

Course Specification

Course Summary Information		
1	Course Title	MA Design: Active Practice
2	Course Code	PT1822
3	Awarding Institution	Birmingham City University
4	Teaching Institution(s) (if different from point 3)	<i>Not Applicable</i>
5	Professional Statutory or Regulatory Body (PSRB) accreditation (if applicable)	<i>Not Applicable</i>
6 Course Description		
<p>Are you passionate about using design to create a more equitable and sustainable world?</p> <p>MA Design: Active Practice offers a unique opportunity to rethink conventional design models through the blending of research and practice.</p> <p>This course empowers you to critically engage with the purpose and value of artefacts, systems, and processes, equipping you to address complex social, political, and technological challenges with innovative design solutions. By merging critical inquiry with hands-on studio work, you will develop the skills and confidence to become a leader driving transformative change in the design field.</p> <p>With a strong emphasis on social change, the course centres on learning by doing. Active design processes—such as making and dialogue—are crucial for developing competencies in design research, analysis, creative problem-solving, and prototyping. Key themes like Design Cultures, Connections, and Challenges will guide your practice-based learning through individual and collaborative projects, enhancing your teamwork and communication skills via real-world design briefs and live assignments.</p> <p>Housed in the historic Birmingham School of Art, this program thrives within a vibrant research culture that welcomes practitioners from diverse backgrounds. Our dynamic studio environment fosters individual growth and collaboration, empowering you to build an impressive portfolio and expand your professional network through participation in design festivals and workshops across Europe.</p> <p>Our alumni have successfully ventured into various careers, including PhD research, teaching, service design, consultancy, and tech start-ups. Many have founded multidisciplinary design collectives and community labs, showcasing the diverse paths available to you.</p> <p>Join our community of forward-thinking designers and help shape a future where design drives transformative, research-led innovation. You'll graduate equipped with the skills, collaborative mindset, and leadership qualities needed to make a lasting impact in the world of design.</p>		
7 Course Awards		

7a	Name of Final Award	Level	Credits Awarded
	Master of Arts Design: Active Practice	Level 7	180
	Master of Arts Design: Active Practice with Professional Placement	Level 7	240
7b	Exit Awards and Credits Awarded		
	Postgraduate Diploma Design: Active Practice	Level 7	60
	Postgraduate Certificate Design: Active Practice	Level 7	120

8	Variation from the University Regulations
	<i>Not Applicable</i>

9	Delivery Patterns			
	Mode(s) of Study	Location(s) of Study	Duration of Study	Code(s)
	Full Time	TBC	12 months	PT1822
	Part Time	TBC	24 months	PT1823
	Full Time with Professional Placement	TBC	18 months	PT1824

10	Entry Requirements
	The admission requirements for this course are stated on the course page of the BCU website at https://www.bcu.ac.uk , or may be found by searching for the course entry profile located on the UCAS website.

11	Course Aims
	<p>Overall, the course aims to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide an innovative and engaging curriculum that combines hands-on experience with comprehensive theoretical insights in design. • Explore the strategic importance of design and creativity in shaping society, politics, economics and the environment. • Advance critical thinking design approaches and methods, integrating these principles into your own practice and research. • Uphold ethical responsibility in understanding and addressing complex phenomena, issues, and situations impacting the design field. • Utilise advanced analytical and critical skills for effective problem-solving, reflective evaluation, and insightful interpretation. • Foster the ability to contextualise your design practice, equipping you to adapt and lead as an agent for change in the industry.

