Crits and Inclusive Learning at UAL

An Arts SU discussion paper

Table of Contents

Foreword

"Crits are seen as a 'rite of passage' in art schools in many ways. They appear to have been around as long as art schools have existed, and they have the potential to create really exciting atmospheres for great discussions.

Feedback from your peers during a creative degree can offer perspectives and conversations that become pivotal to the development of your work. This interaction with each other can allow for valuable practice for post-degree life in the arts when our tutors and course leaders aren't around, and we rely on our fellow creators for advice. It is also these direct feedback discussions that so obviously separate the arts from more academic subjects during university studies.

However, these discussions are only truly valuable in some cases, and often have the potential to be damaging for the artist and their work. In knowing how alienating and harmful crits are for many of our students, it begs the question as to whether crits as a 'rite of passage' are doing more harm than good in the way they are currently delivered.

Crits can take on different forms, depending who is leading them. With this openness comes opportunity for both good and bad: there is potential that this open feedback format will be beneficial, or that people will be subject to conversations around their work that that can become harmful. With being so open, and without any true guidance in our degrees on how to participate in a crit, everyone is left guessing on how to critique in the beginning. We as the artists can try to pinpoint areas for discussion, or steer towards or away from particular subjects, but in a group setting that can be easier said than done.

Crits have a lot of potential for harmful and potentially dangerous comments to be made about an artist's work, and without proper training on how these groups should meet and talk, we can be subjecting artists to an environment that could be attacking elements of their identity. Groups of people and individuals will often, if not always, have biases in some way. Without proper guidance these biases can determine the critiques, and create a toxic environment that does not contribute to their own learning.

Instead an artist learns that they would rather not participate in this group again.

Crits with proper training (for both teachers and students) have the potential to be a constructive space that reduces the risk of harm. It would be naïve to think that crits can continue as they are whilst knowingly hurting our students. Our students deserve safe spaces where they can trust that a guided discussion will occur, and they can participate by choice without fear. We want our students to feel comfortable, as well as being able to form trusting working relationships with their peers. ***This cannot be done without reforming how crits take place at our university.***

This paper shall consider some of the existing academic and practitioner-led literature around crits, articulating some of the problems with crits that others have identified. It shall also share the testimonies of students at UAL that Arts SU have collected, to illustrate the lived experiences of marginalised students who have encountered crits. Finally, it shall set out a list of recommendations, with the aim to start a conversation in UAL about crits.

We hope that this paper encourages the university to rethink its approach to crits, and examine their purpose and impact. Once we establish a common goal for crits, we can identify how we want them to operate, and measure the impact of them on students' learning."

Georgia Spencer – Arts SU Welfare Officer 2021/22

Rachel Williams – Arts SU Education Officer 2021/22

Cover artwork

Arts Students' Union commissioned a current UAL student to produce artwork inspired by the theme of crits to illustrate the cover of this research report.

The commissioned artist is Tasia Graham, currently studying on the BA (Hons) Illustration and Visual Media course at London College of Communication.

The purpose of commissioning this work is not only aesthetic, but to complement the findings of the research by providing a first-hand visual account of how students at UAL are experiencing crits at this time.

Case study – Eleanor's story

This case study has been provided by Eleanor Louise West (Arts SU Activities Officer 2020/21) describing her experience of crits as a student at UAL.

"If you have ever encountered art school, you have heard of crits. 'Crits,' the shortened version of critiques, are famed for being difficult, intimidating, gruelling, and "character-building" by some. And yet crits are universally recognised as an integral part of becoming a successful artist.

Crits at University of the Arts London (UAL) come in many variations, and differ across disciplines of study in the colleges including fashion, design, photography, and fine arts. Crits range from one-to-one tutorials, intimate groups, and whole class or year presentations.

Crits serve a valid purpose of sharing work and gaining reactions from others on what you've created. The end goal for much art is to be exhibited publicly, and so having fresh eyes on work before it is displayed to the world at large is invaluable. In critiques that I have experienced, students play two roles: the role of the presenter who offers their work for review, and the role of the critic to feedback on to offered work. The facilitator (who is most often a tutor) helps to guide the conversation around the work and to offer feedback on the work too.

