# Audio file

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# Transcript ARP Research interview: Pathway leader 22/11/23

Interviewer: Wande Awoniyi

Team on the BA fashion programme. I've started to record it. I do have set questions, but if you go off piece that's fine. You know when you start answering the question, you think you remember and then you come to the end of you that what was the question again, that's absolutely fine. I actually don't mind that at all. So honestly, feel free to divert.

Interviewee: 2nd year fashion programme pathway leader

Need to bring me back? Just go. Equally, I won't be expected.

Interviewer: Wande Awoniyi

Ohh my. I do it all the time so I know what it's like. The idea is looking at. It's particularly in design. Students desire to all work within the same very similar geographical landscape. So within the same. The epi centre, the what's perceived epi centre of fashion, London, Milan, NY, Paris, all that kind of thing. And then also the brands that they expressed desire to work for are there's common themes when you have these conversations and it's a little bit about. Is that helping our students when students don't achieve that desire to work in those brands or in those countries, do they feel that they're settling when they take another placement elsewhere? It's got a lot to do with their future aspirations as well. How do they see placement will be an impact on? Where they go when they graduate and what we do as a teaching team to kind of maybe break the mould a little bit. On a perception of what a successful placement looks like. So that's the kind of overall feeling. So my first question to you is. Did you ever do a placement or internship? Whether it was part of your degree or after you finished and what was it like for you? What were your? Memories of it.

Interviewee: 2nd year fashion programme pathway leader

I did. I loved it. I've got to say I was a. This was when I was at Chelsea, so I came to London to originally to study ceramics. I wanted to be a ceramicist and then. This is ohh. One day before you were born. OK. This is that 197017.

Interviewer: Wande Awoniyi

God bless you.

Interviewee: 2nd year fashion programme pathway leader

I know so and I and then I saw all these divine creatures. I call these fashion students like, you know, with the loops. Like anyway, cut along stories. And I thought I wanted to be that I wanna do that cause I was also dealing with. Lots of other things as well. So coming out as a gay person and and I saw these creatures, these fashion people, I thought I want that. So I joined the fashion course and loved it and we had fantastic teachers, really brilliant, fantastic teachers. And while placements weren't really a set part of the course, it was a. It was actually a diploma London Diploma course. They all had content, you know, they knew everybody. It's like it's like how a lot, you know, somebody that somewhere. So I did a placement with a guy called Chatters. And his name was John Chatterley. And they had a shop down. Ohh, it's just uh, Saint Christopher's place. And basically, yeah. And I was there for a couple of weeks and and it was really out of the kindness of his heart. It was such a nice man. He just gave me a little design project to do, which was like, just kind of. Make an outfit. Using his fabric anything I like so and it was really brilliant. They were so kind. Loved the team and although I don't think I was sort of absorbed into the into their working kind of went in as a you know as I think as a favour to one of my teachers and and did a little project on my own which he looked after and he. He quitted for me and everything, but I could see. You know, you get to see and it's like you get a foot in and suddenly it's you just realise how different it is and that's what I remember. But for me it was an incredibly positive experience. I can't, I can't say useful because I don't think I learned a lot, but I just actually, I think maybe maybe the thing. Hitler was. Was that that I felt like I belonged.

Interviewer: Wande Awoniyi

Right. Yeah. Sense of belonging, yeah. You've chosen right for yourself. When you made that decision to change your career. Ohh so that was the kind of little. Yeah, that's kind of reinforcing your dreams. So that's good so. How knowledgeable would you say uh your menswear students? Cause I wanna be specific on men's wear are in terms of, you know, creative references when it comes to global brands and businesses and designers. So creators outside of Europe and America, how knowledgeable would you say your students were?

Interviewee: 2nd year fashion programme pathway leader

But I want to say they're not knowledgeable. You know, outside of this the the set brands, the known brands, the advertised brands, the ones that they aspire to and is that what is that what your question is want to kind of going outside of that? Are they knowledgeable? Yeah, I'd I would say like it's one of those things. You know we've always got the sliding scale. The you know the you know the student body cohort from really ambitious to just kind of there to do the projects. So I think some of them. Are and some of them will find out. You can have that conversation with them, you know. Are you looking? Have you thought about some? Some need that prompted some automatically look but my. My response is I don't think not in the second year. Maybe when they come back in the final year then yes, because they've been out in it. But before you or the second year kind of before they get to dips.

