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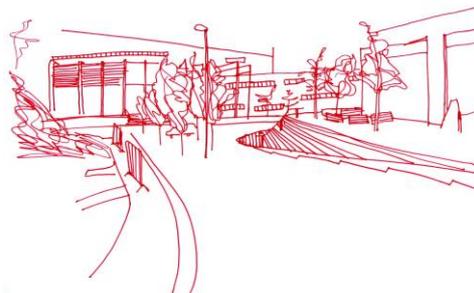
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**Hereford College of Arts - Working in partnership with external communities;
creative arts education outside the institution as a way to develop employability
skills alongside practice**

Nuala is a third year student at Hereford College of Arts studying on the B.A (Hons) Illustration course. She is an active member of the Student Union and a member of the Student Scholarship Group. Here, she writes of her experiences working with external partners from different disciplines during her Summer Vacation. The experience of working within a community of practice has supported her employability skills. Working directly with professional artists outside the institution has supported her building a professional network as well as developing her visual practice.

I applied to Longbridge public art project summer school because I felt it had a strong link between my work during the second year of my illustration degree and what was to come for third year. It was external to my degree but in my opinion, the benefits of continuing artistic study across the summer are hard to argue against. The summer school students were degree level students from across the West Midlands. I was particularly interested in basing my creative practice in Longbridge, as I had studied my BTEC at Bournville College and the terrain has developed considerably enough to revisit it in my illustration without repeating myself. This gave me chance to reflect on how much my creative practice has developed since moving on to Hereford College of Arts to study illustration.



LPAP, or Longbridge Public Arts Project, is based in the new Longbridge town centre which has been built on the site of the old car factory. The project is funded by St Modwen. The art produced through the project is multi-disciplinary, and generally responds to the environment and community. This was important to me as it helped me understand the differences between the way we work as illustrators and the way other artists work. The summer school was run by Matt Andrews, Stephen Burke and Sarah Silverwood. It was free to attend but materials had to be funded ourselves. As an active learner, who would have been doing self-initiated projects on my own over



summer regardless, I was happy with the arrangement, although it would have been unsustainable in practice if the school had been run on a full-time basis.

Key themes running throughout the work artists produce at LPAP are sustainability, and being aware and responsible towards the general public in Longbridge. As part of the summer school, we learnt about these artists, their rationale and their work. This was usually in the form of workshops and talks on Thursday evenings. I tended to [blog about them](#), a habit I'd picked up whilst working with the scholarship group on the [connected classes project](#), which was an active way of consolidating what I'd learnt and to reinforce my participation in the project in the eyes of my audience.

These workshops, talks and interactions with other artists, along with volunteering to invigilate the project, gave me the space to research, experiment and organically work towards a final brief. I think this was a type of rhizomatic learning which sat comfortably in the type of space (academically speaking) we were in. As a full time illustration student, I found that a couple of months part time studying in a more fine art orientated setting helped my creative practice grow. In a professional sense, it is useful to know how differently artists work, and how we can find opportunities to come together.

For my final outcome for the summer school, I produced an A2 drawing taking typographic inspiration for the Longbridge Mass Observation Archive – the product of Sarah Silverwood's artist residency – and my own primary research photographs of Longbridge Lane / Bristol Road junction as things stood this summer. The exhibition for this is in the process of being arranged. I had also done signage for the project's unit, which was easily developed out of the body of illustration I was already doing. The architecture within these signs is that of Longbridge town centre, but isn't repeated in the other illustrations I produced.





Projects like this usually come with extra benefits outside of completing the designated brief. I got to meet and get to know some lovely art students and practicing artists, and also got experience of invigilating the space. Getting experience like this makes me feel more prepared for the future, not just in terms of work prospects but also in more accurately empathising with other people I am likely to be working with in the creative industries. Ultimately I chose this career path because I enjoy it, and I'm hoping to maintain contact with both LPAP and the individual artists I met in the future. It's opened my eyes to what the arts community in the West Midlands is like and made me more confident to make decisions about my career and life over the next few years.

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Nuala's work can be viewed on her website: <http://nualahussey.com/>

For further information around the Longbridge Public Art Project visit their [website](#).