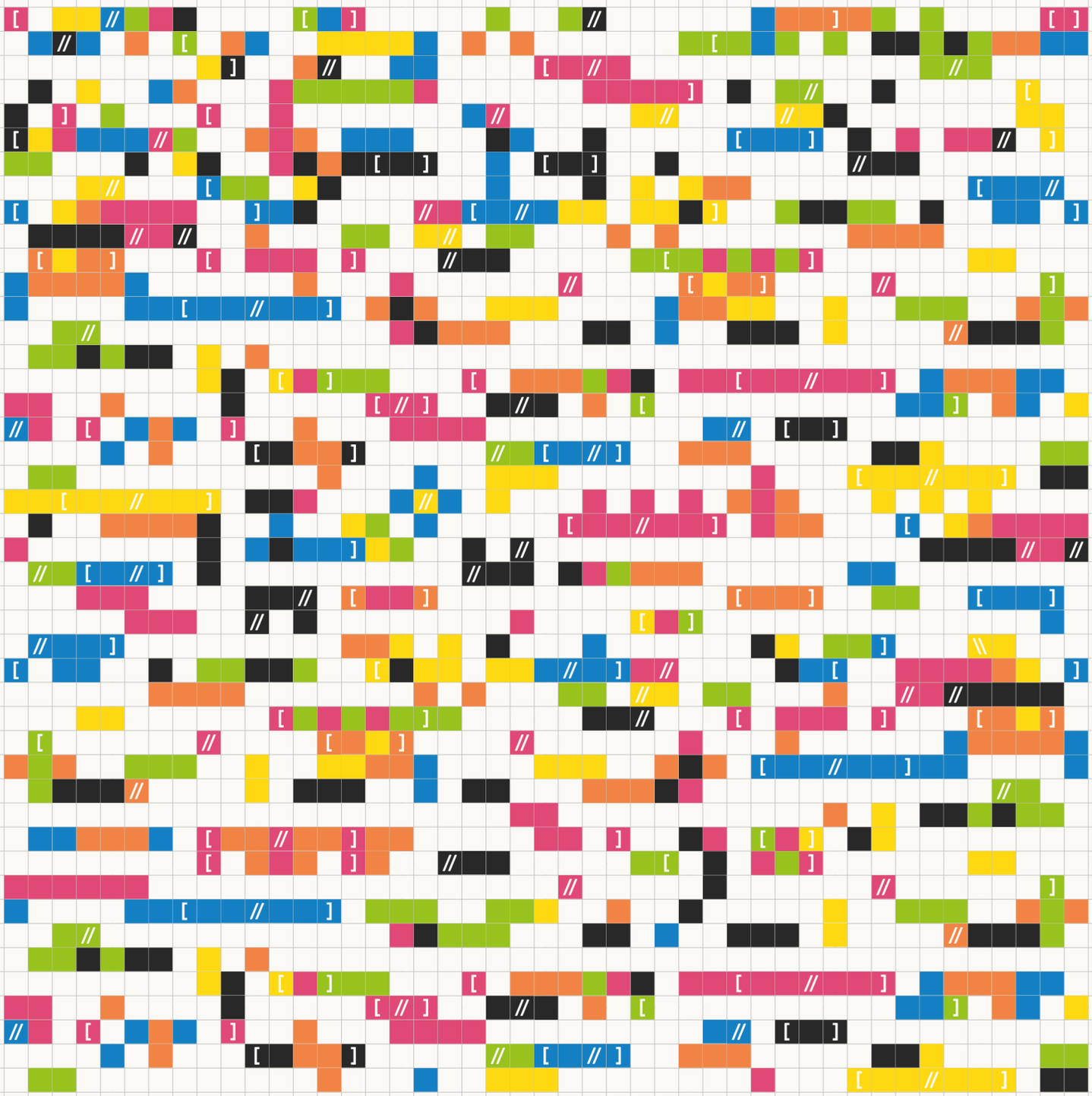
ART OR ALGORITHM?

MARCH 2025

EXPLORING UAL STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON THE USE OF AI IN CREATIVE EDUCATION AND THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES



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01 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

METHODOLOGY //

- ☆ This report is based on qualitative research, using focus groups to explore UAL students' perspectives on AI in creative education and industries.
- ☆ The study involved 25 students from a range of disciplines, including Fine Art, Fashion Design, Animation, Photography, and Creative Computing.
- ☆ Three online focus groups were conducted in January 2025, each lasting between 60 and 90 minutes. Discussions were guided by a semi-structured questionnaire addressing the practical use, benefits, challenges, and ethical implications of AI in both academic and industry settings.
- ☆ The data gathered from these focus groups was analysed using thematic analysis to identify common themes and insights.

VIEWS ON AI IN CREATIVE EDUCATION AND THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES //

- ☆ Students report that AI tools like ChatGPT, Leonardo AI, and transcription applications can assist in research, ideation, and organisation.
- ☆ Some students believe AI can enhance productivity, particularly in the early stages of creative projects (for example, research, idea generation, visual prototypes). AI is seen by some students as a "digital assistant" that supports the creative process without replacing human creativity.
- ☆ Students recognise that over-reliance on AI could diminish the authenticity, emotional depth, and personal connection in creative works. Students worry that AI may lead to the commodification of art, replacing unique, human-made art with mass produced, commercially driven creations.
- ☆ Students hold ethical concerns about AI's exploitation of intellectual property, as AI tools use existing works without proper consent or compensation.
- ☆ Students are concerned about the environmental impact of AI's energy consumption, which contradicts the sustainability goals of UAL and the creative industries.

