

## 1. PROVIDER CONTEXT

Arts University Bournemouth (AUB) is one of the UK's leading specialist institutions with an international reputation in art, design, media and performance. The new 2030 Strategy endorsed the University's vision to be "A world-class art, design and media university working with professional partners to create excellence, relevance and impact"<sup>1</sup>. Through extensive stakeholder engagement, centred on staff, students, industry and alumni, the university revised its values, to help guide its teaching, research and engagement, as below:

### INNOVATIVE

With an open mind we try new things, nurture ideas, trigger creativity and develop solutions. Through our innate curiosity, practice-based enquiry and industry-partnered projects we work with our students, staff and stakeholders to tackle problems and encourage authentic innovation

### COLLABORATIVE

We strive to make a difference in all that we do. Through our collaborative approach we aim to be the agents of positive change for our students, staff, and the communities we serve. Through the applied excellence of our learning, teaching, and research we strive for relevance to make a positive impact.

### CONNECTED

We are better for our diversity. We are enriched by the depth of respect we have for each other and the strength of our relationships with our people, our places and with the planet. Through our commitment to working with those who are different to us, or challenge us, we grow stronger together, creating new synergies, global connections, and sustainable futures.

### PASSIONATE

Education transforms lives: a creative education transforms society. Through our sense of purpose and determination for the best education, research and partnering with industry, we empower our people to learn, grow and connect. We care about the work we do, the respect we have for each other, and the powerful sense of belonging that characterises everything we do.

Few universities in the UK combine the range of specialist courses and skills that AUB has in its taught portfolio. With its emphasis on a 'Maker Culture' AUB's education aim is to transform creativity into career success. This is achieved by creating a rich, contemporary curriculum, nurturing strong links with industry and professional stakeholders, and by encouraging planned and spontaneous collaboration through innovative inter-disciplinary combinations of project- and studio-based learning. Through its distinctive creative pedagogy, AUB creates graduates who are creative problem-solvers, ready to take their place as global citizens in the employment context of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

AUB offers all-through provision from pre-degree courses, through undergraduate provision, on to Master's courses and PhDs. Undergraduate courses are divided into three schools (Arts and Communication; Design and Architecture; and the Bournemouth Film School). The postgraduate offer is delivered through a Graduate School which has a bespoke curriculum model offering micro,

macro-, and meso- level opportunity for core- and inter-disciplinary study. 89% of undergraduate students are under 21 at entry; and just over 70% are female. However, they are also diverse, and their routes to entry are varied; in most years, under 40% of Home students enter direct from A-level; 25% also hold a Foundation Diploma; and a further 25% enter with a BTEC Extended Diploma. The remainder either hold a combination, or other qualifications. This is broadly typical of the qualifications on entry for specialist creative arts providers. Approximately 20% of the total student population is international.

To ensure currency and relevance, learning and teaching is scaffolded by a suite of policies overseen by the **Curriculum Innovation Group** (CIG), led by the Executive Director, Academic Innovation. The most significant for this submission are:

- The **Curriculum 21 Project**, an overarching scheme to update the curriculum and ensure that it is designed to meet the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century employment context. The Project accentuates the distinctiveness of an AUB Graduate, embedding graduate attributes, global citizenship, and employability across undergraduate courses.
- The **Graduate Futures Framework**<sup>2</sup>, which maintains the momentum established through the Graduate Attributes Report (2020), shapes work-integrated learning across AUB, and devises cross-university projects with diverse regional and national external stakeholders.
- The **EDI Programme**, which demonstrates the University's commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) and the civic agenda, with learning outcomes embedded across all courses.
- The **Environmental Sustainability Programme**, designed to initiate a shared approach to achieving the AUB commitment to net zero by 2030 and to systematically embed into course delivery, projects and learning outcomes key components of the United Nations Sustainability Development Goals (SDGs).

More detail about these initiatives is given at appropriate points throughout our submission.

Alongside its oversight of these policies, CIG has a fundamental role in constantly interrogating the curriculum, and pedagogical practices for the creative disciplines. AUB is inspired by the critical value of creative innovation (rather than replication), recognising that the major global challenges will only be solved through creativity. Artificial intelligence can solve increasingly complicated technical challenges, but it cannot master the complexity required to address the biggest questions facing humanity. The University seeks to make its own contribution through the provision of a high-quality creative education which equips graduates for the next stage in their careers as global citizens.

The innovative nature of learning, teaching and engagement across AUB is predicated on a profound sense of Belonging – to the academic discipline, to aligned professions, and to the sense of place, the *genius loci* of the campus which empowers a community of collaborative learning. This distinctive sense of Belonging (which will be evidenced throughout this submission) is forged through the maker-culture whereby students 'make themselves' as creative practitioners, producing artefacts, images, productions, or experiences, but also through the concept of 'making a difference' by locating and testing their practices in a range of professional contexts.

Drawing on the embedded action plans, projects and frameworks identified above, this submission has been arranged according to the aspects, to assist the panel in locating the necessary

information to inform its judgements, but it is important to stress the University takes an holistic view of the student experience, with the activity described under each heading coming together to provide a seamless, high-quality student experience. The submission provides a deliberately broad range of examples as evidence of teaching excellence to demonstrate that our activities and initiatives are embedded across the University.

This submission has been prepared by a cross-section of academic and professional services staff. The Working Group included members from all parts of the University, and sought additional information from all course teams and relevant professional services. Student and alumni voices were critical to its gestation and development. The President of the Students' Union was also a member of the group and made a significant contribution, scrutinising claims and stress-testing assertions. In addition, the group also considered feedback provided by students over the last three years through national and local surveys and initiatives.

The datasets for this exercise include a small number of students (60) who were enrolled on a four-year degree, including a Year Zero, but this course was discontinued after the first contributing year. In 2022/23 AUB registered its first students on franchise courses at a local provider; this population will be in scope for future rounds of the TEF. The submission does not include information about validated courses (at two providers); AUB is proud of the experience and performance of these students, which is overseen with the same diligence as courses delivered by the University, but took the decision only to include evidence relating to registered students. The University does not currently have any TNE students, undergraduate-level apprenticeships, or credit-bearing courses at undergraduate level that do not lead to the award of a qualification.

This submission makes the case that AUB is a special, quite unique learning environment of which staff and students are extremely proud, as summarised by one external examiner:

"The students are able to demonstrate to me that they have a sound understanding of current production methods, and that they are able to produce practical work to a high professional standard. The course successfully mimics industry pipelines to ensure that the students are equipped with relevant, industry facing skills."<sup>3</sup> (Visual Effects (VFX) for Film and Television, 2021)

## **2. STUDENT EXPERIENCE**

Arts University Bournemouth is proud of the outstanding student experience which it offers, focused on excellent teaching and assessment, underpinned by outstanding resources, a robust network of professional and industrial partners, and a unique purpose-built campus.

### **2.1 Learning and teaching in the Creative and Performing arts**

Teaching, learning and assessment within the creative disciplines is distinctive. Students spend significant periods of study learning through practice, building knowledge of their subject by learning skills and techniques which are demonstrated and supported by technical staff as well as academics. AUB endorses this approach, and its specialist arts education is delivered through a studio culture, both physical and virtual, which allows close working proximity to academic and technical support staff. This studio culture includes direct teaching and tutorials, but also extensive independent time supported by technicians in accord with our strong commitment to applied and problem-based learning.

AUB prides itself on an extended taught year of three x 10 weeks, and a high level of student contact time (a student: staff ratio of 14.5:1<sup>4</sup>, which offers the optimum balance of contact for this professionally oriented learning environment). Students learn in part through contextual practice: through making, communicating and supporting each other, augmented by critical and contextual study, which empowers them to make, problem-solve and investigate with confidence.

