatever. So I am looking for someone who is a **good communicator**. Also, if they are going to successfully move on from the degree to work within the industry, that is, if you like, the main mast of the ship, being able to communicate. People won't work with you if you don't communicate or you can't communicate. It is **essential**. In the same way as I think it is essential for me and any teacher to be able to communicate. That is my stock in trade, to an extent. And I think that is one of the primary things. So one of the things I look for, I would always look for a **good ability with English**. Spoken as well as written. Partly because, again, there is so much **writing** involved with the course, and so much communication with people, that it is important that they can do that successfully, diplomatically. Obviously those are the kind of things that come with age, in some respects, and some students aren't particularly diplomatic, but they might learn to be, after a few years.*

The admissions tutor does admit that good communication might ‘come with age’ and be developed over time. However, simultaneously, she is claiming that an essential characteristic for successful candidates is the demonstration of being a ‘natural communicator’, implying that good communication is an ability that can be measured through the selection process and is inherent and fixed. Interestingly, in relation to her perspectives on judging a candidate’s potential to develop communication skills, she explains:

*I have to say I sometimes think that interviewing and offering places to young men, at a particular time in their life, which is kind of mid to late teens, is not always the best time to really see what a person, grown, is going to be. And it is very difficult to make the assumption this person might change, because they might not. So from that point of view I think it is kind of difficult. And certainly with young women, as well, when they come in they can be very quiet and not very talkative because they are nervous. Or, conversely they can talk my ear off because they are nervous. It is kind of difficult, but you just have to try and gauge as best as you can, that they have those communicating skills.*

This statement deserves closer analysis, to deconstruct the assumptions about gender shaping her assessment about a candidate’s potential to develop good communication skills. She emphasizes the need to assess women and men differently on the basis of likely weaknesses that might be associated with being a man or being a woman. This is based on flawed biological assumptions about gender, which rest on notions that men and women are naturally different and inclined to certain kinds of behaviour (Epstein et al., 1997). Her approach then is informed by wider (implicitly sexist) assumptions about the differences between men and women. She suggests that a lack of maturity on the part of young men and a problem of nervousness in young women might be issues for admissions tutors to be aware of. Although she is talking about her desire to give the opportunity to the candidates to demonstrate their capacity to grow and develop, she is also saying it’s very hard to gauge whether or not there is ‘really’ the potential for development. She reiterates the point that having such skills is either present or it is not (whether that is in terms of potential or actual skill). She explains that it is ‘very difficult to make the assumption this person might change, because they might not’. In her statement, communication skills emerges as a set of fixed attributes, as something that is inherent in terms of ability and to some extent fixed and judgments should be made in relation to the differences between men and women.

The admissions tutors’ accounts of their expectations reflect wider discourses and understandings about intelligence and ability. Their understandings are shaped by deeply embedded assumptions about the nature of ability, which have been taken up by policy and embedded in assessment frameworks and practices, including the assessment process involved in admissions practices. David Gillborn (2008) traces highly problematic but nonetheless hegemonic discourses of ability to those assertions made by a group of US psychologists presented in the 1990s as ‘experts in intelligence and allied fields’ who claimed that ability is genetic and tied to racial background (Gillborn, 2008: 112). Although most policy makers would distance themselves publicly from such claims, Gillborn argues that ‘policymakers in Britain act as if they fundamentally accept the same simple view of intelligence (although they substitute the term ability as a relatively fixed and measurable quality that differs between individuals) (Gillborn, 2008: 112). He further explains that policy makers seem to believe that ability is ‘some inner quality or potential’ (Gillborn, 2008: 114).

Gillborn’s critique of ability builds on the insights of sociological theory such as that of Bourdieu outlined above. Such theoretical insights are important in teasing out the assumptions behind judgments about candidates’ potential ability, which are constructed as natural and innate but are socially connected to habitus and cultural capital. This critique helps to expose the ways that social inequalities are unwittingly reproduced through the very admissions frameworks that have been designed by policymakers to be ‘fair’ and ‘transparent’. This is not about individual racism or classism; it is far more insidious and complex than that. This is about histories of institutional racism and classism that have seeped into the very structures, practices and discourses in higher education that are attempting to eradicate social inequality. It is only by deconstructing the criteria (often itself implicit and vague), which informs individual admissions tutor’s decision-making processes, that an understanding of the depth of the problem of the operation of exclusion can be made visible.

The accounts of the admissions tutors were contradictory; on the one hand there were quite precise areas of expectation that the admission tutors highlighted. Yet, there was often a sense of lack of clarity in terms of what precisely the admissions tutors were looking for in the selection process. For example:

*I tell them that I can't be specific. I can't say I want to see so many drawings and so many this-es and that-s. I ask to see the best version of themselves that they can possibly show me. We want to see the best of their work, whatever sort of work it is. And the full range of stuff that they've done.*

It is somewhat confusing that while there was this vagueness expressed, there were very specific areas that were noted as central (even essential) in relation to admission tutors' expectations of candidates. They cited communication skills as a broad area of ability or potential being assessed, and this stood out as a key expectation. More specifically though, demonstrating the ability for academic writing was the aspect of communication continually raised as a key expectation of candidates. For example:

*We are also looking at just awareness of contemporary art, and also some kind of written work that shows that they have some kind of academic underpinning to their work. Because of the fact that the BA Hons course is an academic course, when all is said and done, as well.*

In this quotation, the admissions tutor is emphasizing the academic dimension of the course, which operates here as an example of the polarising discourse that Williams (1997) has outlined in her work. The antithesis of this would be the non-academic course, or the vocational course, to which students associated with WP have been explicitly connected in policy. For example, the 2003 White Paper on higher education clearly demarcates academic versus vocational forms of higher education in relation to the Government's WP agenda:

Our overriding priority is to ensure that as we expand HE places, we ensure that the expansion is of an appropriate quality and type to meet the demands of employers and the needs of the economy and students. (...) We want to see expansion in two-year, work-focused foundation degrees; and in mature students in the workforce developing their skills. As we do this, we will maintain the quality standards required for access to university, both safeguarding the standards of traditional honours degrees and promoting a step-change in the quality and reputation of work-focused courses (DfES, 2003: 64).