12	Course Learning Outcomes
	Knowledge and understanding
1	Critically evaluate contemporary design practices, including the role of design and the designer in modern society.
2	Synthesise research methods and/or methodologies and their practical application, as appropriate to contemporary design practices.
3	Synthesise hybridized forms of working within design, understanding the complex inter-relationships between different design disciplines and contexts.
4	Exhibit an in-depth critical awareness of the historical, cultural and social contexts that shape design culture and how these influence the creation and perception of design.
5	Apply a systematic understanding of knowledge and specialist theoretical and methodological approaches through design challenges.
	Skills and other attributes
6	Synthesise complex knowledge by integrating creative learning and action to develop innovative design solutions.
7	Engage deeply with speculative narratives and materials explorations, pushing the boundaries of traditional design thinking through artefacts and actions.
8	Evaluate issues from multiple perspectives and scales, considering the broader social, cultural and environmental contexts.
9	Generate and articulate theoretical discourses that critically analyse and propose designed alternatives, using collective imagination, strategic propositions and aesthetic exploration.
10	Reflect critically on the social and ethical implications of design decisions, ensuring that sustainability goals are addressed in a responsible and inclusive manner.

13	Level Learning Outcomes
	<i>Upon completion of 60 credits at Level 7 / the PG Cert, students will be able to:</i>
	Utilize appropriate research and contemporary design methodologies to understand their application in various design contexts.
	Apply innovative design techniques from various disciplines to create effective transdisciplinary design outputs.

	Communicate projects and research findings confidently using appropriate academic and professional methods.
	Reflect critically on personal growth and learning to enhance the application of design methodologies in future practice.
	Upon completion of 120 credits at Level 7 / the PG Dip, students will be able to:
	Experiment with information from diverse sources and apply critical thinking to formulate an individual design inquiry.
	Implement advanced design processes and methodologies in a practical context to develop, refine and effectively integrate design artefact and design action.
	Communicate complex concepts related to artefact and action, clearly and effectively through written, verbal, and visual means.
	Engage in continuous professional development, actively seeking opportunities to expand and deepen skills and knowledge related to personal practice.

14	Course Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy
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Learning and Teaching

The course is delivered through a variety of Learning and Teaching strategies including through investigation, acquisition, discussion, practice, collaboration and production methods appropriate to the aims and learning outcomes of the different Stages of the course. Although the modules appear to be distinct, engagement with the course is holistic and fluid.

The learning and teaching strategies include:

- Creative learning through making and action.
- Dynamic Learning. Engage with creative professionals, community activists, scholars and other influential roles that aim to provoke and inspire innovative design approaches and discourses.
- Co-creation and Collaboration. Working together with others to create social change by focusing on fairness, justice and sustainability.
- Co-production + group working through projects. Working collectively at various stages of your programme or through group projects.
- Studio practice (working within a studio context)
- Masterclass skill workshops from industry professionals
- Face-to-face and online lectures (provide you with an in depth understanding of the topic)
- Designer/artist professional presentations (lecture series)
- Workshops (provide you with hands on experience, practically learning new skills, how to operate machinery or to work with and/or immerse yourself within a subject, materials or particular content)
- Group tutorials (an opportunity for peer-to-peer learning whilst developing useful transferable skills for working in the real world)
- *seminars* (designed to encourage dialogue and interactivity and you will work with a tutor to analyse and examine the material/topic in various ways)
- Field Trips (cover a range of learning and teaching strategies that lie outside the institution and normally within the UK and Europe)
- Virtual Learning Environments (Moodle is the University's e-learning environment/ Microsoft Teams)

Assessment:

Assessment is formative and summative. The work presented for the assessment will demonstrate the extent to which the student is currently fulfilling or has fulfilled the learning outcomes for the module.

Formative Assessment

In all modules there are various opportunities for formative feedback and feedforward in the form of tutorials and formal reviews/crits, which provide verbal and/or written feedback. All of these, together with opportunities for students to engage in peer learning and assessment, provide opportunities for the student to attain a higher level of performance in the final summative assessment.

Summative Assessment

This final assessment giving the mark for the module, is known as a summative assessment. An evaluation of achievement is identified through specified assessment criteria aligned to each of the module learning outcomes. The assessment of submitted work is carried out by staff teaching on the modules. Students will receive written feedback for each summative assessment.

