Graphic Designer

Introduction

As a Graphic designer, you will create designs for computer games, websites, adverts, book covers, posters, packaging and so on.

Also known as

- Designer, Graphic

Work Activities

As a Graphic Designer you will create designs to put across a particular message or create a visual effect.

You'll create designs for a whole range of products, including:

- websites and computer games
- book covers
- posters, leaflets and brochures
- stationery and logos
- packaging and exhibition displays

Your exact role will depend a lot on where you work and the industry area. For example, in a small organisation, you may do a wide range of design tasks. In a large organisation, you may specialise in one area of graphics and on one type of product.

Self-employed Graphic Designers may do all aspects of a design project, and need to have business and marketing skills.

If you choose to work in the advertising industry then you may create designs for brochures, posters and mailshots. In the publishing industry, you may create designs for books and magazines. In the television, video and film industry, you may create graphics or special effects for a programme, news item or film.

Being able to read, write and speak Welsh may be an advantage when you're looking for work in Wales.
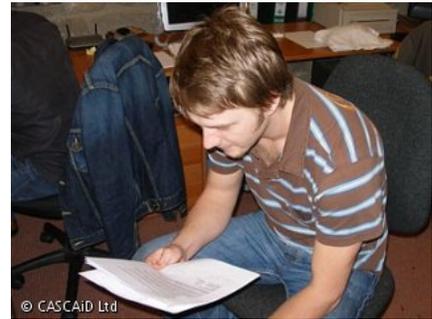
Personal Qualities and Skills

To become a Graphic Designer, you'll need:

- creative skills and original ideas
- an understanding of colour, shape and form
- good communication and negotiation skills
- to work well on your own and with others
- IT skills
- to pay attention to detail
- good organisation and planning skills
- to work to deadlines and budgets
- problem-solving skills

Self-employed or freelance Graphic Designers will need business and marketing skills.

Pay and Opportunities

Pay

Pay rates for Graphic Designers vary with the industry and responsibilities.

The pay rates given below are approximate.

- Starting: £20,500 - £22,500
- With experience: £24,000 - £27,000
- Senior positions: £29,000 - £32,000

Some Graphic Designers receive profit-related bonuses, in addition to their salary.

Hours of work

Graphic Designers usually work 39 hours a week, Monday to Friday. Working hours for self-employed Designers may be irregular, depending on how much work they have week-to-week. Late finishes and work at weekends may be required from time to time, especially as deadlines approach.

Where could I work?

Employers throughout the UK are:

- advertising agencies
- graphic design studios
- computer games companies
- publishing companies
- traditional print and electronic publishing
- companies in the broadcast media

Other opportunities exist in local government, in design departments of commercial companies and in design consultancies.

Opportunities for Graphic Designers occur with employers in towns and cities throughout the UK.

Self-employment

Opportunities occur for experienced Graphic Designers to work as self-employed freelancers. The ability for individuals to promote their work online via the internet means location is less important for self-employed Graphic Designers.

Consultancy and fixed-term contract work may be available for experienced Designers.

Consultancy and freelance work is normally obtained via agents or specialist recruitment agencies.

Where are vacancies advertised?

Vacancies are advertised in local/national newspapers, on recruitment and employers' websites, and on Find a Job (www.gov.uk/jobsearch).

Social media websites, such as LinkedIn, Twitter or Facebook, are a great way to network, find vacancies and get in contact with possible employers. Make sure that your profile presents you in a professional manner that will appeal to potential employers.

Take a look at our General Information Article 'Finding Work Online'.

Entry Routes and Training

Entry routes

A common route into this career is via a foundation course in art and design followed by a degree in graphic design.

Look out for courses with alternative titles, including:

- graphic communication
- visual communication
- graphic branding and identity

Remember to look closely at the content before you decide which course will suit you best.

Some students study a degree in another art and design subject before moving into graphic design later on.

A great way to get into this career is through an internship. Take a look at our information article 'Internships', for more details.

The industry body, Creative Skillset, has a list of accredited university courses on its website.

An Intermediate or Advanced Level Apprenticeship is also great place to start. Take a look at our general information article 'Apprenticeships - How do I apply?' for more details.

HNCs, HNDs and foundation degrees in graphic design and related subjects are available. You could use one of these courses as a stepping stone to a degree course, or try to move straight into work afterwards.

You will need to build up a portfolio of your work, whichever entry route you choose.

Work Experience

Employers value skills gained as an Assistant in a design studio or in a design consultancy. Experience in related fields, such as advertising or marketing is also useful. Commercial awareness and an understanding of the industry you wish to work in is an advantage.

Training

Once you are working, you will develop your skills by learning from other Graphic Designers, or by taking part-time or short training courses.

It is important to keep up to date with developments and new techniques used in design. This will include learning how to use the design software that is commonly used. You'll need to remain curious about design to keep your ideas fresh.

If you would like some more training, there is a BTEC qualification in graphic design. This course is a level 3 qualification and can be awarded as a certificate, award or diploma. When looking at the level 3 award in graphic design, the units that you could be studying include:

- digital story telling
- typefaces and letter forms
- words and images in graphic design
- graphic image making
- website design
- mixed media image making
- graphics for 3D application

Other courses could be available in your area.

Progression

With experience, you could become a Senior Designer, eventually even becoming a Director or setting up your own business.

Qualifications

To get onto an Intermediate or Advanced Level Apprenticeship, you'll usually need five GCSEs at grade C/4 or above, possibly including English and maths.