ETHICAL AND PRACTICAL CONCERNS WITH AI //

[INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY]	AI systems trained on existing artworks raise concerns for students about exploitation, lack of citation, and the devaluation of artists' work.
[AUTHENTICITY]	Students believe AI-generated content lacks the personal, emotional, and cultural engagement inherent in human-created art. Students in creative disciplines express discomfort with AI replacing traditional craftsmanship or subjective thinking.
[ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT]	AI's significant carbon footprint raises questions for students about its alignment with sustainability principles in education and creative practices.
[REGULATION & TRANSPARENCY]	Students have a lack of awareness of clear policies on AI's use in academia, leading to uncertainty about acceptable practices and academic integrity. Students hold concerns about AI usage by academic staff in managing schedules, feedback, and communication.

AI'S POTENTIAL IMPACT ON CAREER PROSPECTS //

[JOB DISPLACEMENT]	Students fear AI could replace human labour in creative industries, leading to job losses in fields such as journalism, fashion, and graphic design. Growing reliance on AI in content generation (writing, design, image creation) raises concerns about devaluing human skills and expertise.

[LABOUR CONCERNS]

Students in creative fields worry that AI will be seen as a cost-effective alternative to human creators, reducing job opportunities and wages.

[SOME ROOM FOR OPTIMISM]

Some students believe that consumers are becoming increasingly disillusioned with AI art's lack of originality, which could lead to a stronger demand for products and artworks that reflect human creativity.

RECOMMENDATIONS //

[1] Incorporate ethical AI education across disciplines

[2] Clarify the regulation of the use of AI tools within UAL to preserve human creativity

[3] Promote transparency and accountability regarding AI use within UAL

[4] Encourage critical engagement with AI and sustainability

[5] Utilise industry experts on behalf of students around AI's role in the creative industries

02 INTRODUCTION

In 2025, creative education and the creative industries are undergoing a profound transformation as artificial intelligence (AI) becomes increasingly integrated into both the educational sphere and professional practice. For art students, who stand at the confluence of traditional craftsmanship and modern technology, this shift represents both an opportunity and a challenge.

This report draws on in-depth discussions from three focus groups with UAL students from across disciplines and colleges, revealing a complex and nuanced picture. Their insights offer a window into the evolving nature of artistic production and creative careers, making it crucial to explore their perspectives on AI's growing role in creative education and the broader cultural landscape.

Our findings reveal that students recognise that AI can significantly enhance efficiency by streamlining research, aiding in idea generation, and even facilitating aspects of visual production. Tools like ChatGPT, Leonardo AI, and various transcription applications are being employed to overcome language barriers, generate prototypes, and organise work, enabling students to navigate the demands of their courses with greater ease.

However, the enthusiasm for these technological advances is tempered by a pervasive sense of wariness. A key theme emerging from these discussions is the fear that AI may undermine the very essence of human creativity. Many students expressed concerns that over-reliance on AI could lead to a commodification of art, where efficiency and mass production replace the unique, imperfect, and deeply personal nature of human expression. This tension is encapsulated in debates around the authenticity of AI-generated work, what it means for an artwork to be original, and whether the use of AI dilutes the creative process.

Ethical debates are at the forefront of these discussions. One major concern is the issue of intellectual property, as AI systems are often trained on vast repositories of existing artworks without the explicit consent of the original creators. Students fear that such practices not only devalue the labour and talent of human artists, but also pave the way for widespread exploitation in the creative industries. Moreover, the environmental impact of powering these sophisticated algorithms (an issue that appears to contradict universities' and industries' sustainability goals) adds another layer of complexity to the ethical landscape.

The regulation and transparency of AI use in both academic and professional settings provides another ethical challenge. Inconsistencies in how AI tools are integrated into coursework, and the lack of awareness of policies on when and how these tools should be cited or credited, have left many students feeling uncertain about acceptable practices. The perceived lack of standardisation raises important questions about fairness, academic integrity, and the long-term implications for creative skill development.

This report seeks to provide an insight into the key debates around AI that are happening within UAL's student body: the dual nature of AI as both a facilitator of efficiency and a potential threat to human creativity, the ethical dilemmas surrounding intellectual property, authenticity, and sustainability, and the need for clear institutional guidelines to navigate these challenges.

By delving into these debates, Arts SU aims to provide actions and recommendations for UAL (as well as industry stakeholders), ensuring that the integration of AI into creative practices benefits students while safeguarding the irreplaceable value of human artistic expression.

03 METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative research design using focus groups to explore UAL students' perceptions of the use of AI in creative education and its broader impact on the creative industries. The focus groups were chosen to foster rich, interactive discussions that could reveal a range of opinions and experiences, allowing for a deeper understanding of the nuanced attitudes held by students on a topic that is potentially divisive.

[PARTICIPANTS]

- ☆ Participants were students enrolled at University of the Arts London (UAL) across a variety of disciplines, including Fine Art, Fashion Design, Animation, Photography, Marketing and Creative Computing.
- ☆ 25 students from across all 4 UAL colleges took part in three separate focus group sessions conducted in January 2025.
- ☆ Recruitment was facilitated through Arts Students' Union's Research Insiders Programme, an opt-in network of UAL student social research participants. Participants received a voucher for their time and as a thank you for their participation.
- ☆ The sample was deliberately varied to include both those who actively use AI tools in their creative practice, and those who did not, ensuring a comprehensive range of perspectives.

