

## **Student Voices transcripts: Raahim**

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### **Raahim Interview 2020**

Academic Support 0:00

So hello, Raahim again. It's about a year since we last spoke. I think a lot must have happened for you. So, I'm really interested in you just giving us an idea of a catch up since we last spoke.

Raahim 0:14

Yeah, it has been a very eventful year since we spoke. I started the second year of my BA womenswear at LCF. And the first half of the year from August to December, we were just sort of learning new techniques. And then the rumours started of COVID-19 and the global pandemic taking over February, March time when we kind of went into lockdown, and since then, have been trying to adjust and cope for a situation that none of us were really prepared for. Everybody in the country and around the world was unsure about what's happening. However, I would say that the students and the staff were in constant conversation with one another. The administration of womenswear was updating us via emails. And because of that, we just had to make sure everything was going according to plan, because in second year, there is a part where we have to go on work placement. It came to the point where work placement was compromised.

So, we had to come up with an alternative project to suit the current times. The best part of it was that I now became part of a class that was dealing with a global pandemic and is almost designing the future of the fashion industry, because we will always be remembered as the students who went through this. So it was very important that the way we dealt with it and the way staff dealt with it was very efficient, very communicative, confusing at times and answer that times, episodes of anxiety on very many occasions, but at the end of it, it came out with a firm conclusion and a sense of direction,

Academic Support 2:05

What does that actually mean? Can you give some examples of things that happened that might not have happened? Had this situation not arisen?

Raahim 2:16

So I got a placement, which was part of the unit, like we had to do three months of placement and get experience physical experience of the industry. Because most of our students were not able to do that instead of actually working in a studio tailoring, we now had to write an essay and analyse a company that we think we would be

working at, which in a way was really good because the design of that particular unit was very much to make people understand how a company works, how business works, the financial side, the production side, and also the brand image and what goes into making a brand. So I think, in a way, it was good. There was something lost. But the things that were lost I believe, were not as crucial. Maybe for me because I have had experience in the fashion industry I can imagine to other students and being like a big deal. Being in that sort of studio environment. We've all seen 'Devil Wears Prada'. We all want that experience. We all wanted that experience. But it's nothing like that. It's not as glamorous. But ... I felt like I got to establish a better relationship with my tutors, the student tutor conversation increased a lot. That's something we got to experience and really, critically analyse, as fashion design students to sit and actually see how a company and its inner workings are going.

Academic Support 3:55

Let's talk a little bit about the move to online learning.

Raahim 4:00

I think with online learning, it's a bit of a double-edged sword. It will work in your favour and it can work against your favour. The good things, I think that it gave us a sense of independence because this alternative project that I was talking about was purely online.

Things became more accessible, I would say, via online teaching because you're at home, you can wake up... from your bed onto your desk, open up a laptop and do it. There is no process of going to campus coming back, getting tired, or sometimes just going in for two hours travelling all the way into central London, coming all the way back out. So, that was the good part about it. I didn't feel that the teaching standards were compromised in any way. It was very much like how it would be on campus. It would be a presentation delivered, we would look at the presentation ask questions in the end. Instead of face to face physically it was face to face virtually. I think it gave opportunity to the university to deliver tutorials on specialist software's like, for example, cloth 3D was one of them. I'm so glad that I took the tutorial. I might have not done that if I was on campus, because something like that, I believe, would have been delivered at the JPS Oxford Street branch. I'm based in Liverpool Street, do I want to catch the train and go to Oxford Street? Is it going to clash with my other classes, and stuff like that. So, there'll be a lot more that'll go into that decision making which now was all eliminated. And also, it's going to be recorded for me to watch later, which would not happen if it was on campus, stuff like that.

(5:50)

The cons I would say about online teaching, we are fashion design students, we like things to be done practically. So very practical course. We prefer material and fabric in hand, and feeling how it feels. Again, going back to the work placement and it's like I want to be physically in a studio. I don't want to watch a YouTube video of what an atelier in France looks like. So, I think it takes away from that experience.

Even if it is compromised, or some things are sacrificed, going through a pandemic, we need to be a bit mature and really think about our priorities. Whether I want to call Instagram story post of me being in a studio or actually learning something that I'm paying for. So yeah, I would say those are the pros and cons that I found from online teaching.

Academic Support 6:44

Do you feel that your practice was informed and developed as a result of this experience? Have new areas opened up for you as a result?

