Programme Specification: MA Visual Communication

Date of Publication to Students: September 2010

> **NOTE:** This specification provides a concise summary of the main features of the course and the learning outcomes that a typical student might reasonably be expected to achieve and demonstrate if s/he takes advantage of the learning opportunities that are provided. More detail on the specific learning outcomes, indicative content and the teaching, learning and assessment methods of each module can be found (1) at http://www.bcu.ac.uk/biad, (2) in the Module Specifications and (3) in the Student Handbook.
>
> The accuracy of the information contained in this document is reviewed by the University and may be checked within independent review processes undertaken by the Quality Assurance Agency.

Awarding Institution / Body:	**Birmingham City University**
Teaching Institution:	**BIAD – Birmingham Institute of Art and Design**
Interim Awards and Final Award:	**Postgraduate Certificate** **Postgraduate Diploma** **Master of Art**
Programme Title:	**MA Visual Communication** offering award titles: **Route R** MA Visual Communication (Creative Advertising) MA Visual Communication (Typographic Practice) MA Visual Communication (Illustration: Narrative & Sequence) MA Visual Communication (Photography: Documentary Practice) **Route V** MA Visual Communication MA Visual Communication (Animation & Moving Image) MA Visual Communication (Graphic Design) MA Visual Communication (Illustration) MA Visual Communication (Multimedia Design) MA Visual Communication (Photography) MA Visual Communication (Scenography) MA Visual Communication (Visual Identity & Banding)
Main fields of Study:	Visual Design and Communication
Modes of Study:	Full-time Part-time
Language of Study:	English
UCAS Code:	

JACS Code:

Relevant subject benchmark statements and other external reference points used to inform programme outcomes:

While there is no Postgraduate subject benchmark statement for Art & Design, the programme embraces the spirit of the Art & Design benchmark statement provided for undergraduate awards.

Advice received from visiting professionals and the network members of students, professional experience of academic staff and feedback from alumni are all used to inform the currency of the programme outcomes at any time.

Programme philosophy and aims

Explain the overall approach adopted by the programme and how it leads to the aims shown below

The programme seeks to provide an immersive learning experience for advanced practitioners within the broad field of Visual Communication, requiring the achievement of generic Visual Communication learning outcomes, within each learner's specialist Area of Practice (AOP).

The programme has taught elements throughout and a visible content base that explicitly links to module learning outcomes. Content is delivered ostensibly by a relatively small team of 'core' staff, as well as a larger team of specialist lecturers, with additional workshops delivered by other faculty staff and external academics / practitioners.

Support of individual Visual Communication specialisms, is provided by subject specialists from within the wider school of Visual Communication.

On application to the programme, prospective students will choose from one of two structurally differentiated routes – route 'R' and route 'V'.

In terms of learning outcomes the first stage of the programme (PGCert), is common to all students, as is 50% of the second stage (PGDip). The remainder of the programme is based on route specific learning outcomes that reflect the different emphases of each.

The primary differences between the routes are in their respective Research and Vocational biases, termed the 'R' route and 'V' route. It should be noted that both routes support and promote research AND vocationally relevant practice, with the difference being in the levels of emphasis and the nature of outcomes.

Learning is achieved through the development of a critical understanding of practice, with methods including the systematic analysis of media and practice, the determining of key and advanced practice based principles, the establishing of evaluative criteria and the regular application of functioning knowledge (as opposed to declarative knowledge).

Learners work towards establishing a deep and clear understanding of how meaning is constructed across a range of media, as well as acquiring the requisite skills and knowledge to produce 'meaningful' visual work within their own Area of Practice.

The course adheres to a constructive alignment model, based on the notion that learners, with the consultative support of tutors, construct their own learning through relevant

learning activities.

Engagement with external associates such as practitioners, employers, clients, researchers etc, is formally supported through the programme.

The aims of the programme are to:

- Enable Visual Communication graduates and/or practitioners to further develop their practice and standing within the field, through a range of reflective learning methods that are conducive to promoting:
  - o advanced subject knowledge (including production)
  - o creative thinking
  - o critical awareness and analytical practice
  - o Engagement with a range of subject related external associates.

- Facilitate a comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to their own research or advanced scholarship.

- Provide an environment in which autonomous and peer learning, is supported by programme specific content and tutoring frameworks.

- **Route R**: Provide graduates with the requisite skills and understanding to develop their academic careers through research oriented practice and/or to make significant contributions to their academic field through research or further study.

- **Route V**: Provide graduates with the requisite skills and understanding to secure positions of advanced standing within visual communication careers, typically servicing the senior creative and/or directorial demands of respective discipline domains.

Intended learning outcomes and the means by which they are achieved and demonstrated:

Learning Outcomes
On successful completion of the programme you will be able to: **1. Synthesize your emergent knowledge and understanding of communication, creative development, analysis, critical awareness and professional practice to advance your standing and ability as a purposeful Visual Communicator** Throughout the programme you will be tested on how effectively you are able to identify learning needs within your AOP and resolve them through engaged, reflective learning. This will be most evident through your work within the analytical practice modules and the study proposal module, notwithstanding that final stage work must encapsulate the skills listed above. Reflective Visual Journals are used most often to evidence these abilities, as are the sourcing of appropriate projects and the construction of your own project briefs, and at later stages working with the Visual Schematic of Practice model.