[DATA COLLECTION]

Data were gathered through three online focus groups, each lasting between 60 and 90 minutes, conducted via Teams. Each session was moderated by a social researcher using a semi-structured discussion guide designed to cover topics such as:

- ☆ The practical use of AI in academic and creative practices.
- ☆ Perceived benefits and challenges associated with AI tools.
- ☆ Ethical concerns including intellectual property, authenticity, and environmental impacts.
- ☆ Implications for future career prospects in the creative industries.

All sessions were audio and video recorded with participants' informed consent.

[DATA ANALYSIS]

Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the transcribed data. This method allowed us to identify, interpret, and report patterns (themes) within the data. The analysis followed these steps:

[1] FAMILIARISATION WITH THE DATA

Researchers immersed themselves in the data by reading and re-reading the transcripts to gain a deep understanding of the discussions.

[2] THEME DEVELOPMENT

Codes were collated and organised into potential themes. These themes were then reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately captured the students' viewpoints.

[3] SYNTHESIS AND REPORTING

The final report synthesised the identified themes to address the research questions.

[ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS]

The research was conducted in strict accordance with ethical guidelines for studies involving human participants. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and they were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any stage without any repercussions. Additionally, participants were reminded that the focus groups were a safe, judgement-free space, encouraging open and honest dialogue.

04 FINDINGS

[AI AS A TOOL FOR RESEARCH AND ORGANISATION]

Participants were first asked whether they had used AI during their studies at UAL, either as a study aid or within the creative practice. While participants overall expressed scepticism about the use of AI in both their creative practice and their studies, they were most positive about AI's potential to support research and organisation for their academic and creative projects.

Many participants across different disciplines reported that they find AI to be a useful tool for supporting the initial phases of their academic and creative work. Rather than using AI to replace creative output or original thinking, participants reported using it to enhance and accelerate tasks such as gathering information, summarising complex academic ideas from their suggested readings, and generating inspiration. The tool was often described as a "digital assistant" that supports the research process by narrowing down vast amounts of information and providing more structured starting points.

For example, a participant on MA Fashion Design Technology (Menswear) shared how they use AI (specifically ChatGPT) to identify artists who work within certain design methodologies. Instead of spending hours searching for this information on various websites, the participant stated they can quickly prompt the AI to list relevant artists, making their research process more efficient. This method also allows them to then explore the works and ideas of these artists in greater depth, providing a foundation for their own creative work. The participant emphasised that while AI helps with the initial research, they still do the in-depth work of evaluating and interpreting the sources, which gives them creative autonomy.

> "I use it to get a list of artists who work in a certain style... it helps me narrow things down quickly. But then I dive deeper into the work myself."
>
> *– MA Fashion Design Technology (Menswear) student*

Similarly, an MA Photojournalism participant reported using ChatGPT to write follow-up scripts for contacting businesses as part of their research. In their case, the AI tool helped craft professional communication by suggesting phrasing that felt formal yet approachable. This case highlights how AI can serve as a useful communication aid in professional settings, allowing students to focus on the creative aspects of their projects rather than spending time drafting and refining their communications. This approach is especially valuable when students are managing multiple tasks and time constraints, allowing them to be more productive.

A further example of using AI in early-stage ideation was shared by an MA Design Management student. They recounted how, in one of their assignments, students were asked to explore the potential of AI in generating images related to their research. The exercise was not about incorporating AI into the final project, but rather understanding how the tool could complement human creativity. The participant explained how using AI tools allowed them to visualise abstract concepts and design ideas that might have otherwise been difficult to articulate in the initial stages of his project. This form of experimentation with AI in design research helped students engage with the technology critically, considering both its capabilities and limitations in a hands-on manner.

> "AI was not part of the final project, but it was useful in helping me visualise ideas early in my design process."
>
> *– MA Design Management student*

A participant studying MA Strategic Fashion Marketing also discussed using AI in a similar light. For this participant, AI tools like Claude were useful in generating ideas for their research. They noted that, while they do not blindly rely on AI, using it as an assistant organise their thoughts was extremely valuable. They compared it to having a brainstorming partner who helps bring clarity to a cluttered mind. The participant specifically mentioned how they would use AI to outline potential strategies or to help articulate complex marketing ideas. The ability to prompt AI for various formats (whether a SWOT analysis or a basic overview of a fashion brand's strengths and weaknesses) made their research process much faster and more focused.

> "It's like having an assistant who helps me organise my thoughts and present them in a clear way."
>
> *– MA Strategic Fashion Marketing student*

A participant on the Fashion Design: Womenswear programme also described their use of AI in generating images to express their ideas, particularly for projects in experiential marketing. They appreciated how AI could translate their conceptual thoughts into visual representations, which would otherwise require significant time and effort if done by hand. The tool allowed them to quickly iterate ideas, altering prompts to refine the generated images until they met her expectations. The participant's experience reflects how AI can be useful in fast-paced projects where there is a need for quick prototyping or visual ideation. By enabling students to generate multiple drafts in a short amount of time, AI can enhance the creative process without stifling originality.

> "It was easier for me to command the AI to create an image of what I had in mind... it saved me so much time compared to doing it myself."
>
> *– Fashion Design: Womenswear student*

In all of these examples, AI was perceived by participants not as replacing human creativity, but complementing it by offering support in the early, more labour-intensive stages of work. Whether helping students filter through large amounts of information, generate quick drafts, or visualise conceptual ideas, participants felt AI can serve as a tool to augment productivity. However, it should be noted from these accounts that students remain conscious of the importance of maintaining control over the creative and intellectual aspects of their work. They view AI as a valuable assistant, not as a substitute for their own creative input or critical thinking.

