P4: *Design for human equity, social, and racial justice* in JTM - Case Study

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Background

1. Setting the Stage: Place, People & Purpose

Central Saint Martins's Jewellery, Textiles & Materials (JTM) community, is an eclectic mix of BA and MA students working, investigating materials in the broadest sense ranging from open-ended design speculation to hands-on craftmanship.

Courses: BA (Hons) Jewellery Design, BA (Hons) Textile Design, MA Material Futures, MA Biodesign, and MA Regenerative Design (online).

On the JTM website, it states that, "Alongside our ethos of radical materiality and intricate making, we are committed to decolonising our curriculum, diversifying our shared learning resources, prioritising representation and developing planet-positive design strategies. We evoke curiosity and provoke change. We actively empower our students and staff to share our strong sense of accountability for climate and biodiversity emergency, economy and social justice."

I joined this setting in two capacities: first as an MA Regenerative Design graduate with a background in education and now as Climate Advocate for the JTM programme. The Climate Advocate scheme – an initiative of UAL's Academic Discourse & Action Learning (ADAL) Working Group – places recent alumni inside courses to audit handbooks, co-design curriculum and act as "critical friends" on climate, racial and social-justice questions.

2. Institutional Drivers: From Guiding Principles to Practice

Since 2023 the ADAL Working Group has been steering Central Saint Martins toward its 2026 Education for Sustainable Development goals. Concrete outputs already in circulation include:

- Five Guiding Principles for Climate, Racial & Social Justice (Fig. 1)

- A Curriculum-Embedding Framework – now referenced in all new course validations
- An open-access Toolkit (glossary, teaching resources, case studies, library guides)
- Carbon Literacy Training – completed by 500+ staff
- The Climate Advocate scheme – one advocate for every academic programme
- ‘Living-lab’ pilots that test alternative teaching rhythms, e.g. “learning in nature” weeks

As a result of ADAL Working Group's intiatives, conversations on circularity and ecological design have become integrated into academic discourse and planning. There is still a goal for all courses in the JTM department to become "shift: level – where at least one of the above principles is contextualised in the student handbook, part of a unit or elective and assessed in at least unit at each level. Generally, principles 1, 2 and 3 were embedded the most within courses in the JTM Programme.¶

During the JTM departmental meeting in January 2025, teaching staff were invited to reflect on and discuss the integration of the Climate, Social, and Racial Justice Principles (see Fig. 1 above) within their courses. As the discussion unfolded, staff shared that they recognized that Principle 4 – *Design for human equity, social, and racial justice* – was the least embedded in current teaching practices. This particularly emerged from multiple comments made by staff who admitted feeling unsure about how to approach these topics in their teaching, citing a lack of appropriate vocabulary and confidence in facilitating such conversations. In response, Programme Head Anne Marr invited me to run peer-to-peer focus groups to investigate how Principle 4 is taught, with view to prototype an intervention that could be implemented across all JTM courses.

3. Peer Listening: What's Missing and What's Needed.

Problem statement – Student representatives reported that while themes of circularity feel second-nature, social-justice discourse emerges only sporadically and is rarely taught or assessed. The Material Futures course handbook I audited in December 2024 showed that engagement with Principle 4 was almost entirely student-led and informal.

A peer-to-peer interview process was set up to engage student representatives across the Jewellery, Textiles and Materials (JTM) programme in dialogue around P4. The objective was to gather diverse student perspectives while fostering inter-programme connection.

A total of ten student representatives across the JTM programme participated in the interviews.

Interviews were conducted in March 2025 through a combination of in-person and online formats. In-person interviews took place during a scheduled student representative meeting, which included food and refreshments to create a relaxed atmosphere. A shared table with open-ended prompts and writing materials encouraged informal discussion among attendees. Interviews were held in a nearby side room,

where students joined individually or in pairs for a ten-minute listening session, guided by a consistent set of questions. Additional interviews were conducted online via Microsoft Teams to ensure full participation.

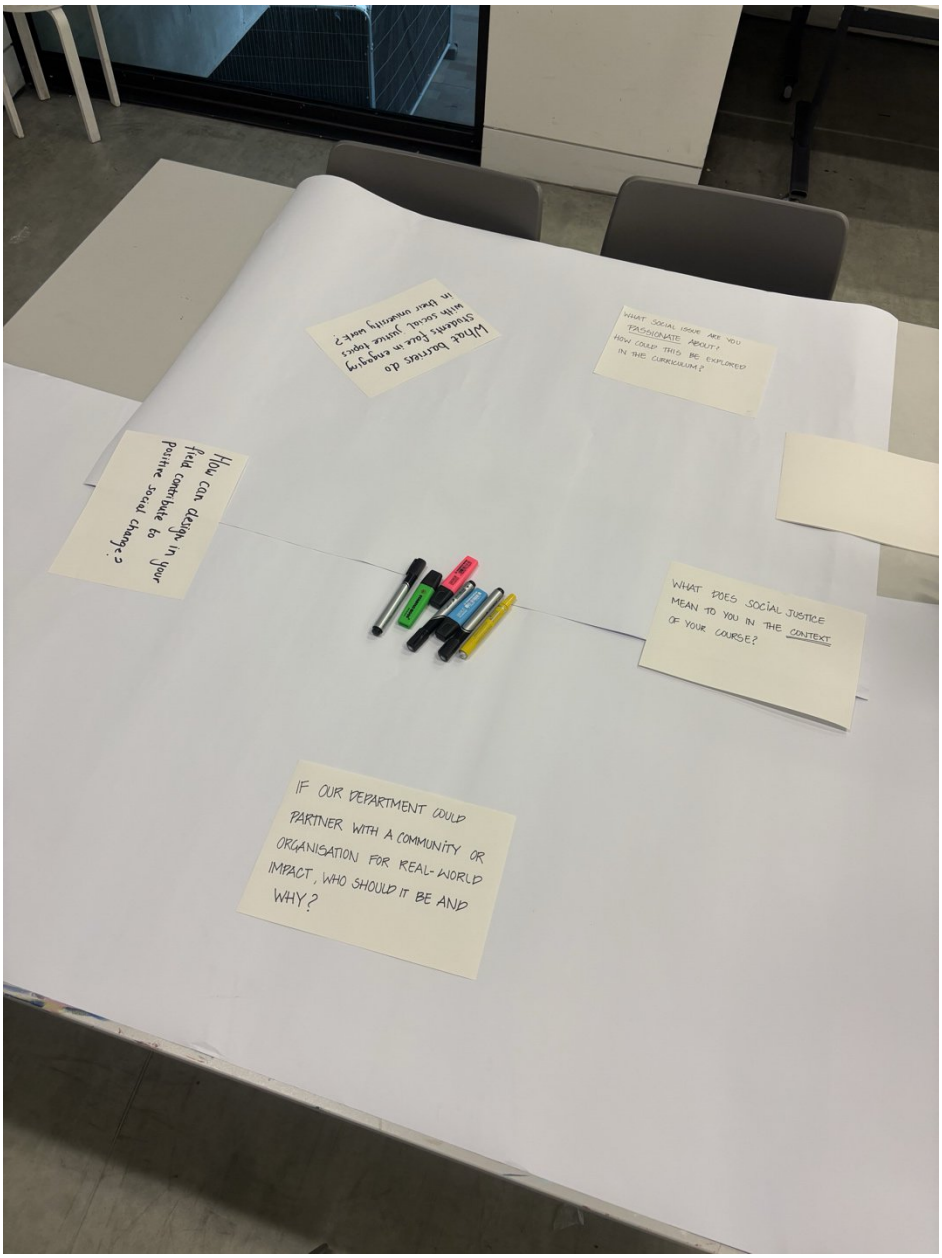
This approach was intentionally timed to coincide with the students' representatives' request to meet one another, and with Programme Lead, Anne Marr, suggestion to buy them pizza and set up on the interviews at the same time.

