

Fostering Psychological Safety in the Creative Arts Environment

Introduction

1. What course or programme are you currently studying at UAL? Please include whether it is UG or PG

Responses: 7

UG BA Fashion Textiles Print
MA Fine Art: Digital PG course
Post Graduate - Masters in Innovation Management
UG LCF womenswear
MA Performance: Society - PG
I already completed studying my BA (hons) Architecture course at Central Saint Martins. Prior to this I completed my Foundation course in Art and Design with a specialism in Spatial Design at Central Saint Martins as well.
PG MA Performance: Society

2. What format is your course?

Responses: 7

Residential	43% (3)
Online	0% (0)
Hybrid (50 - 50 split)	0% (0)
Low-residency	43% (3)
Other	14% (1)

3. Did your course include an induction?

Responses: 7

Yes	43% (3)
No	14% (1)

4. After completing the induction, did you feel as though you were in a position where you felt closer to your peers or your tutor, and therefore more comfortable to share your thoughts or work with them?

Responses: 3

Yes. I think the 'activities week' before the course gave me an insight into what to expect and I could meet some of my peers and talk to tutors. Also, talking to former students during the induction was a good way to understand what to expect and reduce anxiety.

Yes, it is a great opportunity to let us get familiar with how this system work and who are we going to work with. It is also a good chance to see how our peers work.

Yes

5. How did you feel before you started your course? Were the feelings generally more on the positive or negative side?

Responses: 7

The feelings were on the positive side, I was excited to start something new!

Ours is an online course with a low-res so we are familiar and comfortable with online learning. Positive

Positive - hopeful, looking forward to a new start, learning things

It is more on positive side, feeling excited.

I was excited and nervous - on balance more positive

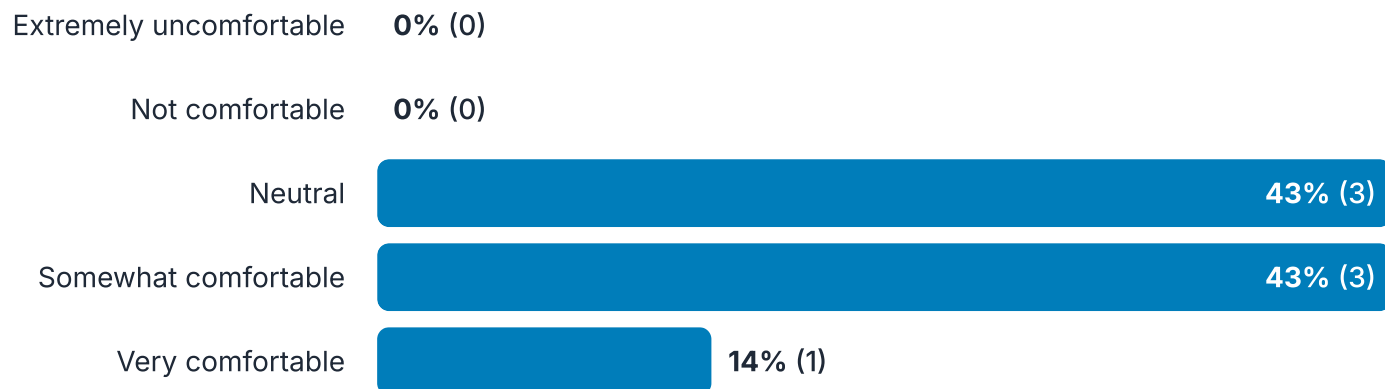
Before starting my course, I experienced a mix of emotions, leaning more towards the negative side. Coming from India, I had never had the opportunity to study arts in a formal setting, which made me feel anxious and uncertain. I initially applied to the foundation course to bridge this gap and explore my interests. After completing the foundation course, I realized that architecture suited me well, and I felt more confident about my portfolio and applying for the BA program. This newfound confidence helped ease some of my anxieties when I joined the BA course. However, being at a world-famous art school without a strong art background was still quite intimidating. Fortunately, I had a few friends from the foundation course who joined the BA program with me, which made the transition smoother and the workload more manageable. Despite this, the experience of being an international student in London at the age of 17 was daunting and overwhelming.

