

# STUDYING ART AND DESIGN DEGREES IN THE UK

A GUIDE FOR INTERNATIONAL  
STUDENT COUNSELLORS



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# WHO IS THIS BOOK FOR?



Advising students on their future studies is a difficult and important job, made harder if you are not familiar with the subject area. Here at Nottingham Trent University (NTU), we invest a lot of time speaking to school and university guidance counsellors about requirements for art and design applications.

This booklet will provide you with information on the following:

- how to make an application
- how to make a creative portfolio
- how universities examine and process art and design applications
- creative careers advice in the UK, and worldwide
- how to help students find the course that suits them best.

**Michael Marsden**  
Dean of the School of Art & Design

## WHY STUDY ART AND DESIGN IN THE UK?

Studying a creative subject in the UK offers a student more than just academic experience. They will have the opportunity to:

- access world-class facilities and equipment
- freely explore their talent and experiment without boundaries
- advance their skills, learning how to turn a creative interest into a successful career
- access one of the world's most buoyant creative industries.

Courses in art and design give students fresh, deep and meaningful ways of expressing themselves and showcasing their talents in new and exciting ways. Subjects such as fashion design, fine art, photography, product design, architecture, graphic design, filmmaking, and theatre design take students behind the scenes, broadening their understanding of each subject and industry area. This allows them to discover a variety of ways and opportunities to pursue a career in art and design.

## NTU: TEACHING ART AND DESIGN SINCE 1843

NTU has been teaching design-related subjects since 1843. Our courses offer each student a unique experience according to their skillset and the direction they wish to take their talent. This is indicative of UK institutions, where free thought, individualism and distinction are highly valued.

# ADVISING YOUR STUDENTS

## FINDING THE RIGHT COURSE

Students coming from high school may not be aware of the vast number of courses on offer to them at university. In the UK, courses tend to specialise from the beginning, so rather than a Bachelors of Design you will find a whole range of specialisms such as graphic design, animation, product (industrial) design, textile design, interior design, and many more.

It has been common practice for school leavers in the UK to undertake a one-year art and design Foundation qualification to experiment with different subjects and media to develop their skills and knowledge before deciding on a pathway at university. For international students, there are specific international foundation courses that often run at the university campus or through a foundation centre partner.

The World Economic Forum reports that 65 % of today's primary school children will work in jobs that do not currently exist. With the rise of artificial intelligence in the workplace, creative careers are resilient, and creative industries are driving growth in developed cities around the world.



## HOW CAN YOU HELP YOUR STUDENT CHOOSE THE RIGHT COURSE?

Your student can create a matrix of what is most important to them for their university experience and use this to create a shortlist of universities. They may feel that living in a large city is most important to them, or they may decide on a campus environment outside of a city. They may place value on how long a course has been running or on graduate employment prospects. You can visit [www.unistats.ac.uk](http://www.unistats.ac.uk) for lots of clear information to help them.

They may want to be amongst groups of students from the same country, or they might want to be in a diverse cohort. Your student might want to study at a high-ranking institution regardless of the course, or they may prefer to focus on course content that matches their needs.

Other factors that may be important to a student could include:

- Am I qualified and can I get in?
- Does this course teach me what I am interested in?
- How much does the course cost, and what other costs will there be?
- Where is the course, and what will my life be like there?
- Is the course recognised by employers, and what are my future career prospects?

Students wanting to study art and design may find the following important when making a decision:

- facilities available for creative practice
- industry links and opportunities to gain work experience
- global opportunities, like field trips and placements overseas
- employability rates (this includes international students).

## SOCIAL MEDIA

All universities have a social media presence, and one of the most effective ways of getting genuine information is directly from existing students. Prospective students can join groups on Facebook and other social media sites relevant to the institutions they are interested in, and can ask questions such as peer reviews. They can probably find students who have come from their city and can ask specific questions about the course, the tutors, where to find their favourite food, and how to settle in to the UK.

## EDUCATION FAIRS

Education fairs happen in many major cities around the world and universities send representatives to give out information. The student will be able to collect course literature from numerous universities, meet academic staff, and ask any questions they may have.