Raahim 6:57

I would 110% I agree with that. Because I think an experience like this has given me new ways of approaching my practice because it really got us as students to critically analyse our situation, cause it's something we were so unprepared for. We didn't even think about it, like it would not cross our mind. I think the only time it would, would be if someone's developing a concept on apocalypse. But it taught me I need to be resourceful...I need to think of ways where I can do the same thing that I would have done, but do it in a way that pushes my practice forward. And I think as a fashion designer, it's very important because of where the industry was right now...and we're in 2020. I personally felt as a designer and as a student that womenswear was not moving forward. There was a set way of doing things rules and regulations. This is me speaking about industry, not LCF ...there was no sense of lateral thinking. Whereas now, we are sort of forced to be in a situation where we have to think laterally, where we have to think of ways of delivering our concept of making our designs.

And I think LCF has delivered on that because at first graduation was all about the graduate show the pressure, what the models are going to look, like the venue, the music, all of that. But now the class of 2020 had to shift that digitally ... completely. And that got me thinking, it costs a lot of money to do a fashion show. Why can I not save that and produce something digitally and have a wider reach? So, as a fashion design student, thinking about brand analysis and business analysis that we learned from the alternative project...which was a result of this pandemic ... got me to think very differently and very radically, in a good way of how fashion design needs to move forward. It's not just sustainable, it's also beneficial for us financially, mentally, physically, because it made us realise that not everything needs to be done in concrete substance, it can be delivered the same way online and actually have a better reach. We can be more creative with it.

Academic Support 9:35

Does that mean that you have to have different sensitivities or different skills or different knowledge to be able to realise what you're wanting to achieve?

Raachim 9:52

I think so, yes. It does give us the idea of being more sensitive to how we are approaching our practice. For example, for my graduation, I'm looking at techniques that I wouldn't necessarily have explored, like a year ago, when the conversation about graduation started. Now I'm looking at more digital platforms, 3D rendering, ways of creating garments and ways of creating sketchbook ideas and drawing ideas which aren't very traditional.

I think this pandemic is making me sensitive enough to realise how can I prove that this didn't hold me back, which I think is very important as a student and as a designer, that I can say that I came out of the global pandemic and was still able to produce stuff equally good, if not better than the usual standard of how it would have been. Because the worst thing I think we can do as students is blame this for our shortcomings.

Raahim 11:00

You've mentioned about the importance of the degree show. And we know the importance of the third year and you're about to go into the third year. And things have changed a lot with blended learning. Could you just talk a little bit about what you envisage to be the challenges and the positives, moving forward?

Raahim 11:22

Yeah. in true Gemini fashion, I've been very, I've had like two different opposite sides. There have been parts where I've been super excited. I'm like, I'm going to be resourceful, I'm going to find ways of things I can do differently. The other part of it is like I have had very many anxiety attacks and days where I don't even want to look at anything. I feel like I'm a loser. This is not gonna work. What has happened... like being so dramatic about it. So, it has had two sides of it. If I look at it in a serious way, or me, the silver lining is that I'm going to

be the class of students that came out of a historic moment. We are the ones who will be challenging ways, because we have been challenged ourselves. It's a bit of a motivation.

(12:15)

Online learning, I think it'll be really good. I feel like we'll have more resources, we will be subject to more digital world, which I think is a reflection of where technology is heading anyways, and I think it's about time that fashion industry caught up with Augmented Reality and sort of the virtual world. We are celebrating designers like Iris Van Herpen, for example. She's so good. She's amazing with her technological work, but she's also doing couture, which is a beautiful fusion of technology, modern day technology, with something quite traditional. It is making us move in that direction to be able to merge virtual design with physical design. So, I'm excited about it.

13:00

What do you think you will need to do in terms of your own organisation and management of time. Do you think you're gonna have to change your approach at all? Or will you do it in the same way as you've always done?

Raahim 13:20

No, I think I'm gonna have to go a bit harder on myself now. Cos' for me specifically, I came from a science background, I came from a psychology background. And this is something that I changed my life for. I changed my career, I changed my degree, got into many fights with my family. And this is the moment I've been working for.

I don't know many students might have seen this series that we had called Glee. And there's a character in there Rachel Barry, and she's like, I've been singing 'don't rain on my parade' since I was two. I've been waiting for this massive audition. And I really like that's pretty much me right now and other students who will be coming in, we have all been working through our GCSEs, A Levels, foundations for this moment. So nothing, not even a global pandemic can get in the way now. So, because of that, I'm gonna be a bit more harder on myself but in a productive way, not in a delusional, self-destructive way. This will be the time to really make sure that every step is informed. Time is used properly. We've had the first two years of our uni experience where we've partied and done all of that and socialised and done our work ...all of that stuff. That was the rehearsals, now it's the final show. I personally, anyways, have to be a bit more mature in my, in my approach, more than I already was, I think.