The goal was to understand how deeply Principle 4 is currently integrated into JTM courses and how students would prefer to engage with it, if at all.

As part of our Climate Advocate training, we did a few sessions with Rose Thompson (Social Purpose Evidence and Evaluation Manager) about peer-to-peer methodologies. With Rose's and Monika Gravagno's support (CSM's Climate Advocate Coordinator), I designed a set of questions for the interview.

1) Have you encountered social or racial justice themes in your coursework or creative practice? If so, where or how?
2) Do you personally incorporate themes of equity and justice in your creative work which is related to your course assignments? If no, what are the barriers?
3) Who teaches you social justice in your course, you don't need to give specific names.
4) How was it taught, e.g. lecture, toolkit, project brief, collaborative work, methodologies, a specific exercise…? Can you give me an example?
5) Do you feel comfortable discussing social and racial justice at university? If no, what would help create a more open and supportive space?
6) Can you give me a specific example/scenario when you've felt comfortable/or uncomfortable?
7) Are there particular themes, topics, or approaches that would make these discussions more engaging? (Case studies of designers/makers working with justice themes, Hands-on workshops exploring ethical materials and processes, Collaborative projects with communities or external groups, Storytelling and lived experiences in design).
8) What would make engagement with social and racial justice in design feel authentic and meaningful to you?
9) If we were to design a workshop on design for human equity and social justice, what format would you prefer? (Hands-on making workshop, Group discussion and reflection, Guest speakers and case studies, Collaborative project with real-world impact)
10) What would you like to gain from a workshop like this?

11) Is there anything else you'd like to add about how the JTM department engages with equity and justice in design?



4. Positioning the Work

I am a graduate of the MA Regenerative Design course, which is part of the Jewellery, Textiles & Materials (JTM) department at Central Saint Martins. My experience as both a student and now a climate advocate deeply shapes the lens through which I approached this research.

Currently, I work in the university as a climate advocate, focused on embedding the university's five Climate, Social and Racial Justice Principles into the JTM curriculum. In particular, this case study concentrates on Principle 4: *Design for human equity, social and racial justice*, which invites students and educators to critically examine societal norms, biases, and values through reflective and regenerative design practices.

My dual role—as both an insider familiar with the pedagogic culture of JTM and an advocate tasked with challenging it—comes with both advantages and limitations. It allowed me to build trust with participants and foster candid, peer-led interviews. However, I remain conscious of the influence my advocacy stance may have on interpretation. To navigate this, I have aimed to centre student voices and frame findings through thematic analysis grounded in their lived experiences and language.

5. Scope of Participation & Early Reach

Before conducting student interviews, I attended the first JTM programme meeting of 2025 to introduce myself and engage with academic staff across all courses. The purpose was to listen to their reflections on how the UAL Climate, Social, and Racial Justice Principles—particularly Principle 4 (Design for human equity, social and racial justice)—were being engaged with in their teaching.

It was during this meeting that the limited integration of Principle 4 across the programme became evident. Staff highlighted several challenges, including a lack of shared language and confidence when discussing complex concepts such as decolonisation. One key suggestion was the development of course-specific glossaries—for example, defining what decolonisation means in the contexts of Biodesign, Textiles, and Jewellery—so that both staff and students could engage more meaningfully with the principle.