I was very excited and looking forward to it as well as somewhat nervous

6.

Responses: 7

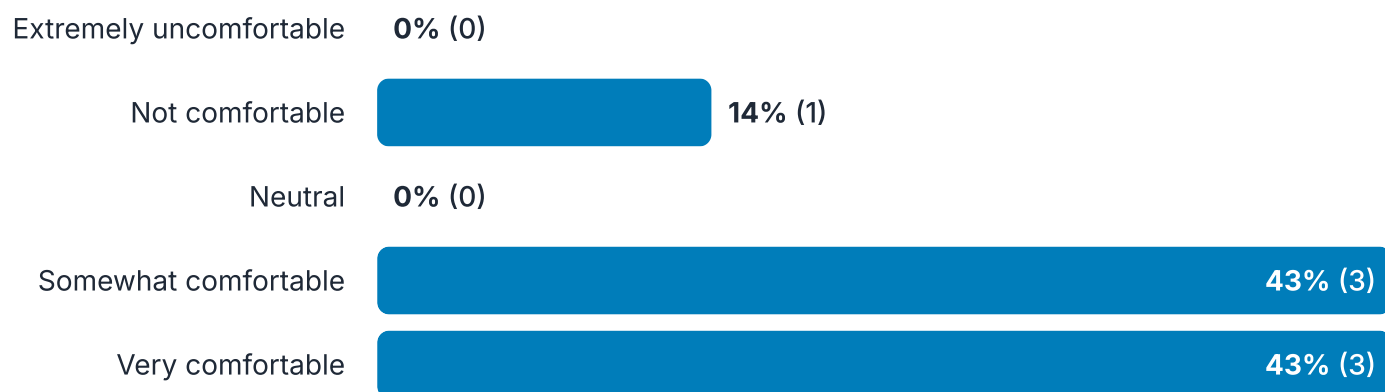
At the beginning of your course, how comfortable did you feel expressing your opinions and ideas? (either in the online learning environment or in the classroom)



7. How comfortable do you now feel in expressing your opinions and ideas? (either in the online learning environment or in the classroom)

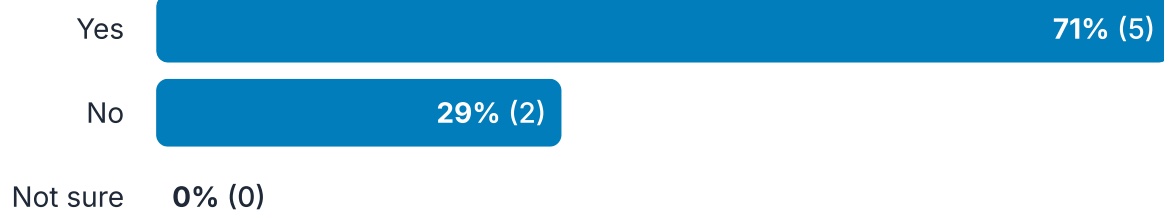
Responses: 7

How comfortable do you now feel in expressing your opinions and ideas? (either in the online learning environment or in the classroom)



8. Have you ever felt hesitant or afraid to contribute to discussions or share your creative work due to concerns about how others might react?

Responses: 7



9. Please explain your response, only if you feel comfortable to do so.

Responses: 7

I felt a bit uncomfortable expressing my views during lectures because I was unsure whether my age or previous work experience influenced my views. This is because I am studying among young people. I also felt uncomfortable sharing my work because of the same reason. Then, gradually, I grew in confidence with the support of amazing teachers and as communication with my peers developed.