The case study and instructional lecture will provide further evidence, as will the AOP publication. Workshops in creative development that result in a range of visual outcomes AND personalised creative thinking strategies will support this outcome.

Reflective Web Publishing and New Media & Technology workshops within the second stage will require you to synthesise earlier attained knowledge with emergent knowledge to respond to your AOP through surveys and speculative enquiry, culminating in theoretical exposition and practical outcomes.

2. Apply a range of formal research methods to significantly advance your knowledge and understanding of aspects of your Area of Practice AND the broader field of Visual Communication

Through a series of research methods workshops during the first two stages of the programme, you will work towards constructing critical evidence to support arguments and dissemination of knowledge through written work, presentations and in the case of the R route, a major research oriented study proposal. All final stage work must exhibit application of formal research methodologies, supported by specialist personal tutors.

3. Formulate effective strategies for learning within a specific area of practice, based on the review and evaluation of your identified learning needs

Following PDP supporting learning models such as micro projects, orientation pyramids and forward planning exercises, you will work with tutors to construct your own strategies for developing your research and practice. Evidence will be presented within your module submissions as standalone documents, including comprehensive supporting statements, and commentary that offers insights into the thinking that underpins your practical and theoretical development. Engagement with your live network should support your understanding of your own learning needs, and orientation and field of practice lectures will provide clear methods for self-evaluation.

4. Construct, manage and manipulate meaning in response to defined and context dependent visual communication problems, both visually and textually articulated

Lectures and workshops are provided to develop your analytical skills and your appreciation of the importance of context dependency in design, including audience factors. Studying semiotic deconstruction and conception techniques, along with visual rhetoric, will enable you to construct meaningful visual communication in response to a range of pre-defined communication objectives and conditions.

5.1 Route R: Manage formal research processes independently or as a member of a team, to make a significant contribution to the academic discourse within your AOP, through continued formal or informal study

Building on the early research methods lectures and workshops you will work with your personal tutor and other professionals within your field, including other academics, to produce work, practical and/or conceptual, that has the potential to contribute new knowledge and insights to your AOP. Outcomes may include design artefacts, films, books, conference papers, exhibitions etc, and be visibly supported by formal research.

5.2 Route V: Construct a personal profile based on your visual practice and academic understanding, that is responsive to the needs and conditions of contemporary professional practice within your AOP

Through the development of your personal visual work within most of the modules of the programme, you will construct a professionally relevant portfolio of skills and work that you utilise in the context of live network engagement and career enhancement. It will reflect trends and innovations within contemporary practice, as well as attempting to challenge pre-conceptions that exist within your AOP. Part of the promotion of your profile will be web based, utilising skills and knowledge acquired through the reflective web and new media & technology workshops.