The admissions tutor quoted above is locating herself, her course, and any future students firmly with the traditional academic higher education and not the work-focused, vocational courses, as highlighted by the White Paper. In this way she is 'safeguarding her course', positioning it as a higher quality course.

In the following quotation, the admissions tutor is again placing writing high up on the list of criteria for selecting appropriate candidates. In this case, he is justifying the decision not to accept a candidate on the basis of her claim to 'hate' the history of art. This candidate, whom he later described, along with other female BTEC National Diploma students, as a 'ladette', was rejected despite the quality of her work, which he explains was not poor. Yet, her declaration demonstrated to him that she might be 'averse to writing', raising particular concerns about her ability to cope with the dissertation (it must be noted that the candidate would have at least 2 years to develop her writing skills and practices before having to tackle a dissertation). It seems remarkable, that even though she had the right qualifications and her work was judged to be good by the admissions tutor, the decision was made not to select her for the course on the basis of her claim to dislike art history during the selection interview:

*Well, the critical studies of the course is roughly twenty per cent of the degree. So if someone comes along who is averse to writing, that could be a problem. We do provide learning support for people who have difficulties. But it is a good indicator, I think. Some people are very proud of their written work. And the girl I was telling you about that came yesterday, who shot herself in the foot, by saying how much she hated doing art history. And it wasn't poor, the work. But because of her reaction to it, you know that this is somebody who is going to have to struggle mightily to get through a degree, particularly when it comes to the dissertation. Somebody who is that averse to it that she hates it. There really is no point in trying to do this. What I look for in the writing is to see whether they are being analytical. Sometimes it can be well written in terms of the English usage but is entirely descriptive. It will talk about a painting or a piece of work, and just describe it, the colours and the composition. And what you are hoping to find is that there is a thinker there. There is somebody who is thinking about the subject and having an opinion.*

Teresa Lillis explains that academic writing practices serve to privilege 'the discursive routines of particular social groups whilst dismissing those of people who, culturally and communally, have access to and engage in a range of other practices' (Lillis, 2002: 39). Her points help to uncover the subtle ways that certain candidates might be constructed as lacking the appropriate potential, when in fact the judgment is being made against an ideal form of literacy practice, that is learned and acquired through particular sets of cultural, social and linguistic capital, most available to those from higher socio-economic and white racialised backgrounds. Lillis explains that:

The conventions surrounding the production of student academic texts are ideologically inscribed in at least two powerful ways: by working towards the exclusion of students from social groups who have historically been excluded from the conservative-liberal project of HE in the UK and by regulating directly and indirectly what student-writers can mean, and who they can be (Lillis, 2002: 39).

The emphasis on demonstrating the ability to write in particular ways serves to exclude working-class and Black and minority ethnic groups at both ontological (who is constructed as having potential and ability) and epistemological (what forms of potential are validated through the selection processes) levels. This is profoundly connected to the legitimisation of particular forms of cultural capital and 'taste' as well as forms of linguistic capital. This highlights the complexity and politics of processes of selection.

THIS IS ABOUT HISTORIES OF  
INSTITUTIONAL RACISM AND  
CLASSISM THAT HAVE SEEPED  
INTO THE VERY STRUCTURES,  
PRACTICES AND DISCOURSES  
IN HIGHER EDUCATION THAT  
ARE ATTEMPTING TO ERADICATE  
SOCIAL INEQUALITY.



The strong emphasis on the portfolio for admission to art school makes it a very different matter from the typical admission to university...the portfolio process is complex and pupils from deprived areas where admission to art school is a rarity are often ill equipped to develop a portfolio of high standard. Further, they typically do not have access to adequate facilities and materials, either at school or at home (UUK, 2002:49).

Although the production of a portfolio is essential to the application and assessment process (McManus, 2006), as we have said there is very little information provided to candidates about this in the pre-application advice and promotion materials. Indeed the admissions tutors themselves often struggled to articulate what they were looking for:

*It is quite difficult to be really specific about it, and it sounds like a cop out to say you know it when you see it but you do.*

*It becomes fairly obvious after a while. I know what I am looking for and it stands out a mile.*

The interviews suggested that the admissions tutors shared a tacit understanding of what they think should be in a portfolio, transferring this implicit expectation onto the applicant. The admissions tutors saw the portfolio as a valid and reliable tool of assessment, which aided them in the appropriate selection of candidates with the potential and ability to complete the course. Again, Gillborn's critique of ability is relevant here; the admissions tutors implied that the portfolio is an instrument of measurement about a candidate's innate level of potential, ability and talent, often constructed as 'creativity'. They used the portfolio to make judgments about who the candidate is; a sign of being the right kind of student for the course. Knowing what should be in the portfolio was itself a sign of being right for the course. Although there was no explicit guidance, candidates were expected to know (instinctively) what a 'good' portfolio consisted of. The cultural capital the candidate must demonstrate in their portfolio is tied in with (middle) classed, (white) racialised and (masculine) gendered dispositions, as the following quotation highlights:

*Originality, experimentation, diversity, an open mind, exploration, even if the work, at this point in time, we were talking about pre-higher education, even sometimes if the work itself is a bit raw around the edges, but you can see someone is really trying to explore and experiment, if they have the motivation to do that then you can do an awful lot to help them to learn what they need to learn on that programme. If somebody has got a closed mind it is that much more difficult.*

The admissions tutor cites a number of characteristics historically connected to white, middle-class and masculine-centred dispositions, for example open-mindedness, motivation, originality, experimentation. Although the admissions tutor suggests that this is a tall order in terms of the educational level of the candidate (pre-higher education), he expects to see these characteristics in the portfolio even if they are 'raw'. Again, this implies a sense of innate ability, which has the potential to be developed, rather than as connected to social and cultural habitus, background and subjective construction (i.e. who is seen as an ideal candidate and according to whose criteria).