Interviewer: Wande Awoniyi

Yeah, yeah. What did they know about? Yeah, the brands and the disc creators that sit outside that kind of very cool core group of, you know, high profile brands and businesses.

Interviewee: 2nd year fashion programme pathway leader

What one or two of them, cuz they will have, they will have somebody that they've they know and like. Yeah. Like a Simon and. Who's kind of outside.

Speaker

Right.

Interviewee: 2nd year fashion programme pathway leader

You know the kind of the main brands, but actually doesn't have a business. So some of them will, but most of them, I would say don't one day they don't they. They kind of want those core people, they want those that core experience cause that is again it's about acceptance.

Interviewer: Wande Awoniyi

That's really interesting. So I kind of jumped ahead with that question. So then I'm gonna bring. It back to. Your perspective what does a successful placement year look like to you from a from your perspective as a tutor? And if you want to imagine one of your students going out and coming back, So what is the successful year look like to you for them?

Interviewee: 2nd year fashion programme pathway leader

So I. When I because I see all the report and most of the reports this year because it was such a big Group Me and me and M\*\*\* shared. But what a successful. Tips here is for me is that the student has a variety of experience and also may go with somebody they really aspire to. Yeah. And then someone that that they're not, maybe so sure about that, you know, or that they have very different. Experiences with it at 1 market level may maybe, let's say LVMH, you know with Alan in Paris and then maybe they're in London with pair Gotham which is. Of you know, it's kind of small business where you're really doing everything but this. I think for me the success is when I see in those reports. Because we don't have anything to do with them. Well, they're out there. We're contact us. Maybe now and again they will. But they, you know, they now have really supported by you and M\*\*\*. But when I see those reports it is how they how they then can connect, who they are and what they do to. What they're doing in industry so they can actually, can they see a play? They can see that they fit somewhere. They can see. Them and actually it changes them as people and it changes their concepts of who they are. So they often go. Being really into, you know, kind of in, you know, students are quite selfish, that's facing them. And I'd say that with love, they're really looking for something, looking for themselves. And they could honestly just be really kind of always looking in and a successful placement helps them look out and kind of look.

Speaker

Yes, yes.

Interviewee: 2nd year fashion programme pathway leader

To you know, a team. How do I? How do I work with you? I might not even like you. You might be intimidated. You might be my boss and I'm jealous. You're younger than me, you know? So it's. But it's then how they encounter that. In different scenarios, maybe at different levels and how it helps them kind of understand who they are and their worth. So that for me is a successful and it doesn't have to be top brands, it really doesn't.

Interviewer: Wande Awoniyi

Well, I think one maybe one of the reasons why top brands of high profile fans are there is before they come on to into uni. That's what they see. The big commercial high high end brands because they have all the budgets and big marketing campaigns and you know you know online or you know in editorials and then when they come into uni, they actually focus on their own creative identity, maybe more than studying other designers. It's all about channeling their own creative. Vision. And so it's in the second year when we start to tell them where do you want. To work that they suddenly. Become like I don't know, and they have to. So I feel part of it is they have to do their own research. It has to be self driven. Who do you connect with creatively and but we also need to maybe feed into that and help them guide them. So from your perspective, yeah.

Interviewee: 2nd year fashion programme pathway leader

But I'm just saying I honestly think that they imagine the industry's gonna be a certain way at a certain level. It's the higher up you go, the better it's gonna be. And we know that that's not the case. So actually talk. You know, I've had students doing placements at Alex Mullins and they loved it. Yeah, they they just really loved the experience. They felt included and the same person has and it has, uh, a placement at Burberry. And they just feel locked out, they can't fit in. They're just doing photocopying. They're just running around. So. But it is that perception, the, the higher you go the narrow, you know, the narrower you get up. The pyramid, the better it is, it's not true.

Interviewer: Wande Awoniyi

So I mean, you've kind of answered my next question, which is what do you think the students want to achieve? On placement.