Academic Support 15:02

And what would you advise a student who was struggling in some way maybe for personal reasons.

Raahim 15:10

For any student who's feeling that ... I have been that student. I have been the student who's had many personal struggles, whether financially mentally physical.

The best thing about UAL is well LCF specifically is that we have a very amazing counselling team. We have the Student Union, we have tutors. Those difficult discussions that you might personally feel like you're too embarrassed or you're too afraid to discuss, don't because there is a zero-person discrimination policy. So, nobody can discriminate against you. And we know how Arts has a very sensitive approach to mental health because it's it has a very ongoing thing. So, don't be afraid. At any point in time, you can email any faculty member that don't even have to be from your course. If you have an email address, send an email say that you want to fix an appointment speak to them face to face, nobody will reject to talk about it.

If they are not the right person to talk about it, or they feel that they're not qualified enough to give assistance, they will always direct you to the person who can. It's so much there that you don't even have to ask for it. Because our tutor asks us from time to time 'Is everything okay? How you doing?' They try to catch up with us.

(17:00)

It's a very friendly environment to study. And so if somebody is going through struggles and they feel like they're in a situation, no matter how trivial it seems, speak about it, talk to any of your tutors. Speak to our student Rep. If you don't feel confident speaking to your friends and your colleagues, staff will always be there to speak to. So yeah, I would say communicate with your tutors and help will be there and you will reach a conclusion.

Academic Support 17:31 UAL

And finally, what would you say to somebody in two minds about coming to UAL given the situation?

Raahim 17:41

I would ask them to really, and I'm saying this because I was this person four years ago, I would say that you need to really analyse and really compare UAL as a whole umbrella for every single college within it... CSM, LCF, all of them. The course description on the website, it's so explicit. And then compare it to other universities. This is four years of your life and a lot of money that you're investing into it. You need to seriously look at and deeply look at what the statistics of the alumni are saying. Look at the Graduate employment rate. What is the course progression like? So is their Master's opportunities, their PhD opportunity? What are the industry connections? Like? What is the reputation most of all look like? Because I've only been in London for 10 years now. Actually. I've met so many people from so many different parts of the world. I have grown as a person, my call of judgement of someone else has become better. So, I feel if somebody is anxious and worried about coming to London, look at the evidence, look at what LCF is producing what UAL is producing, cause we have thousands of students come here. And the balance of good experiences, alumni that are going into the industry and leading the industry, is a lot a lot higher compared to other places.

Academic Support: 19:02

Thank you so much for all that really, really helpful information and I wish you every success.

## Raahim Interview 2019

Raahim 0:00

So, my name is Raheem, I come from Pakistan. I'm currently studying womenswear at London College of fashion. I'm in my first year, right now.

Raahim 0:11

I came to UK in 2010. And I was initially a forensic science and psychology student. And, through sort of self-discovery and finding my way around, I got involved in fashion. And that kind of pushed me into sort of looking to take it more as an educational route rather than just a hobby. My first visit to UAL was to Central Saint Martins through a Google search. And over there, I bumped into one of the Student Liaison Officers, and she introduced me to the spring and summer courses. So, while I was studying forensic science, I was still coming to UAL, to sort of find out more about the academic route and more training, because I really wanted to better myself. And I found that extremely helpful, especially coming from like an Asian background, for the eldest son to have conversations ... about to become a psychiatrist, to turn around to parents and be like, I actually want to do fashion design. It was a hard conversation. But, thanks to the faculty, I found a lot of homework and a lot of research to be able to back myself up, and to show my parents that it's something that I can do and something it is leading me to places. So, I did a B tech level three, in fashion design. And then I did a foundation. And after that I applied to London College of fashion for a womenswear BA. Thankfully, I got accepted. And I've been here ever since.

Academic Support 1:49

Were there times of real doubt and, if so, how did you deal with them?

Raahim 1:54

Oh, yeah, I think the biggest out to start with, was career prospect. Like, where is this going to lead me to? And thankfully, on the website, like the UAL website and the careers office, there is an extensive description of what UAL graduates lead to. And, I mean, the evidence is pretty much out there. We've got brilliant designers, the alumni of UAL, who have gone and have established their own labels and are basically now in the big running of the fashion industry. So, finding that description, seeing the course, it's like in the third year, like a placement year, when you're going out into the industry, I found that really promising, which I did not find in many other universities. And I think UAL has a really good network within the industry, as well. So, that was a doubt, the biggest doubt, like, am I going to have a job coming into a creative industry? And I think the website and the speaking to the officers, and the university really helped me clear those doubts up.

