

Student Voices transcripts: Ifan Interview 2020

Ifan 0:00

So my name is Ifan Barber I am right about to go into my third year of BA Media Communications at London College of Communication, next month. I'm from a coastal town in South Wales called Llanelli. I've always had a of passion for media. And originally when I did my A levels, I was going to go to another university and do a completely different course. But my grades didn't quite work out as I hoped, so I took a year off, re-evaluated my choices, realised London is where I went to be, discovered that UAL is one of the top universities both in this field and in the Arts in general. So, I thought this is where I need to be at this point in time. And I applied. Luckily, I had the grades already, so I didn't have to go through the waiting until results day again, I got my place. And yeah, and it all just went from there then.

(1.00)

A lot of my friends and family have been really surprised by the fact that I've not only left South Wales but gone into a creative field. Most of my friends are training to be teachers or training to be nurses. My sister has just got onto a nursing course at the university in the next town over. So, I am the only grandchild on both sides of the family who has left South Wales. I sort of followed a totally different path. But I think, if you asked my friends and family, they would probably say, 'yeah, Ifan is never gonna just stay in Llanelli and crack on with a nine to five job. It's going to be Ifan either on the TV talking rubbish or it's going to be Ifan writing for one of the top newspapers and that's also what I hope will happen as well.

But ...we were talking about it yesterday actually, with my parents, because my cousin who I'm really close with is starting her teaching course the PGC, on Wednesday. And my mother said, 'why wouldn't you want to be a teacher?'. And my father said 'No, Ifan is a creative. Teaching would not be for him.' So I think it's both taken everyone by surprise but not surprised as well.

(2:09)

It's never even crossed my mind to not go to university. That's always been the goal is to you know, do your GCSE's do you A' levels then go on to get a degree. That's the thing for most people now I thin. To fit into a job these days, you have to have a degree, unless you do like an apprenticeship or you want to be more hands-on with stuff, but that was never something that crossed my mind. It was always ...just in my mind, like stay in education for as long as possible. I'm not ready for the real world so getting a Master's but ... maybe I'll draw the line at masters...I'm not going to I'm not gonna become a doctor of media or anything.

Academic Support 2:44

So cast your mind back a few years to when you first arrived at university. What was it like what were the first few days like how did you prepare to come?

Ifan 2:56

Yeah, so preparation for uni was quite unique for me, I think, because I knew from January that I was going to be moving to London in September in 2018. But the moving date for halls was the first week of September. And I had been living in America working at a summer camp and that ended on the first week of September. So, it literally happened so fast.

I arrived back from New York on September 5, got home that night, to travel from Heathrow to Llanelli which is about a four-hour drive and then immediately started packing to move to London, three days later. So, it was very hectic time for me, I literally come off one adventure and straight down to the other.

(3:43)

But I was so lucky with halls in that I got one that was close enough to LCC but far enough away that I could explore the area on my way to uni and sort of have a life separate from having to just walk down the street to LTC. And I had a group of people living with me who had really common interests. Because even though we're an art school, we have such a vast, like choice of courses. And I was living with people who were doing film and TV, but I was also living with people who were doing fashion and stuff like that as well. So, it's, it's nice to get a spectrum and halls was so great in like having social events. And we were all in the same boat. There were a few people in my flat who would also take yours off like I did, but I think everyone is just there to make friends. And I think that's what's special about an Art school is that it's not just about making friends or making connections. So, it makes us even more eager to connect with people than just having that friendship. It's also someone we could work alongside or, you know, utilise skills and become a team as well as a friendship group. You know.

Academic Support 4:45

Did you feel that the experience for international students in the first few days was very different, or were you aware of extra challenges? Could you talk a bit about that?

Ifan 5:00

Yeah. So I was actually living with two international students in my first year in halls, and I sort of found they sort of were even more eager to fit in straightaway, because it's a new environment for them. I think one of them had one a foundation course so was sort of used to London a bit more, but one of the others just sort of wanted to get straight stuck in wanted to socialise as much, to not only make friends but also understand the area. And I totally get the extra struggle. I mean, coming from Wales is hard enough, and that was... that's only up the M4. But for coming over on a plane I can't even imagine, but the support is definitely there. And enrolment on the course we sort of all clicked instantly whether you were international, or domestic, whatever we all just... it wasn't even a thing to talk about.