15	Course Requirements																																		
15a	<p>Level 7:</p> <p><i>In order to complete this course a student must successfully complete all the following CORE modules (totalling 160 credits):</i></p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr style="background-color: #ffff00;"> <th style="text-align: center;">Module Code</th> <th style="text-align: center;">Module Name</th> <th style="text-align: center;">Credit Value</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">****</td> <td>Design For / Design As</td> <td style="text-align: center;">40</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">****</td> <td>Research Through Practice</td> <td style="text-align: center;">20</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">****</td> <td>Artefact + Action</td> <td style="text-align: center;">40</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">****</td> <td>Professional Project</td> <td style="text-align: center;">60</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p><i>In order to complete this course a student must successfully complete at least 20 credits from the following indicative list of OPTIONAL modules.</i></p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="text-align: center;">Module Code</th> <th style="text-align: center;">Module Name</th> <th style="text-align: center;">Credit Value</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">****</td> <td>Industry Project</td> <td style="text-align: center;">20</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">****</td> <td>Independent Creative Entrepreneur</td> <td style="text-align: center;">20</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">****</td> <td>Work Placement</td> <td style="text-align: center;">20</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p><i>In order to qualify for the award of MA Design: Active Practice with Professional Placement, a student must successfully complete all of the Level 7 modules listed above as well as the following Level 6 module:</i></p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="text-align: center;">Module Code</th> <th style="text-align: center;">Module Name</th> <th style="text-align: center;">Credit Value</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td style="height: 20px;"></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		Module Code	Module Name	Credit Value	****	Design For / Design As	40	****	Research Through Practice	20	****	Artefact + Action	40	****	Professional Project	60	Module Code	Module Name	Credit Value	****	Industry Project	20	****	Independent Creative Entrepreneur	20	****	Work Placement	20	Module Code	Module Name	Credit Value			
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	PLA6003	Professional Placement	60 Credits	
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15b Structure Diagram
Level 7

Course Structure: MASTERS DESIGN: ACTIVE PRACTICE (FT)									
Year 1									
Cohort	S1 wks 1-4	S1 wks 5-8	S1 wks 9-12	S2 wks 1-4	S2 wks 5-8	S2 wks 9-12	S3 wks 1-4	S3 wks 5-8	S3 wks 9-12
September Full-Time	Module: Design For/Design As (40 Credits)			Module: Artefact + Action (40 Credits)			Module: Professional Project (60 credits)		
	Module: Research Through Practice (20 Credits)			Module: Faculty Module (20 Credits)					

Course Structure: MASTERS DESIGN: ACTIVE PRACTICE (PT)									
Year 1									
Cohort	S1 wks 1-4	S1 wks 5-8	S1 wks 9-12	S2 wks 1-4	S2 wks 5-8	S2 wks 9-12	S3 wks 1-4	S3 wks 5-8	S3 wks 9-12
September Part-Time 1	Module: Design For/Design As (40 Credits)			Module: Artefact + Action (40 Credits)			S3 Summer Break in Studies		

Course Structure: MASTERS DESIGN: ACTIVE PRACTICE (PT)									
Year 2									
Cohort	S1 wks 1-4	S1 wks 5-8	S1 wks 9-12	S2 wks 1-4	S2 wks 5-8	S2 wks 9-12	S3 wks 1-4	S3 wks 5-8	S3 wks 9-12
September Part-Time 2				Module: Professional Project (60 credits)			Professional Project (continues)		
	Module: Research Through Practice (20 Credits)			Module: Faculty Module (20 Credits)					

16	Overall Student Workload and Balance of Assessment
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Level 7

Workload

8.3% time spent in timetabled teaching and learning activity

Activity	Number of Hours
Scheduled Learning	150
Directed Learning	1290
Private Study	360
Total Hours	1800

Balance of Assessment

Assessment Mode	Percentage
Coursework	100%
Exam	
In-Person	