

Graphic Design Co-Creation Event – Wednesday 17th October 2018

Introduction from Tom Northey on Graphic Design, Farnham

PowerPoint presentation introducing course statistics, location and heritage. Explanation of course identities being merged to have same titles (Graphic Communication & Visual Communication renamed to Graphic Design).

Selling points of studying Graphic Design in Farnham:

- Student centred learning
- Dedicated studio spaces
- Community focused
- Specialist tutors
- Proven track record

Course agenda:

- Research led insights
- Technology with purpose
- Grounding in Design Principles
- Business oriented
- Specialist Graduates

Brief explanation of course breakdown, years and modules with examples of student work and exhibitions.

Brief explanation of new unit that replaces dissertation – “Contextual Research and Critical Reflection”.

Breakdown of subjects covered by the course.

Information on Alumni – where they are now and typical destinations for graduates.

QAE Observations:

There was a heavy emphasis on how the course allows students to discover, identify and choose their own pathway throughout the course, and that all students are encouraged to find their own direction.

There was a real interest in pushing business-oriented direction with heavy influence from industry, therefore preparing students for employers upon completion of their degree.

Interesting proposal and explanation of the new style ‘dissertation’ which is a year long Contextual Research & Critical Reflection project resulting in portfolio ready work.

Introduction from Mark Hudson on Graphic Design, Epsom

PowerPoint presentation introducing the course broken down into sections:

About us:

This section of the presentation offered an insight into: the ideologies of the course; destinations of graduates; introduction to staff team and visiting tutors; the spaces and resources available to the students; professional partners; Students Satisfaction feedback (100%).

How it works now:

Breakdown of the course by year; brief explanation of the importance of the work placement in year 2; information on the platform system and areas covered within the course.

Future ambitions:

Strong influence from overseas institutions; Course focus projects – students focusing on a single social issue per year to build a series across the years of the course; BME support – widening engagement and supporting new demographics; Encourage student ownership, extend modules and defend the year-long work placement; reduce lop-sidedness of platform group sizes, vocational lag, shallowness (creativity is not in software) and resist teaching only to the outcomes.

New Units

Redesigned Platforms:

- 1 Language – Typography, grids, hierarchy, journalism, copy, messaging, linguistics etc.
- 2 Image – Illustration, art direction, moving image, lens-based media etc.
- 3 Data – Infographics & visual systems, statistics, AI, behaviour, psychology, influence etc.
- 4 Design Futures – Design responsibility, social change, interaction, user interfaces etc.

QAE Observations:

Course material heavily influenced by social issues / impact; philosophical, psychological and behavioural thinking.

Emphasis on the importance of the Year 2 work placement programme and how valuable this is for the students and developing CV ready skills.

Effort and passion to encourage student engagement by promoting student ownership of their education and offering choice while ensuring that BAME support is readily available.

Interesting proposal and explanation of the new style 'dissertation' which is a year-long Contextual Research & Critical Reflection project resulting in portfolio ready work.

Time tabling allows all students free Wednesdays, not just afternoons, as culture days.

Attendee Feedback to Introductions:

Too much choice available – can make selecting which degree to study problematic

Are the current industry field requirements catered for on the degree?

Shallowness – creativity favoured over software knowledge. Students believe there will be more technical training involved in the degree than there is.

Teaches more than just the outcomes to fulfil a more rounded education, however makes course very intense.

The outcomes of the modules should be scripted to requirements of sector job adverts to ensure that the degree is relevant to industry.

Heavily agreed by academics and industry that having a degree provides career opportunities, but is not a 'ticket for a job'.

Group Exercise 1:

Attendees were broken up into three groups: Academics (and QAE); Students / Alumni; Industry / External Examiners:

The following questions were proposed for the group discussion:

Q1 – Is formal education a necessity for Practicing Designers?

Q2 – Can you be a successful designer without a formal design education?

Q3 – What key competencies do you expect from a graduate? Specialist or generalist?