It's an MA and we are at CSM I am not sure any of that is for the timid

The dynamic and curation of my course could be better to facilitate discussions. Currently interactions feel one directional, where we have a presenter who brings in a presentation of their choice and shares it with the class with very little time to unpack it's complexity or even time to ask questions. We are usually given on 10 minutes to ask questions after every presentation. Moreover more could be done to have a diverse set of presenters/guest speakers. Most of times the topics and areas of research of guest speakers don't align with the students.

I wouldn't be hesitant or afraid to share my work during the class since I always get positive feedback. However, as an asian student who spent my previous years in my culture background. I feel like it is difficult for my tutors or my classmates to fully understand my ideas or the way I develop my designs. However, I think this is reasonable. It is somehow not intuitively for my to understand the history or arts in western world (especially in terms of the religions, subcultures etc.)

There were times where I felt my perception was really antagonistic to the tutors point of view, it didnt' feel clear that it was OK to say something

Yes, it's often intimidating when you first join a new course, and finding your footing can be challenging. Even when I knew the answers, I sometimes hesitated to express myself or contribute to conversations. Over the course of the year, I made a conscious effort to change this because I realized I was gaining a lot from the discussions I was having. However, it often felt easier to express myself in smaller studio sessions rather than in large history and theory classes in the lecture hall. The larger setting felt more imposing, which added to the pressure of speaking up.

There have been moments in the course where I felt lilke my view or experience was "against" the group and teacher and therefore I no longer felt so safe to share

10. Have you experienced any instances where you felt excluded or marginalised in the (online) classroom?

Responses: 7



11. If yes, how did it impact your learning experience? (Again, please only share if you are comfortable to do so).

Responses: 5

We work things out. By being open and discussing our concerns we can usually sort things out. Humans are fallible and art explores all those areas

A slightly bit? Especially when the examples given during the class are all out of my knowledge on a culture way.

At the start I found it hard when we were asked to do physical (dance-type) activities as I have a lot of pain and discomfort and those kinds of things don't feel ok for me. I felt quite unsure if it was "ok" for me to not participate but maybe that was part of learning?

I didn't exactly feel marginalized, but I did notice a strong emphasis on precedents, history, and art from European and Western countries, with very little attention given to Asian or other global perspectives. I understand that being in London, much of this focus might stem from the tutors' access, exposure, and experience. However, I felt that it would have been enriching to learn about other parts of the world as well, as they have significant contributions to offer in terms of architecture and history. So, it's not that I felt excluded or marginalized, but there were instances where I wished for greater acknowledgment and appreciation of crafts and practices from diverse regions. Including these in the syllabus would provide a more holistic view and appreciation for global architectural and historical contributions.

In the early stages of the course I was feeling quite anxious about participating in some of the activities which were movement based. The teacher was from a dance background and I have arthritis so I just felt uncomfortable, the teacher always tried to make it clear that there wasn't an expectation to do it "right" but at first this was still really difficult and I didn't like taking part in those sessions

12.

Responses: 7

How important do you think it is for the curriculum to explicitly address psychological safety and inclusivity?



13. What strategies or practices do you believe could enhance psychological safety in online courses?

Responses: 7

Meeting face-to-face at least once with a tutor and peers. Warming-up online activities before the course starts to get to know each other. Working in small groups where a tutor could monitor the progress and give feedback.

We talked about kindness on our course, but we all arrive with our own prejudices and many don't even know what that means. Diversity is the key to all learning and the opportunity to encounter each others lived experiences is the foundation of any learning experience. Inductions discussions about race, gender and socio-economic differences would be useful.

I think building psychological safety is a constant practice. In my opinion, what could have made my experience better is - having a conversation about it, before the start of every project and highlighting ways, tools for collaboration, having discussions about conflict resolution methods. As these things are bound to happen, however addressing them up front equips individuals with better means to respond sensitively in the situation. Moreover each course needs to have a staff member who could be approached to talk about collaboration in the team, interaction dynamics, representation and psychological safety.