The experience of feeding back and offering work for critique has overall been a really rewarding experience for my development as an artist. I enjoyed the opportunity to talk about my peers' work and learned from others who were grappling with subjects completely removed from the themes I was working with and aided in contextualising my practice in comparison to theirs. The skill of responding to artwork is as valuable (if not more valuable) than the skill of creating art itself; no art or design exists in a vacuum after all. Being able to share my research with others has meant in turn that they share their research with me, creating a healthy knowledge exchange between students.

Learning from our peers should be valued as much as learning from our lecturers. However, as a marginalised student, I often found that critiques would start to deviate from responding to my work, its purpose and focus. Instead, the conversations moved into interrogating my identity as a queer woman.

Conversations that were meant to be around developing my body of work instead spanned topics such as how lesbians have sex, and whether identification with queer identity was 'superficial'. I also experienced a requirement to share my trauma with the class, to prove that homophobia was still a real threat to my community. Many marginalised students who are underrepresented in their courses are made to be ambassadors for their communities, and for as long as I was a queer student in those spaces, it was down to me to become their point of reference for the entire LGBTQIA+ community.

Many of these conversations were not only facilitated by the tutor in the group but encouraged and led by them. My relationships with crits changed; rather than crits existing as a place to share work-in-progress and gain constructive feedback, I often felt anxious and ready to defend myself against ignorance and intrusive questions about my identity (often things that were completely removed from my work). I believe that no student should come out of a crit feeling angry, demoralised, upset, or humiliated. Instead, students should feel challenged, inspired, and motivated to create work.

As a queer person, I can only speak from my experience, but I know that my experience is not an isolated case, with many marginalised students being forced into positions of being ambassadors for their communities to educate those with privilege. How much longer will marginalised students be used as tools in others' learning, rather than being treated as experts in their area of study?

My advice for institutions is to invest more in training for all staff who would be expected to facilitate critiques, including hourly paid staff, to help them understand the barriers that marginalised students face in higher education and how to facilitate conversations that are a safe environment for exploration, without exploitation or fetishisation of marginalised experience.

We should be interrogating the power structures created in critiques too: it's about time for a shake-up in our institution. The role of the lecturer in most contexts is to be the expert, the most knowledgeable and qualified in the room. However, throughout our studies, we as students grow. Our expertise within our studies should be respected as valuable knowledge, especially when it relates to a students' own identity. It would be unfair to expect a tutor or lecturer to have extensive knowledge in every sub-field of their subject area, so why do the structures of these open forum crits favour the agency of only our tutors? There should be more value placed on making critiques a non-hierarchal environment

*that all involved can contribute to regardless of their knowledge, **as long as the
conversation is respectful and constructive**.*

*During my time at university, I was involved in Arts SU's LGBTQIA+ Society. As
part of this work, I found many others who had this shared experience of crits. As
a result of our experiences, we created 'Queer Crits', where LGBTQIA+ students
of any course level or specialism could bring share their work for feedback. These
were successful in dismantling the power structures of crits and have provided a
safe space for experimentation and exploration."*

Literature Review

This section of the report shall consider some of the existing academic and practitioner-led literature about crits, including some of the main problems with crits that have been identified, and explore the contemporary debates within art schools about the role crits play in art education.

What is a crit and what it is for?

