

**Jill Journeaux, Coventry University,  
Pilar Montero, Universidad Complutense, Madrid,  
Judith Mottram, Royal College of Art.**

**Higher Education Fine Art in the UK and Spain since 1992: a study in perceptions of change by staff in two universities**

**ABSTRACT**

This paper explores the perceptions of a small sample of academic staff from a university in Spain and another in the UK, to changes in fine art higher education (HE) in both countries over the last 25 years. The authors sought to understand if, and how, the changing HE context had influenced the provision of fine art in each university, and considered it useful to address whether there was any comparability across the two institutions in terms of the responses to the broad changes in resourcing and quality assurance. They used a series of semi-structured interviews with eight respondents, four in each country, aimed at eliciting staff views. These perceptions were considered alongside available data on student numbers, enrolments, graduation and gender, in order to explore the reactions of teaching staff to shifts in context over the period. The study concludes that the stance of criticality adopted by many fine art academics, who value their academic freedom and autonomy and prioritize the practice of their discipline, is being challenged by many of the recent changes in HE. As a result, staff who are being asked to undertake a wider range of activities, are having to adapt their view of the nature of fine art HE.

**INTRODUCTION**

This paper explores the perceptions of a small sample of eight academic staff from a university in Spain and another in the UK, to changes in fine art higher education (HE) in both countries over the last 25 years. The authors sought to understand if, and how, the changing HE context had influenced the provision in each university, and considered it useful to address whether there was any comparability across the two institutions in terms of the responses to the broad changes in resourcing and quality assurance. They used a series of semi-structured interviews with eight respondents, four in each country, aimed at eliciting staff views. These perceptions were considered alongside available data on student numbers, enrolments, graduation and gender, in order to explore the reactions of teaching staff to shifts in context over the period.

The researchers undertook a set of semi-structured interviews, using a template of 10 questions, with respondents who had significant experience of teaching fine art to degree level, at Coventry University (CU) and Universidad Complutense (UCM), in order to elicit their perceptions of change over the period. Interviews with four individual respondents were conducted at each institution. The discussion focused on issues relating to the changes in the management structures of universities in both countries (including the move of the UK polytechnics to university status) and the emerging research agenda, student numbers, tuition fees, metrics, modularization, quality assurance and the teaching of those skills aligned to Fine Art. Respondent comments were coded against these key events, issues and ideas.

In addition, the issues highlighted above were interrogated through available data on student populations. Although robust data was not uniformly available in both countries,

it was considered important to try to enable comparison across the Spanish and UK institutions, as well as to provide a context against which to evaluate the reflections of the respondent group on their experience of teaching across the span of their careers. We looked at data available for the academic years 2004-2005 and 2012-2013. These dates were selected because more robust data was available, the time span would cover the respondents' careers, the earlier date was within the period in which fees were first introduced to the UK context, and the later date was close to the current period.

The paper is structured to enable a discussion of context, followed by a presentation and consideration of the statistical analysis. This is then followed by a discussion of the insights from the interviews under the following thematic headlines: the impact of the research agenda; tuition fees; student numbers; metrics, modularization and quality assurance, and the teaching of skills. The move of the UK polytechnics to university status was considered a significant factor in the changing context for higher education for the UK respondents, as Coventry Polytechnic was one of the institutions that changed its status within their working careers.

### **The changing context for Higher Education in Spain and the UK**

Since 1990 UK HE has faced a series of changes including variations in student numbers (Gillard: 2011), the introduction of and rising costs of tuition fees (Machin & Vignoles, pps.12-14: 2006), a fluctuating resource base, centralized quality assurance processes, the use of metrics to measure outputs and satisfaction, the modularization of, and other structural changes to universities programmes, and the assessment of research. Alongside this, the field of fine art within social and cultural contexts beyond the academy has continued to expand; the relationship between the commercial galleries, the publicly funded national arts sectors and universities has been in flux, and the skills base of the discipline appears to have shifted.

In Spain, a similar set of changes has occurred since the establishment of autonomy for Spanish Universities in 1978. From that date, models were introduced for the governance of institutions and their budgets, the creation of academic syllabi and issuing of qualifications, and the management of budgets for administrative and teaching staff. Further reforms of the education system began in 1983 with the approval of the University Reform Law (LRU), which distributed the responsibility for HE among the State, the Autonomous Communities and the universities themselves. The National Evaluation of Research Activity (CNEAI) was established in 1989 to assess the research activity of university professors and the staff of the Spanish National Research Council. In 2001, the Organic Law of Universities (LOU) repealed the 1983 LRU and undertook to improve the quality and excellence of universities activities. The governing bodies of the universities and the Agencia Nacional de la Calidad y la Acreditación (ANECA) became the foundations of the current system. In 2007, the LOU was amended by the Organic Law of April 12th (LOMLOU). Since then Spanish universities have had to adapt to the European Higher Education Area, following the Bologna Declaration (Coba, E. & Grañeras, M. (dir.): 2009).

The move of UK polytechnics into the university system in 1992 heralded a similar period of major change. The former polytechnics were able to be included in the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) that year, and the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) was established in 1993. In 1998, student tuition fees and loans replaced student maintenance grants. During the period 1998–2000 all UK art & design programmes went through a

Subject Review process as required by the QAA, and in 2002 the QAA Art & Design Benchmarking Statement was published. The accreditation of teachers in the UK HE sector was supported by the creation of the Higher Education Academy in 2007 (HEA 2007) (Journeaux, J. pp. 111-117: 2015).