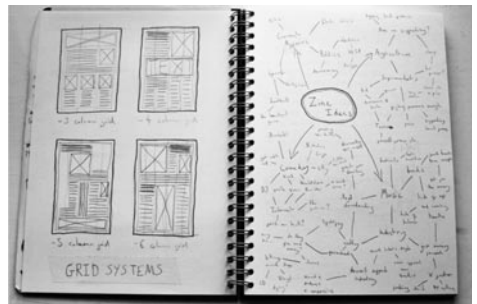
# WHAT IS A CREATIVE PORTFOLIO?

A creative student will feel the need to produce work, whether it is performance, music, conceptual art or illustration. Their interests should be evident in what they are making. This type of work is something that universities look for and is a great sign of a student's ambition.

At some point during the application process, a student will be asked to gather this work together in a format that can be viewed during the application process delete. This collection of work is usually called a creative portfolio.

As an international student will be unlikely to get the chance to meet with a UK institution, they will need to ensure that their portfolio speaks to the viewer and is easy to understand and navigate.

The portfolio should provide the institution's academic staff with an insight into what they are capable of and what they wish to achieve whilst studying. It may also include insight into what the student wishes to do upon completion of their degree.



IMAGES: EXTRACTS FROM SUBMITTED PORTFOLIOS

Watch our portfolio advice video online at:  
[www.ntu.ac.uk/portfolioadvice](http://www.ntu.ac.uk/portfolioadvice)

## BUILDING A PORTFOLIO

The portfolio needs to be organised and annotated as though it is telling a story of the student's projects. For this reason, it is best for the student to start at the beginning of a specific project, explaining where the inspiration came from. The student can then show how the project evolved and developed through experimentation.

## SOME COMMON MISTAKES

- The student uses another's work as their own.
- No variety of work shown – the student repeatedly shows the same style of work or technique throughout the portfolio.
- The student only ever includes finished work.
- The student fails to show diversity within their work, methods, materials etc.

Students should include:

- a range of work that showcases their expertise and what they are interested in
- a variety of work, including: creative research, broad cultural references, concept development, design development, photography, life drawing, mixed media work and digital work (as applicable and relevant to the area of study)
- evidence of the working process (this is what many students miss out)
- the number of pieces in a portfolio that the university college in question has requested.

The willingness to take risks and failing through experimentation is important and should be included in the student's portfolio. Artists and designers learn from mistakes, and a creative failure is still a creative act!

Academic staff look for:

- a quality and range of visual concepts and a level of innovative thinking
- good presentation skills and the ability to visualise ideas
- the ability to handle a variety of technologies, materials and processes
- a willingness to experiment in a range of visual media
- good observational skills in drawing.

The portfolio is all an academic has to assess whether a student would be suitable for their course. They use the portfolio to assess not only the student's talent on offer, and their passion for the subject, but also the student's ability to grow and develop their talent within the area they have chosen to study.

Your student needs to be aware that academics see many portfolios during the application process, so theirs needs to be relevant to the field of study, well organised, annotated, and – above all – interesting and unique.





IMAGE: EXTRACTS FROM SUBMITTED PORTFOLIOS

## HOW CAN A STUDENT'S PORTFOLIO STAND OUT FROM THE REST?

- A show-stopping piece is something that a student can use to focus on. It will define their interests and be something they are truly proud of, and it should be impactful for the academic assessing the portfolio.
- It is important to think about who is viewing the portfolio and what they want to see, which will be interesting work produced by a student who is passionate about the subject area.
- Reading around the subject, understanding current issues and demonstrating an interest in the relevant industry shows that the student is truly engaged. Looking outside of their own practice and towards social responsibility and contentious issues in industry will show maturity and depth of thought. This knowledge should be articulated in the portfolio, to show how it has influenced the development of an idea.
- Their imagination and personality must shine through, as well as their skill and creativity.
- A good way to make a portfolio stand out is to ensure that it encompasses primary sourced material, interesting pieces of work, unrefined work, and a wide range of ideas and experimentation. If a student only includes finished pieces in their portfolio, this only gives the academic a one-dimensional view of their creative process.
- All portfolios should be relevant to the field of study that the student is applying for. The student should show both an understanding of, and a strong passion for, the field they wish to study.

