

**Nottingham Trent University**  
**School of Art & Design**  
**Course Specification**

**Basic Course Information**

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|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Awarding Institution:              | Nottingham Trent University |
| 2. School/Campus:                     | School of Art & Design      |
| 3. Final Award and Course Title:      | BA (Hons) Illustration      |
| 4. Mode of study and normal duration: | FT 3 years<br>SW 4 years    |
| 5. UCAS Code:                         | XXXX                        |

**6. Overview and general educational aims of the course**

**Background**

Our BA (Hons) Illustration provides a journey into the exhilarating world of illustrative practice. Our aim is to help you locate your unique visual identity as an illustrator and prepare you for industry, helping you to create a balance between creative and professional concerns that will underpin your practice during the course and throughout your career.

Our forward-looking course offers a rich curriculum that reflects innovation and cutting edge practice in the illustration industry. You will have the opportunity to explore areas which may include children's book illustration, editorial illustration, graphic novels, graphic design, illustration for branding, illustrator as maker, information design, publishing, motion, printmaking, typography and illustration research.

The course is structured around visual thinking and drawing, supporting you to create thoughtful, intelligent, inventive, and socially conscious illustrative work. As you progress through the course you will craft a portfolio that reflects your own distinct identity as an illustrator.

You will experience contemporary practice in a highly creative environment, working with practicing illustrators, both staff and visiting industry experts, whose professional experience filters directly into the teaching and course design. The staff team have extensive experience at national and international levels in the fields of children's book illustration, editorial illustration, illustration research, graphic novels, graphic design, illustration for branding, publishing, animation, printmaking, and typography. We will provide you with an illustration hub where you will be able to engage with other creatives in a vibrant and creative studio atmosphere.

There are various distinctive and positive features within the course. You will explore how illustration is used as a vehicle for visual storytelling in mediums such as children's books and graphic novels. You will investigate the relationship between illustration and knowledge, producing research and combining theory and practice. We will teach you how illustration is used within a wider design context, giving you awareness of how illustration sits as a strand within visual communication and alongside graphic design. We will link illustrative learning to a clear understanding of visual communication principles. You will learn how components such as type/layout/brand inform and augment illustrative work. Lastly, the course has a real focus on business, with the aim of creating adaptable creative professionals.

The course enables you to bring your ideas to life and to achieve professional standards: you will have regular access to our comprehensive suite of industry-standard resources and facilities. There are fully equipped computer suites and studios dedicated to print, interactive media and moving image, all of which are

regularly updated, and which are supported by experienced, award-winning technical staff, who are based in the resource areas. As part of your studies you will be introduced to ethical practice for illustrators. You will learn about GDPR, ethics, and appropriate industry online practice. Along with the rest of the School of Art and Design, the course benefits from being part of a visually attractive, dynamic working environment shared with other exciting creative communities.

Our ultimate aim with the BA Illustration is that you will leave us fully engaged with the subject of illustration and highly motivated to succeed. The creative industries require practitioners who can respond quickly to change. We therefore seek to instil the following skills and values in our students: design thinking, idea generation and development, conceptual clarity, an ability to work effectively with a broad range of digital media and across different platforms, and a collaborative approach to practice.

The expectation is that after studying this course you will leave NTU with the knowledge and skills to initiate your own illustrative business, along with abilities and intellectual approaches that can be applied in various different roles across the creative industries. We foster a culture of innovative thinking that encourages you to push the boundaries of the discipline, enabling you to build your reputation as an illustrator and to engender a life-long engagement with the subject.

### **Special Features**

#### ***Industry focus***

The course prepares you to work in a global industry where illustrative work is published internationally as a matter of course. You will gain an understanding of the demands of working with international clients, and will be introduced to contemporary illustration thinking and practice within an international creative context. You will do this by working with industry on live briefs, and by reflecting on contemporary international practice within our Illustration in Context, Contemporary Issues in Illustration, and Independent Journal modules. To meet the ever-changing demands of the future, we ensure that graduates of our BA (Hons) Illustration programme are fully aware of social, cultural and political issues that inform contemporary illustration, since emerging illustrators need to understand a wide range of economic, technological and ethical debates today.

The course was created in consultation with the leading industry body The Association of Illustrators (AOI) whose knowledge and expertise informs our approach. This ensures that the course is aligned with the most current industry needs and expectations.