We identified that the key similarities across the two countries may have been that the providers of fine art undergraduate education in both Spain and the UK had to negotiate the challenges of moving into larger institutions with a set of generic standards and expectations of performance. This marked a change from a context in which art and design was largely studied in smaller specialist institutions. The introduction of research assessment processes is also common, as is the introduction of various metrics to measure and quantify quality in HE. In 1999 both Spain and the UK signed up to the Bologna Declaration, which intended to create a harmonized European area of HE, facilitating staff and student mobility across Europe, and both countries took steps to structure programmes to allow for flexible credit accumulation and transfer. However, in contrast to Spain, which committed to fully implementing the Bologna agreement, UK course structures have moved through various cycles of unitization or modularization as the Bologna project has risen and fallen within the agenda of UK universities. The UK government placed more onus on UK universities becoming self-sufficient financial operations who generate their own revenues, rather than receiving the majority of their income from state finance. In Spain, the structuring of programmes has been implemented and has remained in place to meet the Bologna objectives while in Britain, even pre-Brexit, Bologna considerations appear to have had much less day-to-day impact on operational priorities.

Before looking in detail at the perceptions of change among the respondent group, the following section summarizes the picture provided by statistical data on student populations.

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### **The size of the student population, 2004-2013**

As expanding opportunities for students to enter HE was a key narrative in the media of the period (Coughlan 2013, Ellis 2013), we looked at available data on student numbers, including country population, numbers of undergraduate students, enrolments in the discipline and graduation numbers. The available data also allowed us to look at completion rates and the gender of students. The data for Spain came from The National Institute of Statistics for the period up to 2011 and thereafter from the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport, and for the UK from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA).

The country populations for both Spain and the UK grew over the period from 2004 to 2013 (figure 1). Despite the emphasis from successive UK governments on increasing the proportion of young people attending university, the data from HESA (UK) and Instituto Nacional de Estadística INE and Ministerio de Educación Cultura y Deporte (Spain) on total student populations (Figure 2) appears to indicate that the proportion of the population enrolled on UK courses is marginally lower in 2013/14 than it was in 2004/05, at 2.81% in 2013/14 compared to 2.91% in 2004/5. The Spanish data shows a similar difference in the overall numbers of students enrolled in undergraduate courses in the two periods, at 3.31 % of total population in 2004/5 and 3.08% in 2013/14. As with the UK, the total number of students enrolled rose, from 1.96 to 2.14 million. So while the

numbers of students have risen in both countries, the proportion undertaking undergraduate courses has not shifted much (Office of National Statistics 2015).

Figure 1: Country populations, UK and Spain, 2004-5 and 2012-13

Figure 2: Undergraduate enrollments, UK and Spain, 2004-5 and 2012-13

Of the 1.75 million students enrolled on undergraduate courses across the UK in 2005, 306,365 graduates completed their studies (figure 3). Fine Art student enrolments were 17,465, amounting to 1% of the total undergraduate population (figure 4). In Spain we see a slightly higher proportion of Fine Art students among the total population of 1.45 million students in the 2004-2005 academic year. With 48 public universities and 22 private institutions, there were 196,623 students graduating that year. The Fine Arts student enrolments for that year were 26,986, amounting to 1.9% of the total undergraduate population and 1.9% of the graduates in Spain (figure 4). Fine Art graduates also amounted to 1% of graduating students in the UK (HESA, 2015). The number of institutions offering courses in Fine Art in the UK for the two periods covered by this study is not clearly available from existing data sources such as HESA. The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS 2017) does however give the number of institutions offering undergraduate programmes wholly or partially covering Fine Art in 2017 as 137 UK HEIs.

Figure 3: Undergraduate completions, UK and Spain, 2004-5 and 2012-13

Figure 4: Fine Art undergraduate enrolments and completions, UK and Spain, 2004-5 and 2012-13

In both countries we see an imbalance in the gender of graduating students. The UK student graduates in 2004/5 included 2,650 females and 1,305 males. In Spain the graduate cohorts in 2004/5 were comprised of 2,607 female and 1,054 males. By 2012-13, the ratios were still strongly oriented to female participation, with female fine art graduates in the UK having risen more than in Spain. In Spain the increase was from 2,607 to 2,680 and in the UK from 2,650 to 3,060 graduates (figure 5).

Figure 5: Gender of Fine Art graduates, UK and Spain, 2004-5 and 2012-13

In the UK, the scale of postgraduate activity was about one tenth of the size of the undergraduate community, at 1705 enrollments. In Spain, study on a recognized master's degree similar to the current ones was nonexistent in the year 2004. Master's degrees appeared in Spain after the development of the European Higher Education Area. However, the number of students enrolled on a Fine Arts doctorate in Spain in 2004 was 1537, 2% of total enrolments at that level.

When looking at the data for the two periods we see that UK fine art enrolments showed a slight downward trend. The shape of the UK student population had shifted by 2012-2013 when the overall student population had grown to 1.8 million and Fine Art enrolments were now 14,160, a drop of 19%. The number of graduating students had, however, risen by 7% from 3,925 to 4,220, indicating that the numbers of students completing fine art degrees in the UK remained relatively stable, and that completion rates in the discipline were improving.

In Spain the picture was different. By 2012-2013 the number of students enrolled on Spanish Fine Art courses reached 30,958, accounting for 2.2% of total numbers, of which 21,520 were women (69.5%). We note a slight increase in the number of Fine Art students. We also note that the percentage of women who study Fine Art remained the same (69%) but this is a higher proportion in comparison to the other disciplines in Spanish universities, of which 54% of the population is female. In respect of completion rates, we can observe a decrease in Spanish fine art graduates from 2005 to 2014. In 2005 there were 3,661 new graduates in Fine Art. However in 2013 that number decreases to 3,233. This drop may be accounted for by the introduction of separate degrees in Design and Conservation-Restoration, which were previously integrated as specializations in the former degrees of Fine Arts.