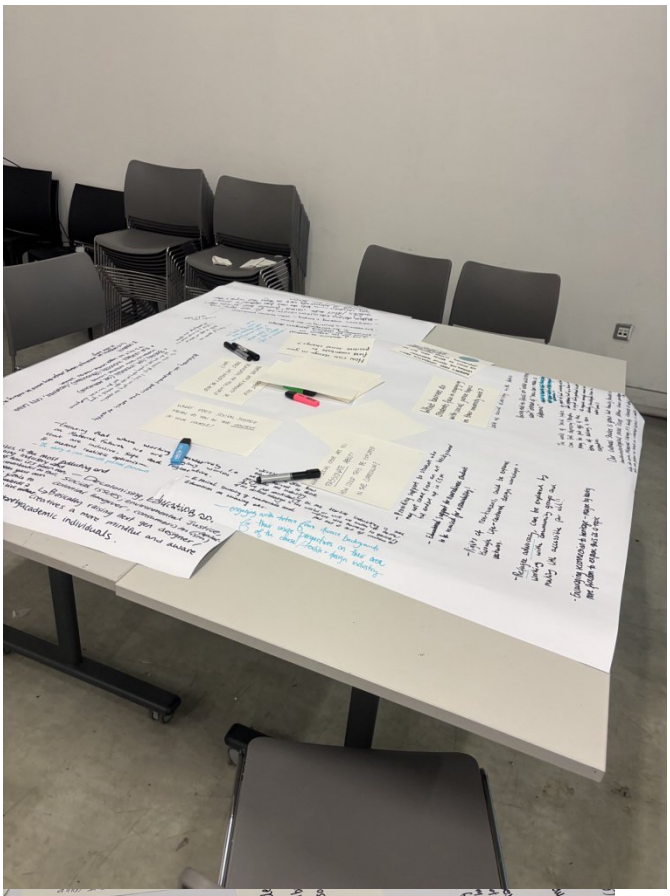
Findings

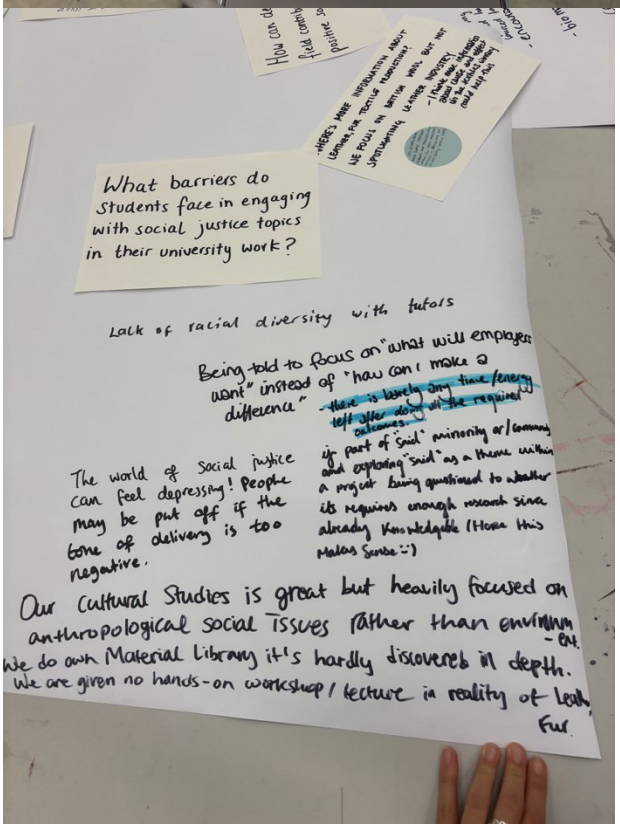
1. Who we listened to

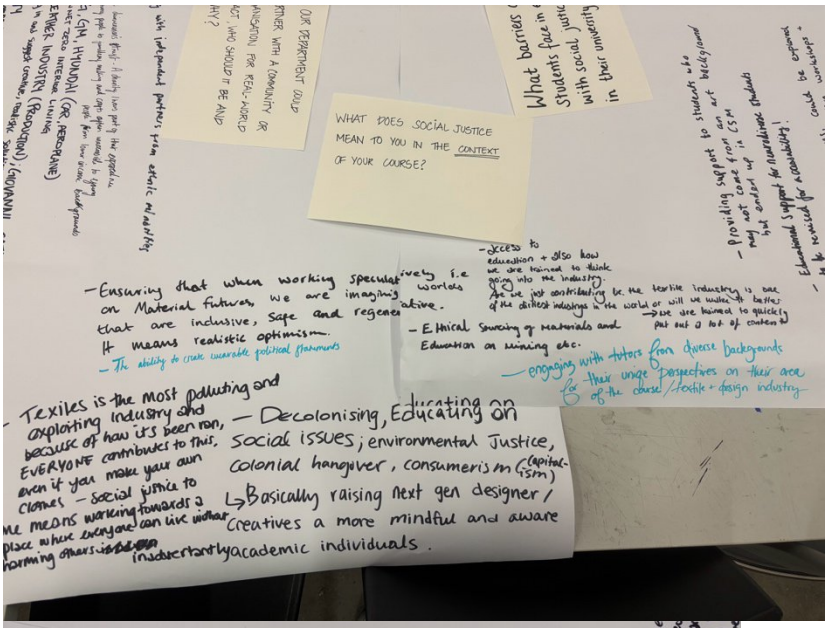
Between March–April 2025, we conducted ten semi-structured peer-to-peer listening interviews with students across five Jewellery, Textiles & Materials (JTM) courses:

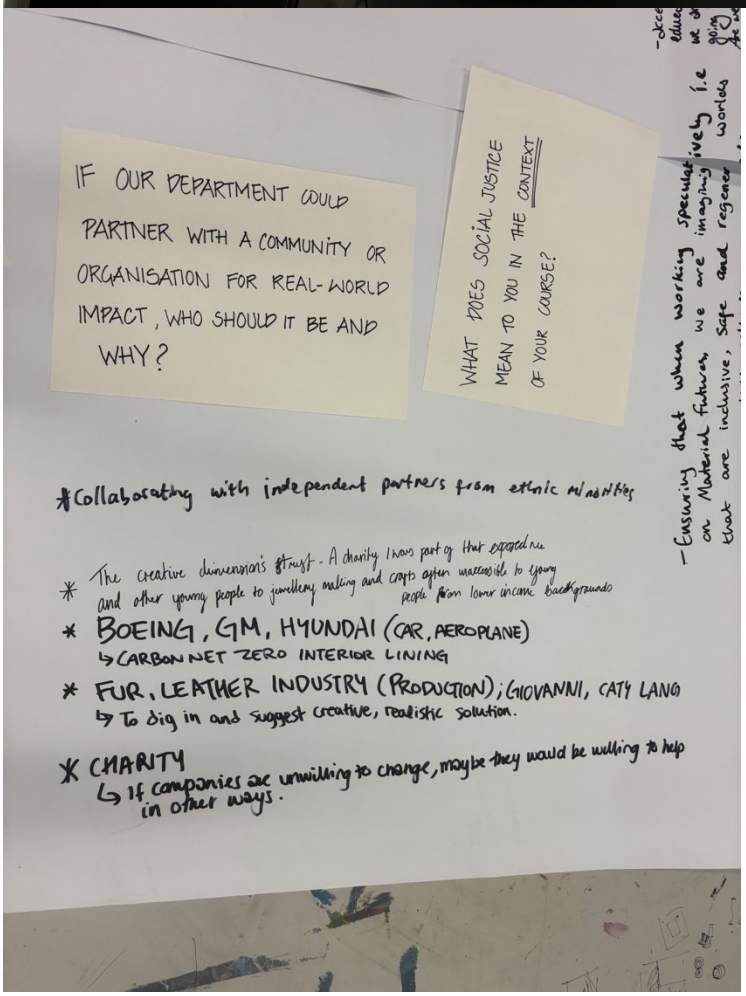
Course	Students
MA Regenerative Design	2
MA Material Futures	2
MA Biodesign	2
BA Textiles	3
BA Jewellery Design	1

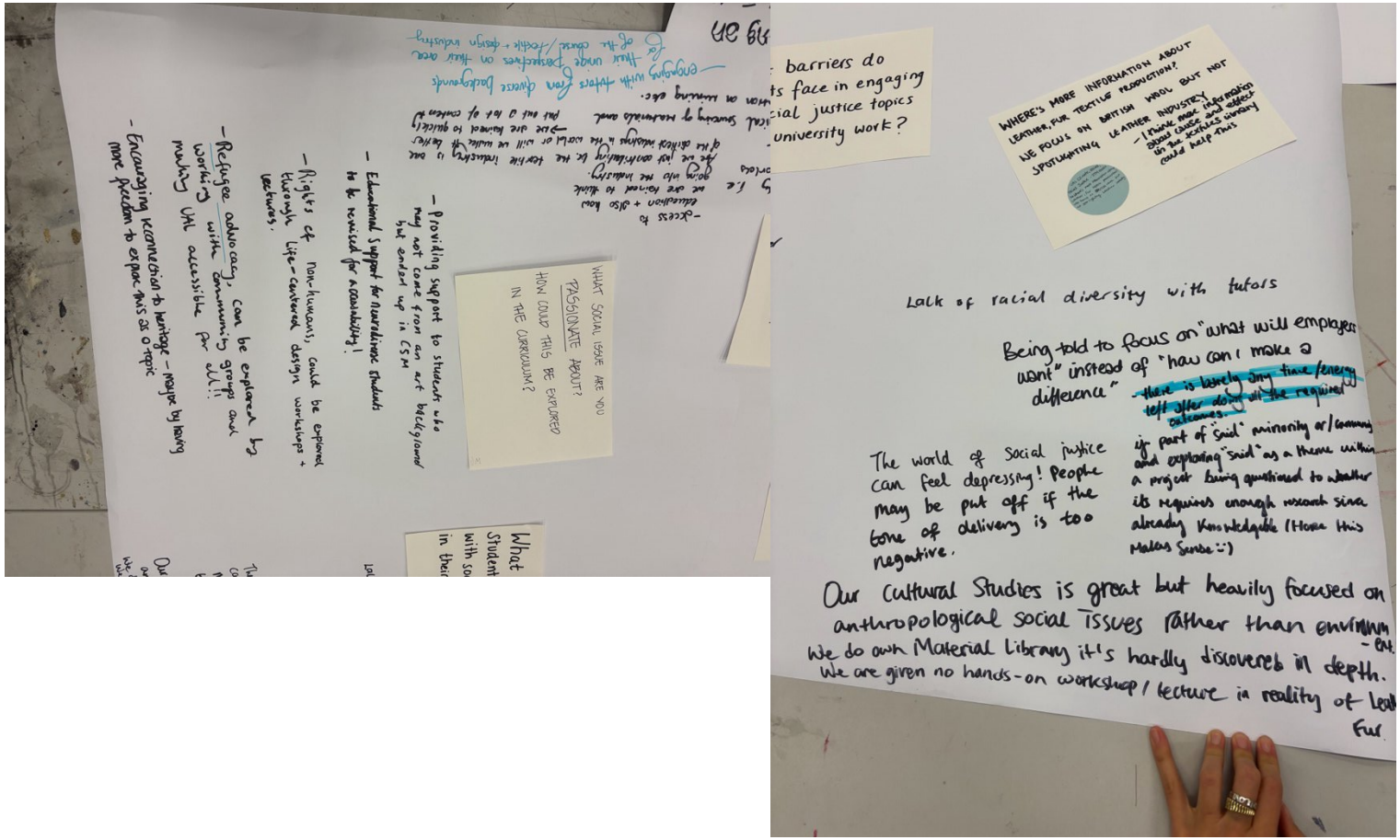
The following images show the table setup featuring prompts related to Principle 4 (Design for human equity, social and racial justice), which provided a space for students to freely share their thoughts and reflections.