Learning teaching, and assessment methods used
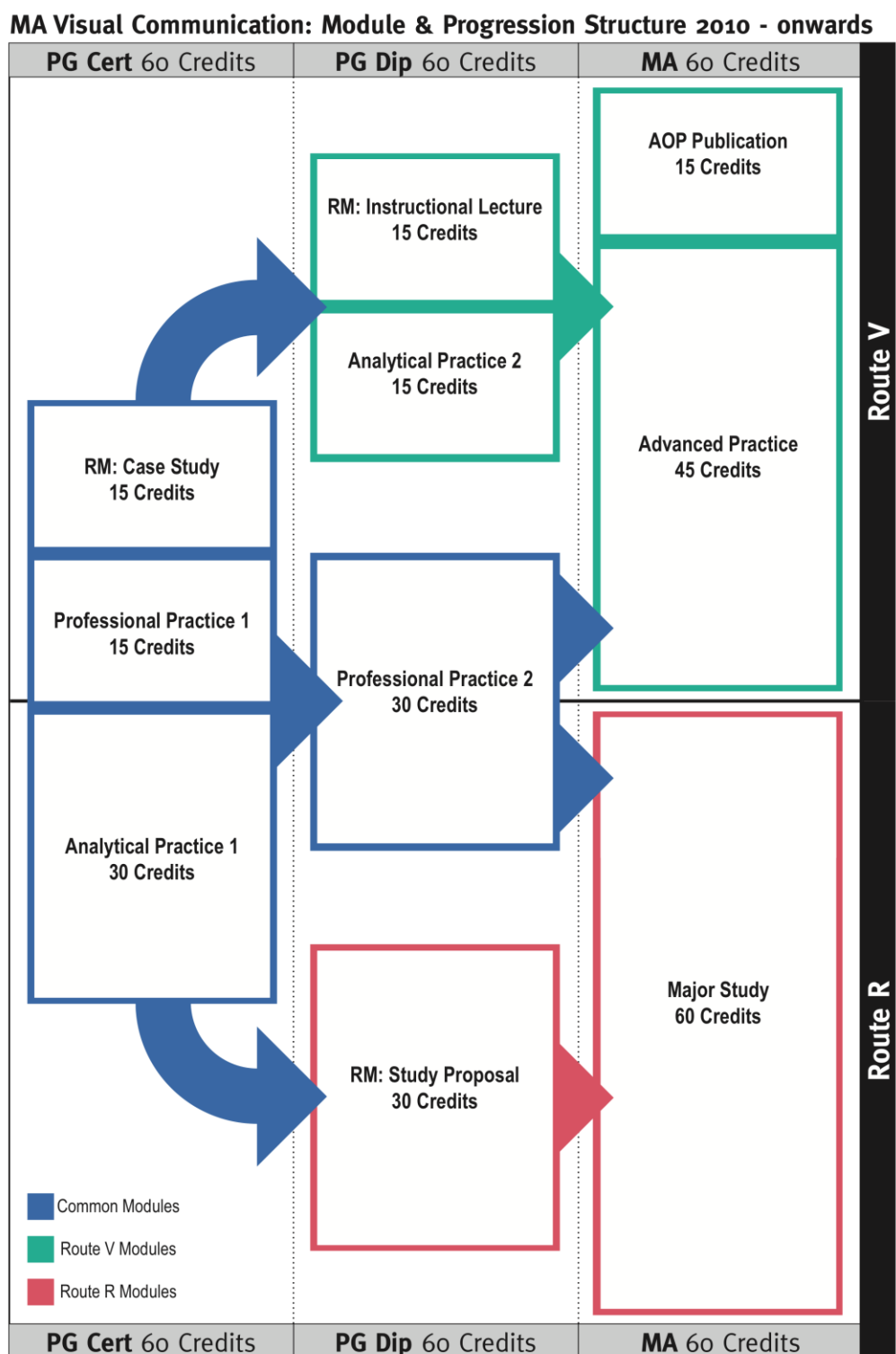
Learning & Teaching

- Formal lectures.

- Interactive lectures and workshops.

- Resource based learning (on and off line).

- Course directed peer group activities (including group crits).

- Learner initiated peer group activities.

- Group tutorials (programme specific).

- Group tutorials (AOP specific).

- Individual tutorials.

- Live network development and engagement.

Assessment (notwithstanding that the programme regards assessment as a critical component of learning)

- Structured peer review exercises.

- Formal periodic work checks.

- Reflective Visual Journals & Supporting statements.

- Visually led presentations.

- 2,500 word Case study.

- 5,000 word study proposal (route R only).

- Instructional lecture with supporting research folder (route V only).

- Publication of AOP specific instructional text(s).

Programme structure and requirements, levels, modules, credits and awards

The structure of the course, the modules, levels and credit values, and the awards which can be gained are shown in the diagram below.

MA Visual Communication: Module & Progression Structure 2010 - onwards

PG Cert 60 Credits	PG Dip 60 Credits	MA 60 Credits

RM: Instructional Lecture
15 Credits

AOP Publication
15 Credits

Analytical Practice 2
15 Credits

RM: Case Study
15 Credits

Advanced Practice
45 Credits

Professional Practice 1
15 Credits

Professional Practice 2
30 Credits

Analytical Practice 1
30 Credits

Major Study
60 Credits

RM: Study Proposal
30 Credits

Route V

Route R

- Common Modules
- Route V Modules
- Route R Modules

PG Cert 60 Credits	PG Dip 60 Credits	MA 60 Credits

Support for Learning including Personal Development Planning (PDP)

Students are encouraged to identify and, with guidance, to reflect on their own learning needs and are offered the following support as appropriate to meet those needs:

A range of PDP specific learning methods including:

- Structured peer review exercises.

- Structured self-evaluation exercises.

- Tutor led work checks.

- Structured forward planning exercises (post assessment reflection).

- Reflective practice exercises (embedded within module learning outcomes).

Additional support for learning includes:

- Specialist personal tutor and related group membership.

- 'Core' team of specialist PG tutors.

- Access to a range of Visual Communication specialists on a 'needs' basis.

- Engagement with a personal live network of associates.

- Technical workshops.

- Technical resources and specialist technical demonstrators.

- Online software development resource (VTC).

- Opportunities to support and contribute to undergraduate delivery.

- Opportunities to contribute to school based research groups.

- Physical and virtual library resources.

Criteria for admission

Candidates must satisfy the general admission requirements of the programme.

The current admission requirements can be found under the 'Entry Requirements' tab of the web page for this course.

Methods for evaluation and enhancement of quality and standards including listening and responding to views of students

- Individual module questionnaires.

- Staff student forum.

- Course Board of Studies.

- School Academic Monitoring Committee.

- Annual programme monitoring (including monitoring through statistical data and external examination).

- Staff meetings.

- Academic staff contributing to the programme engaged in external examining at similar institutions.

Pro-forma issued January 2009