[SCEPTICISM ABOUT AI'S ROLE IN CREATIVE PRACTICE]

Participants were asked how they felt about the use of AI beyond its role as an assistive tool, and instead as a tool for generating creative content or undertaking creative labour. Across all of the focus groups, participants were much more sceptical about the use of AI in their creative practice, especially in fields where personal expression, authenticity, and emotional engagement are considered integral to the creative process. Students in fine art, fashion, and media-related disciplines expressed discomfort with AI being used in ways that interfere with their personal and emotional connection to their work. For many participants, creativity is deeply tied to personal experience and subjective interpretation, and the use of AI as a perceived replacement of craftsmanship or skill feels like a compromise of these values.

A participant studying BA Fine Art captured this sentiment when discussing their reluctance to use AI in their creative practice. For this participant, Fine Art is not just about producing visually appealing works, but about developing ideas that are deeply personal and expressive, that go beyond mere commercial interest. The process of idea creation, the participant believes, is where the most human and authentic artistic works come from. AI, which lacks emotional engagement, cannot replicate this part of the creative process.

> "In a field like fine art, the ideas... that's the most fun bit. If it's not personal to you, it feels hollow."
>
> *- BA Fine Art student*

The participant's discomfort reflects a wider view among participants, who often regard the process of creative thinking as just as important as the final artefact. The notion of using AI to generate these ideas feels like outsourcing something inherently human and personal.

Similarly, a participant studying MA Animation shared their scepticism about AI in their creative practice, particularly regarding AI-generated images. The participant expressed that, as an animator, their work involves creating original visuals, and using AI for this purpose feels like diminishing the value of human creativity. They explained that many artists have spoken out against AI, particularly because it can replicate their styles without crediting them or compensating them. This raises ethical issues, concerns about which many participants felt passionate, believing that the use of AI in the creative industries commodifies art in ways that are unethical.

> "I make my own images, but AI feels like it's stealing from artists who have worked hard... I can't get on board with that."
>
> *– MA Animation student*

The MA Animation participant's concern is rooted in the idea that AI-generated art may erode the uniqueness of human artistry, demonstrating how students are thinking about the implications of AI in the broader context of their careers. As AI generates images by pulling from vast amounts of existing work, students are concerned that this process does not involve the same personal journey or intention that human-made art does. This can result in outputs that (while capable of being visually or commercially appealing) lack the depth and soul to be considered authentic artistic expression.

A participant studying MRes Art: Moving Image also expressed concerns about AI's impact on the authenticity and value of creative work, particularly in image generation. For this participant, the central issue is not solely the ethical dimension of AI's usage, but the broader cultural shift it represents. The participant sees AI as something that can flatten creativity by making it more formulaic, reducing art and design to something that can be further mass produced and exploited for commercial gain, rather than something that comes from a place of deep human insight. The participant explains that while AI may provide starting points for the creative process, it cannot replace the meaningful engagement and nuanced interpretation that artists bring to their work.

> "There's a lot of conversation around AI and image generation... it's hard to justify using something that takes from so many other creators without crediting them. It feels like the art produced isn't new, it's just recycled work. AI can't generate true creativity, it's more of a technical process."
>
> *– MRes Art: Moving Image student*

This participant's thoughts echo concerns about AI's ethical implications, specifically that AI relies on an existing body of work, much of which is created by living artists whose contributions are unacknowledged. This can make the technology feel exploitative, further undermining the idea of artistic ownership and individual creative labour.

In a similar vein, a participant on the BA Fashion Marketing programme was also critical of AI's use in the creative fields due to the way it "steals" from existing works without crediting the creators behind them. They highlighted how generative AI tools are trained on the works of numerous artists and writers, yet they do not compensate or acknowledge these creators for their intellectual labour. This, to the BA Fashion Marketing participant, feels like a direct exploitation of human creativity. While AI can be seen as a time-saving tool, they believe that using it to generate creative content without the consent or recognition of the original creators raises significant ethical issues.

> "Generative AI is trained on using past works of artists... it feels like it's taking advantage of their hard work without giving them credit. AI isn't creating new art; it's just reusing and remaking things that already exist. There's something ethically wrong with that."
>
> *– BA Fashion Marketing student*

Participants across all three focus groups supported the assertion that the growing use of AI in creative spaces risks undermining the value of human effort and creativity by treating it as an endless pool of data to be mined and repurposed.

Even on text-based course, participants felt that the use of AI in the creative process represents a threat to authenticity. A participant studying MA Fashion Cultures and Histories articulated their reluctance to use AI, because of their belief that true creativity comes from subjective human experience.

For the participant, the process of creation is not just about producing something visually pleasing or interesting, it's about embedding personal meaning, cultural context, and emotional depth into the work. They recognised that AI can produce biased outcomes, making assumptions about race and gender that may be false, based on how the AI has been trained.

The participant expressed concerns that unthinking use of AI in creative practices may end up reproducing or entrenching uneven systems of power that exclude minorities.

AI-generated content lacks a personal connection to history or an understanding of power, and for the participant, relying on AI in the creative process risks diluting the very essence of what creativity means.