# APPLYING FOR AN UNDERGRADUATE COURSE IN THE UK

The student can usually apply directly through the university's online application portal if they are applying for **one** course in the UK. The application will require basic information about the student and a personal statement. It is likely that there will be the facility to upload supporting documents, such as transcripts and their portfolio.

If the student would like to apply for more than one course in the UK, they should apply via the UCAS website at **www.ucas.com**. This will guide the student through each aspect of the application stage, making the process easy to understand.

## APPLYING VIA THE UCAS WEBSITE

1. The student should choose the course(s) as early as possible, ensuring that they understand the entry requirements.
2. All applications require a personal statement regardless of the subject area, and all applications for a creative, practice-based subject require a portfolio.
3. Once the student has applied, make sure they check their email inboxes regularly, including their junk mail, in case the institution needs more information.
4. The student should submit all supporting documents as soon as they have them.
5. There are six sections in all application forms: personal details; choices; education; employment; personal statement; and reference(s). There is an additional portfolio section for creative, practice-based subjects.

## PERSONAL STATEMENT

This document helps universities and colleges to assess whether the student is suitable for the course. They are allowed to write a maximum of 4,000 characters, which should include:

- why the student is interested in the particular course
- their career aspirations
- the skills and experiences that make the student suitable to study the subject
- why they want to study in the UK.

They also need to:

- think about relevant skills gained from employment, previous education or extra-curricular activities, i.e. leadership or communication skills
- use simple and clear English, manually checking for spelling mistakes and grammar
- keep everything relevant to the course they are applying to
- tell the truth and not copy others.



IMAGE: NIKOLAY IVANOV, MA ILLUSTRATION

## REFERENCES

References enable universities and colleges to find out more about who the student is, their academic potential, and their attitude to studying.

A reference should:

- be written in English by either a head of year, form tutor or subject teacher who knows the student academically
- give a prediction of the student's grades or scores if they are still studying at the time of application.

## WHEN TO APPLY

Deadlines must be met during the application process. If a deadline is missed, there is no guarantee the student will be accepted on to the course they want to study.

### 15 October

#### (the year before the course begins)

This is the application deadline for universities of Oxford and Cambridge, so if the student wishes to apply for a creative course at either of these universities, they must submit all of their UCAS choices by this date.

### 15 January

This is the advised application deadline for all other courses. Course providers cannot guarantee to consider applications received after this date, and some popular courses may not have any vacancies after this date.



### 24 March

This is the application deadline for some art and design courses (except those with a 15 January deadline).

### 30 June

This is widely considered by many institutions as the international (non-EU) student deadline and the last chance to apply in the regular system. If the student applies after this date, they'll be entered into the UK universities' Clearing process. At this point, the student will need to contact each institution they have applied to, to see if there are spaces left available on the course they wish to study.

# APPLYING FOR A POSTGRADUATE COURSE IN THE UK

Postgraduate applications tend to be made directly to each institution. Few courses are found on UCAS, although it is still worth using the search tool on the UCAS website. Other portals are available as online search tools for Masters courses, but be aware they are often paid for by universities as a method of advertising.

As a student must apply directly to each university with a separate form (usually online), it can be quite an undertaking if a student has many institutions to consider. If you can arrange for a student to meet a representative from a university in their home country, this can often be treated as an application and interview, and sometimes the student can be given an offer if they are suitable for the course.

When comparing against undergraduate applications, portfolios of creative work at postgraduate level tend to be smaller and more focused. A student will demonstrate that they have specialist knowledge of the subject area and the necessary skill level in the media they use, perhaps by showcasing their final year projects from their first degree. They can include whatever they choose, but it is worth bearing in mind that admissions tutors are looking for interesting, bold ideas and highly refined, professional-standard work. Students must show that their work is considered, and that their projects have depth and are not purely an aesthetic exercise.

Many portfolios, especially for applied design subjects, are rejected because students do not show process and therefore do not justify their design outcomes. These tend to be “pretty” portfolios, but they lack real exploration of ideas, so the concepts are weak. Outcomes of design are subjective (one person may like it, another may not) so this is not what a student is judged on. Instead, they are judged on the process they have used and the decisions they have made to get to their outcome. Documenting the decision-making process is therefore very important. At Masters level, students are expected to learn independently and be responsible for their development. This makes it essential that they have a mature approach in their portfolio.



