

An insight into the challenges that mature learners encounter across the student lifecycle in Art & Design Higher Education.

In the paper ‘Art of surviving and thriving’ (Broadhead, 2012) one of the research methods was to capture the student voice by one to one interviews. Broadhead says it was;  
*‘to discover how well Access to Higher Education students were prepared for Higher Education level study in art & design at a specialist college.’*  
Her case studies came from diverse backgrounds and often had ‘unconventional educational histories’. Also one of the findings was ‘the importance of having other mature students on the course. The support they received from each other, a feeling of belonging to a small community of mature students had helped them through this transitional time’

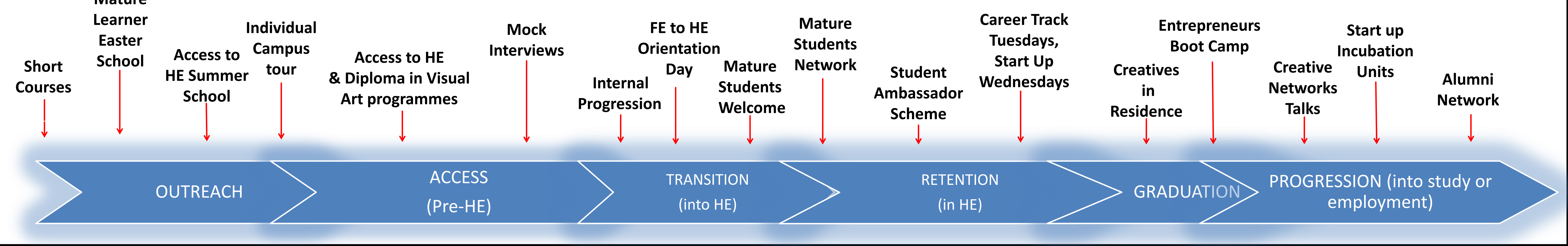
This poster provides a glimpse at the experience of 5 mature students who are studying or have recently studied creative degrees at Leeds College of Art to understand the challenges they have had to overcome in order to stay on course. Also presented is the framework of developmental activities that students can elect to participate in along the student lifecycle to aid the stages of Access, Student Success and Progression. (OFFA, How to produce an access agreement, 2016)



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A framework for Access, Student Success and Progression across the student lifecycle.



“I was very happy to find out there were 10 mature students on my course”

“There is a different mentality at times , because you have taken this decision you want to do your very best”

“I had not written an essay since I was at school, my biggest fear was how people would read what I have written”

“I found out I was dyslexic and having the support tutor provide order to my muddled mind and thoughts that were like a floating mind map. She made it stop”

“The Student Ambassador scheme gives you fantastic skills to put on your CV. It makes you confident, you participate in events you do not normally know how to do. You build up skills without even realising it”

“The writing side of things was a challenge but support from my colleagues was amazing. I now realise how much I have integrated with my cohort over the 3 years. Peer support has been helpful, the other students have been amazing”

L6 (f) 35 years

“I applied on a bit of a chance and was lucky to get an interview and a place. It was a real confidence boost that they wanted me on the course.”

“The project before the interview gave me a taste of the course, I enjoyed that and got good feedback which was a nice introduction to the course.”

“I met up with younger classmates, being surrounded by students 10 years younger has never been an issue. We are all pushing in the same direction and everyone helps.”

“Challenges have been not being in education for so long. I left school at 16 and have worked”

“Student life is not as hard as going to work, as a way of living your life. I found myself at the beginning finding everything a bit slow. I was quite ahead of other people.”

“I have already got work internally through the College and externally with a charity to pick up on. I have a varied set of work skills and experience.”

L6 (m) 33 years

“I was having problems familywise with a very low income and my young daughter to consider”

“He was a great tutor, he pushed me in lots of ways and really sorted my practice for me, this helped me a lot “

The first year experience went quite easily, however she felt that she was struggling this year due to her chronic PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder) normally she could cope but was currently on the waiting list for counselling with Student Welfare. ‘A’ had spoken with her tutors and felt they were understanding.

As a Student Ambassador, she says has given her more confidence to work with people because as a single parent she could not do too much in college because she did not have the time.

She has a small very good friendship group, external to the college ,who also help her with childcare and picking up her daughter.

L5 (f) 32years, single parent.

“I said I will see how far it goes, it has been a lot more difficult than I thought”

“I did have a wobble in the second year, I could not concentrate at all” (due to caring for his wife who sadly passed away)

“On Access it is a much more nurturing environment, on degree it is like being pushed out to sea without any oars” “Its not easy, it is a degree, its higher education.”

“I am the oldest in my year, there is a camaraderie amongst the students, there has been no prejudice from the younger students, they have treated me as their equal”

“One thing it has given me is confidence in speaking to art professionals. I have to go to talk about my work”

“The opportunities that have come up and the people I have met is really valuable”

“It stretches your outlook and your boundaries”

L6 (m) 69 years

“The whole bit at the end is as important as the bit at the beginning.”

“The College spends a lot of time on their Alumni. I get emails on creative opportunities, calls for artists, workshops”

“Students need support and pushing to think ‘How do I survive with an artistic lifestyle?’ The tutors make us think about what you will do when you leave this institution”

“Even though I had a degree I felt I needed something more immersive, like the 1 year Access to Higher Education. It gave me the confidence to do the MA”

“The Mature Students Network was helpful, the students had taken time out, had families, jobs and a wealth of experience so perhaps they understood each others hurdles”

“Being a Student Ambassador allowed me to earn money for a few hours onsite, drawing on my own experience. It was not just a financial thing, it is something I could do in the Arts”

MA Graduate (f) 55years, single parent