The course has strong, constructive links with some of the best professional practitioners and thinkers in the illustration and design industries, both in the UK and internationally. You will benefit from an informative and fascinating series of visiting lecturers and guest speakers, invited for their experiences and insights into the creative business. We also collaborate with professional illustrators and clients who set short projects to help you gain experience of working in a professional context.

#### ***National and International Competitions***

You will be supported and encouraged to enter national and international illustration competitions (e.g. The World Illustration Awards (AOI), The Batsford Prize, The Macmillan Prize (children's book awards), V&A Illustration Awards, YCN). These will help you to establish your reputation and profile as an illustrator.

#### ***Employability Support***

The School of Art and Design offer an excellent range of employability support and the course has its own dedicated Professional Experience Tutor. We encourage all students to undertake some form of work experience during their studies. Graphic Design students are fully supported in this activity and will have the opportunity to gain a School of Art and Design Placement Certificate in Professional Practice (6 weeks), or may wish to consider undertaking a sandwich year (36 weeks) between year 2 and 3 of your studies – you would receive a Diploma in Professional Practice in addition to your degree if you undertook this option.

The professional focus is further supported by the industrial and research profiles of the extensive staff team. You will work and learn with a team of knowledgeable and committed lecturers, who include award-winning designers and illustrators with experience of professional practice at national and international level in the fields of branding, editorial, design/illustration history & writing, illustration, graphic design, interactive and information design, filmmaking, publishing, motion design, typography and art direction.

Strong illustrative/design skills are vital for achieving employability; however, there are other aspects of the Course which also help enhance the profile and attributes of our graduates. As part of your studies you will be involved in activities that enable you to acquire important transferable skills that are in high demand in the job market. You will build your confidence in pitching and making verbal and visual presentations, managing complex projects, and working in and leading teams. These highly desirable skills are known to be an excellent foundation for general graduate-level employment.

In helping you combine these skills with distinctive professional illustrative skills, critical abilities and marketable personal attributes, our aim is for you to play an enjoyable and fulfilling role in society, equipping you to become one of the creative innovators of tomorrow.

### **Our Course Aims**

The Course aims to equip you with:

- An accomplished visual language which communicates effectively and persuasively with your audience
- An understanding of both digital and analogue illustrative processes, including current technological standards and processes that align with industry requirements
- A clear visual identity, recognizable visual voice and awareness of how to position yourself in the illustration/creative industries,
- An understanding of how to balance creative and commercial concerns when producing illustrative work
- Able to consider and synthesize wider issues such as sustainability, global implications and ethics into illustrative solutions
- Critical-thinking skills and an understanding of illustration as a distinct discipline with its own history across cultures
- A critical awareness of the relationship of illustration to cognate disciplines and its place in broader contemporary visual culture
- An understanding of the central role played by visual and textual research in illustration projects
- An innovative, proactive approach to producing illustrative work that pushes the boundaries of the discipline
- A broad understanding of business requirements of the illustration industry

Students will be encouraged to take a position in the world as broad-minded and broad-skilled individuals, fully aware of the roles and responsibilities of professional illustrative practice, and with an ability to contextualise illustration within sustainable, global, social and cultural framework. In a future that will certainly bring continuous change, we aim to prepare you for a career of life-long learning.

### **7. Course outcomes**

Course outcomes describe what you should know and be able to do by the end of your course if you take advantage of the opportunities for learning that we provide.

By the end of the course you should be able to:

- Research, analyse and evaluate a variety of source materials to inform your illustrative practice.
- Evaluate and synthesise relevant theories and practice to develop effective

illustrative responses within your work.

- Critically evaluate global contexts, key issues and debates within the subject to inform your practice and professional direction.
- Demonstrate intellectual curiosity and critical engagement with the subject.
- Evidence successful strategies to explore and/or resolve a wide range of illustrative briefs.
- Experiment with appropriate media, materials, technologies and techniques and apply these to produce final outcomes.
- Identify, develop and create a coherent visual identity which communicates effectively.
- Demonstrate a professional attitude to time, project and resource management, collaborate effectively with others.
- Realise your personal and professional developmental goals, learning independently and developing your transferrable skills across multiple platforms.
- Employ effective professional presentation, communication, written, verbal and critical skills.