Encouraging everyone to open the video. For me, it improves the engagement of online discussions. But it wouldn't be mandatory since some students do not prefer to do that especially when there are too many people. In the case of the online lecture, it might be great to split student into 2-4 persons group for discussions.

Maybe some introduction time where we can get to know each other informally . We also could have a process where we do some thinking about positionality and share about values and co-create some principles of working together. If conflicts come up also there needs to be generous amounts of time to give space and get support. It's a matter of taking time. ,

Enhancing psychological safety in online courses involves fostering clear communication, respectful interaction, and active participation. Tutors should use interactive tools, provide diverse content, and offer constructive feedback to build confidence. Promoting peer support and community, being accessible and empathetic, and incorporating anonymous feedback and mental health resources are also essential - I think the architecture course is incredibly demanding and its helpful to maybe have students from the year above for advise, maybe some insight into the industry from masters students at CSM and definitely more access to metal health resources or more regular drop ins with tutors. crits in an architecture school context can also be incredibly stressful and intimidating as a process so making this more about constructive feedback and being encouraging can make it a lot more enjoyable and better for students mental health.

I think we need time to get to know each other in the course a little more especially at the begining, maybe one to one or small groups/ breakout rooms. And I guess some explicit talking about the values of inclusion and expectations for the group

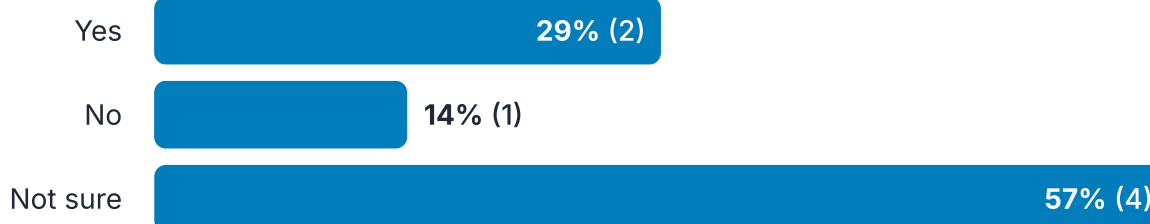
14. Do you think it would have been useful to have had an induction activity that focussed on psychological safety in the context of creative arts?

Responses: 7



15. Do you think that does anonymity or pseudonymity in specifically online interactions would affect your willingness to take part in learning activities and share your thoughts or creative work?

Responses: 7



16. Anonymity or pseudonymity in online interactions would affect my willingness to take part in learning activities and share my thoughts or creative work because...

Responses: 2

It would be great to have this options to choose if you want to share this comment anonymously. But sometimes there could be some people sharing disrespectful comments when they are anonymous.

I would feel more free to say when I was at odds with the teacher /group, however I tend to feel unsure if they are "really" anonymous and still dont always feel safe that way

17. What do you think are the specific challenges or barriers that certain groups of students face regarding psychological safety in online learning? Please explain your answer giving as much detail as you can, drawing on your lived experience if you feel comfortable to do so.

Responses: 7

Sharing an opinion or your work and not receiving feedback on it. Not being able to connect with peers alongside the course where they can discuss challenges they face. Not being able to ask questions to peers and teachers about the work and clarify any doubts. Being given a submission date without a clear explanation or videos on how to submit your work.

I've experienced to myself and others some spectacular prejudice, but we are an international course with a diverse age group and massively different socio-economic circumstances. I am disabled and I am non-binary and both those have been challenged online and in person. I completely accept that we come with very different cultural backgrounds so I take a deep breath and try to defend my position. Misgendering and ablism is an everyday experience for me in real life so that's a shame it has to be here too, but of course it does. However, here I do get an opportunity to challenge it more fully.