In the period 2000 – 2011 there was a significant overall increase in female undergraduates in the UK, from 133,316 women studying in 2000, alongside 109,930 men, to 197,567 women undergraduates in 2011 compared to 197,565 men (House of Commons Library 2012), indicating a rather more even distribution between gender in the university population than in Spain.

The data reveals that both countries have seen only slight changes in the numbers of fine art students and also greater numbers of women opting to study fine art. The numbers of fine art students as a proportion of the total undergraduate population, although very slightly higher in Spain than the UK, are also similar. The key difference is in the high completion rates achieved in the UK, which result in relatively stable numbers of graduating students and the high participation rates by female students. These are notable given the perception, or memory of what actually happened in this period as understood and anecdotally revealed through the interviews. For example, there is a perception amongst UK academic staff in fine art that student numbers have risen significantly during the period, which is not actually reflected in the data, and challenges the prevailing narratives amongst our peer groups in both countries. This baseline data was slightly surprising given the prevailing narratives of the teaching community as encountered within our own institutions and when visiting colleagues elsewhere. A similar gap is evident in the lack of awareness about the gender imbalance in the student population and the relationship of this to subsequent graduate achievements.

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## **The interviews**

The outcomes of the interviews are organized under the following thematic headings: the move to university status and the research agenda, tuition fees, student numbers, metrics, modularization, quality assurance and the teaching of drawing and skills. The researchers used semi-structured interviews to unpack the particular beliefs and understandings of their peers, and to explore how these are perceived as having impacted upon staff, and as a result, may have had some impact on the students of fine art. However the authors recognize the limitations of this study as interviews with students would be necessary to confirm any actual impact. The collective teaching years experience of the four respondents at CU was 105 and all had studied fine art in the late 1970s and 1980s, three in Polytechnics and one in a university. The UCM respondents had 108 years experience. The Spanish respondents A, B and C were civil servants before the approval of the Organic Law of Universities (LOU), and thus were more senior and less affected by the newly introduced requirements for winning grants for research. However, respondent D, a teacher with eight years of experience, was recruited by the UCM after LOU and

subsequent laws had been approved. This background information is pertinent because the ages of six out of eight of the respondents means that they were themselves taught in institutions, or within institutional structures that were different to the ones that they now teach in.

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## 1. The move to University status and the research agenda

This section considers the impact of the move of the independent art schools in the UK into larger academic institutions over the last 40 years and the concurrent development of the research agenda. In the early 1970's most of the previously independent UK schools of art merged with other colleges to become polytechnics. In 1992 all UK polytechnics became universities. In 1986 the RAE was introduced into the UK university sector and was replaced by the Research Excellence Framework (REF) in 2014. The 1992 RAE included those institutions that had previously been polytechnics, HE Institutes or colleges, thus including the majority of Art & Design staff for the first time (Journeaux, J. 2015).

In Spain under the General Education Law (LGE) of 1970, the Academies of Fine Arts became Faculties of Fine Arts, and the art schools of Barcelona, Bilbao, Madrid, Seville and Valencia became full members of the Spanish university system in 1978-1979. As a result of these changes, the subjects of design, restoration and the conservation of cultural heritage became included within fine art degrees. (Royal Decree 988/1978)

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All four UK respondents made a strong connection between the move of the polytechnics (which had previously provided the majority of fine art provision in the UK) into the unified university sector and the emergence of the research agenda. They also linked the emergence of research to a decline in the value of practice for teaching staff. Respondent A(UK) commented:

I think when they became universities there was a subtle change, when the research agenda came in. What you get now is teaching staff who are academics rather than artists. If you've got somebody who's a painter they might foreground that to some extent, but with academically engaged staff there might be slight disconnect between ideas and making and the making has become a little bit further down the agenda.

The pressures placed by administrators and managers on staff teaching fine art to account for its particular value in large multi disciplinary institutions was identified by B(UK), who said: 'it's got a lot of great things like that notion of speculative enquiry but those things are fragile in a structure that is more formalized, to do with conformity'. Overall the respondents identified the professionalization of Higher Education with higher levels of compliance to centralized institutional or governmental policies and requirements, by both staff and students, and regretted the absence of constructive dissent to changes in the context of and requirements for teaching fine art, which they felt was a core characteristic of fine art practice. B(UK) described undergraduates as:

more pragmatic. They understand that reality, that it is a job at the end of the day, whereas I think when I was at college they saw themselves as artists first and foremost, that was what made them tick, that's all they wanted to talk about.

Of the Spanish respondents, A(S), B(S) and C(S) studied fine art when the Academies still existed, but D(S) studied after the move to university status. B(S) and D(S) were optimistic about the integration of the Academies into the University. B(S) noted: ‘The change in the system forced teachers to increase their intellectual and academic level. [And] To understand that they must teach university students with a high academic and intellectual level’. A(S), B(S), and C(S) were more skeptical about research in fine art in the universities. Their words indicate a tension between the professionalized academic and the artist teacher. Respondent B(S) said:

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The main issue is to understand what “research” means in the context of Fine Arts studies. To accomplish a great work of art is not called “research” but “creation”, not from an etiological meaning but a popular one, Picasso “created” El Guernica, he did not make research to produce it. Therefore “research” sucks energies from art practice, when the students are mostly interested to have a good artist as a teacher than a good “researcher” of issues of fine arts.