## SHARON RONG XUE

### MA Commercial Photography China

“I chose NTU because of the internship opportunities provided here.

“There are many advanced studios, lighting and cameras that are available to us as students, which is really useful.

“I love everything about NTU and Nottingham. The teachers, my classmates, and the whole environment just make it enjoyable.”

# CAREERS AND THE CREATIVE ECONOMY

There still exists a perception that employability prospects for a graduate with an art and design degree are poor, but this is not the case. The world is reliant on creative professionals in almost every discipline. Everything you see around you that has been man-made has been designed by a creative individual.

We live in an advanced technical world where visual communication plays an important role. In the UK alone, creative industries generated £91.8bn a year to the UK economy and the number of UK jobs in creative occupations rose to 3.04m in 2016; an increase of 5 percent or four times the average job growth rate across the economy\*.

The arts, entertainment and recreation sectors contain the industries with the highest percentage of jobs in creative occupations. However, the value of creative attributes are highly regarded by employers of all business aspects in terms of design thinking, innovation and idea generators, so it may be that studying a creative subject will lead a student well in whatever field they wish to venture into.

Below are just some examples of graduate roles and destinations that require a specific creative degree.

- designer
- buying, sourcing and merchandising
- product management
- product development
- retailing
- teaching
- marketing
- set designer
- public relations
- sales and events
- media sales
- branding and identity
- illustrator
- publisher
- studio practitioner
- stylist.

Governments around the world understand the value of the creative economy and develop policy to encourage creative districts, innovation centres and the development of design over manufacturing. Creativity and ideas are of huge value and students should be encouraged to look for these high-value careers.

\* *Creative Industries 2018: UK Creative Employment*





## ANNA MANCILLA

**BA (Hons) Fashion Design  
Peru**

"The staff are the best of the best. As an international student, it had a huge impact on how I developed during the course.

"The resources at NTU are incredible, and you will find yourself in a rich, international environment. The course is very challenging, but also very rewarding.

"Nottingham is such a vibrant place to live in. There is always something to do, and I had an incredible time during my student years."

# ABOUT

# NOTTINGHAM TRENT UNIVERSITY

Here at NTU, we want all of our students to feel that this is a home away from home, a place to make friends for life, and to lay the foundations of a successful career. With staff and students from over 160 different countries across the world, we have a thriving international community.

We have approximately 30,000 students across our four campuses, making us one of the largest and most popular universities in the UK. By studying at NTU, international students access a diverse and culturally rich education.

## EMPLOYABILITY AT NTU

We are extremely proud to say that 97% of our graduates are employed or engaged in further study within six months of leaving of us\*, thanks to our great links with industry, our expert academic staff, and professional support from departments such as our Employability team.

## ART AND DESIGN AT NTU

We've been teaching art and design since 1843, making us one of the UK's most established and renowned creative universities.

Located in the centre of Nottingham, a thriving creative city, you'll become part of a community of over 3,000 artists, designers and makers. We offer the experience of an art school, where you will have the freedom to explore your creativity, while providing all the opportunities of a large university.

Our courses are designed in collaboration with industry. Students will have opportunities to gain real-life experience through live projects, competitions, talks from industry experts, exhibitions, and events. We have a reputation for producing successful graduates who go on to become fashion designers, fine artists, photographers and creatives who are globally recognised.



IMAGE: NOTTINGHAM'S OLD MARKET SQUARE

\*DLHE survey 2016/17



## ART AND DESIGN FACILITIES

Our art and design facilities are based in five large buildings on our City Campus.

### Bonington building

Our 1960s Bonington building was re-opened by global fashion designer Paul Smith in 2006. It's home to our Fine Art, Decorative Arts, Photography, Textile Design, Fashion Design, and Fashion Knitwear Design and Knitted Textiles courses.

Students have access to:

- Mac suites
- art and design studios
- workshops
- glass and ceramic kilns
- photography studios
- a dedicated camera store
- fashion studios
- industry-standard electronic garment and knitwear technology
- digital textile printing
- digital loom and embroidery equipment
- image and sound-editing studios
- an art shop.

