

Overview

The Progression Project at Arts University Bournemouth is designed to nurture the personal, creative, and academic journeys of undergraduate students receiving the Care Leaver or Stand Alone Bursaries. Through termly one-to-one bursary meetings with their lead contact (formerly Progression Officer), alongside additional wellbeing and enrichment activities.

The project aims to build confidence, strengthen students' sense of belonging, and support them as they develop their practice and prepare for future careers. Available data on care experienced and estranged students highlights the need for additional support for access, continuation and attainment in Higher Education.

- At age 19, only 13% of statutory care leavers are in university, compared with 46% of the wider population. ([OfS, July 2025](#))
- 18% withdraw within the first year, compared to 10% of non care experienced students ([OfS, October 2025](#))
- Care experienced students get lower degree classifications: 63.2% achieve a first or 2:1 compared to 76.6% of non care-experienced students ([OfS, October 2025](#))

To understand how these experiences shape students over time, baseline surveys were issued at the start of academic years 2024/25 and 2025/26. These surveys track the development of attributes identified as important for thriving in creative higher education, focusing on Wellbeing and Belonging and Academic Progression. This approach enables a clearer understanding of how students' attributes evolve over time, and how the project contributes to their overall development at AUB.

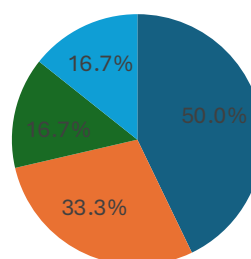


Participants

The 2024–25 bursary cohort is the first to complete both the enrolment and first-year baseline surveys. Six students took part, evenly split between those with experience of care and those with experience of estrangement.

It is important to note that with such a small sample the findings are not generalisable and that the findings will be supplemented with additional qualitative data in 2026 and throughout the project.

Engagement in Transition to University Activities



■ Open Day ■ Offer Holder Day
■ AAAUB ■ 1-1 Campus Tour

Wellbeing and Belonging

Students generally arrived feeling welcomed and aware of the support available to them. By their second year, this awareness had developed into a clearer understanding of how to access support. However, early feelings of welcome did not always translate into a sustained sense of belonging. Fewer students reported having supportive friendships by the start of their second year, despite initially positive indicators. A clear pattern emerged: students who engaged in social events and built supportive friendships were also those who reported a stronger sense of belonging. This suggests that participation in community-building activities - formal or informal - plays a meaningful role in how connected students feel to AUB's creative community. Those who did develop a sense of belonging were also the ones who engaged in social events and formed supportive friendships.

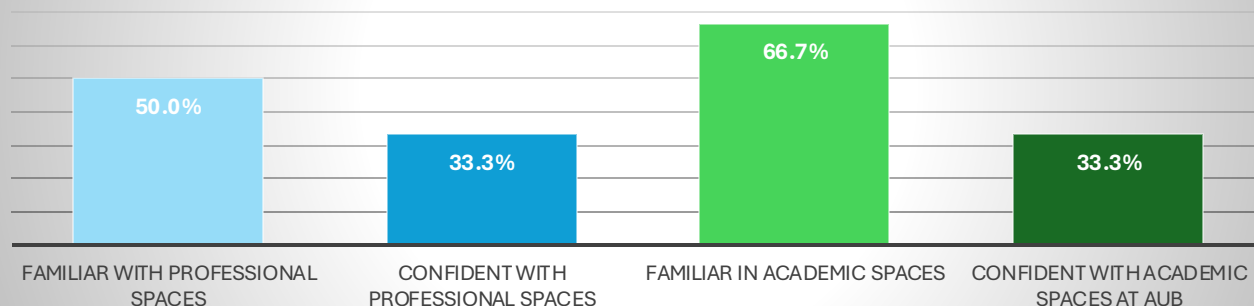
Academic Progression

Students began their first year with good awareness of academic support services, though only half knew who to approach for course-specific support, a figure that remained unchanged a year later. Confidence in seeking help from tutors or technicians also remained limited.

A similar pattern appeared in students' relationships with academic and professional spaces. While familiarity was high early on, confidence in using those spaces dropped by the second year. Only a third of participants felt confident navigating academic or professional environments. The baseline surveys highlights that familiarity with academic spaces is high in the first term, but confidence was much lower by the second year.

This distinction between knowing and feeling confident suggests that students may benefit from more sustained, hands-on support as they transition into more independent creative practice.

Participant familiarity versus confidence in academic and professional spaces at AUB



Learnings and Next Steps

The findings indicate that AUB's transition support for students with experience of care or estrangement is working well at the point of arrival. Students feel welcomed, informed, and aware of the support around them. However, forming friendships and building a personal support network remains a challenge for many, even when opportunities are available. This will be explored further in the focus group in 2026.

The data also suggests that expecting students to feel confident in academic and professional spaces within their first year may be unrealistic. Amending the theory of change and survey questions to reflect a more achievable expectation, that students feel *comfortable*, rather than fully confident, one year into their studies.