## Interview as a Tool of Assessment

Most of the courses interviewed candidates who met the entry requirements, but there were varying modes of interviewing. One course held group interviews, another only interviewed candidates whose portfolios had passed a review process. Some courses asked candidates to bring an essay they had written which would be given a cursory scan at the interview, some administered 'tests' to interviewees, all of which were compiled by teaching staff who seemed unclear about what they were attempting to measure and how they were measuring it. One heavily over-subscribed course only interviewed vocational learners. A level applicants were sent a 'test' through the post, about colour or shape awareness, and offered a place on the basis of the test result and their predicted A level grades. This distinction meant that A level students, who are more likely to come from white, middle-class backgrounds, avoided having to produce a portfolio, or having to answer the intense and probing questions, which were often implicitly about cultural capital and subjectivity, asked at the admissions interview.

Gillborn and Youdell (2000) argue that there is no consensus on the validity of testing as a predictor of achievement; that 'IQ' and 'ability' are not hereditary and measurable and that there is no such thing as culture-free testing. Tests 'measure learnt, mutable skills not fixed and generalised potential' (Gillborn and Youdell, 2000:66); that is they measure 'acquired behaviour' (Gillborn and Youdell, 2000:210). Gillborn and Youdell describe behaviour which suggests the acceptance of hereditarian notions of innate intelligence as 'new IQism' (Gillborn and Youdell, 2000:212) 'an approach that affirms traditional notions of IQ, without conscious deliberation of the consequences, and even masquerades as part of an inclusive project concerned with social justice and equity' (Gillborn and Youdell, 2000:15). In art and design higher education admissions the coupling together of New IQism and 'fairness' was very much in evidence, in the general principle of treating everyone the same on the grounds that the admissions process was designed to assess 'ability' and 'abilities' are seen as innate and free of class and ethnic bias. Notions of innate ability 'testable' through portfolios, essays, tests and interview questions are, as we have said, 'coded and enacted' (Gillborn and Youdell, 2000:212) in art and design HE admissions discourse as 'creativity' and 'talent', (art and design's New IQism), systematically disadvantaging Black and Minority Ethnic and working class groups:

...tests have operated as an apparently 'objective' and 'scientific' measure that has, in fact, systematically disadvantaged minority pupils and provided palliatives for a system happy to be re-assured that the relative failure of minorities reflects their own inner deficits rather than any unfairness in the system (Gillborn and Youdell, 2000:60).

The use of tests as an admissions criteria did not appear in any of the participating institutions admissions information and was one of several clearly inequitable hidden systemic interview practices we encountered, another being internal progression schemes.

All but one institution had an internal progression scheme for their own FE students currently studying the one year foundation diploma course. These students are given an internal pre-UCAS portfolio review and interview, before external candidates could apply, principally as a way of recruiting and retaining students. These schemes are highly problematic, particularly in 'selecting' institutions given the largely white middle-class make-up of their foundation diploma students, as this admissions tutor says:

*There is a definite difference in the students. On foundation diploma courses they have money. There are no two ways about it, they have money. Quite often you see some of them driving better cars than we drive. But the ones that do the NDs in graphic design, or the NDs in graphics and things like that, are definitely kind of inner city working class kids. The majority of them work bloody hard on the NDs. They definitely deserve the places that they get. But what you find is the students who are doing foundation diplomas have got all their A levels already, so they are doing an extra year. And the kids who are doing the NDs don't have A levels, so they are coming through a slightly different route. I think occasionally it has been jokingly said that foundation diploma is a finishing school. A very flip remark, but I think sometimes it could be perceived as that.*

The notion of the foundation diploma as a 'finishing school' was a recurrent theme throughout this research, particularly in selective institutions. Although there is no national data available on the social class and ethnicity of foundation diploma students because this information is not recorded, the 'kind of inner city working class kids' on BTEC National Diploma courses described above, are demographically more likely to be from Black and Minority Ethnic groups, than the foundation diploma students described above as 'having money'. So, internal students from foundation diploma courses, who are more likely to be white and middle class, particularly at selective institutions, are offered an interview, and potentially a place before the UCAS application process is open to external students, a practice which indirectly discriminates against working class and BME students, particularly those studying BTEC National Diplomas (NDs) in local FE colleges, the target group of the National Arts Learning Network.

These internal progression schemes function as a hidden admissions practice (Burke, 2006), not featured anywhere in prospectuses or websites, and are seen as innocuous: a 'commonsense' way of retaining students when they are actually implicated in classed and racialised practices. Gillborn and Youdell (2000) in their work on selection and setting in secondary schools found that 'the most powerful discriminatory processes were operating through commonsense approaches' (Gillborn, 2002: 2).

It was during the interview that the importance of habitus and capital – principally cultural capital, and its conversion into symbolic capital were most apparent. Furthermore, the interview was a space in which subjective construction played out in ways that reinforced classed, gendered and racialised inequalities and misrecognitions about who is (not) seen as having potential. There was a distinct preference for a particular kind of privileged cultural capital, acquired through familial and academic background, which was white and middle class (Bourdieu, 1984). There was also a process of (dis) identification in which certain forms of embodied, performative and discursive subjectivities were mis/recognised.

The majority of applicants had portfolios which were deemed mid-range – that is neither exceptional nor unexceptional. This meant that it was possible for some applicants, predominantly those who were middle-class, to talk their way onto the course by demonstrating the possession of symbolic cultural capital, capital which is valued and can be traded in the field/market of art and design higher education for a place on a course. It was standard practice to construct the interview around a series of canonical questions and acceptable answers which reflect middle-class habitus and cultural capital (McManus 2006). This 'canon' of questions includes the following:

- Who is your favourite artist/designer? Who are your design heroes? Who or what influences your work?
- What galleries do you visit? What is your favourite gallery? What exhibitions have you been to lately? If you could exhibit your work in a gallery where would that be?
- What is your favourite film? What films have you seen recently? What is your favourite advert? Who is your favourite director?
- What books do you read? What are you reading at the moment?
- What is your favourite shop? Where do you like to shop?