Interviewee: 2nd year fashion programme pathway leader

Yeah. Again, it's really different. I think you know our students are so ambitious, sometimes ruthless. Not often, you know, and I think they're great people and I really enjoy them. But I think they want to go in and succeed. That's what they really want to do. They want. To they want to be accepted by these companies because it is. It's a huge thing, you know, you know, I know and I get, you know, you get a good job, you feel good. That's great. You know, I feel, you know, you kind of get that, you know, that sort of that kick of adrenaline where you think, yeah, I'm worth something. I'm good at this. I've been recognised. Being seen, you know. I think a lot of it's that and again the higher up you go, the bigger you know is that the you know my my gigantic ego is fed even more Burberry, if it's not gaoler, if it's you know and I think that's really what they're looking for they want to shine. They're there at Saint Martin's, cause they wanna shine. You know they want. They wanna make change in the world but and. And so I don't think they know what they're what they're looking for. You know they they then go out and do, you know spend 3 days on a photocopier, you know photocopying magazines or being sent out to. You know Zara, to buy some sweatshirts to size up and copy. But it is. There's something about the light of these companies that you know what I mean by that? The, you know, every magazine you pick up, there's the great big editorial. There's the advertising. There's the image, you know, there's so much about image.

Interviewer: Wande Awoniyi

Well, this is the thing then, because to me what you are describing a little bit is the elite. And being amongst the elites. And being able to survive with.

Interviewee: 2nd year fashion programme pathway leader

It's actually quite. Horrible, But that's exactly what it is. It's being, it's being at the top.

Interviewer: Wande Awoniyi

Yes. And so do you think students feel that having those brands on their TV? Especially once they graduate is important. For that success.

Interviewee: 2nd year fashion programme pathway leader

Yeah, OK, it is an acknowledgement. And you know, if you're looking at a CV and again, we know that ourselves, you see certain brands, you instantly make associations. We've all got buyers. You know, you see LVMH, you see Marcella, you see Burberry, you think, great, you know, this person must be \*\*\*\* hot, you know, you maybe you see, you see, you know, you might see Kiko or you see picots and you see well, you know, that maybe then that's another level. But I think there's. Yeah.

Interviewer: Wande Awoniyi

If the student we know from our data when we look at it, that it's really a small number of students that do achieve to go to those top brands. The actual majority you see the list they go to. So what do you think the students that don't achieve it feel? When they don't, if we if we also buy into the. Success that you know sunset is recognised in these places. If they don't, they don't get there. They don't get picked.

Interviewee: 2nd year fashion programme pathway leader

Yeah, I don't think that person is speaking and I, you know, like I'm sure you feel the same. I I don't buy into it, but I know that it's something that. Comes with the gravitas or it comes with lever leverage. And I think students, you know that. For some of them, they want to be at those smaller houses. Having that, you know, someone to be on Savile Row doing pad stitching for men's wear. So you know and they're they're, you know, they that's their world, that's what they love. And maybe there is that kind of different. There's those different groups of people or different students that really. Are at Saint Martins because they think we're nearer that Topper. We're, you know, it's a step closer. Uh, you know at Norwich? No people, students didn't go anywhere, you know, it's heartbreaking, you know, so our students are already at an advantage, but how those students feel that? I think some of them must. Must you? They never talk about it. And maybe that's a conversation to have. They'd never say, oh, you know, they might sell, went so and so. Not really hated it. Or when so and so. And I really loved it or learned so much, but.

Interviewer: Wande Awoniyi

Some of the conversations I have with students is really to try and boost their confidence again when they've had knockbacks and when there was a section of where they thought they should have been and the standard they thought they were. Is not materialised. And it's still like you're still good enough. They still don't experience some place out there for you. Uh, you're gonna end up where you're meant to be. It's like resetting the programme a little bit. That it's not a failure and any other job you take is not that you will still learn something amazing. Would you still see the calls? You. Yes.