> "Creativity is more than just producing something... it's about the emotional and personal connection to the work. AI can't replicate that."
>
> *– MA Fashion Cultures and Histories student*

This perspective highlights a critical divide between students views on AI's practical use in research and more technical tasks, as opposed to its role in the deeply personal and emotional process of creating art or design. While AI can serve as a tool for organising thoughts, gathering information, or even assisting with some technical tasks, students believe AI cannot (and should not) replace the rich and subjective experience that humans bring to their creative work.

The use of AI in creative spaces raises significant questions about ownership, authenticity, and the value of human labour. These concerns are not just theoretical; they represent a growing tension in the creative industries, where the advent of AI could reshape what it means to be an artist or a designer. The fear amongst participants in this study is that AI has the potential to make creativity more transactional and less personal, and that it could devalue the emotional and intellectual investment that human creators put into their work.

Students are wary that leaning too heavily on AI might lead to a loss of what makes their work truly theirs, and they express discomfort at the idea of their creative practices being reduced to mere products of an algorithmic system.

[INTEGRATION OF AI INTO THE CURRICULUM]

Participants were asked about the extent which the use of AI had been integrated into the curriculum of their courses at UAL. Across various disciplines, there are examples of both encouragement and resistance, with some students actively supported to engage with AI tools by staff, and others expressing concern or hesitation regarding its role in their education.

In some courses, AI was explicitly encouraged as a tool to assist in the creative process, particularly for tasks like idea generation, image creation, or assisting in research. However, it is clear from the focus group discussions that many participants also felt that AI was not always welcomed by their tutors or institutional frameworks. Participants expressed mixed feelings about its integration into creative education, often reflecting broader concerns about its potential to replace human creativity or degrade the quality of their work.

As has been touched on previously, some students described being encouraged to use AI to help generate creative ideas or images, especially in the early stages of their projects. For example, a student on BA Bespoke Tailoring mentioned how their tutors encouraged the use of AI tools to generate visual ideas quickly for concept development. The focus was on rapid ideation rather than the final outcome, and students were guided to use AI for inspiration and initial drafts, which they could later refine and develop.

> "In my course, we were really encouraged to put prompts into AI... and kind of generate some quick images and keep tweaking them... to actualise some outcomes and give us some ideas."
>
> *– BA Bespoke Tailoring student*

This reflects a more open approach where AI is used as a tool to spark creativity, particularly when students are developing the initial phases of their projects. AI's potential to speed up the creative process and overcome initial creative blocks was acknowledged, but it was framed as a starting point rather than the definitive solution.

Similarly, a MA Strategic Fashion Marketing participant noted that their course encouraged using AI in specific contexts, such as conducting research for campaign ideas or understanding market trends.

> "My course is deeply rooted in the fashion industry, and we can't deny that AI is taking over a lot of things... we did have a workshop where we worked with AI to see how brands have been using it in their supply chain."
>
> *– MA Strategic Fashion Marketing student*

However, some students also described situations where their tutors discouraged the use of AI or set limitations around it. For instance, a BA Fashion Marketing participant explained that most of their tutors initially discouraged the use of AI, believing it to be a form of "laziness" rather than a legitimate creative tool. The participant reflected on how attitudes toward AI seemed to shift over time, with some tutors changing their stance and allowing it as a valid tool in the second year of their studies.

> "Most of the tutors... discouraged the use of AI... they said it was lazy. But one tutor in the second year said you could use it for some tasks, and I think that was a shift."
>
> *– BA Fashion Marketing student*

This shift reflects a broader uncertainty within educational institutions about how to respond to AI in creative education. While some educators may see AI as an innovative tool that can enhance students' creative processes, others are more cautious, fearing it may reduce the need for skills development or personal effort.

A BA Fashion Management participant discussed how their course included a session focused on the ethical use of AI, which raised questions about AI's potential to replace human input. This demonstrates how some courses are taking a more critical stance, encouraging students to think about the ethical implications of AI's use, particularly in creative contexts. This example shows how courses are incorporating ethical frameworks and reflective discussions about AI's role in creative processes, emphasising human authorship and the value of original work.

For some participants, the integration of AI into their creative education felt disjointed or inconsistent. An MA Animation participant discussed how their course did not specifically encourage AI use, but some students were already utilising AI tools in their own time, particularly in terms of scheduling and planning. There was a general feeling that students are unclear what the rules are around AI usage, and when AI created work needed to be cited. The participant also mentioned that some of the academic staff were hesitant to embrace AI fully, particularly in creative tasks, due to concerns about maintaining artistic integrity.

> "We weren't specifically encouraged to use AI, but we've had instances where students have used been using AI regardless... and in terms of creative practice, some teachers have been against us using AI."
>
> – *MA Animation student*

This participant's reflection highlights the tension around the use of AI in educational settings: while some students are experimenting with AI independently, the institutional approach to AI's role in creative education remains uneven and uncertain.

Finally, some students expressed concerns about the use of AI by academic staff, especially in the context of feedback and communication. For instance, a BA Fine Art participant shared how their lead tutor used AI tools to manage emails and class schedules. While this may streamline some processes for the tutor, it led to confusion for students, as the AI-generated schedules sometimes lacked clarity and were out of touch with human need. This raised concerns about whether unregulated AI could create miscommunications and reduce the personal touch that students often rely on for academic support.

> "I know for a fact that my lead tutor actually uses it to organise her emails and the schedules that we have. And sometimes it feels a bit misleading because sometimes it doesn't really make sense."
>
> *- BA Fine Art student*

This was reinforced by another participant studying BA Fine Art, who believed that some tutors were generating learning materials and imagery using AI, but not citing it as AI generated. The participant worried this creates the situation where tutors are generating work with AI, and students are generating work with AI, having the effect of a conversation between two AIs rather than humans, diminishing the learning experience for all.