Academics and education theorists have recognised that, despite crits being a long-established teaching method of art education, there exists a paucity of academic research examining them and their efficacy. This has led to an insufficient production of knowledge about what a 'good crit' should look like, how crits should be conducted, and how to make them more inclusive for students from minority or marginalised backgrounds. Indeed, Blair writes, "with the exception of architecture, there has, within design disciplines, been minimal research into the role and function of the crit in student learning."[1]

Crits therefore have thrived in art schools through a combination of 'always having been done' and as a word-of-mouth inheritance of them as a teaching method, without a great deal of academic scrutiny as to their role, and without cataloguing best practice. Brown argues that the perception of crits as 'character forming' has led to their continued centrality in art pedagogy: "surviving this ordeal [the crit] is seen as a rite of passage, something to aspire to, even though no systematic evidence demonstrates that this atmosphere is necessary for the training of professionals."[2]

Sara and Parnell find that "the crit commonly appears to be trying to be all things to all people, rarely being particularly successful in any one aspect of learning. … its recognised potential to support constructive, dialogic approaches to learning does not appear to be realised often enough."

---

[1] Blair, Bernadette (2006) Perception, Interpretation, Impact - An examination of the learning value of formative feedback to students through the design studio critique
[2] Brown, R. (2004) The Social Environment of Learning. Enhancing Curricula: Towards the Scholarship of Teaching in Art, Design and Communication in Higher Education

As such, they suggest that art schools and design institutions implement "a clearer set of processes in setting up the crit, including: submitting work in advance to avoid over-tired students; briefing both students and tutors as to the purpose of the crit and the nature of good, constructive feedback; structuring sessions to allow students to prepare their presentations; introducing ways of recording the feedback during the crit; and keeping the process to time."[3]

Further to this, Smith argues that transparency as to the purpose of crits with students would be a positive development in codifying best practice, and making expectations clear as to why this method of education is being adopted. In their research into student perceptions of crits, Smith argues "[a]lthough not a panacea, a transparent approach with explicit requirements and assessment criteria contextualised through examples of a range of previous work can only lessen the current disparity of expectations and improve understanding of how tutors use crits to evaluate work."[4]

Day, in his research aimed explicitly at making the experience of crits for students feel less hostile, seconds this suggestion, asserting "feedback can be improved by explaining the crit, timing the crit, exploring the student role and voice, as well as by providing clear guidelines relating to the role of subjective feedback and how that feedback relates to the grade awarded."[5]

Boundaries and consent in crits

The lack of clarity surrounding what a 'good crit' is, and what it aims to achieve, leads to a further issue: a lack of defined boundaries and parameters within which crits should take place.

In Barrett's research[6] exploring both student and tutor perceptions of crits, respondents recounted examples of the 'worst' crits they have experienced. Several of the testimonies of student participants describe their 'worst' crits as those where the teacher has crossed a boundary, often a physical boundary, making them feel uncomfortable.

---

[3] Sara, Rachel and Parnell, Rosie (2013) Fear and Learning In The Architectural Crit
[4] Smith, Charlie (2015) Understanding Students' Views of the Crit Assessment
[5] Day, Peter (2013) The Art Group Crit: How do you make a Firing Squad less scary?
[6] Barrett, Terry (2010) Studio Critiques of Student Art: As They Are, As They Should Be With Mentoring

Barrett quotes student respondents as citing a time when a tutor "sat in my chair, erased my entire drawing, and redrew it to her liking and told me that is how to draw a still life". Other examples included "ceramics instructors breaking pots they did not want to critique or fire, drawing instructors who marked black Xs on students' drawings, a painting instructor who painted orange Xs on a student's canvas to mark deficiencies, and another who threw a student's painting out an upper floor window saying it would look better if it were flying."

By setting up defined boundaries (for example, collectively setting boundaries at the start of the crit requiring consent before physically changing any artworks), both the tutor and the student will be clear on what can and cannot take place during the crit, minimising the potential for examples such as those cited by Barrett from taking place. This also creates an environment which is collectively owned, with students and tutors equally responsible for upholding the rules of the space, and able to challenge those who step beyond those boundaries.

'The firing squad': the learning environment of crits

In addition to physical boundaries, respecting emotional boundaries is key to ensuring crits are a successful method of teaching, as well as establishing that they are inclusive to all students.

Day's research[7] into crits found that many students perceive the experience of participating in a crit as metaphorically akin to going before 'a firing squad'. Day identified that some students in art schools experience "a fundamentally emotional and fear-focused perception of the Group Crit, one opposed to its supportive and bespoke dynamic intentions".