It's difficult to connect and gauge one's interest online. I find it difficult to understand one's interest in something I am speaking about, mainly because one can't visibly read body language cues. Maybe the session could encourage use of emojis to channelise more expression and interest. Camera off situations also make it difficult for me to engage in conversations, as it makes me feel as the other person is not entirely present. However, I am comfortable and prefer camera off sessions in times when I am more familiar with the person and know that I need to give them their space. It really helps when to have the first interaction or few interactions in a camera on setting.

Accessibility in general I would say. It includes physical accessibility (unstable network/ unadaptive devices) and mental accessibility (low engagement/language barrier/ culture barrier).

Its harder to form subtle connections between students when online, and the space tends to be dominated by the tutor and the more confident voices. We dont get a chance to chat to each other and build our support network. We dont know much about each other or our backgrounds, belifes and values so we might be fearful of what is safe to talk about and what isn't. It is also harder to guage how others are feeling. Some of my cohort follow very high standards of politeness, and may be uncomfortable with too much directness, while others may be accustomed to be very direct and open and won't necessarily be able to guage anything about how others are impacted by a conversation. I also noticed that there was some course content that mentioned racism and anti-racism and in my view this was somewhat tokenised and not treated with the space and attention that is needed around this subject. With a very mixed cohort of very diverse cultures and backgrounds and identities, there were ways in which trauma was "stumbled into" and assumptions about the values or experiences in the group were not thought through. One fellow student disclosed a traumatic event in a breakout room with fellow students that related to the topics being discussed, and while I felt confident to be supportive and "safe" around this it might have been very challenging and become unsafe, this is an example where I dont know how everyone there felt and it seems that whole situation need not have arisen if the lead up in the teaching had been slower and more trauma aware. I would also though say that through the course I felt more safe online as I have options to move away, switch off video, take more time, am less overstimulated by say, a commute or being in the canteen etc. I actually had much more negative experiences in terms of safety, in the in person events. To the point where I couldn't attend much of the program. (I'm neurodivergent). The start of the course could have been slower and a lot more time given for students to get to know each other. And I think a clear session on trauma awreness, support available, a chat about how people want to be supported. And a clear invitation from tutors to share when something is wrong and that y ou won't be penalised or excluded if you have a critique. Channels for sharing problems. and I think tutors themselves will need support and supervision too, as they are put in a position where "stuff comes up" but they are exposed beacuse they dont necessarily have the skills and the groundwork hasn't been done to make sure the group is consciously working on co-creating a safe culture. Another incident was one where a guest artist brought a workshop prompt activity that I found difficult because I felt it might be mocking or making fun of a deeply held belief system (ie it was trivialising a spiritual practice). I felt that I was perceived as being strange and oppositional rather than being given a space to share and be understood. I think this was a cultural clash bbeacuse I prioritise some kinds of beliefs over intellectual hunger - I

appreciate the desire to make everything available for critique, but this was handled, simply put, with disrespect, or at least it wasn't clear that it was being done respectfully and I wasn't reassured on this - rather I was challenged for my "strange" reaction.

Online learning, different students face unique challenges that can make them feel unsafe or excluded. Some might struggle with tech issues if they don't have reliable internet or devices, making participation stressful. Students with disabilities might have trouble if the online tools aren't accessible. Shy or introverted students might find it hard to speak up in virtual classes, while those from diverse cultural backgrounds or who aren't fluent in the course language might feel out of place. Plus, personal issues like mental health struggles or financial problems can make students feel unsupported. From my own experience, tech problems can be a huge barrier, making it hard to feel part of the class.