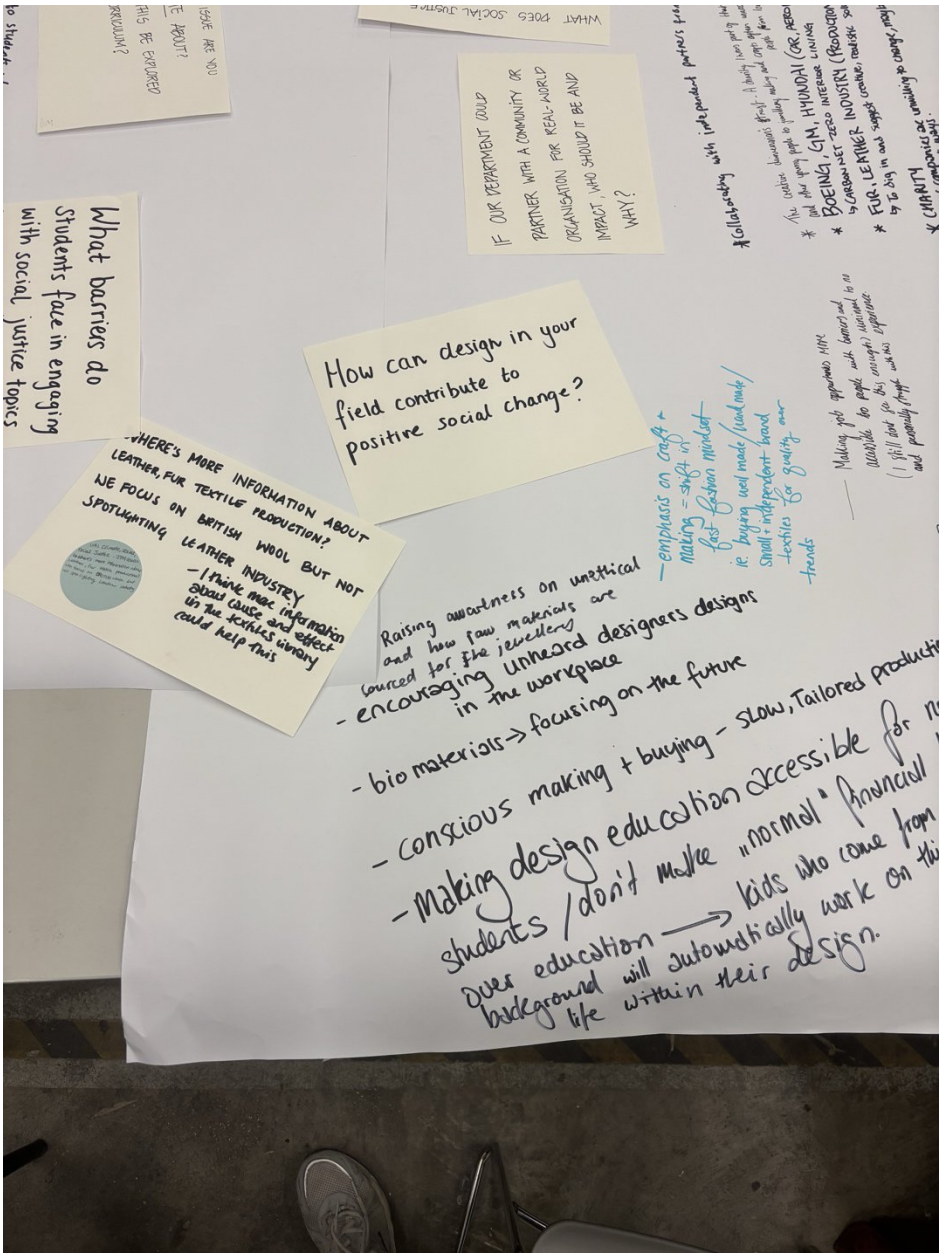



What barriers do students face in engaging with social justice topics in their university work?
Lack of racial diversity with tutors
Being told to focus on "what will employers want" instead of "how can I make a difference"
The world of social justice can feel depressing! People may be put off if the tone of delivery is too negative.
Our Cultural Studies is great but heavily focused on anthropological social issues rather than environm
We do own Material Library it's hardly discovered in depth.
We are given no hands-on workshop / lecture in reality of Leath
Fur.


WHAT DOES SOCIAL JUSTICE MEAN TO YOU IN THE CONTEXT OF YOUR COURSE?
- Ensuring that when working speculatively i.e on Material futures, we are imagining worlds that are inclusive, safe and regenerative.
It means realistic optimism.
- The ability to create wearable political statements
- Texiles is the most polluting and exploiting industry and because of how it's been ran, EVERYONE contributes to this, even if you make your own clothes - social justice to me means working towards a place where everyone can live without harming others inadvertantly
- Decolonising, Educating on social issues; environmental Justice, colonial hangover, consumerism (capitalism)
↳ Basically raising next gen designer / creatives a more mindful and aware academic individuals.
- Ethical sourcing of materials and Education on mining etc.
- engaging with tutors from diverse backgrounds for their unique perspectives on their area of the course / textile + design industry
- Access to education + also how we are trained to think going into the industry.
Are we just contributing to the textile industry is one of the dirtiest industries in the world or will we make it better
→ we are trained to quickly put out a lot of content
- Providing support to students who may not come from an art background but ended up in CSM
Educational support for neurodivergent students
Could be exploited by the revised for accountability!


IF OUR DEPARTMENT COULD PARTNER WITH A COMMUNITY OR ORGANISATION FOR REAL-WORLD IMPACT, WHO SHOULD IT BE AND WHY?
WHAT DOES SOCIAL JUSTICE MEAN TO YOU IN THE CONTEXT OF YOUR COURSE?
* Collaborating with independent partners from ethnic minorities
* The creative dimension's trust - A charity I was part of that exposed me and other young people to jewellery making and crafts often inaccessible to young people from lower income backgrounds
* BOEING, GM, HYUNDAI (CAR, AEROPLANE)
↳ CARBON NET ZERO INTERIOR LINING
* FUR, LEATHER INDUSTRY (PRODUCTION); GIOVANNI, CATY LANG
↳ To dig in and suggest creative, realistic solution.
* CHARITY
↳ If companies are unwilling to change, maybe they would be willing to help in other ways.
- Ensuring that when working speculatively i.e on Material futures, we are imagining worlds that are inclusive, safe and regener