> "I think a point raised with me and my classmates is that some presentations of tutors' work have - obviously we can't confirm - but they've had that AI accent in them, and that's been really poorly received because... number one, that's their job and number two, if we're in a situation where tutors are writing PowerPoints with AI and then students are submitting essays written with AI, it's like two AIs talking to one another. There needs to be more honesty."
>
> *- BA Fine Art student*

Students would value greater clarity on the use of AI, both by students and by staff members, believing that transparency around the usage of AI is the only way to regulate its use ethically.

[THREATS TO CAREER PROSPECTS POSED BY AI]

The use of AI in the broader creative industries raises complex ethical concerns that students at UAL have begun to confront in both their academic and professional journeys. Many students are not just concerned with the potential of AI to replace certain creative processes, but also with its implications on labour, intellectual property, and the commodification of creativity. These ethical questions became a central theme in the focus group discussions, reflecting a growing awareness among students of the power dynamics at play in the intersection of technology and art.

One of the key ethical concerns expressed by students in the focus groups revolves around the potential for AI to replace human labour in creative industries, particularly in roles that require creative thought, artistic skill, and written ability. As AI tools become increasingly capable of generating content, participants voiced concerns about job displacement, especially in fields like journalism, fashion, and graphic design. Participants fear that the growing dominance of AI could lead to a future where artists, designers, writers, and other creatives are inadequately compensated for their labour, or where their work is undervalued, as machines take over many tasks traditionally performed by humans.

In the case of journalism students, the concern about job replacement is particularly acute. A participant studying MA Arts and Lifestyle Journalism shared their experience of using AI tools like ChatGPT to process feedback on their writing. While they see the utility of AI in providing multiple perspectives and refining drafts, they expressed concerns about the growing reliance on AI in journalism, particularly in terms of how it might affect job prospects for human journalists.

> “I use ChatGPT to break down feedback from my tutors... it gives me multiple views, and that helps me produce better pieces... But I think if everyone starts using AI like that, it could replace human writers in the future.”
>
> *- MA Arts and Lifestyle Journalism student*

This reflects a larger anxiety amongst the participants that AI’s increasing involvement in content creation could lead to the automation of tasks that were once central to journalistic work.

As the participant acknowledges, there is usefulness in AI as an assistant in refining writing, but this does not allay concerns about a future where AI-generated articles and content could replace human journalists, diminishing the need for their input altogether.

A participant studying MA Art and Science echoed concerns about AI's potential to disrupt creative industries, including journalism. They expressed discomfort with the idea of AI being used to replace writers and researchers, particularly when AI-generated content may lack the depth and political awareness that human writers bring to their work.

> "AI could replace what journalists are doing, but it won't bring the same insight or understanding that humans do. It feels like AI is taking away jobs and not doing them properly."
>
> *– MA Art and Science student*

This was further raised by a participant on the MA Publishing programme, highlighting the fear that AI could lead to the outsourcing of editorial and creative work, thus devaluing the role of human editors and creatives in the publishing industry. They expressed concern that AI could replace jobs traditionally filled by skilled workers, leading to lower wages and fewer opportunities for human workers.

> "I think especially in my industry, it's getting a lot scarier... in publishing, especially, because it's so easy to use AI to edit things down or to make something more concise and simple. And I think it's getting a little bit more difficult, especially in editorial positions... it would be just much easier for them to not pay editors and to just outsource it to AI and AI tools."
>
> *- MA Publishing student*

This concern (shared by many participants within the focus groups) emphasises that while AI can help produce content quickly, it does so without the critical thinking, ethical consideration, and lived experience that human writers contribute. The fear amongst participants is that as AI becomes more sophisticated, it could replace entire sectors of the workforce (not just in journalism) across various creative fields.

For students on art and design courses, the issue of job replacement by AI is similarly pressing. A participant on MA Design Management referred to how their coursework included using AI tools to generate imagery, but they raised the concern that this kind of task (initially an assistant function) could eventually be seen as something AI can do entirely on its own.

This highlights a fear that creative professionals could be displaced in favour of AI solutions that are perceived by industry as more efficient or cost-effective.

> "In one assignment, we were asked to use AI to generate imagery for our research... I think that AI could eventually take over this kind of job completely. People might see it as a shortcut to do things faster without relying on human input."
>
> *– MA Design Management student*

A participant on BA Fine Art also touched on how AI could devalue creative labour by making the process more impersonal and mechanical. The participant fears that as AI becomes more involved in the creative process, it will lead to an environment where human creativity is seen as less valuable or necessary.

> "If AI does all the thinking and brainstorming for you, then what do you really bring to the table? It feels like the labour of the artist is being devalued when machines can do the same thing in seconds."
>
> *– BA Fine Art student*

[POTENTIAL FOR OPTIMISM ABOUT CAREER PROSPECTS]

While the majority of participants expressed concern about the threat AI poses to their future careers, there was also some sentiment of defiance, or even optimism, amongst some participants. Some participants expressed the belief that, particularly with regards to AI generated imagery, the soullessness and derivative nature of the work AI produces will never be capable of replacing human creativity. Participants emphasised that while AI can produce content quickly, it often lacks the depth, originality, and emotional resonance associated with human-made art. This gap in quality may fuel a desire for more personal, authentic, and nuanced creative work, driving demand for human artists.