## **8. Learning and teaching methods**

The BA (Hons) Illustration course actively encourages interdisciplinarity, variety, diversity and experimentation within its curriculum. The curriculum contains a variety of challenging and engaging tasks, a comprehensive range of exciting learning experiences, all designed to help you gain the specialist knowledge, understanding and skills that you will need to become a part of the creative industries. The Course is also committed to providing an illustration hub, an inspiring and engaging studio environment in which you will enjoy a collective and collaborative approach to learning, and a valuable sense of community with your fellow illustration students.

The course team believes that learning is a two-way process, based on regular peer-group discussions as well as discussions with staff. Consequently, working in small groups is an important aspect of your learning in tutorials and assessments throughout all three years. You will be encouraged to share ideas and to give and receive constructive feedback in a supportive environment. Individual portfolio reviews and feedback on both studio and written work at key points on the course also give you an opportunity to discuss your progress and direction in depth with a lecturer.

You will be taught to reflect on and evaluate your progress and achievement between assessment points, either independently or in peer groups. The University also provides a framework of support for independent learning through the use of a virtual learning environment called 'NOW' (NTU's Online Workspace), and this includes resources that can help you to take responsibility for your learning and support your personal development planning.

At each level of the course you will be encouraged to use your initiative and to be well organised. Skills such as problem solving, group working, self-directing research and developing critical awareness will be developed through projects set in both studio-based and theoretical modules. We use synoptic assessment, which means that we look at your work holistically in order to examine your coherent understanding of your own practice in relation to the learning outcomes, and how this is anchored within illustration's professional and academic paradigms. There is usually an opportunity to go abroad on a field trip to one of the great cities of culture and if for any reason you cannot attend, then alternative learning experiences will be discussed with you.

You will be given the opportunity to collaborate with students from other courses, for example, BA (Hons) Graphic design, BA (Hons) Animation, BA (Hons) Photography, BA (Hons) Filmmaking and many more across the school of Art and Design.

### **Year One (Level 4): Exploring Illustration**

The module will provide a **dynamic exploration of the fundamental core concepts and skills of illustration practice**. During first year of the course you will be initially enabled to focus on the development of your drawing and visual thinking skills. You will engage in research, experimentation and ideation, all important factors in developing a strong creative process. You will experience a range of learning opportunities working in small groups and collaboratively with both self-directed work and industry-facing projects, developing and emphasising your personal employability skills. Throughout, you will be well supported by lecturers' tutorial/feedback sessions, studio activities, collaborative tasks, sign-up surgeries, workshops, group presentations and peer feedback where appropriate. Running alongside this studio practice will be a lecture and seminar series that introduces you to illustration theory and context. In doing so you will explore contemporary issues and debates as they shape our understanding and engagement with the world.

All first-year students within the School of Art and Design will work together on a joint project. As a learning experience this will support your own knowledge of working practices enable you to work collaboratively in groups in new and unique ways.

### **Year Two (Level 5): Professional Context and Personal Direction**

In Year Two you will build on your newly established illustrative skills and knowledge. **You will learn how illustration is applied in different commercial contexts while simultaneously developing your own visual identity.** You will undertake projects, workshops and lectures that will allow you to experience a range of specialist areas of illustration. Our industry led *live briefs*, which align to the Association of Illustrators' categories of Illustration, will bring your employability skills into sharp focus, defining and preparing you for working as an illustrator. You will be encouraged to develop a more strategic approach to your creative process and to develop a higher standard of visual and verbal presentation in project tutorials. These sessions will support your progress, while encouraging you to become a more independent learner.

As part of our commitment to develop personalisation in our curricula, you will be offered a choice of modules at level 5, from which you will pick one. The module options presented have been selected by the course team in order to compliment your study, and to give you the opportunity to follow and deepen your interests, and study with students from other courses.

In the second year, you will have further opportunities to work collaboratively with a wider range of students, partners and industry as part of the School Co-Lab module.

Some students take the opportunity in year two to participate in the Erasmus international study exchange scheme and spend a term of their studies in a similar institution in Europe. If you are interested in an international exchange, you will take the responsibility for arranging it, with the support of the University Exchange Office and course staff.