Interviewee: 2nd year fashion programme pathway leader

Can I just because I don't really know how to answer that last question you asked. But I think they do sometimes think that their placements are going to form. What then happens next? Yes, they do. They do say that, well, if I take this at a gene, if I'll go to Levis and my people gonna think I'm just a jeans designer, they think I'm if I go to you know, let's say Zara with fantastic placements, paid placement. Am I then a, you know, am I then St uh, you know, sort of. So they do. They do have that so again.

Interviewer: Wande Awoniyi

Yeah, I think there's there's something in there. I remember when I was working for certain market level and I was trying to move, it could be difficult. It could be difficult. Do you have Italian? You know? Can you work with this type of material leather? And it was a little bit I was seeing that little barrier. But when I was at when I was considering moving to Burberry, the person at Burberry had come from a. More commercial background and then could see the value of having people from a commercial background in Burberry business. So there are a lot more open to crossing that market level divide. Yeah. So it does take one or two people who succeed in making the shift to open to be more open to seeing diversity in the in the TV and what actually it brings to come from a commercial background or a luxury background. First, first, would you?

Interviewee: 2nd year fashion programme pathway leader

But really, what you're what you're saying? I know you're desperate to get to the next question, but it is about that perception and bias. It's the same. It's that same thing. You know it's it's like that's on your CV. So there I can put you there. That's on your CV. So I'll put you here. That's on your CV and it takes people with experience to actually know that it's the, you know, it's what's in the portfolio and in the person that matters.

Interviewer: Wande Awoniyi

Yes, that is really important point. Would you still see your course, as successful if students moved away from high profile luxury brands and started to go to South America, to Asia, more to Africa and just small brands or quirky brands that people didn't really. No, what would you? Because I know we you. Yeah.

Interviewee: 2nd year fashion programme pathway leader

I would love it. The idea that even that they could go out and do volunteer work, paid volunteer work, you know, in community or in in other countries where. You know this amazing skill, these people we teach are amazing. You know that they can. Use that. You know, this better be off the record one day cause you'll get me fired. OK, I think they they're. They're wasted at these companies. They're lit, they're cogs in little machine. Well, they're little cogs in big machines. They don't even notice. The next person comes along. You're you're forgotten. There's no love. There's and I really resent that. And I feel very passionate about it. And I think that as humans are so incredibly creative and clever and intelligent, and I see them doing projects where they could go in and make real change in the world. And I would love that. That was part of dips. You know that there was, yeah. Like a volunteer or you or you work in a community. Did you? Uh, did you see Matthew? Uh at Premium's project that he did with the prisoners. \*\*\*\*\*\*\* gobsmacking. I mean, just gobsmacking. And I don't think that was part of his placement. He was at JW Anderson, but it was a project that he did when he came back to college. Amazing. You know, so things like that. I would love more of that. Don't just going out into the world in different ways. Yeah. And I I think the course was even more successful. Because there's the the room that we have for those students to get in those companies is tiny. And you know what, they're probably gonna employ somebody at Westminster cause they've got. More better portfolios, more commercial thinking, better skills. You know, our students are. You know, there's zeitgeist thinkers, so really they need to be thinking because I think industries changed, you know, where our students were once at the top, they're not they. They cause the industries. Come down. You know, it's not looking for those people. It doesn't want those like guys, thinkers and I think they're needed elsewhere in, in a, in industry, but in different parts of industry.

Interviewer: Wande Awoniyi

That is very, very insightful. I have shifted my idea and perception of CSM. Now that I'm inside it, I understand the student identity more. They are the innovators, they are the ones who are looking even more forward. They're challenging, they're disrupting. And so. So I do feel there's a commercial place for them also, but I feel like we need to find we need to cultivate a new place to use that skill rather than just going in the same brands where they are churned out and used and moved along.