These questions, asked across disciplines, were sometimes subject specific e.g. 'Who is your favourite graphic designer/fashion designer?' One fashion admissions tutor explained why he always asks applicants what they were reading:

*If someone is reading Vogue but also Jane Austen and they are going to exhibitions of ceramics, and all this sort of thing, it means they are interested in more than one thing, and their work will have all different elements to it when they join us.*

A graphics/digital design foundation degree admissions tutor describes what he asks interviewees and why:

*What is your favourite book? And explain why. What is the best film you have seen recently, and why? Have you been to any galleries, exhibitions, theatre, recently? What is the best advert on television and which is the worst? And are there any contemporary artists, in a broader sense, it could be a designer, or an author, director, musician or something like that, that you particularly admire? So we are trying to find out what they are aware of, you know, and how critically they are ... their understanding of a particular genre. We are not asking them to be experts in every single aspect of art, but what we need to find out is if they have a particular interest in one particular area at this moment in time with digital, maybe film or something like that. So it is about kind of trying to understand their critical analysis thought process.*

A textiles admissions tutor gives her reasons for persistently (sometimes six or seven times in an interview) asking interviewees questions about their influences:

*It helps us assess how outgoing the student is and how prepared they are to look over and above their own little area. So how prepared they are to go out, into the environment. And it is about communication as well, so they can maybe talk about, articulate and talk through ideas from other designers or artists. And sometimes that question invites them to talk about how that artist has influenced them, so we can start to make connections between the critical, the wit and the contextual aspect of the work and their own practice.*

As we have commented, the majority of applicants were seventeen and eighteen years old and were being expected to talk in a highly analytical and critical way about their work, and the work of famous artists and designers, before they had even started their degree courses. In the rather daunting context of an interview, where significant decisions will be made about a candidate's future, and questions are underpinned by the values and perspectives of those from privileged backgrounds, it is not surprising that many candidates from BME and/or working class backgrounds were simply not able to do this to the satisfaction of the admissions tutors and thus were often rejected.

Alan, an eighteen year old young man from a 'notorious' inner city council estate was asked to name a contemporary artist whose work he liked:

*Interviewer: Tell us about a contemporary artist whose work you admire*

*Alan: (after a brief silence): Salvador Dali*

*Interviewer: He's dead*

*Alan: Pardon*

*Interviewer: I said contemporary, Salvador Dali is dead.*

Alan was able to name a 'modern' artist, but not a 'contemporary' artist and was not offered a place on the graphics foundation degree for which he had applied. It could be argued that the words 'modern' and 'contemporary' are almost interchangeable in everyday, rather than technical, language. The observation data also exposes the ways that racialised subjectivities inform admissions tutors' judgments in the selection process. Nina, a Black working class young woman from a poor inner city area, applying for a Fashion Design BA, was asked at the beginning of her interview about the influences on her work:

*Interviewer: What influences your work?*

*Nina: I'm influenced by hip-hop.*

*Interviewer: Hip-hop or the history of hip-hop?*

*Nina: The history of hip-hop*

In response to Nina's answer, the body language of the interviewers visibly changed. They leaned back in their chairs and appeared to go through the motions of interviewing Nina. They asked her what she would like to design and she answered that she was interested in designing sports tops. After a few more questions, seemingly asked to confirm their view of Nina as an inappropriate candidate, they curtailed the interview, giving Nina less time than other applicants. After Nina left the interview room, the interviewers immediately decided to reject her. They discussed how they would record this on the form they were required to complete about all applicants:

*Interviewer one: Why should we say we're rejecting her?*

*Interviewer two: Well she's all hip-hop and sport tops*

*Interviewer one: We'll say that her portfolio was weak.*

Yet, when the interviewers reviewed her portfolio before the interview took place, they had not deemed it weak. Following her interview, the two interviewers recorded on their form that Nina's portfolio was below average, noting also that the clothes she wore to the interview were not fashionable and that she lacked confidence. Nina was dressed very smartly in dark jeans and a cotton top. All of the other (white) female candidates were dressed in similar smart casual clothing of tunic, leggings and pumps. The interviewers also noted their dissatisfaction with Nina's intentions to live at home

whilst studying, suggesting this was a sign of immaturity. They also noticed that there was a page missing from the test paper that Nina had been given, but agreed that this didn't matter because they had already decided to reject her. The white middle-class male candidate interviewed immediately after Nina, was from an affluent spa town, expensively dressed and cited famous contemporary artists and designers amongst his influences. In the interview discussion, he confirmed that he would 'definitely be leaving home because it is all part of the experience.' The young man was offered a place in spite of having considerably poorer qualifications than Nina, including having failed GCSE Art. We suggest that although this applicant was less qualified than Nina, and like her had a portfolio initially assessed as average, the interviewers recognised and valued his cultural capital allowing it to be converted into symbolic cultural capital, and traded upon (Skeggs, 2004) for a place in higher education.

Nina was not recognized as a legitimate subject of art and design studies because she cited a form of fashion/influence seen as invalid in the higher education context. Furthermore, her intentions not to leave home were read as signifying her inappropriate subject position. The male, middle-class, white-English candidate on the other hand knew how to cite the discourses that would enable him to be recognized as a legitimate student subject. Although no explicitly racist statements were made by the admissions tutors, we want to argue that their judgments were shaped by implicit, institutionalized, disciplinary and racialised perspectives of what counts as legitimate forms of experience and knowledge. Classed, gendered and racialised formations of subjectivity, which are embodied as well as performative, profoundly shape selection-processes. Such judgments are made in the context of struggles the tutors themselves are involved with in relation to their own institutional, embodied, performative subjectivities. This is tied in with the derogatory discourses of 'dumbing down' and 'lowering standards' and the desire to be recognized as 'world class'. This is implicitly underpinned by debates about knowledge and skills and work-based, vocational provision as marked out as less legitimate than courses and institutions seen as academic and high status:

Success of individuals and of schools, FE colleges and HE institutions is still measured against traditional models: all school children being examined at the same age, regardless of their preparedness; A-levels in traditional 'academic' subjects being the most acceptable for entry into many universities, 'vocational' routes seen as suitable only for those who cannot achieve in 'academic' routes. Full-time under graduate study, preferably away from home, is the most valued and many employers only recruit graduates with high A-level scores from their shortlist of traditional universities (Copland 2008: 4).