Academic Feedback:

- Having a formal education depends on the person, are they capable of teaching themselves?
- Is it possible to achieve the same level through an apprenticeship or an alternative education?
- What defines 'formal' education? – the question is too narrow
- BA degree offers the leadership skills needed to progress to a managerial position – it is very possible to develop a career in the industry without having a degree, but those without may find it difficult to progress to leadership level – they hit a 'glass ceiling'
- Dependent on the company i.e. size of company – in a small company it may be possible for someone who works in design to achieve managerial / directorial position without the formal education, but may end up having a narrower view of design as they have less opportunity to share creative ideas with peers.
- Often, if a candidate has a degree or not will be used as a filter for potential interviewees
- A BA course does not guarantee you a job as a designer – jobs are not for life
- Project managers – do not need a degree in the area they are managing, they need a smaller knowledge of it (i.e., do not need to know all of the technical aspects of designing, but can manage those who do.)
- For the £30K you spend on a BA course – would it be more beneficial for the student to invest this money in short, technical courses that provide technical skills needed to get into the industry?
 - o Unable to get loans for short courses – these would have to be self-funded
- Students want the guarantee of a job / career at the end of their degree – it was easier for a graduate to accept not getting a job when their education was free.
- Partnering education plans
 - o combine apprenticeship with degree
 - o Offer technical course that can be 'topped up' to form degree – students can choose to continue on to gain leadership skills in 'top-up' course or settle with technical qualification
- It may be easy to get a job in design without the 'formal education', however it is strongly believed that it is not easy to get into a leadership position without a degree
- The competencies obtained are very much dependent on the students' ability to learn
- Difficult to demonstrate leadership skills as a Graphic Designer – the BA demonstrates having these skills
- Leadership skills cannot be conveyed in a portfolio
- Who are we as academics to determine if having a degree is or is not necessary? – we have the job and the experience already.
- What is more relevant? Qualification vs experience?

- Attending University allows a student to fail and learn from their creative experiences – this is not the case in career life.

Student Feedback:

- Farnham students feel the Epsom students have the better course and resources, and vice versa
- Both courses feel the other course teaching would be beneficial to them
- Students generally didn't realise that the courses were different, they believed it to be the same course at different campuses.
- The platforms – 3 years is a short time to learn everything that is put into the course – almost feel as though they are learning to be a Graphic Designer, a theorist, a philosopher, a politician, a psychologist, etc. – Very intense and heavy-going course
- Students believed they would receive more technical training on their courses with less social context.
- It is difficult to navigate all of the information - too much focus on engaging with social concepts
- The degree is seen as a ticket to a job / career – should be about becoming a creative thinker
- Better to be a generalist so there is more variety of suitable jobs at the end of the degree
- Being a specialist allows you to stand out to potential employers but narrows down desirability
- Specialism leads to a lack of future security

Industry Feedback:

- What is the definition of 'successful designer'? – who are we to say what is and isn't successful – very subjective
- What is valuable about the degree? Does the graduate have skills / knowledge / experience they wouldn't gain from another course or education? – If so, how is this portrayed?
- What enables an established career?
- Is there enough space on the 3-year BA course to learn specialist technical skills?
- Is a BA the most relevant and valuable type of education? Degree vs apprenticeship
- Technical skills are essential to a career in Graphic Design – are enough of these being taught on the course?
- There is a growth of alternative education providers that are fulfilling the needs of the industry
- The benefits of gaining a degree are not well enough communicated – what is the value of this specific type of education?
- Engaging in different experiences allows confidence building
- Undergraduates are allowed the tools to make informed choices and understanding
- Importance of University community – valuable to students' development – sharing ideas, inspiration, networking etc.

General feedback – Why do students go to UCA?

Students very much feel that a Graphic Design degree from a specialised art university will equip them with the knowledge and skills to get a career in their chosen industry.

*Academics feel that studying at the University allows the students to explore and discover themselves in terms of creativity – but is **NOT** a ticket to a job.*

Industry believe that the type of education may not be as relevant as the skills the individual has – however, there are some employers that will filter candidates by their type of education. Industry suggested a potential for a 2-year degree that is more vocational and less philosophical that could close the gap.