In the most extreme example of where crits 'go wrong', students can experience a learning environment that they perceive as openly hostile. Newall describes a series of crits that are uploaded to YouTube by SUNY's (State University of New York) art programme: "Comparing a student's work to that of a professional artist, one of the teachers says: 'I guess I'm saying she's good and you're bad'. Another student, who has made a drawing from a photographic source is told: 'that photograph, forgive me, is a lot more interesting than this drawing; the

---

[7] Day, Peter (2013) The Art Group Crit. How do you make a Firing Squad Less Scary?

drawing is really boring'. And another student is told: 'I think it [your work]'s really, really stupid.'"[8]

Although these may appear extreme examples, crossing emotional boundaries can be common in crits, and as a result produces a poor environment for effective learning. In contrast to hostility fostering a desire for self-improvement, Danvers states that "creativity, a critical aspect in all learning but especially in design, thrives in an environment where the individual feels psychologically and physically comfortable, in an atmosphere of trust, security and openness".[9]

Throughout the literature cited in this review, almost all refer to the widespread anxiety that students feel in the lead-up to, during, and after, a crit. While the impacts of this anxiety differ from student to student, it largely derives from pressure to impress one's peers and academic superiors, and a desire to affirm their own self-worth and esteem.

For some students, this anxiety can render crits entirely unhelpful to them. Blair finds that "because for the major part of their presentation many of the interviewed students are in a heightened state of anxiety, their learning must be impaired. They do not hear or remember what they have said or what has been said to them about their work, or even the comments made about other students' work."[10]

Feedback from students at the University of Wolverhampton given to Day in his research emphasised the provision of feedback through alternative forums to crits: "They express a preference for an alternative format, although what that alternative is, is not clear, but defined by a dislike of the Crit model."

Day highlights the "lack of ownership and credibility" of feedback as central to students' learning, yet absent in students' perceptions of the crit. As such, he suggests that the provision of "greater contact and individualised support; smaller groups (seminar model); more peer-to-peer feedback opportunities and more one-to-one tutorials" could be explored when seeking to resolve the issues of the crit.

---

[8] Newall, Michael (2018) Crits, consensus, and criticality
[9] *Danvers, J. (2003) Towards a Radical Pedagogy: Provisional Notes on Learning and Teaching in Art and Design*
[10] Blair, Bernadette (2006) Perception, Interpretation, Impact - An examination of the learning value of formative feedback to students through the design studio critique

These alternative forums for providing feedback may carry less pressure to impress, and subsequently come without the negative side-effects of a 'firing squad'-esque crit.

Personal nature of artwork

The personal subjective nature of art, as well the perception of being judged rather than being provided with constructive feedback, can heighten the negative experience of the crit process that some students experience.

The need to clearly define what should take place during a crit and to create boundaries against what should not occur during a crit would help to reduce negative experiences students have of sharing personal artwork that is derided or misunderstood. Day's research emphasises that the notion of respect, and specifically of respecting the artwork that is being critiqued on its own terms, is central to ensuring the emotional well-being of the crit's participants. Day describes how the experience of having "intimate, personal and emotionally charged pieces of work" described as "derivative, misconceived, poorly presented, 'crap', a pastiche – or quite simply misunderstood" can severely inhibit a student's learning, contrary to the aims of the crit.

The nature of art education, as driven by academic results as much as subjective taste, further problematises how crits operate within the art school. The desire to obtain certain academic results may sometimes be at odds with what one views as integral or beneficial to one's art and journey as a practitioner. This can drive a negative response due to:

> 1) the power imbalance between the teacher (who is responsible for setting grades) and the student (who may feel pressure to receive a specific grade)

> 2) the commodification of education, specifically, art education.

One student surveyed by Day said they had "changed one or two things after attending a crit – even if it's something I have not liked. To get a decent grade."