Really, if like I saw one boy on my course was from the Netherlands and that was talking about the Netherlands was 'Oh, okay, so how are you going to incorporate your Dutch heritage or whatever into your work?' or something like that.

(6:00)

It was my aim to sort of be like, I don't care where you're from. I just want to understand. It's more about understanding one another than really judging one another or where we're from. Being international, I don't think affected people's communication with me anyway. I'm always eager to learn about new places, and stuff anyway. So yeah... I definitely think being international add something to the course. Like, yeah, I'm only an expert on British culture in a way, whereas I have absolutely no experience on culture...media culture in Hong Kong, or media culture in Lebanon, or media culture, even in the Netherlands. It's always interesting in lectures when we're talking about, I don't know, technology's involvement in the media. And then someone in our lecture from Lebanon will say, 'I've never heard of that before. We don't have that in Lebanon, we use this' and stuff like that. So, I think it doesn't just benefit the international students. It benefits everyone because we all learn new things from one another.

(7:00)

And it's the same vice versa then when the girl from Hong Kong asks the British girl, what this is because it's something she's never been exposed to before and stuff. So, it's... I love having international people on the course because it enlightens our knowledge and it enlightens theirs. Yeah.

Academic Support 7:19

Let's talk about your experience at university up until lockdown, and then we'll talk about lockdown.

Ifan 7:26

Yeah, it's been... my experience has been really positive. I think, you know, the lectures are always interesting. The seminars are always engaging, and we've sort of become a little team as an entire course group in helping one another out. We're really good communicators, I found I think that's definitely the best thing about us. We have a group chat on Facebook, where anyone can pop in and I think everyone sort of feels comfortable with one another. So, I think that's that as a result of good communication in class, so I definitely think in university so far, we've really become this really tight knit group that sort of understands one another. And the lectures and seminars have embraced that and really helped us. And I think that was vital then going into lockdown. So... we sort of had unknowingly prepared for that.

Academic Support 8:21

And what happened? What happened in lockdown?

Ifan 8:23

Yes, so lockdown basically ... it was really good timing in a way because we had Easter holidays on March 13. So, I went back to Wales, there were twitterings about like, all London's going to go into lockdown, if you go, you won't be able to come back and I'm like, 'right, okay, I'm going home. Anyway, I haven't seen my family since Christmas. It had been three months. So, I was like, right, I'm going to go back. So, I was home for about 10 days and nothing seemed that different. I was still going out with my friends and then I'd gone to visit a friend at uni. And I got a text from my father saying 'Oh, have you seen the news?' Basically, lockdown for the entire of the UK. Like it was like a movie...it was like those contagion movies, you know, like, Oh, my god, what am I going to do? And then I got the email from UAL saying we were going online regardless. So, I was like, 'right, I don't need to be in London now. I need to get all my stuff and get back to Llanelli. Luckily my father only works Monday to Friday, so we got into the car, Sunday morning, went all the way to London, packed all my stuff up, went home. And luckily then, because it was Easter holidays, I had two weeks to prepare. I didn't have to jump straight into online learning.

(9.38)

We had great communication from UAL saying right you're going to be using this software, your timetable is going to remain the same but contact that was maybe cut and stuff like that. So, we had some sort of understanding going into it. It's really been handled well. And like I said, we all have great communication as students. I'm a course rep, so I sort of make it my job to understand everything so I can be the one to explain it to people who don't understand. so people were saying in the chat, 'what does this mean? Like? How are we going to do this?' And I said, 'I've been in touch with so and so. And they've told me this.' And so I sort of tried to keep everyone in the loop, as prepared for a totally new learning experience. Yeah, but the lockdown didn't really take us by surprise in the end and I haven't had to pay rent. I've been one of the lucky ones. My contract ended in March. I have some money saved, and I managed to get a new laptop, which is really useful for online learning course. So yeah, I was really prepared going into this. And I made sure that a lot of my peers were as well.

