

FOUNDATIONS

Episode 1 – Welcome

Oonagh: This is Foundations, a series of podcasts hoping to answer those questions you have at the end of the day.

[Music]

So welcome to Foundations. [Um] hi, I'm Oonagh, I'm one of the curriculum leaders on Fashion Textiles on the Foundation course at CSM.

Nichol: Hi I'm Nichol and I'm the external Liaison Coordinator for the Foundation Programme at Central Saint Martins. We are here with Chris Roberts, who is the Programme Director for Foundation at Central Saint Martins and he's going to tell us a little bit about what the point of Foundation is.

Oonagh: Chris, what's the point?

Chris: Ok, so the purpose of Foundation I think, really, fundamentally, is to prepare people to progress to specialist art and design subject disciplines within undergraduate. [Um] it's about an experiential [um] kind of process led [um] response to a number of projects.

Oonagh: What advice would you give to a student starting out on the course just now?

Chris: Don't worry. Don't panic. This is all going to be [um] quite challenging. It's quite intensive at the beginning of the course.

Oonagh: [mmm].

Chris: You're not alone. Everyone feels overwhelmed by, by the whole experience, particularly for those of you that have come from, you know, right across the other side of the world and don't know anyone. Actually, you're not the only person here who's feeling like that at the moment. [Um] actually it's a very friendly and warm environment, you know. Speak to people [um], you know, make friends and you'll make friends on the Foundation course that will end up becoming your kind of [um], your kind of network, your kind of professional kind of network kind of later on in life. But trust what we ask of you and, and follow the instructions. Speak to us, ask advice and don't be afraid to ask the same questions of us again and again.

Oonagh: So we're here today with some former Foundation students.

Chris: Would you like to say something about how you felt when you first arrived on the Foundation course?

Student 1: Yeah, I think it's [um], it's like being a fish out of water [laughs] I think for the first few weeks because you're kind of thrown into this group of, I think it was about 60 students per course, and you don't really know anyone. Maybe you know one or two people. And for many of us also being in a new city, so you're kind of [er] figuring out how you're making your way through the uni and through the projects and you're kind of getting taught new ways to develop your work. [Um], so I think it's kind of all of these different things you're juggling at once so it can be a bit kind of overwhelming I think at first [um] but I think you kind of get a rhythm after a bit.

Student 2: The most difficult part was [um] the first week, I think, because it was a new beginning. Everything was totally new. [Um] different students from different parts of the world and we all had to do one project in just a few days and it was really challenging but I think I really learned a lot in just that week.

Oonagh: What would you do—is there anything you would do differently?

Student 1: I think that it can be really terrifying and so you're not really able to produce your best work when you're so, like, paralysed in a sense. [Um] so you just have to kind of let that go [um] otherwise you won't be able to experiment, you won't be able to play around. Otherwise it will just be kind of creating really forced [um], like, tense things [quiet laughs]. I think I had a problem last year with like letting go of control. I probably still do as well [continues laughing].

Oonagh: So you've kind of talked about the immediate issues of the anxiety, the stress of the momentum of this course—

Student 1: —Yeah—

Oonagh: —And going forward [um] what did you do—what did you do to help yourself with that anxiety or what top tips would you give students that are starting, that are listening that have just started?

Student 3: Having a hobby in the, especially at the beginning or just throughout, is very good because it can get stressful so it's good to kind of exit that world for a little bit and [um], for me, it was music.

Student 1: Everyone is kind of in the same boat as you, and so if you really kind of, you know, you can get that talk out with your friends and [um], you know, I think we were always like clustered probably in a corner of the library kind of together [laughs]. You know, things like that, it's just I think if you really interact with the people on your course and you really like make an effort to become friends with them it really helps and it's going to make your whole experience so much better, yeah.

Oonagh: And that idea of taking something forward that you've got from the Foundation that you know kind of implement in your work now. Do you want to tell us a bit about how you've progressed, what you thought you took from the Foundation?

Student 1: On the Foundation you're really taught in the proper, you know—inadvertent commas—[laughs] like [um] 'the proper way' to kind of develop a project and I think I hadn't really done a formal art or design programme before CSM so that was kind of the really big thing you took. So, where you're actually getting kind of taught for the beginning how to progress and develop your work, I think that's the really big takeaway that I have from Foundation 'cause that kind of process is what you still do now and are going to be continuing to do.

Oonagh: You've said the course, the Foundation, introduced this idea of a process. You've got your own sort of independent thinking and learning when you've come on to the BA. When/ what—at what point on the Foundation do you think you were able to start being able to sort of embrace that? You said you were hugely anxious at the beginning. Was that a quick process—

Multiple students: —No—

Oonagh: —or was it sort of at the end?

