



'How can HEIs attract greater numbers of
mature learners?

An approach from
Leeds Arts University

Dr. Samantha Broadhead and Martell Baines

Head of Research and Progression Manager

Twitter: @Samheadart @MartellBaines

- Specialises in creative subjects such as art, design, film, music and creative writing.
- Approximately 2500 students, mostly made up of undergraduates and a small cohort of 70 postgraduate students.
- A second campus provides Further Education courses in art and design, including Access to HE validated by CERTA.

- The predominant student population in the Arts is young, white and female.
- There are 24% mature students in the University's overall student population (FE+UG+PG) (2018/19).
- Proportion of Mature U/G entrants 2018/19 was 6%, (21 years plus)
- Undergraduate Continuation (89.4 %) is slightly lower in HE for mature students compared to younger age groups (92.8%) (2018/19)
- Attainment of a good degree classification (1st/2.1) is 83% mature and 76% younger students. (2018/19)

Why do mature students want to study Art, Craft and Design HE later in life?

(Broadhead and Gregson 2018; Broadhead 2017, Broadhead 2019)

- Growing frustration and regret at not following aspiration to work in the arts.
- Dissatisfaction with chosen career path and a desire to be creative.
- Being strategic in gaining creative knowledge and skills.
- Role models for family.
- Gaining a portfolio of different skills, qualifications, examples of informal and formal learning at different levels.
- Give something back to their communities, through the skills they learn.
- Want to be part of a community of practice (liked-minded people)



Some challenges to recruiting mature students to art and design in higher education? (1)

From an institutional perspective:

- Diminishing numbers of mature students in higher education.
- Lack of part-time opportunities to study art, craft and design in post-compulsory education.
- Informal progression routes diminishing
e.g. adult education classes, gallery education.
- Formal progression routes diminishing,
(where do adults study art and design A levels?).
- Marketing department target traditional age students.



Some challenges to recruiting mature students to art and design in higher education? (2)

From a mature learners' perspective:

- Family expectations
- Perceived precariousness of creative careers.
- Unable to imagine possible future self as artist, designer or craftsperson.
- Lack of 'a clear line of sight' to higher education or creative career.
- Lack of good quality careers advice for adults in relation to creative arts.



Alumni supporting recruitment

A Case study of the Art School Ilkley

Mature students leading collectives, exhibiting groups, services for local communities. Giving back to the local arts communities.

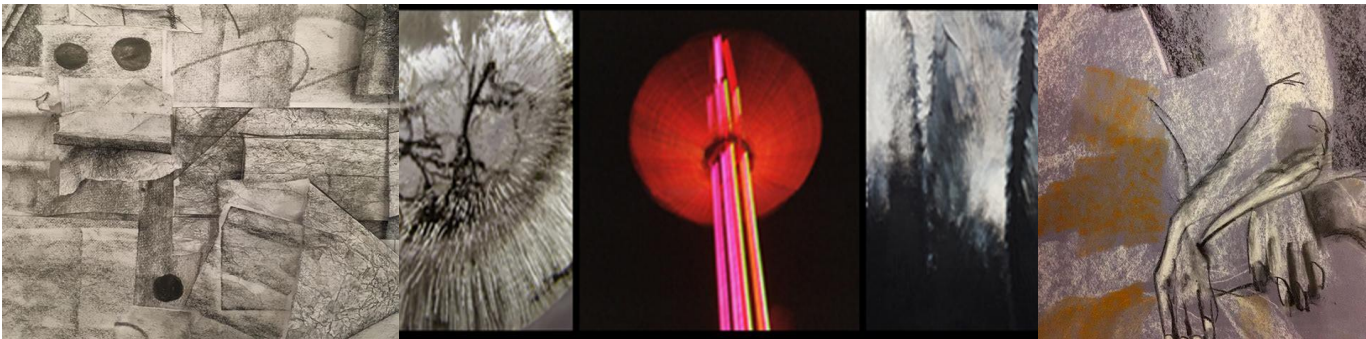
Art School/Ilkley runs unaccredited courses for people of all ages.

Creatives who were mature students run workshops in creative skills.