## 2.2 Curriculum design

The expected outcomes of a creative and performing arts degree inform the nature of curriculum and learning design. All courses are designed to address and embed foundational skills at Level 4, providing students with a sound grounding in the discipline. At AUB the first unit at Level 4, taken during the autumn term, is assessed on a Pass/Fail basis only. The University was keen to help students to focus on the learning process in this first unit, and not to fixate on marks, and piloted the Pass/Fail approach across four courses in 2019/20. Importantly, students reported that this approach was particularly welcome for the first unit and “took the pressure off”, although their feedback also confirmed that they would welcome grades for the remainder of the year, to indicate their progress. This approach was adopted across the whole University from the following year for the first unit at Level 4<sup>5</sup>. To facilitate collaboration across cognate courses, and to support acclimatisation to degree-level learning for students coming from a range of pre-degree backgrounds, all courses share a common unit framework at Level 4 (3 x 40 credit units).

Level 5 builds on these core skills and knowledge with more advanced and technical skills. Problem-based learning is at the heart of the creative pedagogy as are a menu of live and simulated industry-partnered projects. Many units at this level involve live briefs with industry partners; for example, on BA (Hons) Graphic Design, students are required to enter at least two national competitions. This type of unit offers students wide scope to respond to the brief within broad parameters, giving a realistic simulation of industry practice. In other units projects are developed and negotiated by students themselves, aligned to their own areas of interest. The student will indicate how they intend to meet the unit learning outcomes, and will agree this with the unit leader, but has considerable freedom in how they achieve this. The focus of teaching and assessment is therefore to enable a student to take this responsibility and identify a creative, innovative way of responding to a particular problem or issue. The development and negotiation of a Learning Agreement is an essential part of the student experience at Level 5 as they become independent learners. Negotiated with the academic team, the Learning Agreement enables each student to focus on areas of specific interest, prepares them for the major pieces of work they will undertake in the final year, and starts the process of creating a portfolio or showreel which will underpin their first steps into graduate employment.

At Level 6, all courses have a Major Project unit weighted at a minimum of 40 credits; in many cases, this unit is weighted at 60 credits, or 600 notional learning hours. This is a common feature of degrees within the creative and performing arts. This can represent a risk for students: this one unit carries the credit for half the final year of study and is weighted accordingly within the degree classification algorithm. Importantly, this risk is also an opportunity to take ownership of their education, with the chance to synthesise prior learning and focus on a major production. As the culmination of the learning journey, this project is the most significant and industry-focused piece of work which a student undertakes, drawing together both theory and practice which have been developed and refined throughout the course. Through reflexive approaches to learning the student is guided by the course team in creating a project which will best demonstrate their abilities

and equip them for the future. The Major Project provides students with the chance to explore in detail a genuinely challenging, real-world brief, and develop a personal, creative solution; on each course, every project is assessed against common learning outcomes, even though projects themselves can be extraordinarily varied. As one external examiner commented, “The focus on learning agreements with critical path planning, cross referenced to learning outcomes and with acknowledged references has led again to some exemplary proposals and thoughtful collections” (Textiles, 2021).

Studio and workshop learning culture is augmented by an extensive programme of contextual history and theory. However, a fundamental aspect of course design and delivery at AUB is that to be successful, a student cannot simply learn the theory or practice of their discipline without ‘testing’ their skills and knowledge through application, invariably in live settings through productions, performance, installation, or exhibition. The University is proud that in 2022, 83.64% of respondents to the NSS confirmed that the course had provided them with opportunities to apply what they had learned, significantly above the benchmark<sup>6</sup>. This is mirrored by internal survey outcomes, where 95% of respondents agreed that their experience at AUB helped them to apply their creative skills in practical ways. 96% of students also agreed that AUB places an emphasis on encouraging and developing creativity<sup>7</sup>. As an example, BA (Hons) Design focuses on developing ‘Design as an attitude’, teaching students to recognise that there is often ambiguity in the design process. The course has the mantra *okti* (One Thousand Terrible Ideas) to remind students that they should all share incomplete or impractical suggestions, which may result in the generation of some genuinely ground-breaking ideas. Apart from the obvious employment benefits, the focus on the application of learning in creative ways also reduces the risk of plagiarism or other forms of academic misconduct; working with industrial partners such as RNLI, Dragon Rouge, and Dyson, students are expected to develop creative responses to real-life concerns, tested against live projects in true settings.

Through the interdisciplinary design of course structure, the emphasis on application of knowledge and the creation of productions for public consumption, AUB students are taught and encouraged to actively engage in and commit to their learning. Studio culture and active engagement, whether physical or virtual, are crucially important to courses, which are designed around shared learning experiences and collaborative practice. Like many courses, BA (Hons) Fashion was aware that poor studio engagement would hamper student learning and established a manifesto for student engagement which all students were asked to sign. This included making explicit links between the knowledge and skills achieved in one unit, and how they would be relevant in the next. It reinforced AUB’s values that learning is a shared experience and relies on teamwork between the educators and the students, and not something which can simply be purchased. This approach has been adopted across the University and formalised through collaborative agreements.

This progressive approach to specialist learning is essential in gaining employment. A graduating student at AUB applies their learning in a variety of employment contexts enabling them to both work and lead in their chosen profession. Many creative practitioners go on to have portfolio careers or work as solo professionals, especially as they commence their creative journey as a graduate (94% of creative industries firms have fewer than 25 employees, and 67% have 2-4 employees<sup>8</sup>). The curriculum is designed to support the development of the knowledge, skills and attributes that graduates will need in a dynamic and ever-changing environment.

### 2.3 Collaboration

Woven throughout the formal curriculum are the vital professional attributes which are required of all graduates: the demonstration of cultural awareness and the integration of diversity and inclusion; an expectation of ethical practice; a commitment to sustainable working; the development of digital and visual literacy; a deep understanding of communication; and the development of personal resilience. Made explicit in each unit through defined learning outcomes, these are developed alongside the necessary personal attributes of time management, self-management, collaboration with peers, and metacognition (learning to learn) which form the bedrock of any professional career. This wide range of skills is not usually assessed directly, but their development is essential to the successful resolution of project briefs. Learning outcomes will not be met by submissions which do not take due account of, for example, diversity and inclusion, or sustainability. Self-management is crucial for delivering an extended piece of work to deadline.

As a specialist arts university with strong links to industry and professional stakeholders, AUB encourages and nurtures collaboration across disciplines, which is recognised as crucial within the creative industries. While each individual creative graduate has their own skillset, they need to collaborate with other specialists to realise high-quality creative outputs, and the integrated ecosystem of courses provides an environment which offers all students the opportunity to learn from each other, building the understanding and making the connections which propel them in their future careers. This philosophy underpins curriculum design, as well as decisions about both the physical and the virtual campus. One external examiner highlighted this strength:

“The course takes full advantage of working inside a specialist arts university by collaborating across departments. High quality delivery and excellent engagement with visiting artists and companies.” (Dance, 2021)

In one School, four courses have together set up an annual *Creative Match Night*, where talks from successful industry practitioners and alumni are followed by work in break-out groups which enables students to find a possible creative match on another course to take forward collaborative work. Cross-course ‘enterprise pitching’ events are also organised. Course teams worked hard to maintain this collaborative environment during the COVID-19 lockdown. This supported the creation of outstanding work and ensured that students were not isolated in their working and social environments. The scale of collaborative work is extensive; in 2020/21, Bournemouth Film School completed 57 major productions, which drew on students from courses across AUB. Cross-course collaboration, and its role in the learning ethos, is a distinguishing hallmark of the university.

External examiners recognise the significance of this collaboration, with one noting: “Opportunities for collaboration with other courses, such as Interior Architecture, are a particular strength of the course, where students are invited to test alternative methods and approaches from outside their discipline” (Visual Communication, 2021). Another examiner described how courses mirror industrial practice (Fashion Branding and Communication, 2022), and how this impacts so favourably on the student experience. Graduate feedback endorses this aspect:

“Creative collaboration is really the key to working at AUB. It never really mattered that we were studying film or costume or make-up, what made it so memorable and so fitting for the world of work was that we worked together so often. It was a simple statement of intent: we were required to collaborate openly with the courses and the students across [the university]. It has served me well in the industry. That’s why I came to AUB.”

