# UAL leans on international fees and start‑ups as it expands online and pre‑degree offer



The University of the Arts London presents itself as a distinctive creative cluster: six specialist colleges — Central Saint Martins, London College of Fashion, London College of Communication, and the colleges of Camberwell, Chelsea and Wimbledon — distributed across the capital and united under a single institutional umbrella formed in 2004. According to the university’s own description, that structure is intended to foster close industry links and a global profile in art and design, with provision that ranges from pre‑degree courses to research‑level study. The institution’s end‑of‑year shows and graduate employment record have long been held up as evidence that UAL’s teaching converts raw talent into industry‑ready practitioners. (This account draws on the original profile and the university’s public overview.)

Finances underpin much of UAL’s current standing. The university’s 2023/24 financial statements show total income of around £466 million and disclose that international tuition fees made up some 55% of that figure; international students also account for roughly 40% of undergraduates, according to the institution’s published numbers. UAL reports an operating surplus and points to recent capital investment — notably in new premises for the London College of Fashion — as evidence of a broadly sustainable position. These figures explain both the university’s capacity to invest in facilities and its sensitivity to changes in global student mobility.

The creative energy of the campus network is visible beyond degree results. UAL’s alumni have an outsized cultural footprint — the colleges are well represented among winners of major art prizes — and the university says its graduates are in strong demand across fashion, media, fine art, performance and applied design. That reputation helps fuel record application rates and a competitive admissions environment, which the institution frames as a sign of strength for both its courses and its recruitment reach.

Entrepreneurial activity among students has emerged as a notable feature. Data tracked for 2023/24 show UAL leading UK universities for the number of student‑run start‑ups, with nearly 500 ventures recorded, a figure reported and analysed in the sector press and official surveys. Industry commentators who track higher education commercialisation warn that quantity does not always equate to investment value, but the volume of projects does underline the commercial and practical orientation of many courses and students’ appetite to convert creative work into business activity.

Financial support and targeted scholarships form a high‑profile strand of UAL’s offer. The university provides a standard bursary of £1,400 a year to students on maximum maintenance loans — effectively those from households with incomes below £25,000 — and a hardship fund that paid out £2.4m in 2023–24, with awards varying from a few hundred to several thousand pounds. Corporate‑backed scholarships are generous and well‑advertised: UAL’s information confirms the Gucci Changemakers awards of £25,250 a year (totalling £75,750) for three eligible London College of Fashion students who have engaged with the UAL Insights outreach programme, while the Capri Holdings Foundation funds scholarships worth £43,100 over two years for three students undertaking placement years at Central Saint Martins. The university presents these schemes as part of broader efforts to widen access and diversify the sector.

Accommodation and student services reflect the university’s urban footprint and cost base. UAL offers around 3,600 places across a dozen halls, with rents ranging from mid‑four‑figure annual sums to nearly £20,000 for premium studios on year‑round tenancies, figures published in the institution’s student information. Overall, just under a third of undergraduates received some form of financial help in the most recent year cited by the university.

In recent months UAL has expanded its learning platforms. The institution has launched its first wholly online master’s degrees — including an MA in Fashion Business run by London College of Fashion — offering multiple start dates and a flexible, pay‑by‑unit model intended to suit professionals and students unable to relocate. The university markets the programmes as mobile‑first and designed to support low‑bandwidth access, arguing they will extend access to under‑represented groups and older learners.

Alongside digital expansion, the university has consolidated pre‑degree and further education provision in a new School of Pre‑Degree Studies based at Lime Grove in Shepherd’s Bush, with workshop and digital fabrication facilities for 3D printing, casting, ceramics, printmaking and performance. UAL frames the development as both an investment in progression routes and a way to strengthen technical and practical provision at an earlier stage of student development.

Admissions and student support remain central to UAL’s public narrative. The UAL Insights outreach programme targets Londoners from priority postcodes, care‑experienced young people, those from families on means‑tested benefits and prospective first‑generation students; the university also runs Saturday Club schemes for younger pupils. Contextual offers are applied across subjects — the university told the Daily Mail that “our contextual admissions process helps us to identify students with the most creative potential, regardless of their personal background or education experiences.” UAL has acknowledged that student experience was identified as a key risk in its most recent annual reporting and says it is concluding a three‑year programme to implement a new student experience framework; in the latest National Student Survey analysis cited by the profile, UAL’s student support scores have risen and placed it above sector averages in that metric.

That progress sits against wider sector pressures. The university’s dependence on overseas fee income and the mixed picture for commercialisation mean UAL is sensitive to changes in international recruitment and to the availability of public and private funds that underwrite engagement and spin‑out support. Sector reporting has noted that higher education funding headwinds can reduce the value of spin‑outs and strain business‑engagement efforts, a backdrop that makes sustained institutional investment and clear governance around risk all the more important. UAL itself publishes detailed notes on expenditure priorities, governance and risk in its financial reporting.