Interviewee: 2nd year fashion programme pathway leader

Could not agree more. There is still a place for them and they can fit in because they're clever issues and they've got all that they've got. You know, they can turn it on and equally I should say there's something else where they really are able to. You know, to just yeah, to take that to another level, create new ideas for industry, which is about maybe even thinking about how we value things or how we. You know, look at those bias that we have or you know how we, you know why? Why aren't you as successful if you're working? You know, with people in uh, you know, uh, you know, Africa or, you know, Guatemala or the Philippines developing something that's gonna nurture. You know, in different ways, that's for me. Because you know fashion again, this is off the record. Fashion isn't fashion anymore. Fashion is is really about commerce and there was always fashion that was commerce and we know that I worked in that industry. I worked at Calvin Klein. So I know you know as well as you that commercially but. I when I was a student, I always knew that fashion was something really exciting. Really, that took your breath away and that you know, you you never quite got to it because it was always moving ahead. But it was always sort of, you know, I mean, it was always something to aspire to. Not not in this throw away. Wasteful kind of, you know, way that it seems to be now are you just making the chip to sell. It was something that was about people and communities and you know anyway different way. I'm clapping now.

Interviewer: Wande Awoniyi

No, it's.

Interviewee: 2nd year fashion programme pathway leader

Gonna read me back. What's the next question?

Interviewer: Wande Awoniyi

Coming up to the end. So so you know. OK. How do we? Encourage students to develop this new this idea of looking a bit outside the box and being more global, being more, having more of a conscious, A conscious. How do we do that? How do we get them to look at the emerging markets and contribute towards their growth?

Interviewee: 2nd year fashion programme pathway leader

I I think it's. It's definitely going to be embedded in the projects. It's got to be part of the actively part of their learning, and that's not just about bringing people in to talk about these things because they sometimes hear, sometimes they don't. But if they're learning about it within the actual projects, like set within men's where we work with the, the UN 17, you know, goals for an inclusive. World the students really struggle with it and I wish I had more time and more people and more money to. Bring people to talk around that you know. What does it mean? Quality. What does it mean, diversity? What do those things even mean in relation to design? And but we I started putting those things in so it gives them the opportunity to look we had we had one girl. Couple of years ago and she just that she made the most amazing collection and she just put she put spells on these clothes so that they were meant to, like, imbue the wearer. So it just made you somehow heal certain things or. You know, feel a certain way. And I mean, you know, and I just thought that was the the best thing ever. She was taking clothes, changing them, putting them in places and imbuing them with some kind of spell work from these that she looked back into kind of, you know, alchemy. Yeah. Was, you know, and I think that it's in the students.

Interviewer: Wande Awoniyi

Do it, yeah.

Interviewee: 2nd year fashion programme pathway leader

I think our curriculum is too structured. It's too rigid and. We need the skills we need, we need the creative thinking, and then we need an openness and space for the students to think we've got too many projects, Bang, Bang, bang, bang. They don't even have time to think. Buddy, go to the loo and wipe their behinds. They don't have time to think. What am I? Why? Why am I even doing this? Why does this matter? How does this reflect my values? How does this reflect who I want to be in the world cause I'm just doing another project 3 weeks, 4 weeks, so I mean Bang, Bang, bang, we've got some space for them to. Have reflection, which is that's honestly one thing. That's.

Interviewer: Wande Awoniyi

You do do a lot of projects here.

Interviewee: 2nd year fashion programme pathway leader

With God, we're back to when I. Came, I thought. I thought I was exhausted in the first I did 4 projects in one term. I was like this is madness.

Interviewer: Wande Awoniyi

Ohh like.

Interviewee: 2nd year fashion programme pathway leader

Yeah, I mean, I've taken some of them away and I've increased the length of the projects and again, the great thing about Saint Martins, as Sarah is, you've got that autonomy to do that to build in space where the students can think our first project was purely digital. The students hated it. But when it was. Done and this is something else that I think is really important. When it was done, several of them said this was the best thing we could have done. They. Wanted to be. Doing now they wanted to be doing this. Why are we doing this? It's so boring. When it was done, they said, we've learned, we realised we've got a whole load of skill that the other pathways won't have cause in this project. But you know, if we're pleasing the students we they never get to that.

Interviewer: Wande Awoniyi

Yeah, yeah.

Interviewee: 2nd year fashion programme pathway leader

Likes where they're reflecting and thinking. Actually this was, yeah.

Interviewer: Wande Awoniyi

Stretched, yeah. You have to stretch and challenge them. Can I ask what project that was? What? What digital project was it? What skill would they learn?

