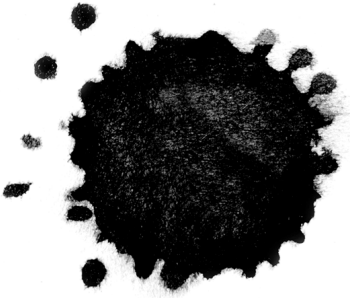


University of the
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creative careers

working in graphic design

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working in graphic design

Where do I start?

Finding a job takes time, energy and effort. One of the most important activities in the process of obtaining work is research. This leaflet is just a starting point.

What do graphic designers do?

How many of the choices you make each day are influenced by an advertisement or a phrase or a picture – or all of the above? If you know how powerful imagery can be in influencing your habits, then it is likely you will know what influences others. A designer has a keen understanding of people and their needs and desires. They may work in an agency or consultancy or in-house in the private or public sector. Our fast-paced world of video entertainment and website design relies heavily on the talents of designers for advertising and marketing in these areas, as well as other media-heavy realms of advertising, such as publishing and merchandising.

You might be involved in any of the following:

Corporate ID, branding, advertising, brochure design, logo design (including animation and icons), marketing, target marketing, illustration, web graphics, digital, painting, image manipulation, concept graphics

Job titles include:

Graphic Designer; Mac Operator/Art Worker, Animator; Illustrator; Multimedia/Web Designer; New Media Designer, Visualiser, Copywriter

In a design agency there may be teams of people working alongside each other including account handlers, marketing team, designers, artworkers, and the production team.

In advertising, you could be working in a creative team, perhaps coming up with ideas for campaigns (usually creative teams work in pairs, and in advertising one person may be working on the visuals and the other producing the written content). You might be involved in pitching these ideas to clients. Sometimes companies interview these pairs of creatives together.

Alternatively, you might work in the production team that takes the original idea and develops it into the finished product.

In a multi-disciplined design consultancy you could be working alongside product designers and 2D and 3D designers, helping clients solve design problems in interior, exhibition and retail design, architecture, lighting and film and TV.

As an in-house designer your focus may be on internal and external marketing.

Visit the Higher Education graduate website Prospects at www.prospects.ac.uk for job profiles and related jobs

Who might employ me?

Graphic Designers work for multi discipline design consultancies or design agencies, advertising agencies, publishing – including books, magazines and newspapers, packaging, the media including television, film or video, in-house marketing departments in either private or public sector, computer games companies. Some designers work freelance. Some design companies are very small.

Terms you might hear

“Above the line” means advertising through TV and radio. “Below the line” means advertising in newspapers, magazines and mailshots. “Business to business” – means that, for example, one company will produce a magazine which is solely for the use of other companies, and not for the general public.

What skills do I need?

Of course you need to be highly creative. If you are working in a creative team then you need to be good at generating ideas and discussing these ideas with others. You need to be persuasive to ‘sell’ your pitch to clients and you need to have strong negotiation skills to work with others such as the account manager, the creative director and the production team who might all be working to a different agenda. You might also need to arrange photo shoots so organisational skills are important.

If you work on the production side then your computer design skills and attention to detail will be more important.

You will need a good knowledge of programmes such as Quark, Photoshop, Freehand and Illustrator plus for some jobs you may be required to have knowledge of 3D-Studio Max, Flash, and Fireworks.

In smaller companies and in some types of work e.g. magazine layout, you might need to have the creative ideas and the design skills combined.

A job advert for Graphic Designers / Visualisers to work for one of the most highly respected Graphic Design houses in the Leicester / Peterborough area reads:

‘ You will be required to design and come up with original art concepts for various high profile products. You should have previous experience working in a reprographics, graphic design, new media or print background. Any experience gained designing and working with the layout of retail, point of sale or marketing products would be advantageous. You should have knowledge of various print or graphic design products such as 3D-Studio Max, Photoshop, Illustrator or Quark on an Apple Mac format, any CAD skills would be advantageous’.