Academic Support 3:02

And what would you say to somebody taking a similar trajectory to, perhaps from an Asian background.

Raahim 3:09

Now, for me, I speak from my own experience, my journey has been really smooth, so far. I have worked hard, like working hard and proving ourselves is a given. Like, it's not going to get handed over to you, like in any field.

However, I would suggest that if you want to do it, do it because you've got nothing to lose. Like I've mentally prepared myself, there was a lot of mental preparation, where I had mentally prepared myself to be like, I don't want to be in my 30s and 40s, mid-life, having nervous breakdown, doing something that I don't really want to do. I will make sure it work out, 'no' is not an answer for me. Because I'm deep in it now and there's no going back. When it comes to the support needed for a family and trying to convince them ...the thing is we're in London, it's one of the fashion capitals, it's a creative capital of the world. Every single creative, if they had a chance to study here in higher education, in the creative industry, would want to do it especially at an institute like UAL and it's different institute's. So, I would say go for it, you're in the right place, you have the resources, there's opportunity, there's room to grow. So, something will come out of it. But at the end of it, you have to work hard. So that's what I would say to anybody who's coming from a similar background. And I think there's really good network, like the Student Union has different clubs and different community groups like I know we have, like a Muslim Islam group, there's like Korean group, like different ethnicities and everything. So, you find your people, you find people who you can resonate with, with similar stories behind you, very much like this interview, like, I'm here sitting with a similar background, to be able to share my experience. So there isn't a sense of loneliness, if that makes any sense. There's support, there's a lot of people working with you, for you. So it's, it's a very nice place to be

Academic Support 5:15

Thinking about what tips or advice that you would give any student before coming here?

Raahim 5:23

I would say, definitely, have your mind, in the game, like be very sure of this is what we want to do. Because you're investing almost three to four years of your life, maybe even five years, if you're planning to do a Masters, do your research. Everything is on the website, you don't even have to be in the UK, to be able to know what the course is offering you. So, I think as a student, it is vital that you do your research. I know we have representatives in other parts of the world. So, there are people available to talk to you. We have an open door policy, like come and ask questions, have a look around. There's Open Days. I'm a student ambassador for LCF. So, I have helped students like on interview days or Open Days to come and give them tour of the uni. I encourage people to come in, just to familiarise yourself. Once you're familiar with the place, you're not scared of it. I know you UAL, because of its reputation can be intimidating. I know a lot of students in my college who were like, I'm not going to get in because it's UAL, it's really difficult to get in there. I was like, well, you got nothing to lose, at the end of the... if you apply and let's say, God forbid, you don't get in, you're still going to be in the same place where you were starting. But if you do get in, all's good. So, be ready to take a chance, be a risk taker and we're in the creative industry, you're applying to a creative industry, you need to be forward thinking, thinking of resonating from your past. So, I think it's really important to do your research, be ready to take risks and don't be afraid of what's to come just tackle things as they as they come. Yeah, that's what I would advise them.

Academic Support 7:16

Now, moving on to ways of work, studying at UAL, the differences from the way you've been studying before, perhaps you could talk a bit about that?

Raahim 7:27

So I'm speaking from a woman's ware student's perspective, and observing students from other courses, I think it's very much independent...but there's also help. So, it's all very self-directed, you get given a brief, and you're allowed to do whatever you want to do, with the brief. And so, you have your own, as one of my lecturer lives to say, your own handwriting, your own portfolio, your own signature. And I think this is something that I had very much doubts about. Because when I didn't have any fashion art background, for my whole life, I wanted to become a neurosurgeon or psychiatrist. Arts or something I wasn't ...I was like I can't draw, I can't sketch, I can't stitch. But the first year, the way the modules are designed is that everybody gets on the same level. So, the first month, I would say, of uni, was just us learning the basic techniques. There have been people on the course who have never even sat on an industrial sewing machine but by the end of the month, they were stitching better than people who have been on an industrial machine for a very long time. There's extreme amount of technical resources available.

Raahim 8:45

In terms of sketchbooks, and portfolios, the teachers are there to help you. But they do encourage you to be your own self, you set your own standard. There isn't like, oh, the portfolio needs to be of this high standard, looking with this kind of layout and with this type of placement of pictures and sketches...You can need to find your own self. And I think the first year in uni has really helped me discover it, through the different types. And then we have like collaboration projects as well, like the one I'm working on right now. We're doing a collaboration with the textile students. So, the course is called Fashion Design and Technology. So, there is an equal balance of designing and sketching and drawing, researching, going out into the field, gathering information, but then also learning the trade as to how things are supposed to be done and how they're to be made. And at the end of it, you don't have to be a master tailor, ready for Savile Row, as long as you know how it's supposed to look and how it's supposed to be made. As long as you're aware of the industry standard that has been told to us by the uni, that will help, I think will really help us. It is very independent, again, independent but there's a lot of help.