A participant studying BA Fine Art, for example, described AI-generated art as having a distinct "AI accent," which they associated with a "plasticky" feel. This, they argued, often made AI art look "tacky" and inferior compared to human-created work. The participant suggested that because AI art often draws from existing databases, it is incapable of producing anything genuinely new or revolutionary, which could make human-created art more appealing and valuable in the future.

> "There's definitely a certain... I don't know, me and my peers kind of call it an AI accent on images where you get that plasticky kind of generative feel and it's not a good look, right? It looks a bit tacky. It doesn't look amazing."
>
> *– BA Fine Art student*

This participant's assertion reflects a belief that emerged amongst some participants that as AI-generated art becomes more pervasive, it will create a demand for authentic, human-made art. This perception could lead to a resurgence in the appreciation for fine art and bespoke creations, as consumers seek out the imperfections and emotional connection inherent in human work.

This is echoed by a participant studying BA Fashion Marketing, who reiterated that AI-generated designs often feel derivative, and this could lead to a growing desire for human-made work. They believe that consumers (especially those who are growing up amidst the proliferation of AI generated content) are becoming increasingly disillusioned with AI art's lack of originality, which could lead to a stronger demand for products and artworks that reflect human creativity.

> "I think already people are getting a little bit sick of AI... and getting a little bit sick of like all of the finish. You can really tell when something is AI generated. And I think that is going to drive a lot more people towards something that is a lot more like human-made, or a little bit more imperfect."
>
> *– BA Fashion Marketing student*

Other participants recognised the limits to which AI can perform manual tasks and are therefore reassured in the short term that their future career prospects are safe. A participant studying BA Bespoke Tailoring noted that while AI is useful for certain tasks, it will never be able to replace the personal touch and craftsmanship required in their field of bespoke tailoring. The participant suggested that as AI takes over more technical tasks, there may be an increasing value placed on personalised, handcrafted work, further increasing the demand for human creatives.

> "I think until they can teach robots to fully make clothing, I think I'm OK. But I think with image generation, they would definitely outsource that."
>
> *– BA Bespoke Tailoring student*

The most optimistic perspectives were shared by those participants studying Creative Computing and working with AI in their coding. A participant studying BSc Data Science and AI shared a viewpoint that AI's potential in their field (data science and AI itself) would create new opportunities, rather than threaten job security. The participant views the increasing integration of AI in different sectors as an expansion of opportunities, not a limitation. They believe that AI will open up new avenues for collaboration and innovation, creating jobs that didn't exist before.

> "In fact, AI will create more opportunities, not just take away jobs. AI is going to open new paths, like new industries and areas where creative people can come together with technology."
>
> *- BSc Data Science and AI student*

While this optimism was contested by other participants looking to develop their careers in other branches of the creative industries, it illustrates that opportunities for optimism about the use of AI in the future do exist amongst the student body.

[CONCERNS AROUND SUSTAINABILITY AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF AI]

As students continue to engage with AI in their coursework and creative practices, a growing concern about the sustainability of these technologies (both in terms of environmental impact and long-term societal effects) has emerged. Many students worry about the environmental costs of AI, particularly the energy and resources required to develop and maintain AI systems, which seem at odds with the principles of sustainability that UAL and the broader creative industries champion.

An MA Journalism participant articulated this concern by reflecting on the irony of using AI in their field, especially when the course they are studying on advocates for sustainability. The participant pointed out that while students are being taught to consider environmental impacts in their work, AI itself contributes to significant carbon emissions and resource depletion. For the participant, the contradiction between using AI and promoting environmental consciousness felt troubling.

> “When we learn about sustainability and environmental journalism, I feel if we are learning about it and then using AI, it’s just ironic for me. To train an AI model, it requires tonnes of carbon and also depletion of natural resources... it just does not make sense to me to be into sustainability and at the same time use it.”
>
> *- MA Journalism student*

A participant on BA Fine Art shared concerns about the lack of awareness amongst their peers of the environmental impact of AI during a seminar discussing the resources required to run AI systems. They noted that many people are unaware of the high energy consumption involved in AI, which contrasts with the sustainability values being taught on her course.

> “We did have a seminar where the impact of AI on the planet was brought up... how much resources it actually needs... a lot of people are definitely unaware of that.”
>
> *- BA Fine Art student*

This perspective highlights a growing unease among students about the environmental sustainability of AI. The energy-intensive processes involved in training AI models raise questions about the long-term viability of relying on these technologies, particularly in a world that is increasingly concerned with reducing its carbon footprint.

05 RECOMMENDATIONS

[1] INCORPORATE ETHICAL AI EDUCATION ACROSS DISCIPLINES

Students have expressed concerns about the ethical implications of AI, particularly in relation to intellectual property, labour exploitation, and environmental sustainability. UAL should continue to develop curriculum components that explicitly address the ethical challenges posed by AI. This could include examining the environmental impact of AI technologies, the ethics of AI in the workplace, and the potential for job displacement in the creative industries. By embedding these topics into courses across disciplines, students will be better equipped to critically engage with AI technologies and consider their broader societal implications, as well as shape future conversations in the creative industries.

☆ **RECOMMENDATION:** Implement dedicated modules or workshops within courses that focus on the ethical use of AI, including discussions on its environmental cost, its role in replacing creative jobs, and its impact on intellectual property.