What is included in this vacancy are many of the technical skills required. What is missing are the softer skills such as team work, communication, organisation and working to deadline. These are the skills applicants need to promote as well as technical skills.

How can I get work?

Surprisingly few graphic design jobs are advertised formally so you need to seek out companies that might have work available and contact them directly. It is important, therefore, to be able to identify companies, know who does what and whether that matches what you want to do. Looking at the vacancies that are advertised on a regular basis keeps you up-to-date with developments in the field. The following information includes how to approach companies, building contacts through promoting yourself and your work, networking and pushing your luck!

How should I approach companies?

Think of what will make you stand out amongst others:

‘The ones who are successful are always organised; have an online portfolio, demonstrate they can be very flexible, independent and it always helps to find out the correct name of the person you are writing to and spell their name right.’

Daljit Singh – Digit (Creative Review article)

It is really important to do your research into the method each employer uses for seeking new talent. So for example a large agency may have a portfolio drop-off day or a formal application process whilst a small agency may accept speculative CVs. Sometimes it is worth the risk of dropping by with your portfolio. It is advisable to arrange meetings with people in order to show your work : when you are starting out this is often the best way to build your confidence and to gather useful advice and feedback that you can then incorporate into your job seeking strategy.

How do I build up contacts in the industry?

Building a network of industry contacts can seem like a daunting task but time spent developing a strategy really does pay off. Everyone approaches this differently and you’ll want to go with whatever works best for you. Here are a few key points.

Promote yourself

Develop an effective marketing pack (see below) and always be ready to seize an opportunity. Awards and competitions are a great way of promoting your work and yourself. The ‘Creative Opportunities’ weekly bulletin is a gateway to specialist subsidised training, awards and bursaries to develop your work. Competitions with cash or exposure prizes are a great way of developing your skills and networks. Check out www.designboom.com - a website featuring competitions, interviews, courses and briefs from new graduates.

Speculative approaches

Armed with your marketing kit and carefully researched production company details why not get in touch with companies where you think your work would really fit in?

The Careers Information Centre has all the main contact directories in this area including the *Creative Handbook* and *Design Handbook*. Ask friends for contacts and utilise online directories as well such as **www.design4design.com** -The Architects and Designers section is a huge database of contact details for architecture and design companies in the UK and Worldwide.

Networking

Another aspect of your strategy could be to take advantage of seminars and talks arranged by membership organisations such as the Chartered Society of Designers and The Association of Illustrators. Visits to trade fairs such as 100% Design, Total Publishing, London Book Fair, Packaging Innovation Show and Print UK provide excellent opportunities to informally meet people and provide excellent opportunities to top up your industry knowledge and network with potential employers, although they are not recruitment events as such. Keep an eye on the Creative Careers noticeboard for forthcoming fairs.

Join relevant trade associations listed at the end of this document – membership is good value if you use it effectively.

Push your luck!

Other methods employed by emerging designers include blagging entry to special events and clubs, hanging out in bars frequented by design agencies and picking the brains of everyone you know for useful contacts. An ex student at LCC worked in the evenings for her father's cab company and bagged all the jobs in Soho picking up advertising executives so that she could pick their brains and get good contacts whilst driving them home. Persistence can pay off!

"I just kept on persisting and the Managing Director eventually agreed to meet me for a coffee on his Sunday afternoon...I couldn't believe it!"

Chelsea Student

Some of these strategies take getting used to but remember you can use Creative Careers resources and workshops to help build confidence.

Where are vacancies advertised?

Creative Careers

A good place to start looking is Creative Careers weekly vacancy bulletin Creative Opportunities at: **www.arts.ac.uk/student/careers** Employers using the service are specifically targeting students and graduates of the University of the Arts London, which gives you a head start. Salary levels can be a little lower than vacancies appearing in the trade press but without the expectation of several years of experience, this can be a great way to break into the industry.