Paul Goodwin, Cross-Cultural Curator at Tate Britain, writes about the paradox and contradiction between the considerable contribution of Black and immigrant cultures to the arts and creativity – which can be seen very clearly in the global commodification of Black urbanism – and the continued 'marginalisation' of Black and immigrant groups:

Black and migrant urban culture – styles fashions, music, arts, cultural productions – are in many places a driving force, among other factors, in the so called 'renaissance' of culture in metropolitan areas – New York, London, Paris, Tokyo etc. Notions of urban 'cool', and 'hipness' as in the jazz age are being re-defined around the global traffic in black culture fuelled by the phenomenal rise in hip-hop and its related industries. Yet at the same time, black communities in these same cities are living in on-going conditions of squalor, extreme poverty and social and economic marginalisation (Goodwin, 2009: under construction).

So although, as Goodwin argues, Black urban culture, and in particular hip-hop, has contributed hugely to the arts, Black people themselves are not benefiting from the commercialisation of their urban culture. In Gilroy (2004) Black fashion Karl Kani™ concurs with Goodwin's argument about the exploitation of Black urban culture, and the exclusion of those who create it:

People see black people as trendsetters, they see what we're on and they wanna be onto the same thing, figuring it's gonna be the next big thing. They try to take things away from us every time. Slang we come up with ends up on T-shirts. We ain't making no T-shirts (Fashion designer Karl Kani, cited in Gilroy, 2004:241).



INTERVIEWER ONE:  
WHY SHOULD WE SAY  
WE'RE REJECTING HER?  
INTERVIEWER TWO:  
WELL SHE'S ALL HIP-HOP  
AND SPORT TOPS.  
INTERVIEWER ONE:  
WE'LL SAY THAT HER  
PORTFOLIO WAS WEAK.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

This report argues that admissions practices are tied up with complex operations of exclusion, which privilege the habitus, subjectivities and cultural and linguistic capital of ‘traditional’ students, who tend to come from white, middle-class backgrounds. Although admissions systems are designed to be ‘fair’ and ‘transparent’, the lack of attention to complex sets of inequalities, differences and mis/recognitions, we argue, undermines the project of widening participation to art and design courses in higher education. The focus on individual practices rather than wider sets of discursive practices helps to hide the workings of inequality in processes of selection.

This research raises conceptual and theoretical issues for understanding processes of exclusion and mis/recognition at play in higher education and disciplinary fields, most specifically art and design. There are also important practical and professional implications to consider from the analysis of the data offered in this report. A key dimension of this concerns the processes of selection, judgment and recognition in the decisions being made through art and design admissions frameworks. We have argued that admissions tutors’ decisions about individual candidates must be understood in relation to the wider contexts in which these decisions are located and embedded. This necessitates that institutional and strategic frameworks are developed in order to support admissions tutors in the complex processes of decision-making they are engaged in and responsible for, and that issues of inclusion and equity are placed at the centre of this process. It is important to highlight that this is not simply about creating transparency, although being explicit and clear about the expectations is an important dimension of creating inclusive admissions practices. This is about engaging admissions tutors in reflecting on the ways that their decisions might be shaped by the (discriminatory) values and perspectives shaping how candidates are (or are not) recognized as having talent, ability and potential. Furthermore, there are implications for the kinds of reflective and critical practices encouraged, or not encouraged, on art and design teacher development and continuing professional development (CPD) programmes, including how art and design HE teachers are subject to ‘regulatory discourses’ (Atkinson, Brown and England, 2006).

Although we feel it is crucial to resist the creation of a ‘how to’ list, or a set of tick boxes, we do want to suggest that there are steps that must be taken to ensure a more inclusive and socially just set of admissions practices. We make the following recommendations with the caveat that there are no universal rules to ensure inclusion, equality and anti-discrimination, not least because these issues are contextual and different individuals bring to those contexts complex formations of identity.

Our recommendations are as follows:

- 1 institutions, departments and course teams must be as explicit as possible about the criteria they are drawing on in the selection process, including the more implicit dimensions of the process;
- 2 such advice and information should include practical issues, such as what constitutes a ‘good’ portfolio, but should be underpinned by sensitivities to the ways certain expectations might be unwittingly excluding those candidates who don’t yet have access to particular forms of cultural capital;
- 3 such information must be made as accessible to candidates as possible, and must not rely on prior knowledge or understanding of asking the ‘right kinds of questions’;
- 4 institutions should provide all staff involved in admissions with carefully designed continuing professional development (CPD), which includes close attention to equitable, anti-discriminatory practices, including the subtle processes of mis/recognition highlighted in this report;
- 5 admissions tutors should understand that simply having a set of standard questions for an interview, which all candidates are asked, is not the same as being ‘fair’. Rather admissions tutors should be required to consider how those questions might privilege particular values and perspectives at the expense of candidates from traditionally under(mis)represented backgrounds;
- 6 interview questions therefore should avoid being value-loaded, or should be designed to value different sets of experiences and perspectives, taking into account the candidates’ age and socio-cultural background;
- 7 admissions tutors must be made accountable by the institution in making their decisions against criteria that places value on equitable and inclusive practices, so that this is an explicit and central part of the selection process;
- 8 admissions teams must be held accountable by their institution in relation to their instruments of assessment (including for example, criteria for judging portfolios, interview questions, tests), which must be fit for purpose not only in selecting candidates with potential, but doing so in ways that are equitable, anti-discriminatory and inclusive;
- 9 the art and design academy needs to carefully scrutinise the potentially discriminatory role of internal progression schemes, and foundation diplomas, in the admissions process;
- 10 the art and design academy needs to further investigate the extent to which the inequitable admissions practices described in this report reflect equally discriminatory curriculum and pedagogical practices.

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## Appendix 1 Analysis of Quantitative data

### UK University data

The data in this report is for UK-domiciled, full-time entrants. UCAS provide figures for UK university admissions (Available from UCAS [www.ucas.ac.uk](http://www.ucas.ac.uk)).