[2] CLARIFY THE REGULATION OF THE USE OF AI TOOLS WITHIN UAL TO PRESERVE HUMAN CREATIVITY

Many students are concerned that AI could undermine the authenticity and value of human-created work, especially in creative fields like art, design, and writing. However, AI is also seen as a tool that can enhance productivity and assist in the creative process. To address this tension, UAL should foster an environment that emphasises AI as a tool for collaboration rather than a replacement for human creativity.

☆ **RECOMMENDATION:** Where necessary, students should be encouraged to restrict AI use to ideation, research, and repetitive tasks. Reinforce the importance of maintaining the personal, emotional, and cultural elements in creative work. Offer workshops on how AI can complement human creativity while maintaining the value of originality and authenticity.

[3] PROMOTE TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY REGARDING AI USE WITHIN UAL

Students are concerned about the lack of transparency in how AI tools are trained and how they rely on existing human-made content. This raises important issues around intellectual property rights and the potential exploitation of artists and creators. UAL must play a key role in promoting transparency and teaching students about responsible AI use, particularly in relation to intellectual property.

Students are also concerned about AI usage amongst the staff, producing outcomes that diminish their educational experience, either through insufficient empathy or systems that are designed by AI that do not consider human need. UAL must be open with the student population about its expectations around appropriate AI usage for the completion of work tasks.

- ☆ **RECOMMENDATION:** Integrate discussions about intellectual property, the training data used by AI tools, and the risks of exploiting artists' work into course curricula. Encourage the use of AI tools that are open-source or respect copyright and intellectual property rights.
- ☆ **RECOMMENDATION:** Ensure the use of AI is considered in relation to UAL's broader Equity, Diversity and Inclusion work. AI models have been shown to replicate racial and gendered biases, including in AI generated imagery, and UAL must be part of the conversation to ensure AI is a tool for equality, not entrenching unequal systems of power.
- ☆ **RECOMMENDATION:** Further communicate to students UAL's expectations around staff usage of AI in work tasks, for example, in scheduling or providing feedback on assignments. Students are concerned that usage of AI to undertake tasks that require emotional insight and human understanding by staff members undermines their educational experience.

[4] ENCOURAGE CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT WITH AI AND SUSTAINABILITY

Many students expressed concerns about the environmental impact of AI, particularly in terms of its high energy consumption. As sustainability is an important value in a UAL education and the creative industries, it is crucial to raise awareness about the sustainability challenges associated with AI usage. UAL is committed to social purpose, and this cannot be considered in isolation from the ethical and sustainability implications of AI.

- ☆ **RECOMMENDATION:** Include discussions on the environmental costs of AI in courses. Encourage students to critically examine the long-term environmental impact of AI tools and provide them with alternatives that are more energy-efficient or promote. sustainability.
- ☆ **RECOMMENDATION:** Use of AI should be included in UAL's Net Zero Plans. The impact of AI usage should be measured and reported on, and this should shape UAL's approach to AI's usage within the curriculum. UAL should promote more sustainable AI technologies or initiatives.

[5] UTILISE INDUSTRY EXPERTS ON BEHALF OF STUDENTS AROUND AI'S ROLE IN THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

Students are keen to understand how AI will impact their future careers in creative industries, especially concerning job opportunities and labour dynamics. UAL should continue to facilitate direct engagement with industry professionals to give students a clearer picture of how AI is shaping the future of their fields.

- ☆ **RECOMMENDATION:** Draw from UAL's considerable connections within the creative industries to ensure students have access to advice and support on how to navigate their chosen field in relation to AI. Organise guest lectures, panel discussions, or industry-focused workshops where students can engage with professionals from sectors like design, fashion, journalism, and technology. These discussions should address how AI is currently being used in the industry, potential job changes, and how students can prepare for future career challenges in an AI-driven environment.

- ☆ **RECOMMENDATION:** UAL should use its connections within industry, and influence and lobbying power, to protect human jobs in the creative industries. This can be achieved through advocating for greater government protections, as well as increased labour and trade union rights within the creative industries.

06 CONCLUSION

The findings of this report reveal that students from various creative disciplines are grappling with the multifaceted implications of AI in both their education and future careers. While many students recognise the potential of AI to enhance productivity, streamline research, and assist in creative processes, there is a growing sense of scepticism around its long-term impact, particularly regarding job displacement, intellectual property concerns, and its environmental sustainability.

Many students worry that AI could reduce the demand for skilled professionals by automating tasks that were once considered essential to human creativity. This fear is compounded by the ethical challenges surrounding AI's reliance on existing works for training data, raising issues of intellectual property and the fair compensation of artists.

While students are often taught the importance of sustainability in their respective fields, the energy consumption required to train AI systems, and the resources needed for their continued operation are seen as contradictory to the values they are being taught. This points to a broader concern about the sustainability of AI in the long term, both in terms of its environmental impact and its potential to disrupt labour markets.

Despite these concerns, students are not wholly opposed to the use of AI. They advocate for its responsible and ethical use, emphasising the importance of maintaining a balance between human creativity and technological advancement. Many students expressed a desire for greater transparency in how AI tools are developed and used, as well as more robust ethical frameworks to ensure that AI serves to enhance human work rather than replace it.

While AI presents some exciting possibilities for the creative industries, there is a clear need for more thoughtful integration of this technology. Both academic institutions and the creative industries must ensure that AI is used in ways that respect intellectual property, promote sustainability, and preserve the integrity of human creativity.

This report highlights the importance of addressing the ethical, environmental, and economic challenges posed by AI to ensure that its integration into education and the creative sectors is beneficial, equitable, and sustainable for all stakeholders involved.

07 AUTHOR

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