ONLINE EDUCATION: TEACHING IN A TIME OF CHANGE

• Paper / Proposal Title:
Taking the art school online

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• Abstract (300 words):
As a small specialist institution Norwich University of the Arts was able to respond quickly and flexibly to the UK lockdown. However the inherent nature of our courses caused many challenges. Art and design courses deal with materials, physical processes and practical skills and are often delivered in specialist workshops with industry-standard equipment.

All undergraduate courses at NUA cover three broad areas: Creative Practice, Research & Communication, Careers & Employability. These are taught holistically through projects which are either live briefs, or modeled on the kinds of practices found in each industry. The closure of our studios and workshops, along with galleries and other spaces in our community, presented obvious problems.

The timing of the national lockdown was in many ways fortuitous. We were just a few weeks away from the point when our studios are normally emptied to accommodate degree shows. Over the Summer a small working group made some key decisions about the 20-21 year. Lectures, tutorials and group sessions would all happen online. Timetables were rewritten to put smaller groups into larger rooms, and every student
would receive one day a week on campus. Engagement and a sense of belonging were important, but also the key need to work hands-on with materials.

Active and experiential learning is key to our programmes, so staff received training in using digital delivery in a more active way. Sharing screens enabled group crits of work in progress, and 3D virtual galleries created a sense of place. Staff also used synchronous sessions to set tasks that were completed live, and shared immediately. Students worked together, in their own spaces, with everyday materials like clothes, magazines or wire.

In combination with regular weekly workshops and projects on campus, this hybrid delivery seems to have worked and engagement is good – in some cases better.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Dr Mark Wilsher is Educational Development Coordinator at Norwich University of the Arts and Director of the East Anglian Fine Art Study Centre. His background is in Fine Art and he has exhibited artwork at institutions including the Henry Moore Foundation and the ICA in London. He recently co-curated the exhibition Artist Boss at the New Art Centre, Salisbury featuring Sir Anthony Caro. He writes regularly for Art Monthly magazine, recently presented a conference paper on research methodologies in fine art (University of Manchester) and published on practice-only PhDs in the Journal of Writing in Creative Practice.