### Ethnicity

The ethnic breakdown for 2007 shows that for the UK university sector 5.3% of cases are unknown. Of the remaining cases, 80% are white, and 20% Black and Minority Ethnic (BME).

Art and Design subjects (JACS code W) account for 10% of all University acceptances. For the Art and Design sector only, 12% of acceptances were from BME groups.

It is also useful to compare the figures to UK population data. The 2001 Census data (Office for National Statistics) shows that 7.9% of the population of England and Wales in 2001 were from minority ethnic groups. Minority ethnic groups are disproportionately represented among the younger age groups. Within the 2001 Census Sample of Anonymised Records (SARs) for 18–21 year olds, 12.9% in this age group in England and Wales were non-white. Minority ethnic groups are disproportionately represented in higher education, and although this representation varies considerably between minority ethnic groups, no minority ethnic group is under represented in higher education compared to their representation in the general population.

However, these figures conceal considerable disparities between ethnic groups in terms of the type of higher education institutions attended and subjects studied.

### Social class

UCAS also provide figures on the socio-economic class (SEC) background of accepted applicants, using Office for National Statistics' definition of socio economic status (Available from [www.statistics.gov.uk](http://www.statistics.gov.uk)).

Table 1:  
Definition of Socio-economic status

Summary	SEC (Socio-economic status)
High	1 Higher managerial and professional occupations
	2 Lower managerial and professional occupations
	3 Intermediate occupations
Low	4 Small employers and own account workers
	5 Lower supervisory and technical occupations
	6 Semi-routine occupations
	7 Routine occupations
Unknown	8 Unemployed / not classified / unknown

In 2007, 50.4% of accepted applicants were from SEC 1–3, 24% from SEC 4–7 and 25.5% were unknown.

The data collected for this research from the NALN institutions excludes unknown SEC from the statistics. Therefore if we apply this assumption to the UCAS SEC data above, for the previous 3 years, we obtain the following statistics:

Table 2:  
SEC data for accepted applicants at UK Universities

SEC	2005	2006	2007
SEC 1–3	68.0%	68.0%	67.7%
SEC 4–7	32.0%	32.0%	32.3%

Table 2 is for the entire UK university sector. For the Art and Design sector only, for 2007, 35.4% of students were from SEC 4–7. The figures reflect the prevalence of foundation degrees in the art and design sector, the highest in higher education. In 2007, Art and Design had twice the number (24.3%) of accepted foundation degree applicants than the next largest subject which is business and administration (12.4%). In NALN institutions foundation degrees have a higher proportion of students from BME and SEC 4–7 groups. If we apply this assumption to the art and design HE sector generally these figures may be replicated nationally.

NALN data

During the period 2004/5 to 2007/8, 14% to 15% of enrolled students in honours and foundation degrees at NALN institutions were from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups. This is higher than the Census figure for the relevant age group, but lower than the figure for the UK university sector as a whole. This figure relates only to individuals for whom ethnic data was available. The proportion of missing values on this variable was 2% to 3%. Although it would be desirable to examine the ethnic minority data in more detail, examining the differences between different minority ethnic groups, rather than grouping them together, the numbers involved are too small to make this reliable.

During the period 2004/5 to 2007/8, 29% to 33% of enrolled students in honours and foundation degrees at NALN institutions were from Socio-economic Class groups 4–7. This figure relates only to individuals for whom SEC data was available. Five institutions were unable to provide data. For those institutions that provided social class data, the proportion of missing values on this variable in the combined data, ranged from 40% to 45%.

Subject disciplines

The representation of students according to social class and ethnic group varies considerably according to the field of study.

Some of the analyses below group together honours and foundation degrees, in order to increase the base sample from which comparisons are drawn. At the NALN institutions, 83% of students are studying an honours degree and 17% are studying a foundation degree. As table 2 shows, foundation degrees have higher proportions of students from BME and low SEC groups.

Table 3:  
Students on honours and foundation degrees  
at NALN institutions, 2007/08

	Honours Degree	Foundation Degree
% BME	13	18
% SEC 4–7	32	41

Ethnicity

- Fine Art Between 2004/5 and 2007/8, 8% of enrolled fine art honours and foundation degree students were from BME groups.
- Design Studies Between 2004/5 and 2007/8, between 19% and 20% of enrolled design studies honours and foundation degree students were from BME groups.
- Music Between 2004/5 and 2007/8, between 3% and 7% of enrolled music honours and foundation degree students were from BME groups.
- Drama Between 2004/5 and 2007/8, between 6% and 8% of enrolled drama honours and foundation degree students were from BME groups.
- Dance Between 2004/5 and 2007/8, the proportion of BME students enrolled in honours and foundation degree courses in dance ranged from 0% to 15%. However, this is based on very small numbers for each year (n<50).
- Cinematics and Photography Between 2004/5 and 2007/8, between 9% and 12% of enrolled cinematics and photography honours and foundation degree students were from BME groups.
- Crafts Between 2004/5 and 2007/8, between 2% and 6% of enrolled crafts honours and foundation degree students were from BME groups.
- Imaginative writing Between 2004/5 and 2007/8, between 4% and 7% of enrolled imaginative writing honours and foundation degree students were from BME groups.
- Other Between 2004/5 and 2007/8, between 9% and 11% of enrolled 'other' honours and foundation degree students were from BME groups.

Summary:

Design studies has a substantially higher representation of BME students compared to the other disciplines. In all other disciplines, BME groups are under-represented compared to their representation at other UK Higher Education Institutions.

Social class

There are high levels of missing values for the social class variable. Clearly, this means that we must be cautious in interpreting these findings.