The intra-course and cross-course collaborations lead to an employment ecosystem, with alumni hiring fellow graduates from within and outside their own disciplines, and graduates regularly working with each other on creative projects and productions. A recent Film graduate has commented: “The AUB community is so prominent in the industry and at almost every job I work on I meet new Alumni. A lot of the early contacts I made and opportunities I created were due to this and I do not believe I would have been so lucky in my work so far without it”.

#### 2.4 Assessment in creative and performing arts

The types of work submitted for assessment are extremely varied, and carefully designed to align to unit and course learning outcomes. All students will be working to resolve a specific creative challenge or project brief, which may conclude by the student creating a creative conclusion in 2D, 3D or a virtual assessable piece of work. This could be graphic, costume or make-up design, a live performance, a photographic response, a short film or animation, the production of an artefact, amongst others. This is alongside more traditional forms of academic submission such as extended essays, placement reports, and individual and group presentations.

One of the challenges of studying and working within the creative and performing arts is that work is often public and ‘on show’ during its creation as well as on completion. Creative outputs are by definition ‘visible’ and ‘external’, which requires the creator to see their work through the eyes of others. In itself, this forms an important aspect of learning. As part of an iterative process, courses provide interim feedback to students using group critiques, where work in progress is shared with tutors and peers for discussion and challenge. This formative and informal feedback is in addition to formal written feedback on work submitted for assessment and can encourage student confidence and resilience as they present work and defend decisions or take on board the feedback in a space which is supportive and non-judgemental. In the 2022 internal student survey, 94% of students agreed that they always act on feedback from their lecturers.

AUB has generously designed display spaces, galleries and screening opportunities both on campus and with partner organisations. BA (Hons) Dance holds six monthly showcases for L5 students with Pavilion Dance South-West, one of many Arts Council National Portfolio Organisations with which AUB is linked through live projects and work-based activities. Similarly, Fine Art students undertake work-integrated learning projects with such major venues as Hauser & Wirth (Henry Moore exhibition, 2021) resulting in assessable opportunities through professional practice. Such projects provide effective preparation for the professional culture of the creative industries in which many creative graduates work. They also fuel the development of serial transferable skills relevant to all professions as identified in many milestone reports (such as those produced by Kingston University in collaboration with YouGov<sup>9</sup> and the World Economic Forum<sup>10</sup>).

#### 2.5 Industry-focused

It is a central part of the AUB ethos that courses should be relevant and up to date, providing the skills which employers seek and equipping graduates to succeed in the job market. Academic staff are engaged in higher-level study or research, working at the forefront of the discipline and engaging with the subject community. Many remain active practitioners within their field or have recently left the industry to join AUB and retain their excellent professional connections. Visiting Tutors will often choose to work part-time precisely so that they can maintain their professional

practice, which in turn informs curriculum design and delivery. A cadre of visiting professors drawn from industry bring esteem, currency, and relevance to taught courses.

The regular engagement with industry professionals, either as course advisers, visiting tutors, guest speakers or as the provider of student projects and live briefs, is crucial to ensuring that students are given the best opportunity to develop the knowledge and skills they need. This is validated through the involvement of two external advisers as part of course approval and review; one of these will be an academic of standing within the discipline, and the other a practitioner and potential employer. This ensures that each course remains firmly grounded in the discipline and supports the development of employable graduates.

All courses engage closely with industry; many offer employer-led projects or live briefs; some also include placements. Performance courses engage external directors to lead productions. On other courses, employers review student portfolios, and offer mock interviews to final year students. Some courses have direct professional recognition: AUB's architecture degrees are accredited by RIBA and ARB, and courses in the Bournemouth Film School are accredited and endorsed by UK ScreenSkills Select which sets exacting standards for course curriculum, resources and industry collaborations. In addition to amassing data about demand and destinations of students, the annual endorsement process requires narrative under the heading "Skills Gaps and Shortages". One recent course submission explained:

"This 'doing it for real' style curriculum design supports the development of transferable and collaborative skills. Our film and television studios at Elliott Road provide a valuable resource in replicating the professional environment for all departments in the hard-to-recruit jobs listed... Screen working is further enhanced in the unit 'History and Representation' which introduces collaborative and sustainable practices: purpose, principles, methods, process, working with others and personal responsibility".

A student from this course ( ) won the final of the BBC TV show, 'Glow Up' while still studying at AUB. She particularly impressed judges with her prosthetics and special-effects make-up, and commented that, "The skills I developed as an artist with the teachings of the AUB tutors have allowed me to secure a career in a competitive industry with a skill set that feels unmatched. They taught me everything I know, allowing me to go on to educate others in the industry (sometimes at higher levels than myself) the 'AUB way'."

BA (Hons) Interior Architecture and Design has been pioneering an integrated partnership with the NHS University Hospitals Dorset, Public Health Dorset, Dorset Integrated Care System (ICS), and the two local councils to develop their Think Big initiative. This collaboration aims to understand the health and social care needs of the region, with AUB students tasked with helping the ICS to consider and develop ideas around designing and delivering community care services. The Deputy Director Transformation at NHS Dorset Clinical Commissioning Group praised the work of the students as active partners, commenting that "we at NHS Dorset have been energised by their commitment, passion, and drive to promote wellness and make people's connection with health infrastructure a positive experience"<sup>11</sup>.

This experience is common to all courses, as exemplified by this comment from an external examiner: "There are good partnerships with industry, leading to live briefs, speakers and event opportunities. This ensures students gain contacts with industry, whilst problematizing industry processes with accurate and 'real life' examples" (Events Management, 2021).



The University recognises the importance of identifying current and projected skills gaps within the creative industries (such as those identified by DCMS<sup>12</sup> and the Creative Industries Council<sup>13</sup>), and seeks to develop courses and pathways which respond to these. Course teams encourage students to consider skills shortages and the opportunity which this provides; for example, the Film Production course highlights Hard to Recruit roles, and students develop specific expertise within these disciplines to secure a direct route into the profession.

AUB recognises that some students will ultimately work outside the industry most closely related to their course. The development of a broader set of graduate skills is therefore central to course outcomes. Some may work in aligned professions, but others follow very different career paths. Some recent examples, nationally and globally, include graduates working as Principal Experience Designer at Thoughtworks, Lifestyle content creator, and Senior Content Creator for Edelman; but recent graduates also hold roles including Operational Interface Project Manager at Balfour Beatty Vinci (working on HS2), Commercial Solicitor, Construction Manager, Marketing Director, Strategy Partner, and even Wedding and Events Manager.

Apart from being engaged in the national and global professional disciplines, courses are also firmly located within the region. As a civic university AUB believes in 'making a difference' in the local community, and many courses offer student projects which engage with local and regional external bodies such as the NHS, the RNLI based in Poole, Pavilion Dance SW, GIANT gallery, or the Lighthouse Arts Centre. AUB's coastal location informs the philosophy of many courses, with projects designed to take account of the local geography, and in particular the challenges (both urban and rural) which face regional communities. BA (Hons) Architecture students are regularly set projects which are based on the proposed development of a local site and are required to locate their response within the context of the community. Students also self-initiate projects with local organisations and charities, addressing "real life" problems for real clients. *AUB Human*, a major learning initiative across Arts & Communication, has addressed numerous environment concerns through live briefs, place-located projects and community-linked practice, resulting in 2021 in a student-initiated public colloquium 'Tech for Social & Sustainable Good'.