Commercial Recruitment Agencies

Whilst some agencies help college leavers, most are more interested if you have relevant experience. One of the few agencies willing to see graduates is **www.careersindesign.com** See the Recruitment and Employment Confederation's website **www.rec.uk.com** for a list of member agencies. Using recruitment agencies is expensive for companies but some recruitment agencies do recruit for junior as well as senior posts. See our handout "Graphic Design Recruitment Agencies" and remember that agencies do need to service the needs of their primary client - the

employer. It is therefore advisable to be very clear about the type of role you are seeking and to ask for details of who your CV is being sent to.

Trade Press

Trade press publications are useful for recruitment advertising, company and industry news, events and trends - essential background information for making speculative applications. Sometimes articles appear which are specifically aimed at graduates and students. For example *Creative Review* in 2004 did a placement survey. Ask in the Careers Information Centre for help with finding these publications. They may also be available in your college or local library. Newspapers and trade magazines listed at the end also advertise graphic design vacancies. Remember that advertising jobs costs thousands of pounds so many vacancies are at a more senior level and require experience. Don't lose heart though, entry-level positions do come up. Reading articles on trends and expanding companies will help when it comes to speculative approaches.

The Internet

This is a great way to start researching companies you may want to work for or to link up with professional membership associations that may be of help. A good starting point is Creative Careers' website www.arts.ac.uk/student/careers - See the Useful Websites section under Design.

If you are thinking of setting up as a freelance designer, some agencies, such as 'Aquent' - www.aquent.com specialise in freelance design positions. Another site www.freelancers.net offers a register for freelance creative talent. Many commissions in graphics are however passed between friends and contacts so it may be advisable to obtain at least a year's graphics experience and contacts before going it alone.

Alternatively, why not advertise yourself? Some websites offer CV databases and mini portfolio services for employers to search, such as www.bbc.co.uk/jobs. More links are provided on the Creative Careers website. Otherwise it's all down to your charm and persistence in making speculative approaches and building contacts.

What are my chances of getting in?

The job market is competitive so you need to get as much work experience as you can and take any opportunity to network. However your chances are greatly improved if you develop a useful strategy that might include gaining experience, doing research, targeting companies

"A blanket bomb approach immediately turns us off a client. We want to feel loved and special to candidates, not just one of many - especially if they aren't even within the same sector" - *Major PR Agency*

Networking and building up your contacts is one of the main ways that you can start to gain some professional experience. Past students, Creative Careers, friends, tutors, launch events are all ways to build up your network of contacts. While you're still at college talk to tutors about your career plans, ask for help in finding professional contacts. After you leave college keep in touch with the University of the Arts London Alumni Association: www.arts.ac.uk/alumni
Also look out for useful events in Creative Opportunities at www.arts.ac.uk/students/careers

Another aspect of your strategy could be to take advantage of membership organisations and trade fairs as a way of informally meeting people.

Membership of the 'Chartered Society of Designers' - www.csd.org.uk - could be a sound investment for students and graduates. At a discounted membership you can access their recruitment agency surveys, portfolio clinics, work placement registers and networking events with company members. Other organisations include 'British Design and Art Direction', 'British Multimedia Association' and the 'Society of Typographic Designers', all of which are included in the Creative Careers useful websites section

Building a network of industry contacts can seem like a daunting task but time spent developing a strategy really does pay off. Everyone approaches this differently and you'll want to go with whatever works best for you. Promote yourself by developing an effective marketing pack (see below) and always be ready to seize an opportunity. Design awards and competitions are a great way of promoting your work and yourself.

Contact details of design companies and ad agencies with graphics departments can be found in industry directories. The Careers Information Centre has all the main directories in this area including *LANRE Pocket Directory*, the *Creative Handbook*, *Design Handbook* and *The Advertisers Annual*. Catalogues of *Design Week* and *iF* award winners are also available – it's always useful to know if the employer has won any awards! Alternatively, search the online directories by name or region to access profiles of design companies at www.dba.org.uk and www.designdirectory.co.uk

How do I improve my chances?