### **Year Three (Level 6): Developing a Distinctive Professional Portfolio**

In Year three you will **create a bespoke professional portfolio that truly represents you as an illustrator**. You are expected to negotiate your own path through the year through your project choices. You will have the freedom to choose from a huge variety of carefully selected industry and staff briefs or to create your own. This will allow you to bring together your knowledge of the subject and industry from year 2 with your own creative vision to produce a highly considered professional body of work. We provide an environment that fosters innovative illustrative practice and encourage you to push the boundaries of the discipline enabling you to stand out in a competitive professional world. You will be assessed on a physical and digital portfolio of curated work.

You have an opportunity to demonstrate your critical and conceptual understanding of illustration through producing a reflective journal/major dissertation on a given topic. The emphasis in this final year is on developing greater autonomy through this increasingly self-directed study. Weekly group tutorials help monitor your progress, and give you the opportunity to give and receive both peer and lecturer feedback. Regular tutorials frame your learning as a culmination of the Illustration Studio and Illustration in Context sessions of the previous two years.

The final year of the course also offers you a chance to make useful contacts through activities such as industry days, where invited guests offer advice, and portfolio surgeries which give further insight into professional practice. The opportunity to work on self-initiated and live briefs and competition briefs also exists, as well as the continuing possibility to organise short periods of work experience. Towards the end of the year you will usually have the option of attending a creative industries business symposium that will allow you to form further industry insights and build your networks.

In summary your learning on the course will take place through a variety of methods including:

- Studio activities
- Peer groups
- Independent learning
- Lectures
- Workshops
- Seminars
- Group tutorials
- One-to-one surgeries
- Portfolio reviews
- Work based learning
- Live projects
- 'NOW' - virtual learning environment

Within this supportive framework, you will be expected to continue to develop your independence, discovering and maturing your own interests and skills and working towards identified personal goals for your future career; laying the foundations for continuing personal, academic or professional development after graduation.

## 9. **Assessment methods**

Formative assessment points take place across the academic year. These are where you will receive an indication as to how your work is progressing in relation to the learning outcomes for the module. The final summative assessment occurs at the end of each module.

All portfolio work completed on BA (Hons) Illustration modules work will be assessed. Two key elements influence the assessment process on this course. The first is to recognise that effective illustration is produced through a process of research, analysis, development and evaluation. The focus of assessment is therefore on the entire process. This is reflected in the Course and Module Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria. The second is the immense value placed on *reflective learning*. Self-evaluation of your learning and development is therefore a regular aspect of tutorials and assessments. All sketchbook work that demonstrates the evolution and development of final idea presentation is required for assessment, they should also demonstrate the sequential and contextual nature of your learning.

Advice and feedback on your work and progress on projects is given at regular group tutorials, and also at formal review points during the module. This is called *Formative* feedback, and is designed to help you to understand the strengths and weaknesses of your work and what you can do to improve it.

All module assessments are based on course work, and there are no separate

assessments such as examinations. At the end of each module you receive a mark together with summary feedback on your achievement. This is called *Summative Feedback*. You will be provided with written Summative Feedback on all of your module assessments (at the end, half or full year depending on your module schedule).

Only work completed and assessed at Level 6 contributes to your degree award.

## 10. Course structure and curriculum

The course is studied on a full-time (3 years) basis, with the option of a sandwich placement between years two and three.

Level 4 (Year 1)	Core / Optional	Credits
Exploring Illustration	Core	100
Illustration in Context	Core	20

Level 5 (Year 2)	Core / Optional	Credits
Professional Context and Personal Direction	Core	60
Contemporary Issues in Illustration	Core	20
Telling stories*	Optional	20
Publishing: Experimental Formats*	Optional	20
Typography: Use and Expression*	Optional	20
Motion Graphics*	Optional	20
Co-Lab: Research, Exploration and Risk Taking	Core	20

\* students must select 1 module (20 credits) from the set of optional modules

Level 6 (Year 3 / 4)	Core / Optional	Credits
Developing a Distinctive Professional Portfolio	Core	100
Independent Journal	Core	20

### Placement awards

Students undertaking the sandwich placement may achieve a Placement Diploma in Professional Practice, and students undertaking placements of shorter duration may be eligible for a Placement Certificate in Professional Practice.

### Interim awards

Students who do not progress to the final stage may be eligible for an interim award of Certificate of Higher Education, Diploma of Higher Education or Ordinary Degree.