WHAT SOCIAL ISSUE ARE YOU PASSIONATE ABOUT?
HOW COULD THIS BE EXPLORED IN THE CURRICULUM?
- Providing support to students who may not come from an art background but ended up in CSM
- Educational support for neurodiverse students to be revised for accessibility!
- Rights of non-humans, could be explored through life-centered design workshops + lectures.
- Refugee advocacy, can be explored by working with community groups and making UAL accessible for all!!
- Encouraging reconnection to heritage - maybe by having more freedom to explore this as a topic
barriers do
ts face in engaging
cial justice topics
university work?
WHERE'S MORE INFORMATION ABOUT LEATHER, FUR TEXTILE PRODUCTION?
WE FOCUS ON BRITISH WOOL BUT NOT SPOTLIGHTING LEATHER INDUSTRY
- I think more information about cause and effect in the textiles library could help this
Lack of racial diversity with tutors
Being told to focus on "what will employers want" instead of "how can I make a difference"
- there is barely any time/energy left after doing all the required outcomes.
The world of social justice can feel depressing! People may be put off if the tone of delivery is too negative.
if part of "said" minority or/community and exploring "said" as a theme within a project being questioned to whether its requires enough research since already knowledgable (Hope this makes sense :-)
Our cultural Studies is great but heavily focused on anthropological social issues rather than environm-ent.
We do own Material Library it's hardly discovered in depth.
We are given no hands-on workshop / lecture in reality of Leath Fur.


What barriers do students face in engaging with social justice topics
How can design in your field contribute to positive social change?
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WHERE'S MORE INFORMATION ABOUT LEATHER, FUR TEXTILE PRODUCTION?
WE FOCUS ON BRITISH WOOL BUT NOT SPOTLIGHTING LEATHER INDUSTRY
- I think more information about waste and effect in the textiles industry could help this
Raising awareness on unethical and how raw materials are sourced for the jewellery
- encouraging Unheard designers designs in the workplace
- biomaterials -> focusing on the future
- conscious making + buying - slow, Tailored productio
- Making design education accessible for n
students / don't make "normal" financial
over education → kids who come from
background will automatically work on th
life within their design.
— emphasis on craft + making = shift in fast fashion mindset
ie. buying well made/hand made/ Small + independent brand textiles for quality over trends
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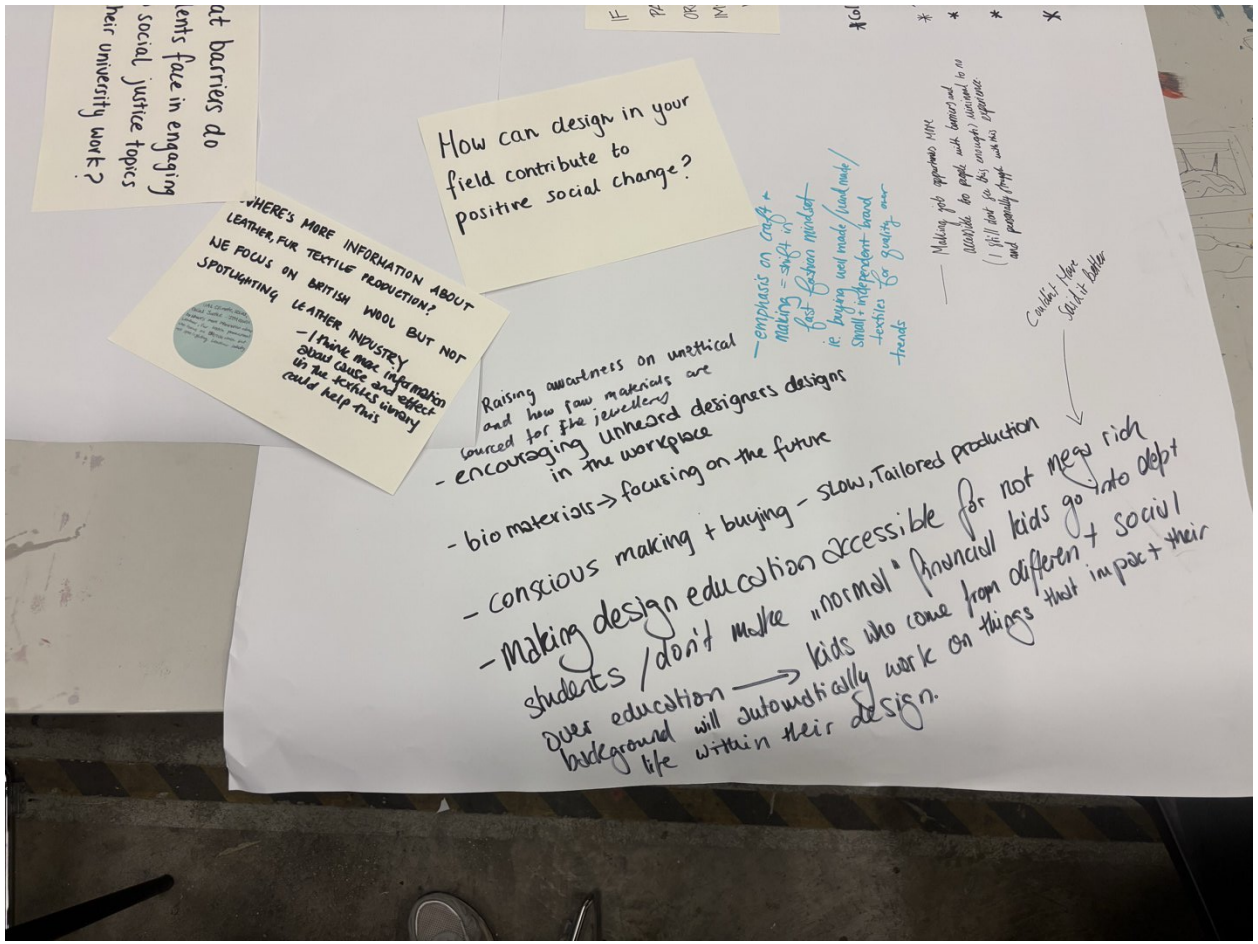
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– I think more information about cause and effect in the textiles library could help this
– emphasis on craft + making = shift in fast fashion mindset
ie. buying well made / hand made / small + independent brand textiles for quality over trends
Making job opportunities MIM accessible to people with barriers and (I still look for this enough) unrelated to no and personally thought with this experience
Couldn't Have Said it better
Raising awareness on unethical and how raw materials are sourced for the jewellery
- encouraging unheard designers designs in the workplace
- bio materials → focusing on the future
- conscious making + buying - slow, Tailored production
- Making design education accessible for not mega rich students / don't make "normal" financial kids go into dept over education → kids who come from different + social background will automatically work on things that impact their life within their design.

2. Thematic analysis

1. Curricular marginality — “It’s just not embedded”

Across JTM courses, students expressed that social and racial justice are rarely integrated into core briefs or outcomes. Themes appear peripherally—“suggested,” “encouraged through osmosis,” or “left up to us.” There’s rarely formal scaffolding. Exposure is often incidental—via peer conversations, guest speakers, or optional events—rather than sustained or assessed within studio modules.

Below are some of the quotes from the interview:

“It’s more like a soft suggestion, but definitely not pushed.”
—**MA Biodesign** student

“No one specifically teaches it. There’s stuff going on in the building that you can choose to interact with, but we haven’t had a lecture explicitly on social justice.”
—**BA Jewellery Design** student

“We’ve talked about cultural criticism—race, gender, class—in Cultural Studies. But it really depends on the tutor.”
—**BA Textiles** student

2. Student initiative — “It’s something I bring in”

Despite the gaps, several students actively pursue social justice themes—drawing from activist networks, previous training, and lived experience. These students serve as informal catalysts for their peers.

“My project is activism-oriented. I’m bringing that lens into my work, even though it’s not really built into the course.”
—**MA Biodesign** student

“It’s something that comes through by looking at other students’ work or having conversations. Not really foregrounded, but encouraged kind of through osmosis.”
—**MA Material Futures** student

“I do feel supported to explore those themes—but I often have to go outside the course to really build that knowledge.”
—**MA Material Futures** student

3. Structural and emotional barriers

Barriers to deeper engagement include:

- Lack of time in fast-paced project cycles
- Fear of “saying the wrong thing”
- Anxiety about fitting into commercial expectations (“Will this sell?”)

“The projects are just too short. There’s usually a visual concept but not much time to go deeper.”
—**BA Textiles** student

“I try to avoid making work too message-heavy because jewellery is so product-focused... but I’ve seen tension when students want to focus on their cultural history but worry it won’t sell.”
—**BA Jewellery Design** student

“It takes bravery to bring those issues in. Sometimes I avoid going there and stick with a safer topic.”
—**MA Biodesign** student

“In first year we had a nice ‘be kind’ icebreaker. But nothing really sustained or specific about justice.”
—**BA Jewellery Design** student

“It depends who’s in the room. You have to think carefully how to say things, so it doesn’t make others uncomfortable—which then makes you uncomfortable.”
—**MA Material Futures** student

4. Representation and trust — “We need to see ourselves”

Students repeatedly emphasised that who is in the room matters. Authentic, open conversations depend not only on facilitation style but also on visible representation in teaching teams. Students from the global majority expressed the need for tutors and leaders who share cultural contexts and understand the lived realities of social and racial inequity.

“It would help if tutors of colour were present—so we can talk to someone specific.”
—**BA Textiles** student

“The lecturer on Orientalism and the white gaze was a Black woman from the U.S.—it made a difference. One of our tutors said she trusted her more than a white or English

speaker to teach that topic."
—**BA Textiles** student

"There are lots of international students here, but no real structure for integrating everyone. And not enough leadership that reflects us."
—**MA Biodesign** student

"We need people of colour as part of the leadership. That's what's missing."
—**MA Regenerative Design** student

5. Authenticity and meaningful engagement — "Make it real"

Students across all levels are sceptical of tokenistic approaches. They called for work that is grounded in *lived experience*, *local impact*, and *visible outcomes*. Real-world engagement and reflective practice were seen as essential to making Principle 4 meaningful, not just conceptual.

"Storytelling from people who've lived it—that's what really lands."
—**BA Jewellery Design** student

"Real-world collaborative projects—that's what legitimises it for people. Makes it feel serious."
—**MA Biodesign** student

"At Parsons [Parsons School of Design in the U.S.], we researched everything before making. Here, it feels like context is an afterthought."
What this student highlights is a perceived shift in emphasis — at Parsons, material and contextual research was deeply integrated into the early stages of the design process, guiding decisions before any making began. In contrast, their experience at Central Saint Martins suggests that making often precedes deeper contextual inquiry, with less emphasis on researching materials or broader social, environmental, or cultural contexts beforehand.
—**BA Textiles** student

"Everyone brings something different. Even just swapping food or stories during breaks—that's powerful. Let's bring that into the course."
—**MA Biodesign** student

"Seeing active change—especially at the local level. That's when it feels real."
—**MA Material Futures** student

“If each of us brings our background into the conversation, it’s inherently enriching.”
—**MA Biodesign** student

6. A hunger for well-designed spaces — “We need more than a talk”

Students are not asking for more lectures—they’re asking for design-led, participatory, and interdisciplinary learning experiences. They called for spaces that balance hands-on creative work, guided reflection, and exposure to community voices. Some stressed that *how* the space is facilitated is just as important as the content.

“Workshops where you can bring your ignorance into the room—that’s when it works.”
—**BA Textiles** student

“Hands-on making is where we get the brainfood... but the deeper thinking feels separate from the making classes.”
—**BA Textiles** student

“We need a Designing for Humanity module. With case studies, real examples, community links. Not just words.”
—**MA Biodesign** student

“Deeper conversations could go in Year 2—Year 1 is packed, but the second year has space to reflect and build something meaningful.”
—**MA Biodesign** student

Summary

- Principle 4 is not consistently embedded in the JTM curriculum—but there is a clear appetite among students for its inclusion.
- There is a culture of silence or discomfort, especially in predominantly white spaces or with ill-prepared facilitation.
- Students of colour, in particular, want to feel safe enough to bring their whole selves into the room.
- Equity work is seen as urgent and relevant, especially when it connects to real-life change, community work, and reflective practice.

Key Learnings

What went well, and why?
One of the strongest aspects of the project was the atmosphere I was able to create during the sessions. Participants seemed comfortable, open, and willing to speak freely. This sense of trust felt important, especially given the sensitivity of some of the topics discussed. The students expressed that they were keen to be heard and inform curriculum development practices.

What were the challenges? What didn't work as planned, and why?
One of the main challenges was securing participation from student representatives. Communication was often slow or unresponsive, and I had to rely heavily on Anne Marr's network to get in touch with students — especially from one of the courses, where I only received a response after Anne intervened. In total, I was only able to speak to one student from that course. My original goal had been to get two responses per course, which I didn't achieve. I also aimed for more gender diversity but ended up speaking to only two male students overall.

Were there any expected or unexpected drawbacks for participants — criticisms or pushback? Reflections?
As expected, many students voiced concerns about the indirect nature of their learning experience. A recurring theme was frustration with broader institutional issues, particularly around access and the lack of visible diversity in the student population. Several participants expressed a desire for the university to be more accountable and transparent in addressing these concerns.

Were there particular groups, contexts, or locations where the project didn't work as well? Why?
While not necessarily a failure of context, it was clear that some courses were harder to access than others, which limited the breadth of representation across the project. This lack of participation may reflect internal communication barriers within departments or differing levels of student engagement.

Are there things that remain unknown — gaps in information or unanswered questions?
Yes. Due to the limited number of interviews and lack of responses from some student groups, there are definitely gaps in understanding how the experiences shared compare across a broader cohort. Questions around how feedback is received internally, or how representative these voices were, remain open. There is also an ongoing question

about how to better reach underrepresented groups and engage male students more meaningfully.

Recommendations & Workshop Design

As someone who's walked in these shoes - as a JTM alum - I know how powerful creative education can be when it speaks to the whole person—not just the designer. Through this listening project, I heard echoes of what I felt during my own time here: a strong desire to engage with equity and justice, but not always the space, structure, or confidence to do so.

Here's what I believe we can do—together—to better embed Principle 4: *Design for human equity, social and racial justice:*

1. Bring Principle 4 into the heart of the curriculum

Too often, social and racial justice is treated as a sidebar or optional theme—something you bring in *if you have time.* But students are asking for it to be part of the core.

Ideas:

- Write it directly into project briefs and learning outcomes—not just Cultural Studies.
- Create a cross-course module that weaves justice, reflection, and material experimentation.
- Support staff to explore their own equity literacy through co-learning and training.

2. Build trust before asking for vulnerability

Many students told me they're afraid of "saying the wrong thing" or not being taken seriously. Others carry deep cultural knowledge—but don't see it reflected in the room.

Ideas:

- Start each workshop with co-created *brave space agreements* that invite imperfection and care.
- Curate diverse facilitators, including those who reflect the global majority of our student body.

- Share the labour—equity shouldn't be an "extra" taken on by students of colour.
- Language evolves; each year offer students a toolkit that helps them talk about social and racial justice, so they feel empowered to explore it in their work.

3. Combine head, heart, and hands

This came through clearly: students don't want another theoretical seminar. They want tactile, meaningful, creative engagement.

Ideas:

- Provocations and case studies rooted in lived experience
- Collaborative material-making with ethical constraints
- Tools like an *Equity Compass* to support reflection and decision-making

4. Make it real

Students don't want speculative justice. They want their creative practice to *matter*—to someone, somewhere.

Ideas:

- Invite local community partners or lived-experience collaborators to shape the brief
- Show examples of student work that's had genuine ripple effects
- Make room for students to *see the impact* of what they design

5. Take time

Equity work isn't one-and-done. It's iterative, reflective, and often emotional. The students need more than just a drop-in session.

Suggested format:

Session	Focus	Activities
Part 1: Ground & Reflect	Building trust, exploring identity and power	- Story circles - Identity mapping

Part 2: Apply & Connect	Translating values into design practice	- Lived-experience provocations - Equity Compass activity - Hands-on ethical materials task - Co-design with a speculative community
Optional Part 3	Feedback & iteration	- Present to peers and community guests - Reflect on design process and impact

6. Give practical tools

Students want to walk away with things they can *use*—in their portfolios, studios, and lives.

Ideas:

- An Equity-in-Design checklist specific to materials-based practice
- A reflective journal or zine template
- A shared folder of speakers, case studies, and toolkits
- Invite speakers with existing frameworks and toolkits, e.g. Design Justice Network.

Implications for workshop design

Based on these findings, the following design principles should guide the upcoming JTM workshop on Principle 4:

1. **Co-create psychological safety**
   Set explicit ground-rules (“bring all your ignorance”) that normalise vulnerability and imperfection.
2. **Elevate lived experience**
   Use facilitators and speakers whose backgrounds reflect those of students.
3. **Balance theory and practice**
   Combine case studies and critical theory with hands-on design and ethical making.
4. **Include community and context**
   Let students co-design with or for communities they care about. Connect learning to their social worlds.
5. **Embed reflective practice**
   Use tools like the “Equity Compass” or journaling exercises to support long-term internal change.

6. **Give time**
   Avoid tokenistic one-offs. Consider a two-part workshop or follow-up space for reflection and action.

A final thought

Listening to students reminded me why I do this work. The desire is already here—what we need is permission, structure, and support to act on it. This workshop is not a box-ticking exercise. It's a chance to cultivate a culture where justice is not just theorised, but *practised.*

Looking ahead, the next step will be to explore how this peer-to-peer evaluation can inform the development of a workshop, a toolkit, or another form of intervention. While the exact shape of the outcome remains to be determined, what is already clear is the significant value of the peer-to-peer evaluation insights' in shaping and guiding the next phase of the process.