Employers want to see evidence of your skills and a commitment to working in the field:

Industry experience

Try to get some experience in the industry. Paid or unpaid, it shows you are comfortable and committed in this environment. Other work experience also counts. Customer service skills in a Saturday job demonstrate your ability to handle clients tactfully and with discretion - essential in a busy design studio.

If you do not have experience and are able to take an unpaid work placement the rewards can be high. Try to negotiate around what you would like to do before starting and you could gain valuable experience for your CV as well as a network of contacts. Creative Careers publishes current placements in 'Creative Opportunities' as well as keeping a catalogue of employers offering short-term placements. The Chartered Society of Designers also operates a work placement register.

'The industry year has been very beneficial to me- not only have I worked for companies like Johnson Banks and The Partners and have started to do freelance jobs, but I have also had the opportunity to meet inspiring people' - *LCC student on her placement year*

Carry on creating new work

Don't be shy of taking on design projects you can realistically handle. In addition to paid commissions, charities, friends and voluntary organisations often welcome support in producing marketing materials. Not only do commissions look good on your CV, they keep your portfolio up to date and show you can work with clients.

Enhance your skills

Keep your technical skills up to date. While having an in depth knowledge of one particular software package can be an advantage, employees who can multitask with a range of software offer added value. See "How can I study Graphic Design" below for more information.

What should be in my marketing pack?

As a Graphic Designer you will want your personality and creativity to come across clearly in your self-marketing pack. Along with your CV the pack should ideally include your own letterhead or logo, a business card, postcards of your work to leave behind and perhaps some slides of your work. A website is often expected as well as a portfolio and CD-ROM. There are websites where you can learn how to develop your own website such Web page Design for Designers <http://wpdfd.com/wpdhome.htm> Each term Creative Careers offers the opportunity for students and graduates to enter a CV competition and the winners are available to view at the Careers Information Centre. To get some inspiration why not come and have a look?

Design employers will expect you to use all your flair and imagination to create text and images that really stand out. Keep your CV snappy, one or two pages at most. It will always be work in progress, edited for each employer you see according to their needs and interests.

"We expect graphic designers to be able to set up an online portfolio but we need to be able to open it quickly - within 20 seconds or we will not bother. Websites therefore need to be attractive but simple". *Recruitment Agency*

A word on protecting your work

If you are working freelance it is really important that you get advice on protecting your work and setting up contracts in order to avoid being ripped off. You'll need strong negotiation skills and an awareness of your rights.

Know your rights: visit www.own-it.org organises regular events and workshops covering IP issues for creative people. Tickets for events are always free. Get familiar with the Enterprise Centre for Creative Arts London www.ecca-london.org who can advise you on all aspects of freelancing and point you in the right direction for specialist copyright issues. Another good website which offers copyright advice is www.acid.uk.com

How can I study graphic design?

Courses in graphic design enable people to learn skills related to visual communication. Taught areas of the course might include specialisms in: advertising; printing; publishing; audio-visual multimedia; typography; information graphics; calligraphy; illustration; web design; computer-aided design.

Some courses have very similar titles but different content. Some common terms for courses include: communication design; graphic design; graphic media communication; media design; visual arts; visual communication; visual information design.

There are many courses to choose from and it is important to do careful research to find the right one for you. You should look into the quality of the facilities available (e.g. how up-to-date are the software packages you will be using?) There are various ways of finding out more about graphic design courses. For more information about how to choose the right course, see Creative Careers handout “Applying to Higher Education - guidelines for students” To research undergraduate courses and module options go to **www.ucas.com** and select a course search with the key word sound.

Postgraduate

There are different views about whether a postgraduate qualification is necessary for career progression in graphic design. Think about what you want to achieve. Are you looking to develop a specialist skill e.g. animation or a specific software package. In some cases, a short professional course may be a more suitable option for technical skill acquisition. (See **www.hotcourses.com** or ‘Floodlight’ **www.floodlight.co.uk** for short course information) Or are you interested in continuing an intellectual exploration of graphic design issues, e.g. in visual culture, or in the politics of visual representation? Theoretical courses could lead to further research or teaching.