There are so many dimensions I would want to think about here - Racism has come up in our sessions sometimes, not very openly or extreme but it was treated a little bit more as a trending topic and not given the attention it needed especially considering the very multi-racial and multi-national nature of our cohorts where there are many complexities. For example we looked at a Black performance artist who made work in an American context about race, and it was mentioned that we could read Resmaa Menakem's work, (My Grandmother's Hands) which is a practice-oriented book but was mentioned as a regular reading matter. There were no assumptions explored about the groups understanding of anti-racism discourse and with a range of racialised people in the group it came up in a breakout room that a woman had a fear of Black men due to an assault she had experienced, there were only students in that meeting and it was fine, I guess that suggests there was some psychological safety, but it felt as though a lot of traumatic content was being talked about and presented in quite a fast, intellectual way. That breakout room could have been really difficult. There was also an event in person that was very unsafe psychologically but that's outside the scope. In many ways online does make it safer. There was one other time when I felt unsafe and again it was to do with a guest lecturer who brought some serious matters in a way that seemed flippant or trivialising. And I didn't share those views that the topic was to be played with, so it brought a small crisis in my engagement with the course.

18. In your opinion, what role do course tutors and designers play in promoting psychological safety and inclusivity in online education?

Responses: 7

Course tutors: send regular emails with clear instructions and videos on where to find course materials. Presentations and workshops from other tutors such as language support, IT support, designers and former students could help ease the tension. Sometimes, if the same thing is explained several times from a different perspective, you start to understand it more clearly. This is because, sometimes a tutor who has taught the course several times can explain the material very quickly just by going through the slides. However, students hear it for the first time and it can be overwhelming for them to take it all in and to understand what is required of them. So, sending videos and recordings and presentations to cater for students with different abilities can help maintain psychological safety,

Our tutor is excellent and really does try to get everyone to embody the course principle of kindness. The breakout rooms, in-person conversations, or our conversations on social media platforms are where the harms live because that's where we all let our guard down and become our true selves. Ableism is sadly institutionalised. Lifts, disabled toilets, access, comfortable seating, and the non-availability of disability assistants all contribute to a difficult experience for physically disabled students.

Course tutors and designers play a vital role. Hence it needs to be established in the induction and at regular intervals throughout the course.

Course tutors need to truly care about what the students are doing. They need to be able to put themselves in other people's shoes. This does not mean that they cannot be strict with students. On the contrary, as a student, I would rather meet a strict teacher so that I can learn more. Designers need to take inclusivity and accessibility into consideration while doing the products.

For me this should be moving towards being a core competency of all tutors and designers. We don't live in a safe world and while we can't ever guarantee safety I have seen that the culture of the academy is such that the emphasis is on achievement, intellectual hunger, academic and intellectualisation of issues, and this sometimes or often, overrides the emotional and psychological needs in a group. It is a matter of luck whether a tutor is more or less focused on these things. If we are going to be studying trauma-linked topics like racism, care, consent, misogyny, politics, society, violence, disability etc, we need to know it's being held with awareness and skill around knowing that we don't know anyone's experiences and how they might be experiencing the content and the group. Tutors can have a really negative impact if they are not fully aware and trained in good quality practice. So they have a very significant role, also because they hold a lot of power in the college situation where they have the possibility to pass or fail a student or make a space feel good or not at different times and for different people.

Course tutors and designers play a big role in making online education feel safe and inclusive. They help by setting up breakout spaces where students can chat in smaller groups, making it easier to share ideas. Regular chat sessions also help build a sense of community, letting students connect with tutors and peers. It's important for tutors to let students know about the resources available to them, like counseling and academic support, so they know there's help if they need it. Being genuinely present and responsive shows students that their tutors care and are there for them, making it easier for students to open up about what's going on in their lives.

Tutors need to demonstrate their understanding, frame our meetings and build trust through practice. Designers can consider language, layouts, and test - test - test. It amazes me how many online platforms (not necessarily university) have so many little errors and glitches, as though someone has never actually tested it. Instant feedback akin to the "Chat now" widgets some websites have, would be a good way to capture those little glitches. Generally I think the uni has made quite good systems, although they do seem overcomplicated especially at the start of the course.

Thank you very much

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your valuable insights will contribute to our understanding of psychological safety and inclusivity in online learning environments. Your responses are anonymous and will be used solely for research purposes. Your participation is greatly appreciated! Please do remember to submit your hours on Arts Temps once you have completed the questionnaire.