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Another comment expressing a similar tension was expressed by A(S):

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From my point of view there are two types of teachers in this Faculty. My peers who teach in outdated methods of the 19th century and those who have a more modern style that confuses research with creation. (...) Staff must be professionals not theorists, professors should teach what they practice (...) the feature of this faculty is creation. Creation involves discipline, creativity, resilience, own judgment and resistance.

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It was also pointed out by C(S) that ‘apart from some exceptions there isn’t real research in Fine Art. Most of them (the researchers in the interviewee’s institution) are in History or Sociology of Art. There are few relevant papers on art’s nature, materials, or the psychology of creation...’ This view was not shared by D(S) who argued that the incorporation of Fine Art Academies into the University had professionalized both the graduate who can choose between many jobs with the legitimization of the university award, and the structure of the syllabi that now has to fit within university rules.

Whilst the respondents agreed that the changes in academic institutions have affected the teaching of the discipline of fine art and highlighted the development of a research agenda as the key change, this small sample of interviews indicates a difference between younger and older staff, particularly those that studied in the 1970’s. It touches upon the complex but also polarized discourses around research into and through art practice that have occurred during the last 30 years, and the evolving characteristics of ‘advanced thought’ (Macleod & Chapman p.147 2014), in the field of fine art practice. Indeed in an earlier paper (1998) Macleod described PhD students in the field of fine art as often experiencing ‘an acute anxiety about retaining their identity as artists’ and we would argue that this is also being felt by staff teaching in fine art who have well established identities as artists but who are being asked to remodel themselves as artist researchers, and who are resistant to such a shift in positioning.

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## **2. Tuition fees**

This section considers the impact of tuition fees on the staff and student experience. In 1997 following the publication of the Dearing Report ‘Higher Education in the Learning Society’ (Dearing 1997), the UK government implemented a system of means tested tuition fees, and abolished the student maintenance grant, replacing it with student loans.

The Comprehensive Spending Review of 2004 clarified the need for universities to increase their income to make up for shortfalls in public funding. In 2004 the Labour government legislated to allow universities to set their own tuition fees up to a level of £3,000 per annum. In 2010, the ceiling for tuition fees was raised to £9,000 per annum following the publication of the Browne Review into the future of HE funding (Browne 2010), with pro rata payments for part time study.

The cost of studying in Spain varies according to whether the university is public or private. In both public and private universities the amount that students pay varies according to the number of credits for which they enroll, the degree course chosen, and their academic performance (students repeating subjects must pay an extra charge when they enroll for the second time). Private universities set the prices of all their degrees. Tuition fees vary for different degrees between €5000 and €15000 per academic year. However, prices in public universities for all official degrees are established by decree for each Autonomous Community within the limits set by the General Conference for University Policy. In 2012 a new Royal Decree approved a rise in university tuition fees, whilst reducing the quantity of study grants and toughening the requisites for obtaining them. Making use of their powers of self-government, the autonomous communities have implemented the law in different ways, some applying the authorized maximum fee increase, others the minimum.

In 2004-2005 the prices for enrolment on undergraduate degrees in public universities were set within a range between €7 (Canary Island) and €10 (Navarra) per credit (a European credit corresponds to 25 to 30 hours of student work). The annual cost of [four year](#) undergraduate tuition in Spanish public universities thus ranged between €420 and €600 per course of 60 credits per year. In the 2013-2014 academic year, prices for the enrolment of bachelor degrees in public universities were within a range between €12 (Galicia) and €34 (Catalonia) per credit. The cost of undergraduate tuition in Spanish public universities had thus increased to range between €720 and €2,040 per year, [and €2,880 and €8,160 per four year course.](#)

Tuition fees increased significantly in Spain between 2004 and 2013 but the HE budget has decreased since the Bologna Declaration (1999). Furthermore, in Spanish public universities, from 2009 to 2013 the number of employees has reduced by 26.3%, from 110,287 teachers in 2009 to 95,947 in 2013. (Datos básicos del sistema universitario español, Curso 2013-2014). Respondents A(S) and C(S) claimed they did not notice any change in the teaching of fine arts students when the cost of tuition was raised. On the other hand, respondents B(S) and D(S) think that it has affected both teachers and students. During recent years there has been a considerable rise in students that have to work while studying to be able to pay for their studies and many become part-time. B(S) said:

Spain has a policy of second-rate European salaries and one of increasing the prices for tuition as in the USA. The working and middle classes in Spain have less income to send their children to universities. Higher classes are richer and devoted to private universities. Private universities make a good profit; meanwhile public universities get less and less resources even though they are more efficient. It is quite clear that there is an ideological policy of tuition and fees in Spain

Marina Elias references Bernstein's concept of the 'pedagogical re-contextualizing field' (Elias, p.63. 2011), in identifying stresses on Spanish academics. She attributes this to the lack of funding in support of the roll out of new processes of change, the move to student based curricula which require more hours of input from staff, the rapid introduction of

complex and contradictory processes that do not allow time for the implementation of changes to become embedded and fine tuned, and a lack of co-ordination of the hurried introduction of reforms. In *Developing a Quality Culture in Higher Education* (2000) Mantz Yorke argues that whilst quality and quality assurance processes have become embedded into the UK HE sector the actual development of a quality culture and experience for students has not kept pace with the development of these new practices. He attributes this to at least in part to a tension between the external equilibrium in which HE institutions function and the pressing need for a radical rethink of HE curricula, and it may be this tension which is being revealed by the comments of all of the individuals interviewed for this small study.