Group Exercise 2

Attendees were broken down into four groups to discuss the dynamics of the new proposed units for the Epsom Graphic Design course. (Language, Image, Data, Design Futures)

Discussion topics were:

- 1 How to differentiate between the second- and third-year versions of topic?
- 2 How to shape content to support less confident / high achievers?
- 3 How to teach competencies needed by industry now / in the future?

Example of Draft Unit outline and content provided to groups:

Data can be defined as facts and information that can be used in calculating, reasoning or planning. Visualising such information is a key challenge facing designers as machine learning and the rise of big data revolutionises the way personal information is gathered and processed. This unit looks at both devising visualising systems but also examines the social contexts behind algorithmic processing of data and gives confidence in the key concepts behind statistical analysis.

Indicative content could include: Information graphics and visual systems. Confidence with statistics. AI and machine learning. Big data and the quantified self. Surveillance and the algorithmic pact. Behaviour, psychology, influence.

Group Exercise 2 Feedback:

This exercise was very complex for most participants. The general consensus was that the exercise itself and the definition of the unit breakdown were overly complicated. The wording used was regarded as intimidating to those with an outsider view of the course.

It was suggested that the criteria appeared to be more akin to / suitable for Postgraduate level rather than Undergraduate.

The general feel among the students (and other attendees) was that Epsom descriptors were “fussy”, and portrayed the course / university as overly scholarly, and less creative. Use of Latinised text made people draw comparisons to institutions such as ‘Oxbridge’, which could further intimidate or overwhelm some creative students, and potentially put people off applying for this course. This was raised by an industry representative who did not understand the unit description or what benefit it would have for the student.

Alumni in attendance who had graduated from the Farnham Graphic Design course pointed out the confusion between the two courses, both titled ‘Graphic Design’ but offering very different course structure / content – how can two courses that are so different offer the same degree? And how is this identified to potential future employers?

Farnham Alumni suggested that the descriptors of the course appeared slightly “spoon fed” and that there was not as much room for personal choice and development as there had been in his course,

in which the briefs were more open-ended with a choice to follow your own path. However, academics stated that most tutors allow more freedom / rule breaking from students in terms of project work.

Structural suggestions:

Year one should be mostly about experimenting with different areas to allow the students to choose what area they would like to specialise in. (Introduction of platform rotation)

Years 2 & 3 specialist areas should be chosen, and these two years should be used to enhance and promote expertise in chosen pathways.

The level of understanding and complexity should enhance with each year, integrating practice and theory further.

Due to the overlap of platforms, there is a potential for self-plagiarism if a student takes an idea to use / develop in other platforms - this should be strongly communicated to the students, so they are aware of the possible implications.

QAE Event Feedback

This event was well structured, informative and for the most part, very successful.

It is advisable that this event should be extended to a full day, as some discussions were limited due to time constraints.

It would be beneficial to hold an event like this well in advance of a course revalidation (i.e. over a year prior to the revalidation timeline) which would allow the feedback from the event to be written into the course structure and scrutinised.

An event like this could also be successful when used as a tool for Course Creation, Course Validation, Course Revalidation / Periodic Review and QER Process.

For Course Creation – it may be valuable to have two separate events, for example:

1. An event with Industry representatives – to establish **WHAT** criteria is beneficial for the students in terms of career prospects. (Possibly invite alumni to this event as well as they can provide insight on any areas of learning / information that were not covered in their education that they feel should have been)
2. An event with current students / alumni (and possibly FE students) to establish **HOW** this information / criterion is best taught / learned / structured. (It might also be useful to get insight from students on how to write briefs and course structure that can be easily understood and appeals to them)

It was noted that it would be beneficial to hold a post-event debrief with the current students in attendance – there were comments made throughout the course of the day that may cause concern or distress for them and could potentially lead to low moral / complaints / withdrawal (i.e. “a degree is not a guarantee for a job”; “a job is not for life, but a student loan is” etc.)

The group exercises were very useful and allowed a great deal of communication, however further structure and / or guidance would be needed, especially when they are complex / detailed like Group Exercise 2. Smaller, more concise group work would be recommended.