Academic Support 10:01

What do you think are the key skills of successfully working in that way?

Raahim 10:07

Having an open mind, I would say. Just come with no barriers. This is the time where you're allowed to be as creative as possible. Because essentially, you're working for yourself. So, you are ...you are your own boss. I've never had any teacher, or any lecturer turn around to me, and say Oh, this doesn't look nice, they've never said it. And I've observed it around the class, they've never discouraged students. They've helped us to grow from it and how we can develop it further and how we can take it to the next level. But this is the time, I would say, just go all guns blazing, because you don't have a creative director on your head or a stylist or a team of senior designers who are telling you this needs to look to fit your brand.

Essentially, you're making your own brand in these four years. So, have an open mind, be ready to take risks, learn the rules, and then be ready to break them, as well. But that's what I would suggest is what will make you a very successful student and help you discover your own style as well. Come in with a very open mind to be able to explore. Be very curious about stuff.

Raahim 11:22

Can you talk a bit about time management?

Raahim 11:26

I struggled with time management, I'm not going to lie. Like I've been in London for 10 years now. But, as an international student, I can imagine that London's very exciting. You want to explore the city and you want to go out party and Freshers Fair and all of those things and, as exciting as they are, priority is very important. Prioritise your work, before anything else. Being able to say no to things, is extremely important. And I've learned that the hard way. I am in uni five to six days a week, nine o'clock in the morning till it closes is like eight or 10. And then you'd go to CSM library, which is open 24/7, and do more research there. Sometimes things don't go as planned. There are train delays, traffic, some personal issues ...the university is really cooperative, it isn't very regimented, it's not a sort of a dictatorship. The teachers are readily available. They will help you, help you catch up. But, you're only going to be having things piling up on top of each other, which is not good when you have six samples of trousers to make. And then six samples of shirts to make...but now in your second project, and you've got a skirt to make and you have a 40 page Sketchbook. So, things do pile up. And you don't want to be at the point in stage where you're not liking your project. That will reflect the standard of your work. So, be on time, communicate with your teachers. If there is any problem there is support available Academic Support and student advisories And if you're having problems with essays...just don't be afraid to ask questions, if you think you're falling behind, but try and stay on top of it. That's very important.

Academic Support 13:09

And can you just give an idea of the different ways in which you learn?

Raahim 13:13

Okay, so essentially, we have like designing sample rooms where we would have a one-to-one. We will be sitting in a studio with the teacher, looking at the sketch book, looking at the research. Then, we have another classes which are fully technical based. So, you'd be on a sewing machine or a specialist machine. Again, this is for a womanswear. Then you have lectures where we ... the first project was introduction to womenswear. And I think although the seminars and lectures haven't been sort of very designed-based, but they play such a massive and vital part when it comes to research. So you get a sort of idea of becoming almost a creative director and coming up with concepts and coming up with storylines behind your collections.

Raahim 14:07

And then you have debates as well. So student debates where you sit in a group and you discuss and you cross critique the work and you are exposed to opinions from people who are coming from all over the world from different backgrounds. So again, it really expands your mind. Then there's also something called an orb, which is like an online resource booking. And you can book tutorials for things that might not be on your course. But if you still want to learn them, you can, like laser cutting, screen printing, over like a couple of days.

Raahim 14:42

I really want to mention the student enterprise team. And that's basically a board of three tutors, who are helping you set up your own business from the first and help you would like seed funding and funding to start your own brand, help you with your business plan, basically helping you set up on your own company. And the best thing I found about UAL is that you get an alumni card. So, even once you have graduated, you can still come to the uni and use the resources and use the library.

So you're essentially part of UAL for a very long time. They're not letting ...they're not letting you go.

Raahim 15:21

So, it is, essentially, at the end of the day, a very close community and a network that you can depend to, even after you graduate. So that is one thing that I found so good. That played a vital part in applying to UAL as well.

Academic Support 15:35

Thank you so much. You've provided such a lot of really useful information. Really best of luck in the future. Thank

Raahim 15:42

Thank you for having me as well. And I hope it's been helpful and whoever is coming to UAL, good luck to them as well.