Fine Art	Between 2004/5 and 2007/8, between 24% and 33% of enrolled fine art honours and foundation degree students were SEC 4–7.
Design Studies	Between 2004/5 and 2007/8, between 31% and 36% of enrolled design studies honours and foundation degree students were SEC 4–7.
Music	Between 2004/5 and 2007/8, between 20% and 30% of enrolled music honours and foundation degree students were SEC 4–7.
Drama	Between 2004/5 and 2007/8, between 27% and 32% of enrolled drama honours and foundation degree students were SEC 4–7.
Dance	Between 2004/5 and 2007/8, between 15% and 42% of enrolled dance honours and foundation degree students were SEC 4–7 (note that the figures for dance are based on small numbers, n<50 for each year).
Cinematics and Photography	Between 2004/5 and 2007/8, between 27% and 37% of enrolled cinematics and photography honours and foundation degree students were SEC 4–7.
Crafts	Between 2004/5 and 2007/8, between 19% and 43% of enrolled crafts honours and foundation degree students were SEC 4–7.
Imaginative writing	Between 2004/5 and 2007/8, between 23% and 36% of enrolled imaginative writing honours and foundation degree students were SEC 4–7.
Other	Between 2004/5 and 2007/8, between 19% and 45% of enrolled 'other' honours and foundation degree students were SEC 4–7.

Institutions

Analysis at the institutional level is problematic, because the numbers concerned are often small. Caution is therefore needed in interpreting these results. In particular, year-on-year fluctuations do not necessarily represent trends.

Figure 1 shows the proportion of minority ethnic students by institution. A couple of institutions have higher levels of BME students; however the majority of NALN institutions have around 10% or less BME representation. A number of institutions consistently have levels of BME representation of 5% or less.

Figure 1: Ethnicity by Institution  
Ethnicity – All Undergraduate % BME

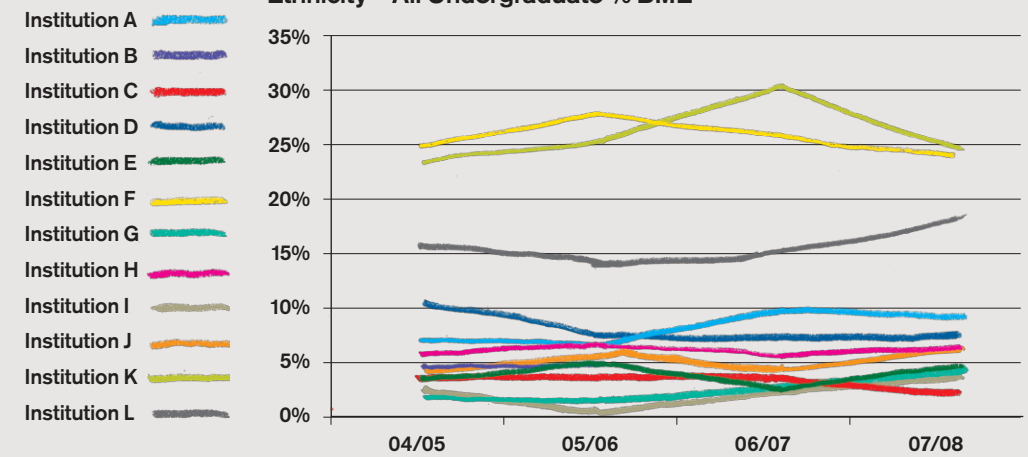
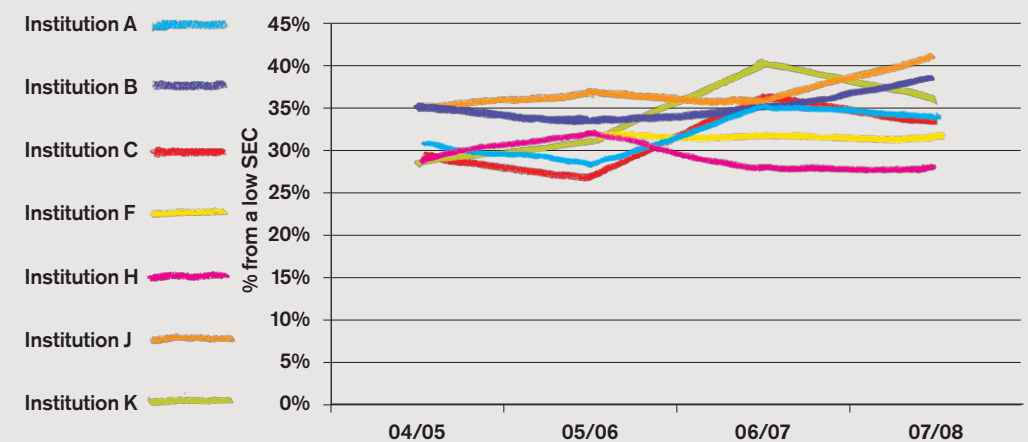


Figure 2 below shows the proportion of accepted applicants by social class, for those institutions providing this information. Clearly, most of the NALN institutions had broadly similar levels of students from low social class groups.

Figure 2: Social Class by Institution  
Social Class – All Undergraduate % low SEC



## Appendix 2

### Sample Interview Documents

Interview  
Document  
Sample 1 –  
Guide for Staff

Route A/B interviews

The interviews are 15–20 minutes long and **MUST** run to time. I'd like each interviewer to take responsibility for one question below. The first 10 minutes of the interview will be question 1 and the applicant has an opportunity to talk about a piece of their work. The interviewing team should respond and ask open questions as they arise in relation to the applicant's work.

- 1 Take us to a significant piece of work or project and discuss your creative journey to this? E.g. process of initiating ideas, research and developing ideas. (Use this time to also ask about anything in the application). The latter 10 minutes will be taken up with the questions below:
- 2 Can you tell us why you want to apply to this course?
- 3 Tell us about a particular artist or designer, film, exhibition that has inspired you and or influenced you or made you think critically.
- 4 There is a Critical Studies component to the course – how do you see the relationship between research, writing and theory e.g. contextual/critical studies and your visual practice? (As about essay writing and connections with their own work).
- 5 If you could show your work in any ideal situation, space, context, where or what would the location be?
- 6 What other courses have you applied to?
- 7 Are you holding any other offers?
- 8 Are there any questions you would like to ask us?

Interview  
Document  
Sample 2 –  
Guide for Staff

Interview question template 06

Role A: Chair  
Role B: 2nd member panel.  
Roles C & D: Two second year students

Chair welcomes applicant back to the room (after the 3 minutes of portfolio inspection), and introduces himself and then the other panel members.