## 2.6 Support for staff

Alongside a comprehensive new staff induction programme, AUB invests heavily in staff development to ensure that all staff are academically and/or professionally qualified to a high level, and are supported to undertake staff development in pursuit of teaching excellence and professional currency. All members of academic staff are required to hold a teaching qualification or HEA Fellowship (through Advance HE) within two years of appointment, as a condition of their employment; guidance and mentoring is available to support staff in making a Fellowship application if required. In 2021/22, 66% of established staff held a teaching qualification; this represented a rise in the number of staff, despite representing a slight fall in the overall proportion following a recruitment drive that came as a response to the growth in student numbers. Overall, 84% of academic staff hold either a teaching qualification or HEA Fellowship, and 24% of technician staff. There is also fees and remission support for staff to attain postgraduate and research qualifications, which allows them to engage and contribute at the forefront of their discipline, which in turn informs their teaching.

Course teams are made up of staff from varied and diverse backgrounds (both professionally and globally) which include significant research achievement, high levels of industry experience,

expertise in teaching and learning and skills and knowledge in technical application. Guest speakers deliver lectures, workshop, or masterclass, supplementing the expertise available within the team. Dedicated teams of technical staff, including cadres of technical specialists, are essential to student learning, providing bespoke technical support.

In 2021, as part of its commitment to EDI, AUB significantly strengthened its team and appointed a dedicated EDI Academic Adviser, whose role is to work with course teams on the diversity of both content and delivery to make this as inclusive and accessible as possible to all students. This is an additional resource to support academic staff in reviewing their curriculum and pedagogic practice, and to challenge any unspoken assumptions and encourage greater reflection; it remains the responsibility of the specialist course team to determine the most appropriate subject curriculum.

AUB has a long-standing scheme for the Peer Observation of Teaching. In 2021/22, the focus was on the transition to blended learning<sup>14</sup>, and how course teams had successfully integrated their successful practice from the enforced switch to remote learning in spring 2020 into standard delivery. Staff recognised that online teaching might encourage a more transactional approach which could be less engaging and did not support the social aspects of learning. This had been addressed in a variety of ways, which focused on remembering that this remained a “real world” activity and would be most effective if it was located within an interactional space. This included some straightforward approaches, such as delivering in different spaces (for example, in a garden for a talk about health and the natural world), but also by building in student participation: “creating a symbolic self-portrait using objects significant to them from around their home”, or “constructing a modernist mask to wear on screen”. Some sessions were re-ordered such that they opened with student input, usually on work they had completed prior to the session, and this set a tone which discouraged ‘passive listening’. This also had the benefit of encouraging greater self-reliance/autonomy in learning, as well as enhancing motivation and participation.

Practice and experience are also shared through the annual verification exercise<sup>15</sup>, where Level 6 work from each course is reviewed by a cross-University panel of academics, including some early career academics. Alongside the primary purpose of confirming that academic standards have been applied consistently across all awards, this provides the opportunity for the sharing of innovative practice, especially where a student submission is not typical (such as the production of a short video in place of a physical artefact, but still meeting the unit learning outcomes).

Professional staff are also required to engage in professional development (CPD) to refresh and update their knowledge, and to participate in national and international networks to share practice and support positive development and learning across the higher education sector.

## 2.7 Student support

Academic support from tutors and technicians is a crucial element of all courses. Apart from formal tutorial sessions, academic and technical staff provide extensive formative comment, feedback and support within the studio setting, engaging with students as they develop and hone their skills. This support is even more important when students are generating their own project ideas and seeking to create a Learning Agreement. Tutors and technicians will ensure that students are being realistic and achievable in their goals and timescale and that the work is broadly equivalent to the demands set out in the unit descriptor.

AUB also employs a dedicated team which provides generic academic skills support, open to all students and supported by an online study skills toolkit<sup>16</sup>; some of these resources have also been published on the Association for Learning Development in Higher Education website for use by other universities<sup>17</sup>. Bespoke sessions can be arranged by a course tutor; or students can access 1-1 or small-group tutorial support, on a range of topics. These include Independent study; Critical thinking and writing; Essay and dissertation writing; Organisation and time management; and Managing workload. In total, almost 2,200 students used the service in 2021/22 (over half the AUB student population)<sup>18</sup>, with excellent feedback from both staff and students, including a student nomination for the *AUB Thank You* award. English for Academic Purposes support is also offered to those for whom English is not a first language. Specialist staff provide advice and support to students with a disability, including liaising with course teams about any learning needs or reasonable adjustments. Students might also be supported by a specialist mentor to enable them to access the curriculum. Around 30% of AUB students disclose a disability (usually around 25% of the entry cohort, with further disclosures during the period of study). Continuation and completion rates for disabled students are both materially above benchmark, and progression data is stronger than for non-disabled students; AUB is proud of the high quality of support it provides to disabled students through application and admission, successful achievement, and progression.

The metrics show that student satisfaction with academic support is in line with benchmark. This outcome was significantly impacted by the years 2021 and 2022; previously, AUB's results on this NSS Scale were consistently strong. Discussions with former sabbatical officers of the Students' Union suggest that the results in 2021 and 2022 were partly a result of unrealistic student expectations (as queries sent by email or other digital means were not responded to instantly, in the way that direct questions in the studio would be); but in addition, the COVID-19 pandemic appears to have led to student insecurity about their performance. In practice, achievement remained at a high level; many external examiners commented that the final projects were of such a good standard that it was not evident that learning had been disrupted by a pandemic and restricted studio access for part of the course. The results of the internal Student Perception Survey in 2022 showed a much stronger outcome, with 85% of students satisfied with Academic support (slightly below the 2020 result, but well ahead of 2021)<sup>19</sup>.

AUB recognises that the TEF assessment relates to the student academic experience, and high-quality academic support. However, as indicated throughout, it also acknowledges that a strong sense of belonging is central to student continuation, completion and achievement; a genuinely inclusive culture enables all groups to access the curriculum and the full academic learning experience. The most recent Matrix accreditation report "covered Student Services as a whole, and there was not room in this Report to itemise the many examples of good practice, innovative ways of working, ongoing development of resources, all for the benefit of students, that were described during interviews by staff from individual services"<sup>20</sup>.

Data from the 2021/22 cibyl Student Mental Health Study<sup>21</sup> included 672 responses from AUB students, 5.4% of the national total. The self-selecting nature of respondents is recognised, but it is nevertheless striking that 14% of AUB student respondents identified as transgender (against 3% of the overall respondent population); and 54% as LGBTQ+, against 20% of the overall population. This indicates a very high proportion of students from groups which can be considered marginalised; but it was striking that only 17% of AUB respondents reported that they had no close friends at university against a national average of 27%; and that AUB students were also more satisfied than the average with the quality of these friendships. AUB was one of the first wave of providers to join the Student Minds University Mental health charter programme<sup>22</sup>, and has the

highest proportion of Mental Health First Aid trained academic staff (85%) of any provider in the UK<sup>23</sup>, which enables concerns to be identified at an early stage and referred for specialist support. There is no unambiguous dividing line which demarcates support which is 'non-academic'; for example, the BA (Hons) Performance Design and Film Costume introduced *Destress and Draw*, a set of online skills-based drawing sessions for student wellbeing, and BA (Hons) Dance held brief online sessions each morning during the pandemic to encourage student movement, but also for a quick check-in on student wellbeing. These are clear demonstrations of a commitment to support all students, from all backgrounds, in accessing the full academic experience.

## 2.8 Campus and resources

The University is based on an imaginatively designed campus in the Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole conurbation; courses in the Bournemouth Film School benefit from an additional nearby location which houses our production studios, and other courses are also part-delivered in The Pavilion in Bournemouth town centre, as well as in a range of studio settings attached to an Arts Council-funded gallery, and a newly acquired art deco theatre, undergoing further refurbishment. The physical campus is important to students not just for the extremely high-quality resources it provides every student, but as the base for student belonging, the heart of a community of practitioners. Students moving around the campus will walk without restriction through, or past, other studios where creative work is taking place; any other student they meet is a fellow creative practitioner. This forms part of the unique culture of the University, fostering inspiration and the generation of ideas. It is the core of the AUB experience, typified by the commitment to innovation and quality evident from the quality of the staff, the external professional environment, the bespoke estate, the equipment provided, and the course content and delivery.