Training educators and students on how to provide productive feedback is necessary to avoid negative crit experiences, and to improve the efficacy of the process. Education and understanding are especially important in the context of artworks with personal meaning for students from marginalised backgrounds,

whose experiences may differ largely from their peers and superiors, as well as the white Western canon.

The impact of culture and background on students' experiences of crits

Cultural differences between students and staff may be difficult to bridge, given the diversity of UAL's student and staff bodies. However, it is key to consider their impact on how students experience crits as a learning opportunity, and how they perceive the efficacy of crits for that learning. In Blair's research, she cited the example of "[o]ne European student [who] was critical of the 'Englishness' of the feedback given at crits to students. 'They said 'oh it's great work and I thought no, that work is really rubbish and it is not good at all … the British are really polite so instead of saying it's rubbish they try and say it in a really nice way. To me it is straightforward - if it's bad it's bad''. This example suggests that students want feedback that is constructive, relevant to the art they have submitted for critique, and honest.

Little research has been done on how the design of the crit accommodates those from marginalised backgrounds. Given design biases in other learning programmes and institutional exclusion of those from marginalised backgrounds, it is imperative to consider how existing practices such as crits may fail to consider those from marginalised backgrounds.

Sara and Parnell suggest that the crit is an event that can put off female and/or black and minority ethnic students continuing their studies: "the current model is contributing to a potentially damaging negative experience that has no perceived learning potential."

Lee, in a symposium on the nature of critique in contemporary art discourse, goes further, arguing that crits in fact reinforce and reproduce harmful hierarchies of knowledge and power: "considering how foundational crits are to art schools, they have been under-considered as an important pedagogical tool for the reproduction of contemporary art discourse. In fact, the typical crit goes against all tenets of progressive education in privileging 'expert voices' and disciplining

obedient artists in a neutralised white-cube space that prefigures the commercial gallery context."[11]

She asserts that crits in art schools are "prone to unregulated wildflower commentary that is either explicitly or implicitly racist, sexist, or Western-centric, precisely in the name of critique". She comments "critique is given a 'free pass' where some epistemological or evaluative frameworks go unmarked, whereas, others are marked exhaustively."

During the anti-racism strategy consultation panel that the SU conducted in 2020, several UAL students from ethnic minority backgrounds highlighted how crits specifically had negative implications for them, due to factors such as ignorant comments made by those providing feedback, the exploitation of the student's perceived 'exoticness' by those providing feedback (for example, trying to tell the student that their artwork was tied to their background, even if the student had explicitly said it was not), and the unwillingness of more privileged students (particularly wealthy, white, cis-gendered, heterosexual men) to engage with the lived experience of marginalised groups, and how systems of power have excluded those groups.

There do however exist some examples of where in UAL members of staff have been critical to challenging this experience of crits for students from marginalised backgrounds. Bernstein describes how he actively challenged the possibly unconscious queerphobic critiques that took place in a crit: "Students were invited to comment on each other's presentations. The only presentation in which the research methods of the presenter were critiqued was the presentation about LGBT experiences and attitudes to LGBT in London. I pointed out to the group that they had not considered it appropriate or worthwhile to critique anybody else's methods and to consider why that might be."[12]

---

[11] Lee, Billie (2017) Art School in a Moment of Danger: Art, Pedagogy, and Otherness

[12] Bernstein, Daniel Simon (2018) The Room Of Silence

Testimonies from UAL students and graduates

Arts SU invited current students and graduates to submit their experiences of crits at UAL. These testimonies are not intended to reflect the entire student opinion of crits, however they illustrate the kinds of experiences students have had of this teaching method. These testimonies were collected anonymously via an electronic survey.