Taken together, the picture UAL presents is of a specialist institution combining cultural authority, concentrated investment and evolving delivery models to broaden access and foster enterprise. The university’s published accounts and course pages frame these moves as part of a deliberate strategy to protect core strengths — studios, specialist teaching and industry links — while modernising provision to reach new learners and support graduate entrepreneurship. How well that balance holds in the face of sector uncertainty will be one of the clearest tests of UAL’s long‑term resilience.

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## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/university-guide/article-14914839/University-Arts-London.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.arts.ac.uk/about-ual)
* Paragraph 2 – [[3]](https://www.arts.ac.uk/study-at-ual/fees-and-funding/ual-where-the-money-goes), [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/university-guide/article-14914839/University-Arts-London.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
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* Paragraph 4 – [[6]](https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/funding-cuts-hamper-business-and-community-engagement-efforts), [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/university-guide/article-14914839/University-Arts-London.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
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* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/university-guide/article-14914839/University-Arts-London.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.arts.ac.uk/about-ual)
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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/university-guide/article-14914839/University-Arts-London.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.arts.ac.uk/about-ual> - University of the Arts London’s About page outlines its identity as a London-based specialist institution formed of six colleges: Central Saint Martins, London College of Fashion, London College of Communication, Camberwell, Chelsea and Wimbledon. It highlights UAL’s global standing in art and design, its range of courses from pre-degree to postgraduate, and its emphasis on research, industry links and creative impact. The page describes UAL’s commitment to diversity and inclusion, its role in shaping culture and industry, and practical information such as locations, contacts and governance. It presents UAL as a collaborative creative network that nurtures artistic talent worldwide consistently.
3. <https://www.arts.ac.uk/study-at-ual/fees-and-funding/ual-where-the-money-goes> - The UAL 'Where the money goes' page summarises the university’s income and expenditure for the 2023/24 financial year, showing total income of £466 million and detailed breakdowns. It states that international tuition fees constituted 55% of total income, with home and EU fees and other sources making up the remainder. The page explains expenditure categories including teaching, residences, premises and central services, and notes an operating surplus. Links to the full Report and Financial Statements are provided for detailed figures. The page emphasises financial sustainability and investment in facilities and student services and outlines risks, governance, future priorities and transparency.
4. <https://www.arts.ac.uk/study-at-ual/fees-and-funding/scholarships-search/gucci-changemakers-scholarship> - The Gucci Changemakers Scholarship page on UAL’s site describes a funded award of £75,750 in total (£25,250 per year) for three Home students at London College of Fashion who have participated in the UAL Insights outreach programme. It summarises eligibility criteria, the scholarship’s focus on financial need and creative potential, and coverage of tuition and maintenance during study (excluding placement years). The page explains application timings, assessment process and guidance documents, and emphasises Gucci’s wider Changemakers initiative and its aim to increase diversity and access in fashion education. Practical application details and deadlines are included, with support available for applicants.
5. <https://www.arts.ac.uk/study-at-ual/fees-and-funding/scholarships-search/capri-holdings> - The Capri Holdings Foundation Scholarships page sets out awards totalling £43,100 each over two years for three Home students undertaking the Diploma in Professional Studies placement year on BA Fashion Design or BA Fashion Communication at Central Saint Martins. It details eligibility, assessment by financial need and creative potential, and specifies amounts for placement and final year (£17,850 and £25,250 respectively). The page explains the scholarship’s aim to support students from under‑represented communities, provides guidance notes and application deadlines, and clarifies payment arrangements. It frames the scheme as part of Capri Holdings’ pledge to advance diversity within fashion and inclusion.
6. <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/funding-cuts-hamper-business-and-community-engagement-efforts> - Times Higher Education reports on university spin‑outs and start‑ups, noting that the University of the Arts London registered the most student start‑ups in 2023‑24 with 493 ventures, ahead of other UK institutions. The piece analyses national trends in higher education commercialisation, discusses how funding cuts affect business and community engagement, and compares spin‑out numbers across providers. It cites data from the Higher Education – Business and Community Interaction survey and industry trackers, highlighting differences between spin‑out volume and investment value. The article contextualises start‑up figures alongside broader sector challenges and urges sustained institutional investment.
7. <https://ualonline.arts.ac.uk/courses/ma-fashion-business-online> - The MA Fashion Business (Online) page from UAL Online describes a fully online, part‑time master’s delivered by London College of Fashion, designed to develop business and strategic skills for the fashion sector. It highlights flexible study with multiple entry points per year, a pay‑per‑unit model, industry‑informed units and a capstone project, and emphasises sustainability, social and racial justice in the curriculum. The page sets out careers outcomes, entry requirements, fees per unit and details of student support. It promotes online learning as widening access, allowing professionals and international students to study without relocating, with dedicated student success teams and resources.