AUB has always operated a policy of investing strongly in its estate and facilities, with the aim of enriching and extending the physical and eco-campus, and enhance the digital infrastructure. The campus has been designed to have physical, visual and discipline coherence. The overall effect is one of a unified creative community, which promotes a sense of belonging. Students at all levels have access to industry standard work environments, and the campus supports technically innovative creative practice and research by the whole community. While all courses have dedicated studio space attuned to their own discipline requirements, facilities are generally shared across all those courses who need access. For every year since 2012/13, the HESA EMS return has 100% of non-residential estate functional suitability rated as "Excellent" or "Good".

The COVID-19 pandemic was therefore particularly difficult for courses in creative and performing arts. Teaching and assessment were adapted in response to government restrictions, and all learning outcomes were delivered. BA (Hons) Film Production produced detailed guidance on Covid-secure film making<sup>24</sup>, which earned sector-wide recognition for imaginative use of technical guidance while adhering strictly to national health and safety guidelines. However, there was less opportunity for students to access studios outside teaching time (and courses sent out learning packs to students so that they had the necessary materials to continue to learn remotely). This had a notable impact on some metrics, as discussed at the conclusion of this section.

To further support student learning a bespoke repository of digital assets, design application software and collaboration tools is available to all students, alongside a virtual learning environment and a suite of online short courses, technical demonstrations, and micro-credentials materials including access to the LinkedIn Learning Platform. AUB provides all students with free course-related software, including the Microsoft 365 (Office Suite), AutoDesk 2D/3D applications,

Adobe Creative Cloud, LinkedIn Learning and all related online resources and training; this represents an overall saving of over £5,000per annum for each student. High end laptops are widely available for students to borrow for a short-term period, with core applications (MS Office Suite, Adobe Creative Suite) installed on all machines. AUB has a student: computer ratio of 3.5:1, which is significantly ahead of the sector average of around 10:1. During the pandemic, the University was aware of issues of digital poverty, and in particular that the specification required to run some advanced industry standard software programmes would not be available to students. AUB purchased additional remote Citrix licences which enabled students to log in remotely, using their own machine, and complete sophisticated 2D/3D design & animation projects by 'taking over' a much more powerful campus machine equipped with industry level software and accessible to high end render facilities. This was an innovative development which has subsequently been copied by other creative arts providers. In a student pulse survey conducted in November 2020, 88% of students (and 92% of first year students) confirmed that they had the right access to digital resources<sup>25</sup>. The facility for remote access remains in place and maintains flexibility for learners to high end 3D and processing heavy resources normally available on campus. AUB uses *Canvas* to provide a virtual learning environment (VLE). Following staged migration from previous platforms, and as part of a 5-year digital investment plan, *Canvas Clinics* provide extensive training to staff to support asynchronous learning as part of a contemporary approach to pedagogy.

In 2020, the University opened an Innovation Suite which houses hi-end bespoke industry standard rapid prototyping machines including multi axis CNC milling, SLS 3D printers, a suite of commercial multi material 3D printers, a design lab for VR and interactive creative technologies in addition to digital looms and direct-to-textile printers. As well as offering advanced creative technology, this equipment supports the University's commitment to sustainability as physical production can be delayed until a high-quality prototype has been produced.

All facilities are available to undergraduate students, following the appropriate induction. Courses also participate in an annual capital bidding round to identify any new or replacement equipment. This process is supported by the technical staff, who are often the first to be aware of, and use, new products emerging onto the market and can advise on the suitability and applicability.

While the online pivot in 2020 came as a matter of necessity, AUB embraces the opportunity for online learning to add value and flexibility. BA (Hons) Make-up for Media and Performance pioneered short demo videos used as refresher-courses for students, and from March 2020 other courses followed this example, supported by the DELL (Digital Engagement and Learning) lead. Courses created bespoke and shared induction, technique and workshop video and rich media material online. Co-located on the VLE for ease of access, an online learning knowledge bank, summarising the key features of tools which staff have used, emerged as a recommendation from the 2022 Peer Observation process, and is now being implemented. Other examples of the agility with which staff responded to the pandemic include the live streamed events created by the technician team in one school, delivered on a shared narrowcast channel, and the establishment of 'video villages' which enabled students to fully participate in sessions even when they were not within the physical space. There was a string of high-quality online live performances, including domestic dance events staged in students' homes and the creation of acting performances which were devised and delivered remotely, as well as the introduction of safe working practices to enable the delivery of a full performance to a small audience in Autumn 202. The innovative use of digital technology has enabled AUB to support the student experience – nationally and globally, with students all over the world – with outstanding continuation and completion rates.

AUB Library offers outstanding resources to students. 93% of library resources are available electronically, which makes them widely accessible to all students. In 2017, the University's Equalities Committee noted that, "There was a perceived lack of diversity in Library material, although it was acknowledged that various resources were stored online, so were less visible". The Library subsequently undertook a project to review and diversify its collection. It has developed and published dedicated webpages on EDI support available in the library<sup>26</sup>, including specific advice on how to search diversely and explore arts-based educational resources dedicated to and created by marginalised communities; anti-racist resources; resources on making higher education more accessible to under-represented groups; and tools to diversify reading list content.

The University has developed a Materials Library, which contains a wide range of product samples. The collection is designed to inspire and offer ideas in support of creative practice, as well as providing a knowledge of materials, their properties and applications<sup>27</sup>. Each sample is supported by a digital data sheet which provides key information, but also user comments on their experience of working with the material, thus generating and sharing valuable additional knowledge. If a material is part of a product family, there will also be a product family data sheet which links to other related samples. AUB also houses the Museum of Design in Plastics (MoDiP), the only UK accredited and nationally designated museum with a focus on plastics. The purpose of the Museum is to develop understanding of the value of plastics within historical, contemporary, and sustainable contexts. This resource is available to all students (with an extensive searchable online catalogue). MoDiP also runs object-based learning activities, especially with design courses, to explore the value of primary research and close-looking as opposed to reviewing images on screen or in print formats. AUB was commissioned to produce a sustainable garment for one of the 4-metre-high mannequins used in the Indian wedding scene for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, June 2021. The resulting recycled plastics-based sari was designed and fabricated by AUB Textiles students in collaboration with Events Management students, and featured widely in national media.

Students agree that they have access to outstanding learning resources; the TEF data dashboard shows that each demographic group reports satisfaction above the benchmark, and in 2022 all three questions on Learning Resources in the NSS achieved scores above benchmark. Satisfaction with the Library, at 91.15%, was the second highest recorded at any HEI in the UK.

The University is proud of the high-end resources and support provided for all students. The positive outcomes relating to continuation and completion demonstrate the effectiveness of our approach, and the success of its sustained and embedded engagement with all students. A staff pulse survey (March 2022) 76% of staff agreed that "We have effective work practices that best serve the needs of our students and stakeholders, where the student experience is paramount"<sup>28</sup>.

Nevertheless, AUB recognises that during the pandemic, the learning experience did not always match the expectations which students had developed; remote learning, while meeting the same outcomes and delivering the same results, was less satisfying to many students. This was reflected in the National Student Survey results in 2021 and 2022, as well as in the COVID-19 specific questions; it is notable that internal survey results, which were slightly lower in 2021, improved significantly in 2022. AUB has not commented extensively on the pandemic in this submission, as it recognises that this was a challenge for all providers, but there is considerable evidence that the restrictions posed additional challenges for some specialist disciplines, including those within the creative and performing arts.

## 2.9 Academic governance

Students play a full part in academic governance arrangements. The President of the Students' Union (AUBSU) is a member of the Board of Governors, and of Academic Board. There are student representatives on all academic committees, and related working groups. Each course elects two student representatives for each cohort; student representative elections are organised by AUBSU to ensure that they are fair, and that all students are aware of the opportunity. Representatives are trained by AUBSU, who also arrange regular meeting for representatives to share experiences and good practice. The student representatives are members of the Course Partnership Group (CPG), chaired by the Course Leader, which is held at least termly to discuss any issues arising from the operation of the course. The two elected sabbatical officers also have regular meetings with members of the senior team, including the Vice-Chancellor. This enables any matters of concern to be identified and addressed at an early stage.