Some commentators suggest that the introduction of tuition fees has led to increasing consumer awareness on the part of parents and students, and the increasing commodification of university education. Klemencic (2011) argues that the introduction of, or substantial increase in, fees in some countries have significantly impacted upon student-university relations as students are conceived as and described as customers rather than partners. However, in response to questions about the perceived impact of fees on fine art students experience and performance A(UK) noted a conservative shift in student expectations:

I think some of them have either from themselves or their family, an idea of don't make waves, you're borrowing all this money and you don't want to mess up your degree, you want to make sure you come out with a 2:1 so don't make trouble. Some of them are now making comments that they want to learn, we're going to university we're paying all this money. They're saying can we have more lectures because in a lecture you're sitting there and learning something.

This was also reflected by B(UK): 'it's that what am I getting for my money situation. That in itself is fuelling a move towards a more professionalized unitized model of engagement where students will complain if they're not getting what they expect.' However C(UK), a sculpture tutor with 25 years experience in HE disagreed with these perceptions saying: 'The thing I notice is students can't do what they want to occasionally because they simply can't afford the materials and it's affecting the work so a lot of it is found materials, table top size, plaster, paper.' This was echoed by other respondents, who described the financial pressures on art students due to the costs of materials. C(UK) recalled the reductions in consumables budgets which has eroded the capacity of staff to guide students through experiences of a range of media in first year projects (Journeaux & Mottram 2015), producing a situation where current students make decisions about the materials they use based on affordability, thus mitigating against such processes as oil painting, stone carving and printmaking, in favor of found materials or conceptual works requiring minimal materials.

The existence of the number of private universities operating in the Spanish system was identified as a significant distinguishing difference between the two countries, as the direct costs to students in public UK universities is similar to the costs in Spanish private universities, but both are considerably more expensive than public universities in Spain. The rising costs of study either due to increasing student fees or to economic austerity, and the resultant impact upon their study was a common theme across all the interviews. What was clear was that austerity has been much more keenly felt by the four Spanish respondents than those in the UK. D(S) considered that austerity was the reason why 'now there are fewer students who want to study fine art and many of the fine art students are part time'.

### 3. Student numbers and motivations

The researchers identified the issue of student numbers as a key theme because anecdotal accounts suggested that staff had felt the pressure of increasing numbers. However the overall statistics indicate little growth in fine art numbers and indicate a slight reduction in enrolments. The staff perception may be due to more students enrolled on fewer courses, or to reduced staffing, or to the call on staff to spend more time undertaking administration, quality assurance, income generation or research (Barrett L & Barrett, P. 2008).

All the UK respondents questioned the motivation of those students now studying fine art, describing some of them as simply wanting a degree rather than being particularly interested in art, and described a complex and rapidly shifting landscape. They saw this as posing difficult challenges in educating a large and diverse body of students for, and through, art. Several respondents volunteered that there was pressure on the one to one tutorial, which they felt had been a mainstay of UK fine art education. B(UK) noted:

there's a greater pressure to think of more imaginative ways of dealing with student groups, so I think that one to one tutorial has been for better or worse compromised but discussing your work with one person ..... I think students still want that.

B(UK) however argued that the one to one tutorial presupposed a level of engagement which is no longer apparent amongst undergraduates in fine art. This interviewee felt that the notion of the one to one tutorial as a dialogue between artist and aspiring artist that most staff over 45 years of age experienced, has been altered by the nature of contemporary fine art undergraduates and their ambitions after graduation. B(UK) described the need for small group teaching, which allowed students to listen to their peers' responses to staff questions and gave time for students to formulate responses to those questions. D(UK) thought that the one to one system of teaching was appropriate for people who were serious about becoming artists but not as effective for those looking for an education through fine art.

The Spanish respondents showed an ambivalent attitude towards the number of students. Since the approval of the Bologna Agreement, the ratio of students to group and teacher has decreased while the amount of students per teacher has not. Teachers now have different groups with the same hours to teach, which in total can double the amount of students than previously. Before Bologna a teacher could teach an annual subject (120 hours) with 60 students. After Bologna a teacher can teach four subjects per year, (two per semester, 30 hours per subject). Each group has around 30 students. So a teacher after Bologna teaches the same hours with double the number of students. Both B(S) and C(S) attributed the increased numbers of students to the increase of specializations and the expansion of the field of fine art. B(S) emphasized the need 'to understand that many students of fine arts do not wish to be just an "artist" (even less to be traditional artists: painters or sculptors) but visual artists, even professionals of making images.'

The positive impact of the decrease of students per group was affirmed by D(S), since teachers could now dedicate more time to each student. However, A(S) argued that both the quality and the student numbers have decreased since Bologna. A(S) and C(S) echoed

concerns voiced by UK respondents about the motivation of students studying fine art, describing them as simply wanting a degree rather than having an actual interest in art. Moreover D(S) pointed to the impact of the 2008 financial crisis to explain the decrease in the number of graduates in the last years: some students must work in order to pay for their studies thus the number of part time students has increased. In fact only since 2007, the year in which the LOMLOU Law was approved, has it been possible to be a part time student in the Spanish University System and this period is coincident with the period of financial crisis. By contrast HE has been available in the UK on a part time basis for many years, however as student loans and tuition fees have increased students have needed to work part time whilst also studying full time, blurring the distinction of both categories. In 2013 The Times Higher Education [Supplement](#) reported on a survey of 1,704 students, undertaken by the insurance provider Endsleigh, which found that 57% of students in the UK [were](#) working in some form whilst at university; a 7% increase on the previous year. There was clear agreement amongst respondents in both countries that the motivations of students had changed during the period, and that many students simply wanted a degree and did not aspire to become artists, however, Spanish respondents emphasized the expansion of the field of fine art beyond the academy as being the key driver for changes in student motivation.