> "I enjoy crits but they are exhausting and get in the way of my disability. I feel that I always get more insight on one-to-one tutorials than crits. Maybe we could have more opportunities to exhibit instead?"
>
> - Current student, Fine Art, Central Saint Martins

> "Crits for me were both positive and negative for different reasons. Crits were positive in the sense that they were necessary and formative for my works development. Having a critical eye to my work is beneficial, as oftentimes I could be stuck in a rut of repetitiveness near my artwork, which could mean it was somewhat hard to understand the outwards perspectives on what I make.
>
> However, I make work about my identity as a queer, trans individual so having the perspective from people outside of my community could be more difficult than helpful. When I make work about my queer identity, its often very niche and specific to my community. So oftentimes, I found that the subject of my work was discussed more than how I made the work and translated my ideas.
>
> Discussions will be about my identity, and the community as a whole, or questions would be asked that are completely irrelevant.
>
> Sometimes, I just wanted to know if the piece I was making was the right size or medium, and whether I should curate it in a different way! peers who made art about anything generic, were questioned on this. I was heavily involved in the LGBT+ society at uni, and I helped run and

participated in a couple of queer crits which were fronted by Eleanor West. These crits were so much more important.

Discussions weren't had about 'is the artist trans?' etc (or if they were, they were brief) instead, we discussed how my work was made, how I should curate it, and whether my concepts translate.

Most importantly, we spoke about audience translation, and making sure that we knew who the artist aimed to make the art for. Was it the general public? Was it for queer people?

It's important we navigate the art world as a collective, and were able to collaborate on skills with that navigation, and to help each other figure out how we could make artwork that is specifically for that audience. As sometimes this is one of the most difficult things about being a marginalised artist."

- Recent graduate (2020), Fine Art: Sculpture, Camberwell College of Art

"Good, positive and neutral ground to share ideas with like-minded people (specifically the online queer crits)"

- Current student, Production Arts For Screen, Wimbledon College of Art

"For crits on my course, I have often found that the peer-led sessions are more useful, with more relevant and useable sources, as well as ideas relating to the work. That's not to say that the tutor-led crits don't work, they can just sometimes leave me feeling that the same advice and ideas are being said repetitively and are occasionally a tad dated.

The best crit I've had, however, was the one run by the LGBTQ+ society for queer students. This provided a safe and understanding space of people who have been through similar life experiences, and so a greater level of "queer analysis" of the work was enabled, which was really validating and refreshing. More of these sorts of community-specific crits would be really

appreciated, as it also allows you to bond with fellow queer people (or whatever the community may be) across UAL.

Furthermore, as it involved people from a range of disciplines and courses, it allowed for a much more interesting and wide-ranging variety of discussions, which were really useful. I think there should be more crits in general, as sometimes due to not being in the building you can feel a bit lost, and those extra conversations really help push the work, but specifically more peer-led crits and more crits run by different groups, societies, and communites, for example, the LGBTQ+ Society."

- Current student, Fine Art, Central Saint Martins

"The idea of a crit is something I welcomed about art school, but I was quite disappointed with the reality. Something about spending upwards of 6 hours talking about 15 people's work drains the life out of me after person number 5. The critique becomes shallow after that as everyone else is also already exhausted.

I also hope to get more actual critique. I have been the only person in my crits to actually critique. I'm all for safe sharing spaces but it seems pointless to stand around and tell each other how much we love their work. I want more critical thinking to be present.

Finally, as a trans and queer individual, I feel like a lot of my time is spent explaining my personal context for my work, and am given often very cis and heteronormative suggestions. My work isn't even about specific transness, but more liminality and the in-between in a more philosophical context. But as soon as my cis peers (all of my peers) hear the themes, they can only see the very top layer of what I'm showing. I would feel much more comfortable if a larger portion of the student and teaching body at UAL was trans/gender non-conforming, because it gets really exhausting being able to contribute to others work but not having the same reciprocated.

- Current student, Fine Art, Chelsea College of Art

"My first tutorial ever I cried in, and my tutor asked me to 'refrain from expressing emotion'. That set me up to have zero positive expectation.

Every crit you have to anticipate arguing that your work is even valid to be in the space. It's like game-face and it's exhausting.

I'm white, cis, and not disabled, and I find the atmosphere inaccessible and often unhelpful. Worst critics are students, enabled by tutors. None of my crits have ever been disastrous, however, I have witnessed the absolute slaughter of other students. The 'helpful' bits are limited.