Academic Support 10:37

Talk a bit about online learning. What was that like for you? And have there been any benefits? Also, there are a lot of challenges. Perhaps you could talk about them both?

Ifan 10.49

Yeah. So online learning has been really interesting. We obviously did that for the entire of the final term. We had three modules to complete by June. And there was definitely a mix of highs and lows. And I think breakdowns and cheers at various points. I've definitely reaped the benefits of online learning, I got my first ever A+, as a result of online learning. Basically, a team project got turned into an individual project, this project was a poster campaign where we had to generate our own images and stuff.

But of course, when I'm locked into this house, I'm not able to create my own images to a professional effect. So, we will allow you to use copyrighted images to a certain degree. And I do thrive more working as an individual. I do enjoy teamwork, but I'm a self-confessed control freak. So, I like to be in charge. And sometimes I clash with people. And so, being able to work independently during lockdown was great but then I sort of felt like you've missed out on the opportunity to work with new people and sort of garner new skills from other people. So yeah, there are highs and lows to it.

(12:00)

And a lot of people got really frustrated. We were told to prepare for cut in contact hours and ultimately work at from four day to two a day. So, it was literally sliced in half. But obviously the teachers were on their emails and stuff like that. So, you could reach out but as a whole year group, we were in less contact. So, definitely online learning was frustrating, but ultimately rewarding. Personally, I, I think it was for a lot of other people as well, because I'm sure staff understood the situation and were maybe slightly more generous in their marking.

Academic Support 12:36

And how is your course going to be taught this coming term? What have you been told?

Ifan 12:42

So, we, we got the email on August 5 on what would be happening this September, and it's going to be blended learning. Lectures and seminars are going to be online, but workshops are going to be in person. The campus is reopening... from what I gather, each year group is going to be allocated a day of the week so, Year three will go on a Monday and have complete access to the library while still enforcing social distancing, obviously. So, it's going to be fine. I think it allows me the opportunity to maybe look at getting some form of internship or just cracking on with my job. I do have a part time job up here at the moment. So, hopefully I can just benefit myself financially, or even try and learn new things outside of university as well. So, it's going to be an interesting final year, but I'm going to try and take as much advantage of it as I possibly can.

Academic Support 13:32

And if you were somebody thinking of applying or having got a place and thinking whether to come this year, what would be your advice.

Ifan

I would totally understand why someone wouldn't want to apply this year because you wouldn't be getting the traditional university experience in some senses. But I really feel from what UAL have told me and returning students so far, it's a chance to have a really unique learning experience. Now you still got the campus lifestyle because you still have access to the library. And I don't know what the cafe situation is going to be whether that's going to be socially distance and gloves and visors and all that but staff are still going to teach to the best of their ability.. they certainly did during the final term last year. And hopefully, the workshops being face to face will then allow you to make the connections. Because that was my concern and certainly a lot of my friends' siblings were meant to start this year. But then, when they were told it was completely moving online, just sort of thought, you can't make that human connection with your fellow classmates when you're talking to them over a zoom call. I certainly imagine like a group project would be very awkward with people you've never met in person. But UAL doing this blended, I think is perfect for first years as well as returning students because it allows you to make that human connection. Yeah, so I'd definitely recommend just going with the flow and signing up for the blended learning.

Academic Support 14:59

Maybe you could talk a bit more about how you're planning to change your own work style and work patterns to deal with the new situation.

Ifan 15:12

Yeah, I think with the new working situation at the campus, now I'm going to have to try and be much more organised with when and where I do my work. Because I do like to take advantage of the library as much as I possibly can. But if I only have that one to two days a week, as opposed to the five days a week, all day that I'm used to, I'm definitely going to have to become more comfortable in working at home or maybe finding coffee shops that I can sit down and do some work, you know. I'm gonna have to adjust the environment that I'm comfortable on working in. Because I don't think my style particularly has to change. We're still getting essays, we're still getting projects. It's just the environment that I'm comfortable in working in it's gonna have to evolve.

Academic Support 15:52

And if things turned for the worse in terms of Coronavirus, and we had to go into lockdown again. Your experience from last year what would that tell you about how you might approach it this year?