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#### **4. Metrics, modularization and quality assurance**

The researchers had identified the introduction of metrics, modularization and new quality assurance regimes as centralized processes, as factors which may have impacted upon teaching. As indicated earlier, the 1990's saw the introduction of a new UK quality assurance structure. In 2003 the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education survey (DLHE) was introduced, followed in 2005 by the Student Survey (NSS), the results of which were published on the Higher Education Funding Council for England website. The use of published metrics, and the establishment of university league tables, the requirement for universities to publish Key Information Sets (KIS) and the Research Assessment and Excellence evaluations (RAE & REF), have over the last 20 years, arguably shifted higher education from being a self regulating sector, to a centrally assessed and regulated one (Journeaux, J. 2015). With regard to the DLHE survey A(UK) noted that 'Because of the fees and because of the numbers then you get this governmental attitude of it's not about education it's about jobs.' All of the UK respondents perceived the use of metrics to be more likely to influence staff behaviour than student experience. A(UK) said of the NSS:

It's all about staff. The good things were all staff were great we had some really great support, great teaching, the negative things were we needed to see the staff more, they weren't around enough and all they really want for their money was somebody with them, they want to see us talking to them, they want some teaching really.

This echoes the findings of Dineen & Collins (2005), that the biggest single influence on the studio environment is the teacher-student relationship.

B(UK) observed that the use of metrics 'makes staff more guarded. I know staff who probably wouldn't be adversarial in discussion with students because they don't want to upset anybody, the last thing you want is someone complaining'. The other UK respondents picked up on the issue of an increasing tension between the models of

professionalized academic and the artist teacher. They all saw the strength of staff as being visible in the studios, available to talk to students and challenging them about their ideas and their work. They perceived the increased emphasis on measuring the student experience and the time required to comply with such requirements as taking them out of direct contact with students. However, all of the UK respondents supported the need for transparency and recognized the shifting nature of the context as the metrics have become embedded in the culture of UK HE. B(UK) commented that:

although there was widespread apprehension, disillusionment with its early iteration, ...there's a feel good factor to actually getting a good NSS return which then makes it feel a lot more worthwhile and it's like an endorsement.

A(UK) expressed concern about the proportion of the curriculum now required to be explicitly concerned with employment in order to meet the metrics, commenting 'that professionalization thing can get in the way and they find themselves doing things which take them away from their core study.' However Hjelde (2015) argues that [the](#) fine art curriculum is best served by a strong element of enterprise and employability education, but makes the point that this needs to be tailored to discipline specific knowledge and characteristics, and that its requirements should be shaped by artistic research and art production methods. Indeed the Creating Entrepreneurship: entrepreneurship education for the creative industries report (Clewes, D. 2007), identifies the first two of three recommendations as supporting the case that discipline appropriate definitions of entrepreneurial skills and attributes are required, and finds that whilst entrepreneurship is in fact inherent to effective creative practice, it does need to be specifically identified within curricula. It may be that the respondent perceptions were coloured by their own past experience of being a fine art student, or it could be that their perception of the content of locally delivered entrepreneurship modules is too generic and insufficiently embedded within fine art practice.

In line with the UK respondents all Spanish respondents perceived the use of metrics to be more likely to influence staff behaviour but that this did not always translate into an improved student experience. The Spanish respondents reported that their daily work has not been affected by the use of metrics: 'Rankings are quantitative assessments that have greater influence at the level of management of the University and the relationship between the University and the State and autonomous government' D(S). As regards metrics, C(S) thought 'The use of metrics serves to make teachers accumulate research with low intellectual impact, therefore teachers are rewarded for quantity over quality', but B(S) said 'The Bologna system provides better-trained teachers who are adapted for the new kind of student of fine arts'. Overall the UK respondents were more vocal, and appeared to be more concerned, about the application of metrics to their work as lecturers.

In 1993 the UK Quality Assurance Agency was established and introduced the process of Academic Review. From 1998 to 2000 as part of the QAA Subject Review process, all UK Art & Design undergraduate programmes went through a process of external peer evaluation, which used a numerical outcome as the sum of the assessment of six components, which were scored 1-4 giving a maximum score of 24. The 2001 RAE followed quickly on the heels of the QAA Subject Reviews and taken together the results of these two assessments offered clear indicators of the health of UK Art & Design HE. Following this assessment round, in 2002 the QAA published the Art & Design Subject Benchmarks, which were written by a group of senior academics representing the art and design HE sector (Journeaux, J. 2015). There was a feeling amongst some UK respondents that the application of metrics alongside the implementation of the QAA Art

& Design Benchmarks has: 'taken the soul out of creativity' C(UK), which chimes with Mantz Yorke's (2000) prediction that benchmarks would prove: 'unwieldy and acknowledged more in the breach than in the observance'. Yorke deemed them unlikely to improve quality and like to exacerbate some of the inherent tensions that exist in higher education. The rejection of any canon or boundaries that clearly articulate the field of fine art practice is an ongoing issue for fine art education in the UK and one that caused considerable debate within the peer group when the Art & Design Benchmarks were being formulated in 2001. Writing about the establishment of the QAA Benchmark Statements David Buss who chaired the committee wrote:

Guided by the views of the membership of NFAFE (The National Association for Fine Art Education) we have stated 'there is a consensus that [Art] is a creative endeavor which constantly speculates upon and challenges its own nature and purpose' (Buss 2000).

Echoing comments made about the impact of metrics upon staff and student experiences A (UK) said of quality assurance processes: 'I don't think it's particularly helpful, it can divert a lot of hours into doing stuff like quality' and D(UK) admitted 'to be honest I think it takes our eye off the ball I think we're administrating far to much, and it's taking us away from being in the studio with the students.'