What else might a graphic design qualification lead to?

Not everyone who studies graphic design becomes a graphic designer. In the first place, a third of graduate-level jobs advertised are for graduates of any discipline. See the ‘Prospects Today’ and ‘Prospects Directory’ publications, available from the Careers Information Centre, for more details. You may be interested in working in a visually creative environment without being a designer e.g. in arts administration or as an advertising account executive.

Or, perhaps you can see opportunities to develop your work in a different direction. The boundaries between visual arts have become increasingly blurred with graphic designers becoming exhibiting artists or photographers for example. Constantly evolving technology and new industries also provide different opportunities. For example, design for computer games, CD-Roms, websites and other media have emerged in the relatively recent past. The best advice is to keep thoroughly up-to-date with trends and commit to life-long learning of new skills.

Further information

National press and journals carrying vacancies

In the UK, the newspapers and a number of trade magazines advertise vacancies in graphic design and new media. Many of these are held in the Careers Information Centre at Davies Street or are available from newsagents. They include *The Guardian* - Mondays and Saturdays, and at www.jobsunlimited.co.uk; *The Independent* - on Wednesdays; *Creative Review*, *FX*, *ICON*, *Design Week*, *New Design*.

Career information on graphic design and other design fields

Creative Careers has a well stocked resource centre and a fabulous careers library online. For more information visit the resources link to the website www.arts.ac.uk/student/careers or check out the graduate higher education careers service at www.prospects.ac.uk

Vacancies and networking websites for graphic designers

There are so many useful websites and these are just a few

Arts Culture Media Jobs
www.acmjobs.com

British Design Initiative
britishdesign.co.uk

Careers in Design
www.careersindesign.com

Chartered Society of Designers
www.csd.org.uk Design

Design Boom
www.designboom.com/eng

Jobs in Design
www.designjonsearch.com

Directory of Design Consultants
www.designdirectory.co.uk

Games industry :
www.gamesindustry.biz
Gamasutra: www.gamasutra.com
Both provide industry news and jobs

BBC - Work Experience website: **www.bbc.co.uk/workexperience**

An online only portal for applying for work experience at the BBC involving over 100 different areas across the organisation.

BBC jobs: **www.bbc.co.uk/job**

Careers, jobs & training at the BBC

BBC Vision: **www.bbc.co.uk/designvision**

A BBC initiative to encourage and support creative talent and design innovation for the film, broadcast and media industry.

Useful books in the Careers Information Centre at Davies Street

Design Directory

Creative Handbook

Lanre Pocket Directory

Protecting your work

The Enterprise Centre for the Creative Arts - ECCA

www.ecca-london.org

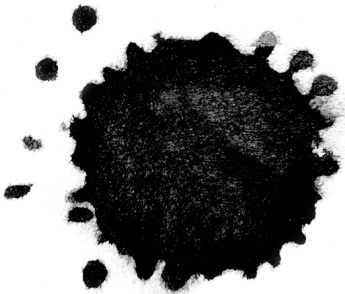
ECCA runs 1-to-1 advice sessions for anyone in the London area that is thinking of setting up (or who has already set up) a creative business or freelancing.

Written and researched by Jacqui Adams September 2005.

University of the Arts London
– a creative constellation

Camberwell College of Arts
Central Saint Martins College
of Art and Design
Chelsea College of Art and Design
London College of Communication
London College of Fashion
Wimbledon College of Art

www.arts.ac.uk



The main purpose of our written material is to provide specialist careers information, that is not readily available elsewhere, for our students and recent graduates.

All eligible students and graduates are welcome to use Creative Careers. We provide a range of services from information, advice and guidance through to practical group workshops. To find out how we work with students and leavers at your college or how to contact us visit www.arts.ac.uk/student/careers.

We aim to be disability friendly so do let us know of any particular requirements you may have. All our handouts and workshop materials are available in alternative formats on request. Please contact us to discuss your needs and how we can help. To make comments about this handout or suggestions for new ones we could produce, please email us at careers@arts.ac.uk

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