**Questions:**

A: Can you tell us first, if we are able to offer you a place this year would you choose to take it up in October or defer entry for a year (explain that it doesn't matter to us either way, but it helps us to know in advance)

A Can you tell us a little bit about the structure of your Foundation Course (or equivalent) ie: was it very structured with projects – to what extent were you able to do work that you call your own.

A Can you tell us how you found the experience of your Foundation year (or equivalent).

A Have you visited an Open Day?  
Can you tell us why you want to come and study here?

“I will hand you over to B, who will ask you about the work you have bought along today...”

B Can you pick out one piece or a series of related pieces, which are for you the most important for you? With which artists do you feel you share a connection, or could find some common ground?

B Can you talk to us about the artists who have been important for you? With which artists do you feel you share a connection, or could find some common ground?

B Other questions which relate to the specific character of the work.

A Would either of the students like to ask a question?  
(In turn role C 1st, then role D 2nd student member of panel)

A Can you talk to us about a 'Cultural Event' which you have picked-up on or has been memorable for you over the last 12 months? (A Cultural Event, a book or a film or an exhibition, a play, travelling or even a political demonstration)

A Is there a question you would like to ask us?

A Thank you for coming for interview, you will hear from us through UCAS in about two weeks.

**Interview protocol:**

- Applicants register with the course secretary and show evidence of ID and educational qualifications.
- The applicants are seen for interview one at a time.
- The panel will invite the applicant to discuss the portfolio of work and the themes that are evident in it.

**Interview notes**

- Applicants Name:
- Date:
- Drawing –
- Experimental approaches to materials / processes –
- Visual / Textual Research –
- Sketchbooks / Notebooks –
- Work developed independently –
- Critical awareness / judgement –
- General –
- Evidence of ability to satisfy CrS element of the course – Y / N
- Disability: Y / N  
If yes what level of support would be required?
- Panel members:
- Accept: Y / N

Interview  
Document  
Sample 4 –  
Written Test

Please answer the following questions and bring this with you to your interview:

- Name
- Current institution
- What maths qualifications do you have?
- What English qualifications do you have?
- What art and design related qualifications do you have?
- Do you have any fashion experience?
- State three of your strengths
- State three of your weaknesses
- Why did you apply to this particular course?
- Do you have any concerns about studying?
- What do you see yourself in 5 years time?
- What motivates you?
- What makes a good entrepreneur?
- Which designers or artists do you think are most influential to fashion? Explain your choices.
- If you were an item of clothing what would you be?
- If a film were to be made about your life, which actor would best play you and why?
- Which reality show would you best be suited to and why?
- Which public figure has a positive brand image?
- Which public figure needs a makeover? Explain your choice.
- Do you think there is a gap in the fashion market? If so, how could it be filled?
- What makes a good design?
- Why should we offer you a place on the course?

Questions asked at interview:

- Tell us about the course you are on at the moment?
- Will you live at home or move near to college?
- When you are given a project how do you start and then develop it?
- Apart from this subject, what are you passionate about?
- Describe your work in a sentence.
- What are your strengths?
- What are your weaknesses?
- How do you feel about the use of technology in fashion?
- What have you read lately, and what are you reading now?
- What are your expectations of the course?
- How do you think it will differ from your present course?
- What made you pick this course?
- What motivates you?
- What has been your proudest accomplishment so far?
- What kind of things are you most confident in doing?
- What kinds of things are you not so confident in doing?
- How do you usually cope with pressure?
- If you were us and were looking to take a student on what kind of qualities would you be looking for in a student?
- What has been the biggest obstacle you have overcome and how did you do it?
- How would your friends describe you?
- What kind of situations do you find it difficult to deal with?
- How would you cope with being in college 5 days a week from 9am – 4pm?

Interview Check List

- Name:
- Date:
- Route:

Previous education (Level and name institution)

Academic Achievements

- a) (i) 3 A Level passes A–C or equivalent (AVCE, ND)
- (ii) 3 GCSE passes at A–C (other than Art/Design) or GNVQ Intermediate
- (iii) GCSE English Language at A–C
- b) Access to HE

In the interview:

Main questions to ask candidate about their work:

- Oral confidence
  - Visual confidence
  - Fashion Understanding
  - Suitability
- (Unsatisfactory / Satisfactory / Good / Very good / Excellent)

When looking at the portfolio:

- Drawing
  - Colour use
  - Presentation
  - Computer work
  - Sketch book
  - Written work
- 
- Quantity of evidence
  - Quality of evidence
- 
- General comment on portfolio

Name:

In your own handwriting answer the following questions:

- 1 Describe your work in one sentence
- 2 Describe two strong characteristics of your portfolio work.
- 3 Outline four trends which you see on the high street today.
- 4 What is your understanding of the difference between fashion and clothing?
- 5 Name one person who inspires your work and explain why?
- 6 You have £1,000 to spend in one day. What would you buy?
- 7 Discuss one of the following and its relationship to fashion.
  - a. multiculturalism
  - b. A modern art / design movement
  - c. Architecture

Interview  
Document  
Sample 7 –  
Written Test

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## About the Authors

Penny Jane Burke is Professor of Education at Roehampton University, London.

Penny's first career was as a classical ballet dancer. Her sole-authored book, *Accessing Education: effectively widening participation* (2002), draws on her ethnographic study of mature students' experiences of accessing lifelong learning opportunities. Her co-authored book *Reconceptualising Lifelong Learning: Feminist Interventions* (Burke and Jackson, 2007) was nominated for the 2008 Cyril O. Houle World Award for Outstanding Literature in Adult Education. She has a wide range of other publications focusing on widening participation in peer-reviewed journals and chapters in books. She was a recipient of the Higher Education Academy's prestigious National Teaching Fellowship award in 2008 and is the Access and Widening Participation Network Leader for the Society for Research in Higher Education.

Jackie McManus is Head of Widening Participation Programmes at University of the Arts London. She has over twenty years' experience of managing community education programmes, and campaign work. Jackie is highly committed to social justice in art and design education and has initiated a range of innovative programmes to widen participation at UAL. She is a Fellow of the Royal Society of the Arts.