Student 1: No, I think it kind of happened [um] like right before—when you're doing the whole application for the BA. I think everyone will agree, the most—I think the best—work that you produce is like the very end. Like [laughs] I think everything that was in my portfolio wasn't anything from before Christmas holidays, it was like from January to February was the work that went onto my BA portfolio. Any everything from that, I think, was what I was pleased with, yeah.

Oonagh: So, basically, you'd be saying, you're top tip would be don't worry too much initially—

Multiple students: —[laughs] Yeah—

Student 4: You have to make like really crappy work—

Oonagh: —Yeah—

Student 4: 'cause you just like, you have to get it out of your system.

Student 1: [mmm].

Student 4: Like you just have to do it, there's no way around it. Like, even in your BA, you need to make crappy projects—

Student 1: —Yeah—

Student 4: Just so you can like figure out the good stuff as well.

Oonagh: And so the take away to new student starting would be to actually just go with the Foundation process.

Student 1: Yeah.

Uma: Go through the probably the painful little bits.

Student 1: Yeah, I think like the first month or so we were all just like 'I don't understand this at all' but looking back on that, y'know, everything, y'know, it all just kind of falls into place, yeah.

Nichol: What do you wish you knew when you started?

Student 2: [Um] I wish I had known I didn't need to worry a lot in the beginning. [Um] I wanted to be [um] everything to be perfect from the beginning and I think in this course it's important to just experiment in the beginning and then make your decisions throughout the course and then, and then you can give more time to every project. But in the beginning we have to give time to just experiment and don't worry.

Student 1: You have an ID card so [laughs] you can get in the building, so you can [um], you know, go and see everything and take every opportunity.

Student 4: I guess I would have liked to know that it was a bit more like conceptual, if that makes sense?

Student 1: Yeah, I think it's just kind of like calibrate the way that you might be thinking. It's more of a conceptual approach and I think that just knowing that on the off—like from the get go would be just something good to know probably, yeah.

Oonagh: I wanted to ask you, if we had students listening to this, they'd literally just started and they're, you know, freaking out or, like you said, facing fear and things like that. If they said 'what is the point, why am I doing this?', what would you say to them?

Student 4: It'll make sense—you'll get it when you're done with the course.

Student 1: Yeah, I think even regardless of not if you decide to continue at Saint Martins or at a different art university, I think kind of the skills that you're going to be taught will apply to any, anything that you decide to do in your future.

Student 4: [Mhmm] It was just this idea of like, yeah, of thinking abstractly, is really hard to understand initially. But then you can apply everything to it which is really, really lovely.

Chris: What skills do you think you got from the Foundation course?

Student 3: [Um] advice i would give is just to start the course, like, open minded, 'cause there's a lot of like [um] like things that they will tell you to do, like maybe draw on the floor for maybe 10 minutes, or like draw with your eyes closed, or like draw with your left hand if your right handed, but it's sort of—like at the time, you

might feel a bit stupid, but it's all for a reason 'cause when you like, when you go on on the course and you look back you think 'oh, this helped me with this' or 'this helped me with that'. There's nothing that they will tell you to do that's not for a specific reason so, yeah, just come open minded and expect to try things that you probably haven't.

Student 1: [Um] I think the skills are both in terms of how you're approaching your own work but also how you're going to be interacting with other people [um] and how you're gonna be [er]—I think there's also like, you have to think' about how you're going to start presenting yourself as well.

Chris: One of the [um] I suppose fundamental things that we, we try and teach on the Foundation course is resilience, but also to teach people to try and be self motivated and [um] I wonder if you could say something about, about how you , how you managed to keep motivating yourself throughout the course?

Student 4: Fear.

Multiple students: [Laughter]

Student 1: But I think resilience is a really interesting one as well 'cause I think I hadn't really been critiqued in the sense of how we would be or even given a tutorial [um] prior to being on that. So that's kind of like, you know, you have to learn tough love [laughs] is, I think, is a good thing as well.

Oonagh: Were you, were you often upset?

Student 1: Maybe not often [laughs] but I can definitely remember a few times where I was upset or you feel a bit defeated but I don't think that that changes.

Oonagh: I think we're sort of saying it's that idea of letting it go. Have I just quoted a Disney song? I can't believe it!

Group: [Laughter] Frozen!

Oonagh: So that's it for this welcoming episode. In the next episode we'll be talking about where to go for help and support on the Foundation course.

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