Participants who are interested are supported in developing portfolios for application to the University's Access course.

Testimony from Art School/Ilkley:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mKXPeiBSigE>



Invisibility of mature students

Marginalisation of mature students in policy debates about art and design education.

Prioritising of other social groups in the Access and Participation Plan.

Little motivation for institution to increase their mature students.

Decline of adult and continuing education departments in universities.

Call for ethical timetabling that takes into account the lives and responsibilities of mature students.



Multilayered approach to recruitment

Developing a network of creatives through gallery openings and 'Creative Networks' events.

Access to Higher Education in Art and Design course provision (Level 3).

Developing clear and straightforward Recognition of Prior Experiential learning (RPEL).

Cross-institutional strategies to support the students' life cycle.

The mature student's network - drawing upon alumni to encourage recruitment.



Taking a multi-layered approach

Summer schools aimed at potential mature students.

Supporting internal progression.

Working with mature students in research projects, outreach work, widening participation work.

Continuing relationships with mature students after they leave University, encouraging them to exhibit so that they become visible role models.

Encouraging potential students to recognise their own prior learning.

Running 'Mature students Matter' in art, craft and design events.



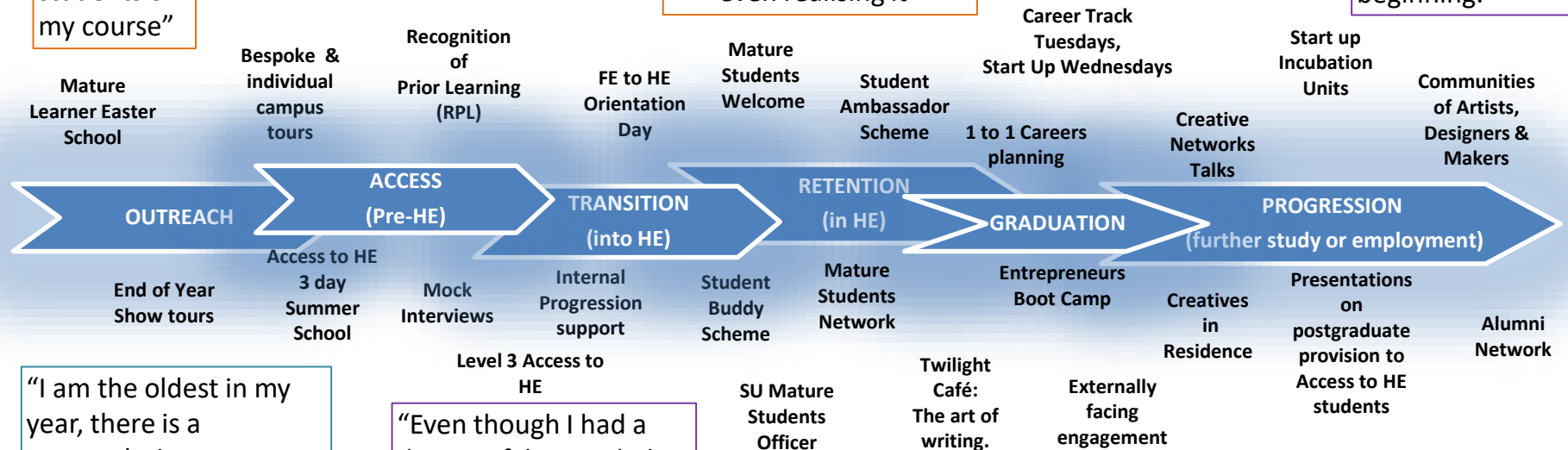
"I was very happy to find out there were 10 mature students on my course"

"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 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"

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

"The whole bit at the end is as important as the bit at the beginning."



"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."

"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."

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

"The University spends a lot of time on their Alumni.

I get emails on creative opportunities, calls for artists, workshops."



Thank You

Dr. Samantha Broadhead SFHEA
Head of Research
Sam.Broadhead@Leeds-art.ac.uk
[@Samheadart](https://twitter.com/Samheadart)

Martell Baines FHEA
Progression Manager
Martell.baines@leeds-art.ac.uk
[@MartellBaines](https://twitter.com/MartellBaines)