The usual entry requirements for a relevant foundation course are 1/2 A levels. You'll need an A level in art or in an art-based subject, and GCSEs passes at grade C/4 or above in 4/5 subjects.

Some courses ask that you have a pass in English.

Alternatives to A levels include:

- a BTEC level 3 qualification in 'art and design (graphics option)' or 'graphic design'
- City & Guilds level 2 qualification in art and design 2D and 3D techniques
- a design Advanced Level Apprenticeship
- the International Baccalaureate Diploma
- a BTEC level 3 qualification in 'interactive media, design for games and ICT'

Many other qualifications are also accepted so check university websites for more details.

The entry requirements for relevant HNCs, HNDs and foundation degrees are similar to those needed for the Foundation course mentioned above.

If you go on to a degree directly, you'll usually need:

- 2 or more A levels where many courses ask that you have at least a B grade in an art-based subject
- 4/5 GCSEs at grades C/4 or above where a pass in English is often required

To enter any course in art and design, you'll need a portfolio of your work.

Some universities accept the Welsh Baccalaureate as equivalent to 1 A level.

Adult Opportunities

Age limits

It is illegal for any organisation to set age limits for entry to employment, education or training, unless they can show there is a real need to have these limits.

Experience/skills

Employers value skills gained as an assistant in a design studio or in a design consultancy. Experience in related fields, such as advertising or marketing is also useful. Commercial awareness and an understanding of the industry you wish to work in is an advantage.

To enter the work or relevant courses, you normally need a portfolio of work showing your creative ability.

Courses

If you don't have the qualifications needed to enter your chosen degree or HND course, a college or university Access course (eg, Access to Art and Design) could be the way in. No formal qualifications are usually required, but you should check individual course details.

They can lead to relevant degree/HND courses.

It's also possible to do a part-time Art Foundation course, which leads to a degree or HND course. Higher National Certificate (HNC) courses are also available part-time, often in the evenings and/or in the daytime.

Universities and colleges of higher education (HE) will usually consider applications from candidates who don't meet their usual entry requirements, especially those with experience in arts, crafts or design. You should check the admissions policy of individual universities and HE colleges.

Distance learning

Relevant courses at various levels in Graphic Design are offered by a large number of centres, by distance learning.

The University of Hertfordshire offers an MA/PgD/PgC in Graphic Design by distance learning.

Further Information

Contacts

- **Apprenticeships: Get In. Go Far**
  National Apprenticeship Service (NAS)
  Tel: 0800 015 0400
  Email: nationalhelpdesk@findapprenticeship.service.gov.uk
  Website: www.apprenticeships.org.uk

- **LGjobs**
  Local government vacancies
  Website: www.lgjobs.com

- **Skills Development Scotland - Modern Apprenticeships**
  Tel: 0800 9178000
  Email: info@skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk
  Website: www.myworldofwork.co.uk/modernapprenticeships

- **myjobscotland: Scottish local government vacancies**
  Scottish enquiries
  Email: myjobscotland@cosla.gov.uk
  Website: www.myjobscotland.gov.uk

- **ScreenSkills**
  Skills for the creative industries
  Email: info@creativeskillset.org
  Website: www.creativeskillset.org

- **Creative Choices**
  Publisher: Creative & Cultural Skills
  Email: info@creative-choices.co.uk
  Website: www.creative-choices.co.uk

- **Creative & Cultural Skills**
  Skills for craft, cultural heritage, design, literature, music, performing arts and visual arts
  Email: london@ccskills.org.uk
  Website: ccskills.org.uk

- **Chartered Society of Designers (CSD)**
  Email: info@csd.org.uk
  Website: www.csd.org.uk

- **Getting into Art & Design Courses**
  Author: James Burnett Publisher: Trotman
  Website: trotman.co.uk/our-books/getting-into-art-and-design-courses/

- **London Art College**
  Address: PO Box 719, Lancaster LA1 2WT
  Tel: 0800 3280465
  Email: admin@londonartcollege.co.uk

Website: www.londonartcollege.co.uk

- **Design and Art Direction (D&AD)**
  Address: Britannia House, 68-80 Hanbury Street, London E1 5JL
  Tel: 020 7840 1111
  Email: contact@dandad.org
  Website: www.dandad.org

- **Harrison Scott Associates**
  Recruitment in printing, packaging and paper industries
  Website: www.harrison-scott.com

- **Careers Wales - Welsh Apprenticeships**
  Tel: 0800 028 4844
  Website: ams.careerswales.com/

- **Welsh Books Council (Welsh Enquiries)**
  Address: Castell Brychan, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion, SY23 2JB
  Tel: 01970 624151
  Email: info@wbc.org.uk
  Website: www.cllc.org.uk

- **Hiive**
  Hiive is the online professional network for creative people.
  Website: app.hiive.co.uk/

Related Careers

- Medical Illustrator
- Design Assistant
- Fashion Designer
- Artworker
- Metal Engraver
- Visual Merchandiser
- Commercial Illustrator
- Signmaker
- Ceramics Designer
- Footwear Designer
- Furniture Designer
- Product Designer
- Vehicle Designer
- Interior Designer
- Jewellery Designer
- Packaging Designer
- Textile Designer
- Costume Designer
- Theatre Designer
- Musical Instrument Technician
- Picture Researcher
- Technical/Scientific Illustrator
- Model Maker
- Picture Framer
- Designer
- Illustrator
- Artist
- CGI Artist
- VFX Artist
- Nostalgist