



The University for the Creative Arts (UCA) has announced plans to close its campus in Rochester in September 2023 – a move that could discriminate against local and disadvantaged students.

The University has also said it will be "stepping back" as a further education provider, to focus on undergraduate, postgraduate and research degrees. Aside from the devastating loss of higher education courses at Rochester, stripping away further education provision entirely from all UCA Universities will create barriers for many young people in accessing creative careers, with those from disadvantaged backgrounds being especially hit by this decision. We know access to further and higher education is needed at a local level. Moving provision to a different campus, will exclude many young people, who do not have access to affordable transport. These are students who are already facing a limited start to their creative careers due to not having had the opportunity to experience a full and varied arts education at school. Having access to a post-16 arts education can be a transformative experience for young people from all backgrounds.

Research from The University and College Union, states that, *1 "Recognition of further education's role in reinforcing social integration, social mobility and social equality extends beyond the provision of apprenticeships to the large groups of young people and adults who access further education in order to change their place in our society, to benefit themselves, their families and their communities"*.

Courses such as the Pre-degree Foundation Diploma and Post-GCSE Extended Diploma, work as a diagnostic course, where students can experience a broad range of subjects before choosing one that suits them best. With degree courses becoming so expensive, the diploma ensures that the right decision has been made and retention rates are stronger. With a basic grounding in the arts, students can make an informed decision, either moving onto paid employment, apprenticeships, or higher education.

On successful completion of UCA's Diploma 2 Degree (D2D) students are currently offered a guaranteed place on their undergraduate programmes. The head of school for further education said about progressing D2D students, *2 "Year on year they do far better than the national average. The quality of their work is far better than the national average and our pass rate is far better than the national average"*. Evidence that the pre-degree courses benefit both students and the university. For adult learners, the UCA Access to HE course, offers an entry route for students aged 19+. With ages on the course ranging from 19-80.

With growing interest and government support of further education and post-16 vocational courses, it is the wrong decision to remove further education from the UCA core offer. The move to become a more "global" institution and eliminate pre-degree courses that offer an accessible "first step", will alienate the local



communities which they have previously served, in Rochester's case for over 100 years.

It is vital to retain the Rochester campus and its established reciprocal links with local creative businesses. Rosie Wolfenden MBE, Managing Director and Co-Founder of Tatty Devine says that, *"The UCA's plans to shut the Rochester Campus and take away the further education provision from all UCA sites is devastating to us not only as believers in the importance of a creative education for all but also as employers. Half of our team based in Chatham studied there and it has proved a real hotbed of talent for the local area and it's creative industries"*.

A creative career should be an accessible option to everyone – ensuring our creative workforce represents all communities is fundamental. Our craft skills sector alone, contributes £3.4 billion to the UK economy and industry leaders from all sectors recognise the importance of creative skills in their workforce. Research from the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre, written in partnership with Nesta, tells us that,³ *"Creativity is likely to become even more important in the future job market. Although it may seem ubiquitous, far from every job advert lists 'creativity' as a requirement. In fact, job adverts for the DCMS Creative Occupations official list are still far more likely to ask for it. Strikingly, jobs asking for creativity are also much more likely to grow as a percentage of the workforce by the year 2030. This reinforces the finding from previous research that policymakers should be investing in the workforce's creative skills"*.

The closure of the Rochester Campus and further education courses across all sites, will effectively exclude many young people in the Southeast from accessing a creative education. Sadly, this is not a standalone case, we know this is happening across the country. The closure of these crucial education providers will not only annihilate access to education for all but also risks severing ties for established routes into employment and jeopardises the sustainability of regional creative businesses.

Rochester craft career alumni include - Stephen Webster, Dame Zandra Rhodes and Karen Millen.

Crafts Council June 2021

Notes

1. https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/8461/FE-in-England-transforming-lives-and-communities-interim-report-Jan-17/pdf/Transforming_lives_FE_report_Jan17.pdf
2. <https://uca.ac.uk/study/levels-of-study/pre-degree/>
3. <https://www.pec.ac.uk/news/new-research-shows-creativity-will-become-even-more-important-to-the-growth-of-jobs-between-now-and-2030>