Following the move to university status in 1992 many UK institutions introduced modular award structures that were perceived to allow for increased student numbers, greater flexibility of and access to, provision for students. The great majority of UK institutions offering fine art now do so via a modular structure, although in the last 10 years there has been a shift back towards an emphasis on an holistic course albeit often delivered in large module or unit blocks. A(UK) argued that 'they were forced into certain practices or course structures to conform to a more straight academic pattern rather than say a slightly more open ended creative pattern which they were doing before.' However B(UK) noted that:

Curiously I think staff are now reluctant to lose modularity, this move back to courses is a great idea, this notion of the coherence of the course and the course identity, but people are still quite protective over their bit, their unit, their modules and that's an interesting paradox really.

This respondent also argued that younger staff experienced modularity in their own education, so find it difficult to conceive of a more holistic approach, and that some staff valued the protective format of many of the structures and procedures that have been introduced. B(UK) said, 'as with quality assurance, I think the savvier staff have realized that the learning outcomes model protects them as well.' Modularization was the issue that elicited the strongest response from the UK respondents, who saw it as central to current problems in fine art education. They argued that the continuum of the generative process was interrupted by too frequent assessments. C(UK) describes the creative continuum as 'very much broken up', recognizing the tensions around the need to construct conditions for creativity. The student experience of frequent assessments associated with modular programmes was seen to prove detrimental to creativity when the primary goal was an externally imposed grade, as suggested by Amabile (1996). D(UK) noted that early forms of modularity had enabled discipline specificity, for example in terms of the teaching of drawing, but that in recent years this specialist approach had been eroded by the move to structures that place more emphasis on the course as a whole, linking this shift to changes in staffing numbers and expertise:

As time's gone by when those modules disappeared they weren't replaced and they're more sort of generic modules and they weren't that specific and it was to do with being able to staff them you know those old modules were staff hours heavy.

In Spain the adoption of a system of credit accumulation standardized the syllabi. The Bologna Declaration structure reduced the university undergraduate course from five to four years broken down into two semesters a year. Before the Bologna plan was implemented, the majority of courses took five years. However, today most last four years (eight semesters) and are 240 credits in the European Credit Transform System (ECTS). The reduction of time that a student spends at the University was considered a loss by all Spanish respondents.

In 2002, the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation of Spain (ANECA) was established to provide external quality assurance for Spanish HE. ANECA has developed programs in order to perform its activities (evaluation, certification, quality assurance and accreditation of academic staff; civil and non-civil servant, syllabi and degrees), with the purpose of integrating the Spanish system into the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

All the Spanish respondents questioned the increase of bureaucratization and its negative influence in their daily work and none believed the quality of the Spanish University System had improved in the last 25 years. D(S) said, 'it has brought a number of bureaucratic tasks which requires spending time that negatively affects the other tasks of research and teaching'. C(S) commented similarly: 'There is an awareness of the fulfillment of the duty by teachers in more bureaucratic aspects, but I do not think that the quality has increased.'

ANECA does not include among its objectives and powers the development of rankings in which it can establish a series of objective parameters between different universities, as the UK systems do. As a consequence the researchers were unable to compare the results of universities in teaching, research and innovation and technological development. Similarly it was not possible to determine a classification of institutions for each area and for all university activities; therefore a direct comparison with the UK via analysis of metrics was not possible.

Whilst the situation in both countries is rather different with regard to processes of measurement and evaluation, similarities emerge from the interviews with respondents in both countries recognizing that the system needed to change and that a new type of academic was emerging. Staff in both countries doubted that quality assurance processes had improved the quality of teaching, and pointed to increased bureaucracy taking them away from the students and the studios. The impact of modularization and credit accumulation systems provoked the most negative reactions during all the interviews in both countries, because the staff perceived these as breaking up the curriculum and effectively reducing the learning time available for students.

#### **4. The teaching of skills**

The researchers asked about making, drawing and other skills, in order to ascertain how academic staff perceived the teaching of skills in fine art. UK respondents related this topic to the expansion of the field of fine art curriculum and identified with the ongoing debate within fine art education about when and how to teach skills:

it's this whole dilemma isn't it? Is it that the student's got to decide what they want to do and then they go and find out how to do it or do they get told all the techniques and decide what to do with them? (C(UK)).

Another aspect of the dilemma was identified by B(UK), who saw an increased reluctance on the part of academics to teach specific making skills:

I think the skills thing is a contentious area really and I think people are fearful of it because it's they often confuse it I think with being prescriptive, which might be partly be ascribed to the growing academisation of fine art within the university system and the privileging of the idea and of research rather than making and practice.

This respondent also questioned the reluctance of staff in fine art in the UK to teach drawing, and when asked if drawing has been affected by assessment requirements and the language of learning outcomes commented: 'the increase in the annotated log has replaced the sketch book for many people, they don't actually draw anything they just photocopy stuff off the net, stick it in and label it.' The lack of skills teaching was related by D(UK) to the increased emphasis on research saying:

I'm aware that there's a very strong culture towards research but whether it's more of a practice based research or a written academic research, what I've noticed over the years is that increasingly people are not teaching skills and I don't think the emphasis is placed so much on skills.

A(UK) said 'we have drifted a bit towards the technicians. We have very good technicians but I think there is a bit of a disconnect'. This echoes the observations of Makin and Watkins, who in a paper given at the 2014 GLAD Conference noted that the teaching of skills is increasingly the responsibility of technical staff and is rarely undertaken by academics. They noted the changing nature of technicians' roles, and concluded that an increasing emphasis and focus on the conceptual was matched by an increasing lack of clear value being placed on the practical.