Student feedback is gathered in myriad ways. Apart from the CPG meetings, and other informal feedback which may be given in the studio setting, or through meetings between course staff and student groups, the University participates in the National Student Survey (NSS) and conducts an internal Student Perception Survey (SPS) for all students not in their final year. There are also routine evaluations of each taught unit. However, AUB is mindful of the need to avoid survey fatigue, not least to encourage participation in the major surveys. The periodic review of courses also always includes a meeting with the student representatives; members of the course team are not permitted to attend this meeting. The Board of Governors introduced a reverse mentoring scheme for students in 2020, which has been well-received.

The results of student surveys are reviewed by Learning Teaching and Quality Committee, which considers performance against the benchmark (where appropriate) and may identify University-level actions in response. An annual report on academic standards and the quality of the student learning experience<sup>29</sup> is prepared for Academic Board and the Board of Governors, which spends dedicated time reviewing the report (supported by tailored educational resources) to fulfil its responsibility for academic assurance. The Board has now agreed a suite of KPIs related to academic standards and the quality of the student experience to support this area of its work.

At course level, the outcomes are considered as part of the Annual Course Review, with action plans put in place as required. The excellent NSS results on *Student Voice*, which are replicated across all student demographic groups, demonstrate the effectiveness of these processes in responding to students. The University also scored above sector average for Learning Community, which it considers to be a very creditable achievement in a year when results across the creatives sector were disappointing. In the most recent internal survey, 88% of students confirmed that "if I could have my time again, I would still come to AUB"<sup>30</sup>.

## 3. **STUDENT OUTCOMES**

The previous sections of this submission have described the student experience at AUB, through articulating the approach to course design (foundational knowledge and skills moving towards specialist focus into Levels 5 and 6); describing approaches to of problem- and research-based learning through live and simulated projects; and explaining the high level of academic, technical and facilities available to students and the support which nurtures the AUB sense of belonging. The following section focuses on how the university develops in students the professional and

personal skills and attributes necessary as they enter a dynamic employment context which increasingly features new and emerging business models.

### 3.1 Positive outcomes

AUB's priority is to create career-ready graduates who can pursue the career of their choosing as global citizens and meet the needs of a global industry, deploying their creative skills across a wide range of industries, as well as preparing them for further study. This requires both traditional graduate skills, but also a deep understanding of equality, diversity and inclusion; and of sustainability, which is increasingly central to all careers within the creative industries. The concept of the ethical practitioner is central to all courses, and many staff are involved in industry-led initiatives to encourage sustainable practices (such as the *Theatre Green Book*, and *We Are Albert*). The final summative major project, weighted at 40 or more usually 60 credits, is generally delivered through a negotiated Learning Agreement, which requires considerable academic self-awareness. The learning outcomes for this unit demonstrate the key graduate attributes, for example BA (Hons) Textiles<sup>31</sup>:

LO1 Demonstrate the ability to rigorously apply your specific specialist textiles/surface knowledge, understanding creative processes in the production of a refined and technically competent major project.

LO2 Demonstrate the ability to manage the complexity of practice demanded by the project by managing your time and working efficiently.

LO3 Demonstrate ability in the coherent use of various representation techniques, documentation and presentations to specialist and non-specialist audiences.

LO4 Demonstrate awareness of contemporary and historic knowledge (specific to your interests), considering ethical, social and cultural issues where appropriate to the concept of your brief and as a responsible professional textile practitioner (whether working independently or as part of a team).

Throughout the University the curriculum is designed to replicate industry practice where appropriate, including through cross-course collaborations. Within the Bournemouth Film School, for example, courses focus on the specialisms that mirror the creative and technical departments typical of professional productions. AUB is highly unusual in being able to offer this across undergraduate courses (with pre-degree and postgraduate pathways), creating industry-ready graduates with both practical experience and impressive showreels and portfolios. Graduates regularly note how often they work with other AUB alumni on professional projects; a recent press release from the Dorset LEP noted that "more than half of all the graduates working in the UK's film, visual effects and video games industries were educated in Dorset"<sup>32</sup>. External examiners regularly comment on both the excellent production values, and the interconnectedness of the groups of students. Selected comments from external examiner reports in the last two years include:

- Student work with 'clear industry focus' (Commercial Photography, 2021)
- Students gain 'opportunities to encounter a wide range of experiences within professional contexts.' (Dance, 2021)
- 'The range of facilities and collaborations that are available by proxy to students, place this course in fairly a unique position, where meaningful opportunities exist to develop professional practice opportunities on site.' (Make-up for Media and Performance, 2022)



- ‘There are good partnerships with industry, leading to live briefs, speakers and event opportunities. This ensures students gain contacts with industry, whilst problematizing industry processes with accurate and ‘real life’ examples.’ (Events Management, 2021)
- students at AUB have complementary skills which have been honed to a greater extent than at other institutions’ (Acting, 2022)
- ‘technically literate graduates who are confident working within established industry processes and systems’ (Fashion, 2022).

The net effect of these approaches was recently summarised by a local employer, who reported: “If future ‘brands’ are in the hands of Bournemouth AUB students, UK brands will be very well positioned to compete on the World stage”<sup>33</sup>.

As detailed previously, most academic and technical staff have current or recent professional experience. All courses are closely linked to the industry. These range across a wide range of companies, from international brands to local micro-business and start-ups, and they form lasting relationships with courses to provide placements or work-related opportunities on an annual basis, supporting students in their first steps into graduate employment. All courses regularly invite industry speakers, including course alumni. This practice continued throughout (and beyond) the period of the pandemic, with talks moved online, with the additional benefit of enabling global participants.

Examples of activity to prepare students for employment include:

- BA (Hons) Creative Writing’s diverse guest speaker programme from a range of backgrounds (industry, professional) includes a 1:1 writing mentorship opportunity unique to undergraduate provision in the UK. During the pandemic, the course also developed a Virtual Writer in Residence programme with award-winning novelist Okechukwu Nzelu, taking full advantage of the increased familiarity with online collaboration tools.
- BA (Hons) Fashion’s working partnership with the British heritage brand *Burberry*, running live project briefs for 3 years. A close working relationship with F&F clothing and Vivienne Westwood (Honorary Fellow of the University, 2019), and with Alexander McQueen, Tom Ford and Adidas. In addition, educational partnerships with leading digital fashion companies Lectra and CLO3D and is recognised as the UK leader for digital fashion in higher education. Many other providers only moved to using this design software as a response to the pandemic, whereas at AUB it is embedded within the course.
- BA (Hons) Film Production is designed to focus on the wide variety of different roles which are required as part of a film crew. Attuned to the global needs of the industry, there is a particular interest in the ‘Hard to Recruit’ roles across film, which can provide an alternative route into the chosen profession. In addition, the course has a dedicated unit in L5 with a focus on alternative industries which graduates may enter, with external speakers and workshops to enable students to reflect on their preferred career direction.
- Students on BA (Hons) Acting are taught to be Actor Creators, with a robust acting methodology but also tools which enable them to create their own performance work. This equips graduates with the skills to work in theatre, TV & film as well as producing and touring work they have created. During lockdown, students created an online season of plays in partnership with five innovative theatre companies.