Ifan 16:07

I think if we went into a second lockdown, my first mindset would be, just totally forget the procrastination. Sit down at that computer. Look at that screen for as long as you have to do and just motivate yourself. I found that was the biggest thing this year is in lockdown, if you can't go through that front door, then your best bet is to just crack on with the work. Because I find with being in London, it's so easy to procrastinate because you can just walk up the street and go to a museum instead of writing your essays or to the cinema, and obviously in lockdown, none of that is there so instead of picking up that book that's on your bookshelf, or going on to Netflix, get that essay done because that episode or whatever you're watching Netflix will still be there once that essay is done. The best thing to do ... if a second lockdown happens is to put everything into perspective and realise that it's important to get the work done and then the other stuff will still be there afterwards.

(17:01)

I think what a lot of people forget is the library because it's not only got loads of books that apply to every course but there's also computers there's silence zones and you know, there's like also group work zones, it's just fantastic and I overlooked it in first year. And then second year, it was my second home. It was where I'd write all my essays because I would be distracted by the woman upstairs at home deciding to sing at seven o'clock in the morning. So, I'd get up out and go to the library and then I ... what's great about LCC is that it's in such a great location. So, once you're done in the library, you can go for a walk along the Thames or you can pop into the Imperial War Museum and stuff like that. So, you know, just take advantage of the library, because then you're in a great location both while you're doing your work and then afterwards you can socialise with your friends. I think the library is something that should definitely not be snubbed. Especially when you have very limited access to it this September. So, I will be taking every second in that library that I can get.

Academic Support 18:12

Maybe just talk a bit about being an art and design students living and working or studying in London. What's that like? What does that offer?

Ifan 18:21

I would say, London is the cultural capital of the UK. As an aspiring journalist, I have had some really interesting experiences of going to be in the audiences of interviews at the Huffington Post offices. They had this online series, where anyone could go and watch these interviews. And you know, just being an art student in general, not just a media student, you know, the Tate Modern is literally one of the best places hang out. I think it is Britain's most popular tourist attraction, I think, the Tate Modern is and I can totally see why. Even just walking around London it's the best way to get inspiration because you literally see every walk of life.

(19:00)

It's meeting new people through uni or through your job. That is another thing actually, as well, is working in London. Luckily, I've got a really flexible job it's working for an audience management company. I've worked on shows like The X Factor, Britain's Got Talent. And that's obviously understanding the business that I want to go into ultimately, while also seeing it from another perspective, which I think is really interesting. So yeah, really take advantage and I think that's going to be the thing this September, I would try and get a job as quickly as possible, regardless of the situation cuz you're gonna have so much free time now with the limited access to uni. So maybe make that one of your first things. It's finding a job, whether it applies to your course or doesn't, just something to do with your time definitely.

Academic Support 19:43

Sometimes students struggle... staff struggle. What would you recommend to people if they were feeling depressed or lonely or anxious?

Ifan 19:58

Yeah, I get anxious, often, I'm such a worrier. That probably leads to some form of depression for me when I don't leave the house and I just said my pajamas and I sort of mope around. And you may think I sound insane when I say this, but I honestly find the best. ...for me personally ... is talking to myself, like I have some of the best conversations just with myself and just calm yourself down and tell yourself that everything's okay. Because more often than not, my worries are the most minimal stuff. It's like, I lie in bed at night. And I just think, 'could that sentence in that essay be structured like this?' and then I panic that me not changing that sentence will lead to me failing the entire essay, but then I also tell myself then like, 'hold on, you're being silly here, one sentence is not going to cause you to fail your entire course'. And then there are bigger things like obviously we're all worried about COVID and one of us catching it or your parents catching it. But I would honestly say, if you think talking to yourself, sounds crazy. It's honestly not it's honestly one of the best forms of medicine for me. Anyway.

Academic Support 21:08

Such interesting and really clear and confident reflections. (Thank you). Any final words to somebody listening to this and thinking about coming to us very shortly.

Ifan 21:17

So I think my advice would be if you're, if you're coming to London feeling that you're not confident enough to live in a city like this... you may not have the confidence now, but give yourself a couple of weeks in London, and that confidence will be there. So, don't think you're not strong enough to live in a city like this because you definitely are.