They also enjoy our own dedicated gallery space. Bonington Gallery has a national and international reach, whilst engaging with students, staff and the local community in Nottingham. To learn more, visit [www.boningtongallery.co.uk](http://www.boningtongallery.co.uk).



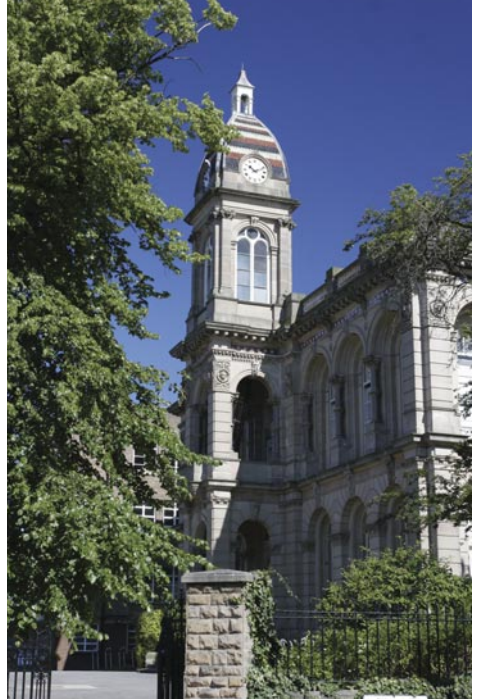
IMAGE: YUNA KWON, BA (HONS) FASHION DESIGN

## Waverley building

This Grade II listed building has been the home of Art and Design for over 150 years. Waverley hosts a spacious gallery and exhibition foyer with:

- a working studio theatre
- modern design workshop and studios
- a Mac suite
- a full wardrobe department and production facilities
- audio and video suites with comprehensive editing facilities
- an all-purpose film studio
- an as-live TV studio
- a 3D motion-capture studio.

Our Graphic Design, Costume Design and Making, Theatre Design, Design for Film and Television, Filmmaking, and Animation courses are based in the Waverley building.



## Barnes Wallis building

The Barnes Wallis building is located in the heart of the City Campus, with its modern teaching rooms, collaborative working spaces, and Mac suite.

These facilities are dedicated to students on our fashion management, marketing and communication courses.



IMAGES: WAVERLEY BUILDING (TOP); BARNES WALLIS BUILDING INTERIOR (BOTTOM)



IMAGE: ARKWRIGHT BUILDING, WITH NEWTON BUILDING IN BACKGROUND

### **Maudslay building**

The Maudslay building is a design-focused centre for industry and technology where you will find all our Product Design courses. Facilities include:

- metal-working and timber-machining workshops
- a computer numerical control (CNC) waterjet, able to cut almost any material
- large format CNC router to cut wood, plastics and aluminium
- a number of industry-standard 3D printers.



Maudslay is also home to The Hive, the University's purpose-built centre for entrepreneurship and enterprise.

Primarily for NTU students and graduates, The Hive can help turn business ideas into a reality through their support network, and mentoring and training programmes.

### **Arkwright building**

The Arkwright building (pictured above), built in the 19th Century, is steeped in history and underwent a £90m redevelopment, winning numerous awards including several from the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA). The building offers large, bright open studio spaces for our students studying on our Architecture and Product Design courses.

# WELCOMING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

## SUPPORTING YOU

Making the transition to independent study at university can be a daunting experience. That's why NTU provides additional workshops on academic writing, in addition to tutorial support within each academic field. Alongside this, we also provide students with the opportunity to learn from or become an academic mentor to give support in areas such as maths, language and IT literacy skills.

You can also get advice on applying through our dedicated International Student Support team. They can give advice on visas, money matters, health problems, UK employment regulations, and any academic or personal issues. Visit [www.ntu.ac.uk/international](http://www.ntu.ac.uk/international) to find out more.

## LEARNING NEW LANGUAGES AND EXPLORING THE WORLD

We have over 200 partners located in 35 countries, so there are plenty of opportunities for students to travel and study abroad during their studies at NTU. A number of our courses offer international trips, whilst we offer the opportunity of a funded study or work placement in Europe through the Erasmus+ programme, or with one of our many study abroad partners, located worldwide.

