

# Craft Your Future

UAL STUDENTS' VIEWS ON SKILLS,  
GRADUATE PREPAREDNESS, AND  
THE CREATIVE ECONOMY

# Introduction

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The UK's creative industries are at a crossroads. Long celebrated as a global cultural powerhouse contributing over £100 billion to the economy, the sector is now contending with a mix of long-standing and emerging challenges. The aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, cuts to arts funding, the impact of Brexit on international collaboration, the rise of precarious employment, and rapid advances in technologies like artificial intelligence have all contributed to a climate of uncertainty. For students preparing to enter this evolving field, questions of sustainability, access, and opportunity feel more urgent than ever.

This report presents findings from a cross-college survey of University of the Arts London (UAL) students, capturing their views on the skills they've developed through their courses, how prepared they feel to graduate into professional life, and their perceptions of the current creative economy. The responses reflect a student population that is both ambitious and deeply aware of the systemic barriers they may face, ranging from inadequate pay and high living costs, to a lack of clear career pathways and access to networks.

The findings reveal an engaged student body, deeply aware of both the strengths and gaps in their education. While many students feel they are developing vital technical and creative skills, others express concerns about their readiness to manage the financial realities of creative work, or to navigate an industry marked by increasing competition, economic instability, and a troubling culture of nepotism. The report also captures students' perspectives on the broader creative economy (including job demand, diversity, and the role of AI) highlighting a need for ongoing adaptation and support from their course and the university more broadly.

The purpose of this report is to offer university leadership, academic staff, careers services, as well as creative industry stakeholders a clear and candid insight into how students perceive the value and limitations of their educational experience at UAL and their views on the creative economy.

We hope that this report will serve as a constructive and complementary contribution to the excellent work UAL is already undertaking to support student employability and industry engagement. By amplifying student voices and highlighting areas of both strength and opportunity, this report is intended to inform and enhance the university's ongoing efforts to prepare graduates for sustainable, fulfilling careers in the creative industries.

At a time when graduate outcomes and student satisfaction are under increasing scrutiny, listening to this data is not only a moral imperative but a strategic one. By responding to these findings, UAL has the opportunity to strengthen its reputation as a world-leading creative institution that equips students not just with artistic skill, but with the tools, knowledge, and resilience needed to thrive in a competitive and changing industry.

This report matters because it amplifies the lived experiences of students preparing to enter one of the UK's most dynamic sectors. It provides clear, data-driven insights into where UAL is succeeding, and where there is more work to be done.

# Executive Summary

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This report presents the findings of a cross-college survey conducted by Arts Students' Union at University of the Arts London (UAL), capturing the views of 450 students on their skills, confidence, career aspirations, and perceptions of the creative economy. The data provides timely insight into how students are experiencing their education and preparing for professional life in a rapidly changing sector.

## **Perceptions of the creative economy**

- 42% of students identified the high cost of living in creative hubs (especially London) as their top concern about entering the creative workforce.
- 29% cited a lack of job opportunities, and 26% expressed concerns about insufficient professional networks, pointing to systemic access issues that go beyond education alone.
- 15% were concerned about the impact of AI and automation, highlighting early awareness of technological shifts affecting traditional creative roles.
- Perceptions of demand for skills amongst students were mixed: 55% believe there is moderate demand for skills in their field, while 17% perceive low demand, indicating a cautious outlook on job availability.

## **Financial preparedness**

- Only a fifth (20%) of respondents feel financially prepared for their early career, underscoring the need for stronger support around budgeting, pricing, and managing freelance income.
- Students from less privileged backgrounds face disproportionate barriers due to the reliance on unpaid work and the concentration of opportunities in expensive cities.

## **Career aspirations**

- A vast majority of respondents (82%) plan to build a career in the creative industries: 52% aim to be employed in the creative sector (for example working in creative agencies or studios) with 21% pursuing freelance work in the creative industries and 9% aspiring to start their own business or artistic practice.
- A further 10% intend to continue into further study.
- Only 4% intend to work outside the creative industries, demonstrating strong commitment to creative careers.
- When asked to name specific employers or sectors, fashion (14%) and design (11%) were the most cited areas of interest, followed by museums and cultural institutions (9%).

## **Graduate mobility**

- 51% of respondents plan to pursue a career in the UK, while 14% intend to work abroad, and 35% remain undecided.

## **Skills and career preparedness**

- While 20% of students feel very confident in their technical skills, and 60% feel somewhat confident, nearly 1 in 5 (18%) feel unsure or unprepared.
- Only 28% feel confident using industry-standard tools, highlighting a skills gap in software and technical training.
- Respondents in year 1 are more confident in their technical skills than respondents in year 3, indicating a decline in confidence as students progress through their UAL journey, a trend contrary to the expected developmental trajectory.
- Creative problem-solving (74%), communication (60%), and time management (49%) were among the most cited skills that respondents had developed through their course.
- When asked to identify the single most important skill gained from their course, students most frequently cited discipline-specific technical skills (26%) and critical thinking (22%).
- International students face unique barriers, including cultural unfamiliarity, visa concerns, and difficulty understanding job search processes in the UK. Some felt that their prior experience abroad was undervalued by UK employers and that guidance specific to international contexts was lacking.

## **Real-world experience and industry engagement**

- Only 14% of students report frequent opportunities to gain real-world experience through their course; 50% said they rarely or never have such opportunities.
- Similarly, only 11% feel they have had regular contact with potential employers or clients, revealing limited industry-facing engagement embedded into courses.

## **Careers support**

- Over half of students (52%) said they were satisfied or very satisfied with UAL's careers services. However, only 11% of students said they are very satisfied.
- Students strongly prefer careers support that is discipline-specific and embedded into their course or college, rather than centrally delivered.
- The most desired types of career support provided by courses include:
  - Networking events (68%)
  - Technical workshops (60%)
  - Freelancing guidance (58%)
  - Job preparation (55%)

## **Support ranked by usefulness**

- Students ranked the following resources as most helpful:
  - a. Career advice sessions with a professional adviser
  - b. Networking events with industry professionals
  - c. Internships or placement opportunities
- Lower-ranked services included alumni mentoring and freelancing workshops, though data shows high potential interest, indicating students may not be aware of the current offer.

# Methodology

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The research for this report was conducted via an electronic survey, accessible to all current UAL students. The survey was composed as a series of Likert scale questions, rank choice questions, and open text comments. It asked students about the skills they have acquired on their courses, their perception of preparedness for graduation, and their views on the state of the creative economy. It also collected demographic data to analyse trends.

The survey was open from 10th February 2025 until 17th March 2025.

It was promoted through the Students' Union communication channels, such as social media, weekly email newsletters and the course rep system. Participant recruitment was also facilitated through Arts Students' Union's Research Insiders Programme, an opt-in network of UAL student social research participants.

The survey received 450 responses and collected an accurate sample across all UAL colleges.

The results of this survey are accurate at a 95% confidence level and a margin of error of 5%, in line with standard social research practice.

# Perceptions of the creative economy

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The creative economy is often understood as a dynamic and desirable space in which to build a career, rich in innovation, cultural impact, and career opportunity. Yet for students at the threshold of entering this world in 2025, the reality is more complex. The first section of this report explores how UAL students perceive the current state of the creative economy, setting out in clear terms the hopes, uncertainties, and concerns shaping their transition from education to employment. This provides context for how students are thinking about their careers, and what tailored support explored later in the report may be appropriate.

## **Concerns about the starting a career in the creative economy**

Respondents were first asked to set out their biggest concerns about starting a career in the current creative economy. They were provided with a list of potential concerns and asked to select up to three from the list. This process forces participants to prioritise, only being able to select from amongst their top 3 concerns, revealing their true concerns.

The most pressing concern (shared by a plurality of 42% of respondents) is the high cost of living in creative hub cities, particularly London. This reflects a growing anxiety about the affordability of pursuing a creative career in the locations where such industries are concentrated. For many students, the geographic centralisation of creative opportunities exacerbates existing inequalities, creating a financial barrier that can disproportionately affect those from less privileged backgrounds.

Closely following this are concerns about the lack of job opportunities (29%) and the absence of professional networks or connections (26%). These responses point to a widespread feeling among students that entering the sector is not just about talent or training, but also about access: to jobs, to insider networks, and to informal knowledge and cultural capital that can shape a career. This insight underlines the importance of UAL continuing to play an active role in providing those opportunities to develop professional networks and bridging education with the professional world.

A quarter of students also highlight both uncertainty about long-term career stability (25%) and intense competition for roles (25%), suggesting a broader sense of precarity and insecurity in the creative economy. Combined with a fifth (20%) concerned about inadequate pay in entry-level roles and 19% citing the pressure to work unpaid or underpaid to build a portfolio, this further reveals the extent to which financial precarity is not just seen as a barrier to entry, but a pervasive condition of early career progression.

Notably, 15% of respondents express concern about the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) and automation, a reflection of shifting industry norms and emerging technological threats to traditional creative roles. This is reinforced by the findings of Arts SU’s recent report into UAL students’ views on AI, Art or Algorithm. While these responses indicate it is not yet a dominant concern, this figure is significant and likely to grow, particularly as generative AI becomes more embedded in sectors like design, media, and advertising.

Other concerns, while mentioned by smaller proportions of respondents, speak to ongoing structural issues: lack of mentorship (13%), difficulty finding freelance clients (12%), limited diversity and inclusion (10%), and challenges around intellectual property rights (6%). These indicate areas where the university could play a targeted role in offering additional support, guidance, and learning resources.

| What are your biggest concerns about starting a career in the current creative economy? (Select up to three) | Responses |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| High cost of living in creative hub cities (for example, London)                                             | 42%       |
| Lack of job opportunities                                                                                    | 29%       |
| Lack of professional connections and/or networking opportunities                                             | 26%       |
| Uncertainty about long-term career stability in the creative industry                                        | 25%       |
| Competition for jobs in your desired field                                                                   | 25%       |
| Inadequate pay in entry-level roles                                                                          | 20%       |
| Pressure to work unpaid or underpaid to build a portfolio                                                    | 19%       |
| Impact of artificial intelligence (AI) and automation on creative jobs                                       | 15%       |
| Lack of mentorship or guidance for early-career professionals                                                | 13%       |
| Difficulty in finding freelance clients                                                                      | 12%       |
| Limited access to affordable creative tools or software                                                      | 10%       |
| Limited diversity and inclusion in the industry                                                              | 10%       |
| Challenges in understanding intellectual property rights and licensing                                       | 6%        |



Perception of demand for skills in the creative industries

Respondents were next asked how they perceive the current demand for skills in their area of the creative industries. A majority of respondents (55%) described the current demand as moderate. Just over a fifth (22%) reported a perception of high demand, while almost a fifth (17%) believed there is low demand and 6% were unsure. This mixed outlook reflects a wider climate of instability and uneven recovery within the UK’s creative sector.

According to Creative UK’s The UK Creative Industries: Sector Deal Progress Report, while the creative industries contributed over £108 billion to the UK economy pre-pandemic and remain one of the UK’s fastest-growing sectors, the recovery from COVID-19 has been fragmented. Sub-sectors like advertising, digital media, and gaming have rebounded strongly, while areas such as performing arts, fashion, and craft-based practices have faced greater challenges in regaining momentum. This unevenness in opportunity may be directly influencing students’ perceptions, particularly those studying in disciplines that have been slower to bounce back.

Furthermore, research by the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (PEC) indicates that employment within the sector is becoming increasingly freelance, project-based, and competitive. Entry-level roles are often scarce, and barriers such as location, socio-economic background, and professional networks continue to shape who gains access to creative work. For students who are preparing to enter this landscape (especially those without existing industry ties or financial safety nets) the perception of limited or uncertain demand is grounded in real structural obstacles.

The rise of automation and AI is also a contributing factor. While new creative roles are emerging (particularly in tech-integrated fields) there is widespread concern about how traditional creative skills are being devalued or replaced. Students are acutely aware of these shifts, with some questioning whether their current skill set aligns with where the industry is headed.

This data reveals a central tension: while the creative industries are often growing in economic terms, students do not necessarily feel that this growth translates into clear or accessible opportunities for emerging professionals. The lack of confidence may stem from limited exposure to live briefs, employer engagement, or career guidance that links course content with current industry needs.

| How do you perceive the current demand for skills in your area of the creative industries? | Responses |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| High demand                                                                                | 22%       |
| Moderate demand                                                                            | 55%       |
| Low demand                                                                                 | 17%       |
| Unsure                                                                                     | 6%        |

## Financial preparedness

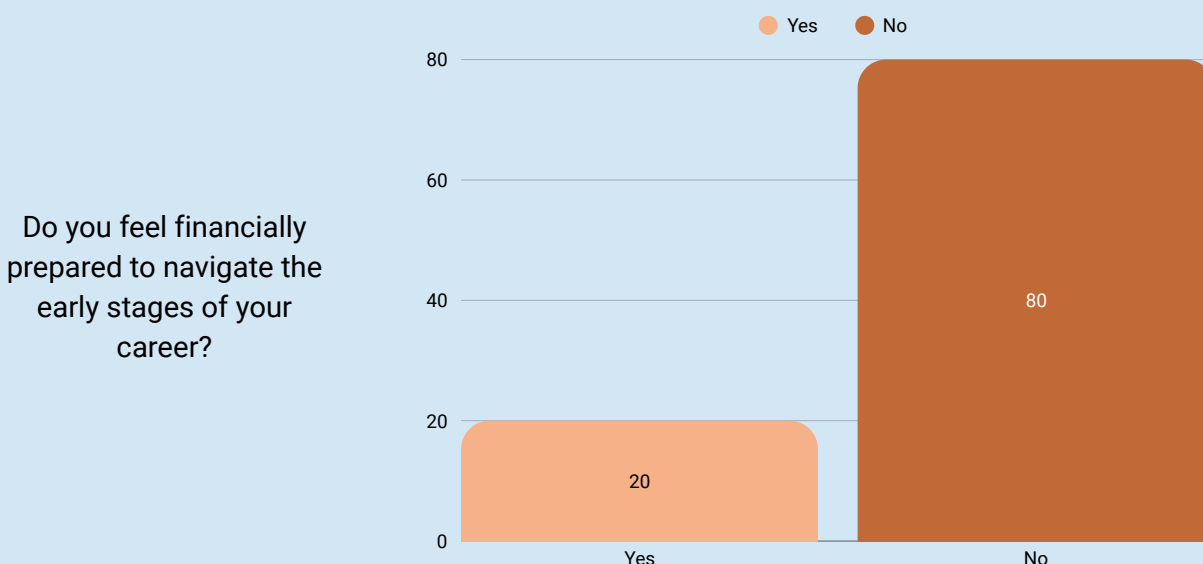
Respondents were asked about how prepared they feel financially to navigate the early stages of their career. The data presents a stark picture: only a fifth (20%) of respondents feel financially prepared to navigate the early stages of their careers, while 80% do not. This overwhelming sense of unpreparedness highlights a critical pressure point for emerging creatives, and one that cannot be addressed by skills development alone.

The creative industries, especially in their early-career stages, are often characterised by low pay, short-term contracts, and informal working conditions. Many entry-level roles are concentrated in high-cost cities like London, where the cost of living continues to outpace the financial compensation of early career creative work. Internships (often unpaid or underpaid) remain a common gateway into the sector, further disadvantaging those without financial support or external resources.

For students without familial financial backing or savings, this creates a significant barrier to entry. The result is a creative workforce that risks becoming less diverse, less equitable, and less representative of the full range of student talent and ambition.

This lack of financial preparedness is not simply about budgeting or personal finance. It reflects broader structural conditions that limit access to creative careers. It also points to a gap in the support currently offered through creative education. While UAL equips students with artistic and technical skills, many still feel underprepared to handle the financial realities of freelancing, entrepreneurship, or surviving in a competitive job market.

More transparent conversations are needed about the economic realities of the sector, and how students can strategically plan for them. Careers support should not only focus on securing roles, but also on helping students build sustainable, resilient practices. Expanding paid placement opportunities, bursaries, and funding for early-career projects could help bridge the gap for students most at risk of financial exclusion. Further to this, the university should consider expanding integrated financial literacy and business skills training across all courses, including modules on taxes, pricing, contracts, budgeting, and managing irregular income.



# Career aspirations

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This section explores the career ambitions of students across the university, revealing a community of emerging artists, designers, makers, and thinkers who are not only eager to contribute to the sector, but to help shape its future. While the creative industries face increasing uncertainty, the data reveals that UAL students remain firmly committed to building futures within them.

The data shows that most students envision their post-graduation path within the creative economy, whether through employment in agencies or studios, freelance work, or launching independent practices.

These aspirations reflect confidence in their creative identity and a desire to turn their education into meaningful, impactful work. At the same time, the diversity of responses (from students planning further study to those interested in self-employment) signals the wide range of ambitions, motivations, and strategies students are developing in response to the complexities of the sector.

## **Sector aspirations**

Respondents were first asked about their primary career goal after graduating from the current degree they are studying. They were asked to choose from a range of sectors and opportunities, to give an indication of where their practice is currently orientated towards. While these aspirations may change, this data provides a snapshot of what the student body is currently considering.

The majority of respondents (52%) indicated a desire for employment in the creative sector, such as at a creative agency or studio. A further 21% aim to pursue freelance work within the sector, and 9% hope to establish their own business or creative practice. These responses reflect a strong commitment amongst UAL students to building careers that align with their creative education and artistic identity.

This collective ambition to remain within the creative industries (whether through employment, self-employment, or entrepreneurship) underscores the value students place on their craft and on contributing meaningfully to the UK's cultural and creative landscape. However, this aspiration exists alongside significant awareness of the barriers to doing so, as seen in other areas of the report, such as financial preparedness and perceived job market conditions.

The 10% of students intending to pursue further education suggests that some see postgraduate study as a necessary next step, either to deepen specialisation, pivot within the industry, or delay entry into an uncertain job market. Meanwhile, only 4% are planning employment outside the creative industries, and 1% are aiming for freelance work outside the sector, demonstrating that despite challenges, students are largely committed to staying within the creative ecosystem.

These career intentions align with broader trends in the UK's creative economy, which (despite recent challenges) remains a significant employer. According to the UK government's Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), the creative industries accounted for over 2.3 million jobs in 2022, around 7% of the UK workforce. However, employment growth has been uneven. DCMS data shows that while areas like tech, advertising, and digital media have expanded rapidly, others such as visual arts, crafts, and performance have struggled to recover to pre-pandemic levels.

Freelancing is a particularly defining feature of the sector: nearly one-third (31%) of all creative industry workers are self-employed, a figure significantly higher than the national average (15%) across other sectors<sup>3</sup>. This helps explain why 21% of UAL students plan to pursue freelance work, and 9% aspire to start their own creative business. It also adds context to concerns around financial preparedness, as many creative graduates must navigate the complexities of self-employment early in their careers.

| What is your primary career goal after graduating?                           | Responses |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Employment in the creative sector (for example, a creative agency or studio) | 52%       |
| Freelance work in the creative sector                                        | 21%       |
| Further education (a Master's programme or PhD, for example)                 | 10%       |
| Establishing your own business or creative practice                          | 9%        |
| Employment outside of the creative sector                                    | 4%        |
| Other (please specify)                                                       | 3%        |
| Freelance work outside of the creative sector                                | 1%        |

Respondents were then asked whether they have identified any specific employers or clients they aspire to work with after graduation, and to provide their response in open text comments. The respondents shared a wide range of ambitions, reflecting the breadth of disciplines taught at the university and the diversity of interests within its student body. While many respondents had not yet pinpointed particular organisations, those who did provided insight into the sectors, roles, and types of workplaces they are most drawn to.

To provide a sense of proportion of interest in different sectors, these open text comments were themed and analysed quantitatively. The chart below provides a breakdown of the proportion of responses that referred to a specific sector and examples of the employers named.

| Sector                                              | % of Responses | Examples                                                                   |
|-----------------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| No specific employer identified / unsure            | 54%            | "No", "Not yet", "Unsure", or left blank                                   |
| Fashion and luxury brands                           | 14%            | Chanel, LVMH, Stella McCartney, Alexander McQueen, Burberry, Prada         |
| Design studios or creative agencies                 | 11%            | Pentagram, Layer, Blond, IDEO, Map Project Office, Koto Studio             |
| Museums, galleries, and cultural institutions       | 9%             | Tate, V&A, MoMA, The Met, White Cube, British Museum                       |
| Film, TV, and media production                      | 9%             | BBC, Netflix, Disney, Warner Bros, BFI, A24                                |
| Entrepreneurship / freelance / independent practice | 7%             | Starting own brand, freelancing in music, working with independent studios |
| Publishing, editorial work, and journalism          | 5%             | Penguin Random House, Conde Nast, Vogue, The Guardian, IDEA Books          |
| Theatre and performing arts                         | 4%             | National Theatre, Almeida, Punchdrunk, Jamie Lloyd                         |
| Gaming, animation, and interactive design           | 4%             | Riot Games, Aardman, Rockstar Games, Naughty Dog, Square Enix              |
| Architecture, urban design, and built environment   | 4%             | Arup, Foster + Partners, Zaha Hadid, Urban Design Group                    |
| Tech and "big tech" companies                       | 4%             | Google, Apple, IBM, Meta, Alphabet                                         |
| Sustainability / social impact / NGOs               | 3%             | Finisterre, UN, rewilding charities, NGO work                              |

Reviewing these results, over half (54%) of respondents did not name a specific employer, highlighting a need for more career exploration for most students. However, 46% of respondents already considering the employers and creative career pathways they would like to pursue demonstrates how much a graduate career is a consideration of many UAL students.

Among those who did, fashion and design were the most popular sectors, representing a combined 25% of all identifiable aspirations. Cultural institutions and media organisations also featured prominently, indicating a continued interest in traditional creative industries despite emerging challenges in those fields.

A notable proportion of respondents (around 7%) expressed a desire to work in social impact or sustainability-focused roles, revealing an emerging value-driven orientation. Finally, freelance work and independent practice continue to be a significant ambition; almost 1 in 10 of those who answered aspire to work outside conventional employment models.

### **Graduate mobility**

Respondents were asked whether they plan to stay in the UK or work abroad after graduation. A narrow majority of respondents (51%) indicated they definitively intend to pursue their careers within the UK. Meanwhile, 14% expressed a desire to work abroad, and a significant 35% (over a third) remain undecided.

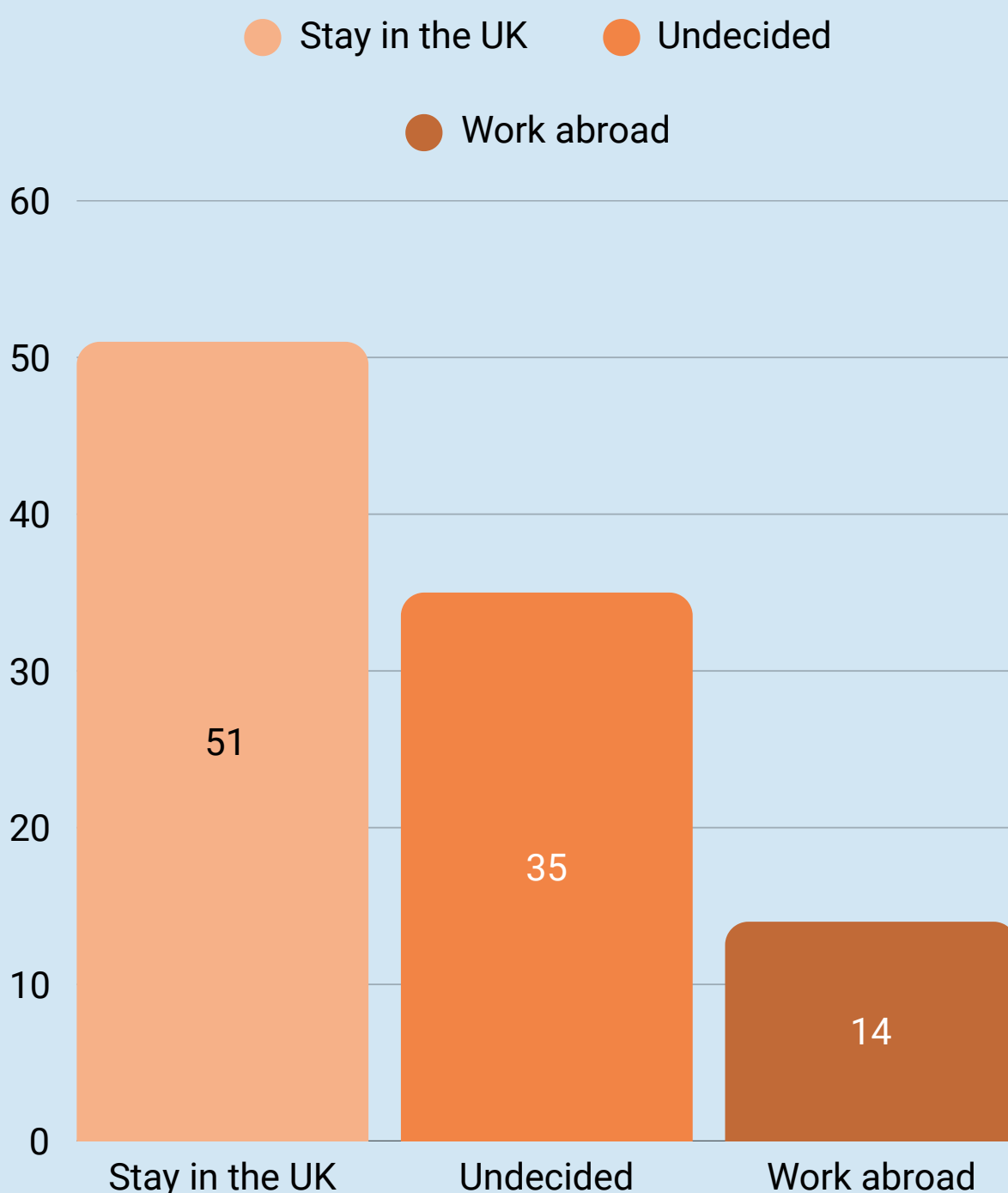
This data suggests that while the UAL student body is largely committed to building its early career in the UK's creative industries, this is not without some hesitation. The sizeable proportion of undecided students reveals uncertainty about the opportunities, affordability, and professional viability of staying in the UK long term. Students choosing to stay in the UK are likely motivated by a range of factors, including proximity to the UK's creative hubs, especially London, which remains a global centre for fashion, media, design, and the arts; access to existing networks, alumni connections, and university resources that are UK-based; and the familiarity of the UK job market and visa advantages for domestic and settled students.

However, this commitment is not without tension. As other parts of this report demonstrate, students are deeply concerned about the cost of living, competition for jobs, and financial insecurity in entry-level creative roles, all factors which may push more graduates to reconsider staying in the UK in the long term.

Conversely, the 14% of students aiming to work internationally are likely driven by the global nature of creative careers, where cities like Paris, Berlin, New York, Tokyo, and Amsterdam offer alternative opportunities, aesthetics, and creative ecosystems; a desire to work in more affordable or culturally aligned environments, or to engage with regional creative movements outside the UK; and international students who may plan to return to their home countries or seek work elsewhere due to (increasingly prohibitive) UK visa restrictions post-graduation.

According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS), in 2022, approximately 90,000 British citizens moved abroad for work, with individuals aged 25-44 being the most likely to relocate, contextualising a longer-term trend of transnational creative labour, a pattern increasingly common in digital, visual, and performance arts<sup>4</sup>. Embedding more international case studies, residencies, or global exchange opportunities into the curriculum may better reflect the ambitions of students who see themselves as part of a global creative community.

Do you plan to stay in the UK to pursue your career after graduation, or are you considering working abroad?



# Skills acquired and career preparedness

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The next section of the report explores how confident students feel about the skills they've developed during their studies, and how well-equipped they believe they are to enter the creative workforce.

While many students feel they have gained a solid foundation of technical and creative abilities, there is a clear desire for more targeted preparation for the realities of professional life. Students are eager for more practical and future-focused learning, and these preferences highlight a demand for structured, hands-on guidance that connects academic learning with real-world expectations.

The data also shows gaps in exposure to the creative industries during studies. Many students reported limited opportunities to gain real-world experience or to connect with potential employers or clients, and fewer than a third said they had definitely learned about emerging trends like AI or sustainability in their field. These insights show that while students value the creative education they receive at UAL, they are asking for more support in bridging the gap between study and industry, particularly when it comes to building confidence, business literacy, and professional networks. This section highlights where courses have succeeded, and where further investment is needed to prepare students for the demands of a dynamic, competitive creative economy.

## **Skills acquisition**

Respondents were first asked questions about the skills they have been equipped with through studying on their course. As creative graduates prepare to enter a competitive and constantly evolving job market, their sense of technical readiness plays a crucial role in shaping their confidence, and ultimately, their outcomes.

The data reveals a cautiously optimistic student body: a fifth (20%) of respondents reported feeling very confident that their course had equipped them with the technical skills required for their desired career, while a majority (60%) felt somewhat confident. However, nearly 1 in 5 students (18%) expressed feeling 'not so confident', and 2% felt 'not at all confident'.

This nuanced distribution suggests that while many students feel they will leave UAL with a reasonable level of assurance in their technical foundations, a significant minority are still uncertain about how their skills will translate into employability. This uncertainty may be shaped not only by what students are taught, but also by how much hands-on, industry-facing experience they've had to apply those skills in real-world contexts, a concern echoed elsewhere in the report.





An analysis of student confidence levels across different years of study reveals no significant differences between Year 1 and Year 4+ students. Using a 4-point scale (where 1 indicates 'very confident' and 4 indicates 'not at all confident') the median response for Years 1, 2, 3, and 4+ is consistently 2.

| Year of study | Median response | Mean response |
|---------------|-----------------|---------------|
| Year 1        | 2               | 1.98          |
| Year 2        | 2               | 2.02          |
| Year 3        | 2               | 2.22          |
| Year 4+       | 2               | 2.08          |

Interestingly, while the median remains stable, the mean response suggests a slight decline in confidence as students progress through their studies. The mean score increases from 1.98 in Year 1 to 2.22 in Year 3, indicating that students may feel less confident in their technical skills over time, a trend contrary to the expected developmental trajectory.

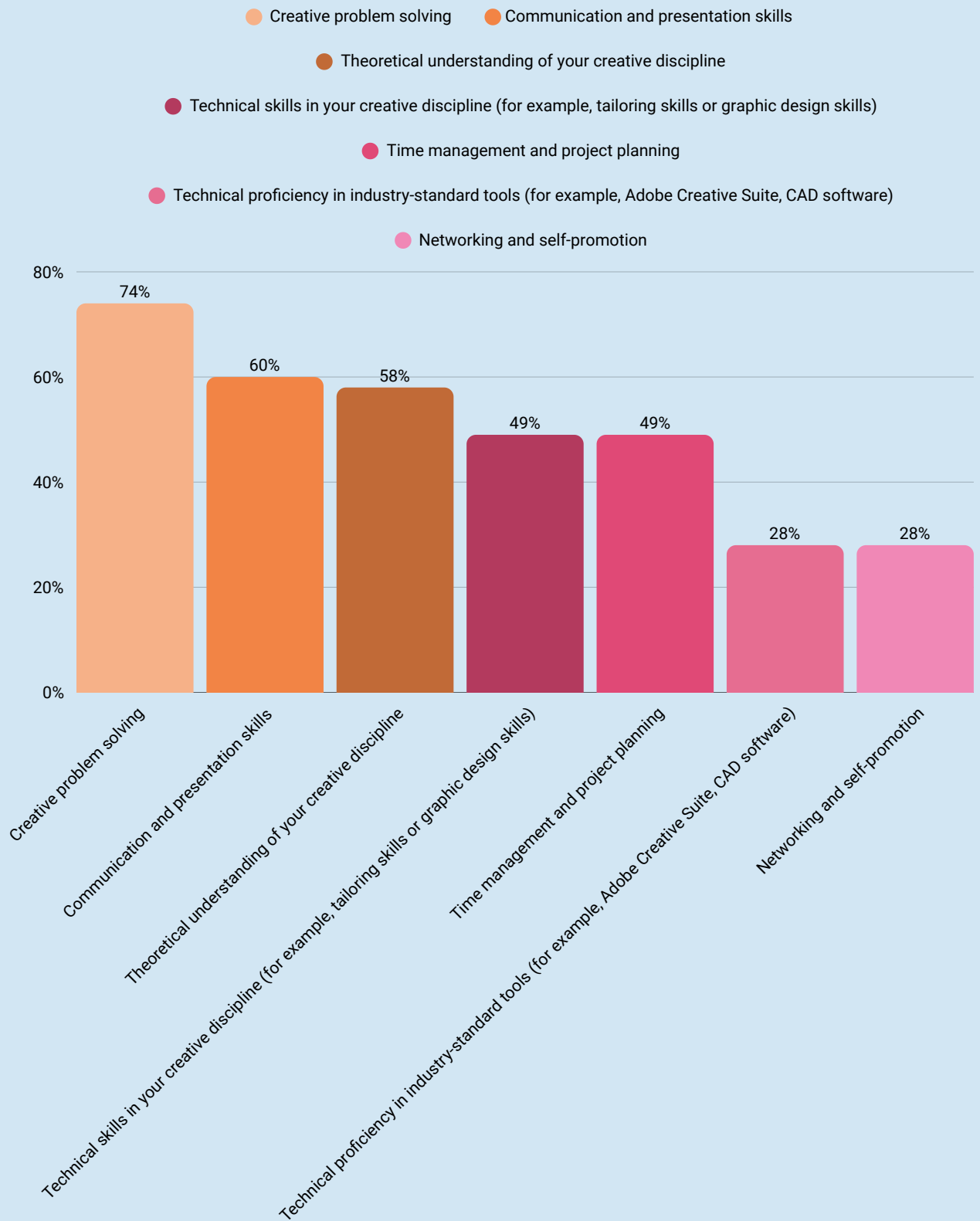
Further to this, respondents were asked to select from a list of skills they could develop from their studies and choose all that apply.

The most cited skill was creative problem solving (74%), suggesting that UAL students feel confident in their ability to think conceptually and approach challenges creatively; essential qualities in any creative profession. However, fewer than half (49%) felt they had strong technical skills in their discipline, and only 28% felt proficient in industry-standard tools. This skills gap may be contributing directly to the 20% of students who feel only marginally or not at all confident about their technical readiness.

Encouragingly, many students reported confidence in communication and presentation skills (60%) and time management (49%), which are crucial for collaboration, freelancing, and client work. However, only 28% said they had developed networking and self-promotion skills, an area that is critical in a creative economy often shaped by portfolios, social media presence, and informal hiring pathways.

This data reinforces a wider theme found throughout the report that while UAL courses are succeeding in nurturing creativity and foundational knowledge, students want (and need) more practical preparation for industry-specific workflows and tools. Software proficiency (Adobe Creative Suite or CAD, for example), business literacy, and professional networking are not perceived as 'add-ons'; they are essential skills for thriving in freelance, agency, or entrepreneurial roles.

Do you feel you have developed the following skills during your studies? (Select all that apply)



In order to identify what skills respondents value most that they have developed from their studies, they were asked “what skill that your course has given to you do you feel is the most important for your future career prospects?”

To provide a sense of proportion of skills valued, these open text comments were themed and analysed quantitatively. The chart below provides a breakdown of the proportion of responses that referred to a specific skill.

| Skill theme                                | % Responses |
|--------------------------------------------|-------------|
| Technical skills in creative discipline    | 26%         |
| Critical thinking and research             | 22%         |
| Creative problem solving / design thinking | 15%         |
| Communication and presentation skills      | 14%         |
| Networking and self-promotion              | 12%         |
| Collaboration and teamwork                 | 10%         |
| Time management and project planning       | 8%          |
| Professionalism / industry awareness       | 5%          |
| Self-motivation / independence             | 4%          |
| Confidence / personal development          | 6%          |
| Software and digital tools                 | 7%          |
| Other / unclear / no response              | 7%          |

The most frequently skills cited as the most valuable related to discipline-specific technical skills (around 25% of open text comments). These included CAD and software proficiency (for example, Adobe Suite, Rhino, or AutoCAD), which were often cited as important because they are viewed as essential to employment. For example:

“Technical proficiency in the Adobe Suite... because it’s the industry standard.”

“Solidworks is one of the most used CAD software in industry.”

Other technical skills cited as most valuable include sewing, woodworking, ceramics, casting, sound production, and photography.

Critical thinking emerged as another of the most widely appreciated transferable skills (around 22% of responses). Students valued being taught how to think, analyse, and reflect on their work and the wider world:

“Critical thinking and self-reflection allow me to create better and more innovative work.”

“It’s taught me to think deeply and question everything.”

Research skills were often paired with critical thinking, underpinning creative development and theoretical grounding.

Around 15% of responses emphasised the importance of developing creative problem-solving approaches, particularly those that allowed them to navigate ambiguity, generate new ideas, and adapt to challenges:

“Design thinking is the most valuable mindset we cultivate in our projects.”

“Creative fixing” and “concept thinking” were also commonly mentioned.

### **Course career support and real-world experience**

Respondents were next asked about the careers advice and support provided within their course (as opposed to by UAL more broadly), as well as opportunities to engage with real-world career development experience through their course.

Respondents were first asked which types of career-focused events or programmes they would like to attend if offered by their course. Networking (68%) is cited as the top priority for respondents, showing how critical students perceive ‘who you know’ to be in accessing creative opportunities. This reflects the informal, portfolio-based nature of creative employment.

60% of respondents want additional technical workshops, suggesting a desire for deeper or more specialised training that goes beyond what’s delivered in core modules, potentially to keep up with evolving industry standards. This further reinforces the finding that 20% of respondents feel only marginally or not at all confident about their technical readiness for their chosen career pathway.

The strong demand for freelancing (58%) and job preparation (55%) highlights a workforce entering into non-linear, project-based careers. Students recognise that navigating this path requires distinct skills in client communication, pricing, and even legal knowledge, often underrepresented in traditional curricula.

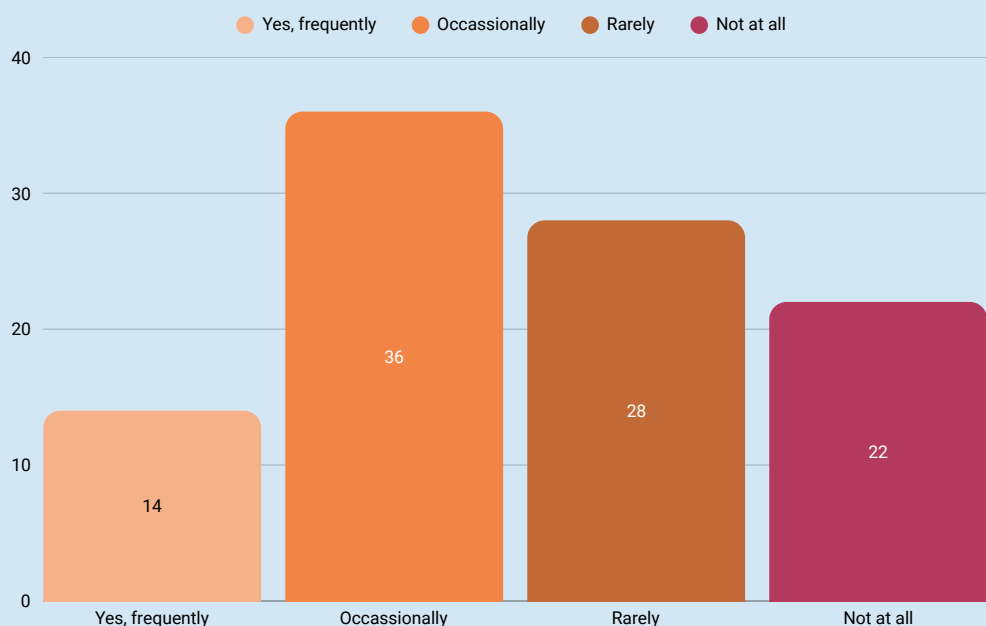
| <b>If your course organised careers events or programmes in the following areas, which would you want to attend? (Select all that apply)</b> | <b>Responses</b> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|
| Networking and building professional connections                                                                                             | 68%              |
| Additional technical skills workshops                                                                                                        | 60%              |
| Freelancing and self-employment guidance                                                                                                     | 58%              |
| Job application and interview preparation                                                                                                    | 55%              |
| Industry guest lectures or panels                                                                                                            | 48%              |
| Advice on setting up your own business                                                                                                       | 40%              |
| Mental health and resilience for the workplace                                                                                               | 27%              |

Respondents were also asked whether, through their course, they had received opportunities to gain real-world experience of their creative discipline through internships, placements, or live briefs. Only 14% of students report frequent real-world experience during their course, suggesting that formal links between curriculum and industry are not in constant effect, and instead are restricted to specific points in the course. 36% say they had occasional exposure (perhaps through isolated briefs or one-off projects) indicating that opportunities may exist but are not deeply embedded in the learning journey.

A combined 50% ('rarely' or 'not at all') had little to no real-world experience, which raises concerns about graduate readiness, particularly in disciplines where employer expectations include work-based learning or internships.

Live briefs, internships, and placements help students develop not just technical skills but also professional behaviours, communication styles, and confidence. Embedding structured industry experience where relevant (particularly through regular curriculum-linked opportunities) could significantly improve student outcomes and perceptions of course value.

Through your course, have you had opportunities to gain real-world experience of your creative discipline through internships, placements, or live briefs?

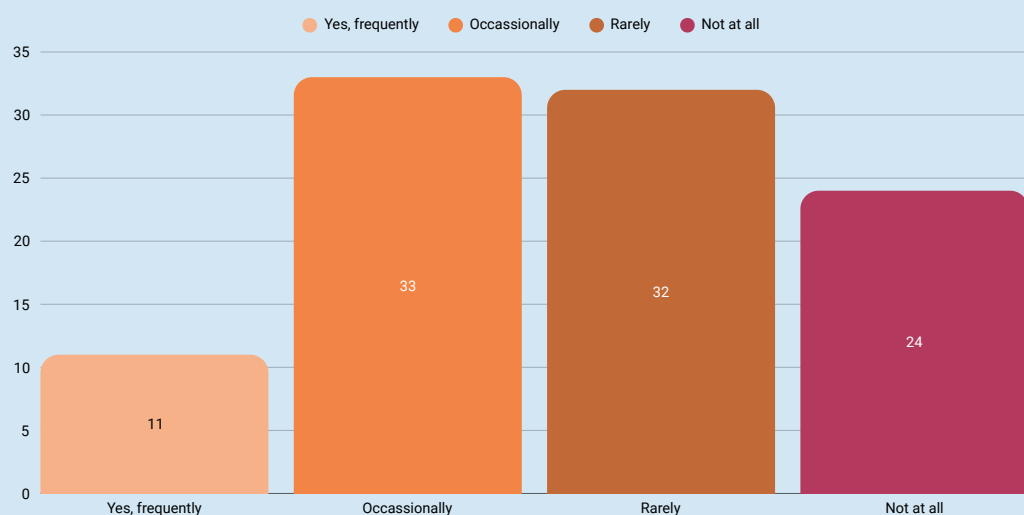


Similarly, respondents were asked if they had received opportunities to connect with potential employers or clients during their studies. Only around 1 in 10 students (11%) said they had regular access to potential employers or clients during their course. A plurality of respondents (33%) experienced this occasionally, through specific units, career fairs, or external speaker events.

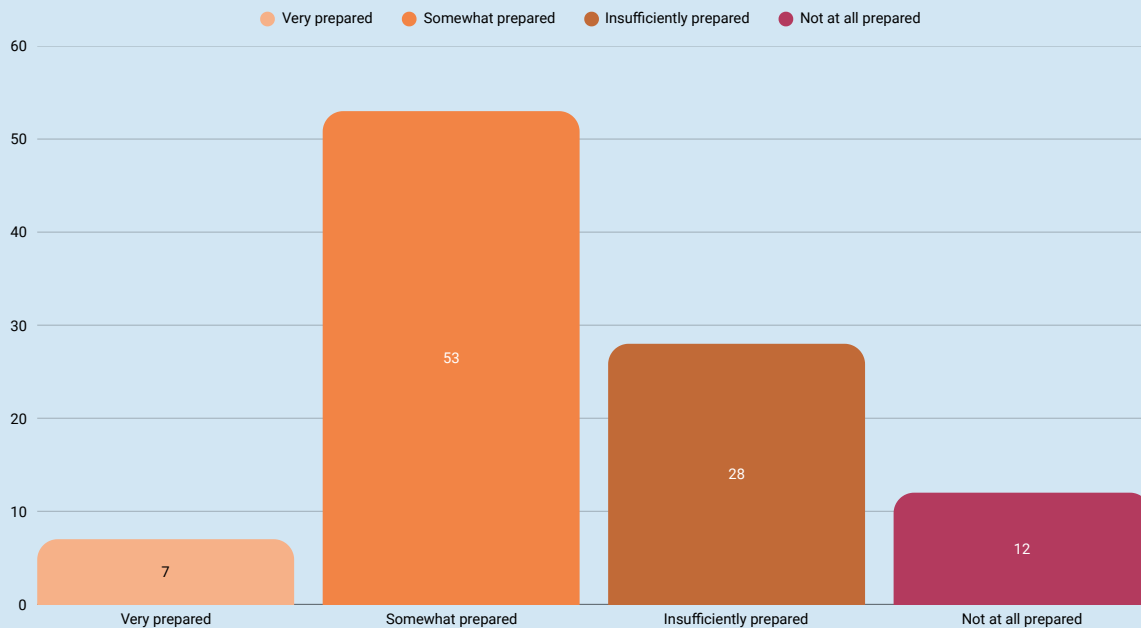
56% of respondents report 'rare' or 'no opportunities' to connect with professionals, which likely contributes to the high demand for networking support observed elsewhere in this report.

The combination of this data with low real-world experience exposure indicates that students are being trained creatively but feel under-connected to the wider industry ecosystem.

Through your course, have you had access to opportunities to connect with potential employers or clients during your studies (for example, job fairs or live projects)?



As a result of your course, how prepared do you feel to enter the job market after graduation?



Finally, respondents were asked directly how prepared they feel to enter the job market after graduation as a result of their course.

Only 7% of respondents said they feel very prepared to enter the job market, highlighting that a sense of full readiness is rare. This low figure signals that even with a specialised creative education, most students still feel they have more to develop to confidently pursue a career in their chosen field.

The largest share of students (53%) feel somewhat prepared, suggesting that many see their course as providing a solid foundation, but with room for further development. These students may have gained key creative and technical skills, but still lack experience, industry insight, or business acumen that they believe are necessary for a smooth transition into professional life.

A combined 40% of students feel insufficiently prepared or not prepared at all. This is a substantial figure, and it highlights real concerns about how effectively courses are bridging the gap between creative practice and employment realities. These students may be unsure how to promote themselves, understand career pathways, or navigate the freelance-heavy and network-driven nature of creative industries.



In open text comments, respondents were asked to explain their answer around their perceptions of their own preparedness, to provide greater context. These responses were themed and quantified.

Over one-third of respondents (35%) explained their uncertainty by referencing their early stage in the programme (typically Year 1 or early Year 2). These students acknowledged that career preparation was not expected yet but also expressed hope or concern about what would come in future years. Comments included:

“I’m only in first year, so it’s too early to say.”

“I hope by the time I graduate I will feel ready, but I don’t know what that support looks like yet.”

This indicates a need for early scaffolding of career development (such as industry insights, role visibility, and transferable skill framing) even before final year job hunting begins.

A dominant concern cited across responses (around 25%) was the lack of meaningful interaction with industry:

“We haven’t had much opportunity to connect with people from the industry.”

“No placements, no live briefs, no networking support.”

Students pointed out a disconnect between the classroom and professional world, with limited structured opportunities to build networks, understand hiring practices, or experience real-life projects. This was especially problematic in practice-based fields like design, media, and fashion, where employer expectations are high.

Many students (18%) expressed confidence in their creative or technical abilities, but not in their employability:

“I feel prepared in my skill set but not in the business or digital side.”

“I know how to design, but not how to get a job or freelance.”

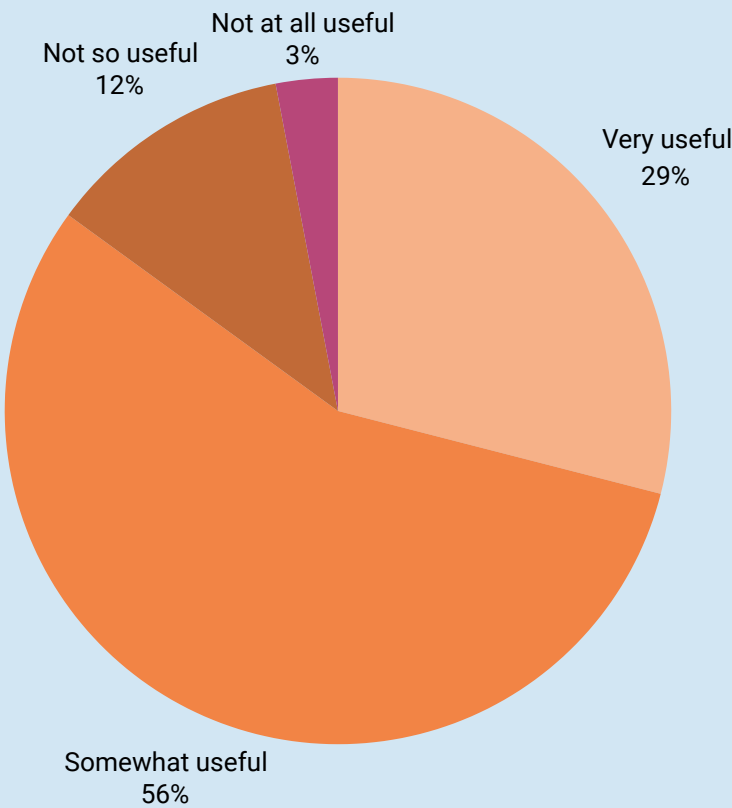
Students cited missing skills in freelancing and taxes, marketing and promotion, interview preparation, and portfolio curation. This gap reflects a strong desire for professional development to be integrated into the curriculum, not left as something to pursue on top of studies.

## Feedback from tutors and career preparedness

Respondents were asked how useful they find the feedback and critiques they receive from tutors in improving their skills and portfolio for the job market.

Tutors and lecturers play a vital role in shaping students' creative development, but also in helping them understand how to translate that work for the job market. The data below explores how students rate the usefulness of the feedback they receive, specifically in relation to career preparedness and portfolio development.

How useful do you find the feedback and critiques from tutors or lecturers in improving your skills and portfolio for the job market?



A combined 85% of students found tutor and lecturer feedback to be very useful (29%) or somewhat useful (56%) in improving their skills and portfolios. This suggests that for most students, academic critique does provide meaningful developmental value, particularly in refining technical practice, critical thinking, and conceptual development. However, the "somewhat useful" majority (56%) implies that feedback could go further in addressing professional relevance, employability, or industry alignment.

A notable 15% of students said feedback was not so useful (12%) or not at all useful (3%), a non-trivial portion of the cohort. For these students, critiques may feel too abstract, overly academic, or insufficiently tied to real-world standards and expectations.

In open text comments, respondents were asked to explain their response. While students overwhelmingly appreciate the creative and technical input they receive from tutors, there is a growing desire for feedback that speaks more directly to the demands of the professional world. Students are looking for critique that goes beyond academic evaluation and helps them understand how to refine, frame, and present their work in ways that resonate with employers, clients, and industry audiences.

This means feedback that is not only constructive, but practical: pointing out how a portfolio might be read in a hiring context, how a piece of work might be explained in an interview, or how a design decision might be justified to a client. Many students also want clearer connections drawn between their coursework and real industry standards, trends, or expectations. For some, the academic framing of critiques can sometimes feel disconnected from the freelance-based, portfolio-driven nature of creative employment.

There is also an appetite for support that helps students build the language and confidence to talk about their work in professional settings. Being able to explain creative choices, articulate a personal design identity, or demonstrate how work meets a brief are all areas students feel could be better supported through more targeted, market-aware critique.

This may involve drawing clearer links between coursework and industry norms, integrating professional language into critiques, and offering advice on how students can position their work to different audiences. Greater collaboration between academic teams and employability services could also help ensure that feedback reflects the full scope of what it means to be job-ready, not just creatively, but professionally and strategically.

Ultimately, feedback should empower students not only to improve their work, but to understand its value in the world beyond university. Making this shift toward more professionally oriented critique will help bridge the gap between education and employment, and ensure that UAL graduates leave feeling confident, capable, and connected to the creative industries they're entering.

## International students

International students provided their perspective in open text comments how prepared they feel to enter the job market after graduation.

A significant number of international students voiced concerns about the limited exposure to industry environments and real-world work opportunities throughout their course. Some felt that their curriculum was disconnected from the job market, with few chances to engage in live briefs, placements, internships, or employer-led projects. This perceived gap between education and employment left students feeling underprepared to transition into professional roles.

Respondents expressed a strong desire for more structured and accessible pathways to real-world experience, including better career support services and network-building opportunities. Respondents frequently described their learning experience as being heavily theoretical, with minimal focus on practical or industry-applicable skills.

"We studied a lot about theories. But the connection between school and the industry is weak." - MRes Moving Image international student, CSM

"Too much self-led study." - MA Animation international student, LCC

"Creative part is well covered but technical skills are lacking. More time should be allocated to teach technical skills. It feels we are just rushing from one skill to another making us a jack of all but a master of none. " - BA Textile Design international student, Chelsea

While they appreciated the academic depth and creative exploration, many felt this came at the cost of building tangible, job-ready competencies. Several students noted that key technical and software skills were either missing or rushed through. There was a strong call for more balanced curricula, where academic learning is complemented by hands-on training, practical workshops, and direct application of skills in industry-relevant contexts.

International students also highlighted a range of unique challenges in navigating the UK job market. These included a lack of cultural familiarity, uncertainty about job-seeking protocols, and concerns about visa restrictions. Even students with industry experience from their home countries felt undervalued in the UK context. They reported that course content rarely addressed global job search strategies or provided guidance tailored to international backgrounds. There was a clear need for inclusive support structures that bridge these gaps and acknowledge the diverse experiences of international learners.

"As an international student, I lack opportunity to connect with industry and don't understand UK job market." - MA Global Collaborative Design Practice international student, Camberwell

"I am from an international country and it seems like we need a lot more of explanation or classes about how to get inside the industry. There's a lot of cultural differences and takes a while to figure it out how it works." - MA Fine Art international student, CSM

"Most employers don't consider my home country experience. Also I need visa sponsorship." - Graduate Diploma Fashion Management international student, LCF

Finally, a number of international students did feel well-prepared for the job market. These students typically attributed their confidence to a combination of prior work experience, self-initiated learning, and targeted support from their course. They felt they had gained valuable technical and creative skills, as well as a clearer understanding of how to position themselves professionally. These positive cases highlight best practices that could be built upon and scaled across other programmes.

# Careers guidance

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The final section of this report looks at the broader career guidance ecosystem available at UAL, and respondents' perceptions of that support.

Just over half of students (52%) said they were satisfied or very satisfied with UAL's careers services. This is very positive, and in open text comments respondents suggest they have benefited from employability workshops, one-to-one sessions, or events such as careers fairs and creative industry panels. However, the low figure of very satisfied students (11%) suggests that even those with positive experiences may feel the support is too broad, limited in scope, or not deeply embedded in their course enough.

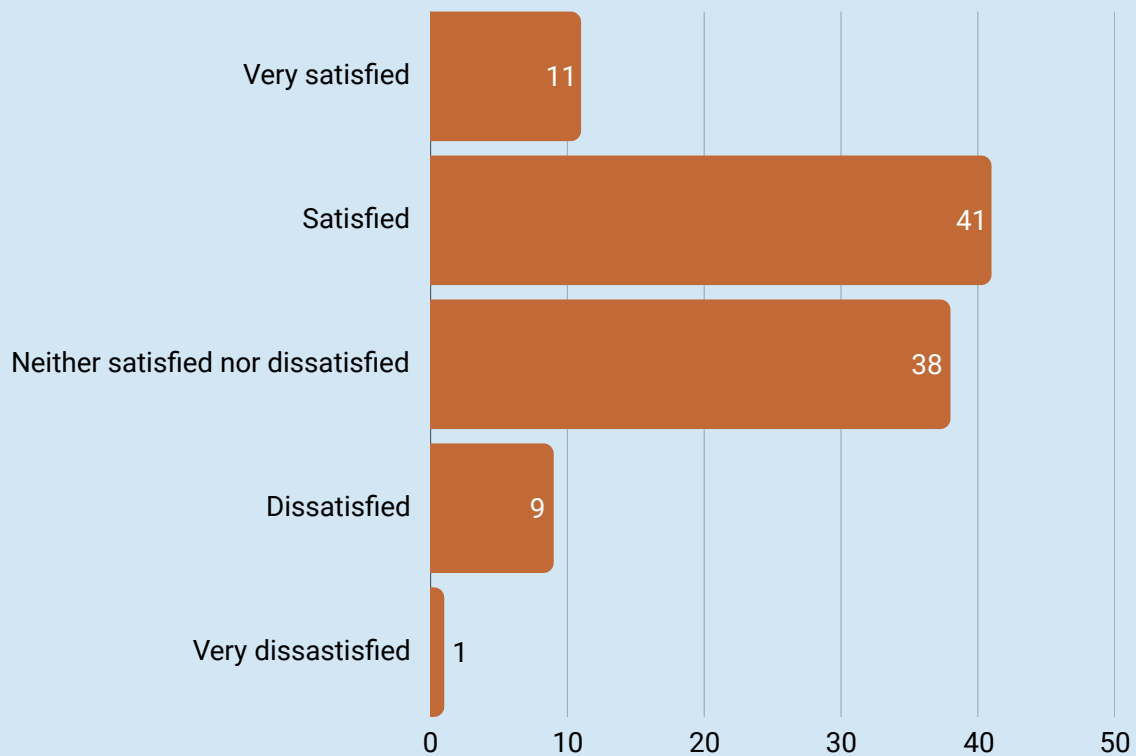
A notable 38% of students selected neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, a response that often reflects low engagement or unclear impact. Many in this group likely aren't fully aware of the support available, haven't accessed it, have not felt the need to contact the service, or feel it isn't well-suited to their needs. This significant proportion of respondents feeling neutral suggests many students may feel unsure or uninformed.

Across open-text responses in the wider survey, one theme emerges clearly: students believe careers support is most effective when it is local, specific, and embedded within their course or college. Rather than accessing what is perceived as centralised, "one-size-fits-all" advice, respondents want careers teams that understand the nuances of their discipline.

Students are looking for advice that acknowledges the unique structures of their creative employment (such as pitching, building a portfolio, self-promotion, or securing commissions) beyond traditional job applications. They want careers support to reflect the realities of their field, and to be delivered by people who are familiar with its language, challenges, and entry routes.

For many, this means not just having access to a university-wide service, but having career guidance that is integrated directly into their college and on the ground co-delivered or co-designed with academics, alumni, and industry partners.

How satisfied are you with the career support services provided by UAL more generally?



For UAL to raise satisfaction and impact, it could beyond a centralised model and invest in decentralised, embedded careers support within colleges that meets students where they are. This means:

- Developing college- and course-specific careers pathways
- Ensuring careers staff continue to collaborate closely with course teams and tutors to tailor advice
- Embedding support within studio culture, critiques, and live briefs
- Making discipline-specific employer engagement a standard part of the curriculum

By building careers guidance that reflects the diversity of creative work, and delivering it within students' everyday learning environments, UAL can ensure that more students leave not just technically talented but strategically prepared to thrive in the industries they aspire to join.

Finally respondents were asked to rank a range of careers support resources in order of most useful to least useful. This prioritisation forces participants to reveal their true preferences. The results are displayed as weighted averages; in ranking questions, the average ranking is calculated for each answer choice so it can be determined which answer choice was most preferred overall. The answer choice with the largest average ranking is the most preferred choice.

| Which of the following university-provided resources would you find most helpful in preparing you for the workforce? Rank these options from most helpful to least helpful. | Weighted average score |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Career advice sessions with a professional career adviser                                                                                                                   | 5.13                   |
| Networking events with industry professionals                                                                                                                               | 5.04                   |
| Internship or placement opportunities                                                                                                                                       | 4.48                   |
| Portfolio reviews and feedback                                                                                                                                              | 4.18                   |
| Crit events exploring your work-in-progress                                                                                                                                 | 4.05                   |
| Workshops on freelancing or self-employment                                                                                                                                 | 2.67                   |
| Alumni connections or mentoring programmes                                                                                                                                  | 2.45                   |

Students ranked career advice sessions with a professional adviser as the most helpful resource (5.13), followed by networking events with industry professionals (5.04). This result aligns closely with broader trends seen throughout the report: students want advice that is personalised, contextualised, and actionable, preferably delivered by someone who understands the intricacies of their chosen creative career paths.

The importance placed on networking also echoes findings elsewhere in this report, where 68% of students said they would attend networking-focused events organised by their course. This reinforces the idea that creative careers are not just skill-dependent, they're also connection-driven, and students recognise this as a key area where university support can make a real difference.

Internship or placement opportunities ranked third (4.48), highlighting that students still see hands-on, practical work as a crucial bridge between education and employment. However, as observed elsewhere in the report, only 14% of students reported frequent access to real-world experiences through their course. This suggests a gap between the value students place on placements and their availability in the curriculum, an area for further development.

Portfolio reviews (4.18) and crit events (4.05) fell into the middle range. These resources are embedded in creative education, and students do value them, but the data suggests they may not always be framed or delivered in ways that feel directly applicable to the job market. As suggested elsewhere in this report, students may be seeking critique that goes beyond creative direction to include professional framing: how to present, position, and pitch their work to clients and employers.



At the lower end of the rankings were freelancing/self-employment workshops (2.67) and alumni mentoring programmes (2.45). On the surface, this might suggest less student interest in entrepreneurial pathways or alumni networks. However, this likely reflects issues of awareness, accessibility, or quality, rather than lack of interest.

In earlier sections of the report, 58% of students said they would attend self-employment workshops provided by their course, indicating a significant appetite. The low ranking here may imply that students are unsure how helpful the current offer is or have not seen these services delivered in ways that feel practical, relevant, or well-integrated into their course. Similarly, low engagement with alumni may point to underutilised networks, rather than lack of demand.

To meet student needs, UAL should focus on strengthening the resources students value most: by increasing the availability of advisory sessions, expanding networking opportunities, and embedding portfolio and placement support directly into the curriculum. At the same time, there may be a need to reimagine how lower-ranked resources like freelancing workshops or alumni mentoring are delivered, ensuring they are practical, discipline-specific, or better promoted.

By doing so, UAL can continue to offer a careers programme that is not only comprehensive, but aligned with how students want, and need, to be supported as they prepare to enter an increasingly complex creative workforce.

# Recommendations

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## **1. Further embed financial literacy and business training across all courses**

80% of UAL students surveyed do not feel financially prepared to navigate the early stages of their careers. This unpreparedness is especially critical considering that 21% of students anticipate working freelance and 9% intend to launch their own business or creative practice. These pathways require not only technical expertise but also solid knowledge of pricing, contracts, taxation, managing irregular income, and strategic planning.

To support students in making sustainable careers, financial literacy must be further integrated across all levels of the curriculum. This could include workshops on personal finance, training on invoicing and legal obligations, and modules focused on self-employment and entrepreneurship. Ensuring that this training is specific to each discipline resonates strongly with the findings of the report, with respondents desiring advice that feels appropriate to their context.

This would ensure that all students, regardless of background, are equipped to succeed in the often-unpredictable financial landscape of creative work.

## **2. Expand structured real-world learning opportunities**

The report reveals that only 14% of students have frequent access to real-world experience, and half of the student body (50%) believe they rarely or never engage with industry through their course. This significant gap between education and industry engagement undermines graduate readiness, especially in sectors where hands-on experience is a prerequisite.

Students call for more placements, internships, and live briefs embedded directly into their coursework. Real-world exposure not only helps students build confidence and professionalism but also provides insight into industry workflows and expectations.

Making experiential learning a core part of all programmes would bridge the gap between study and employment, and help students graduate with both portfolio and practice.

### **3. Localise and embed careers support within courses and colleges**

While over half of students (52%) are generally satisfied with UAL's careers services, only 11% are very satisfied. Additionally, a significant 38% remain neutral, suggesting lower engagement or awareness than desired. Open-text feedback reveals that students want careers guidance that is specific to their discipline and integrated into their daily academic environment.

Rather than relying solely on a centralised model, careers support should expand its localised offer, embedded within each college and co-delivered with tutors who understand the nuances of creative disciplines. This decentralised approach would offer contextualised, timely, and highly relevant advice, allowing students to access tailored support throughout their course.

### **4. Make networking and industry connection a curriculum standard**

The creative industries often operate through informal hiring, referrals, and client relationships, making networks essential for success. 68% of students said they would attend networking events if offered by their course, and 26% ranked lack of connections as one of their top concerns about starting a career in the current creative economy.

Only 11% of respondents report having regular access to potential employers or clients through their curriculum. UAL should embed networking as a fundamental part of every course, not as an optional extra.

This could include structured industry panels, speed-networking events, guest crits from employers, and alumni spotlights. Building industry access into the academic journey ensures all students (not just the well-connected) can develop meaningful professional relationships.

### **5. Further expand on tutor feedback towards professional guidance**

85% of students find tutor feedback useful, which demonstrates the important respondents place in the knowledge of their tutors, and how critical they perceive it to their future career success. Students value critique that goes beyond academic evaluation and prepares them to speak about their work in professional contexts.

Building from this excellent practice, tutors should be supported to continue to offer career-conscious feedback that addresses how a project might be received by employers or clients. This includes advice on portfolio presentation, storytelling around creative choices, and awareness of industry expectations.

Integrating professional language into critique can demystify the transition from studio to industry.

## **6. Prioritise development of technical skills and industry tools**

Only 49% of respondents feel confident in their technical skills, and just 28% feel proficient in industry-standard tools. This skills gap directly impacts employment confidence, with 20% of students feeling only marginally or not at all technically ready for work.

Courses must ensure all students receive up-to-date training on the tools and software they will encounter in the workplace. This includes platforms like Adobe Creative Suite, CAD systems, and emerging tech relevant to each field.

Greater investment in hands-on training integrated into course is an expectation amongst most respondents. Extra-curricular advanced workshops could also be made available to help students stay competitive.

## **7. Continue to provide early and ongoing career development starting in Year 1**

A common theme among student responses is that career preparation begins too late. About 35% of those who felt unprepared cited being in their first or second year, uncertain about what future support would entail.

Scaffolding career education from the outset, as is being addressed in UAL's Employability Framework, would build confidence and direction. This could begin with light-touch initiatives like "career curiosity" workshops in Year 1, such as exploring different industry roles, guest talks from recent graduates, and exercises to identify personal strengths and values.

In Year 2, students might engage with more applied opportunities: live briefs with employers, mock interviews, or skills audits that help them map out their developing portfolio. By Year 3, students would shift focus toward refining applications, preparing final portfolios, and articulating their unique professional identity.

Embedding this progressive structure within core units, rather than optional add-ons, ensures consistent engagement. It also supports students in making connections between their creative practice and future career pathways from day one, leading to stronger, more confident graduates ready to navigate the evolving creative economy.

## **8. Enhance and promote alumni mentoring and freelance workshops**

There is a strong appetite among students for more support in freelancing and navigating independent career paths, with 58% of students saying they would attend freelancing workshops. However, these resources currently rank lower in perceived usefulness, which may reflect challenges around visibility, accessibility, or how relevant and practical students find them.

To maximise their value, these offerings can be developed through co-creation with students and alumni. Alumni mentoring schemes could include informal roundtables, drop-in Q&As, and short-term project partnerships, making engagement feel less intimidating and more personal. Workshops should be highly practical, focusing on skills like writing contracts, pricing creative work, managing clients, and using tools like QuickBooks or Notion for freelancing.

Pairing these sessions with real-world examples, such as alumni stories or short talks from early-career creatives, would help students see clear, achievable paths forward. Promoting them through course newsletters, studio briefings, and tutor endorsements would also help increase uptake.

These enhancements would create a more dynamic, visible, and empowering set of resources, better aligned with the needs and aspirations of UAL's emerging freelancers and entrepreneurs.

## **9. Address equity of access for the cost of living and support for marginalised students**

The high cost of living in creative hubs like London is a pressing concern for 42% of students, posing a challenge to equity of access in early career development. Yet there are many proactive, collaborative ways to improve access.

UAL can work in partnership with industry to co-develop creative solutions that ease the financial burden on students while offering professional growth. These might include:

- Paid micro-internships and project-based commissions sponsored by partner organisations, especially during holidays or between terms.
- Remote or hybrid work placements to reduce relocation or travel costs while still giving students access to national or international employers.
- On-campus consultancy labs where students work on real-world briefs for external clients, earning either payment or academic credit.
- Access to subsidised studio spaces, equipment loans, or co-working hubs through corporate sponsorships or alumni-led collectives.

Moreover, creating strong peer mentoring networks and expanding visibility for diverse role models within the curriculum can help ensure all students feel seen and supported. These practical, partnership-based steps allow UAL to champion inclusion and resilience across the creative pipeline, making success more attainable for students from all backgrounds.

## **10. Strengthen support for global career pathways**

While 51% of students plan to stay in the UK, 35% are undecided and 14% aim to work abroad. With increasing global mobility and creative exchange, UAL should better reflect the international ambitions of those students with a more global outlook.

This includes incorporating global creative case studies, offering virtual international placements, and expanding exchange or residency programmes.

Supporting students to see themselves as part of a transnational creative ecosystem would align education with the realities of a mobile and interconnected sector.

## **11. Clarify the scope and availability of high-profile industry partnerships**

UAL's partnerships with globally recognised creative organisations (such as LVMH and other leading brands) are a powerful asset in attracting prospective students and strengthening the university's external reputation. However, student feedback suggests that the visibility of these partnerships may unintentionally create unrealistic expectations around direct access to internships, jobs, or exclusive opportunities through studying at UAL.

To ensure transparency and manage expectations effectively, UAL should consider implementing clearer communications around the purpose and structure of these partnerships. This could include:

- Clearly distinguishing between strategic partnerships (research collaboration, brand alignment, or innovation funding) and student-facing opportunities (live briefs, placement pathways, or sponsored awards).
- Developing a public-facing guide or webpage that outlines what each major partnership offers (and does not offer) students, with examples of past engagement or outcomes.
- Including realistic examples of how students have interacted with these organisations (such as contributing to a live brief, attending a guest lecture, or being shortlisted for a competition) rather than implying direct recruitment pipelines.
- Ensuring that course marketing materials and recruitment communications are aligned with what is realistically accessible, to avoid over-promising.

By setting accurate, aspirational (but achievable) expectations, UAL can maintain the prestige of its partnerships while building greater trust with current and prospective students. This approach reinforces UAL's commitment to transparency and to providing meaningful, clearly articulated pathways into the creative industries.

# Conclusion

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This report presents a detailed overview of student perspectives on graduate readiness, employability, and the future of work within the creative industries. Drawing on robust quantitative and qualitative data, it reveals a cohort that is highly engaged with their discipline and acutely aware of both the opportunities and structural barriers that shape early-career trajectories in the arts and design sectors.

The findings indicate that while students at UAL are developing strong creative and conceptual skills, many feel underprepared for the financial, professional, and practical dimensions of entering the workforce. Concerns about cost of living, lack of access to industry networks, and limited exposure to real-world experience are common across disciplines. At the same time, students express a clear commitment to remaining within the creative economy and contributing meaningfully to its evolution.

The report identifies several areas where further investment and development could enhance student outcomes, including the integration of financial literacy and business education, the expansion of embedded industry partnerships, and the localisation of careers support within colleges. These insights offer a valuable evidence base for ongoing strategic planning at both course and institutional levels.

As the creative economy continues to evolve in response to technological change, globalisation, and shifts in employment practice, the role of higher education in preparing graduates must also adapt.

By acting on the issues highlighted in this report, UAL has an opportunity to strengthen its position as a leader in creative education, equipping students not only with artistic expertise, but with the tools, confidence, and support required to thrive in a complex and competitive professional landscape.

# Author

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