The University was aware that, despite the many examples of industry-linked learning and the strong focus on creative careers in its courses, this was not reflected in the data relating to professional employment (now renamed Highly Skilled Employment) or further study. AUB considers that graduate success should be viewed broadly, and in part determined by the graduate's own aspirations. Graduates in the creative arts are often freelancers, especially in the early part of their career; and more generally, they create and contribute to both 'social value' and 'cultural value'. The creative industries have large, positive multiplier impacts (over a twenty-year sample period, each creative job added at least a further 2 non-tradeable jobs in the local economy<sup>34</sup>). Nevertheless, the University was mindful of the potential significance of published information about student progression, and in 2020, it conducted a project to consider "what it is that makes AUB graduates successful, and what skills, attitudes, behaviours and values make them strong ambassadors"; in short, defining gradueness for AUB. The project concluded by identifying the following key graduate skills:

**Creativity:** specialist technical skills; creative thinking; aesthetic skills; cultural awareness.

**Excellence:** critical thinking; resilience; adaptability; confidence.

**Relevance:** problem solving; inclusion of diversity; global citizenship; ethical.

**Impact:** communication & interaction; digital & visual literacy; project management; professionalism.

The project recognised that "AUB students are able to articulate their creative skills very effectively, and they recognise and value their journeys as creative practitioners. However, students also develop skills and attributes which make them employable in many industries, and which contribute to their development as global citizens with high levels of social responsibility. Students are usually much less able to identify and articulate these skills, or to identify how their creativity may be used effectively within "non-creative" settings."<sup>35</sup>

In consequence, AUB introduced its new Graduate Futures Framework<sup>36</sup>, which embeds graduate attributes within all courses, and promotes steps to a diverse array of career readiness. All undergraduate students at each level take the *Career Readiness Survey* when they enrol, which provides the Careers and Enterprise team with valuable information about the stage of career planning students have reached. Importantly, the framework highlights the importance of ensuring that "career management skills are embedded in the curriculum at each level of study, providing a scaffolded approach to career development learning, enabling students to take ownership of their own professional development". This ensures a recognition of serial transferable skills relevant to all professions as discussed in section 2.4 above.

A *Creative Futures Fest* is held every spring term, comprising a fortnight of panel and networking events with industry professionals, employers and alumni. Open to all students, the aim is to inspire and inform students of a wide range of careers. As well as inviting alumni who have pursued careers related to their field of study, graduates are also included who have succeeded in careers outside of their degree discipline or who have pursued portfolio careers. This underlines the transferable nature of the skills that students are developing on their degrees and opens a world of opportunities. More broadly, the Careers and Enterprise team offers a cycle of individual appointments to all students, but also runs events with AUB alumni and industry professionals to support career decision-making and to help students develop skills and confidence when developing their business ideas or approaching clients or industry employers. There are also opportunities for networking with national recruiters who are based locally, and events and

employer fairs held on campus, as well as specific activities arranged at course level such as Launchpad, a 'feedback speed dating' event run by BA (Hons) Dance.

The Careers and Enterprise team works closely with academics to deliver an extensive range of workshops from Level 4 to Level 6. These cover career management and skills development. The team also offers a range of workshops focused on specific skills and knowledge, with an opportunity to meet with alumni and hear from start-up experts; and hosts the AUB Futures Careers hub with careers resources, events, and a range of opportunities including internships, freelance opportunities, competitions, part-time work, and of course graduate jobs.

Initiatives to support students with gaining industry experience include the micro-internship programme, which offers flexible internships to fit alongside studies (funded by the University for not-for-profit organisations, or by the provider where this is a commercial enterprise). Working with local employers, students can work on live projects on a part-time basis alongside their studies. Priority is given to Access & Participation students, but the programme is open to all undergraduates. Another recent initiative is the establishment of the AUB Creative Agency which will offer paid freelancing roles, giving all students an excellent opportunity to build skills and industry experience while earning money to support their studies.

32% of the creative industries workforce are self-employed (including freelancers), compared with 16% of the UK workforce<sup>37</sup>. This includes over 70% of those working in music, performing and visual arts; and up to 87% of actors, entertainers and presenters; and dancers and choreographers<sup>38</sup>. This highlights the importance of preparing students for solo entrepreneurship and running a portfolio career. There is a yearly programme of events aimed at building confidence and developing practical skills and knowledge around managing a freelance portfolio career. This includes Enterprise and Innovation Awards, and a graduate residency programme to support students starting their own business. A specialist creative business consultant delivers a range of workshops open to all students and works with Dorset Growth Hub providing support and mentoring for business start-up.

AUB also runs a Graduate Internship Scheme. All final year students are invited to apply for one of a fixed number of roles, with a one-year fixed-term contract. The programme offers an opportunity for new graduates to utilise their skills and to gain experience of professional employment either within an academic school or in professional roles where creative and communication skills are of particular importance. The roles they undertake can be quite varied; many support technical delivery, but for example one in BA (Hons) Interior Architecture and Design has led an external project with Pavilion Dance South-west (PDSW), working with a group of students on the refurbishment of the reception area. Another supports live collaborative engagement events.

AUB is proud that every student demographic group has Continuation data which is above the benchmark (although it recognises that some groups are very small). It is particularly noteworthy that Continuation rates are significantly above benchmark for students from IMD Quintiles 1 and 2, demonstrating the University's commitment to positive outcomes for all students. Completion data is even stronger, with most demographic groups showing performance which is well above the benchmark. This is testament to the high quality of teaching, resources and academic support available to students throughout their course, leading to positive outcomes. Completion rates in Natural and built environment are below the benchmark; the only course offered in this discipline is BA (Hons) Architecture. This is a professionally accredited course on which students are required to meet over 150 specific learning outcomes to achieve the degree, and completion rates on this

course are consequently slightly lower than on many other courses. The course team continues to review both entry requirements, and the curriculum, to ensure that the degree remains accessible while meeting the expectations of the accrediting bodies. Student satisfaction on the course is very high, with all data points materially well above benchmark.

Many courses in the creative and performing arts are not well served by the methodology used for the progression metrics. The first step in many creative careers leading to graduate outcomes may be as a freelancer, or in the role of an assistant rather than a manager. To give one example, many of the graduates from our costume course will take the role of Costume Assistant, subsequently progressing to the more senior role of Costume Designer. A relevant bachelor's degree is the only route into this profession, but the entry role is not designated a highly skilled job. Of all AUB's courses, BA (Hons) Costume is the one with the lowest proportion of graduates identified as being in highly skilled employment; but of 2019 graduates, 61% were reported as being in a costume-related job and 82% involved in further study, costume design or another non-creative highly skilled role, while the Graduate Outcomes survey only reported 43% with positive destinations. Similarly, graduates may take on the role of Gallery Assistant as the first step in a career in curatorial practice. This is the case for many specialist roles within the creative professions, where the entry point is as assistant director, producer, designer or similar. AUB is confident that it provides all the ingredients to create a successful, 'rounded' graduate. Supporting evidence can be found in external examiner reports as described above.

Reference to national standing and leadership is frequently recognised by external examiners: 'The training that AUB provides exemplifies best-practice in this field'; 'UK leading industry feeder' and '[AUB courses are] 'amongst the best ... programmes in the UK'.

Public evidence also shows that progression rates for some demographic groups (including Asian graduates, ABCS Quintile 1, IMD Quintiles 1-2 and those Eligible for free school meals) show performance which is very close to, and in one case above, the benchmark. This mirrors internal data that demographic factors do not play a decisive role in student and graduate success.

### 3.2 Educational gain

This submission has described the ways in which AUB delivers a student experience which cannot be summarised neatly by a qualification certificate<sup>39</sup>. Successful graduates are able to think independently and critically and will have developed 'meta-cognitive skills' and the 'embedded skills' of 'reflecting, planning, self-awareness in relation to learning needs and goals, monitoring, adjusting and evaluating'<sup>40</sup>. These skills are aligned to those identified by the AUB Graduate Attributes project but are not always easily measurable through traditional assessment.

Indeed, historically it has been difficult to describe creative and performing arts higher learning within the 'confines' of the traditional university degree experience. Creative arts higher education is now shaped to meet the expectations of qualifications frameworks descriptors, including common classification descriptors. Within these confines, creative arts courses have strongly promoted the idea that students do not succeed as professional creatives unless they are deeply and critically engaged in their learning and that critical reflection on this process is key to their success. This idea is to be found in the national subject benchmarks for creative arts in general, as developed by the sector creative community and employers, and also in the learning outcomes of most formal units of delivery.