That being said (when you are in a position of privilege) can get accustomed to the format of the crit, which is negative feedback. They have made me hardier as an artist, and more self-assured. I would never feel comfortable making work about being queer, the few times I have been vaguely vulnerable in them, I regretted it."

- Current student, Fine Art, Central Saint Martins

Conclusion and discussion

This report has sought to elucidate the debates currently taking place amongst students about the role of crits in their education. It has drawn from case studies, testimonies, and academic literature with the intention of beginning a conversation about how crits should be delivered inclusively, the benefits that crits can provide, and what pitfalls should be avoided.

Here we propose a range of recommendations and discussion points for UAL to consider moving forward.

Our recommendations and discussion points are as follows:

- **Establishing collective ground rules and boundaries as a norm within crits** is crucial for reforming how crits are conducted. Consent and respect are values that are central to a successful crit, yet for some students, the crit does not feel like a safe space for healthy discussion and learning. Drawing up ground rules as standard at the beginning of crits, ensuring that both students and teachers take collective ownership of their responsibility to each other, will foster a culture of trust and compassion. It should also become standard for the group crit to ask the artist what they want to gain from the crit, for example, would they find it most beneficial to hear the group's feedback on their ideas or on their technique.

- Feedback widely suggests that **training in 'how to participate in a group crit' is a skill that students would benefit from, and it should be integrated into the curriculum**. Many students are expected to provide constructive feedback without any formal knowledge of how to do so, leading to inconsistent and occasionally insensitive feedback. This becomes especially clear when crits are delivered as a form of feedback for assessed work. How can one be assessed on something you are never taught to do?

- **Recording crits should be adopted as standard** to ensure that any feedback provided is not lost. When artists are presenting their work, they are often overwhelmed by the experience of articulating their intentions,

and receiving feedback from a group. Any helpful feedback may be lost in this process is no record is made of it. Implementing recorded group crits for all students would ensure this learning gain is not lost.

- **Conversations within the university around decolonisation, inclusion and anti-racism should include the role of the crit**. For many students of colour, the group crit can all too often be a space where their identity and cultural reference points are subject to undue interrogation, and other forms of cultural knowledge that do not conform to the artistic and academic canon may be disregarded. Lived experience is a form of knowledge that should be recognised and celebrated within the space of the crit.

- **Queer Crits provides a model for how community-led and extracurricular crits can be delivered**, for students from marginalised background for whom formalised group crits are not providing the feedback they require. This has also been an approach adopted in Art SU's Black History Month group crit. UAL can provide the necessary infrastructure for these community-led crits, through funding and resources.

- For staff and students, **unconscious bias training** is integral to improving the experience of crits. Formalising the approach academic staff take to crits, and training them in how to lead group crits that actively challenge bias, will improve the experience for all students.

- Within pedagogical and education committees within UAL, an open conversation must be had about what is the role of the group crit. **If crits did not currently exist, would UAL invent them now in the form they currently take?** Crits are a teaching method, a feedback method, they test public speaking and ideas articulation skills. Sharing what best practice already exists within the university is crucial to reforming them.

- Work with Arts SU to **conduct further research into the experience of minority and marginalised students and their experiences of crits**. UAL's proposed Awarding Gap Review provides an ideal space for the role of crits to examined.

These should in no way be seen as an exhaustive list; Arts SU would like to work with UAL to further this conversation, reviewing current practice in partnership, and ensuring that every student has a positive experience of engaging in crits, not just a privileged few.

Author

Calum Sherwood

Calum Sherwood is the Senior Policy and Research Officer at Arts SU, having worked in education policy since 2012. Calum studied Politics and Sociology at the University of Bristol and holds an MSc in Social Research from Birkbeck, University of London.

Arts SU Policy Team

Arts SU is an independent charity who work to represent and support students at the University of the Arts London. This project was led by the Arts SU Policy Team, who focus on producing high-quality research on academic and social issues that impact on our members.

If you have any questions about the report, contact c.sherwood@su.arts.ac.uk