Students can also learn a new language through our University Language Programme (ULP), where we offer free in-session English language support to all international students throughout their studies to help fine-tune their English language skills for academic purposes.

**PAGE 20**



IMAGE: ART AND DESIGN STUDENTS ON EXCHANGE IN NEW YORK.

## MAKING NEW FRIENDS

There are plenty of opportunities to meet other students and make new friends. The first is during Welcome Week, where students get the opportunity to try new things and explore the enormous variety of opportunities available to them while at NTU. We also host Global Week, a celebration of our rich and culturally diverse international community. During this award-winning week, we host a variety of cultural events from Bollywood dance workshops and Korean movie nights to African storytelling, and Tai Chi – a chance to broaden students' understanding of different cultures, customs, and language.

Other good ways to make friends are by joining student societies, sports clubs and volunteering schemes, which are all available through the Students' Union. Students can even make friends online before they come by visiting [www.facebook.com/ntuinternational](http://www.facebook.com/ntuinternational) and joining our Facebook group.





"Coming to Nottingham was the best decision I have ever made. It's a small city compared to London, but that is what I love about it – everything is within walking distance.

"It's filled with students, and I enjoy the social life with friends I've made from around the globe. I have never felt homesick after coming here, I found a new family amongst my friends. Nottingham is like my home away from home."

**TAKSH DEDHIA**  
**BA (Hons) Fashion Management**  
**India**

# USEFUL INFORMATION

## VISAS

A condition of obtaining a Tier 4 student visa is that the student must have enough money to be able to study in the UK. The money must be held in a bank account in the student's or the student's parents' names for at least 28 days before the visa is applied for.

For more information, visit [www.gov.uk/tier-4-general-visa/overview](http://www.gov.uk/tier-4-general-visa/overview).

## UKCISA

The UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA) is an independent advice service for international students who wish to study in the UK. It offers impartial advice on a whole host of subjects.

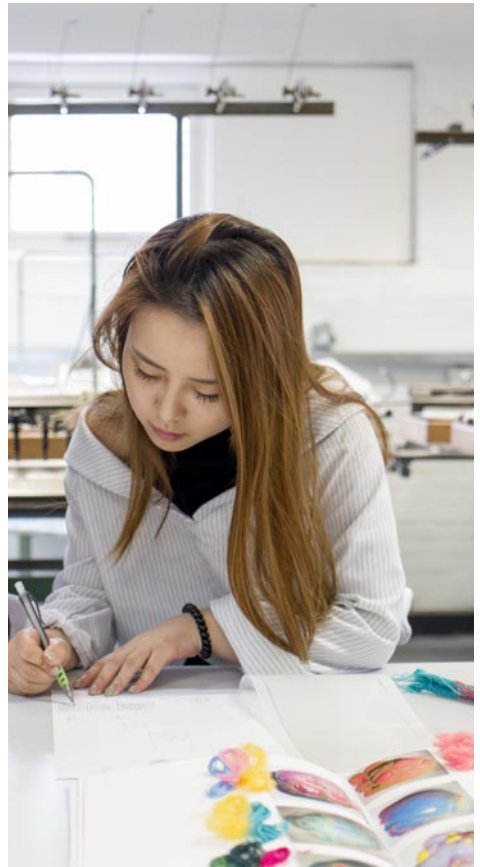
Visit [www.ukcisa.org.uk](http://www.ukcisa.org.uk) for more information.

## SCHOLARSHIPS

Once a student holds an unconditional or conditional offer from an institution, they are then eligible to apply for any scholarships that the institution may have. Visit [www.ntu.ac.uk/internationalscholarships](http://www.ntu.ac.uk/internationalscholarships) to see the types of scholarship available at NTU, and to find out how to apply for them.

## GENERAL ADVICE

If your student is thinking about studying at NTU, they can visit [www.ntu.ac.uk/international](http://www.ntu.ac.uk/international) for important information.





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**[www.ntu.ac.uk/art](http://www.ntu.ac.uk/art)**



ntuartanddesign



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## #NTUart

Take a look at what our students are doing by using our hashtag #NTUart across our social media channels.



Teaching  
Excellence  
Framework

This information can be made available in alternative formats.

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