As has been described throughout this submission, AUB has an expectation that in order to achieve well in their final degree, students will have been tested on their critical engagement with their subject and on their understanding of self and of their contextual professional milieu. This is demonstrated through course outcomes, such as: *Apply critical self-reflection and independent research to the development and management of your textiles practice and transferable skillsets* (BA (Hons) Textiles); *Extend your academic learning as an independent, self-reflective and creative practitioner, fully prepared for professional environments or postgraduate study*, (BA (Hons) Illustration); *Self and peer appraise to manage and reflect on learning*, (BA (Hons) Graphic Design); *Apply transferable skills, exercising initiative and personal responsibility*, (BA (Hons) Fashion Branding and Communication)<sup>41</sup>.

A specific challenge in measuring educational gain for students whose admission to higher education is based on portfolio or addition, and not just certificated learning, is that knowledge on entry is not quantified even through the proxy of tariff points or similar. While students will usually have achieved prior qualifications, these have only played a partial role in the decision to offer a place; and these qualifications may be in very different disciplines. In 2017 AUB was a partner in one of the original HEFCE Learning Gain projects and it remains committed to developing a measure of educational gain for a creative provider. AUB has therefore undertaken some initial work on the formal assessment of educational gain and sets out its early work below.

This work was undertaken in recognition that many of the interventions in the HEFCE Learning Gain project which were most successful are not scalable, and that any measurement of learning gain is likely to be based on proxy measures and thus contestable. The University has commissioned research to understand the idea of educational gain and the possible use of proxy educational gain measures more fully in an institution like AUB<sup>42</sup>. This has enabled initial consideration of the questions, 'what constitutes educational gain for an AUB student' and 'what can be learned from the most successful courses measured under our chosen educational gain proxies'?

The challenge of capturing meta or transferable skills (sometimes described as 'beyond' subject learning or 'subject non-specific skills'), is to be found at the heart of the discourse on learning gain although there is no consensus on whether learning gain consists of subject specific or subject non-specific learning. AUB takes the view that both are important to the current conversation on educational gain and that both are to be found across the assessed curricula of our courses.

The lessons learned from the *HEFCE Learning Gain Pilots Final Evaluation*<sup>43</sup> have influenced the approach to researching educational gain, namely that:

- it was appropriate to use existing methods and not 'over-survey' students,
- multiple measures or multiple 'proxies' for measuring gain would give richest results,
- a longitudinal approach to measuring the learning journey was essential,
- the outcomes of measuring educational gain had the most value when used at subject level (in AUB's case at course Level),
- educational gain is inherently difficult to measure and is not a clear-cut indicator of the quality of the student experience.

Following this research, a 'proof of concept' exercise was conducted to enable a decision about the validity of the exercise as an appropriate means to assess educational gain at AUB. This involved

a four-stage approach: Developing a framework, Selection & Implementation of tools; Analysis & Discussion of findings, and Refinement of approach. AUB is currently at stage 3 of this process.

AUB agreed to adopt the dimensions of educational gain as described by the OfS namely: *Cognitive gain* - what students think and know; *Soft skills* - what students feel and how they engage; and *Employability and career readiness*. These dimensions were further fleshed out and shaped into AUB's educational gain components influenced by one of the projects in the HEFCE Learning Gain project (the LEGACY project is described in Vermunt et al, 2018). Components are:

- critical understanding of context for practice
- critical understanding of one's achievements in relation to context of practice
- time keeping and project management
- critical reflection on practice and progress
- research skills in the broadest sense as understood at AUB
- critical understanding of one's achievements in relation to context of practice
- teamwork; extra-curricular work
- professional placement, employability.

The proof-of-concept exercise then identified initial existing proxy measures for each of these dimensions, recognising that further measures might be introduced in future:

- *Cognitive gain*: student achievement in selected units, culminating in the major project. The use of attainment data was underpinned by understandings stated earlier in this section about the embeddedness in the curriculum of certain aspects of learning gain.
- *Soft skills*: selected questions on engagement, professional practice, collaboration etc. from the NSS and the internal bi-annual survey on student engagement (SPS).
- *Employability and career readiness*: Careers Registration data, and student attainment in units where professional practice was emphasised at Levels 5 and 6. This latter was included as Careers Registration is comparatively new at AUB, and only limited data are available.

Early results suggest that the approach developed by AUB could provide a credible framework to consider educational gain within a specialist creative University, and the University will explore this further to establish whether it can confirm the validity of these measures and their usefulness.

AUB approached the proof-of-concept exercise without any preconceptions about the findings so it was interesting to note that when courses were ranked by their performance in three proxies, there were clear 'leaders'. This has offered the opportunity to identify and extend any effective educational practices used by those courses across the whole institution. Other findings have also given the opportunity to propose further enhancements to the internal Student Perception Survey and to the Careers Registration Process. This has given some insight into the answers to the original questions, 'what constitutes educational gain for an AUB student' and 'what can be learned from the most successful courses measured under our chosen educational gain proxies'? The early findings suggest that educational gain for an AUB student can include improvements in attainment over time. This improvement cannot be achieved without also demonstrating gain in critical self-reflection and understanding of the context of professional practice.

The results establish that AUB students demonstrate attributes such as: a feeling of community, experience of diversity, collaboration and the practical application of learning, are important to

them. The Soft Skills proxy exercise found that students perceived they had gained the specific soft skills of *critical and analytical thinking* and been able to apply *their [creative] skills in practical ways*, scoring an average of 89% in these two statements across all three cohorts surveyed and always above sector average.

The courses ranked the most highly in the 'meta' list suggest that there may be some relationship between increases in student attainment (*generally* between levels 5 and 6 and *specifically* in the professional and practical units) and increases in employability or careers thinking. The next step will be to look more closely at how the successful courses engage with employability activity. Anecdotally, the University working group on educational gain is aware that the top three courses are highly practical with exceptional links to 'real world' collaborative professional practices such as live performance; and two of these are among the lowest-ranked courses on the Progression metrics.

One of the findings from the proof-of-concept exercise was that across the University as a whole, it appears that students performed exceptionally well in the final projects with nearly a third achieving marks of 70%+ (ratified by second/double marking and the use of external examiners). There was also an increase in the proportion of students achieving marks of 70%+ in the units explicitly designated as having 'employability' content between Levels 5 and 6. Half the courses showed an increase in the number of students achieving 70%+ in the 'employability' units at Level 5 and 6. More than half the courses showed gain (an increase in grade band averages) above year grade average in 2021; 40% showed similar gain in 2022. A high percentage of both cohorts maintained or improved on their grade bands between Level 5 and 6 (84% in 2021 and 74% in 2022).

## Concluding remarks

The overall continuation, completion, and attainment data for AUB confirms that teaching, feedback and assessment are highly effective. The University is confident that it delivers positive outcomes for all students, and is seeking to develop a robust model of educational gain for a specialist provider.

External examiners consistently confirm the standards of awards, with one noting "This is my 4th year examining and the work I have seen is of an excellent academic and technical standard. I have myself worked with comparable courses both within the UK sector and outside. Therefore, my observations are not only within the national benchmark but also on an international level" (Make-up for Media and Performance, 2021).

This submission closes with comments from three more external examiners in 2022: "The students used the word amazing often in their conversation with me and clearly felt that the staff had gone above and beyond in their support of students. The range of external projects that staff and students engage with, such as sustainable costume and performance design projects, is to be praised" (Costume and Performance Design, 2021). "I think the assessment system at AUB is working well. The quality and detail of feedback is high - in fact, in terms of annotations, it perhaps goes above and beyond" (Creative Writing, 2021). "Some students focused their briefs and concepts around sustainable making and environmentally sympathetic making which shows the students are engaged with changing the landscape of the model making industry" (Modelmaking, 2022).

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