D(UK) believed that fine art students want to know that they are being taught by people who also practice what they teach. This respondent suggested that the experience of seeing work made by a tutor is more meaningful for a fine art student than reading a paper written by that tutor. The model of working in the studio of the tutor who leads by example has been a strong part of the Spanish tradition. The fine art departments at Complutense University continue to be named after the genres: painting, sculpture, drawing, but all the Spanish respondents perceived that drawing as a discipline has been losing importance. The shift from teaching techniques linked to the great historical disciplines to a fine arts education from a contemporary perspective was reflected in the interviews. Respondents pointed out the increase of the importance of new technologies in the production of images and how these technologies impacted upon teaching, to the point that A(S) and C(S) consider the emergence of new technologies as the most important change in the last 25 years in the teaching of the fine arts. A(S) said: 'there is no sense in the classical division of genres. Drawing is all and nothing. Before it was basis of art but now all disciplines are mixed..... people use less drawing.' B(S) recalls: Drawing in today's world and the necessities to be able to think and produce images is multimedia and multidisciplinary,' and adds:

Yet, many teachers (out of their time) must be just good in traditional skills, I mean, be proficient in oil painting and model class. These teachers' skills are not so important in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (for the matter, I am very skilled in oil painting and model classes, but, I hope, not only in that).

C(S) also noted this recognition of the waning importance of the underpinning of drawing: 'Drawing requires technique and lots of practice. When this domain in the plastic arts was absolutely necessary no efforts are spared. In contemporary art it does not seem to be so necessary.'

All the respondents revealed similar experiences of the move away from teaching drawing and skills such as painting, with Spanish respondents citing the expansion of the field of fine art and the impact of new technologies on the discipline as reasons for the demise of skills based curricula. UK respondents reiterated their Spanish colleagues views, but also connected the problem to perceptions of skills and making as being deemed non-intellectual within the context of the university. The sample selected for the study focused on experienced lecturers who could give an overview of the period of time covered by the selection of statistical data. Not surprisingly the discussions around skills revealed a mismatch of staff skills to student skills. This is partly due to new technology but also to the move away from discipline skills to personal and soft skills within HE.

### **Conclusions and emergent issues**

The key finding of the study is that the perceptions, lived experience and local knowledge of the respondents was at times at odds with the infrastructure and regulatory context of the situation within which they worked. On occasions for example, in relation to employability, perceptions were at odds with recent research undertaken in the field of fine art education (Hjelde, K. 2015). Over-arching narratives of continuous expansion of numbers on UK undergraduate courses do not in fact pertain to recruitment to fine art which has slightly decreased within the period of study. However, the researchers found that high levels of completion in the subject and the continuing measurement of completion levels in the UK has resulted in low numbers of fine art students failing or dropping out of their courses, which has enabled the numbers of graduates to remain stable. UK respondents who are immersed in media reports of increasing numbers of undergraduates, and who are working to competitive admissions and retention targets did not always appreciate this fact.

In a similar fashion the popular narratives around the introduction of tuition fees in the UK – that they would prove off putting to potential fine art students – have yet to be proven as the slight drop in numbers is not significant enough per se. Some of the respondents had a wider perception of the financial challenges faced by fine art students, which included the high costs of materials for the fabrication of art objects and the way in which this is mitigating against such activities as painting and sculpture and re-enforcing the use of mixed media by students. The respondents acknowledged that undergraduate fine art education is no longer a training for those who wish to become artists, and thus the older model of the one-to-one tutorial is neither viable nor desirable and that newer forms of delivery are required. This change to a mass education through fine art, rather than for fine art, has also resulted in a shift of values around the importance of discipline based skills in the curriculum such as drawing and making. The participants acknowledged this shift and also recognized that priority has now been placed on individual skills such as entrepreneurship and communication skills.

In Spain, in the period of study, there has been a slight increase in the number of fine art students. However the impact of tuition costs and the economic crisis has been reflected in the increased numbers of the part-time students. The implementation of the Bologna Agreement, and the resultant reduction of the length of courses from five to four years and the move to semesters, has been perceived as a loss by all respondents. By contrast, the impact of metrics and quality assurance has been seen by some respondents as an opportunity to improve and to adapt to a different and international context in which remarkable technological developments are transforming fine art practice and the fine art curriculum for students. The recent period of fiscal austerity across Europe was felt particularly strongly by the Spanish respondents, who are working in a government funded public system, as opposed to their UK counterparts who have seen significant shifts from local authority funding as a polytechnic, through central government funding structures to the current system of student tuition fees.

The researchers suggest that staff perceptions of increasing workloads, the imposition of metrics, and other conditions such as greater accountability of staff time and effort, have resulted in negative perceptions of their professional situation. The consequence of the need to extend the capabilities of the traditional fine art lecturer into a professionalized multi-faceted academic appears to have put pressure on academic staff teaching fine art. They have had to move beyond the artist / master model in order to understand and implement quality assurance systems, undertake research, recruit students at all levels and generate income. This has been accelerated during the recent period of austerity, and the accompanying crisis narratives that have appeared in the media have heightened the stress. The researchers suggest that whilst the stance of criticality adopted by the fine art academic, who values academic freedom and autonomy is challenged by many of the recent changes in HE, there is evidence in the interviews of an understanding of the shifting context and the need for continued change. The interviews also reveal perceptions of a downgrading of practice as fine art adapts to the research expectations of university status, and the translation of this process as one of downgrading the artist teacher in favour of the academic researcher. However, given that the study targeted experienced staff in order to offer an oversight of perceptions through a period of time, it will be coloured by the age of the respondents. Younger staff who are newer to teaching may see these perceptions as issues in different ways, as they have confidence in newer technological approaches and know no other system than the one they were taught within.

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