## 11. Admission to the course

### Entry requirements.

For current information regarding all entry requirements for this course, please see the 'Applying' tab on the NTU course information web page.

## **12. Support for learning**

The School is committed to assisting you to achieve the best results possible during your studies, providing a wide range of academic and pastoral help and advice. In addition to the course leader, module leaders and course administrator, a member of staff will also be assigned to you at the start of the course as your personal tutor.

As part of your Induction, you will be introduced to the Student Handbook which includes information on how to access Employability Services, Disability Services, Fees and Student Finance Services, Language Support, the Student Union, Health and Wellbeing Services, International Students Support, Study Support and Individual Support.

The course strategy on academic guidance seeks to develop greater autonomy for you as you move through the three levels, and regular group tutorials also provide you with peer support for learning.

At the beginning of the course, you will take part in induction activities to introduce you to your fellow students and to the course structure. During Year One your written work is monitored for undiagnosed dyslexia, and sometimes students are referred for further testing if required.

Your student handbook will contain details of the support available to you should there be an interruption in your studies, due to circumstances outside of your control, or through other factors affecting your academic performance.

To ensure that you have a clear understanding of the way in which you are progressing within the modules, you will receive feedback on the progress that you are making on a regular basis, both informally and formally. Group tutorials are also an important opportunity to note the feedback that you are getting from your tutors and fellow students and are seen as an important part of the feedback mechanism in the School of Art and Design.

NTU's Online Workspace is referred to as 'NOW'. All course and module information is posted on this site for you to access at any time.

## **13. Graduate destinations/employability**

From the very start of the course, you will be encouraged to identify with the world of work and your future beyond graduation. Through our visiting speakers and guest speakers, all students have the chance to hear advice and personal experience from well-known professionals (some of them our NTU graduates) who represent every aspect of contemporary illustration and design practice. Further activities take place in year two that are designed to encourage research into employment opportunities and help prepare you for work experience placement.

During the final year, you are encouraged to negotiate project choices that align with your personal direction or chosen area of interest within illustration and wider creative industries. This ensures that you build up a portfolio of work that reflects your interest in the subject and your intentions beyond graduation. You will have the opportunity to enter prestigious competitions which will establish your reputation as an illustrator. You will also be offered opportunities to present your portfolio to employers, usually as part of live briefs or through portfolio surgeries. This gives you the chance



to rehearse your presentation and interview skills in a more formal environment and is also a useful networking occasion.

The course has a dedicated Employability Tutor and, additionally, the school Employability Team continuously work closely with all course staff to support Illustration students with drop-in session and advice. The Employability team also provide specialist career talks, workshops and events which continues after you have completed your course.

The active involvement of a range of employers and visiting professionals setting short projects for students provides invaluable experience of working with an external client. It also offers an opportunity to make contact with employers for future opportunities such as work experience placements. In final year, you will often get the chance to meet up with guest speakers after the lecture for portfolio advice and discussion, which will help to further your understand of the illustration and broader creative industries, and to make decisions about your future career focus.

#### 14. **Course standards and quality**

There are well established systems for overseeing the quality of the curriculum within the School.

Module feedback questionnaires and annual surveys are used to gather feedback from students on their learning experiences. Termly course committee meetings, attended by student representatives and academic staff, provide opportunities to raise and discuss matters contributing to the quality, standards and continuing development of the course.

The outcomes of the above inform an annual report highlighting positive features and areas to address which are further included in a course development plan. The plan is monitored through course committees and students have the opportunity to talk through the impact of any changes made.

Informally, course and individual tutorials additionally provide a further means of gathering student feedback and enable staff to address matters as soon as they arise.

Externally, the School consult with industry representatives as part of the course review and development process to ensure continued relevance of the curriculum to the creative and cultural industries. An external examiner is appointed to provide advice and monitor the academic standards of the course and student achievement in relation to those standards.

#### 15. **Assessment regulations**

This course is subject to the University's Common Assessment Regulations (located in Section 16A of the Quality Handbook).

#### 16. **Additional information**

Collaborative partner(s): Association of Illustrators (needs approval)

Course referenced to national (QAA)

Art and Design (2017)

Benchmark Statements:

Course recognised by:

NTIC progression route(s):

Foundation Certificate in Art,  
Design & Media

Date this course specification approved:

DAG 15/11/19

Any additional information: