

Programme Specification: MA Visual Communication

1. Awarding Institution/Body	University of Gloucestershire
2. Teaching Institution	University of Gloucestershire
3. Recognition by Professional Body.	N.A.
4. Final award and level of qualification	PG Cert/PG Dip/MA: Level 7
5. Modular Scheme or other	PMS
6. Programme title (name on certificate)	Visual Communication
7. UCAS code	N.A.
8. JACS code	N.A.
9. QAA subject benchmark statement(s) where relevant	Art and design (2008)
10. Date of initial validation	April 2010
11. Date of revision	April 2010

12. External and Internal reference points

The educational aims and outcomes of the programme have been written with reference to the following reference points.

12a) EXTERNAL

the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ); Descriptor for higher education qualifications at level 7 for a Master's degree.

the QAA Benchmark statements (QAA); Art and design (2008)

Further details for the above are available at the relevant website(s).

12b) INTERNAL

University of Gloucestershire PMS regulations;

University of Gloucestershire LTA strategic framework (2007) (LTASF);

University of Gloucestershire Postgraduate PDP Policy

Further details for the above are available at the University website

13. Main educational aims of the programme

The MA in Visual Communication aims to deepen students' knowledge and understanding of their previous creative practice whilst developing their potential for new approaches to visual communication practice in order to creatively and intellectually engage, at a sophisticated level, with a range of visual communication industries as well as higher academic research surrounding visual communication.

The MA Visual Communication programme provides students with the opportunity for personal, intellectual and creative development in a postgraduate context. In most cases students joining this MA programme will have completed a related Art and Design degree or the Visual Communication Top-Up degree.

Study to MA level requires an increased intensity, complexity and density of study in comparison to undergraduate study. Students will have the opportunity to broaden, review and then refine their practical creative design skills in order to address visual communication challenges within the media and communication industries.

Reflective practice, and its relevance to professional practice and creative development, will be embedded within the curriculum.

It is anticipated that the opportunity to research, practice and explore core elements of Art, Design and contextual and critical studies in order to expand the potential for effective visual communication will extend from historic precedents to contemporary practices and models for future developments.

The course will support research into the links between creation, production and market. A short period of work experience and/or reflection upon primary observations of contemporary communication design practice will form part of the Diploma Level.

At each stage of their studies students will have the opportunity to implement their learning and demonstrate a level of achievement through the production of a coherent body of practical work.

Students will undertake inventive and diverse solutions through the exploration of a range of creative design fields including Graphic Design, Photography, illustration, Digital, moving image and Animation. Students will question and explore a range of visual media and their technologies to meet the evolving challenges of multidisciplinary design communication. The programme will encourage the exploration and investigation of complementary disciplines to achieve integrated solutions and by employing these particular skills to produce a uniquely effective creative communication.

The dexterity and interrelationship of the visual image, written word, and verbal communication will be explored. Students will be required to make and articulate value judgments about a broad range of visual media through a variety of critical approaches and methodologies. They will address the role of the audience and consumer in relationship to high, mass and popular culture and the idea that images construct the fabric of everyday life, our identities, and notions of truth, knowledge and reality.

At the completion of the MA students should be able to demonstrate a systematic understanding of the application of skills, knowledge and a critical awareness of current debates at the forefront of creative design practice and relevant academic research. Students should be able to relate their skills and knowledge to their application within relevant visual communication markets.

The main educational aims of MA Visual Communication are to provide you, the student, with opportunities to:

- a. broaden and extend your practice by encouraging inventive and diverse solutions achieved through cross-disciplinary approaches employing a range of visual media and their particular technologies – digital and traditional. (QAA: 2.2)
- b. develop greater self-awareness and confidence to refine your artistic, academic and professional objectives. (QAA: 2.3)
- c. develop a comprehensive understanding of a range of research methods and demonstrate self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems in written work and practical design work. (FHEQ)
- d. advance your boundaries of knowledge through research and support your ability to undertake research of complex issues. You will have the opportunity to

demonstrate originality in the application of knowledge, and also refine your critical, technical and visual skills. (FHEQ)

e. challenge, develop and demonstrate your ability to communicate ideas, both systematically and creatively, to specialist and non specialist audiences. (QAA: 2.7)

f. develop your ability to project manage, identifying and prioritising necessary and desirable resources, to work both independently and in collaboration with others. Manage the creative processes in yourself and others. In preparation for complex and unpredictable professional environments you will develop and demonstrate the qualities needed for employment in circumstances requiring sound judgement, personal responsibility and initiative. (QAA: 2.6)(FHEQ)

g. express and refine your individual authorial voice, evaluate methodologies and develop critiques of them and, where appropriate, to propose new hypotheses and solutions to creative challenges. (FHEQ)

h. continue to advance your knowledge and develop your own targeted strategies for sustainable practice, career development and self directed research. (FHEQ)

14. Programme outcomes – the programme provides opportunities for you, the student, to achieve and demonstrate the following learning outcomes:

14a) Knowledge and understanding of:

- i. Key concepts, critical debates, practices, and audiences in relationship to visual communication and contemporary creative industries. (QAA: 4.4)
- ii. Approaches to assimilation and synthesis of creative and conceptual ideas in order to develop original practical outcomes.
- iii. methods and materials of production for visual communication including the impact of new technologies on working practices and contemporary graphic visual practice including knowledge of historical, technical and cultural influences (QAA: 4.3, 4.4)
- iv. the interrelationship of cognate visual design and media disciplines and the symbiotic relationship between theory and practice (QAA: 4.4)
- v. Demonstrate self-direction, creativity and originality in tackling and solving problems.
- vi. Demonstrate the ability to communicate successfully to specialist and non-specialist audiences.
- vii. advanced presentation, communication and research skills.
- viii. the role and impact of visual communication in national and global contexts
- ix. strategies for communication through traditional, new and emerging technology and media.

14b) Intellectual/ thinking skills – able to:

- x. contribute to current debates within the visual media and communication industries and cultural arenas. Engage in academic debate at a significant level and demonstrate the ability to critically evaluate visual communication texts and practices including the students' own work. (FHEQ)
- xi. debate and engage with cultural, political and environmental concerns and perspectives on the social responsibilities of those working within the creative industries (QAA: 4.2)(LTASF: Learning for Sustainable Development)
- xii. understand the relationship between client, producer, audience and artefact (QAA: 4.2)
- xiii. develop conceptual skills to meet a defined brief, including the critical assessment and evaluation of information (QAA: 4.3)(FHEQ)
- xiv. embrace new ideas and technologies, whilst using traditional skills and production methodologies for appropriate purposes (QAA: 4.3, 4.4.5)
- xv. apply a variety of ideas generating techniques to range of sources, appropriate to the outcomes requirements (QAA: 4.4)
- xvi. apply creative and aesthetic judgement throughout all stages of the creation and production process (QAA: 4.3)
- xvii. recognize the role of research in underpinning the formulation and synthesis of ideas (QAA: 4.3)
- xviii. formulate informed opinions about subject specific contextual issues (QAA: 4.3)
- xix. critically examine subject specific related theory, idea, hypothesis, problem or application which forms the core of a written or combined written and practice-based dissertation (QAA: 4.3, 4.4)(FHEQ)

14c) Subject specific/Practical and professional skills – able to:

- xx. implement a range of advanced practical skills competently and appropriately. (FHEQ)
- xxi. show initiative, self motivation, and the ability to both create and achieve challenging goals and objectives with a degree of originality and sophistication in the application of knowledge and/or skills. (FHEQ)
- xxii. select and employ information and communication technology effectively and demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of relevant and available techniques. (FHEQ)
- xxiii. select and employ appropriate materials, techniques and processes in the execution of practical outcomes to meet tight deadlines and professional standards (QAA: 4.3, 4.4) (FHEQ)
- xxiv. demonstrate a systematic understanding and critical awareness of the value and role of organisational structures encountered in the creative industries. (FHEQ)
- xxv. collect, analyse, interpret, organise and develop visual and textual information from a wide range of sources and generate and develop original ideas,

concepts, solutions and arguments in response to set briefs and/or self-initiated study (QAA: 4.3, 4.4)(FHEQ)

- xxvi. demonstrate a critical and reflective engagement with personal practice, with targeted strategies for sustainable practice including an individual authorial voice, a philosophy, stylised approach and workflow to negotiating visual solutions to communication briefs. (FHEQ) (LTASF)

14d) Transferable/key skills – able to:

- xxvii. work reflectively to set goals, manage workloads, and maintain effective time management skills to meet deadlines (QAA: 4.4.1)
- xxviii. effectively communicate ideas, principles and theories by visual, written and oral means to audiences in a range of situations; (QAA: 4.4.4)
- xxix. research and synthesise appropriate information from a wide range of sources and present reasoned argument (QAA: 4.4.2)
- xxx. source, navigate, select, retrieve, evaluate and manage information in order to write fully referenced and annotated prose that develops and supports an academic treatise (QAA: 4.4.5)
- xxxi. effectively collaborate, communicate and negotiate with individuals or groups to achieve objectives. (QAA: 4.4.3)
- xxxii. critically reflect on the role and relationship of skills and learning to future employability and career progression in order to inform personal action plans for continual evolution of skills and the development of individual lifelong learning strategies (QAA: 4.1)(LTASF)

15. Teaching, learning and assessment – the teaching, learning and assessment strategies and methods used in the programme to enable learning outcomes to be achieved and demonstrated by you, the student.

15a) Teaching and learning methods

In line with the University Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategic Framework, (2007) students are supported in becoming effective learners for life by developing their knowledge, confidence and capacities to reflect on, plan and manage their own learning. Learner empowerment enhances employability and other opportunities for personal fulfillment. (xxvi, xxxii) (LTASF)

Knowledge and understanding (i-ix)

Through the Postgraduate Certificate, Postgraduate Diploma and MA stages of the programme learners are guided towards taking an increasingly autonomous approach to the development of their personal practice. The initial PG Certificate modules are strongly structured and guided investigations supported by workshops and a structured lecture programme, whilst the final research module, VCO444 Creation, Vision and Realisation, module is negotiated through individually developed research proposals and supported through individual tutorial supervision (with some group seminar sessions).

Through an Active learning approach learners are encouraged to develop both their capacity for independent learning and their ability to work with others, as well as structurally relevant in terms of embedding learning these are relevant skills in relation to future employability and potential career progression. Through project-based enquiry learners develop the ability to solve assignment problems in a creative way identifying and to redefining problems in the process. (QAA: 2.5) (QAA: 5.2)

To support and develop this independence of learning learners utilise a tutorial base drawn from the teaching team to receive feedback on proposals, work in progress and resolution of practical work. The ongoing dialogue between tutor and learner supports not only the learners' deepening understanding of their subject but also the learners' growing ability to think critically about their own performance and how to improve it.

In order to accommodate learning styles and enrich the learners' experience the programme employs a wide range of strategies for teaching and learning: lectures, presentations by learners, seminars, workshops, demonstrations, work placements, critiques, group and individual tutorials, individual and group assignment work. (LTASF: Active Engagement)

Taught sessions in practical modules begin with reflection and feedback on the aims, objectives and planning of projects. As practical work commences and evolves the learner receives feedback on work in progress, or might be required to lead a seminar or presentation, to peers or an invited audience, about the work in progress. Finally teaching will embrace discussion on selection and presentation of finished work.

Intellectual/ thinking skills (x-xix) are promoted and delivered via lectures, research, briefings and practical projects, seminars, tutorials, critiques, group discussions, work placements and engaging with dissertations and research for major projects (QAA: 5.7). Practice-based modules also require the reflective development and presentation of a research file, or written critical element, alongside the development work and finished artwork. Practical work also requires learners to meet the challenges of solving complex visual and written communications problems, evaluating their conceptual and aesthetic value and analysing the appropriateness of solutions. (QAA: 5.8)

Subject specific/Practical and professional skills (xx-xxvi) are acquired through 'hands on' workshops and concurrently running projects, lectures, briefings, demonstrations, seminars, workshops, tutorials, critiques, team-working, and work placements investigations and reflective reports. Learners at this level are expected to capitalise on their current and prior experiences and are encouraged to reflect on their knowledge, experience and practice, including through a process of peer interaction. (FHEQ)

Transferable/key skills (xxvii – xxxii), including employment skills, are embedded in the programme curriculum. These skills form core Learning Outcomes in the programmes module descriptors and inform the set assignment requirements.

15b) Assessment

Within the programme the proposed modes of study and assessment involve engaging and challenging learners as individuals (although, with the approval of tutors, learners may choose to work in negotiated creative partnerships) to develop a piece of work over time and to undertake a process within which progress is

reviewed continually. This is achieved through:

- a varied range of formative assessments
- independent research projects
- opportunities for collaborative project work
- assessed seminar presentations
- peer reviews and assessment elements
- reflective commentaries/diaries
- practical project work for portfolio based assessment.

Module tutors offer opportunities for constructive formative feedback which learners are encouraged to reflect upon and address in moving forward towards the modules summative assessment points (LTASF).

Feedback from assignments is delivered in written form with marking grids and formal written tutor feedback, learners also receive feedback during critiques and at one-to-one tutorials, in some instances there may also be group tutorials to discuss assessed work, or peer review and/or peer assessment within a modules formal assessment elements. (QAA: 5.3)

The Learning Outcomes for this programme have been mapped across the modules; broken down and woven through the module assignments' assessment requirements. To accommodate learning styles, enrich the learners' experience, and address the wide range of knowledge and skills being developed on the course, the programme employs a diverse range of strategies for assessment including substantial practical assignments, seminar presentations, research activities, reflective diaries, collaborative practice, formal essays, and a dissertation (xix). – Refer to module assignment breakdown below:

VCO401

Element 001: 20% - Written Reflective and analytical supporting documentation, which will include evaluation of final elements of the practical work produced.