Interviewee: 2nd year fashion programme pathway leader

K\*\*\* project, it was called Brave New World, and it was the first second year project, so lots of skills based projects, and it was about them creating any world they could imagine digitally. So it was cloud based. So we, Four amazing kind of intro to close so that they could familiarise with that, but then all these different Dutchy play sessions where they could actually create objects. Did you see and put them in an environment? But it was really to say to them, you know what? What world do you want to create and what world do you want to build? For you, for you, for maybe for your customer, for whatever. But just to imagine. And honestly, they really struggled with it. Because they yeah.

Interviewer: Wande Awoniyi

So that, I mean, what was it because my final question is what are the barriers you think to breaking this mould and having them be a bit more open? Like why did, why were they resistant to some of the different approaches?

Interviewee: 2nd year fashion programme pathway leader

OK. They we had a meeting. About this project and and I know Cxxx’s brilliant and I know. And I said to them when we did the briefing, you know, this is an incredible. She talked a lot about her work that she does and her research and this these programmes she's developed. And there was sort of a silence, I thought, because it was my first time with this creeper, I thought, well, you know, they might just be quiet, you know, it's those briefings sometimes online. Any questions? Literally nothing. Nothing. Nothing. And then it took a couple of weeks, and then we had a presentation on something else. And I could tell they were really \*\*\*\*\*\* \*\*\*. But. So, so cut, right? So let's just stop this. So what's going on? What? What is this people wondering? In late people, you know what? What is this? I don't. I don't think this is OK. I don't want to be treated like this. I wouldn't treat you like this. You know I'm here, you know. And so gradually they opened up a little bit and they didn't know me well, so they don't really know how much they can. Say, you know that's also a sort of. Pathway leader thing path. But they started saying, well, we've why we've got this project and all we're doing is digital and all we're doing is Chloe and all we're doing is, you know, the other, you know, we want a team project, we wanna do, you know, the other women who is doing channel, right. That's what they wanted. Want they. They wanted Balenciaga. Chanel marcella. Anything they want, John. That's what they wanted. So I lost my rag. Right, which I don't often do. Lewis was with me, so he picked up the pieces. It was great. But I said so. Well, you'd rather be doing a boring bloody design project with a house design. 6 outfits make an outfit. That's what you want to be doing. Well, then you know congratulations. Because that's not the course that I want to design for us. That's part of our course. But you know, I want us to be thinking differently, having different skills going into a world where you are able to kind of, you know, be more than that. That you can, you know, in a way, you can do that. You know, there's the challenge and design another bloody collection, you know. Anyway, so when when Lewis kind of I had to go for a walk cause I've got myself in the state so I went for a walk and when I came back the atmosphere had changed and Lewis just looked at me and I thought well it's time to move on. But then I realised that when the we had a. A group queer. Then we had a debrief with Kath was outside and we said look, just let us know how. How was it after all? And the feedback was really positive. Yeah. So. But that it's they're they're thinking.

Interviewer: Wande Awoniyi

I mean, that's your. That's your job, though, isn't it? It is to kind of break new ground with them and help them see things from a difficult point of view, but it's hard.

Interviewee: 2nd year fashion programme pathway leader

What's hard is I don't. My job is sometimes just to please the student. Sometimes. Yeah. And I know. And I know that's part of it. But equally, I completely agree. And it's in my nature. I'm going to, I'm going to challenge you. Even if you're we're doing another design project, I'm gonna challenge you. Look deeper into your research. Have you thought, you know, take it beyond what you're able to do. Explore your boundaries, you know, challenge my boundaries. I should be good. I should be saying. God, you can't. I mean, I'm \*\* years old. I shouldn't be going out and push it. You got me. But, but you know the but you know the job is so multi levelled, you know to and the student. And I do respect the students very much and their voice and their needs. But I think we have got to also have that. Ability to challenge them and push them out of that safety zone to make them feel a bit vulnerable.

Interviewer: Wande Awoniyi

I went last week as well to their show at the V and A. It was all very interesting, really good work. But I think your students are lucky to have you. And I think I really appreciate the reality check. You know, we can have all these views of, you know, it should be like this, but there is a reality that just exists and it's going to take a while to break down and do things differently. But that was very, very useful. Oh my goodness.