Element 002: 80% - Practical creative design work - A series of finished and appropriately presented practical outcomes achieved by exploring and resolving a given theme through four different design disciplines.

VCO402

Element 001: 10% - Short written proposal presented at a group seminar, outline and initial ideas for a research project that explores cross-disciplinary practice.

Element 002: 50% - Research Essay

Element 003: 40% - Presentation demonstrating the practical application of key points drawn from the research

VCO403

Element 001: 15% - Short written proposal explaining and justifying the methodology, audience and evaluative parameters of proposed practical project/s

Element 002: 70% - Self initiated Practical project/s (learners may choose to work in negotiated collaborative partnerships)

Element 003: 15% - Reflective and analytical supporting documentation; critical evaluation of final body of work

VCO404

Element 001: 50% - Written essay responding to the lecture programme and/or work placement/experience (work placement negotiated and agreed with module tutor and/or placement co-ordinator)

Element 002: 50% - Presentation of a practical creative 'visual communication' outcome which presents a piece of research undertaken as part of this module into the creative/media/communication industry

VCO444

Element 001: 100% - choice of either a 15,000 word formal written dissertation, or major practical project supported by written research, reflective digest and evaluation.

These assessment methods aim to assess achievement, both formatively and summatively, over the whole degree programme. Graduates will be expected to have achieved master's level in knowledge, understanding and skills taken as a whole. (FHEQ)

16. Current Programme Map

MA Visual Communication map:

Course Title MA Visual Communication
Course Leader

Award requirements	You must pass 60 CAT points for each award stage and meet the following requirements:
Postgraduate Certificate	VCO 401 and VCO 402
Postgraduate Diploma	Postgraduate Certificate, plus VCO 403 plus either VCO 404 <u>or</u> module/s totalling 30credits from the MEC & MES course maps
Masters	Postgraduate Diploma, plus VCO 444
Notes	

Modules:

Code and Title	CAT Points	Study Period
VCO 401: Cross Disciplinary Practice	30	SEM 1
VCO 402: Research, Critique and Practice	30	SEM 1
VCO 403: Individual Experimental Practice	30	SEM 2
VCO 404: Contemporary Professional Development	30	SEM 2
VCO 444: Creation, Vision and Realisation	60	SEM 3

17. Programme Overview

The programme is offered in the following modes of study: Full-time, Part-Time. Staged awards are available within this programme of study, see section 4. Students may enter, interrupt or leave a programme at the end of each award stage.

The language of study is English.

17a) Structure, key features and modules

This section of the programme specification should be read with reference to section 16, the programme map. Modules may be compulsory, core or optional and may have specific pre-requisites.

VCO401 (30 credits), VCO402 (30 credits) are both compulsory and lead to the award of a PG Certificate, students can then progress on to take the

compulsory VCO403 (30credits), and an option of either VCO404 (30 credits) or other module/s from the PMS in order to achieve a PG Diploma. Students can then continue and take the compulsory VCO444 in order to achieve the full MA award.

The Visual Communication MA provides a wide range of professional skills. Whilst the course is practical in orientation, it is underpinned by theory designed to enhance an individual's understanding of creative communication and entrepreneurial skills.

At both the Certificate and Diploma stages students undertake two modules which should be considered in conjunction with each other, together they offer a balance of practice and theory and each informs the other. All modules contain PDP elements and require students to engage with real world visual communication challenges along with the development of their reflective practice and planning for career development. A short work placement is an option as part of the Diploma stage module Contemporary Professional Development, VCO404.

Typical career opportunities would include working in Advertising, Graphic Design or Photography as a creative practitioner or in an allied area such as digital publishing.

17b) Credit and award requirements

The scheme provides for *awards* of Postgraduate Certificate, Postgraduate Diploma, and Master's degree. Each of these awards is situated at Level 7 of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ). At the University, this is designated as Level IV.

Award	Credits, measured by Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (CAT) points
Postgraduate Certificate	60 at Level IV
Postgraduate Diploma	120 at Level IV
MA	180 at Level IV

18. Additional information

Further information on Assessment; Quality Assurance including Evaluation; Disability and Learning support provision; Criteria for Admission/Recruitment and Careers can be found at the University website.

The National Recognition Information Centre (NARIC) provides details of comparative information on all Higher Education programmes.